



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES

(Budget Estimates)

TUESDAY, 31 MAY 2005

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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SENATE

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 31 May 2005

Members: Senator Knowles (*Chair*), Senator Greig (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Barnett, Denman, Humphries and Moore

Senators in attendance: Senator Knowles (*Chair*), Senator Greig (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Allison, Barnett, Crossin, Eggleston, Evans, Forshaw, Humphries, McLucas, Ludwig, Moore and Webber

Committee met at 9.04 am

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES PORTFOLIO

Consideration resumed from 30 May 2005.

In Attendance

Senator Patterson, Minister for Family and Community Services

Department of Family and Community Services

Executive

Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary

Mr Wayne Jackson, Deputy Secretary

Mr Stephen Hunter, Deputy Secretary

Mr David Kalisch, Acting Deputy Secretary Executive (Secretary & Deputy Secretaries)

Group Managers

Ms Glenys Beauchamp, Group Manager, Families and Children

Ms Kerry Flanagan, Group Manager, Women and Youth

Mr Robert Knapp, Group Manager, Housing and Disability

Mr Alex Dolan, Acting Group Manager, Social Policy

Ms Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Communities

Mr Tim Youngberry, Group Manager, Business, Financial Services and Information Technology

Women and Youth

Ms Kerry Flanagan, Group Manager, Women and Youth

Ms Jenny Bourne, Branch Manager, Safety, Leadership and Consultation

Ms Lee Emerson, Branch Manager, Policy, Research and International

Ms Kim Loveday, Branch Manager, Youth Bureau

1.1 Support for Today

Mr Alex Dolan, Acting Group Manager, Social Policy

Ms Pamela Kinnear, Senior Advisor Family Payments

Mr Andrew Whitecross, Branch Manager, Research and Data Management

Mr Steve Jennaway, Branch Manager, Budget Development

Ms Michalina Stawyskyj, Branch Manager, People

Ms Fiona Dempster, Branch Manager, Ministerial, Media and Executive Support

1.2 Preparing for the Future

Mr Alex Dolan, Acting Group Manager, Social Policy

Ms Pamela Kinnear, Senior Advisor Family Payments

Mr Andrew Whitecross, Branch Manager, Research and Data Management

Mr Steve Jennaway, Branch Manager, Budget Development

Ms Michalina Stawyskyj, Branch Manager, People

Ms Fiona Dempster, Branch Manager, Ministerial, Media and Executive Support

2.1 Practical Support and Sharing Responsibility

Mr Robert Knapp, Group Manager Housing and Disability

Ms Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Communities

Ms Liza Carroll, Branch Manager, Housing Support

Mr Peter Taylor, Branch Manager, Branch Manager Indigenous Housing & Infrastructure

Ms Dawn Casey, Branch Manager Indigenous Housing & Infrastructure

3.1 Support for the Aged

Mr Alex Dolan, Acting Group Manager, Social Policy

Mr Nick Hartland, Branch Manager, Social Security Relationships and Compliance

Mr Peter Hutchinson, Acting Branch Manager International

Mr Ben Wallace, Acting Branch Manager, Seniors & Means Test

3.2 Support for People with Disabilities

Mr Robert Knapp, Group Manager Housing and Disability

Ms Peta Winzar, National Disability Operations State Manager Queensland State Office

Mr Roger Barson, Branch Manager Disability and Carers

3.3 Support for Carers

Mr Robert Knapp, Group Manager Housing and Disability

Mr Roger Barson, Branch Manager Disability and Carers

3.4 Support for Youth

Ms Kerry Flanagan, Group Manager, Women and Youth

Ms Kim Loveday, Branch Manager, Youth Bureau

Ms Kasy Chambers, Branch Manager, Communications and Library

3.5 Support for Women

Ms Kerry Flanagan, Group Manager, Women and Youth

Mr Alex Dolan, Acting Group Manager, Social Policy

Ms Jenny Bourne, Branch Manager Safety, Leadership and Consultation

Ms Lee Emerson, Branch Manager Policy, Research and International

Mr Ben Wallace, Acting Branch Manager Seniors and Means Test

4.1 Support for Families

Ms Glenys Beauchamp, Group Manager, Families and Children

Mr Alex Dolan, Acting Group Manager, Social Policy

Ms Kerry Flanagan, Group Manager, Women and Youth

Mr Jeff Popple, Branch Manager Families and Children's Policy

Dr Loucas Nicolaou, Branch Manager, Indigenous Family and Child Wellbeing

Mr Evan Lewis, Branch Manager, Early Childhood and Communities

Mr Tony Carmichael, Branch Manager, Family Relationship Services and Child Support Policy

Mr David Hazlehurst, Manager Family Payments

Ms Kim Loveday, Branch Manager Youth Bureau

4.2 Child Support

Mr Wayne Jackson, Deputy Secretary

Ms Glenys Beauchamp, Group Manager, Families and Children

Mr Tony Carmichael, Branch Manager, Family Relationship Services and Child Support Policy

4.3 Child Care Support

Ms Glenys Beauchamp, Group Manager, Families and Children

Ms Linda Powell, Branch Manager, Child Care Policy and Planning

Ms Donna Griffin, Acting Branch Manager, Child Care Policy and Planning

5.1 Supporting Communities and Delivering Local Solutions

Ms Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Communities

Mr Barry Smith, Assistance Secretary, Community Branch

Aboriginal Hostels Ltd

Mr Keith Clarke, General Manager

Dr Kamlesh Sharma, Assistant General Manager and Company Secretary

Mr Russell Lane, Assistant General Manager Operations

Department of Family and Community Services

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee considering the budget estimates. The committee will now continue its examination of the Family and Community Services portfolio. I welcome back the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Kay Patterson; Dr Harmer; and officers of the Department of Family and Community Services. The committee has completed outcomes 1 and 2 and output groups 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3. We will now commence with output group 3.4 and then go to output group 3.5, followed by outcomes 4 and 5.

Senator McLUCAS—Dr Harmer, last night we were discussing page 123 of the PBS. You offered to take on notice the disaggregation of a number of those outputs. Would it be possible for you to provide the committee with each of the outputs disaggregated by program? This is not just for outcome 3, but let us talk about outcome 3 first. Could you provide us with each of the outputs, disaggregated by program, for the whole of outcome 3, with the funds that are attributed to each.

Dr Harmer—For 2004 and 2005?

Senator McLUCAS—I understand that it is tricky for 2004-05 because of the changed arrangements. I am particularly looking for 2005-06 and then the out years from there. I recognise the difficulty of doing it for 2004-05 and comparing apples and oranges, but if it were possible to do it for 2004-05 then that would be helpful.

Dr Harmer—Senator, I think I answered at the last hearings a question in relation to this from Senator Collins, who was after a more detailed breakdown of forward estimates by program type—which is, I suspect, what you are also asking for. Is that correct?

Senator McLUCAS—Yes, it is.

Dr Harmer—The answer I gave at the time has not changed. It is consistent with the position that the Department of Finance and Administration has taken in relation to all the estimates for all the departments, and DEWR and others have been asked similar questions. The answer is:

... FaCS will not provide financial estimates for each forward estimates year on Special Appropriations by payment type.

This is consistent with the position taken by Finance and DEWR and other departments. It continues:

What FaCS will do—

and this is intended to be helpful—

to assist the Senate Committee is to answer questions by payment type on future financial trends/expectations over the forward estimates period, for example on expectations of increases or decreases ...

It is unable to provide, however, the detailed numbers—which are not published in the budget. I provided that answer—

Senator McLUCAS—What question number is that, Dr Harmer?

Dr Harmer—T21. It was in answer to Senator Collins's question at the 16 February hearing.

Senator McLUCAS—I will have a look at that and see whether that is what I am looking for. If there is something further, we will come back to it.

[9.08 am]

Senator CROSSIN—I have questions for people involved in 3.4, Support for Youth. I will start by asking you to give me a description of the Mentor Marketplace program.

Ms Loveday—The Mentor Marketplace program provides mentoring opportunities for a wide range of young people. A decision was made in the budget to continue it and to create it as a lapsing program. Under that measure, funding was provided for up to 12 existing Mentor Marketplace projects from 1 July 2005, and funding was also provided for up to 15 new projects from 1 January 2006. The program seeks to provide a wide range of mentoring opportunities for young people, especially those at risk, those in contact with the juvenile justice system and those who need assistance to stay connected to family and the community.

Senator CROSSIN—There were 12 existing programs. Has that now been extended to 15 or will there be an additional 15?

Ms Loveday—In the original program that finishes on 30 June there were 27 providers. With the extension of the program we are in the process of running a selection process. We invited the 27 existing providers to apply for 12 places. They will be selected on the basis of meeting criteria of best practice for mentoring, establishing relationships with community and business groups to work towards self-sustainability—that sort of thing. So 12 of those existing 27 will be successful and their funding will continue in the programs they currently have. Then we will run an open selection process—which the remaining current 15 providers, as

well as other organisations, will be welcome to apply for—for up to 15 new providers, some of whom may be some of the existing ones.

Senator CROSSIN—So the intent is that, after 1 July, within the coming 12 months there will still be 27 providers?

Ms Loveday—From 1 January next year there will be 27 providers.

Senator CROSSIN—Is it correct that the estimate for 2004-05 is around \$2.6 million?

Ms Loveday—That is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—But for 2005-06 it is \$1.7 million. Is that correct?

Ms Loveday—That is correct. That is because for six months of the financial year there will only be 12 providers. The second 15 are not starting until 1 January 2006 because we have to run an open selection process.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you provide me with a state-by-state breakdown of the funding allocated from the Mentor Marketplace program since its implementation?

Ms Loveday—I have not got those figures at the moment.

Senator CROSSIN—When was it first implemented?

Ms Flanagan—I think we might have provided a written answer on the state-by-state breakdown for the Mentor Marketplace before, but I can check for you. If we have not done so, we can take it on notice and provide it to you.

Senator CROSSIN—When was it first introduced?

Ms Loveday—It was first announced in the 2001-02 budget.

Senator CROSSIN—Perhaps you could give me the current state-by-state breakdown, the breakdown since its implementation and a forward estimate for the following 12 months.

Ms Loveday—We will not know until we have run the selection processes who has been successful and where they are located.

Senator CROSSIN—From 1 July will you not have 12 providers who will automatically be—

Ms Loveday—We will have 12 providers, but the existing 27 have applied for those 12 places and so we do not know which of those will be successful until the process is completed.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you tell me where the \$828,000 increase in funding for the Mentor Marketplace between 2003-04 and 2004-05 was allocated?

Ms Loveday—The Mentor Marketplace?

Senator CROSSIN—There was an \$828,000 increase in funding.

Ms Loveday—Yes. I think you will find that that was a movement of funds. We asked for some to be rephased from 2003-04 to 2004-05, which took it up to the \$2,710,000.

Senator CROSSIN—What do you mean by ‘rephased’?

Ms Loveday—We had a slight underspend in 2003-04. There was a project that took some time to develop, so we requested that that money be moved into 2004-05 to be expended and it was fully expended there.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you tell me why there was a \$908,000, or 34.6 per cent, funding decrease from the final estimates of 2004-05 to the 2005-06 estimates?

Ms Loveday—That is because of the half-year of not having the full 27 providers.

Senator CROSSIN—Okay. In relation to the current providers, are they in each state and territory?

Ms Loveday—Yes, they are.

Senator CROSSIN—So tell me: what is the application process for the funding grants for the program?

Ms Loveday—The current one for 2004-05 and 2005-06?

Senator CROSSIN—Yes.

Ms Loveday—On the announcement of the budget we wrote to the existing 27 providers and requested that they apply for 12 places of continued funding. We have received their applications and are currently assessing those applications based on best practice, their ability to deliver on what they originally got the funding for and the viability of their mentoring models. The original Mentor Marketplace was a pilot established to investigate models for mentoring—there are a number around. So the 12 will be selected on a range of criteria. We wrote to them and they were things that they were asked to deliver on as part of the 27, and that included their connections with community and business, their movement towards self-sustainability, the outcomes that they get for the young people that they are mentoring, their ability to find mentors and match them with appropriate mentees and their support for those relationships. They are currently being assessed on that. Twelve will be successful, and we will hope to announce those very shortly because their funding is due to start on 1 July. After that, we will go out to the market with an open tender requesting applicants for up to a further 15 providers with the same criteria to give other players an opportunity to apply.

Senator CROSSIN—So with these 12 it may well be that not every state and territory is successful? Or is the aim that you would have at least one successful tenderer from each state and territory?

Ms Loveday—That is not a stated aim of this particular first round with the 12 that we are looking for—

Senator CROSSIN—So you might find that in South Australia, for example, no people are successful in the coming tender round?

Ms Loveday—Anything is possible. I am not on the selection panel. I do not know the spread of very good practice and the very successful providers who would be the 12 out of the 27. We seek to have a spread so that all young people in areas of need have access to these services.

Senator CROSSIN—But there is no guarantee that that will happen?

Ms Loveday—No, no guarantee.

Senator CROSSIN—Why was a decision made to split the 12 and then the 15? There will obviously be some providers that will have six months of no activity and might even have to put off staff or there will be providers that might have clients that will not be able to service them in the six months. Why was the decision made not to go to tender for the 27 again?

Ms Loveday—As I said, the original Mentor Marketplace program was the government's first foray into mentoring. We did not know what successful mentor models were out there—what organisations would be able to deliver an appropriate service, especially to youth at risk, rather than perhaps some of the more common mentoring youth development models where you are looking at very high-performing youth who are mentored to be leaders. We were especially looking at models that might adequately address the needs of a really broad range of youth. Until we saw what was available, we were unable to judge what would be successful. Part of the requirement with that pilot was to see what relationships those organisations could establish with other groups within their community and with businesses so that there was some movement to being able to provide services on an ongoing basis that would not necessarily fall over as soon as any level of government funding was withdrawn.

Our review of the program showed that there were varying degrees of success in some of those criteria and that it takes quite some time not only to establish those links with other groups in the community—other community groups—but also to establish appropriate links with finding appropriate mentors and mentees. So in establishing an ongoing program, we wanted to pick the very best of those models and the best of those organisations that were having success. We had some anecdotal evidence that some of the organisations were not being very successful for a range of reasons, not really understanding the complexities of mentoring. It sounds quite easy to do, but in fact it is quite a complex field. It requires a lot of support on the part of the provider for both the mentor and the mentee and getting those relationships so that they are workable, long-term relationships.

With regard to some of the perhaps unsuccessful organisations, there will be some that will be able to keep on going for quite some time, until September or October. We have had some evidence from providers that, even if they are unsuccessful in getting further funding in that 12, they will be able to keep going for quite some time. We will look on a case-by-case basis as to the extent to which we can help them transfer or keep their clients. It depends how big a part of the organisation it is.

Senator CROSSIN—With regard to the review of the program you mentioned, the department has undertaken a formal evaluation of the program, has it?

Ms Loveday—We did as part of the budget proposal.

Senator CROSSIN—That is not a public document?

Ms Loveday—It has been approved for release and we are in the process of arranging that.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you ensure that the committee gets a copy?

Ms Loveday—It will be on our web site, but yes I can do that.

Senator CROSSIN—Why was the program retained in the youth bureau of FaCS and not moved to DEWR, say, with programs such as the Green Corps program?

Ms Loveday—It is not an employment participation program. It is a support program for youth in a wide range of situations and it supports keeping them connected to their community and family, not necessarily get them into work.

Senator CROSSIN—Thanks. With regard to the Reconnect program, it is my understanding that that is funds, counselling and adolescent mediation and practical support for young people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. Is that correct?

Ms Loveday—Mostly for those at risk of homelessness. It is about keeping them connected with their school and their families through a variety of interventions.

Senator CROSSIN—The estimates for 2004-05 show \$21.4 million, and for the coming year it is \$22.6 million. Is that correct?

Ms Loveday—Yes, that is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—In your budget statements, practical support is listed as one of the benefits provided by the program.

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Exactly what support is included in that statement? When you talk about practical support in the Reconnect program, what are you actually talking about?

Ms Loveday—It could be a range of things—a worker in the community organisation who establishes a relationship and helps the young person start recommunicating with their family or helps them deal with their studies or any social problems they might have with their peers. It just depends on the young person. It is a program that is responsive to the individual needs of the young person.

Senator CROSSIN—Are you able to provide me with a list of the Reconnect services that are funded by the government and the amount of funding that each service is allocated?

Ms Loveday—Yes. There are 96 of them.

Senator CROSSIN—I am assuming that they are in each state and territory.

Ms Loveday—They are.

Senator CROSSIN—Perhaps if you take—

Ms Loveday—I have a list here in hard copy. But I can take it on notice and send it in.

Senator CROSSIN—Thanks. I am sure that is fine. Actually, we are happy for you to table the hard copy and we will just take copies of it. That is one less question on notice you have to worry about.

Ms Loveday—Okay.

Senator CROSSIN—So do you have a breakdown of the amounts that are spent on young people who are already homeless vis-a-vis the young people who are at risk of being homeless?

Ms Loveday—No, I do not. The program is about young people who are at risk of being homeless, rather than young people who are already homeless. I do not have figures of those who then tip over into homelessness.

Senator CROSSIN—Does FaCS keep figures at all of young people who are homeless compared to young people who are at risk?

Ms Loveday—Not that I am aware of, no—not under the Reconnect program.

Senator CROSSIN—The program provides counselling, mediation and practical support. Do your funding details provide specific allocations for each of those areas?

Ms Loveday—No.

Senator CROSSIN—So when you provide funding to a service it might all go to counselling or it might all go to practical support?

Ms Loveday—It is up to them to decide what is the most appropriate support for each individual young person as they come to them.

Senator CROSSIN—The transition to independent living allowance provides \$1,000 for young people who have just left state care—is that correct?

Ms Loveday—That is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—Does that include youth who have come from, say, foster homes? What do you mean by ‘state care’?

Ms Loveday—It is generally where they are wards of the state—

Senator CROSSIN—And are now moving to independent living?

Ms Loveday—and have reached the age—I think it is over 16—when they move to independent living.

Senator CROSSIN—How many people would that have been in the last 12 months?

Ms Loveday—I do not have the most up-to-date figures. We receive reports quarterly from the administering providers, who are the focal point for organisations who come into contact with these young people. They put in an application to those providers for goods up to the value of \$1,000. We receive reports from them quarterly on how many young people have applied and how many payments have been made. I do not have up-to-date figures for that, but I can get them for you.

Senator CROSSIN—So you cannot tell me as at the last quarter how many \$1,000 payments have been made?

Ms Loveday—I do not have it on me here, but I can get it to you by lunchtime.

Senator CROSSIN—The amount allocated for this program in 2004-05 was \$2.7 million. I notice that the allocation for the coming year is only \$2.5 million. Why is there a reduction in those funds?

Ms Flanagan—The answer to your question is that there has been an efficiency dividend applied. The efficiency dividend for this particular program has gone from one per cent to 1.25 per cent, which is the difference that you see between the two amounts.

Senator CROSSIN—Does that mean that fewer people will be able to access this money?

Ms Loveday—Not necessarily, because not necessarily every young person needs to access \$1,000. The amount does not necessarily equate to \$1,000 per person. It just depends

what their need is. One young person transitioning to independence might require a TAFE fee or a bond for an apartment to be paid or a fridge to be able to live independently, so they do not necessarily all get up to \$1,000.

Senator CROSSIN—So \$1,000 is the maximum amount?

Ms Loveday—That is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—Technically, though, there is less money allocated against this program in this coming year than last year.

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you provide me with a list of organisations which have been contracted to assist the young people under this program?

Ms Loveday—Yes. I will get that list for you.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the average transition to living payment that most young people would get?

Ms Loveday—I will have to get that for you.

Senator CROSSIN—You do not have that?

Ms Loveday—I do not have that at the moment, no.

Senator CROSSIN—So you are telling me that the money is not particularly spent on goods and equipment, then?

Ms Loveday—In a lot of cases it is, but it can also be spent on a bond for a unit or on a fee for a TAFE course. The organisation that meets with the young person is required to develop a transition plan, which is a plan of how the young person is going to transition to independence and be supported. That plan will be different for each young person that they are dealing with. So their needs and what sort of support they require will be quite different.

Senator CROSSIN—The allowance is not given directly to an individual, is it?

Ms Loveday—No, it is not.

Senator CROSSIN—It is channelled through an NGO?

Ms Loveday—That is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—What percentage of that money do NGOs take off for administrative costs?

Ms Loveday—They do not take any percentage of that money. In terms of the NGO that is dealing with the young person, there is no administrative overhead on that.

Senator CROSSIN—So, if I as a young person apply for \$900, what is the process? You give the NGO—

Ms Loveday—The child or the young person comes out of state based care. The NGO in the town that is helping them transition in a variety of ways develops a transition plan. On that plan they identify that the young person needs to buy a fridge in order to be able to live independently. They contact the administering provider—there are several in each state—and fill in an application for \$700, if that is what they can get a fridge for.

Dr Harmer—As a young person you do not apply for an amount. The money is provided to the NGO, who does an assessment of the need, and that need is funded up to a maximum of \$1,000.

Ms Loveday—That is correct. The NGO has to get a quote for whatever the item is that they want, and they send that in as part of their application.

Senator CROSSIN—I am trying to get a handle on what bucket of funds the NGO is paid out of for this work. It must cost them money in terms of staff time and resources.

Ms Loveday—In terms of the TILA, the transition to independent living allowance, generally they are only applying for payment of a particular item and there is no payment to that NGO. Generally they receive funding from state governments in terms of their role in assisting young people who are in state based care to transition to independence. The TILA is just an allowance for them to access money to buy specific goods.

Senator CROSSIN—So there is no specific funding from the Commonwealth that supports or backs up the work of the NGO in this instance?

Ms Loveday—Not concerned with the young child, no. They are receiving their support elsewhere.

Senator CROSSIN—Do NGOs express any concern about the level of support they undertake in administering this program? Has there been any feedback about that?

Ms Loveday—The administering organisations are different from the NGOs who are dealing with the children, with the young people. The administering organisations are sort of a central point or funnel for all the applications. They are paid an administrative amount out of the program per successful case.

Senator CROSSIN—Give me an example of an administrative organisation in Victoria.

Ms Loveday—The Salvation Army is an administering organisation.

Senator CROSSIN—Which is separate to the NGOs?

Ms Loveday—Which is separate to the NGOs dealing with the children who are exiting state care.

Senator CROSSIN—So what percentage of the funds does the administrative organisation receive?

Ms Loveday—For 2004-05 they are receiving \$30 per case, per successful payment.

Senator CROSSIN—Every time someone is allocated some money out of the living allowance program, \$30 is added to that to provide to the administrative group—is that correct? Or is that included in the amount?

Ms Loveday—No. That is a separate transaction. The administering organisation is not the same as the NGO who is dealing with the young person.

Senator CROSSIN—Yes, I have got that.

Ms Loveday—The NGO who is dealing with the young person will put in an application to say that they need a fridge, a toaster or whatever.

Senator CROSSIN—Up to the value of \$900, say.

Ms Loveday—The administering organisation—for example, the Salvation Army in Victoria—will assess that application as to whether it meets the guidelines, whether there is a transition plan in place and whether there is access to other funds that would be more appropriate. Then it releases whatever the amount that has been requested by the NGO to pay for those things. They then are paid for by FaCS for that successful case.

Senator CROSSIN—That \$30 per transaction comes out of the administrative appropriations?

Ms Loveday—Yes, it does.

Senator CROSSIN—So the \$2.5 million for this coming year will also include the \$30 per transaction—is that correct?

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—How many of those would you have paid in the last 12 months?

Ms Loveday—The same number as the number of young people who needed assistance.

Senator CROSSIN—You do not have those with you?

Ms Loveday—No. When I give you the number of young people it will be the same number that have been paid.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you tell me a bit about the Youth Activities Services and the Family Liaison Worker programs?

Ms Loveday—These are generally very small services that provide a range of activities in out of school hours for 11- to 16-year-olds. The nature of those activities really is in response to what the local need is in the local community.

Senator CROSSIN—There was a review of this program in 2001; is that right?

Ms Loveday—There was a review, yes, in 2001.

Senator CROSSIN—My understanding is that that review indicated that there were 10 recommendations. Have all of those recommendations been implemented?

Ms Loveday—They are in the process of being implemented.

Senator CROSSIN—All of them?

Ms Loveday—I do not know if I can say categorically all of them, but most of them. I do not have a list of all of them in front of me so I would have to check, but we are seeking to implement those recommendations.

Senator CROSSIN—This program has been allocated \$7.2 million in this coming year and it received around \$6.9 million last year; is that correct? So there is an increase in the amount for this program.

Ms Loveday—Yes, that is right. There is indexation.

Senator CROSSIN—You outline in your PBS that this program aims to overcome behaviour that may have negative long-term effects on young people. What specific behaviours are targeted by this program and why were they selected?

Ms Loveday—It was originally set up for out of school hours to keep young people occupied who may otherwise get into strife. But over time—the program was started in about 1990—it has become more useful by helping them develop their skills, their self-esteem, their ability to socialise and their ability to interact with other people. Without those qualities there is an increased risk of either dysfunctional behaviour or disengagement from their community.

Senator CROSSIN—So it does not target specific behaviour problems.

Ms Loveday—It does not target specific behaviours, no. As I said, it is very much responsive to what the local need is. These services have been set up in very specific areas because they are quite small. They generally do not cover a huge geographic area, so it just depends on what is required.

Senator CROSSIN—My notes tell me that of the review that was conducted, recommendations 2 and 10 are yet to be implemented. Recommendation 2 was to establish a working party to review the criteria for measuring high needs areas. I am wondering if you know whether that working party has been established.

Ms Loveday—I do not.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you take that on notice?

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Recommendation No. 10 was that an appropriate level of funding should be determined for the program. I am wondering if that has been implemented.

Ms Loveday—The funding is what has been appropriated, Senator. I have it that the evaluation was in 2003-04, not 2001.

Senator CROSSIN—I know you are telling me that \$7.2 million has been appropriated. I suppose the question is: following the review, has the appropriate level of funding been determined?

Ms Loveday—As far as I am aware the review did not actually nominate a level of funding that would be appropriate. The funding at the moment is what it is with the number of services we have.

Senator CROSSIN—So there has been no attempt to actually determine whether that is appropriate or adequate or not.

Ms Loveday—Apart from the review, no other review has been undertaken.

Senator CROSSIN—In terms of recreational, vocational and educational activities, are the funds allocated against each of those three areas?

Ms Loveday—No, Senator. It could be a combination depending on what the need is at the local areas.

Senator CROSSIN—So these are funds that might be allocated to the YMCA or the YWCA, for example.

Ms Loveday—There are a whole range of organisations that deliver YAS/FLW. Some of them are local councils, some are other NGOs that are involved in youth centre type activities—it is just a just a broad range—and the YWCA.

Senator CROSSIN—Some might choose to do all three, some might choose to just do recreational?

Ms Loveday—That is correct. It depends on what the need is.

Senator CROSSIN—The Newly Arrived Youth Support Services is quite a recent program; is that right? My understanding is that it aims to connect JPET and the Reconnect programs with young people who are newly arrived to Australia; is that right?

Ms Loveday—That is correct, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—How new is that program?

Ms Loveday—It was in last year's budget for the first time. We are still in the process of implementing that, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—Sorry, you are still—?

Ms Loveday—We are in the process of implementing it. It was a 2004-05 budget measure.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have a line by line breakdown of the programs that have been funded since last year?

Ms Loveday—I can get you the first phase funding of the programs that have been funded in phase 1, which were the areas identified in the Department of Immigration's settlement database of the areas of high need where there is a high refugee or immigrant youth population. We have funding agreements with the providers in those locations. Plus there will be a second round, you know, 506, for the remainder of the places where there are not currently Reconnect and JPET providers. The first phase was where there are current providers available to do this extra work. The second phase is where there are not current providers and we need to have a look at how we might establish those particular types of interventions in an area.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have an idea of how many young people have actually been directly assisted by the program?

Ms Loveday—At the moment probably not many because we have only just signed the funding agreements with the providers.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have numbers at all?

Ms Loveday—No, we do not because we have only just completed the arrangements with the funding agreement.

Senator CROSSIN—I see. I understand that in September of last year there was reference to an expert reference group being established to review the project; is that correct?

Ms Loveday—Yes, that has not been established yet because there were delays in getting the implementation finalised because of government machinery changes.

Senator CROSSIN—So you do not know who the members of this group are or who was intended to be on this group?

Ms Loveday—No, I do not.

Senator CROSSIN—So they have not met yet.

Ms Loveday—They have not met yet. It has not been established yet as far as I am aware.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the time line then for actually establishing this group and reviewing the project?

Ms Loveday—I will have to get back to you on that. As I said, there were delays in implementation. Until we have completed getting on board all the providers—there is no program to review and evaluate until we actually have it working, have it implemented.

Senator CROSSIN—I notice that there is a provider in Darwin. Who is that?

Ms Loveday—The Darwin provider will be selected as part of the phase 2 allocation where we have no established JPET and Reconnect services.

Senator CROSSIN—So you have not allocated anyone in those places yet?

Ms Loveday—Not yet, no. That will be a part of phase 2.

Senator CROSSIN—So phase 2 is to identify the areas of high need; is that correct?

Ms Loveday—We have areas of high need. Those were identified through the DIMIA settlement database. They were split up in areas where we had current JPET and Reconnect providers that could take on this extra service immediately because they were established services.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you provide us with that list?

Ms Loveday—Yes, I can. Phase 2 was where we either might have a Reconnect or a JPET provider but not both. There are then the questions of, ‘Well, how do we get, say, a JPET intervention when all we have is a Reconnect provider?’ We are still trying to work through those issues.

Senator CROSSIN—I understand. What about for those young people who have settled in regional or rural areas? How will that be accommodated by the department?

Ms Loveday—There are a couple of areas of high need, such as Wollongong, which have a high concentration of newly arrived young people who may be high need, depending on what their background is—we could not cover all of the areas. We really looked at the areas where there were high concentrations of these young people.

Senator CROSSIN—That might not necessarily be in rural or regional areas, though?

Ms Loveday—It might not. But we also have a lead provider, I suppose you would call it, which is the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues. They are going to look at a range of issues for us outside just the delivery of that program.

Senator CROSSIN—If we are encouraging newly arrived migrants to actually go to rural and regional areas, this program might not necessarily cater for the youth who take up that opportunity?

Ms Loveday—If they get there in sufficient numbers, then when the program is reviewed—as all programs are—I am sure that will show that the areas of need might change. That happens for all programs. I doubt we are going to be able to capture every young person who has newly arrived who requires support services, but we will capture as many as we can. There are existing Reconnect and JPET services in many, many locations, and these newly

arrived young people are not denied access to those normal services. In fact, many of the established current Reconnect providers I know do deal with young people who are newly arrived and at risk. They are not confined to the NAYS services; they can go to normal JPET and Reconnect services.

Senator CROSSIN—I turn to some of the youth initiatives that are outlined in the budget. If I am correct, there is the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme. Is that correct?

Ms Loveday—That is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—The National Youth Roundtable and the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group.

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—The Australian Forum of Youth Organisations and the web site, The Source.

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—National Youth Week and the national advisory and consultative forum. There are seven. Have I missed any?

Ms Loveday—That is about it.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I ask you about the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme?

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—I understand that the priorities for the 2001 to 2005 scheme were to increase young people's participation in economic and social issues, and to listen and respond to young people. Can the department explain how young people have been involved in the research scheme?

Ms Loveday—NYARS, the research scheme, is actually under the auspices of MCEETYA—the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs—and through the youth task force, which is a committee of officials made up of Australian government and state government youth departments. The NYARS scheme operates under their auspices. Those priorities that you have outlined are the priorities determined by MCEETYA for youth for that period. NYARS does agreed research projects, which are agreed between all jurisdictions within those priorities.

Senator CROSSIN—So it does not come under FaCS? Is that what you are telling me?

Ms Loveday—FaCS has responsibility for administering it at the moment. We are the chair of NYARS for two years. It is a rotating chair. Previously it was the ACT government.

Senator CROSSIN—You do you not know how many young people have been involved?

Ms Loveday—Young people are not involved. It is purely a research program.

Senator CROSSIN—I see. Has a review of the program been undertaken or completed?

Ms Loveday—MCEETYA asked for a scoping study and a look into the effectiveness of NYARS last year. The review found that some of the research projects possibly take a little bit too long to come to fruition and that some process issues could be streamlined. It was mainly

a study of internal process and how it could be made more effective and streamlined, and how the decision making around it could be more streamlined. It relates to all jurisdictions, so anything that NYARS does has to be agreed between the jurisdictions.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you know if the report of that review is available?

Ms Loveday—It is not a public document. It was for the youth task force, to look at how it could make NYARS operate more effectively.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I ask you some questions about the National Youth Roundtable?

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Has the National Youth Roundtable ever been evaluated?

Ms Loveday—Not a formal evaluation, that I am aware of. I have been in the job only a short while, so I could be incorrect. We have a look at it after every roundtable. We get feedback from the young people who participate. Rather than a formal evaluation, we review the roundtable after it has taken place.

Senator CROSSIN—So young people who actually participate each year provide feedback on that year's activities? Is that correct?

Ms Loveday—Yes, that is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—Are copies of that feedback available?

Ms Loveday—It is not feedback in terms of a formal document, as such. The formal document that is available is the executive summary of their projects. The feedback we get is on an informal basis.

Senator CROSSIN—It is anecdotal, is it?

Ms Loveday—Yes. We talk to them and we establish a relationship with them. We go to them and ask what they would have liked done better, whether it was organised the way they expected and that sort of thing. It is not a formal evaluation; it is feedback in order for us to run next year's roundtable better.

Senator CROSSIN—That is done by word of mouth or by just talking to them?

Ms Loveday—By talking to them.

Senator CROSSIN—They do not fill out a survey form or an evaluation sheet at the end?

Ms Loveday—Not that I am aware of, no.

Senator CROSSIN—The figures provided to me show that in the year 2000 the National Youth Roundtable was allocated around \$54,000. In 2003 it was allocated around \$125,000 or \$126,000. What is the allocation in this budget?

Ms Loveday—For 2004-05 it was \$750,000, I think. I could be wrong. I have it here somewhere. Sorry, I was incorrect. For 2004-05, it was \$420,000.

Senator CROSSIN—And for this year?

Ms Loveday—We have not yet set a budget for this year, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—When is that likely to be done?

Ms Loveday—When I have my planning day and set my budget.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the reason for the increase over those years from \$125,000 to \$420,000? Have you increased the number of participants?

Ms Loveday—I would have to find out for you, Senator. I was not there, so I do not know.

Senator CROSSIN—Could it be the number of participants, or where they are coming from?

Ms Loveday—Also, the costs would just be going up because of the increased costs of transport and accommodation for the young people to come together.

Senator CROSSIN—Right.

Ms Loveday—I would have to check whether the actual format of the roundtable changed that would have generated a cost change.

Senator CROSSIN—How many young people have actually applied for the National Youth Roundtable?

Ms Loveday—For this year?

Senator CROSSIN—For 2004.

Ms Loveday—I have the figures for last year's roundtable, which is completed. For this year I think it is in excess of 160.

Senator CROSSIN—My figures tell me that in 2004 there were 650 applicants.

Ms Loveday—Maybe my figures are incorrect.

Senator CROSSIN—And that in the year 2000 about 1,000 young people applied.

Ms Loveday—I will check for you, Senator, and get back to you. I am sorry. I probably do not have that right.

Senator CROSSIN—I am just wondering if you have considered why fewer people are applying.

Ms Loveday—I do not think there has been a significant drop, but I will check the numbers and tell you exactly how many people applied last year and this year. We are undertaking the selection process for this year, so I can find that out straight away.

Senator CROSSIN—The figures of 1,000 applicants in the year 2000 and 650 in 2004 come from question No. 142 in the February 2004 additional estimates.

Ms Loveday—I have just found it. Four hundred and fifty applications were received for the 2005 roundtable.

Senator CROSSIN—Your answer to question No. 142 in February 2004 was that 650 had applied, so that is a drop.

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—It is a drop. Has anyone looked at why there has been a decrease in the number of people applying? Has anyone looked at ways to increase the numbers?

Ms Loveday—I have not looked at it recently. I do not know whether somebody looked at the increase previously. I was not in the job, but I can find out for you. I would have to look at it over time and see what the issues were.

Senator CROSSIN—I am wondering what steps might have been taken to actually ensure that there is an increase in the numbers of people applying rather than a decrease.

Dr Harmer—What is your question, Senator, so that we can take it on notice?

Senator CROSSIN—What steps have been taken to analyse why there has been a decrease in the number of young people applying for the National Youth Roundtable?

Ms Loveday—Some 450 applicants from which to choose 30 people is still quite a good field.

Senator CROSSIN—That is true, but it was 1,000 young people in 2000.

Dr Harmer—I suspect it might just be a reflection of the possibility of getting chosen or selected.

Ms Loveday—Just from talking to the young people themselves, there is a range of reasons they might or might not apply. If they have a particularly heavy study load it is a commitment to come together a couple of times a year to communicate and do some work on their project. Quite a number of them are studying or have other commitments. They have to think about whether they are able to devote that time.

Senator CROSSIN—I am particularly interested to see whether there have been any formal steps taken to analyse why there has been a decrease in the numbers applying.

Ms Loveday—I will check that for you, Senator.

Dr Harmer—One of the difficulties with the youth strategy is to encourage more people to apply. If we have only a relatively limited number of places, we are in danger of encouraging people to put some effort in without a great prospect of getting on. I suspect that some of the young people who would like to participate may be realistic about not being able to make it. We will take that question on notice.

Senator CROSSIN—The ABC reported on 15 December last year that a member of the National Youth Roundtable had said publicly that the roundtable was gagged by the government. Has there been an investigation into this claim?

Ms Loveday—At the time we sought to see what the situation was. The other members of the roundtable said no and the person herself said that she was misquoted. It was not an ‘investigation’, which has not-so-great connotations. We asked the young people whether they felt that that was the situation and their answer was a definitive no.

Senator CROSSIN—Who did you ask? All of the participants?

Ms Loveday—We asked a representative group plus the girl who was quoted.

Senator CROSSIN—Why did she believe she had be misquoted?

Ms Loveday—She read the report and said that she had been misquoted in the paper.

Senator CROSSIN—So she never used the words ‘gagged by the government’? Was this a written report or review, or just anecdotal?

Ms Loveday—We like to talk to the young people and find out how they are feeling about the program. We asked several of them what the situation was and they were all quite happy with how it had been going. The girl herself felt that she had been misquoted and misunderstood.

Senator CROSSIN—What did she mean? Did you ever ascertain that?

Ms Loveday—I did not speak to her personally. I can find out exactly what her words were. As far as I am aware, the young people, as part of their training, received some media training because for some of them it is quite daunting to have the media asking them questions. They received some training from FaCS staff on how they might deal with the questions. Perhaps the reporter misrepresented that as FaCS trying to tell them what to answer, whereas in fact the aim of it and what all the roundtable members said was that it was to give them some tools and support in how they might deal with the media. They are not used to it. That is not their normal area.

Senator CROSSIN—The process of consultation in the National Youth Roundtable involves members of the roundtable consulting other young people about issues relating to the groups they are allocated to. Have members been directly consulted by members of the government on issues affecting young people?

Ms Loveday—Members of the government are present at the presentation of their reports. Plus the executive summaries of their project reports are sent not only to ministers at the Australian government level but also to ministers at state government level and anybody else who might have portfolio responsibility for the issues they have raised. They are given the opportunity to speak with members of the government.

Senator CROSSIN—Members also have the opportunity to talk to their representatives from each state and territory—is that correct?

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—How soon after National Youth Roundtable members are selected do members of parliament know who is on the Youth Roundtable from their state or territory? Is formal advice provided to them?

Ms Loveday—Advice is provided. We advise the applicants within a week or two of a decision being made. We communicate with MPs and senators about a week or so after that. We let the young people know first.

Senator CROSSIN—Who is actually on the selection committee that selects the members for the National Youth Roundtable?

Ms Loveday—We have put together an independent selection committee. I will take that on notice. It is a small group who are actually meeting in Sydney today to look at it.

Senator CROSSIN—Today?

Ms Loveday—Yes. They are young people. I will get that information for you.

Senator CROSSIN—Is one them the Young Australian of the Year?

Ms Loveday—I think it might be, but I will confirm that later.

Senator CROSSIN—Could you provide me with a line-by-line breakdown of the costs associated with the National Youth Roundtable last year? Are young people involved in the selection of the themes that the groups are allocated?

Ms Loveday—I will check all of that for you and get back to you.

Senator CROSSIN—Has there been any consideration of whether 50 is a sufficient number of people to provide advice to the government? Did you review that number?

Ms Loveday—Yes, we have looked at that for this coming year. In fact, the decision has been made to decrease it to 30. Fifty is a little unwieldy organisationally and when trying to devote enough time to the individual young people. It is a consultation mechanism, but there is also quite a deal of support required for those young people. It is an experience for them. There are some younger members of the group who are under 18. We decided to see how smaller groups would help the projects and their ability to interact with each other and form a cohesive group.

Senator CROSSIN—So it is going from 50 to 30 for this coming year?

Ms Loveday—That is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I ask you about the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group. In the estimates hearing last year the department said that conversations with applicants on the reasons there is a low number of young people applying for the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group were not yet pulled into a summary. Is that summary now available?

Ms Loveday—I have not seen a formal summary; however, I know that for this year's National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group our applications have gone from 40 to about 63. Part of that was because we put in a bit of extra effort getting out to the regional media and the Indigenous media. We found that the regional newspapers picked up the story several weeks after the metropolitan papers, even though a lot of it had gone out at the same time. The extra effort in using networks of previous NIYLG members to get the message out to more remote communities and regional areas has been successful.

Senator CROSSIN—Just going back to the original questions, then: has a summary of those reasons that you alluded to, or the process you alluded to, in last year's budget estimates been completed? Can you take that on notice?

Ms Loveday—I will take that on notice.

Senator CROSSIN—At last year's estimates it was also said that there was a review of the nomination process. Has that been undertaken?

Ms Loveday—Only as part of looking at what worked last year and what did not and what we might look at doing. We have gone out in newspaper—

Senator CROSSIN—Was that a normal review?

Ms Loveday—We run this every year and we have a look at it every year. What is the best way of getting the outcomes we want from it? We ask previous members of both the roundtable and the NIYLG what they think and how they would like to see it operate. As per last year, we have extended an open invitation for young people who meet certain criteria.

But, as I said, this year we made an extra effort in terms of regional and remote media links to get that out.

Senator CROSSIN—Of those 63 who have applied this year, you still will be selecting only 15?

Ms Loveday—That is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—There has not been a review of that number?

Ms Loveday—Not a formal review. They worked quite well at that number. It is quite a small group. It is quite a different type of operation to the roundtable. It is called a leadership group because it is actually about leadership of those young people, and they need to be able to form a cohesive, supportive group themselves. Once you start getting too big you have a problem in having that support within the group. So 15 seems to work quite well. You often have one or two who might not be able to make a meeting for a range of reasons—sometimes study, sometimes family issues. So, generally, you find that at any get-together you would have, about 13 young people.

Senator CROSSIN—The Australian Forum of Youth Organisations, can you indicate to me what have been some specific policy outcomes or new initiatives that have resulted from those meetings?

Ms Loveday—We have not held a meeting since early last year for that group.

Senator CROSSIN—What do you mean by ‘early last year’?

Ms Loveday—I think it was about April.

Senator CROSSIN—So there has been no meeting of the youth organisations forum since April last year?

Ms Loveday—No. One was scheduled just prior to the election which had to be postponed. When I came into the position I met with some of the AFYO members and also the YACF, the Youth Advisory Consultative Forum, to see how they felt about the role of the two bodies. They said that, while the group was a great group and they felt that they had good access to us, perhaps the set-up of the way it was now was not as appropriate as it had been. AFYO has very much a focus on youth development organisations such as the Scouts and the Boys’ Brigade—those sorts of traditional youth development organisations. While they have quite a strong role to play in the sorts of policy outcomes that we are aiming for, even they felt that maybe youth development was a bit broader than that.

Senator CROSSIN—When are you planning to meet with these organisations?

Ms Loveday—We are currently in discussions to see how we want to take it forward in the future.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the monetary amount that is allocated against this in the budget?

Ms Loveday—For AFYO it is \$75,000 for 2004-05.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have a breakdown of how much the meeting last year would have cost?

Ms Loveday—I have not got it with me. I can take that on notice. I think that might have been provided.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I just ask you about The Source, the web site. The Auditor-General's report, *Management of Internet Portals at the Department of Family and Community Services*, which is audit report No. 27, actually identified a range of areas where the department was not able to identify any benefits of the web site among other areas concerned. What steps have been undertaken by FaCS to respond to this concern?

Ms Chambers—We have looked at The Source. We undertook a technical and design review in 2004 and a new design was implemented in August 2004. That design was tested with a range of young people. Since that new design has been put into place the email traffic commenting on the design has been overwhelmingly positive. We receive about 30,000 visitors a month—not commenting directly on the design.

Senator CROSSIN—Has the web site undergone a cost-benefit analysis that was recommended in the Auditor-General's report?

Ms Chambers—We are currently undertaking some market research to make sure that it still fits the needs of the target group and ascertain what the target group would be looking for on that web site. We are right in the middle of that research at the moment.

Senator CROSSIN—I do not have many other questions about that. Can I just go to National Youth Week. The budget for National Youth Week in previous estimates hearings included a large portion of contractors and consultants. Can you just explain to me what the role of the consultants and the contractors in the organisations for the National Youth Week are? Do you have a list of them?

Ms Chambers—Certainly. This year, in National Youth Week 2005, we have not used a great range of consultants, as we have in previous years. Our major consultant has been Horizon, which has provided PR for National Youth Week. That PR is actually provided as part of the Australian government's commitment to a communications strategy. It is part of the role of the Australian government to provide a national communications strategy so that the states and territories, and to a certain extent local governments, can also ride off that communications strategy.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have a list of the consultants or the contractors?

Ms Chambers—Not on me, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you take that on notice for me?

Ms Chambers—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you also provide me with the figures for the numbers of young people who have accessed the web site on a month-by-month basis since January of this year?

Ms Chambers—We run with a little bit of a lag. The last figures that we currently have are for the last three months of 2004, and they work out to be an average of approximately 30,000 visitors a month.

Senator CROSSIN—There seems to be very little information about the Youth Advisory Consultative Forum. Are there any minutes or policy outcomes of this forum?

Ms Loveday—As I said, AFYO is a group that provides advice on youth issues. YACF, however, is actually made up of individuals who are prominent in the field of youth. They also have not met this year but, as I said, we are currently looking at the two groups.

Senator CROSSIN—When was the last time they met?

Ms Loveday—I do not know if I have that information. I will have to get that for you.

Senator CROSSIN—Who are the members of this forum?

Ms Chambers—I do not have that with me at the moment, but I will get it for you. I have AFYO but not YACF. I can get that for you.

Senator CROSSIN—All right. So you do not know if there are any young people who sit on this committee?

Ms Chambers—These are experts in the youth field.

Senator CROSSIN—Not necessarily young people?

Ms Loveday—Not necessarily young people. They are people who work in the field—academics, youth workers and that sort of thing.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the budgeted item for this coming year?

Ms Loveday—\$75,000.

Senator CROSSIN—The government only consults through the consultation processes that have been outlined and talked about today—the seven initiatives? Is that right?

Ms Loveday—That is right.

Senator CROSSIN—There are never any sort of open consultations with young people, other than the seven initiatives that we have gone through this morning?

Ms Loveday—Only the seven we have noted.

Senator CROSSIN—Only those seven?

Ms Loveday—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—What programs do you actually provide for young people who are not at risk? As I look at those seven, the majority of your programs that are funded are generally for young people at risk, the exceptions being National Youth Week, the National Youth Roundtable and the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group.

Ms Loveday—That is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—The other four are targeted at youth at risk; is that correct?

Ms Loveday—We have some other smaller initiatives.

Ms Chambers—We have a range of youth sponsorships which are aimed at providing the opportunity for young people to showcase their talents, to provide a positive portrayal of young people and offset negative stereotypes. They include programs like the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge, Cool Schools, Step to the Future, leadership forums and Wakakirri. They are small programs, but they do represent an opportunity for young people to participate.

Senator CROSSIN—The department of children and youth affairs was downgraded to a bureau within FaCS after the 2004 election; is that correct?

Dr Harmer—What was that question again, Senator, please?

Senator CROSSIN—The department of children and youth affairs is now a bureau within FaCS, following the 2004 election.

Dr Harmer—I do not think there has ever been a department of children and youth affairs in the Commonwealth.

Senator CROSSIN—Just always a—

Dr Harmer—A bureau.

Senator CROSSIN—Even though we had a Minister for Children and Youth Affairs?

Dr Harmer—That was the minister.

Senator CROSSIN—But no department or bureau associated with it?

Dr Harmer—No, no department.

Senator CROSSIN—Lastly, has there been any work done within your area on establishing a commissioner for children and young people?

Ms Loveday—No, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—No thought has been given to it or no work has been done on that?

Ms Loveday—Not in my branch.

Senator McLUCAS—You are aware it is a recommendation of the Senate inquiry into children who lived in institutional care?

Dr Harmer—There is no current work going on, but if there is a report of a Senate inquiry that pertains to our area it is certainly something that we would be looking at.

Senator McLUCAS—Part of the government response to that report mentioned it. It is interesting that it has not come across your desk yet.

Dr Harmer—The last number of months have been an extremely busy period, leading up to and post budget. I am sure Ms Loveday has a lot of things on her plate, and that will be one of them.

Senator McLUCAS—I think Ms Loveday said that she does not have that on her plate.

Dr Harmer—Not at the moment.

Ms Loveday—I have only been in the job since January, so my plate is yet still undiscovered.

Senator McLUCAS—We will just put it to the side. It will come across your desk at some stage.

Ms Loveday—I know. I will look out for it.

Senator CROSSIN—That is all of the questions I have for the youth area.

Ms Flanagan—Senator, I want to clarify an earlier answer I gave on the transition to independent living allowance. There is a decrease, as you noted, from \$2.7 million down to \$2.560 million. That is not in fact due to an efficiency dividend. It is due to a rephrase. So the underlying budget for TILA is the \$2.560 million, but there was a transfer of \$150,000 between years, which is why it was just bumped up in one year.

Senator CROSSIN—I understand.

Proceedings suspended from 10.17 am to 10.30 am

Senator McLUCAS—Dr Harmer, I want to come back to an answer you gave to Senator Collins at last estimates. Senator Collins's request was for the forward estimates of special appropriations. I was also interested in that, but we can talk about that in a moment. I am more interested in appropriation bills Nos 1 and 2. What I am looking for is appropriation bills Nos 1 and 2 to be disaggregated by line item and then the forward estimates to be shown for each program.

Dr Harmer—I think the answer to that is the same answer that applies to the special appropriations. I will need to check with my people, but I am pretty sure that finance department guidance and the position that other departments have taken is that it is not in the budget papers and if I recall the discussion last time correctly—and I am relying on my memory here—there were some concerns that by breaking it down into very small subprogram or program elements we might reveal some of the Treasury parameters. I think that was the issue. So we have decided as a department to try to be as helpful as we can but not provide breakdowns for the forward estimates years below the program level.

Senator McLUCAS—Below the program level.

Dr Harmer—I will need to rely on my chief finance officer and the people in the budget area to correct me or expand on that. Can you give me an example of what it is that you want? Pick a program that you would like the forward estimates for and I will give you an indication of whether that is doable.

Senator McLUCAS—Yesterday we went into a lot of detail trying to get an understanding of output 3.2 and the figures under Appropriation Bill (No. 1) for employment assistance and other services, including expenditure under the Disability Services Act 1986. That seemed to have a whole range of programs that sat under that—six, eight or 10 of them. We could sit here and I could write out each of those programs by hand and we could talk about how much is disaggregated for this year, next year and so on. But if we could disaggregate appropriation bills Nos 1 and 2 into the program and then give the forward estimates, I think that would be very helpful to the committee.

Dr Harmer—I am not sure I can do that. I am not even sure if we have splits in the out years for those subelements of that program. I need to check that. I also need to check that it does not compromise the position that the department of finance and others have taken in relation to the provision of forward estimates information which is outside what is provided in the budget. So those two things I would need to look at. If you can ask me a question, I will take it on notice and get back to you on that.

Senator McLUCAS—This is a program, and governments say from time to time that the program will run for three years or five years or whatever it is. That is always in the announcement. It is not as if we are asking for anything that is a secret.

Dr Harmer—We will try to be helpful. If you had a particular part of the program that you wanted to ask us about, such as whether it is ongoing, we can certainly answer that. In my final paragraph in answer to Senator Collins, I said:

What FaCS will do to assist the Senate Committee is to answer questions by payment type on future financial trends/expectations over the forward estimates period ...

What I am not able to give you is a specific tabular breakdown of the subprograms.

Senator McLUCAS—I thought this question to Senator Collins was just about special appropriations.

Dr Harmer—Can we get back to you on that, Senator? I need to check whether this one applies more broadly or just to special appropriations. For the example you used, I am not at all confident—and I have not got the people here—that we could give you the breakdown in forward estimates years. I am not even sure we have it, frankly, for those programs.

Senator McLUCAS—I can understand that, Dr Harmer. That is understandable because those programs may not be operating.

Dr Harmer—They may not be separated in the forward years. It may be a matter of government decision in terms of the split of the program resources between the subprograms over the years. I am not sure that we necessarily would have the detail of that at this point. We would have the macro figure.

Senator McLUCAS—Let us have a chat about it after lunch.

Dr Harmer—Sure.

[10.36 am]

CHAIR—Thank you very much to those associated with output 3.4. We now move to output 3.5, Support for women.

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Flanagan, can I start with some figures in the PBS. On page 124, I notice that you are now responsible for the wife pension (disability support pension), the wife pension (age) and the widow B pension; is that correct?

Ms Flanagan—Just to clarify, I am not responsible for them. It is just that, in the outcome structure of the department, these particular payments are presented under the women's output group.

Ms Flanagan—If you have questions about those particular pension payments, we can get the people who are responsible for those to answer them.

Dr Harmer—We have the people here who are responsible for those.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you explain to me why these payments are categorised with the women's output group?

Dr Harmer—It is an internal decision made by the department. When we are trying to structure output groups, it makes sense and it makes it easier to follow. We have allocated

these under the women's outcome. They are all women recipients of those programs. So it is a departmental decision to try to make the PBS as consistent and coherent as possible. Those are the three programs that are focused entirely on women and we thought that they would fit best in our program structure under the heading of women's programs.

Senator CROSSIN—So the specific output group of the Office for Women now includes special appropriations of women who are recipients of that money; is that correct?

Dr Harmer—We do not have an outcome which is just the Office for Women. We have an outcome which is 'Support for women' which includes the programs run by the Office for Women and some of the programs targeted entirely at women from the rest of the department.

Senator CROSSIN—I see. So, Ms Flanagan, you are heading up the Office for Women. Who heads up the wife pensions and the widow B pension payments?

Mr Kalisch—Those payments are largely managed by our seniors and means test branch. Mr Dolan is the acting group manager of that area.

Mr Dolan—The seniors and means test branch comes under the social policy group. It has primary responsibility for the management of the aged pension. Because it has similar customer groups to the age pension it also looks after the wife pension (age), the wife pension (disability support pension) and the widow B pension. There are similarities in customers of the groups which is why they have been grouped together in terms of administrative oversight.

Senator CROSSIN—Why are not all pensions that women receive from FaCS in this output?

Dr Harmer—Because the other pensions that women receive men also receive. These are the three only women pensions.

Mr Kalisch—We have different payment responsibilities put under the relevant outcome and output areas. We do not group them under one outcome called income support payments. We put them under the appropriate outcome and output group and these payments, most appropriately, fall within this output group.

Senator CROSSIN—So the baby bonus is not under here?

Mr Kalisch—The baby bonus is a tax benefit. The maternity allowance, which I think is potentially what you are talking about, is something that is provided under our broader family assistance area.

Senator CROSSIN—So, even though it might be predominantly paid to women, it is not under this group?

Mr Kalisch—No, it is what are predominantly paid to women but so are some of our family assistance measures. They are predominantly for children in terms of those family assistance measures. That is under output group 4.1.

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Flanagan, can I go back to the Office for Women. How many staff are now at the Office for Women?

Ms Flanagan—I believe we have around 40 staff who are currently employed in the office.

Senator CROSSIN—Would they all be full time or are they full-time equivalents?

Ms Flanagan—There were 39 staff as at 27 May 2005. Six officers were part time and four officers were employed on a non-ongoing basis and the rest of them are full-time staff.

Senator CROSSIN—Is that a reduction from last year?

Ms Flanagan—No, that is actually an increase. It depends where you actually take the point of last year.

Senator CROSSIN—Perhaps if I take the point last year when I asked the same question in estimates.

Ms Flanagan—There has certainly been an increase since our discussion last year.

Senator CROSSIN—When I look at page 28 of the PBS at outcome 3 I am trying to ascertain how much is allocated to the Office for Women for departmental expenses.

Ms Flanagan—The table on page 28 does not actually give you that because it also has the administration of the pension payments that you have just referred to.

Senator CROSSIN—That is right.

Ms Flanagan—There is also an allocation model across the department for corporate overheads that are actually applied. But certainly the core of the Office for Women—that is, staff whom we employ on our core functions—has in fact increased. In the budget process we have also received some new policy money on an ongoing basis.

Senator CROSSIN—What amount have you got for this year to run your office?

Ms Flanagan—The amount to actually run the office—

Dr Harmer—Is it 2004-05 or 2005-06 that you are asking about?

Senator CROSSIN—2005-06.

Dr Harmer—So you are talking about the resources Ms Flanagan will have to run the Office for Women in 2005-06?

Senator CROSSIN—Yes.

Ms Flanagan—It is probably about \$4½ million dollars. We have some ongoing money that came across with us from PM&C. We also have new policy money to perform our functions.

Senator CROSSIN—Where will I find that in the PBS?

Ms Flanagan—You will not be able to find that particular figure in the PBS.

Senator CROSSIN—Why not?

Ms Flanagan—Because, as we have just described, outcome 3, the departmental costs, also include the administration of the pensions that are also grouped under outcome 3.5.

Senator CROSSIN—You have just been busy telling me that the office is run and managed quite separately to the women's pension area, for want of a better word. Why are those two costs not split in the table on page 28?

Mr Youngberry—The nearest number that you will get in relation to departmental funding for the support for women's output is on page 125. Basically that shows under output group 3.5, policy services and program management, \$3.9 million and a service delivery component of \$7.5 million. They will incorporate the Office for Women as well as the costs of running the special appropriation items in that output.

Senator CROSSIN—As I read through this PBS I made the note 'break down?' next to the figures that you have just quoted on page 125. There is nothing in here that actually tells me how much money you have allocated to the Office for Women to run that office for the next 12 months.

Dr Harmer—No, but we can provide it to you. Because of the way we have described our outputs we do not show it separately in the portfolio budget statement but we certainly have an allocation— Ms Flanagan has an allocation for the Office for Women—and we would be happy to provide it for you.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you tell me why you do not put it in the PBS?

Dr Harmer—Because there is no output for the Office for Women in the Department of Family and Community Services. The basis for putting our numbers into the portfolio budget statements is according to output structure and we do not have an output called Office for Women. We have an output called assistance for women of which the Office of Women is a part.

Senator CROSSIN—I still do not understand why you do not have a break down of how much it is going to cost you to run the programs and run the department under that output?

Dr Harmer—We have it in the department. We do not show it in the portfolio budget statements because there is no separate output or suboutput.

Mr Youngberry—I think if we went to break this down for the Office for Women there would be argument for breaking out many aspects of FaCS's internal operations and this document would increase tremendously.

Senator CROSSIN—That would not be such a bad thing, would it?

Senator MOORE—We are asking in particular about the Office for Women because your department has very recently picked it up and because there is interest in the fact that it has moved. I take your point that if you are going to pull out this particular program it would be unusual with the rest of the department. Can you give me another example of a stand-alone unit within the department that is not found in the PBS?

Dr Harmer—There are virtually no stand-alone structures.

Mr Youngberry—There are lots of stand-alone units in terms of our organisational structure. In terms of something that is analogous to the Office for Women, the youth bureau would have fitted into that category although it is morphed into our youth branch which was on earlier this morning. There will be any number of instances such as that. We have 30-odd branches across the department which are stand-alone management units. If we were to report all of those it would become an impossible exercise to try to fit all the numbers into this document.

Dr Harmer—The Office for Women is now a division or group within the Department of Family and Community Services. We do not show in our portfolio budget statements the funding separately by group; we show it by output. We have the funding because my group managers need to have resources so they can manage. We can also provide you with an estimate or an answer on how much—and Ms Flanagan certainly knows or if she does not know now she soon will—money she will have to run the Office for Women for 2005-06. But it is not a separate output and therefore is not shown separately in the portfolio budget statements any more than my corporate services division or my families and children's division or my housing and disability division are shown.

Senator CROSSIN—I understand that Dr Harmer, but we have come from a situation where we had the Office for the Status of Women under the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Office for Women has been renamed and pushed under family and community services and subsumed in the department. I think there are people out there who would actually like to see how much is being appropriated to that department to run it each year. If you can take the question on notice that is fine. I understand that it is associated with an output group but in the PBS it would be interesting to see exactly what expenses are being appropriated to achieve that output. Now the position of program manager for the violence against women program is vacant; is that correct?

Ms Flanagan—We have just advertised an EL2 position, which will be responsible for the Women's Safety Agenda.

Senator CROSSIN—So the position of manager of the violence against women program no longer exists?

Ms Flanagan—I am not quite sure what position you are talking about. The violence against women campaign is run by one of the sections within the Office for Women. We have recently advertised the position of head of that section, but we do not have a separate program manager for the campaign.

Senator MOORE—Which section is that?

Ms Flanagan—It is called the women's safety section.

Senator MOORE—What does it look after, apart from the program that Senator Crossin is talking about?

Ms Flanagan—It will be responsible for the new safety agenda, which is one of the new policy proposals announced by the government.

Senator MOORE—That is a new program?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Are the violence against women strategy and the youth strategy the only two in that safety division at this stage?

Ms Flanagan—No. The safety section will look after both the campaign and a number of other elements that were announced as election commitments. For example, we will implement training for nurses attached to GP practices in rural and remote areas. We have some more innovative projects on violence. We are looking to work with Attorney-General's

on the justice system to ensure that people—usually women—who are victims of domestic violence or sexual assault are better treated in the justice system. That particular section will look after a whole range of measures.

Senator MOORE—Can we get a list of those?

Ms Flanagan—Yes. Actually, they are listed in the women’s budget publication?

Senator MOORE—All of them?

Ms Flanagan—Yes. All of those elements are listed there.

Senator MOORE—I have read that. I just did not pick that up.

Senator CROSSIN—I will go to that in a minute. I refer you to the table on page 124. The final estimate for the Women’s Leadership and Development program for 2004-05 is around \$2.5 million. Will that amount be rephased to 2005-06?

Ms Flanagan—Senator, there is a bit of a trick in these figures—surprise, surprise.

Senator CROSSIN—No, I am not surprised there is a trick in any of the figures this government produces.

Ms Flanagan—Because we transferred from the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio halfway through the year, this is, in effect, the balance that we brought with us. You need to add both the figure in the Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio Budget Statement and the one that you have here. I can tell you the total. We expect to be able to expend all of our money in 2004-05, at this stage.

Senator CROSSIN—So the \$2.5 million is what the Office for Women brought across with them from October of last year; is that right?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, when we transferred in November.

Dr Harmer—I think Ms Flanagan is about to provide the combined total of the figure from PM&C plus this amount.

Ms Flanagan—The total is \$11.589 million. That is for both the Women’s Leadership and Development program and the Women’s Safety Agenda. The total that we were allocated last year was \$11.589 million, and we brought \$7.669 million with us to FaCS.

Senator CROSSIN—You anticipate spending all of that by 30 June?

Ms Flanagan—That is certainly our intention at the moment, yes.

Senator CROSSIN—So the \$21.9 million will be new money from 1 July?

Ms Flanagan—That is correct, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—No rephase? No carry-over?

Ms Flanagan—No.

Senator CROSSIN—How much money has been allocated in the Victims of Trafficking Support program? I note that it is a \$20 million package, but how much does the Office for Women manage?

Ms Flanagan—We have an allocation for the next two years of \$755,000 per year.

Senator CROSSIN—Where will I find that amount on page 124?

Ms Flanagan—You will not find it on page 124. I am sorry, I thought that was shown separately in another part of the PBS. It is shown on page 157, but the dollar amount is not actually shown. I thought that the dollar amount was shown.

Senator CROSSIN—Page 157?

Ms Flanagan—On the bottom of page 157 it is separately identified, but it does not show the figure of \$755,000.

Senator CROSSIN—No. Your performance indicator is 90 per cent. Nowhere in the PBS does it show how much of that \$20 million FaCS has?

Ms Flanagan—No, not separated out.

Senator CROSSIN—Why is that? Isn't the PBS supposed to show where all your money is going?

Ms Flanagan—Mr Youngberry might—

Senator CROSSIN—Maybe I should ask what is in the PBS.

Dr Harmer—All of the money that we have is shown in the PBS. The PBS is produced under quite strict guidelines, which are provided by the department of finance, as to how a PBS should be produced. It specifies that a PBS should show expenditure, estimates and projections on the basis of outcome groups. That is what we have done. We have done this, as have all other departments, to comply with the guidelines issued by the department of finance as to how a PBS should be put together. One thing we can, and will, do for you as often as we can is to provide answers. We have these amounts, presumably, at our fingertips here at the estimates committee or we are able to get them for you, and we will answer your questions. This PBS document is produced strictly in accordance with the guidelines provided to us by the department of finance.

Senator CROSSIN—On what page will I find mention of the \$750,000 for the Victims of Trafficking Support program?

Mr Youngberry—That amount will be included in the measure tables on page 67. Again, what is reported in the PBS is the measure level, and the measure will be comprised of a number of components.

Senator CROSSIN—Is it under the Women's Safety Agenda?

Ms Flanagan—Yes. That is the total that includes the trafficking provision. On page 124, under Women's Safety Agenda the trafficking amount is shown. It is not shown as a separate measure.

Senator CROSSIN—It is included in the \$17.5 million?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—You would say that that complies with the requirements of the Department of Finance and Administration?

Dr Harmer—Yes, it does.

Senator CROSSIN—Even though the output is shown on page 157 but nowhere in here is there an itemised amount?

Dr Harmer—Which page are you on, Senator?

Senator CROSSIN—There is an output shown on page 157, but there is no separate line item in this PBS allocating \$750,000 to the trafficking support for women.

Mr Youngberry—It is included in the measure. You also need to refer to page 67, which lists the two measures and provides the aggregates across the full estimates period.

Senator CROSSIN—On page 41—

Mr Youngberry—Sorry, I was confused. I thought it was part of the budget measure and it is not.

Senator CROSSIN—Well, we could be here all day discussing whether or not it is adequate. Can you explain what the second dot point on page 41 means? It shows that \$4.7 million will be moved from 2004-05 to 2005-06 for the Family Violence Partnership Program. Ms Flanagan, does that come under anything to do with you?

Ms Flanagan—No.

Dr Harmer—That is under outcome 4 in the families and children's program. It is a family violence initiative, so it is included in the families program.

Senator CROSSIN—Because it was not clear to me whether that was part of the left over money from PADV or whether it was something Office of Women were handling.

Ms Flanagan—No, Senator. The Indigenous Family Violence Program is, as I say, included in the families outcome. So that is not one of ours.

Senator CROSSIN—Just finalising this, in the budget 2005-06, What's New, What's Different package, if we go to page 16 of that, can you give me an allocation against each of these? It is \$75.7 million over four years for the Women's Safety Agenda. How much is allocated under your control?

Ms Flanagan—Out of the \$75.7 million, around \$13 million of that is actually appropriated to the Department of Health and Ageing, to the Practice Incentive Program, and this is to encourage doctors in GP practices in rural and remote areas to be able to release GP nurses for training so that they are trained in recognising and being able to support victims of domestic violence.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I meticulously go through these dot points then. The re-run of the Violence Against Women campaign has got how much appropriated against it?

Ms Flanagan—We do not actually have money appropriated against each of these elements per se. I think when we have had these discussions before we have come up with a notional budget. What we need to do as we move through the forward estimates period is to look at priorities. It is possible that the costings will change or that the estimate that we have made for how much it might cost to provide training in the justice system might vary.

Senator CROSSIN—How did you come up with the figure of \$75.7 million?

Ms Flanagan—We had a number of notional budgets against that.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you give me what the notional budget is against each of the dot points?

Ms Flanagan—At a very, very broad level we can do that, noting that these were part of the budget processes.

Senator CROSSIN—Well, let us do that. What is the notional budget for re-running the Violence Against Women campaign?

Ms Flanagan—Do you want it over the four years?

Senator CROSSIN—Yes, because that is what you have got here, \$75.7 million over four years.

Ms Flanagan—We will need to take that question on notice. We do not actually have the figures here because, as I say, with all of these programs we have come up with a notional budget that underlies budget costings, but it is not necessarily that they are going to be the budgets that we follow through with.

Senator CROSSIN—I understand that.

Ms Flanagan—It is only when we start to implement will we know how firm those are.

Senator CROSSIN—But I am trying to ascertain how you came up with a figure of \$75 million. You must have added A plus B plus C somewhere along the line.

Dr Harmer—It was a government decision. The \$75 million would have been a decision taken by the government in the budget for the allocation as part of the minister's budget submission. We are not able to give you the advice we gave the minister or the input that we gave the minister in going into those discussions that led up to the breakdown of the \$75 million. That was the decision that the government came to for an amount that covered all of those things over those four years.

Senator CROSSIN—But you must have, though, a four-year forward estimates for each of these seven dot points.

Dr Harmer—What Ms Flanagan has said is that she can give you, as I indicated—just bear with me for a moment—going back to Senator McLucas's question about wanting a split over the forward estimates years et cetera, we will give you what we have got in terms of our broad projections, but this is a classic example, Senator McLucas, of where the numbers are not in stone and, as Ms Flanagan has said, as things change, our estimates change, as needs arise, we have the capacity to move some of the money around within that \$75 million between the subprograms. That is why we are not able to give, in many cases, a four-year forward estimate for each of the sub bits.

Senator CROSSIN—You are able to give us a notional estimate then?

Dr Harmer—We can give you, as I said in my answer to Senator Collins, an indication whether it is going up or down—a notional figure. But we would not be able to be held to that because it may change during the four years.

Senator McLUCAS—Put that proviso on the top of the table. I think we all acknowledge that government priorities change. Senator Crossin is right: to get to \$75 million you have to add up a lot of numbers and we are interested in knowing those notional estimates.

Dr Harmer—We will take it on notice and provide you with that.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the notional estimate then for this year only? You were going to provide us with the notional estimates for four years for each of these seven dot points. What is the notional estimate for 2005-06 to re-run the Violence Against Women campaign?

Ms Flanagan—This is the issue. We went into budget, figures were agreed. There is much, as you would imagine, toing-and-froing before the final figure that you are actually given. There are various elements that have been committed to and announced and all of those elements will be delivered. What we now have to do is to sit down with the minister and work out how we are going to do those during the year. It might be, for example, that we have decided to do something with the justice system, but it might be that we do not start that until the second year of the forward estimates period, for example.

Senator CROSSIN—But that is not going to be the case with the Violence Against Women campaign, is it?

Ms Flanagan—Sorry?

Senator CROSSIN—I mean, is that the case with the Violence Against Women campaign?

Ms Flanagan—With the Violence Against Women campaign we actually have agreed; we have been to the Ministerial Committee on Government Communications and we have actually agreed on a media buy. So I can give you figures that we have committed under those various elements and that is probably the major one.

Senator CROSSIN—Let us do that then.

Ms Flanagan—But there are many other elements that we have not yet done a lot of planning for.

Senator CROSSIN—So what is the notional allocation for this year under the continued funding for the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse and the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault—that is the second dot point?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, and both of those, as you would appreciate, are already existing bodies and we would be entering contract negotiations with them. This would be an example where, in the estimates that built up to the \$75 million, we would have put in what they are currently given, but we need the flexibility to see whether that is the appropriate funding level.

Senator CROSSIN—I am asking for what your notional allocation is for that dot point.

Ms Flanagan—We can tell you what the existing funding is that we paid both the domestic violence clearing house and AXA this year.

Senator CROSSIN—Let us start there. What is that then?

Ms Flanagan—The domestic violence clearing house we funded last year for \$350,000. We are just trying to get the centre for sexual assault. I only have a contract price for two years which was \$1.198 million.

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Flanagan, on page 124 of PBS, you have \$17.5 million for the women's safety agenda. You have just told me that \$750,000 of that is for trafficking against women. What are you intending to spend the rest of the money on?

Ms Flanagan—I think that you have the dot points there that you were just referring to, so re-running the violence campaign will be a very big element of that, doing a media buy.

Senator CROSSIN—How much have you allocated notionally against that in order to come up with the \$17.5 million in the PBS?

Ms Flanagan—I think that we have allocated around \$5 million to do a media buy, although again that will change once we actually speak to Universal McCann who will be purchasing the media buys for us.

Dr Harmer—So the answer to the question is approximately \$5 million, but it may change.

Senator CROSSIN—I understand that. I am just trying to get an idea—

Dr Harmer—Sure.

Senator CROSSIN—The research projects on domestic violence and sexual assault; is that part of the \$17.5 million?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, it is.

Senator CROSSIN—How much has been notionally allocated against that?

Ms Flanagan—We have not yet notionally allocated many of the costs for 2005-06. I think what we agreed to do was take on notice a sort of notional allocation across the four years that underlay the budget estimates, but we are now only going through our planning processes to work out what we will expend under that \$17 million in 2005-06. I can give you, at a very broad level—

Senator CROSSIN—How did you come up with the figure of \$17.5 million for the PBS?

Dr Harmer—The government allocated that amount to this program and it will be up to the minister, within the subelements of that, to allocate funds to the various components. What Ms Flanagan is saying is that we have not yet agreed with the minister and with the government exactly how those funds will be split. We do know that \$17.581 million will be spent in 2005-06 on the Women's Safety Agenda, which comprises a number of components. But Ms Flanagan has given you an indication of what we plan to spend—around \$5 million—on the re-running of the campaign. But in relation to the other elements of the Women's Safety Agenda, we are not able to give you that figure because we have not decided it or agreed it.

Senator Patterson—We will be looking at things like the kit that has been prepared for businesses to reduce the likelihood of domestic violence or to assist human resources people in businesses. That has been developed. There have been some additions to that. It has been rolled out in meetings with human resource people from businesses in a number of the capital cities. We are now moving to places like Townsville and Toowoomba. I cannot remember the exact regional areas. Depending on that success of that, the response to that and the interest in it, I would be looking at whether we could actually take that further into more regional areas.

But we need to know how that has gone first—what the response has been like. In fact, it has been very good in the cities. It is about telling businesses that it affects their businesses to the tune of about \$1.8 billion. It has been estimated that it affects productivity, that it affects their workplace and that there are things they can do and things they could understand to give particularly women assistance in where to find help.

If we feel that that is one of the more successful parts of the campaign, I would be wanting that to continue. If something else is better—the PADV and other parts of the domestic violence program—then we will be looking at those. I do not want to lock myself into something and say, ‘Yes, we’re going to spend it on this,’ and we find that it is not as successful as another part of the program.

Senator McLUCAS—That is not what Senator Crossin is asking, Minister.

Senator Patterson—Well, she is. She wants a breakdown on how it is going to be spent.

Senator McLUCAS—No. She is looking for the total potential spend in each of those seven—

Senator Patterson—It will be \$17½ million.

Senator McLUCAS—There are seven subprograms to that program.

Senator Patterson—And at the next estimates committee you will hear how it will be broken down. I am not going to commit to exactly how much we are going to spend where when we know that some programs may be more successful than others. There might be more demand for it.

Senator CROSSIN—I understand that. I understand that if you allocate \$5 million against the Violence Against Women campaign and \$2 million against research you might find at the end of the day that you have to take \$1 million off research. I understand that you need that flexibility.

Senator Patterson—We will have that flexibility and we will tell you next budget, next estimates—

Senator CROSSIN—I am trying to get you to tell me how you arrived at \$75.7 million over four years.

Dr Harmer—We cannot do that. What we will do is give you the notional allocation, with the appropriate caveats, of the \$17.5 million. We will take that on notice and provide, notionally, the allocation to the seven subprograms for 2005-06.

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Flanagan, do you have an idea of the notional allocation for the research projects on domestic violence and sexual assault for the next year?

Ms Flanagan—I think Dr Harmer has indicated that we can take this on notice and give it to you.

Dr Harmer—We will give it to you for all seven.

Senator McLUCAS—So you do not have it with you now?

Ms Flanagan—I do not have it with me simply because we have not yet gone through the process of actually looking at how we might expend it.

Senator Patterson—Nor have I decided how that will be done.

Senator McLUCAS—Minister, did you come up with \$17.581 million?

Senator Patterson—No, we came up with what we thought we could get and I argued very hard for it. It is not an easy process in ERC. Well, you do not know, Senator McLucas, and it might be a long time before you find out.

Senator McLUCAS—I just do not know why you would go to ERC with an application for \$17.581 million? Why not \$17.580 million?

Senator Patterson—Don't be so—

Senator McLUCAS—It is a very specific figure. It is not as if it is something you have just picked out of the air.

Senator Patterson—Often when you break them into four years you get that point at the end of a figure, when you look at how much we are going to have over the four years. Dr Harmer has told you what we will give you. At the end of this year, when estimates come back, you can ask us how we are spending it. I can tell you that it will be spent wisely and that it will be spent on projects that we believe will have outcomes.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I ask you about the \$75.7 million over four years? Do you have a breakdown of at least that figure over the next four years? Obviously the first year is going to be \$17.581 million; is that right? So what is the second, third and fourth year?

Ms Flanagan—I think that we have agreed that we will take on notice the breakdown—

Senator CROSSIN—So you did not bring that with you?

Ms Flanagan—No, I did not bring it with me because, as I say, it was part of the budget processes. We have been given an amount of money to run the Women's Safety Agenda and that is what we will endeavour to do over the next four years. What have been announced are the various elements that are going to be implemented, and all of those elements will need to be implemented. That is clearly on the public record. As to the amount of money we might spend against each of those elements over the four years, that is yet to be seen.

I would also point out that the \$17 million also includes some ongoing money—it is not just new policy money—which is why the figure might look a little strange. For example, I think we have discussed before the personal safety survey. We rephased money to run the personal safety survey.

Senator CROSSIN—How much was that?

Ms Flanagan—I can give you those sorts of figures because they are currently under contract.

Senator CROSSIN—We are trying to get a breakdown of the \$17.5 million as best as you have with you.

Dr Harmer—We will give you that. What Ms Flanagan is saying is that she does not have it with her. We will provide that on notice, and we will do our best to give you the notional allocation of the breakdown of the \$17.5 million between the seven programs.

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Flanagan is telling me that you do have some figures that go towards the \$17.5 million; is that right?

Dr Harmer—The ones that she has here we will give you.

Ms Flanagan—The personal safety survey—as I say, we have a memorandum of understanding with the Australian Bureau of Statistics—in 2005-06 has \$2.173 million and in 2006-07 has \$0.324 million. As you have already identified, the victims of trafficking have \$755,000 in 2005-06 and \$755,000 in 2006-07. They are ongoing elements that we are able to give you the figures for.

Senator CROSSIN—Is the \$13 million you mentioned earlier the amount that is allocated against the training for nurses in regional and rural areas?

Ms Flanagan—It has actually been paid to the Department of Health and Ageing, to their practice incentive program so that various GP practices can release the nurses for training.

Senator CROSSIN—But is that what it is? Is this dot point—training for nurses in regional and rural areas—the \$13 million you are talking about?

Ms Flanagan—No, Senator. We have an additional amount which is part of the \$75.7 million that has been allocated to the Office for Women. We will be developing training packages to deliver to the nurses.

Senator CROSSIN—So you are going to get back to me with the notional allocations for the training for the criminal justice section, the dedicated resource to the Australian Institute of Criminology and Mensline.

Senator Patterson—For the third time the answer is yes.

Senator CROSSIN—You do not have a notional allocation for this coming year for Mensline?

Ms Flanagan—No, we do not.

Senator CROSSIN—What is your time line for negotiating with the minister your budgeted amounts within the \$17.5 million? Do you hope to have that done by 30 June?

Ms Flanagan—That is certainly what we are working towards. We are having a planning day on 17 June, and we are hoping to have our business planning for the forthcoming year done. We need to take to the minister the range of suggestions about what we are going to do for 2005-06.

Senator CROSSIN—So once you have that allocated for the following year, can you provide that to the committee? It is a question you can take on notice, but I realise you will not have it until after 17 June.

Ms Flanagan—Again, Senator, things can also change during the year. What we have always been happy to provide is a report on how expenditure has been going over the year.

Senator MOORE—That is really important to have that basis about how the expenditure is going. It is nice to have something to compare it to as well, so that you can see how the flow is going. Can I just clarify something, Minister and Ms Flanagan. You said that at the

next estimates we will be able to have information about how the expenditure is going across each of those areas. By then will there be a future budget arrangement?

Senator Patterson—At the estimates in November?

Senator MOORE—That is right.

Senator Patterson—I would like to keep some flexibility.

Senator MOORE—There is always flexibility, Minister.

Senator Patterson—If I see that a program is working well and there is a demand for it—if we realise that, for example, HR people in a particular area would really respond well to it, I do not want to have it so tight that I cannot get that flexibility and ensure that we will get the best outcome. We will give you as much information as we can in November. We will tell you what we have spent, but the figures will be notional about what we are going to spend, because that means that we can have flexibility and respond to the demand.

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Flanagan, is it correct that you have refunded the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse?

Ms Flanagan—That is one of the elements—the domestic violence clearinghouse—yes.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the refunded amount?

Ms Flanagan—I just read those figures out earlier on in terms of the contract. This is one of the issues, Senator. We now need to negotiate a new contract with them, so I was able to give you the figures relating to our funding of them in 2004-05. This, I suppose, is one of the elements contributing to my reluctance to give you the figures, because while that might be the notional amount we might want them to do more work for us, for example, and it will be in contract negotiations and discussions with the minister that we will determine what the appropriate amount is that should go to those bodies.

Senator CROSSIN—I am just working off two pieces of paper.

Dr Harmer—Can I just add that that is a very good example of why we cannot give you a specific allocation—because the contract price for the final two years of that will impact on how much we have for other programs.

Senator CROSSIN—I understand that. We are asking for a notional allocation only.

Senator McLUCAS—Dr Harmer, you run a lot of programs where you ask a range of non-government organisations to tender or to apply for funding. They have to provide you a budget, don't they?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator McLUCAS—Each line item in that budget has to have a number at the end of it, one would imagine.

Dr Harmer—We do run 72 programs, Senator, so I am not sure that I can answer categorically for each one. I suspect we have different arrangements for some of the programs. We possibly ask for notional budgets for some, where we understand that they need some flexibility. I do not know. If you have a specific—

Senator McLUCAS—But in a general sense.

Dr Harmer—In a general sense we would expect that if they are applying for government funding they would have a projection on what they are going to spend.

Senator McLUCAS—And it will have a list of words down one side and a list of numbers down the other side and it will add up at the bottom and there will be a final figure and that is the application for funding from that NGO.

Dr Harmer—That is right.

Senator McLUCAS—And then they acquit to that.

Dr Harmer—Generally, I would think that is the case.

Senator McLUCAS—But your organisation—and I do not know whether it is just this particular section—does not seem to have to do that.

Dr Harmer—No, we do that. I just gave you a very specific example of why it is not possible for Ms Flanagan to give you a line-by-line allocation of the \$17.5 million even for next year, because we have not yet finalised negotiations for one of the components with a contractor. If that costs more, we will have to reduce one of the elements a bit. If it costs less, we will have a little bit more to spend on the other elements.

Senator McLUCAS—When a non-government organisation puts in a bid for some funding and then finds that the cost of purchasing that item or the cost of delivering it is more expensive, they will often write back to you and say we have to vary this line. That is a fairly standard procedure. That is the sort of thing we are getting to here. There must be a notional allocation of moneys there that will change over time. There must be a piece of paper that currently exists that could be provided to this committee in the knowledge that it may change.

Senator Patterson—We have said now three or four times that we will give you those notional figures on notice.

Senator McLUCAS—Why on notice? They must be in a folder here somewhere.

Senator Patterson—We will give it to you on notice. If you want to go on all day, then you can. But we will give you those notional figures, with your understanding that they can change because, as Ms Flanagan said, contracting for the work of the clearinghouse may be a little more than we anticipate or contracting for any other things—whether it be for a repetition of the Violence Against Women, Australia Says No campaign or whatever—may vary. I am telling you for the fourth time: we will give you the notional figures. For the fifth time, so it is clear—very clear—on notice we will give you the notional breakdown of that spending.

Senator McLUCAS—Why are they not here today?

Senator Patterson—For the sixth time—

CHAIR—Can we now proceed—

Dr Harmer—Senator, I have been doing Senate estimates for around about 20 or 25 years. I do not recall another Senate estimates where I have been pressed and it has not been accepted that in good faith we will take away a question on notice and provide an answer as quickly as possible. I do not remember another time where a Senate estimates committee has insisted we must have the answer here.

Senator McLUCAS—I am surprised.

CHAIR—Can we now proceed, because, Senator McLucas, we are not going to get any further. We have really gone over this time and time again. The minister, the departmental secretary and the officers have all given an undertaking. We cannot go any further. Can we now proceed to the next set of questions.

Senator CROSSIN—Thanks, Dr Harmer. I have been questioning the Office of the Status of Women and the Office for Women for seven years and I cannot remember a time when the officers have brought the information we have requested. I still do not understand why they do not anticipate what we are going to ask when the questions are the same year after year after year.

CHAIR—Senator, we cannot proceed with this any further. Do you have any further questions?

Senator CROSSIN—We have plenty, of course.

CHAIR—Let us proceed with further questions.

Senator CROSSIN—I am after a financial accrual for all the programs and projects that were funded under the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence strategy, phases 1 and 2. Now that that funding has stopped—on 30 June—do you have an accrual of all the programs and projects that were funded? Is there something you can table?

Ms Flanagan—So for both PADV 1 and 2 you want the budget by project?

Senator CROSSIN—Yes, and programs.

Ms Flanagan—We do not have that with us. We can take that on notice and see whether we can get it for you. I would imagine that much of it can be got, because the contracts that we would have let would have had to have been publicly gazetted, but we do not have a full list with us today.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you also provide me with—

Ms Flanagan—PADV 1 and 2 went over, I think, seven or eight years, so we will just have to see.

Senator CROSSIN—That is right: since 1997. But it was a substantial amount that is not being refunded this year. So what we are after is a summary of what was funded over that period of time.

Ms Flanagan—Okay. We will do that, noting that the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence strategy was a project based funding allocation. So it was for innovative best practice to develop, for example, training manuals for frontline workers et cetera.

Senator CROSSIN—I know all of that. Can you also provide me with an individual line item budget summary of the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence strategy for the last four years? Can you tell me if on 30 June all of that money will be spent?

Ms Flanagan—Sorry, but I am not quite clear what you mean by a line item compared to a project.

Senator CROSSIN—I think probably if you can give us a project by project summary or a program by program summary, that will do.

Ms Flanagan—Okay.

Senator CROSSIN—Will all of that money have been spent by 30 June?

Ms Flanagan—As I said earlier, Senator, it is certainly our intention that we will be able to spend all of that money by 30 June.

Senator CROSSIN—You are not expecting any money to be outstanding on that date?

Ms Flanagan—We do not. It is always hard to predict, but certainly we are not expecting to have any significant amount left.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you know why funding for the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence strategy was not continued?

Ms Flanagan—Government took a decision that, in effect, what it wanted to do was to work with the new women's safety agenda, exploring many of the lessons that have come out of Partnerships Against Domestic Violence. For example, research which has suggested that women are not well handled in the justice system is now being funded. So, even though it has been retitled, there is still a huge commitment to tackling domestic violence and sexual assault. The funding over the last four years was \$44.3 million and that has actually gone to \$75.7 million.

Senator CROSSIN—Over four years?

Ms Flanagan—Over four years, yes.

Senator CROSSIN—And you cannot give me a breakdown of that, so we will not go into that again.

Ms Flanagan—I can give you a breakdown of the \$43 million that has already been spent.

Senator CROSSIN—No, that is old money. What is the difference between the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence strategy and the Women's Safety Agenda?

Ms Flanagan—The Partnerships Against Domestic Violence had a range of elements. It had research, it had innovative best practice, et cetera, and the Women's Safety Agenda also ran, as you would appreciate, a very big media campaign, or a number of media campaigns, over the time it existed. So many of the elements remain the same.

Senator CROSSIN—I am well aware of those.

Ms Flanagan—We have had that discussion before, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—We have.

Ms Flanagan—But many of the elements that still reside within the Women's Safety Agenda were also part of Partnerships Against Domestic Violence.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have a summary of that somewhere? Do you have a documented analysis of the differences or the similarities between the two programs?

Ms Flanagan—No, Senator, we have not undertaken that.

Senator CROSSIN—How would you respond to the criticism that the Women’s Safety Agenda is just a watered-down Partnerships Against Domestic Violence program?

Ms Flanagan—Senator, I think that the proof is in the funding. The funding has gone from \$44.3 million over the last four years to \$75.7 million. I think that there is a firm ongoing commitment to tackle domestic violence and sexual assault issues at the Australian government level.

Senator CROSSIN—The \$44.3 million, was that not over three years?

Ms Flanagan—No, that is comprised of the second part of the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, the \$25 million. There was \$16.5 million given for the National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault and then a further \$6.7 million given in last year’s budget to run—or to assist in running—the media campaign.

Senator CROSSIN—It was over a three-year period though: is that correct?

Ms Flanagan—The second NICSA came in, I think, in 2000. I would need to get my years out. There is a slight difference in when those two big programs were started, I think.

Senator CROSSIN—I understand that WESNET has completed an audit of all the recommendations made in the research reports under the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence program. Is that correct?

Ms Flanagan—I do not think that WESNET has done that. We have a measure evaluation of the initiative.

Senator CROSSIN—You did not pay WESNET money to complete the audit report titled *Examining progress in accommodation and support options for women in domestic violence*?

Ms Flanagan—We commissioned WESNET to do that report, but it is a sub-element. It was a research task under the program.

Senator CROSSIN—Is that report public?

Ms Flanagan—My understanding is that the report will be published on our web site—the executive summary of the report. It is a very long report—I think it is 368 pages. At the moment we are getting it ready for release.

Senator CROSSIN—The executive summary is there already?

Ms Flanagan—No, I believe not.

Senator CROSSIN—When will it be there?

Ms Flanagan—We can get back to you and give you a time.

Senator CROSSIN—So, your intention is to publish that publicly?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, Senator.

Senator MOORE—Ms Flanagan, can we get the whole report? If people can get the executive summary on the web site, can people then request the full report by contacting the department?

Ms Flanagan—Yes. That is the idea. The executive summary will be there so that people can actually request the full report and we can mail it out.

Senator MOORE—Free of cost?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, Senator.

Senator Patterson—Perhaps it depends on how many copies are requested.

Senator MOORE—I have no idea, minister.

Senator CROSSIN—The Violence Against Women, Australia Says No campaign will be run again: is that correct?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—I had assumed there was about \$17.5 million allocated against that, but that is not correct, is it? The \$17.5 million is your whole Women's Safety Agenda: is that right?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—And you cannot tell me what the notional estimate for this campaign is—you think it is around \$5 million: is that right?

Dr Harmer—Approximately \$5 million.

Senator Patterson—For the seventh time, yes, we will give it to you on notice.

Senator CROSSIN—I understand that.

Senator Patterson—I have kept a note of how many times I have told you. It is seven now.

Senator CROSSIN—How much did you spend on this campaign last year?

Ms Flanagan—Overall, Senator, we spent around \$20 million, but that was over three years.

Senator CROSSIN—That was for the Violence Against Women campaign?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—Over the previous three years—is that the period you are talking about?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—So is there a view that this campaign in the next 12 months will be smaller?

Ms Flanagan—I do not know what you mean by smaller.

Senator CROSSIN—The amount of \$20 million over three years is much more of an allocation than a notional allocation of \$5 million for this year. What are you planning to do this year that might be less than what you did last year?

Ms Flanagan—You would appreciate that the \$20 million-odd included, basically, the development of the campaign, so there were costs in actually coming up with the ads et cetera. What we are now doing is delivering a product that we have developed, and that, of course, does not cost as much. We would be intending, in terms of a media buy, to do a similar sort of media buy to the one that we did last year. We will be running TV ads, we will

be running ads in magazines, we will be doing cinemas and we will be doing what is called convenience or washroom advertising. I think the only element that we might not proceed with this year is radio.

Senator CROSSIN—Okay. I have a file note here that tells me that the funding for Partnerships Against Domestic Violence was actually \$73.2 million over four years.

Ms Flanagan—Yes, that figure includes the first \$25 million for PADV1, which was given between 1997 and 2000. I think if you want to compare the figure work, we use it over the previous four years rather than the previous eight years, because this is a four-year allocation.

Senator CROSSIN—Yes, I see. We are still waiting for a breakdown of the Women's Safety Agenda budget allocation—and the same with the budget estimates for the Women's Safety Agenda.

Senator Patterson—What did you say again? Did I hear you correctly? Do you want me to say again what we are going to do?

Senator MOORE—That was not a question, Minister.

Senator CROSSIN—No, it was not a question.

Senator Patterson—It was a statement, was it?

Senator MOORE—We must keep the figures accurate, Minister.

Senator Patterson—I do want to keep the figures accurate, and I do not want to have to tell you an eighth time.

Senator CROSSIN—What are the components that you are looking at funding in this year's Violence Against Women, Australia Says No campaign. I know you just told us a minute ago, but can you just go through it again?

Ms Flanagan—I have just explained what we intend to do in terms of the media buy: that is, TV ads, cinemas, magazines and convenience advertising.

Senator CROSSIN—What does that mean?

Ms Flanagan—Washrooms, toilet doors. It is a very safe environment for women to take down numbers.

Senator CROSSIN—Will the funding only go towards the media buy: it is not going to be for stickers, balloons or bands or anything like this?

Ms Flanagan—At the moment we do not have down balloons and stickers.

Senator CROSSIN—I do not necessarily mean specifically balloons and stickers.

Ms Flanagan—At the risk of raising this once again, in terms of planning we have a solid media buy but one of the things that we would like to do over the forward estimates period is to see how we might change or update the campaign, and this is where we get back to the discussion we had earlier about notional budgets.

Senator CROSSIN—Did you conduct an evaluation of last year's campaign?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, we did, in terms of how it was recognised or how successful the actual media campaign itself was.

Senator CROSSIN—When was that conducted?

Ms Flanagan—After the ads were shown in June last year, an evaluation was conducted by Elliott and Shanahan and they came up with a fairly high recognition rate. So the campaign seemed to be very successful in raising awareness in the community and people had very strong recognitional recall.

Senator CROSSIN—Is that evaluation available publicly?

Ms Flanagan—I think with all evaluations done of media campaigns, GCU do not release them. That is the policy that has been there for a long time.

Senator CROSSIN—GCU?

Ms Flanagan—The Government Communications Unit in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that organises the media buys for government.

Senator CROSSIN—So they have conducted an evaluation of the campaign?

Ms Flanagan—With all campaigns, we conduct evaluations of how successful they have been. That evaluation was conducted for this one, and we got a very good response rate.

Senator CROSSIN—I have some questions about the help line. How much was allocated in the 2004-05 budget to the help line? How much has been paid to date?

Ms Flanagan—There have been two contracts. I will have to check whether, in fact, this information is commercial-in-confidence or whether we can give it to you. I think we did give you a written answer on the Lifeline contract earlier on, but I will see whether we can update it for you. While Ms Bourne is looking for that answer, do you have some more questions?

Senator CROSSIN—I understand that last year Lifeline was giving \$100 per referral to agencies. That is what you said in answer to a question from Senator Stott-Despoja. So in the breakdown of the figures we wanted to know how many times \$100 was given out. What was the allocation of money that was spent on agencies?

Ms Flanagan—We can give you the number of referrals that have occurred, noting that some of them, in effect, attract the \$100 and some of them do not. There are referral guidelines which suggest that if a referral goes to a government department, for example, then of course the \$100 would not go with it. So there have been—

Senator CROSSIN—How much is the total allocation that you have paid? How much is X times \$100?

Ms Flanagan—I think towards the end of the year it will be upwards of around \$850,000, which in effect will mean 8,500 organisations will have—

Senator CROSSIN—Or 8,500 referrals.

Ms Flanagan—This is why I want to be clear. We have had about 9,800 referrals to date and a smaller proportion of those attract a payment. I have the figures for referrals with me, but not the final figure.

Senator CROSSIN—So how many referrals have there been?

Ms Flanagan—There have been around 9,882 to date.

Senator CROSSIN—Of that, you have paid \$850,000 to agencies?

Ms Flanagan—That is our estimate to the end of the year, but I need to check that figure and get back to you.

Senator MOORE—By the end of June?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Are you able to give me a list of agencies that got referrals?

Ms Flanagan—We prefer not to do that, simply because of privacy and confidentiality reasons. You might appreciate that if one particular service in a small country town is getting a series of referrals we are concerned that that might possibly expose the person who is using that service. We can give you a broad idea.

Senator CROSSIN—I do not want you to tell me the name of the person who was referred to that service. But you must be able to tell me where most of that \$850,000 has been paid to.

Ms Flanagan—I can give you possibly a broad idea of the sorts of referrals that might occur, which will give you an idea of where the services are.

Senator CROSSIN—No. I think you have done that in answer to a question from me. I specifically want to know what agencies have received the money.

Ms Flanagan—I am just worried about the privacy issues. We could possibly do a breakdown by state, if that would help you, to give you an idea on a state basis about where the money has gone.

Senator CROSSIN—That would be a good start. What would be some of the agencies that would get referrals—women's legal services or women's refuge groups?

Ms Flanagan—I can give you a copy of the referral guidelines, which are public, that explain when a referral actually attracts the \$100 fee. For example, as I think I said earlier—

Senator CROSSIN—I think we are more interested in who is being referred to what agency.

Ms Flanagan—We can try and give you a breakdown by state. There is a whole range of agencies that are getting referrals. I understand that referrals do go to refuges. For example, referrals have gone to Mensline and to sexual assault counselling services across Australia. A whole range of services have received money. Family relationships services have also received funding.

Senator CROSSIN—Where possible, we would like a broad summary of what agencies have received that money, because at this stage we do not have any idea where that money is being paid to.

Ms Flanagan—We will see if we can keep it at a fairly general level, noting the concerns that we have, and we will try to get that information to you so that it will be of some assistance.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you tell me how much has been spent in 2004-05 against the help line?

Ms Flanagan—Is this against delivering the help line itself? There are two parts to the contract we have with Lifeline: there are the referrals we have just spoken about and the delivery of the actual help line service itself.

Senator CROSSIN—The referral is \$850,000.

Ms Flanagan—That is the estimate to the end of the year.

Senator CROSSIN—So what is the other allocation?

Ms Flanagan—We will get back to you with the contract figures. The officer is looking for them at the moment. There are two contracts.

Senator CROSSIN—We are after the total amount you anticipate spending on the help line come 30 June.

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Given that the current contract for the help line expires on 6 June, which is next week, do you intend to conduct a public tendering process to rerun the help line or will Lifeline be recontracted?

Ms Flanagan—At the moment we are in discussions with Lifeline to extend the contract for six months while we conduct an evaluation of how the help line has gone. Once we receive the results of that evaluation, we will take that to the minister and we will decide on the continuation of the help line.

Senator CROSSIN—Who is conducting that evaluation?

Ms Flanagan—Urbis Keys Young, I understand, is doing the evaluation for us.

Senator CROSSIN—At what cost?

Ms Flanagan—I think it is around \$50,000. I know it is something less than that, but I am just not quite sure of the contract price.

Senator CROSSIN—Who will be involved in that evaluation? Will it be an evaluation that broadly canvasses the views of people from, say, women's refuges, WESNET and supported accommodation providers? What is the brief for the evaluation?

Ms Flanagan—The cost of the evaluation is \$49,745, so I was about right with the figure of \$50,000. I am not sure of the detail about who will be consulted. We can get that information to you.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you envisage that women's refuges predominantly would be consulted about the effectiveness of Lifeline?

Ms Flanagan—Senator, this is not an evaluation about the effectiveness of Lifeline; it is an evaluation of what the help line has actually done. You would appreciate that a wide variety of calls are made to the help line. Often they are for help and assistance. Only about a quarter of the calls have actually been referred on to other service providers. The evaluation is actually looking at how the help line is operating. It is not an evaluation of Lifeline as the deliverer of that.

Senator CROSSIN—How can you separate out the two? Surely the way Lifeline handles those calls will depend upon the success of the help line?

Ms Flanagan—Yes. Lifeline is working under contract to us. We have specified how we want them to deliver that service. We are really looking at whether what we have asked them to do is an appropriate way of doing it and whether it is successful.

Senator CROSSIN—Was there any previous tendering process for Lifeline's contract in 2004-05?

Ms Flanagan—My understanding is that we approached four organisations that it was considered would be able to deliver a national help line.

Senator CROSSIN—What were those organisations?

Ms Flanagan—We will find that out for you, Senator. We have it in our folders.

Senator CROSSIN—Isn't there a debate about whether there should be a specific line, such as Lifeline, or whether people should be directed to specific domestic violence counselling agencies in their states and territories?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, Senator. Again, I think it has been made fairly clear that the government was looking for a national help line with 24-hour live counsellors, so to speak, on the other end of the phone. The calls needed to be answered very quickly.

Senator CROSSIN—And effectively?

Ms Flanagan—And effectively. The government wanted to minimise double handling. Even if we had a centralised line, we knew that, if we were to use the state domestic violence lines—and there are a number of them—then, in effect, calls would have to come into a central pool and be handed on to somebody. We were looking for immediate assistance.

Senator CROSSIN—I will go to some of those in a minute. Just remember your answers, because I will come back to some of those in a minute.

Senator MOORE—I have a couple of questions on that point, Ms Flanagan. One relates to the evaluation process that you have just mentioned. Will that be funded out of this year's budget or next year's budget?

Ms Flanagan—It is being funded out of this year's budget.

Senator MOORE—So it is part of the overall funding for this particular program item? The evaluation is funded under that?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Have there been any previous evaluations of this service? During the life of this particular service, has there been a previous evaluation?

Ms Flanagan—Senator, the help line was established only in June last year.

Senator MOORE—So during that 12 months there has been no six-monthly evaluation of how it is going?

Ms Flanagan—No, Senator.

Senator MOORE—None at all?

Ms Flanagan—We are doing this formal evaluation now.

Senator MOORE—This is the first time it has been evaluated?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you know if any other organisation has evaluated the help line? Has any other organisation or body evaluated the help line?

Ms Flanagan—Not that I am aware of, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—Will the evaluation you plan to conduct include the level of satisfaction of callers to the help line

Ms Flanagan—As I say, I need to refer to the actual contract and what we have asked Urbis Keys Young to do for us, and then I can give you that detail.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you provide a copy of that contract to this committee?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Thank you. When the evaluation is done, will it be released publicly?

Ms Flanagan—We will have to wait and see what we get, Senator. As with all evaluations that are done—

Senator CROSSIN—You will wait and see how effective the evaluation is before you decide whether or not to release it?

Ms Flanagan—No. As with all evaluations, we do not commit to publicly releasing them. We need to go through a process to see, for example, whether we are happy with them. If the evaluation does not comply with the contract or with what we have asked for, it would not be sensible to release it until we have ensured that the evaluation—

Senator CROSSIN—You would want your money back then, would you not?

Ms Flanagan—We would.

Senator CROSSIN—Have you had any complaints about the delivery of the service?

Ms Flanagan—We have had a few complaints, noting that over 44,000 calls have been received to the help line, to date.

Senator CROSSIN—How many complaints have you received?

Ms Flanagan—I have heard of probably less than 10. There are some isolated examples of customers perhaps not being referred properly. As I say, they have been very, very isolated, considering that 44,000 calls have been received.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you take any action when you receive a complaint?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, we do. When it has been raised with us in the past we have asked for the specific example—if it is possible to get that level of detail, and often it is—and we have then raised it with Lifeline and tried to describe the circumstances in which it occurred.

Senator CROSSIN—What has been their response?

Ms Flanagan—As I say, there are only a couple of cases that I am personally aware of that have been referred back to Lifeline. For example, an incorrect address was provided for one of the services they referred on to. They have a web site called Just Look. We have asked

Lifeline to try to ensure that its records are up to date, noting that it is also incumbent on those services themselves to ensure that the details are up to date.

Senator MOORE—Do all of those complaints come to your office?

Ms Flanagan—Sorry?

Senator MOORE—Is that the complaint mechanism that people know about?

Ms Flanagan—We have asked for them to come to us because we are contracting Lifeline. We have also asked Lifeline, when they hear of complaints, to inform us of those and to ensure that remedial action is taken.

Senator MOORE—How do people know that you are the complaint mechanism? Is that through a kind of script from Lifeline? As Senator Crossin has pointed out, if someone has a complaint, how do they know that the complaint mechanism is to the department?

Ms Flanagan—I do not think it is necessarily described that way. We have not set up a formal complaint mechanism. As you might appreciate, this is a help line which is assisting people in need. I suppose the answer is that we have no formal complaint mechanism, but an isolated number of complaints have surfaced. People usually know that they should bring them to us because we are administering the contract with Lifeline.

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Flanagan, your department has not conducted any evaluation of any kind on the help line, to date: is that correct?

Ms Flanagan—We are currently contracted to conduct an evaluation.

Senator CROSSIN—Have you had some concerns about Lifeline's operations, given that you are extending it for six months rather than just re-offering it to them?

Ms Flanagan—As you might appreciate, with many of these things we need to conduct an evaluation to see how it is going. It has been in operation for nearly a year. Any prudent program manager would do an evaluation. After we have the results of that evaluation, we will determine what course of action we will follow.

Senator CROSSIN—Have you had any reports from Lifeline, callers or any other community organisations in response to the phone line? Did Lifeline report to you regularly about what was happening?

Ms Flanagan—Lifeline gives us fortnightly statistics on the number of callers, what sorts of things they call about et cetera. We are in constant contact with Lifeline on this matter.

Senator CROSSIN—Do they provide you with a summary of their responses to those callers?

Ms Flanagan—I am not quite sure what you mean. They have a script that they are expected to follow.

Senator CROSSIN—So you would know out of those callers how many are domestic violence related?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, we have those figures. We ask them to report on those.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you provide those to us as well?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, we can.

Senator CROSSIN—Are you aware that callers to the Crisis Line have been referred to organisations that do not have appropriate services to assist victims? Are you confident that Lifeline is referring people to organisations that can assist them? How do you make that assessment?

Ms Flanagan—In the vast majority of cases it appears to be happening smoothly. There was the isolated example that I talked about earlier where we had the incorrect address. The other example is in regional areas where there might be a lack of services and a counsellor tries to find something of assistance. There are couple of isolated examples that we have heard of. By and large it works very well indeed.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you know how many calls Lifeline was getting each year prior to having this contract with you?

Ms Flanagan—Lifeline itself?

Senator CROSSIN—Yes.

Ms Flanagan—I can look up their annual report and tell you. I do not have it with me.

Senator CROSSIN—You do not know off the top of your head how many calls they were receiving?

Ms Flanagan—No.

Senator CROSSIN—I have a file note here that tells me that Lifeline was receiving about 500,000 phone calls a year but that only 10,000 of those related to information regarding domestic violence. Only two per cent of that organisation's calls on an annual basis dealt with domestic violence. Was that low incidence of association with domestic violence considered when Lifeline was given the contract last year?

Ms Flanagan—The percentage of domestic violence calls that I recall—I do not know the total calls received—was more like four or five per cent. What we have asked them to do is set up a completely separate outfit using Lifeline counsellors who have been given additional training to deal with people who are ringing on this particular help line because it is a specific help line to assist people who might be victims of domestic violence or sexual assault.

Senator CROSSIN—I have some questions about that training, but I want to go back to some other areas. I understand Victoria Crisis Line has received money from referrals. That is an agency that has received maybe the \$100. They then refer clients on to women's refuges, but the refuges do not get an increase in money. Are you aware of this flow-on? So you have set up a help line and you have had 44,000 people contact the help line in a 12-month period. Some of those have then been referred to crisis centres and then referred to refuges. But the refuges are not getting additional support or an increase.

Ms Flanagan—I understand—and we can get the figures out—that there are referrals direct to refuges as well. I think that the circumstance you talk about is after hours when there are central points, in some of the states, to determine where beds might be overnight. If they were to refer somebody to a refuge during the day and they could contact that refuge then the \$100 would go to the refuge.

Senator CROSSIN—But otherwise if the flow-on effect is that the refuge does not get the referral but at the end of day is the end point for that victim, there is no additional assistance for that refuge to help that person, is there?

Ms Flanagan—What we are trying to do here—and there have been many other domestic violence media campaigns that have been run by state governments—is recognise that there would be an impact on services—

Senator CROSSIN—And an increase in demand.

Ms Flanagan—Exactly. So we tried to design a process to ensure that some money flowed to support the services that were dealing with these people. I do not know in any other media campaign that is being conducted that this has necessarily been done. We wanted to recognise that there would be an impact on services.

Senator CROSSIN—Have you actually looked at whether this is the most efficient use of this money when, at the end of the day, some women's refuges are not getting assistance from the Commonwealth but are having to cope with your increased demand because of the establishment of the help line?

Ms Flanagan—This is exactly why we tried to set up a process which was to ensure that some money flowed to the services that were being impacted upon. We tried to come up with something relatively simple that did not impose an administrative burden on the services themselves. One of the models we could have looked at was victims having a voucher. They could hand the voucher in to whichever service they chose to go to and then it could have been acquitted back. We talked to them and tried to come up with something in between which recognised the impact but was also administratively easy to manage.

Senator CROSSIN—So is the Office for Women looking at trying to compensate those women's refuges that do not get a referral but in fact are the secondary phase of this program and deal with the client at the end stage? The Victoria Crisis Line has the money but they referred that client on to the women's refuge and the women's refuge does not get the money. Is there an attempt to look at supporting the programs on the ground that end up with these clients?

Ms Flanagan—That is exactly why we set up the process of referrals. I think what you are pointing to is a particular circumstance where you think the money is going to, in effect, a go-between.

Senator CROSSIN—The money is going to the go-between and not to the end service.

Ms Flanagan—We need to have evidence that that is happening. I do not want to move too far away from the system that we currently have.

Senator CROSSIN—Have you tried to find whether there is evidence of that happening?

Ms Flanagan—Again, I have not heard very much evidence that that is happening at all.

Senator MOORE—How would you go about fixing that secondary process?

Ms Flanagan—We have a meeting of women's advisers around the states and territories. We have regular teleconferences and updates. I can assure you that the women advisers in the

states are feeding through what they hear from the service sector on the ground about what is going on.

Senator MOORE—So have you heard Senator Crossin's issue before?

Ms Flanagan—I am aware that there might be some double handling, but I was not aware that the money, in effect, was not flowing, and that it usually occurred, as I say, only late at night, when the services themselves were closed for the day—that some states had this particular point where they can allocate beds.

Senator CROSSIN—Have any referrals been made to Lifeline itself?

Ms Flanagan—If they have, they have not been paid, you will be pleased to know, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—Even if they were, is this not a conflict of interest?

Ms Flanagan—Not if they are not paid—if they filter a call and they believe that more general counselling is required. I do know circumstances where they have been referred on to Lifeline, but there is no money involved in it.

Senator MOORE—Is that part of the contract?

Ms Flanagan—It is.

Senator MOORE—So it is clearly stated in the contract that self-referrals will not be funded?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Are there any preferred referral services that the help line recommends?

Ms Flanagan—No. We have really left that up to Lifeline to determine what is the most appropriate service for the particular person who is ringing—what they actually need. Sometimes they might need legal advice; sometimes they might—

Senator CROSSIN—So you do not know if Lifeline has a preferred list of services?

Ms Flanagan—I would need to have a look at the contract. Certainly we did not ask them ever to develop a preferred list of services. The wording of the contract—

Senator CROSSIN—Can you take that on notice for me?

Ms Flanagan—I shall.

Senator CROSSIN—And ask Lifeline if they have a preferred list of services and, if they do, what they are?

Ms Flanagan—I shall ask them, but the intention has been that they should be catering for the individuals who ring and the needs that those individuals might have. That is the first priority.

Senator CROSSIN—The government made a decision to actually establish this new national line rather than go to domestic violence lines that were set up in each state and territory; is that correct?

Ms Flanagan—The government made a decision that it needed a national help line that actually had counsellors answering the phone, and it believed the only way to do this was to approach national organisations. You asked earlier who were the four national organisations that were approached. They were Lifeline, Mission Australia, Relationships Australia and Kids Help Line.

Senator CROSSIN—And a decision was made to go with Lifeline; is that right?

Ms Flanagan—We approached these four organisations. Two of them submitted tenders and then we had an evaluation process to decide which one would be chosen.

Senator CROSSIN—In answer to a question in February—question No. 13—you indicated that 75 per cent of the total calls were from women. Would that still be an accurate percentage?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, Senator, I think that percentage has pretty much held up.

Senator CROSSIN—Also from the February estimates, you said that the predominant reason people contacted the phone line was because of domestic violence. Would that still be—

Ms Flanagan—Yes, Senator. That is still correct.

Senator CROSSIN—Let me just ask about the training and the staff. Who is actually answering the phones when someone rings?

Ms Flanagan—I understand that a trained Lifeline counsellor answers.

Senator CROSSIN—Where is the service based?

Ms Flanagan—At the moment it is a decentralised service. When we first started the help line we actually had a central call centre, but now it is distributed I think over four or five sites in Sydney.

Senator CROSSIN—So they are all located in Sydney?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—So when you call through, no-one interstate or in a rural or regional town will pick up the phone?

Ms Flanagan—No. We have, as I say, had to base it in Sydney.

Senator CROSSIN—How do they know where to refer people ringing from Tasmania or Perth—if they do not know the area?

Ms Flanagan—There is a database called Just Look that is used by Lifeline. I think it has something like 15,000 different organisations on it. As long as the data on that is correct, it has a number of different search facilities. So if the caller identifies as being from Tasmania, the counsellor would actually look up the database to see whether there was a service close by.

Senator MOORE—Ms Flanagan, can you advise us which Lifeline sites are doing it?

Ms Flanagan—Where they currently are located in Sydney?

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Ms Flanagan—We can take that on notice.

Senator MOORE—In Brisbane, for instance, Lifeline has one major site. I know that they are more spread out in Sydney, but it would just be good to know which ones they are. Are all of the people who are answering the calls located in a formal Lifeline site? People are not on call, answering from home or answering from another location?

Ms Flanagan—No. My understanding of the technology is that they actually have to be physically present. As you would appreciate, they monitor what is going on. If you suddenly get a spike, you will have people on call that you will need to bring in very quickly. I understand that they also have the capacity to sort of move the calls across the various call centres.

Senator MOORE—Using their own technology and so on?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator Patterson—I can see some of the concerns that you are expressing, but one of the other concerns is: when you have a national campaign you want to get a response on a telephone ASAP. Some people were critical and said, ‘You’ve got a line in New South Wales.’ That is fine. We are running a national campaign so that somebody in the Kimberleys can ring the number just as easily as can someone on the west coast of Tasmania. That is the real challenge: to get across the simple message and the simple phone number. One person from a rural area who called had not contacted anybody in 20 years because the people that this person would have gone to would have known the person who was abusing her. So this flushed out some people who would have never—and I only know one in particular because it was raised with me—contacted anybody.

The issues of having a general number, as difficult as they are, have to be weighed up against the benefits of having a general number. There are people who are too scared to ring a number, especially in a rural or regional area, when they might get someone they know. Also, you want to have a number that can be contacted 24 hours a day—in summertime in Western Australia—and that is as accessible to people in the Kimberleys as it is to people on the west coast of Tasmania. There is a trade-off. I know some of the issues you are raising—I asked all of these questions myself—but it is better than trying to put in an advertisement 25 numbers, some of which you could not get if you were living on the west coast of Tasmania or in the Kimberleys. That is the issue.

Senator CROSSIN—I am sure that you would be looking at every opportunity you could to improve the service, Minister, no doubt.

Senator Patterson—We have.

Senator MOORE—Minister, we were talking about one thing just as you came in. I know it is all part of the evaluation, but certainly one of the things that some of the services raised with us was a 1300 number option. You talked about some of the things you took into account when you were doing it. Was the issue of a 1300 number that could be rerouted considered?

Ms Flanagan—It was certainly raised with us, but it did not meet what the government wanted, and that was to have somebody to answer the phone immediately and not to go through that double handling. As I understand it, with a 1300 number it could have been done

possibly by technology. But you are getting somebody possibly ringing in distress and the first thing they get is, 'If you live in WA please dial 3.' We were specifically asked to come up with a help line that had a human being on the end of the phone who was able to immediately deal with the problems that were being presented.

Senator MOORE—It is just good to know the rationale so that when these issues are raised—

Senator CROSSIN—We might go to the issue of double handling in a minute. What databases of referral are Lifeline counsellors using at the moment?

Ms Flanagan—It is called Just Look.

Senator CROSSIN—That is all they are using; is that correct?

Ms Flanagan—Yes. It is a very comprehensive database. In fact, it was one of the things that made Lifeline a strong contender in that they already had an extensive database to use.

Senator CROSSIN—What qualifications do Lifeline staff have if they are working on this help line?

Ms Flanagan—They are trained as general Lifeline counsellors. They undergo normal Lifeline training. We had also wanted and asked for experienced Lifeline counsellors, so not just those who had been trained and had been on the other end of the phone in the first few weeks. We were looking for trained and experienced people who had actually worked on Lifeline itself. I understand they also received additional training in domestic violence and sexual assault.

Senator CROSSIN—What did that training consist of?

Ms Flanagan—I think we had the sector help us design it and it was delivered to them. It was all specified. I cannot recall the details, but we did actually see what the training looked like.

Senator CROSSIN—So that training was not a run through of various sector web sites and what was on those web sites. Was it comprehensive or not comprehensive?

Ms Flanagan—I would need to get the details of what was provided. I do not have them with me.

Senator CROSSIN—Can you take that on notice?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, we can.

Senator CROSSIN—Do counsellors actually have any knowledge or resources available to them about the different child protection laws and processes in each state?

Ms Flanagan—I would need to check. As I say, one of the attractions of Lifeline was that they have much of these resource for their general number including, as I say, what different sorts of legislation there might be in the states.

Senator CROSSIN—So you have never done an evaluation or looked at whether the training of these people is adequate. You have taken the word of Lifeline that it was undertaken.

Ms Flanagan—We are doing an evaluation of—

Senator Patterson—Senator Crossin, are you questioning the capacity of Lifeline to deal with these issues? Are you saying that Lifeline does not have the capacity to deal with this?

Senator CROSSIN—I want to know the extent and the comprehensiveness of the training given to the domestic violence counsellors who answer your help line. How adequately were they trained before they were put on the end of this telephone line?

Senator Patterson—I am sure Lifeline will be very interested in reading the *Hansard*.

Senator CROSSIN—I am sure they will be. My understanding is that these counsellors were provided with just the web sites of the different services.

Ms Flanagan—That is certainly not my understanding. We will take that on notice.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you know how many hours of specialist training they received on domestic violence?

Ms Flanagan—As I said, I will take that on notice.

Senator CROSSIN—And to what extent that might have included sexual assault issues and the landscape of the sector across Australia—you are not aware of that at this stage? Will you have to take it on notice?

Ms Flanagan—Yes. As I said, we specified what sort of training we wanted them to do. I am not sure of the details of how that was implemented. We will get that to you.

Senator CROSSIN—Okay. Can you please ask Lifeline to provide this committee with the training outline that was given to these staff?

Ms Flanagan—We will take on notice what training was provided and we can give you what training we asked Lifeline to do as part of their contract.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you know whether the counsellors receive training updates about domestic violence issues?

Ms Flanagan—We are not aware of that. We will check with the program manager who is looking after this.

Senator CROSSIN—Are the counsellors volunteers or are they paid?

Ms Flanagan—They are paid.

Senator CROSSIN—How many staff would currently be answering the phones associated with your help line?

Ms Flanagan—It would depend how many calls might be coming in. Again, the contract specifies the level of people we require and, as I said, there are on-call arrangements so that if more calls come through we can ramp up fairly quickly. It is not a designated number sitting waiting for calls. We try to ensure that the rostering occurs in such a way that people are there to answer the calls.

Senator CROSSIN—If a complaint is made about help line, what processes are undertaken to address the issue?

Ms Flanagan—I think we covered this ground earlier on. If a complaint is made, either to Lifeline itself or, in effect, through the Office of Women, we raise it with Lifeline. We have

also asked Lifeline, if they are getting complaints, to raise those with us. We then look at what the issue might be and try and come up with a solution for it. Sometimes that can be a simple solution, as we discussed, in terms of ensuring that the correct address is on the database.

Senator CROSSIN—You said there were some suggested scripts for the counsellors: is that correct?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Are you able to provide those to the committee?

Ms Flanagan—I would need to speak to Lifeline, because they designed them, to see whether it is possible to do that.

Senator CROSSIN—Is there a checklist that counsellors use?

Ms Flanagan—There is a checklist of the statistical information we have asked for, for example, but we have also directed Lifeline that if that is going to get in the way of the counselling that they are not to ask directed questions. For example, we do not require them to ask the age of the person ringing, but if they can give a bit of a guess about whether they think it is a young person et cetera—

Senator CROSSIN—Are you able to provide us with a checklist, if there is such a thing?

Ms Flanagan—I will check. As I say, I do not know what you mean by a checklist. If you mean in terms of collecting statistics—

Senator CROSSIN—It would be related to the suggested scripts—whether there are particular questions that are asked in order.

Ms Flanagan—You would appreciate these are scripts that Lifeline itself uses. So, for example, if you get somebody who appears to be suicidal, they have a particular script which says, ‘You immediately need to get somebody else in the centre to contact the police,’ or—

Senator CROSSIN—So when people ring in, basically each individual case is left to each counsellor?

Ms Flanagan—Yes. As I say, they are trained to pick up where there might be certain circumstances where they need to intervene much more quickly than if, for example, a person is just ringing up for a chat.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I go to the issue you mentioned about double handling.

Senator Patterson—That was in the context of the 1300 number.

Senator CROSSIN—Yes, I understand that. You would appreciate a number of women who might ring this helpline are calling from telephone boxes and may have nothing on them at all, except what they need to ring the helpline number. Are you aware of how many of those women are asked to take down a further number or asked to make a further call or asked ‘Do you have a pen and you can take down this number’?

Ms Flanagan—We can deduce from the figures that the help line has received around 44,000 calls to date. Of those, around 9,800 have been referrals. In effect, three-quarters of the calls do not result in a referral, people are ringing up to have a discussion and they need some counselling or to order a booklet—or often they are family members et cetera. The other

reason why we wanted a person on the end of the phone was because we were told by experts in the field that often people do not ring and immediately say, 'I need a number for a refuge' or 'I want to see the police': they often need a series of conversations before they are ready to take action. So three-quarters of the calls have not resulted in referrals. Of those that do result in referrals, we know again of circumstances where they might immediately have to speak to the police, if they are in a violent situation, and Lifeline has a way of dealing with those where, I understand, they themselves call the police. There might also be circumstances—

Senator CROSSIN—Have you ever asked Lifeline how many times they offer another number to the victim who is ringing?

Dr Harmer—Ms Flanagan has a big division to run with a lot of subprograms and programs. When we contract a service to a company or an organisation like Lifeline, we give them pretty clear specifications about what it is we want them to do and then we evaluate what they have done. We have an evaluation due with us before the end of the financial year, presumably looking at how Lifeline have done in relation to the specifications of the task. I would hope that many of the questions that you are asking about how effective Lifeline are will be addressed by the evaluation. Basically, you are asking Ms Flanagan to give you an evaluation now. She is waiting for the evaluation to come through from the contractor, who was paid, presumably, some thousands of dollars to do an evaluation. She is not evaluating it. She has run the program, she has let the contract, she has given specifications to the provider. We are now getting an evaluation in. It will not be very long away, and I hope it will address many of the issues that you have asked.

Senator CROSSIN—Perhaps what I am highlighting is the need to make sure the person evaluating the program now rings callers, or maybe tries to elicit from callers how effective the help line is, and certainly seeks to gain some comments from women's refuges. The questions I am now asking are a result of many emails that have come from women's refuges around the country. For example, they tell me the majority of women they see are given the general Lifeline line to contact—in other words, Lifeline are actually referring them to Lifeline itself. I know they do not get paid for that but the question is whether that is appropriate. A number of the women's refuges are telling me that in most of the cases women are asked to take down another number, so in most of the cases perhaps double handling is occurring. Women who ring from a phone box, who have run out of their home without a purse, without anything on them, how can they possibly take down another number or remember another number? We are getting a lot of feedback about the inappropriateness of the responses women are getting when they ring that line.

Dr Harmer—I would hope that the evaluators are taking that sort of information into account. Would you be prepared to make available to the evaluators the information you have, which may help?

Senator CROSSIN—I am sure we will let these refuges know that they ought to contact you in order to have some input into the evaluation. I am very concerned when women tell me they get a response like, 'It's not him, it's the alcohol. Why don't you try talking to him about his drinking problem', or 'My goodness, you've got broken ribs, perhaps you ought to wear thicker clothing.' These are responses women are recording that counsellors are telling them over the Lifeline help line—things like 'Why do you think he hits you?', 'You ought to write

down the dates and describe what happens each time.’ They are very concerning comments to us.

Senator Patterson—Can I just say, that accusation was made earlier on when the campaign first started. That is an allegation that that is what was said. In fact, I responded to that issue about somebody being told they needed to wear thicker clothes, and we raised it—

Ms Flanagan—We raised it with them.

Senator Patterson—with Lifeline. We have had, I have to say, Lifeline tell us that some people have rung, they believe, vexatiously—is that correct?

Ms Flanagan—Yes—men mainly.

Senator Patterson—Some men were ringing vexatiously—some people were ringing vexatiously—and that concerns me. There were some people who were very angry that we did not put down every phone number in every state of every crisis centre that women could go to. I indicated before that there was a very difficult balance in making sure that we had people across Australia able to access a phone number in the first instance, without having to go through a long list. If you put the advertisement on television would you say, ‘Go to the back of your telephone book’? It was very difficult to get a quick one-off. The reason I held it up, and the Prime Minister was concerned as well, was they put a website number up. You would have been criticising us then that we had a website number and a lot of people would not have access to the web. In addition, the thing that concerned me was that if I used my computer and went to that website it would be marked on my computer that I had used that website and that could lead to more abuse. I thought these things through very carefully to try and get the balance, as I said before, that would give people access as best as we possibly could across Australia, reducing the likelihood that they would be abused again. You know if you use a website and you go back into it a couple of days later there are a number of ways on the computer you can see very clearly—you can do a Google search—that you have been in there before. I thought this thing through very carefully and that was why the delay occurred, because the Prime Minister and I were both concerned about there being only a website. We had a telephone number.

One of the things we may be able to look at, as I have listened to you saying that people do not have a telephone number, is the possibility of redirecting telephone calls. I do not know how much it would cost and whether Lifeline would have the capacity to redirect telephone calls. That is something we could look at—whether they could redirect calls rather than the person having to take a number down. I do not know whether they have that capacity. If that is an issue and it comes out in the report that it is an issue I will have a look at that before we redo the campaign. Let me say, I did think this through very carefully. It is very easy to sit here and pick at this and air allegations, and sometimes those are unfounded, I think: we raised that particular one about somebody being told that, and Lifeline said they did not believe that that was a response they would get from a counsellor.

Senator CROSSIN—Why did we raise this? Firstly, is this the most efficient use of domestic violence money and, secondly, if it is a service that is going to be operating, is it the most efficient service for providing this assistance to victims? I have had a number of people who have contacted me to say that counsellors had no idea whereabouts in the state they were

calling from. I will give you a very good example: someone from Darwin said to me the other day that they rang the help line and they were asked, 'What part of South-East Asia is that in?' It was a joke. She just hung up on them. She thought that was a joke—they cannot even tell you where Darwin is, let alone give details of services in the area. You tell me that they are using the Just look website, and I think part of the evaluation needs to be whether this is effective—whether or not counsellors are actually being trained and have an understanding of the issues and the services relating to domestic violence. These are concerns that have been emailed to me and a number of my colleagues in caucus, and we do not raise them lightly. We raise them because people are questioning us about whether or not the domestic violence money is being used and spent efficiently and effectively.

Senator Patterson—If that person rang, maybe they could give us the time, and we will do a time call on when they rang, because I am sure Lifeline monitor some of their calls. You give us the time that they rang and, if this person is so keen on knowing that—and I presume it was Lifeline they rang—

Senator CROSSIN—If they are prepared to tell me that.

Senator Patterson—If they are prepared to tell you the time they rang, if they know, we will ask Lifeline to look at it.

Senator CROSSIN—They might not be prepared to tell me that.

Senator Patterson—You have made a very serious allegation on hearsay—something somebody has told you. In good faith, that person may be in need of help, but I believe there are some people who are ringing up just to try and test the system—that is what I said—and I am not going to take at face value a report from somebody. I will ask—

Senator CROSSIN—I have many dot points here, Minister.

Senator Patterson—I am speaking. I will ask Lifeline to tell me about this, because I believe they monitor some of their phone calls. We had this before, and I was concerned, and we went to Lifeline and asked them. These sorts of allegations against an organisation which does a huge amount for people need to be substantiated. If you can tell us the time of the call—and I know that might be difficult—if they were ringing from Darwin then Lifeline might be able to detect where that advice came from. If you can tell us the time of the call, we will go back and have a look at it. But you are making very, very serious allegations about an organisation which offers a service to a large number of Australians. To say that somebody would ask, 'Which part of South-East Asia is Darwin?' is a serious allegation that these people are incompetent.

Senator CROSSIN—We have documented here nearly 15 dot points of concerns. For example, 'Why do you think he hits you?', 'Have you talked to him about why he abuses you?'—I am just wondering—

Senator Patterson—You are saying that is what people have said.

Senator CROSSIN—That is—

Senator Patterson—I do not necessarily agree that that is necessarily true.

Senator CROSSIN—I do not think we would raise it here if we believed they were frivolous.

Senator Patterson—I am not saying you believe they are frivolous, I am asking if they are actually accurate?

Senator CROSSIN—It is probably a pleasing sign that you are going to evaluate the effectiveness of the help line—and perhaps even Lifeline’s involvement, before the contract is reissued. I think the issue we are raising here is that the evaluation should include making sure the evaluator contacts women’s refuges or, if they can, any callers that are happy to be identified and to provide some feedback before that contract is reissued. I think that is why this is being raised.

Senator Patterson—I am sure Lifeline will be absolutely fascinated with this discussion *Hansard*.

Senator CROSSIN—I am sure they will be.

Senator MOORE—Ms Flanagan, I asked you earlier about what happened when people did complain to you, and you said you checked into it, and the Minister has indicated that she has done that as well. You mentioned in a previous answer earlier this morning that you have about 40 staff, is that right?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Is there any staff member or unit in your group that is a liaison point for this particular project? I keep saying you, and I know that you know that we know that it is not you in particular—I am sure, Dr Harmer, we do not expect Ms Flanagan to be answering for this—but is there anyone in your area that is responsible for this particular action?

Ms Flanagan—Yes. The area responsible is the Women’s Safety Agenda section. I think we spoke earlier on about the fact that we have just advertised the position of head of that section. The person that had been doing the job was the main liaison point and we would intend, once we have recruited a new person, that they would continue to be the main liaison point—or possibly one of their staff—with Lifeline to manage this.

Senator MOORE—That would be my understanding of project management—that certainly we are waiting for the end of 12 months to have a formal evaluation and all these issues are coming up. But there would always be an officer or officers who would be the point of contact about where this is going.

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator MOORE—It is not a criticism of Lifeline per se; it is information to see how we can get the system working and resourced effectively and responsive. Minister, in terms of testing the system surely you expected that. When you were looking together at the contract—looking at how it was going to work—with the amount of concern that was raised about the methodology of how it was originally given and with the minister’s comments about testing the system, of course that was going to happen. So I would have thought that an experienced organisation like Lifeline would have expected that and would not have taken personally the fact that there would have been tests done to see how it was going.

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator MOORE—I have a question on the issue of people from refuges. If the kind of advice that Senator Crossin has been talking about came back to a refuge, and someone from the refuge then rang the Lifeline number to question what was said, could we find out what Lifeline's response would be to that? Have they had that kind of call? Have they had calls from refuges saying, 'Did you tell someone this kind of thing'? Can you tell me whether that has happened.

Ms Flanagan—I think that it has, but, as we were saying earlier on, I do not know whether it has occurred in any systemic way. We have told Lifeline that if they hear of issues they need to tell us, as we contract them to perform a service.

Senator MOORE—There is also the whole confidence thing. Ringing up and questioning advice is not vexatious; it is actually questioning the advice. I would have thought that this discussion was actually quite reasonable in view of the amount of information we had at the start. It is my understanding from that that there is someone in the unit who actually is keeping in contact with Lifeline quite regularly—hopefully so that, if Senator Crossin has these kinds of issues, there is someone she can go to straightaway.

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Have Lifeline told you about any complaints in this weekly response that you get from Lifeline about how many calls they have had? Have Lifeline themselves said, 'We have received these complaints about the services'?

Ms Flanagan—Again, there have been one or two isolated incidents, and we do expect Lifeline to let us know if they are contacted. We want to work together to come up with a solution.

Senator MOORE—So that is part of the expected protocol?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, indeed.

Senator MOORE—So, if they get a complaint through any kind of mechanism, whether they believe it is vexatious or not, the expectation is that they will then report back to you in their regular reporting process?

Ms Flanagan—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—I am going to move off that, Ms Flanagan. I have questions on a few other areas and if I do not get to cover them I will put them on notice. Does the Office for Women interact with the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, we do interact.

Senator CROSSIN—What does that mean? Do you meet regularly?

Ms Flanagan—I don't know that we meet with them regularly. We have some ongoing contact with them, but we do not have formal, regular meetings.

Senator CROSSIN—The Office for Women provides high-level policy and other advice to the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues. Do you have anyone who is

specifically employed to liaise with that agency or with DEWR to advise them on policies that affect women?

Ms Flanagan—Not anybody specifically. What we are trying to set up at the moment is a sort of desk officer arrangement whereby particular staff will have a range of portfolio interests.

Senator CROSSIN—On page 120 of the PBS you say that you ensure that women are consulted on and have input to emerging policy that has a major impact on women. What consultations did you undertake about the industrial relations package the Prime Minister announced last week?

Ms Flanagan—Let me describe our consultation mechanism, which is through the four secretariats that we have, with the 60-odd women's organisations.

Senator CROSSIN—Which reminds me, I might ask you to update for me which organisations are under each secretariat. Can you take that on notice?

Ms Flanagan—Yes, we can do that. We identify with those organisations—in consultation with them—what they think the emerging issues are. For example, work has been done recently on superannuation and also on drought and women in drought. They have also been interested in looking at grandparenting—the role of grandparents—and currently I think there is a forum or a workshop being organised in Melbourne in the next couple of weeks on what is called the 'sandwich generation', which looks at the balance of work and family between young children and dependent older parents.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I take you then to this statement on page 120. You ensure that women are consulted on and have input to what they see as emerging policies rather than input into the government's emerging policies: is that right? Is that the interpretation I should put on that?

Ms Flanagan—That is the interpretation you could put on that, but you would also, because you have asked us these questions before, be aware that we do input to policy development processes around some of these big issues, and we do that through our minister as a member of cabinet.

Senator CROSSIN—But, in terms of the industrial relations changes, you did not consult with women's groups through the secretariat about those proposed changes prior to their announcement?

Ms Flanagan—No, that is not—

Senator CROSSIN—Did any of those groups provide you with any input into industrial relations changes they wanted prior to that announcement?

Ms Flanagan—No, not that I am aware of.

Dr Harmer—I am not certain about this because I have not been involved heavily but I think that in relation to the proposals by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Industrial Relations to change IR arrangements the process they are going through is they have announced the broad parameters and the broad directions for reform and they will be discussing and consulting with various groups around some of the details of that. If women's

groups had particular views around the direction of those reforms, I would imagine that the Office for Women would be an appropriate conduit. If we did find that women's groups wanted to have input into that policy, they could either go to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations or they could come through Ms Flanagan at the Office for Women and we would certainly ensure that those comments and views were passed on to DEWR. We have constant mechanisms to—

Senator CROSSIN—But, Ms Flanagan, you do not have any plans at this stage to consult the four secretariats about those proposals?

Ms Flanagan—No.

Senator CROSSIN—To have an active consultation process that you initiate?

Ms Flanagan—No, we have not done that in the past. I think Dr Harmer has alluded to the fact there will be a broader consultation process. I suppose what we would need to do would be to establish how women's views would be canvassed in that. One model that I think you are describing relates to whether we would consult with the secretariats. If DEWR asked us to do that as an appropriate mechanism to get women's input then we, of course, would do that.

Senator CROSSIN—You would not do that as an initiative of the Office of Women, without DEWR requesting that of you?

Ms Flanagan—No, that is not the way we have operated. We leave the parent department that has come up with the policy to design their own consultation processes and we fit in with those as needed.

Senator Patterson—I will bring this *Hansard* to the relevant minister's attention.

Senator CROSSIN—Have you asked DEWR how the proposed IR changes will impact on women?

Ms Flanagan—As you would appreciate, we certainly are doing a bit of analysis about those proposals. Just as we would advise the minister on any other initiative that might have an impact in her area of responsibility, we will be providing that information to her.

Senator CROSSIN—I am not asking you what input you had, but did you have input into that proposed policy? Did you provide advice to the minister or to the prime minister and cabinet?

Ms Flanagan—On the IR reforms themselves? I think the answer is no on the IR reforms.

Senator CROSSIN—Were you asked for advice?

Senator Patterson—Senator, let me just tell you the way it happens. When a department puts up a brief—a proposal—that proposal is looked at by the relevant departments. Advice is given to the minister—whether it be about how it might affect rural people, how it might affect families, how it might affect the environment or how it might affect women. I am briefed on the department's view. I will use that information, according to my judgment, in discussions in cabinet. That is how the process works. The department has an input. It goes through the brief and, if it is to do with, say, metal regulations or something that has nothing to do with our department, then our department would not comment. But it is usual, because a

lot of policy touches on this portfolio, that the department would involve itself very deeply in submissions and would give its advice from its background and knowledge.

Senator CROSSIN—So, Minister, as a member of cabinet, did you ask the Office for Women what their view might be of the impact of these IR changes on women?

Senator Patterson—As I said to you, Senator Crossin, the cabinet submission is seen by the department. The department identifies areas that it thinks should be brought to my attention. I may or may not wish to comment on them. That is all I am going to say to you.

Dr Harmer—Just to add to that, when we provide a briefing to the minister, as we do from time to time on other ministers' cabinet submissions, we do not provide two or three briefs on the one submission from various divisions—

Senator CROSSIN—I understand that, but as part of your analysis of those changes, which you would have given your minister to take to cabinet, did you not ask the Office for Women specifically to look at those changes?

Dr Harmer—I cannot remember this specific case, but the Office for Women would almost certainly be involved in contributing to the brief for the minister on any major issues, particularly if they were going to affect women.

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Flanagan has just said to me that she did not provide any input, and she was not asked for any input. I am just wondering why.

Senator Patterson—That was about the development of the policy. You have taken words out of her mouth. What I am saying is that the department provides me with information—and I am not going to tell you what bits they do; it is advice to me as minister—

Senator CROSSIN—I am not asking for details—

CHAIR—Senator, let the minister respond.

Senator Patterson—The whole policy, the whole brief, will go to the department. They look at it, pick out the areas that they think will have an impact on the areas I am responsible for and brief me on those areas. The issue you asked about was the preparation of the policy, and that is different. I think you have interpreted what—

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Flanagan, since the policy has been announced—

Senator Patterson—That is not for you—

Senator CROSSIN—have you been asked to provide comments about that policy, seeing that it is a proposed policy?

Ms Flanagan—We are certainly doing some work. We have not yet given it to the minister, but we are just trying to understand and do a bit more analysis on the IR changes and their impact on women. When that is ready we will provide it to the minister.

CHAIR—May I make sure that honourable senators are aware that the officers do not have to give any answers to questions about advice that they give to the minister.

Senator CROSSIN—I did not ask about what advice you gave. I asked whether or not you gave that advice. There is quite a big difference.

CHAIR—We are getting very close to that precise question, and I just draw your attention to the fact that you are putting—

Senator CROSSIN—I think I have been in estimates long enough to know the difference.

CHAIR—Senator Crossin, I do not know whether you realise that you make it almost impossible for *Hansard* if you continue to talk over the top of people. They cannot record both voices simultaneously. I just ask you to be careful not to encroach on those areas that involve asking officers for information about advice given to the minister.

Senator CROSSIN—Thanks for that, Chair. We have been at estimates long enough to know the difference, so we do not need the lecture.

CHAIR—It seems as though you did need clarification. Could you please proceed.

Senator CROSSIN—Ms Flanagan, with regard to the Women's Safety Agenda and the SAAP5 funding negotiations, now that the Violence Against Women: Australia Says No help line will continue to be funded, have you asked to have any input into whether or not the government intends to also increase funding to domestic violence support services, to cope with the increased demand?

Ms Flanagan—There are two parts to that. Firstly, when the Office for Women was in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet it was involved in consultations in developing SAAP5. So we did have input into that process, and I think the government is now negotiating that particular agreement. Secondly, as we discussed earlier on, we recognised that there would be an impact on services. We had a very small budget, as you would imagine. The Office for Women does not fund services directly, and we wanted to acknowledge that there would be an impact on services, which is why we set up the referrals process.

Senator CROSSIN—Is the Office for Women or any other section of FaCS that you might have input into doing an analysis of how services are going to cope with the demand generated by the campaign?

Ms Flanagan—No, we are not. As I pointed out earlier on, a number of media campaigns have been run on domestic violence at the state level in the past. I think that there are a whole range of different things that might impact on the demand on services, including those state government run campaigns, and they are all taken into account, I imagine, in allocating funding.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you know if any of the pilot programs under the innovations pool or under the National Homelessness Strategy will be directly focused on addressing this issue?

Ms Flanagan—No, and I think these questions should have been asked in outcome 2.

Senator MOORE—We discussed this yesterday in outcome 2, and we were advised by Dr Harmer to look at the link between SAAP funding and women in domestic violence with you. So although it may seem to be a repeated process of questioning it is actually drawing out the linkages. We were advised to take up this issue.

Dr Harmer—You were—and questions on domestic violence, women et cetera are certainly appropriately addressed to Ms Flanagan. However, in relation to the priority pool—

which the minister and the department's SAAP people spent some time on yesterday; Senator Crossin, you were not here—we are still in the process of negotiating that with the states. We are not at all close to deciding what precise programs or projects will be funded out of that pool. That will clearly be done once we have agreement with the states, know how much money we have and look at the priorities across the various states.

Senator MOORE—Dr Harmer, yesterday your officers gave us a clear indication that this area of domestic violence was one of the clear priorities of the innovative pool—

Dr Harmer—It will certainly be one of the areas, but I could not, for example, give you an indication of whether we are going to fund particular projects or proposals.

Senator MOORE—You could not do that yesterday either, which was a shame.

Dr Harmer—We will not be able to do it for quite a while.

Senator MOORE—In terms of the process, it was just to restate and put on the record the role that the Office for Women will have in looking across the areas. We heard evidence yesterday about the way the department operates, with communication across the areas. For Senator Crossin's interest in this particular area, we need to hear from Ms Flanagan about your expectation of what your role in this process is going to be. We have already identified that the issue of domestic violence and women's safety is going to be a priority.

Dr Harmer—One of the great advantages of having the Office for Women in the Department of Family and Community Services as we develop that is that they will be adjacent to the areas that are working on the SAAP and prioritising for the SAAP priority projects.

Proceedings suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.04 pm

CHAIR—We will now move to outcome 4, Families and children have choices and opportunities. I invite Senator Evans to ask questions.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Thank you. I want to start by running through the budget measures relating to families to make sure we understand them because they are not detailed in the portfolio budget statements but are mainly in the budget measures now. I want to go through each of the family measures—the debt measures et cetera—to get an understanding of what they all mean and how they are going to work.

Dr Harmer—I will lead my team.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I was just checking whether you wanted someone to come forward or whether you are going to take it all on your own.

Dr Harmer—No, I have the whole team.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Now you have an abundance of riches; you have gone from nothing to the whole team.

Dr Harmer—They figured I need a lot of help.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Perhaps we will run through them in the order they are in the Budget No. 2 paper, if that is easy for people. I want to cover them all. The first one is

'Family assistance—a negotiated payment option to reduce overpayments'. Can someone take me through how that works?

Mr Hazlehurst—The negotiated payment option introduces another choice for families to complement the More Choice for Families options that were introduced a couple of years ago. At the moment, when a family advises of a change in their estimate, they can take an option which involves an adjustment to their payment such that it will either completely eliminate any overpayment or they will receive no more family payments that year. They cannot get rid of the overpayment—the best they can do is to take a complete cessation of their payment. This option allows families to take an option that is a middle ground between completely adjusting the rate of payment they are receiving so as to get rid of the overpayment, which for many families is too big an adjustment, and not having any adjustment at all and receiving the full overpayment at the end of the financial year. This allows families to negotiate a rate that will suit their financial circumstances.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I take it, therefore, that you still end up with a debt but it is a planned debt in a sense. What does this mean for how they then acquit the debt or how the debt is accounted for?

Mr Hazlehurst—Families will still be encouraged to take the full adjustment to get rid of the debt entirely within that financial year through reduced payments on a fortnightly basis. However, if they do take this option they will end up with an overpayment at the end of the year that would then be recovered in the usual way—through withholdings from the following year's payment—or through some of the other measures that assist families to repay debts. The \$600 supplement may also offset any overpayment they may have received, netting out the effect of that.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—You say you will encourage people to take measures which will totally eliminate the debt, but you are offering this option. Why are you offering this option?

Senator Patterson—Senator Evans, let me just interrupt here. I was concerned when people raised with me that, when their pay increased or their circumstances changed and they were deemed to have had more family tax benefit than they were entitled to throughout the year, it was either on or off. It was like a binary system: either you take no payments or you continue to get the same amount of money until the end of the year and you will have a large overpayment. I thought it would be very difficult for people to say, 'No, I don't want any payment at all.' There was no way to negotiate, for example: 'I'll take half my payments and maybe have a small debt. I can manage that with the offset. I can also manage that by paying a bit back next year,' but to suddenly have no payment may have meant that people were not able to manage. That was a request and a concern that was raised with me. When I first took over the portfolio, I met with a number of people who had received overpayments. I talked to them about the various issues that they faced. That was one that came through in correspondence from members. You wrote to me as did Senator Moore.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—This is because of the immediate loss of income?

Senator Patterson—Yes, sudden loss of income. We prefer them to stop but it was all or nothing. Centrelink staff said to me, 'Senator, you can't negotiate with them. Some of them say, "Let me just have half or let me have a quarter."' They could not; it was on or off, yes or

no—you get the money or you keep taking the same amount, which seemed to me a rather silly choice.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—No, I understand the difficulty of that. That is where most of the complaints have come from, as people have suddenly found themselves in debt for wrongly calculating, and then the pressure that comes on about that. I am just trying to understand the guidance that you give to officers about that. Has that been formulated, Mr Hazlehurst, or is that a work in progress?

Mr Hazlehurst—It still is a work in progress, but the underlying premise will still be to encourage families to take a full reduction, such that they do not end up with a debt. But where families say they really cannot absorb that kind of hit on the family payments they receive on a fortnightly basis they can negotiate a different arrangement.

Senator Patterson—It seems to me, Senator, much more sensible than saying, ‘Well, if you can’t stand the hit take the lot and have a larger debt.’ It just seems to me not a sensible way of doing it.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—It is another consequence, as you say, of trying to manage the system to reduce the impact of raising debt; I appreciate that. Is there some guidance, though, in the sense of saying, ‘You cannot negotiate a rate that is not at least half of what you are currently getting, or you have to be paying off at least 25 per cent of your debt over the course of the year,’ or is it purely at the discretion of negotiation with the Centrelink officers?

Mr Hazlehurst—The finer details have not been worked through yet. The measure does not commence until July 2006, but at this stage we have not given any consideration to having limits on the extent to which people can negotiate.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So it is a July 2006 measure.

Mr Kalisch—Certainly the premise around this measure is that families will have more choice to do something that would advantage them in the future. So at this stage I think the premise would be towards no restrictions on what families could propose, and if they could absorb a small reduction in their fortnightly FTB that that would be acceptable.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—There are a couple of competing issues here though, aren’t there? You are using now the one-off payments at the end of the year as a way of helping manage the debt problem—and we will come to the other measures later—and effectively you are saying, in terms of the multiples of \$600, that if families have a debt under that it can be used to pay off their debt. So the obvious question about this measure is: will they be allowed to accrue a debt that is greater than their entitlement at the end of the year payments?

Senator Patterson—I am going to look at it in detail, Senator. I do not want to make it totally restrictive. I do not want to enable people to get in debt, but I want to give them some leeway. I will be looking at that. As you were told, we have got time for that implementation. All of these things take a little longer because the system has to be up and running. One of the things I will do is consult with some of the Centrelink officers who face these issues in family payments and also talk to some families again, as I have in the past, about these issues.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So it is fair to say that that policy decision has not been taken?

Senator Patterson—No, it has not been taken.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I see the costs of \$506 million. That is the systems work is it? That is why I thought it was a 2005 measure, but it is an 2006-07 measure.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, that is right. There will be the normal set-up costs that Centrelink faces in terms of systems build, training—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—These are essentially payments to Centrelink to cover the costs of that?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, that is correct. There would be some funds in that that would be for FaCS in terms of working through the finer detail of the policy, preparing the legislation et cetera.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Budget Paper No. 2 shows that this is expected to reduce the level of overpayments by \$160.3 million over four years. Does that mean a saving or does that just mean that overpayments raised will be reduced by that amount?

Mr Hazlehurst—The latter, Senator.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So you think there is an actual saving?

Mr Hazlehurst—No, the latter.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So it is not a real saving to government? Does it mean that the amount of overpayments will be reduced by a figure but the net return to government will be the same?

Mr Hazlehurst—In the way in which some of these debt reduction or overpayment reduction measures have been costed, there are some accounting rules about the extent to which overpayments that have been raised will be able to be recovered. As a general rule, around nine per cent is factored into the costings across the board in relation to measures that reduce the level of overpayments.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Nine per cent representing what, Mr Hazlehurst?

Mr Hazlehurst—As a convention, that is the amount that would be expected not to be recovered if those overpayments were there.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So in terms of the overpayments you expect to only get 91 per cent back and to lose nine per cent on the processing as an average?

Mr Hazlehurst—Those are the accounting rules that apply but, as you described, this does not represent a savings as such.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—It is somebody's calculation of the reduction in debt brought about by this measure?

Mr Hazlehurst—In overpayments, that is correct.

Senator Patterson—It is somebody's estimate. We would have talked to people who deal with the clients. A significant number of them would say, 'I just want to keep having my payment,' so they would get a larger overpayment. We believe that they should have a choice. Some of them have asked, 'Can I have half? Can I do something?' and the officer has had to say, 'No, you can either take a total drop, to nothing, or you can keep being paid as you have been.' This, to me, seemed illogical.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I accept the logic of that.

Senator Patterson—The argument is that people would more often choose to keep getting their payment and deal with it later.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Is that true?

Senator Patterson—I think people would make a choice because they said they needed the money.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I was going to come to the experience of that.

Senator Patterson—The estimate would be based on evidence of people ringing in and asking, ‘Can I just get half? I don’t want a total loss.’ However, they did not have that choice. We believe that the More Choice program, including this choice, will have an effect on reducing overpayment.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—That takes us to what the experience of the estimation has been. Is it that people choose to keep taking the money and raising the debt when you discuss this with them?

Mr Hazlehurst—The experience suggests that a majority of people choose to take the adjustment but there is a significant minority of people who do not.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Do you have any figures on that? I am interested in getting a sense of the experience.

Mr Hazlehurst—I do not have them in front of me right now, but we could provide them.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Perhaps you could take that on notice. I am trying to get a sense of the reaction. A significant minority just say, ‘To hell with it, I need the money now and I’ll worry about you chasing me for the debt later’?

Mr Hazlehurst—That is correct.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And currently you do not have any ability to provide firmer guidance to them?

Senator Patterson—We cannot give them a choice.

Mr Hazlehurst—There is no power to provide them with a different rate.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Even though you know they are no longer entitled? Surely you have the power to suspend their payments?

Mr Hazlehurst—Until the end of the financial year we cannot be sure of their annual income. At the point at which these adjustments are made, we are still working with a provisional estimate of their income.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Does that mean that I can ring you and tell you that I earn only \$100 a week, when I am an member of parliament and you take my word for it? Surely there is some sort of process to determine the reasonableness of the estimation.

Mr Hazlehurst—There is scope for Centrelink to query an estimate that it does not believe to be reasonable. However, in the sorts of circumstances that you are describing it may be that a family with an earner who works shiftwork, for example, may increase their employment

income quite significantly for a period, they think that it will last until the end of the financial year but it does not.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I am aware of all the potential ups and downs that can occur—people coming in and out of the work force, changing conditions, all those sorts of things. Is your current power basically that they provide you with an estimation, you contact them saying, ‘You have provided us with information now that gives us a different estimation,’ but you cannot say to them ‘Hang on, we can’t keep paying you at this rate’?

Senator Patterson—They could have given you the estimation three years ago and not updated it. And we have people who have not updated it, even though they are reminded over and over.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—No, this is a different question.

Senator Patterson—No, it is the same question. We cannot actually—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I want to go to the powers of the department and Centrelink to act when they have information that says that people have underestimated and are effectively running up considerable debt. You say to me that you have no power to intervene at that stage.

Mr Kalisch—You would recall that when we have discussed in previous hearings the More Choice for Families measures that they are essentially a voluntary choice of the customer. Within that range of voluntary choices they can choose to take up one of those choices or choose not to.

Senator Patterson—Senator Evans, that is why in the budget there are a range of measures, including the automatic uplift factor and the measure that once they have put their tax returns in using last year’s income they can then correct it. But, at the moment, if a person put in an estimate three years ago and they get material to remind them that they have underestimated their income two years in a row—that they have a debt—there is no way we can actually increase that estimate. If they then ring up and change it back, they are knowingly lowering it against their last year’s income. If we get that legislation through—

Mr Hazlehurst—Just to clarify, there are two separate things going on in this space. When you look at the More Choice options, including this new negotiated rate, it is about the rate of payment received once a notification around a changed estimate has come in. And in relation to those choices they are voluntary choices, so, as Mr Kalisch pointed out, Centrelink cannot compel someone to take a different rate. However, Centrelink can query an unreasonable estimate. So if, for example, someone has provided in the past estimates that have led to significant debt over a period of some years, there is scope for Centrelink to query another estimate that has a rate that looks as though it will again lead to a debt.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—But the limit of their power is to query?

Mr Hazlehurst—No, they can cancel payment.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I thought the answer to the question earlier was that they did not have the power to cancel payment.

Mr Hazlehurst—There are two separate processes. There is the adjustment that occurs as a result of a change in an estimate which Centrelink can query. The other part of the process is

whether a family chooses to take one of the More Choice options which does not change their estimate. It just changes the rate of payment that they receive for the remainder of the year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So at the moment the only reason you can act is if the family actually makes a change to their estimate?

Mr Hazlehurst—That is correct.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And your power to act is reliant on that trigger?

Mr Hazlehurst—That is correct.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And is that in regulations or the legislation?

Mr Hazlehurst—That is in the legislation.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Has there been any consideration for change in the legislation to broaden the ability to trigger that intervention?

Mr Hazlehurst—I am not sure. I am not aware of consideration being given to making the More Choice options mandatory or compellable.

Mr Kalisch—Certainly the broad premise of FTB and income estimates is that the responsibility lies ultimately with the customer and the family to provide accurate information. It would be very difficult if government, in the form of Centrelink officers, were to take on part of that role. That is where the logical conclusion is.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—There are a few other customers of Centrelink who say have not minded butting in on a few occasions, on unemployment benefits or whatever. It is not as if it is unheard of. I am not critical of that—it is a necessary protection of the system—we are just checking the protections of this system. It seems unusual that you do not have that power.

Dr Harmer—If through legislation we took away from the family or the customer the power to estimate the income it could be quite a difficult administration, with lots of appeals.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I was not suggesting that. However, if someone adjusts their income, you have the power to have a chat with them; if that is not successful, you have the power to intervene. But you are saying to me that you do not have the power to act if they do not adjust their income estimation. It strikes me as a bit unusual.

Mr Hazlehurst—The More Choice options, generally speaking, come into play when someone rings up and changes their income estimate. When they have increased their income estimate the More Choice options become relevant, because it then looks at a way of reducing the amount of payment that would be received for the remainder of the year so as to reduce any overpayment.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Aren't you then arguing the contrary to what you have just told me, in the sense that you then have the ability to intervene if you think their estimation would result in a serious debt?

Mr Hazlehurst—Only in respect of the estimate, not in respect of the choice that they then take to manage their payment for the remainder of that financial year. In essence, that is why the government has brought in this new measure—to provide greater flexibility for families in how they manage their payment for the rest of that financial year.

Mr Kalisch—This approach is broadly consistent with the rest of the income support system—whether it be family payments, income support to working age or age pension—where the responsibility still lies with the customer to inform of changes in income.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I love that term ‘broadly consistent’. It is also the case that the government, as with the opposition and everyone else, does not want to see families incurring debts. It is fair to say the government has put a fair amount of effort into dealing with the family debt issues.

Senator Patterson—It is only the overpayment issue. In this budget there are measures: the automatic uplift factor and the uplift factor based on their income. Some people who put in an estimate months or years ago have not updated it, and we have no way of doing that, whereas if a person had an income in excess of what they said last year, we would uplift it to that unless they have notified us in the intervening period between 1 July and the time they put in their tax return. They can then advise us if their incomes have dropped but they will be told, ‘You understand that, if you underestimate your income, you could have an overpayment.’

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I accept that. I am just focusing in on what strikes me as a bit of a flaw in the system. I am just trying to understand the powers—

Senator Patterson—I am trying to make it as close as possible to the income they earn in that year but still have flexibility if people’s incomes will change. Some whose incomes have gone down would be entitled to more FTB, and they will get it closer to when they need it if they ring and advise us. Equally, if they ring to say their income has gone up, there are now some other options for them to manage that, not this binary yes or no, ‘You can keep getting the same amount or you can take nothing.’ It would seem an odd way to do it. I thought this was another measure to assist those people.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—The potential difficulty is that you still have the situation where people are planning to get into debt and you, the government, are knowingly entering into an arrangement with them that allows them to incur debt or take money from you to which they may not be entitled.

Senator Patterson—We do it now by allowing them to take all of their entitlement for the rest of the year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I am trying to explore how this works. I know what you are saying, and I am not arguing about it, but I am trying to work out how this measure works. It seems to me that you leave yourself a bit exposed by negotiating a rate which you know is in excess of what the person is entitled to.

Mr Hazlehurst—As I mentioned before, the way we work in with Centrelink on this in terms of the types of conversations they would actually have with families is to encourage them as much as possible to take the full adjustment—in other words, to reduce their payments by up to the complete amount of their remaining payments in order to reduce the debts as much as possible. What we have now is a situation where many families cannot afford that drop in payment, hence they cannot take any adjustment at all. So in some ways that sets up the system to have insufficient flexibility to allow some families to reduce the level of their overpayment. The way in which this measure works is to give that extra

flexibility to allow those families that would otherwise take no adjustment at all, ending up with a bigger overpayment, to have some reduction in their overpayment.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—But you are going to get me the figures on the experience of that because, at the moment, you do not know what will happen with this measure. Obviously you made an estimation but by your own definition people would still say, ‘No thanks very much, we’ll keep taking the money.’ You are not claiming the \$160 million as savings; it is merely less accumulation. But this measure is also a cost to you, isn’t it? If people take money off you that they are not entitled to, that is a cost to the Commonwealth. It is a non-interest bearing loan by the Commonwealth to the family in effect, isn’t it?

Mr Hazlehurst—In the same way that all overpayments are.

Mr Kalisch—But this measure is producing a saving to the Commonwealth, because we anticipate that the level of debts will be lower than it would otherwise have been. I should mention that, just as we monitor the number of people who take up the other More Choice for Families options, we will of course monitor the numbers of people who take up this choice in future years. But it will be some time off before we have some numbers as this only starts in July 2006.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—What is the reason for that? Is it just that you need the start-up time?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, basically.

Mr Kalisch—It needs legislation, plus start-up time.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—It needs legislation as well?

Mr Kalisch—Yes, I think it does.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Why does it need legislation?

Mr Kalisch—I am sorry. Some of the families measures do need legislation but this one does not.

Mr Hazlehurst—My apologies, no it does not.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Do you have legal advice on the negotiation of the level at which you agree to overpay—the issue I have been trying to highlight?

Mr Hazlehurst—No.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Mr Hazlehurst, you will get the percentages of families who do or do not take the advice and any analysis you have, won’t you? As you say, at the moment it is an either or situation, so it is quite an easy figure to get: they either said yes or no in relation to the negotiation, as it were.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Can we move to the next one, which is ‘Family Assistance—assistance to families at risk of overpayment’.

Mr Hazlehurst—Would you like me to explain that?

Senator CHRIS EVANS—It is always helpful.

Mr Hazlehurst—There are two parts to this measure. The first part is that there will be a process of identifying families who are at risk of receiving an overpayment and giving additional support, primarily in the form of telephone contact with them—so they will be outbound calls from Centrelink.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So the expenditure on this measure is again payment to Centrelink for that activity by Centrelink?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And why is it only in the next two financial years?

Mr Hazlehurst—This measure is in effect going to be tested to see the extent to which it is working and, should it be successful, then a case will be put for continuing it, I expect.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So basically the government approved funding for two years and you will come back to them with a proposition about whether it is continued or not?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—How are you going to identify families at risk of overpayment? I presume you have done a lot of work in the last few years about who is at risk of overpayment, haven't you?

Mr Hazlehurst—There has been some work done and there is going to be more. We are doing it through a range of ways. There are two main ways of identifying the families. One is purely through statistical analysis—simply looking at patterns of debts and correlations between those and the family circumstances that are able to be captured from the data held by Centrelink. Then we are also hoping to inform that further through actual direct interaction with families, not necessarily in the form of a survey per se, but certainly gathering some more qualitative information about the other circumstances of families that might help to sharpen the profile.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—What do you know currently about families at risk? Have you published that or pulled it together in any form?

Mr Hazlehurst—I am not sure that it has actually been published, but most of what we know already is consistent with what you can work out intuitively, which is that families that have—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—That is what you call commonsense, is it?

Mr Hazlehurst—Families that have changes in circumstances are more likely to receive overpayments. Families that have incomes close to or on the taper ranges for family payments are more likely to receive overpayments simply because a change in their income will have an impact on their payment.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Immediately. It is easy to say families that have changes in circumstances will be high risk. That is immediately apparent, but how do you identify which families those are?

Mr Hazlehurst—The kinds of circumstances that could be more predictable, I suppose, are the ones where families have irregular patterns of earnings and where they have had a lot of changes in their estimates in the past. That would be an indicator.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—What are the incomes most likely to be affected by the tapers?

Mr Hazlehurst—At the moment the first taper starts at about \$32,000. I cannot recall exactly where it ends—it changed last year with the budget—but I think it is about \$50,000. The second taper cuts in at about \$70,000, but I can get you the precise figures.

Mr Kalisch—As you would recall from an answer to a question on notice, for a number of people with debts the average income was quite high, and has gone up quite significantly. That suggests that to some extent a fair amount of the debt action is actually in the second taper range for very high-income earners where they are probably increasing their income beyond the taper range and falling out of eligibility.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Is that because you think families with the lower level incomes have broader experience and have responded to the messages and the education campaigns?

Mr Kalisch—I think it probably points to the centrality of family tax benefit to the incomes and the living standards of those on middle to moderate incomes, whereas for those at the upper income range it is probably not quite so important to their family budget and therefore responding to Centrelink is not quite as high on their agenda as it should be.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And their focus on the changes is not quite as keen.

Mr Kalisch—Their change of incomes may be more significant at times.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Do you have any published data, Mr Hazlehurst, on what you know already about those at risk of overpayment? Do you have any general descriptor that you have published?

Mr Hazlehurst—I do not believe so.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Perhaps you could take it on notice for me whether you have anything that would be helpful in defining the department's current understanding of the at-risk categories. You may not have.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—It is a general inquiry. If the answer is that you cannot help me, I will take that as the answer.

Dr Harmer—We can probably piece together a profile of the at-risk categories without too great a difficulty, I would have thought.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I am not asking about who is going to work; I just want to get a sense of it. I do not want to put the department to a lot of work. It is not a question on which I want thousands of people beavering away; I just want to get a sense of who you are aiming at. Obviously you are going to do more work to try to define that down. So, again, the cost is the cost to Centrelink doing the work, basically. Do you have a total figure for what we are spending on the compliance issues with family debt?

Mr Hazlehurst—No.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—We had the previous range of measures, and now we have these. There is \$6 million here and \$8 million there; it is starting to add up. I know the others are more important.

Dr Harmer—I do not think we have, but I think we spend something like \$14 billion so it is a relatively small proportion of the total spend on compliance.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I know you are profligate, Dr Harmer; that is well established!

Dr Harmer—Certainly not.

Mr Kalisch—There is certainly a sense of underlying compliance activity at the moment that is devoted towards this program and it is being enhanced, as you recognise, in these measures.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I think Dr Harmer's point is a fair one, which is to say that, compared with what we are paying out in family benefits, it is a small amount. But, as the minister said, it is another range of measures trying to deal with the problem. Let us go to the third one: the family system is automatically updating income estimates. Mr Hazlehurst, are you the star on this, as well?

Mr Hazlehurst—I am happy to explain it to you. As the minister mentioned before, this measure has two components within it. The first is that, at the moment, just before the financial year commences, families receive a letter advising them of their existing estimate and inviting them to update it for the next financial year. From 2006-07 families will receive advice of an uplifted estimate at that time—uplifted by the change in average weekly earnings. They will be advised that that will be the estimate that is used subject to them coming back to Centrelink and saying, 'No, my real circumstances are such and such and therefore a lower estimate is warranted.' Subsequent to that, when their income is determined for the previous year—that is, their entitlements have been reconciled, they have lodged their tax return and their income has been determined—it will be compared with the estimate that is held by Centrelink. If that income is higher, including an uplift by AWE for that income—the estimate that is on the books—the estimate will be automatically uplifted again and families advised of that. They would then be given the opportunity to provide a different estimate if their circumstances have changed or if they believe that the further uplifted estimate was incorrect. So this is a mechanism to help families get their estimates right, particularly those families who in the past have not done as much as others to contact Centrelink when their circumstances change, including just simply having a regular increase in their take-home pay.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So this runs a bit counter to what you were telling me earlier about choice, et cetera cetera. This is really starting to build in some automatic signals in the system.

Mr Hazlehurst—There is still choice for the family in the sense that the automatic uplift, if you like, is one that families can respond to. So it is a starting point for the family for that financial year, which is then reviewed again when their income has been determined for the previous year. But it is always open to the family to disagree. Indeed, the strong message that will be given to families, including in those letters that they received before the commencement of the new financial year, will be that it is their responsibility to ensure that their estimate is right. So if they disagree with the estimate that has been provided in that letter—the uplifted estimate—it is their responsibility to let Centrelink know what they believe their true estimate, or most likely income, will be for that next financial year.

Mr Kalisch—It is probably appropriate to think of this measure as a guided or assisted choice.

Senator Patterson—Which they can change. But, as I said to you, they will knowingly change it. If their estimate is lower than when their tax return comes in—unless they have very lumpy income, and we have more choices for people to deal with that—it does provide a system which marries using last year's income with a flexibility that indicates that your income can change during the year. It brings your payments as close as possible to the time that you need them.

I have thought long and hard about this, Senator Evans. I have introduced a range of measures. This is yet another one. It is in the budget this time. It was brought to my attention that when somebody pays a Child Support Agency payment for, say, three years, they lose their maintenance income threshold and only get one for that year. I have said that we should amortise that across three years. You cannot always force an ex spouse or an ex partner to pay on a regular basis. We are getting payment of CSA in one year for the last three years—or that year and two years before—and there is a maintenance income threshold. You have up to \$1,400 before that then starts to count as income for the purpose of assessing family tax benefit. You get a lump sum and you get one maintenance income threshold for that year, so people were incurring debts. This will enable them to amortise that across the years for which the payment is made, to try and assess that.

A lot of people have come with issues that I think are reasonable to look at and that is yet another one. Those people were getting an overpayment because they had a paying ex-partner paying CSA in lump sums.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—We will come to that in the child support measures. Effectively, the family assistance office are going to write to people twice a year, once just prior to the start of the financial year, and once following assessment of their tax return. Is that right?

Mr Hazlehurst—They are both letters that currently families already receive. The first letter is currently what is referred to as the new financial year assessment letter, received just before the commencement of the financial year. The second letter would be the reconciliation letter that they receive, which is the letter that tells them how their payments have been balanced for the previous year. It will also now advise them that a comparison has been made between their actual income from the previous year and the estimate that is being held on the books.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Are you telling me they receive both letters currently but the nature of the letter is changing?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So they already get the reconciliation letter, which says, 'We have added everything up, we have gone through your tax return and we owe you \$33.50 or you owe us whatever.' In addition, that letter will now contain a recommended adjustment.

Mr Hazlehurst—It will contain an adjustment that will be made unless the family advises that their circumstances are actually such that that amendment is inappropriate.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So the emphasis is for you to respond to the letter or Centrelink will adjust your family payments?

Mr Hazlehurst—That is correct.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So you only get the choice if you are active? The deferral or do nothing option is that Centrelink changes your assessment?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator Patterson—Based on last year's income.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I did not understand that. I thought it required some active choice, but in fact Centrelink make a decision and they only alter that if you contact them to put an alternative case. Do they then discuss that with you or is it again the case that if the customer says, 'No, I want to be paid family payment at X rather than recommended Y,' do you pay them at X?

Mr Hazlehurst—The same principle applies as we discussed earlier. Where Centrelink believe that the estimate the family then comes back with is unreasonable—perhaps based on the experience of previous years where estimates have been a lot lower than actual income once determined and families have ended up with a succession of debts—in those circumstances they may reject the revised estimate.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So the automatic updating of income estimates by Centrelink triggers the power therefore for Centrelink to set the rate or remove the choice?

Mr Hazlehurst—It is not quite like that, Senator. The actual update of the estimates by Centrelink will not be one in which there is any discretion for Centrelink. The first one will just happen, because it is an adjustment as a result of changes in average weekly earnings. The second will happen automatically if the family's previous year's income is higher than the estimate held on the books, so there is no discretion for Centrelink. What could then happen is that a family could get back in contact with Centrelink with a further revised estimate—that is, they have actually exercised their choice to disagree with the estimate that would otherwise be held on the books. It is at that point that Centrelink can say, 'Hang on, this does not look reasonable.' In the first instance we would expect that Centrelink would ask for some evidence of the estimate that has been provided by the family—for example, some evidence of pay slips to indicate that the family is quite reasonably expecting a lower actual income for that year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I understand that fairly well. I am interested in the powers question, because I must admit that following our previous discussion I am still not certain about that. Are you saying to me that, as a result of your automatically adjusting their estimation for the next year, and their challenging that—

Mr Hazlehurst—It is the challenging part that is the part that enlivens the power, but it is not, strictly speaking, the challenging of it. It is simply the fact that the family is providing an estimate that Centrelink believes is unreasonable, so it is an existing power within the legislation being used in a new context—that is, the context in which they are disagreeing with—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—But it is much more likely to be triggered by the fact that, as I understand it, it is the first time you are providing the estimation of their income for the year. Is that fair? I do not want to verbal anyone, but this is the first time that you are actually telling them what you think their income for the year will be.

Mr Kalisch—It may be particularly challenging for those families that have not updated their estimate for a number of years.

Senator Patterson—We have families who get the letters and are asked to update their estimate—they underestimated their income by \$10,000 the year before last and last year and they will do it again this year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Most of them have been to see me about the debts in between times, I can assure you.

Senator Patterson—They do not tell you about the other bit of it, Senator Evans.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—But they do come and talk to me about the debt.

Senator Patterson—The overpayments—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Let me assure you that you have grabbed their attention!

Senator Patterson—are significantly down, and the effect of the \$600 they get at the end of the year is real.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—That is a debt management strategy.

Senator Patterson—Rubbish!

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I will ask you the figures on that in a minute. I am correct in saying that this is the first time the department has introduced a method by which you seek to estimate their income and therefore their debt family payments.

Senator Patterson—Only based on their last year's income.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I understand that, but I just want to be clear about the key point: this is the first time that the department, through Centrelink, have made an estimation of their income and therefore their entitlement to family payment?

Senator Patterson—Can just say something to you—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Can I have the answer first, Minister?

Senator Patterson—I will answer in the way that I want to answer.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Madam Chair, I do not think that is right. I do want an answer, and then you can give a commentary.

Senator Patterson—I will answer that question in the way that I want to answer it. The answer is that for many of them it will be exactly the same as their estimate. For some of them it will be a little more than their estimate and for some it will be under their estimate. Many people—I think more than 25 per cent now—estimate their income correctly. So the estimate that we have from their last year's income will be the same. Some of them overestimate their income, and that will not change. If they overestimate their income, it will remain at the

income they have given us—some people choose to do that because they prefer to have some of their lump sum at the end of the year.

If they underestimate their income, it will be uplifted to last year's income and then they can change it. So not every single person will be affected by this. If they have estimated their income correctly, it will remain the same. If they overestimate their income, as some do because they prefer to do that, that will not be changed. The people who will be affected are the ones who have not been able to estimate their income. In that case we will take last year's income and then they can change it if they think that is appropriate. So do not run around saying that everyone will be affected because a significant proportion of people either estimate their income correctly or overestimate their income—and they choose to do that.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Could I ask the question again then: is this the first time that the department have estimated the income and the family payments on behalf of clients?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And this will be introduced from when?

Mr Hazlehurst—It will be introduced from 1 July 2006.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—What is the reason for the delay? Is it the need to adjust the systems?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, it is quite a substantial change.

Senator Patterson—Let me qualify, it is the first time an FTB has been estimated not the first time the department has estimated people's incomes on the basis of another known factor. You might need to go back and have a look at what happened with family payments under Labor and what was used to estimate people's incomes. Under the FTB, it is the first time.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Can someone take me through then what the costs are of this measure. I see that it is \$3.8 million for the first year, \$10.2 million for the next and then it trails off. Is this because once operating there will not be much cost? Is it about changing the system?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, it will be a process that becomes largely automated.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So there are no additional mail costs or whatever because you are already writing to them twice and you are just adding further details to the letters. Is that fair?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—What impact are you estimating this will have on debt behaviour?

Mr Hazlehurst—As indicated on page 163 of Budget Paper No. 2, the estimate is that this will reduce the level of debt by around \$115.2 million over four years.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Sorry, I missed that figure. I had gone over the page. Again, this is not a saving; this is a reduction in debt—is that right?

Mr Hazlehurst—Correct.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—There is not necessarily a saving from the measure, or there is none predicted?

Mr Hazlehurst—That is correct.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Again, it is a measure that anticipates a reduction in the amount of debt incurred.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I had not noticed it before, but you described it as \$115 million over four years.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Obviously you do not expect any reduction in debt in the first year because it is not implemented, you are just paying for start up costs or getting prepared for the change. Are you saying to me that it is roughly just under \$40 million a year?

Mr Hazlehurst—We would expect that there would be a bigger effect in the first year, primarily because the first time that estimates go through this process there will be a set of adjustments that thereafter will be much smaller, particularly around an adjustment that brings the estimate up to the actual income for the previous year.

Mr Kalisch—As we explained earlier, there are a number of families that have not updated their estimates for a number of years. The first time that happens it is a much greater jump and then it is more incremental year after year beyond that.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Equally, in describing those families, you are describing people who would have received quite considerable debt notices from you.

Mr Kalisch—Yes, year after year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And that has not altered their behaviour. Why is the letter going to be more influential? Or is the implication that the inertia will be overcome, that it requires them to take action?

Mr Kalisch—Yes, you get beyond the passive non-compliance.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—But you may well be withholding payments from these people in recovering debt anyway, won't you?

Mr Kalisch—Yes. But as we go onto another measure, that level of withholding is very modest.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Mr Hazlehurst, do you have the estimates for the years?

Mr Hazlehurst—The estimates of the reductions in debt or the estimates of the expenditure?

Senator CHRIS EVANS—The reductions in debt.

Mr Hazlehurst—No, I do not have those.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Perhaps you can take that on notice. Can you explain to me, when you say the first year, do you mean 2006-07 or do you mean 2007-08?

Mr Hazlehurst—It will have an effect on the entitlements in relation to 2006-07.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Do you want to tell me what that means?

Mr Hazlehurst—It is not the entitlements, it is actually the cash. It will have an effect in 2006-07 because families will be receiving an amount of money that is closer to what their actual income turns out to be.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—When does your first letter go out with the estimation for their income?

Mr Hazlehurst—It will be in April-May of 2006.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So effectively it is starting in the 2005-06 year in that you are providing a pre-financial year estimation for them in the 2005-06 year.

Mr Hazlehurst—For 2006-07, yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Effectively it is not a July 2006 start-up; it is pre-July.

Mr Hazlehurst—That is true.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I thought from what you said that it would not be until the year after, but in fact it should have its first impact in the 2006-07 year because people will already have had the adjustment made.

Mr Hazlehurst—That is true.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Does work need to be done with Tax regarding the sharing of information or do you have access to all that already?

Mr Hazlehurst—We are working closely with Tax around this measure, but the information we already get through the processes that occur around reconciliation of entitlements, for example, are at the end of the financial year. That is the key piece of information that needs to be communicated to Centrelink—the actual income for the previous year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And that is already provided to you—direct or through the Family Assistance Office?

Mr Hazlehurst—The Family Assistance Office in the process of reconciling entitlements for that year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So this is not any change in the information coming over, just a process that will then occur inside Centrelink that provides for the adjustment based on the figures they have got from Tax, or from FAO via Tax?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Can we do the improving debt recovery measure, then?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes. There are two measures within this measure. The first is around increasing the withholding rates from future family payments for families with debts. Those will increase from \$20 to \$30 per fortnight for families with debts under \$750 and from \$40 to \$60 per fortnight for families with debts over \$750. The second part of this measure is that for families—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Can we just deal with that first?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, of course.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—They are separate measures, in a sense, are they?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes. They work together.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Just so I am clear. Is the increase in the standard recovery rate legislated or regulated, or just at the instruction of Centrelink?

Mr Hazlehurst—No, it is not legislated.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So it is a policy decision inside the department?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And the current policy is \$20 and \$40 and you are increasing that to \$30 and \$60.

Mr Hazlehurst—That is correct.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And that does not require any regulation change or whatever—it is just a policy decision by the department.

Mr Hazlehurst—By the government, yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—How are those rates determined and what is the argument for the increase?

Mr Hazlehurst—The argument for the increase is simply to increase the rate at which families repay debts so that they have debts reduced or completely removed faster. But also it reflects the fact that the rates of recovery have not changed since the commencement of family tax benefit. So, for example, they have not been indexed or they have not been adjusted as rates of family payment have increased. So these are simply changes to reflect the passage of time and also are still very generous by comparison with recovery rates for other forms of social security.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I accept the argument about it not having been indexed and trying to move the rate. I understand the logic of that. But then you make the point yourself that it is quite different to the other social security recovery rates. What is the rationale there?

Mr Hazlehurst—Only that the government has decided to both set originally and maintain these adjusted rates at a level that is far more generous so as not to impact on families.

Senator Patterson—Are you suggesting it should be higher, Senator Evans?

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I am trying to understand the policy decision, Minister.

Senator Patterson—I am just asking whether you think that should be higher.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—That is not how estimates works. I know you like to have a general chat and a discussion, but I am always mindful of the chair telling me: ‘Just ask questions, Senator Evans. Keep to your role here.’

Senator Patterson—You are implying that it could be higher.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I am not implying anything, Minister. I am asking a question of the officers, which is the role of estimates. I want to understand the policy decision taken by the government. They have been helpful with the answers so far, and we are doing fine.

Senator Patterson—And I am just asking whether you think it should be higher.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Come around for a cup of tea, and we will have a chat about it.

Senator Patterson—I do not think I want to have a cup of tea with you with the frame of mind you are in at the moment. When you cool your jets, I might.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I do not want to incur the wrath of the chair. So it was a policy decision, in effect, not to link it to the other social security payments. My next question is of the sort that I asked earlier in relation to the other measures. What can you tell me about the experience of recovery that would inform this decision? Do you have a large number of people who are not making significant progress on their debts because of the lower rates of recovery that exist currently?

Mr Hazlehurst—Obviously there is a wide range of experience in the level of debts that families have. Families now have lower debts than previously as a result of the supplement, but there are some families with larger debts than others and these rates of repayment will ensure that both the smaller debts and the larger debts are repaid faster.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So what is the process? Is this a default if you are unable to negotiate a higher rate of repayment? Is that what this represents?

Mr Hazlehurst—These are the automatic rates that would apply. There is scope for people to have a lower rate if they are able to demonstrate that they do not have the financial capacity to pay at these rates. So, if you like, there is still a hardship provision for families that cannot afford to pay these rates.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And how is that accessed?

Mr Hazlehurst—By ringing Centrelink.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Is it automatic, or is it a judgment made by Centrelink?

Mr Hazlehurst—It would be a judgment made by Centrelink and would normally be based on some evidence of the capacity of the family to pay or otherwise.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So it is a Centrelink decision; is that appealable?

Mr Hazlehurst—I am not sure.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Perhaps you could take that question on notice for me.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So there is a hardship provision that allows Centrelink to set a lower rate.

Mr Hazlehurst—That is right.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—It is not an established rate, just a lower rate.

Mr Hazlehurst—That is correct.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I presume people have the option of paying off the debt faster as well, so this is the default rate, effectively.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And this does not come in until July 2006?

Mr Hazlehurst—That is right.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Why is there a long lead time on something that is as straightforward as this?

Mr Hazlehurst—Only to get the arrangements in place in terms of the changes to the system, advice to customers and those sorts of issues.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—It seems like a long lead time for a fairly minor change.

Mr Hazlehurst—There is a lot of change going on in the families space, so we sought to ensure that the changes are done properly.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Do you have any figures for me on your experience as to the effectiveness of the standard recovery rates? Do you have information on how many are paying at that rate or at a higher or lower rate?

Mr Hazlehurst—I do not have that information. One obvious thing to say about the effectiveness of the rates is that overpayments, as you know, are at an average of, I think, just over \$1,000 at the moment for 2004-05. These rates will obviously recover that level of overpayment in the shorter period of time—a little over a year. I do not have an answer to that question.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I will put some questions on notice about that just to get a sense of it. I am sorry I interrupted you, Mr Hazlehurst; you were going to tell us about the second measure.

Mr Hazlehurst—The second measure is complementary to the first. You will be pleased to know it is actually the one measure that starts earlier than 1 July 2006; it starts on 1 January 2006. It looks at having negotiated recovery arrangements with families that have debts of \$3,000 or more that are 12 months old. Those arrangements will be negotiated with families based on their real capacity to pay. The fall-back position for those would be the new standard recovery rates.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So that does not alter that. The bottom line is that, if they do not want to cooperate with a higher rate, that is what they go on to.

Mr Hazlehurst—That is correct—although, again, there is scope for them to demonstrate they do not even have the financial capacity to pay that rate.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—You are talking about people with larger longstanding debts that you are trying to clean up, but at the end of the day the default mechanism is the other measure.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—How do you currently treat families with larger longer term debts? What is your current mechanism for clearing those debts?

Mr Hazlehurst—My understanding would be that they are just on the standard recovery rates, unless they wish to have arrangements in place for a faster recovery.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So there are no current arrangements in place like with other social security debts for debt collection and other measures?

Mr Hazlehurst—For as long as they are on family tax benefit, the standard rate of recovery applies. So, for debts of greater than \$750—that is, ones that might be more like the \$3,000 debts—it would be the \$40 per fortnight. Once they cease to be on family tax benefit, other arrangements more like the income support arrangements might be put in place for the recovery of those debts.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—When they are off family tax benefit?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes. Obviously there is nothing to withhold once they are off family tax benefit, so other arrangements need to be put in place.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So you put them into the normal debt collection channels under income support?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—If the sorts of people Mr Kalisch was talking about earlier—those who are, if you like, serially unresponsive to your best endeavours and who have incurred a large number of debts and seem to be able under this system to continue to incur a large number of debts—refuse to cooperate, the only recourse you have at the moment for dealing with them is to recover at these default rates. Is that fair?

Mr Kalisch—That is probably fair. We also deal with the older debts first, so it can be some time—as I think Mr Hazlehurst was indicating—before some of these very large debts are recovered at the current rates.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—What do you mean when you say that you deal with the older debts first, Mr Kalisch?

Mr Kalisch—If, for example, we have a family that has received debts in three years, we essentially recover the debts from the first year first and then we go to the second and the third year debts—whilst also hoping that they will not have any future debts.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I do not understand the distinction: if they owe you three grand each year, they owe you nine grand.

Mr Kalisch—It is really just an accounting dimension.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Yes. It does not really matter much. They owe you nine grand and you are trying to get back what you can at the rates stipulated by the policy.

Mr Kalisch—Yes, and as reasonably as we can.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So there is no trigger for more drastic action or higher rates?

Mr Kalisch—Not in the current circumstances.

Mr Hazlehurst—And that is what these measures are effectively for.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—But currently the legislation does not provide you with any other capacity—or do you just choose not to exercise that capacity as a policy decision?

Mr Kalisch—It is really a policy decision of government.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So, effectively, it is currently a policy decision of government not to pursue those debts but there are powers available.

Mr Kalisch—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I will now move on to the family assistance measure to increase Family Tax Benefit Part A income threshold.

Mr Hazlehurst—This is a very straightforward one. This simply increases the part A income threshold, or the free area, from \$33,361 for the 2005-06 year to \$37,500 from 1 July 2006. That is the amount of income a family can earn before their family tax benefit A is affected.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—What is the rationale for that beneficial measure?

Mr Hazlehurst—The rationale for that measure is simply to provide more money to families as they return to work or earn more money from—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I was trying to get a sense of whether that is indexed to MTAWA over two years?

Mr Hazlehurst—It is already indexed by CPI. This is a one-off measure to provide additional help to families.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—That is what I thought. So July 2005 increase rate is a reflection of the CPI having been applied?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Is that in legislation?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—By this budget decision, the base rate is altered, effective from 1 July 2006?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And the normal indexation arrangements continue to flow?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Mr Kalisch—Essentially, as Mr Hazlehurst indicated, it not only provides more income to families within that income range and just beyond it but it also reduces the effective marginal tax rates for families up to the \$37,500 range.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I know it is beneficial and that it comes at quite a cost to the budget but I am trying to understand the rationale, if there was one, for the selection of the figure. Is it linked to anything else?

Mr Kalisch—It was really a choice of government to provide assistance to families within that broad income range and to complement the other tax changes to reduce effective marginal tax rates around that income range.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I accept that in general terms.

Mr Kalisch—That was the understanding I had.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—There is no reference to the \$37,500 in the other measures?

Mr Kalisch—No.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I was trying to work out whether there was a link to another measure and whether that was why one had settled on \$37,500 rather than \$37,000 or \$38,000. Thanks for that. I will move to ‘Family assistance—maintenance income credit’.

Mr Hazlehurst—This is a measure that the minister described earlier, which relates to the current experiences of resident parents who receive child support payments, particularly in the form of lump sum payments of arrears. They can receive the child support payment that may have been owing over some years in one go and, potentially incur substantial debts in relation to their family tax benefit entitlements. At the moment there is a free area in relation to the payment of that child support, which is an amount of \$1,149.75 per year plus \$383.25 per additional child after the first child. Under this measure, any unused amount of that free area from previous years—that is, for the years in which the child support that would have been paid if it had been paid on time—can be carried forward as a credit, for example if someone should have received \$1,000 of child support per year but had not received anything for three years and then got it in a lump sum, they would be well above that free area; hence the maintenance income test would reduce their family tax benefit by 50c in the dollar.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—You would currently treat it all as income in the one year?

Mr Hazlehurst—That is right.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And you will now treat it as income spread over the years that it should have been paid?

Mr Hazlehurst—That is the effect of the measure but in fact the way in which it will work is that they will have, in effect, a higher free area because they will have a maintenance income credit from the previous years which they will be able to add together and only if the child support they receive as a lump sum is greater than that credit that they have brought forward would there be any impact on their family tax benefit.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—How many years can they carry the credit? I know often people have to wait a long time to get some of those job—

Mr Hazlehurst—It is unlimited from commencement, from 2000.

Senator Patterson—This was clearly as a result of this issue being raised with me and an example which I thought was unfair, that somebody could not control an ex-partner paying in a lump sum. I said to the department, ‘There must be a way we can amortise this over a period of time’, and I think this is a reasonably fair way. You have to make sure people cannot game it but this is a way of saying, ‘Since you have no control, you have lost your maintenance income test threshold and we will take that into account’, and I think it is a reasonable and fair measure.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Are there any other measures in the budget that go to this same thing, because obviously there are other issues like income tax and other measures, or is this a one-off?

Senator Patterson—There is the other measure that was in last year's budget which we implemented from this year and that is another issue that people came to me and said when they returned to work, when they had FTB B and they returned to work that even though they told Centrelink they still had an overpayment, because if they had been at home for nine months and worked for the last three and earned enough money to exceed the amount that they were entitled to earn, even telling Centrelink they still had an overpayment. What we introduced was a quarantining of that amount that they had received once on returning to work after the birth of each child, so they have one time when they can return to work, and the child might be six months old, it might be nine months old, it might be two years, it might be three years, but they cannot really judge when they are going back to work. They get their family tax benefit during the year so they will be able to maintain that payment, the amount that they have received, before returning to work. It was another issue of people not being able to assess their income and feeling aggrieved when they rang Centrelink and said, 'I have now gone back to work' and they were told they had already received more than they should have.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Thanks, Minister, but what I am asking about is the particular issue of the back payment of child support. Are there other measures that also seek to deal with this? I am thinking off the top of my head but obviously it affects people's entitlement to a whole range of benefits, including family tax, it affects their income tax et cetera. It has been an issue raised with me as well over the years when people get sudden lump sums because the Child Support Agency has taken action or what have you and often there is a big time gap.

Senator Patterson—I do not think there any other of our payments that are affected.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—No, it was a whole-of-government question, whether there are others, whether this is one of a suite of things or whether this is—

Mr Kalisch—I cannot think of any other thing that would be directly affected quite so much. Certainly, the maintenance income test means that it would impact on family tax benefit quite directly. It does not have any income tax implications.

Mr Hazlehurst—There was a time when the maintenance income test applied to other payments but it only applies to family tax benefit now.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I was going to ask about maintenance income credit. You have some capital costs in the first year; what is that for?

Mr Hazlehurst—That would relate to the systems changes, I am assuming. I will correct that if that is not the case.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I take it that it is going to cost about \$15 million or \$16 million in current dollars per year—and not just in the out years but forever, as it were?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—It is an ongoing cost to the budget?

Mr Hazlehurst—That is right.

Senator Patterson—But had the money been paid on a regular basis over that time, we would have been bearing that anyway. It is acknowledging that the money has been paid for three years once rather than every year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Did that work at the ERC—it must have?

Senator Patterson—I worked hard at that one. I have worked hard to get a lot of these changes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I thought it was drawing a bit of a long bow, but it obviously worked with the ERC, so good luck to you I guess.

Senator Patterson—I had good arguments. I argued very strongly for that one.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I still think the conclusion is that it costs \$16 million a year.

Senator Patterson—It is, but you would have had that cost had they been paid. That is what I argued—and I won it.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—If Costello bought it, I am happy to let you get away with it.

Senator Patterson—Thank you very much. I am very convincing when I am in full flight. Do not ever go into the ERC when I have to confront you—I don't think that will ever happen.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I am sure Mr Costello took the view that \$16 million a year to get rid of you was probably money well spent.

Senator Patterson—Thank you, Senator Evans; you are charming!

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I meant it in the possible way.

Senator Patterson—In the nicest possible way, yes—like Barry Humphries does.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I did, actually. I am sure you had him by the leg. I will move to 'Family assistance—using reconciliation top-up payments and tax refunds to offset outstanding family assistance debts'. Even the description is a confusing mouthful. What does it all mean?

Mr Hazlehurst—At present where a family's entitlement is reconciled at the end of the financial year, the adjustment that is made can include an adjustment to their tax refund should they have a family payment overpayment and a tax refund owing to them. In that case the tax refund would be offset against that over payment. This simply brings the arrangements into line where the person has debts from previous years. For example, if a person is calculated to be entitled to a top-up in a current financial year and has a debt from previous financial years, the two things would be offset. Similarly, if they have a tax refund owing to them in this financial year but a previous year family tax benefit overpayment, the two things would be offset.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—This effectively allows you to add and subtract family tax liabilities or credits against their tax liability over a series of years. How many years? Is this backdated?

Mr Hazlehurst—The offsetting against the income tax assessment only occurs each year. The offsetting against a previous year family tax benefit debt could, however, be wherever they have that family tax benefit debt.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So the family tax benefit debt may be four years old—

Mr Hazlehurst—Conceivably, yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—you are currently recovering it at \$40 a fortnight and, if they are entitled to a tax refund this year of \$1,000, if they still owe you more than \$1,000, you can actually claim that \$1,000 tax refund against any of the years in which they incurred the debt?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—You are saying to me that up until now you have only been able to do it for the current year?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—How many people do you think this is likely to affect?

Mr Hazlehurst—We are anticipating that it could be as many as 50,000 families across both the tax refunds and top-ups offsetting. So if you have a family tax benefit top-up in the current financial year but a previous year debt that would also be offset.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So it works both ways: if you owe them money, you can offset against the debt; if they owe you money, they still owe you money, don't they?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, Senator.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—You only benefit from this if they are actually owed money for the family tax reconciliation?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, or they have a tax refund.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Sorry, there are two elements there. There is the reconciliation of their family tax and there is the income tax reconciliation.

Mr Kalisch—A further point of clarification: if they do have an income tax refund, we are potentially just one of the beneficiaries of that refund. We are in a pecking order and we are somewhat lower down than some other aspects.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Where are you on the pecking order?

Mr Kalisch—If they have a prior year tax debt then that gets paid first. Then I think there are a number of other areas such as HECS debts and other things that get there before us.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Is there a published priority list?

Mr Kalisch—We could probably take that on notice and get that to you. I am sure it is published.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—The vision of you all lining up to have a go at my tax return is quite frightening, Mr Kalisch! It is reassuring that you are about fourth in the line, but Mr Carmody and the education department are in front of you.

Dr Harmer—We will be very persistent.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—‘From cradle to grave’ is your motto.

Senator Patterson—We are also reducing the likelihood we have to be there in the future—significantly reducing the likelihood.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So you expect it to affect about 50,000 families. In what year?

Mr Hazlehurst—Senator, these are only estimates, of course.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Sure. I am going to take you to the money estimate in a second. I just want to be clear in my own mind which year it applies.

Mr Hazlehurst—We are expecting there could be in the order of 43,000 families in the first year but fewer in following years because the recovery, particularly from top-ups of previous year debts—as you no doubt would be aware, top-ups have increased dramatically as a result of the supplement—will have a significant impact in the first year. We are expecting that that might reduce quite substantially in the out years.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Effectively it will be a matching against debts that might go back how far?

Mr Hazlehurst—Four years.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—In the first year you have got the option of garnisheeing it against four years worth and the next year you have got it against just that current year, effectively, unless there was not enough—

Senator Patterson—And also because of the measures, you are reducing the likelihood of overpayment. So you have got two factors working together.

Mr Hazlehurst—I would be cautious about being too scientific about these numbers. These are our estimates in relation to something which has not happened yet.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—That is all right. I do not think you have to worry about me overestimating the accuracy of your predictions. You can rest assured about that. I know how hard it is. Let me be clear on the costing, because it will cost \$4.7 million over four years to administer; I understand that. It is expected to reduce the level of debt by an estimated \$47.1 million over four years. Is that a real saving or is that a reduction in the debt?

Mr Hazlehurst—The latter.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So, again, it is not a savings measure; it is a reduction in the amount of money you would have otherwise been owed?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—You would expect to get most of that progress in the first year as well?

Mr Hazlehurst—Certainly a bigger effect in the first year, yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Have you got an estimate of that? You said it would be 43,000 more likely in the first year. Have you got a dollar estimate for the first year as well?

Mr Hazlehurst—I do not have a dollar estimate, no.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Perhaps you could take on notice how you expect that reduced level of debt to come down. What is the longer term expectation of the numbers of families and the overpayment impact? What would you see it settling as?

Mr Hazlehurst—I think the government would hope that it would settle as a figure of zero. If all of the other measures in the package, the supplement and this measure over time have a bigger effect up-front, because they are about offsetting against previous year debts, the longer term hope and expectation would be that this particular provision will not need to operate very much, if at all, because there will not be any previous year debts.

Senator Patterson—Unless some of them make an absolutely significant difference in their income. There will be occasions where people cannot predict some lump sum or some change in their circumstances, like a huge promotion. There will always be cases where people have underestimated that it is so far off their previous year's income. My charter was to reduce the overpayments, and that is what I have been doing systematically by a number of measures. I want to get it as low as possible. There will always be some people whose circumstances change, whose incomes change dramatically, who maybe do not advise us in the middle of the year and we find out when they put their tax return in. Or it might change towards the end of the financial year when they have had most of their FTB. But that will be the exception rather than the rule.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Mr Hazlehurst, can I just be clear: when is the first year that this will impact on people?

Mr Hazlehurst—It will impact with the reconciliation of the 2005-06 entitlement year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So it will impact on people in terms of their filing of their 2005-06 taxation returns?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So it is not earlier than July 2006 in terms of the impact, but again it is a measure which will commence immediately, in effect.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Because next year's tax return will be the trigger.

Mr Kalisch—It will commence from July 2006, once people start filing returns for the 2005-06 year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—The moment they file their return after 1 July 2006 this will be triggered, effectively.

Senator Patterson—And the legislation should be in to deal with the issue of the quarantining of the FTB B so that next year when people go back to work—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I think that is the next measure, Minister. Just hold on one second.

Senator Patterson—I am just excited to tell you about all the things I have done.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—And I have been giving you the opportunity, but do not confuse me. We will be able to do that one. The systems will be in place for you to be able to do that to impact on next financial year's returns.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—In order let the minister bubble over with the excitement of telling us about family tax benefit part B supplement, I will move to that.

Senator Patterson—The supplement and quarantining are different issues. So many things are happening.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I was going to ask, actually, at the end whether there is a chart of how all this works with the existing provisions, because there are a lot of provisions now impacting on the family payments debt issues. How many measures in total have we ended up with?

Mr Hazlehurst—The main measures have been the More Choice for Families options, the supplement and this set of six measures.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Does attempt to deal with the family debt payment issue involve eight or nine separate measures in total?

Mr Kalisch—It is hard to say. There are probably three or four different sets of measures.

Senator Patterson—That would be a better way of putting it. Some of them are incorporated in More Choices—the uplift factors are a set of measures. It is about assisting families to get the estimate of their income correct as far as they possibly can at the time they need it.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Maybe if the department would not mind taking on notice the provision of a list of all the measures that have been introduced to deal with the family debt issue—a consolidated list.

Senator Patterson—It is to do with people estimating their income correctly.

Mr Kalisch—Perhaps we can give you a consolidated list of all the measures. A number of the measures, such as the one we described around the FTB A threshold increase, are really an increase to the generosity of payments.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Sorry, I really only covered that in the same area because that was the order of listing in Budget Paper No. 2—I accept that is just the way they were listed there. That is where the budget measures are best presented, so I just went through them in that order. I accept that is a separate issue. But I would like a consolidated list, because—as the minister makes the point that there have been a lot of measures—there is also a bit of complexity involved. Some of them may be of interest only to a small group of people because of the nature of some of them—they are administrative changes that most families would not even know about, but some will. So we are now on the family tax benefit B supplement.

Mr Hazlehurst—This is a measure you will be familiar with from the previous hearing. This is really just a restatement of the financial position in relation to the B supplement, which was an announcement made during the election campaign and now has been

implemented by the government. These figures, at page 166 of Budget Paper No. 2, take into account the bring-forward of the measure by the half-year—the \$150 bring-forward to 1 January 2005 as well as the full \$300 payment for 2005-06 and indexed thereafter for the out years.

Mr Kalisch—Senator, you would recall that we did discuss this at the last estimates hearing.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Yes, even my memory is not that bad, Mr Kalisch. And this is just the budget measure that gives effect to the announcement?

Senator Patterson—Senator Evans, can I just go back to that question you asked. I will just take a measure, for example the CSA lump sum measure. That has a double goal: one is to treat someone fairly who had a three-year payment made in one year, and it also has the effect of reducing an overpayment because a person's income seems to be higher. The question you have asked is quite difficult, in the sense that my main goal in that CSA was that it is not fair that someone cannot control what Centrelink pays them; they get a higher income that year and they lose their maintenance income tax for two of the years. But it also gave many of them a debt because their income was higher. So the primary goal of that was to make it fairer for people. Do you count it as an overpayment measure? No, primarily it is not but it will have an impact on overpayment, so it is not easy to give you that list. I just want you to be aware that it is a primary objective to reduce overpayment. I will put it on the list, but if it is about the primary objective, for example, the CSA—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I accept that you want to add a commentary on it. That is obviously fine, and I accept that that is what that measure does. I am not going to quibble about that.

Senator Patterson—But some of them are done like that to make it fairer but they do have the impact of reducing overpayment—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I suspected you would argue that all the measures were to make it fairer, but—

Senator Patterson—They are to make it fairer, but that one in particular—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I did not think I would need to feed you the lines though. I am a bit surprised that you want to highlight this one as fairer!

Senator Patterson—The uplift factor is very much that some people do not indicate their income, and it makes it fairer for everyone that people in similar circumstances are being treated the same as closely as possible.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Maybe we will leave it on the basis that the department will still take the question on notice. As the answers have to be ticked off on by you, Minister, I would expect to see a commentary attached to those that you think need—

Senator Patterson—I am just clarifying for you that there are sometimes a number of objectives within the one measure.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I think it is reasonable for you to put that commentary on the answer as to the measures you think have a slightly different impact or a slightly different—

Senator Patterson—No doubt I will, Senator Evans.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I always assumed you would. So we are all happy; that is the main thing. What was the family tax benefit B issue you wanted to talk about, Minister?

Senator Patterson—The quarantining.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Which budget measure is that?

Senator Patterson—It was a budget measure last year but it has an impact this financial year.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—It is from last year's budget?

Senator Patterson—Yes, but it has a major budgetary impact in the coming financial year. It is where a person returns to work, having received family tax benefit B, and brings up—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I know the one you mean. Sorry; I thought you were talking about a new measure. I thought that I had missed something and that you wanted to talk about it, but you mean last year's budget measure which comes in this year.

Senator Patterson—There is, again, another measure which reduces the likelihood of overpayment. It is for people who feel they have done the right thing. They cannot predict when they are going back. So we are treating similarly people in similar circumstances. For each person who returns to work after the birth of a child, the FTB that they received in the period of the year before they returned to work will be exempt; they will be able to maintain it. It will be debated in the Reps today, apparently.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—The treatment of women returning to work has been one of the most difficult issues, one of the ones where I have seen the worst cases involved with it.

Senator Patterson—People were concerned. They would ring up and say, 'We've done the right thing and we still have incurred an overpayment.' Again, there are two objectives in the measure. We look forward to its speedy passage before the end of this sitting session, so that we can implement it.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—You will have to see how you go about getting it on the government's list.

Senator Patterson—It is on.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I am not sure that it is in front of Mr Costello's tax package, though. We'll see.

Senator Patterson—We could do it as a non-con bill, if we had a lot of agreement—on a Thursday, Senator.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—You never know your luck in a big city.

Senator MOORE—Dr Harmer, I am going to jump in with regard to two other parts of 4.1 while Senator Evans is having a break. Senator Ludwig has had to leave, so he has entrusted some questions to me and he has put some on notice. He wants to get on record, though, a couple of questions about the family relationships centres program. The Attorney-General's Department had advised us that FaCS is the responsible agency for the regular monitoring and quality assurance of the family relationships centres program. Can you give us an idea of

FaCS' involvement with the family relationships centres program. How will the money that has been budgeted for it—\$6.6 million, I think—be spent?

Ms Beauchamp—It is part of a broader package of \$392 million that was announced by the minister and the Attorney-General. One component of it relates to the family relationships centres. The Attorney-General's Department has responsibility for the policy and funding. The department, as indicated in our forward estimates and budget papers, are responsible for the contract management and administration of those centres.

Senator MOORE—So contract management and administration are your only responsibilities?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—You have no policy role?

Ms Beauchamp—We work with the Attorney-General's Department, but the policy role is primarily with that portfolio.

Senator MOORE—So it is another one of the cross-agency ones?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—If you have primary ownership of the contract management, is the \$6.6 million the full allocation for your agency over the four years?

Ms Beauchamp—Page 54 of our budget paper details the departmental funds appropriated for the administration and contract management of the family relationship centres. Adding it up brings it to the figure you just mentioned.

Senator MOORE—How do you perceive your role in the contract management? What will that involve?

Mr Carmichael—We have a business partnership agreement with the Attorney-General's Department that details very clearly our role and the Attorney-General's role. We will help to develop the tender documentation for the family relationship centres in concert with the Attorney-General's Department. We have the network that will manage those services, so we will help set up contracts and advise and participate in the process of allocating the funding. Ultimately it is the Attorney-General who decides the allocation of funding for money appropriated to the Attorney-General's Department. Similarly, money appropriated to our portfolio is finally determined by our minister. We manage the whole program. There is a close liaison between the two agencies, so there is some crossover in policy. We have not finally decided on the model of the family relationship centres—there are consultations happening around the country as we speak. It is a partnership program between the two agencies. Some of the funding that is appropriated in this budget under the new family law system and into our portfolio may also find its way into the family relationship centres, depending on the location and availability of services in that region.

Senator MOORE—You mentioned that a consultation process is going on at the moment. Is that what is referred to as 'scenario workshops'?

Mr Carmichael—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Is that a new term? I am used to ‘consultation’ but is that the new term for the consultation process?

Mr Carmichael—There has been a lot of consultation around the package. As you would be aware there was consultation on that package of measures just before Christmas, which was finalised in early January. I guess it was to distinguish that the next phase of the consultation would focus on the model rather than on further consultation about what might be in the package.

Senator MOORE—Who has been involved in this second round of discussion? Is it by invitation?

Mr Carmichael—It has been by invitation. There is a broad cross-section of service providers, peak bodies, the Attorney-General’s Department and the Department of Family and Community Services, the Family Court, Child Support Agency and Centrelink—all the relevant players.

Senator MOORE—Is that invitation list determined jointly between you and Attorney-General’s?

Mr Carmichael—Yes, it was.

Senator MOORE—Can we get a list of those invitations?

Mr Carmichael—Yes, we could provide that.

Senator MOORE—I would imagine the decision was made by people’s roles in this kind of area. That would have been a determining factor.

Mr Carmichael—Sorry?

Senator MOORE—The decision about who to invite would have gone with the key players in different areas.

Mr Carmichael—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Were Catholic Welfare Australia and Relationships Australia on the list?

Mr Carmichael—Yes, they were.

Senator MOORE—Was the scenario workshop process was both central and regional? It was across the country, wasn’t it?

Mr Carmichael—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Were there representatives of those groups that were involved at the national and regional levels?

Mr Carmichael—Yes.

Senator MOORE—So we can get from you the direction of those scenario workshops and who attended?

Mr Carmichael—Yes. Just to be clear: there is consultation happening around the country on the performance framework and a range of other things that came out of the family relationships centres program review that are complementary to the scenario workshops.

There are two: one in Canberra and one in Perth. There was a good cross-section of people invited to both of those.

Senator MOORE—So there were only two scenario workshops?

Mr Carmichael—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Can you give me any indication of why those places were chosen?

Mr Carmichael—Just for diversity—Canberra would capture providers from Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Perth would capture providers from South Australia, probably the Northern Territory and Western Australia. There has been a lot of discussion. A national round of consultations went through regional areas and every capital city. So there was thorough consultation on the model. This feeds back to those participants information on where we got to, what the budgeted decisions were and what the opportunities are now, and gives them some further feedback on the work that we did with the earlier consultations. It builds on a national round of consultations that happened late last year.

Senator MOORE—And that was the one that was focusing on the model.

Mr Carmichael—Yes, and the whole new family law package.

Senator MOORE—You said earlier that your agency was responsible for developing the tender process.

Mr Carmichael—We will do that jointly with Attorney-General's.

Senator MOORE—Do you have agreed guidelines on how that will operate? Certainly in this part of the industry how tenders work creates a great deal of discussion.

Mr Carmichael—It does. Both departments have their own guidelines. We need to work through what it would be for this process, because if we in the end decide that we will both be jointly funding the family relationship centres, obviously there is some working through of exactly what tender process we would use. As part of the tendering process we will provide, through our state and territory office network, workshops or information sessions for anybody wanting to tender so it will be very clearly articulated what the requirements would be. It will also be posted on our web site and the Attorney-General's web site.

Senator MOORE—What is the time frame for that?

Mr Carmichael—The whole package has been designed to roll out over four years. One of the concerns we have overall is that it is a big package. It is around a 280 per cent increase in the size of the program across that four years. We are very concerned about building capacity in a sensible way in the sector. We have built in reasonable time lines so that we can develop the tendering package, get it out to the sector and the sector can have plenty of time to apply. So most of the new services that will be tendered will not start until 2006-07, in that financial year. There will be a number of enhancements to current services that we can roll out in the next 2005-06 financial year.

Senator MOORE—And the actual public tendering should take place in 2005-06?

Mr Carmichael—Yes.

Senator MOORE—And then slowly evolve. But the public part of putting the tender in and making it public; you are anticipating that during the next financial year?

Mr Carmichael—Yes. There are different components to the package. The family relationship centres are a brand new part of the model, but most of the rest of the package is enhancing existing service types. So there is a lot more focus on getting the sector engaged in the FRC, helping develop the model and being involved then, obviously and publicly advertising for tendering for that program.

Senator MOORE—When you have determined the tender process, can we get a copy of that, when you have come to your agreed tender?

Mr Carmichael—Yes, we can do that.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any idea when that will be?

Mr Carmichael—It will be later this year, is our guess.

Senator MOORE—Later this calendar year?

Mr Carmichael—Later this calendar year, yes. We want to be able to advertise, give service providers a number of months to complete the tender, for us to go through and assess the tenders, then to seek ministerial approval, and have that well progressed by early next year. So there is plenty of time for the winning tenderers to then do the recruitment and be ready to start providing services by 1 July 2006.

Senator MOORE—Giving people a reasonable amount of time to respond to the tender?—because we have heard arguments in other programs about that.

Mr Carmichael—Yes.

Senator MOORE—In the processes you described to me, both leading up to Christmas on different parts of the program and in the subsequent scenario workshops, have Family Services Australia played a part in those?

Mr Carmichael—They are one of the three industry representative bodies we fund, and they have been integral to that process.

Senator MOORE—In both parts of that?

Mr Carmichael—In all parts.

Senator MOORE—In all parts. We meet on a fortnightly basis with them, as we do with the other industry bodies. We have a liaison meeting regularly, so they are always kept informed of progress and we seek their input on a regular basis.

Senator MOORE—Is that liaison part of your overall responsibility, or this particular program?

Mr Carmichael—It is an overall responsibility. Those industry bodies are only funded for the family relationship services program, and so we meet with them looking at the whole of the program. Obviously at this point in time, with the interest around family relationship centres and the new family law package, we are spending a fair bit of time explaining that and consulting with them on those aspects of that package.

Senator MOORE—So you meet with your larger consultative groups on a fortnightly basis at the moment.

Mr Carmichael—That is the sort of basis—certainly every couple of weeks. At other times, it is more often. At other times it might be monthly.

Senator MOORE—That is part of the whole program, though; it is not just on this particular issue of the centres? Has any decision been made on the location of the centres?

Mr Carmichael—We have done preliminary needs assessment work. We have provided that advice to the Attorney-General's Department but those processes have not been worked through yet. We are still working out how we will progress that, as the two departments.

Senator MOORE—How do you see that decision being made? You have done the preliminary work based on your expertise in families and so on, and you have passed it on to Attorney-General's—what happens then with that process?

Ms Beauchamp—That decision will be up to the Attorney-General in consultation with our minister.

Senator MOORE—So it is the Attorney-General's final decision after taking advice from your minister—is that how you see it?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—At this stage of your discussions, do you have any idea whether there will be discretion for centres in determining their own approach to how they operate? At the moment there is a variation of processes across some of the things that are doing this kind of work already, so do you see that once this program is implemented there will still be that discretion for people to operate in different ways?

Mr Carmichael—I think it is necessary. One of the things we would be trying to do with the earlier rollout is to test models in various locations, some in inner metro, some in outer metro, some in rural and some in remote locations. Obviously, when you get into rural and remote areas, the model has to look quite different because of a whole range of other circumstances but mostly because, with the services system, there are not as many providers in those regional areas. So we are looking for a range of innovative models, and part of the earlier rollout would be trying to test some of those models to see how they work.

Senator MOORE—One of the issues that has been raised a lot is the safety of these centres. Is that one of the agenda items—to test out what safety mechanisms would be available at the various centres?

Mr Carmichael—That is certainly one of the things being discussed. You will note in our announcements around our part of the family law package that we have some special family violence additional funding, where we will be looking at and testing some further innovation around how we deal with high conflict families, particularly where violent behaviour is happening within families.

Senator MOORE—Leading on from that is: what measures do you hope to be in place to ensure that centres are capable of identifying cases that involve family violence or child abuse?

Mr Carmichael—There will be additional training. There is a focus within the program, anyway, around that and enhancing the capacity of services. But, generally, 90 per cent of people coming into the service system have a level of conflict and sometimes that can be extreme. But conflict and violence is not unknown to the service system already. It is something that, whilst they deal with it reasonably well, we can certainly make improvements. They are some of the things we will be looking to do at the rollout of the revised program, because, as part of the renovation of the program, we have done a review over the last year or so. There is a range of things we want to take forward. The performance framework that we are consulting around the country on now deals with those sorts of issues as well.

Senator MOORE—That wide-ranging consultation is one of the issues that came up in the discussions before Christmas?

Mr Carmichael—Yes.

Senator MOORE—What measures will be placed to ensure that centres refer families down appropriate pathways even when those pathways might lead cases away from using that centre's service?

Mr Carmichael—That is a particular interest of how they are set up. We are very mindful that the family relationships centres will be the gateway into the service system, so they need to work well. We will be encouraging partnership as much as we can, and part of our consideration in the tendering process is giving some consideration to how providers can partner. Some interesting partnerships have already emerged over the last year or so within the service system, crossing some of the boundaries of the industry representative bodies, and we are encouraging that because we want to see an integrated services system. We are very concerned. Some of the provisions around protocols and transparency of referral that will be in the guidelines and incorporated in the tender documentation refer to the need to be able to demonstrate that they can achieve high levels of transparency and integrity in the way they refer to other agencies.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any idea, at this stage of the planning, how many of these centres there will be? A certain number has been given.

Ms Beauchamp—Sixty five.

Senator MOORE—That would be the end result—having 65. Is it expected that they will roll out or will they all be operational on a day?

Ms Beauchamp—The government has announced that in the first year of operation, from the 2006-07 year, there will be 15.

Senator MOORE—What happens if there are more than that ready to go? Is there any limit?

Mr Carmichael—The funding is staged so that we can fund 15. We will need to determine the second and third year of the rollout. There is provision and a requirement that we have to go through a process of evaluation after the first 18 months. We can test then whether we have sufficient numbers and whether the model is right. We will be building in an evaluation process very early in the roll-out phase so that we can build on good practice and where

things are working well, also where things have not worked so well because we have tried something that was not as good as where it worked somewhere else, so that we can make some modification.

Senator MOORE—So there is flexibility in the whole process.

Mr Carmichael—Yes.

Senator MOORE—But not the flexibility to bring money forward?

Mr Carmichael—No, not at this stage.

[4.10 pm]

Senator MOORE—I asked those questions for Senator Ludwig, apart from the ones he has put on notice. I will just check with you, Chair. I would like to move on to Indigenous Family Violence, the Family Violence Partnership Program and the Family Violence Regional Activities Program, which I am told is under 4.1.

CHAIR—Senator Moore, would you like to proceed.

Senator MOORE—Dr Harmer, I want to turn to the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. When we were doing the Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mr Tom Calma, talked to us about an audit being done in that area. He said at that stage, which was in March, that he had not seen any results of the review even though the review had been announced on 15 March 2002, according to this note. Can you tell us, first of all, whether this is a FaCS responsibility now that there have been ministerial changes? Does FaCS still have responsibility for servicing the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs?

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Senator MOORE—My indications are that FaCS provides the background and support for this particular audit process.

Ms Beauchamp—I would have to take that on notice. I am not aware of the process you are talking about.

Senator MOORE—You are aware of the National Audit of Indigenous Family Violence Programs?

Dr Nicolaou—That is something that has been transferred to our department.

Senator MOORE—Would family violence programs normally come under your department?

Ms Beauchamp—We have two elements for family violence in relation to the Indigenous population that we are responsible for: the Family Violence Partnerships Program and the Family Violence Regional Activities Program.

Senator MOORE—Yes. I have a couple on those over the page. But we are just following through on this particular audit, which was apparently looking at family violence in Indigenous communities and was released and promoted. But we have not heard what happened with it. Does it not come under your area?

Dr Nicolaou—Which year was the audit that you are referring to?

Senator MOORE—It was announced on 15 March 2002 as a major initiative. But we have not received the results and we want to find out where it is at. It was announced by Minister Ruddock, I believe, but because it was family violence there was an expectation of an involvement by FaCS. With the demise of ATSIC we believe that the family elements of ATSIC came to FaCS.

Dr Harmer—In fact most of them did, but I do not think that audit, which was completed, it seems, two years before the decision to provide—

Senator MOORE—We do not know whether it has been completed or not—that is what we are trying to find out. It was commenced.

Dr Harmer—The fact that Dr Nicolaou does not know anything about it probably means that the responsibility for it is still with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

Ms Beauchamp—Or the Office of Evaluation and Audit Division.

Dr Nicolaou—I am aware that there was an audit of legal services.

Senator MOORE—Yes, there was one of those.

Dr Nicolaou—If that is the case, that is something which was transferred to the Attorney-General's Department.

Senator MOORE—We will follow this up with DIMIA. It would just seem to me that if there was an audit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family violence then somehow your section would be involved in that.

Dr Nicolaou—If it was an audit of the family violence legal services, it is not something which would have come to FaCS. It would be something that went to the Attorney-General's Department.

Senator MOORE—We will agree to follow up on that.

Dr Harmer—It is possible that there is a word missing from that title—it may be legal.

Senator MOORE—All things are possible. We will follow up there. Minister Ruddock's press release also said at the time that the audit proposal was developed by the National Indigenous Working Group on Violence, which was an ATSIC initiative. Are you aware whether that working group is still in existence? Did you pick up any involvement in a national Indigenous working group on violence?

Dr Nicolaou—No, we are working closely with the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination. Any consultation with any national body will be done through them.

Senator MOORE—Have you stumbled over such a group called a National Indigenous Working Group on Violence in your consultations with OIPC?

Dr Nicolaou—I believe that group was before the abolition of ATSSIS.

Senator MOORE—So it is certainly not something that is being supported in any way by FaCS at this stage?

Dr Nicolaou—No.

Senator MOORE—I might have better luck with my next couple of questions. The FaCS web site, which I do read regularly, and the PBS indicate that the Family Violence Partnership Program is implemented through agreements with state and territory governments. What we do not know is whether there are agreements in place with all the states and territories at the moment.

Ms Beauchamp—There is an agreement in place with the Northern Territory government and we are in the middle of negotiating agreements with most of the other states and territories.

Senator MOORE—What is your time frame?

Ms Beauchamp—That is variable depending on where we are in the negotiation process with each of the states and territories. We anticipate that over the next three months we will have a substantial number of agreements in place.

Senator MOORE—So you are aiming to go over the financial year and be very early in 2005-06?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—How do the arrangements you are working on compare to the way the program or its equivalent was previously managed by ATSIC?

Ms Beauchamp—We have the staff who were part of ATSSIS. They have transferred over to our department.

Senator MOORE—Did all of them come?

Ms Beauchamp—This particular initiative was only a new budget initiative for 2004-05 so there was no infrastructure in place before the announcement of that initiative. We do have the staff that were transferred and we are currently in the process of rolling it out—

Senator MOORE—So even though they had not really been identified in ATSSIS, the people who would have been likely to have been working on that came across to you.

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator MOORE—And they are continuing to work in the area. How many staff are there in that particular area?

Dr Nicolaou—There are three or four staff.

Senator MOORE—An article in the *Weipa Bulletin*, which is a splendid publication, on 4 January 2004 talked about the launch of the ATSIC Peninsula Regional Council's Family Violence Strategy. It got lots of publicity last June; I think it must have been one of the early ones. What is the current status of that particular program in Weipa—the ATSIC Peninsula Regional Council's Family Violence Strategy or whatever it has been renamed? What is happening with similar ATSIC regional council family violence strategies? How have you actually worked to handle that sticky transition from setting them up to being a brand new entity?

Dr Nicolaou—I am not familiar with the details of the one you just mentioned. Also, that may be referring to something that was announced by the ATSI regional council.

Senator MOORE—It was, in partnership.

Dr Nicolaou—And the councils still exist until the end of this financial year. It hardly means it is something that the Australian government supported, but certainly one of the two programs that we have has provided support to regional councils in the past. We can take that on notice.

Senator MOORE—That would be good. In particular, you could have a look at where family violence strategies have been set up under councils and what the program is to look at how they are going and to maintain any kind of goodwill or work when the transition comes. The work on family violence support will be going to your section, will it not?

Dr Harmer—The OIPC in the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs is responsible for the administration and the winding down, the transition arrangements, of our regional councils. So it would still be theirs at the moment. It will be up to them what, if anything, we take over in the transition of the regional councils, including the one in northern Australia that you referred to.

Senator MOORE—With the working groups that have been set up to look at Aboriginal services across the new Public Service and the brand new approach, this is the kind of program that FaCS will be expected to pick up, will it not?

Dr Nicolaou—Not necessarily. FaCS will be expected to contribute to a process as much as, say, the Attorney-General's Department, which has a family violence program as well. So the Indigenous coordination centres will be managing the process. We do have staff in each of the Indigenous coordination centres who will be contributing to that kind of work.

Senator MOORE—Dr Harmer, in evidence yesterday one of your officers was telling us that you have staff in just about all the ICCs now.

Dr Harmer—We do.

Senator MOORE—So probably, without being too prescriptive, this is the kind of work that your people in the ICCs may pick up?

Dr Harmer—It is quite likely that our people in the ICCs will be involved in some of the elements of programs initiated by regional councils. But, again, it will be up to the OIPC which elements of those programs initiated at local level by regional councils and supported by ATSI will continue and which will fit into programs and which will not.

Senator MOORE—And how?

Dr Harmer—Yes. And our people in the ICCs will certainly stand ready to help and assist where we can with all those.

Senator MOORE—At this particular point there has been no formal agreement on that until after the OIPC handles the transition?

Dr Harmer—Not on that one, no.

Ms Beauchamp—In relation to the Family Violence Regional Activities Program, we have been involved in an OIPC process in terms of an open submission process at the regional level through the ICCs. That process is still in train at the moment. We are seeking submissions through OIPC on the sorts of initiatives that you have raised.

Senator MOORE—What kinds of projects are being looked at being funded under that Family Violence Regional Activities Program? Just give me some idea of what kinds of projects are being successful.

Ms Beauchamp—It is currently in a process. I probably cannot go into the details because they are currently being considered. But they are local solutions to the particular areas of need. So it could be anything in terms of having a counsellor or a contact point with local organisations, some sort of referral services. It is really looking at very small interventions that local communities put to government.

Senator MOORE—How is that working at the moment? You said it is actually happening now. I forget your actual words. What does that exactly mean? In your Family Violence Regional Activities Program, what is happening at the local level?

Ms Beauchamp—To ensure we have an integrated approach across government to all the ex-ATSIS programs, we have a process in train at the moment where we are seeking submissions from the ICCs and local communities. A number of communities are putting up submissions in that process. The Family Violence Regional Activities Program is one element of those ex-ATSIS programs.

Senator MOORE—And that work is being done through the ICCs?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—So the closing date for applications under the Family Violence Regional Activities Program was extended to 15 April?

Dr Nicolaou—That is correct.

Senator MOORE—When will that process conclude? When will you start announcing whether or not people have been successful?

Ms Beauchamp—The funding applies from 2005-06, so we are hoping the minister will be announcing before that date.

Senator MOORE—So hopefully during June?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—The guidelines for the Family Violence Regional Activities Program say that they were prepared to assist non-profit organisations to apply for grants. I have been informed that the application process for the grants is 35 pages in length. Is the grant application form 35 pages in length, Dr Nicolaou?

Dr Nicolaou—One of the roles of our staff in the Indigenous coordination centres is to actually work with the ICC manager and the community to help them prepare submissions accordingly.

Senator MOORE—But is the application form 35 pages in length?

Dr Nicolaou—I do not have the form in front of me. I do not remember exactly how many pages there are, but there is a need to identify what each project is supposed to do and how the organisation is going to implement a particular project. As I said, our staff in the Indigenous coordination centres are there to assist community organisations to put up those submissions.

Senator MOORE—Have you received any complaints or concerns from organisations about the complexity of the application process?

Dr Nicolaou—We have not received the applications as yet, but so far no.

Senator MOORE—So you have had no formal complaints?

Dr Nicolaou—No.

Senator MOORE—Have you had any feedback from your ICC staff about the number of people who have needed help in filling out those forms?

Dr Nicolaou—Not at this stage.

Senator MOORE—Can we put that on notice, Dr Nicolaou? Can you have a look at that for us to see whether there has been a demand for that support? Can you find out how your staff in the ICCs are going with that and whether there have been a lot of complaints?

Dr Nicolaou—We can check that.

Senator MOORE—I have had a look at the application form, and it is long. I have to admit I did not count the number of pages. How are the design and the activities of the two programs in your portfolio, the Family Violence Partnership Program and the FVRAP, being coordinated?

Ms Beauchamp—The Family Violence Partnership Program is primarily a program that we work on in partnership with the state and territory governments. As part of that process, we require a lot of consultation with local communities. We also require funding to be contributed by the states and territories. That is working at a fairly high level at a jurisdictional approach.

Senator MOORE—And we are still waiting for those agreements with some of the state governments?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes. And we are working very much at the local level around the Family Violence Regional Activities Program.

Senator MOORE—So that is very much at the community level?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—How is FaCS coordinating the expenditure and program design of these programs with the Attorney-General's Department?

Ms Beauchamp—We work very closely with the Attorney-General's Department. Loucas has an ongoing relationship with the area that is managing the Family Violence Regional Activities Program.

Dr Nicolaou—We have regular meetings. Also the Safer Communities Working Group, which is managed by OIPC, is another forum whereby we ensure that we consult and work with other agencies, particularly A-G's.

Senator MOORE—So the formal work, because it is a cross-agency program, is done by an identified working group?

Dr Nicolaou—The safe communities working group.

Senator MOORE—So that is the formal working group?

Dr Nicolaou—Yes.

Senator MOORE—And that has representatives from where?

Dr Nicolaou—The main departments—the Department of Health and Ageing, the Attorney-General's Department, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Transport and Regional Services and us.

Senator MOORE—And DIMIA?

Dr Nicolaou—And DIMIA, with OIPC chairing.

Senator MOORE—So that is the formal arrangement and each of the departments are expected to have a representative on that?

Dr Nicolaou—Yes.

Senator MOORE—At what level, Dr Nicolaou?

Dr Nicolaou—At the SES level.

Senator MOORE—So it is considered within the system to be a high-level working group?

Dr Nicolaou—Yes.

Senator MOORE—So that is one formal approach. Is there any other formalised coordination?

Dr Nicolaou—That is the critical one.

Senator MOORE—The rest feeds off that.

Dr Nicolaou—I work very closely with my counterpart in the Attorney-General's Department, who implements similar programs in the area of family violence, for example.

Senator MOORE—So you have the overall one that looks at the whole program and then on particular projects you work together.

Dr Nicolaou—We have bilateral discussions.

Senator MOORE—Like a subgroup.

Dr Nicolaou—Yes. We have bilateral discussions where necessary.

Senator MOORE—Does that take a lot of your time?

Dr Nicolaou—It does, but it is critical time.

Senator MOORE—That is an open question. Is a significant part of your job that kind of liaison on these processes?

Dr Nicolaou—It is. It is consistent with the government's priority for a whole-of-government approach.

Ms Beauchamp—We need to make sure that Loucas's program responsibilities feed into other areas in the department and that we are working with OIPC so we have got an integrated approach across all departments in coming up with a package of solutions for local areas.

Senator MOORE—Dr Harmer yesterday was talking about the internal coordination you have just mentioned, Ms Beauchamp. Is Dr Nicolaou's section responsible for getting that information out across FaCS when it comes to involving any other part of FaCS?

Ms Beauchamp—We are only part of that primary responsibility. We do have an Indigenous policy branch. That has a coordination role in terms of tracking exactly what sorts of activities are occurring across the department. We do integrate through that coordination.

Senator MOORE—Is that Indigenous policy branch part of your area or separate?

Ms Beauchamp—Separate.

Senator MOORE—Who heads up that one?

Ms Beauchamp—Geoff Richardson heads that up.

Senator MOORE—Mr Richardson came across from ATISIS as well, didn't he?

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator MOORE—So the people in that unit would have that ATISIS background.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Most of them would.

Ms Beauchamp—Some of them would.

Senator MOORE—So they have that background with the programs under the previous structure.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes. The other ATISIS program to come across the department was the Indigenous housing program. That is in another area.

Senator MOORE—The department's web site indicates that the 2004 budget committed \$37.3 million over four years, with \$5.3 million in 2004-05 for the Family Violence Partnership Program. Was this additional to some resources that already existed?

Ms Beauchamp—This was additional, a new budget measure.

Senator MOORE—Did that come on top of previous safety issues within your department? You already had working programs, and this is a new budget area that came in on top of existing programs.

Ms Beauchamp—It was a new budget initiative and additional money, and we have got specific areas of responsibility around it. As you have mentioned, it is \$37.5 million. We are in the process of rolling that out.

Senator MOORE—The PBS indicates that there is just over \$14.7 million in administered appropriations for this program in 2005-06. How much of this funding is rephased from 2004-05?

Dr Nicolaou—\$4.7 million.

Senator MOORE—That carries over. Can you provide a breakdown of estimated funding for this program by administered and departmental costs over the years 2004-05 to 2008-09? Over the life of the current budget measure, from 2004-05 to 2008-09, can you give us a breakdown of—I hesitate to go back to the discussion we had earlier today on another program—some form of notional budget expenditure for administrative and departmental costs?

Dr Nicolaou—We could. Certainly the portfolio budget statements of DIMIA for last year do include specific amounts which separate administered from departmental, so we can provide that to you.

Ms Beauchamp—Our budget papers this year do refer to the movement of administered funds into 2005-06.

Senator MOORE—And I take it you would expect the same flexibility as we had in the discussion earlier in the day? There could be flexibility with the way that the money is expended?

Ms Beauchamp—Depending on how we negotiate that with the states and territories, yes.

Senator MOORE—I thought I would just say that rather than get into a long debate about things being notional or whatever. There is a significant amount of departmental appropriations allocated to output group 4.1 on the PBS. Can you at this stage give us any idea of how much of that is going to be attributable to each of the two Indigenous family violence programs? It is a breakdown question. On page 166 we get a kind of amalgamation of the expenditure under 4.1.

Ms Beauchamp—I would have to take that on notice.

Senator MOORE—You will have a shot at it?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Dr Harmer—We can probably give it to you.

Senator MOORE—Lovely, thank you.

CHAIR—Senator Patterson, would you like to make a statement?

Senator Patterson—Yes, I would. Earlier today we had some questions about the Violence Against Women—Australia Says No campaign. The shadow minister, Tanya Plibersek, has put out a very misleading press release. She said that I said there was no attempt to investigate complaints about the way in which Lifeline was dealing with it. I very clearly said that we referred those complaints to Lifeline. She goes on to say:

Refuge workers decided to test the Helpline themselves as a quality assurance check.

Here we have workers in a refuge holding up the helpline, filling it up with hypothetical cases and then reporting back on what they think they heard or were told. I do not think they would have been unbiased observers in reporting what they heard from Lifeline. I find the press release totally misleading. It is not a true reflection of what happened in Senate estimates.

Last estimates we had an episode like this. Here we have another episode. I do not mind people reflecting the truth of what is said in estimates, but I do object to this. I made it very clear that we had referred the complaint back to Lifeline, and they indicated that they did not

believe that would have been said. But here we have an admission that we had refuge workers—and some of these people were not happy that we did not put their helpline down; but, as I said in estimates hearings, we wanted to have a line that was available across the nation—clogging up the line with false, hypothetical cases. That is not acceptable, and nor is it acceptable to say that I did not attempt to investigate it. That is not what I said in estimates.

CHAIR—Thank you, Senator Patterson.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Chair, I do not know under what rule or procedure of estimates the minister keeps on making statements every time she does not like a press release someone puts out. It is an abuse of Senate process. I am happy for the minister to debate the issues elsewhere with members of parliament or issue her own press releases, but I do not see why we ought to be allowing the minister to make statements about every press release she does not agree with. I do not want to take up the substantive issue—that is for her and Ms Plibersek to debate in the public arena as part of the democratic process—but I do not quite see why every time the minister gets upset we have to—

CHAIR—I will make a ruling on that. It is the same ruling that I made the last time and I will make it repeatedly for my last 2½ days in this place. If a minister misrepresents anything in the chamber—and let us face it; we are operating here under the rules of the Senate—it is up to that minister to come into the chamber and correct the record as soon as possible. I think the same must apply to someone who misrepresents the proceedings of this committee, a la the Senate, and it is up to anyone to come in here and correct the record. If that has been put out publicly, which I understand it has, and the media are running with it, it is up to the Senate to make sure that it reflects accurately what transpired in this committee meeting. That press release and the one referred to at the last estimates did not accurately reflect the proceedings of this committee.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—With respect, Chair, I think we ought to get some advice from the Clerk on that. I do not see how you can attempt to decide the accuracy or otherwise of press releases of members of the House of Representatives.

Senator Patterson—I have the right to claim to be misrepresented in any Senate proceeding at the end of a section—and that is what I have done here.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—But you do not claim to have been represented in this forum.

Senator Patterson—I waited until people had finished questioning on an area. I could have actually said that I claim to have been misrepresented, because I have been misrepresented. It says in this press release that I made no attempt to investigate. That is not what I said. I indicated that the department had gone back to Lifeline indicating these concerns. Now I find that these refuge workers admit that they were testing the helpline.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—My point stands. I think we ought to seek some advice from the Clerk.

CHAIR—My point will stand and it refers directly to events of this committee and it is important that it reflect accurately the proceedings of this committee.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Who is going to make that judgment?

CHAIR—I will make that judgment.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—So you are going to vet all the opposition press releases?

CHAIR—No, I will make the judgment as to whether or not something that has happened in this committee is relevant to this committee. This was a debate that was held earlier this morning at which you were not present, Senator Evans—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—That is why I am not debating the content.

CHAIR—and it is important that it is accurately reflected. I will allow that type of procedure to take place because it is part of the proceedings of this committee. Are there any further questions?

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I just note for the record, Madam Chair, that I think your ruling is plainly ridiculous. I will seek the Clerk's advice on whether it is appropriate for us to try to respond to press releases issued by House of Representatives members, either government or non-government in that way. I do not want to debate the issues.

CHAIR—I can understand that you would think that my ruling is plainly ridiculous because it reflects adversely upon one of your colleagues—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—I think it reflects on you, Madam Chair, not on the colleague.

CHAIR—Excuse me: do not talk whilst someone else is talking. It is impossible for Hansard to record two voices simultaneously. I will maintain a position in this committee whereby a discussion has been referred to inaccurately and it is important that the record be corrected.

Senator Patterson—I was misrepresented and that is what I will claim. As in the last case, if there were press releases that I do not like but are not misrepresenting me or what is said in here, then I have to live with that—but I was misrepresented.

CHAIR—Can we now proceed. Are there any further questions on 4.1?

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Are there any other press releases that people do not like?

CHAIR—Any further questions on 4.1?

Senator McLUCAS—I just want to seek leave to clarify that the 'misrepresentation' that Senator Patterson is referring to about what occurred in the February estimates is incorrect. We can go back and debate that in an appropriate chamber at another time.

Senator Patterson—I will never forget that.

Senator McLUCAS—Just for the record, my press release is accurate and that has been confirmed by your letter to me.

CHAIR—Are there any further questions on 4.1?

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Can I ask whether we are doing any research on means testing arrangements for FTB B? Have the departments engaged any work on whether we can better target—

Dr Harmer—I need to get my FTB team back to the table.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Sorry. Am I in the right section?

Dr Harmer—Yes, but we had gone from FTB to—

Senator CHRIS EVANS—It is only one quick issue and then you can—

Dr Harmer—I can let them go?

Senator CHRIS EVANS—You can probably let them go. That will be up to the Chair, but I think we will be moving on after that to child support and other issues. I just wanted to check whether or not we were doing any work on this question of better targeting or means testing on FTB B?

Mr Hazlehurst—A couple of measures have been introduced or are being introduced. For example, the changes to the free area for FTB B—increasing it to \$4,000—and the change in the taper from 30 cents to 20 cents in the dollar were obviously both informed and then the effects analysed in terms of the impact on the numbers of people receiving different rates. Is that what you mean?

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Yes, that is the sort of thing. I have seen references to the government responding to concern about high-income families being paid FTB B. Does that research, about the free area and the taper, touch on those matters?

Mr Hazlehurst—No. That analysis simply goes to what impact changes in the means testing arrangements have on the overall distribution of incomes and families receiving FTB B. But, of course, those means testing arrangements apply to the secondary earner not to overall family income.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Are there any measures being considered or any discussion of how one would prevent FTB B being paid to high-income earners or better target the benefit?

Mr Kalisch—No consideration is being given to changing the very nature of FTB B, which I suppose is what you are getting at.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Do I take it from that that you mean you have to change the very nature of FTB B? Can you explain that to me just for the record?

Mr Kalisch—As Mr Hazlehurst explained, FTB B has an income test only on the secondary earner for couples, and for lone parents there is no income test. So, for example, if you are a lone parent earning a very high income you get full rate FTB B.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Effectively what you would have to do for couples with two incomes is include the income test for the primary earner—is that right?

Mr Kalisch—Yes, and then you would probably need to think about how you would apply such an income test to the situation of the lone parents—whether you would want to apply, in effect, a primary income test to lone parents as well.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—But without moving to a joint income or a primary income test, will FTB effectively work in the same way?

Mr Kalisch—Yes.

Senator CHRIS EVANS—Thanks for that.

[4.46 pm]

CHAIR—We will move on to output group 4.2, Child support.

Dr Harmer—You asked a question earlier about a 35-page form.

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Dr Harmer—I have just asked Dr Nicolaou to check whether it was our form. It is not; it is an OIPC form which we had some contribution to, but it is not a form that has been designed by Family and Community Services.

Senator MOORE—How many pages?

Dr Harmer—It is of the order that you describe, but it is not our form.

Senator MOORE—I am sure that, as he read it, he counted the pages.

Dr Harmer—It is of that order, I think. We are getting a copy. I just wanted to reassure you that it is not a form designed by Family and Community Services.

Senator MOORE—Absolutely. But it is a form that was designed before you took ownership of the process and, of course, you share our concern with a form of that complexity.

Dr Harmer—I think it is a form that is still in OIPC rather than with us. I do not think it has come over at all.

Senator MOORE—Thank you for that clarification. I think we have asked questions about the child support review in previous rounds of estimates in the past, because it has been going for a while. Ms Beauchamp, can you tell us where the child support review is up to?

Ms Beauchamp—The child support task force review?

Senator MOORE—You are providing secretariat support for the child support review and also your policy expertise across that area. Can you tell us, from the position you have in providing that secretariat support, what stage the review is up to?

Ms Beauchamp—I understand that the report is nearly finalised.

Dr Harmer—It is close to finalisation.

Senator MOORE—By the end of the financial year—is that the expectation?

Ms Beauchamp—I think it is a matter between the chair of the task force and the government.

Senator MOORE—Professor Parkinson?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—So it is with that group but nearly finalised?

Ms Beauchamp—I understand that it is in the final stages.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any understanding of why there has been a delay?

Ms Beauchamp—It is due to the complexity of the issue.

Senator MOORE—Are you aware—and this might be more a question for you, Minister—as to whether a summary report has been received by cabinet?

Senator Patterson—Professor Parkinson has worked very hard on this quite complex issue and has consulted a large number of people. He asked for an extension and that was granted. He did provide an interim summary report, which cabinet has looked at. He is

advising us that he believes the full report will be available to me soon, and I look forward to receiving that report.

Senator MOORE—Are you able to tell us when the interim report was provided? Is that something that we can know?

Mr Carmichael—The date of that report is 4 May 2005.

Senator Patterson—I am not sure I saw it that day but it was around that time.

Senator MOORE—Was the request for the extension in terms of a particular time extension or just to when it was going to be finished?

Senator Patterson—It was a particular time extension. He had hoped it would be finished by the end of May, but it has involved a huge amount of work and I want to make sure that we get a report in a form in which Professor Parkinson would be happy to present it to us.

Senator MOORE—At this stage is there any consideration regarding the final report being a public document or not?

Senator Patterson—It will come to me and then in discussion with my senior colleagues there will be a decision about when it goes to cabinet and how we respond to it.

Senator MOORE—And at that stage there could be an issue as to whether it should be public or not?

Senator Patterson—Cabinet will make a decision about the way in which it is going to respond to that report.

Senator MOORE—Okay. Ms Beauchamp, so we have it on record, exactly what role does FaCS have in this review? What responsibility does your department have?

Ms Beauchamp—FaCS provided a secretariat role to the task force—for example, arranging meetings, doing some of the administrative work et cetera.

Senator MOORE—How many officers were involved in that?

Ms Beauchamp—We had about eight dedicated staff.

Senator MOORE—And you still do? Is that number still intact?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes, until the report is finalised.

Senator MOORE—And which branch or section do they belong to?

Ms Beauchamp—Family Relationships Services Branch.

Senator MOORE—Have they been working on the review the whole time?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—How long has that been?

Ms Beauchamp—I think it is about seven or eight months.

Senator MOORE—In 2004?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes, 2004-05.

Senator MOORE—Thank you. I have finished under that heading.

[4.54 pm]

CHAIR—We will move to output 4.3, Child care support.

Senator MOORE—Dr Harmer, yesterday we had some preliminary questions at the beginning of our discussion about exactly how the department has worked on the Welfare to Work program. My understanding from that was that FaCS involvement was through the child-care program? Is that right?

Dr Harmer—Our involvement was through a person from the Department of Family and Community Services who was placed within the task force which operated out of PM&C. The whole of the department supported with various input—data and information et cetera—and contributed to the eventual outcome which was pulled together by PM&C through our person in the task force. As I said yesterday, the person in the task force contributed to the overall policy development work, with advice from the Office of the Status of Women, the pensions area, the child-care area et cetera.

Senator MOORE—In that discussion, we came up with the key policy area in which you were involved, which was the child-care area.

Dr Harmer—The outcome of the decision on Welfare to Work in terms of expenditure most significantly impacted on FaCS in the child-care area.

Senator MOORE—Ms Beauchamp, in terms of the kind of work your area did and the planning and modelling that you do, can you tell us how many people eligible for the parenting payment, the PP, as at 1 July 2006 are forecast to move into work by 2008 as a result of this particular program?

Dr Harmer—The estimates for the parenting payment and how many will or will not get into work are matters for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. That program is now not administered by FaCS. Since the machinery of government changes, that is a program for DEWR and FaCS is not able to provide estimates for what happens to the recipients of that program.

Senator MOORE—So any questions to do with people who are currently on the parenting payment are now no longer your responsibility?

Dr Harmer—Exactly. Forward estimates of the parenting payment and the disability support pension and estimates of any kind in relation to the Welfare to Work program are now the responsibility of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

Senator MOORE—So the linkage with those particular recipients and their child care is not your concern?

Dr Harmer—When the Welfare to Work package was being put together, we provided some information through our person in the task force about likely child-care needs et cetera according to estimates. But we had no way of telling as we input that information exactly which of it was taken into account in the development of the package. We were not running it; it was PM&C.

Senator MOORE—Is the policy work and the knowledge of the groups and their child-care needs something that your department does not have?

Dr Harmer—We had input into the process by providing information through our person on the task force. In a sense, we contributed policy advice to the task force and to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet which then went to form part of the budget consideration.

Senator MOORE—So in terms of your knowledge of the national child-care needs, how do you actually project those requirements if you do not have knowledge of the figures?

Dr Harmer—We provided some estimates and some policy advice to the government when they were formulating their package for Welfare to Work reforms. Out of that came decisions which are now in the budget about the allocation to the Department of Family and Community Services for child care.

Senator MOORE—On what were those estimates based?

Dr Harmer—We certainly know that part of what they were based on was information that we provided through our conduit. But I am not sure whether that was entirely it or whether there were other considerations, because we were one player in a task force run by PM&C. If you are looking for forward estimates for these sorts of things, I think it has already been said both by the Department of Finance and Administration and by the head of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations that they are taking such questions on notice. I would need to do the same, because the responsibility for providing those answers would have to be with PM&C, who led the task force.

Senator MOORE—On that basis, Dr Harmer, you were able to provide some information through the knowledge that you already had in your systems about child care and child-care needs and through previous knowledge of these recipients?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator MOORE—And your person was able to feed that through to the task force to provide that degree of information?

Dr Harmer—We certainly provided policy advice, estimates and input to the development of the task force position. The government then took a decision on the basis of some of the things that were recommended by the task force. But, once we had given the information, we had no knowledge of exactly how it was taken into account.

Senator MOORE—So you contributed information?

Dr Harmer—We contributed policy advice and estimates to the process, yes.

Senator MOORE—And on the basis of what you have told me, if we were to ask you questions, you would be prepared to take them on notice and see whether or not you are able to give us that information?

Dr Harmer—Yes. If the questions are related to things about the Welfare to Work package, as Dr Boxall has said in the other committee, that would be something that we would certainly take on notice. But we would expect to be coordinated through Prime Minister and Cabinet, which is I think what he said.

Senator MOORE—I will run through the questions, which I think in this first batch will fall vaguely under that area. I will also ask, with each one, whether this was the kind of

information you had prior to you transferring the responsibility of this group of people to the other departments.

Dr Harmer—We always try to be as helpful as we can. We will have a go at answering it if we can.

Senator MOORE—We appreciate that. You will see where they are going. I will ask for each one whether this was the kind of information you would have had prior to the machinery of government changes.

Dr Harmer—It sounds like a hypothetical, but let us give it a go.

Senator MOORE—It is a hypothetical, but they are stranded questions. I have asked you the question about the estimation of how many people eligible for parenting pension are forecast to move into work. The thrust of that question to your area is parents with children.

Dr Harmer—In a hypothetical situation, had the machinery of government changes not happened, we would have been the main input and the provider of estimates for that. But, given the task force occurred after the machinery of government, we therefore were not the main input into it.

Senator MOORE—This is the kind of modelling you would have done before you lost that responsibility.

Dr Harmer—It is difficult for me because I only took over the department after the machinery of government changes. The people who were responsible for parenting payment are now in DEWR. So we have no-one left in Family and Community Services who was responsible.

Senator MOORE—Were the people responsible for parenting payment in the child care branch before they moved to DEWR?

Dr Harmer—No.

Senator MOORE—They were in a separate branch altogether?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Which branch was that?

Mr Kalisch—It was in the parenting labour market branch. Pretty much that entire branch moved to DEWR. They had responsibility for parenting payment and newstart allowance.

Senator MOORE—Do you actually keep any of these kinds of figures?

Mr Kalisch—Those records would have gone to DEWR.

Senator MOORE—All the records went as well.

Dr Harmer—Everything in relation to parenting payment recipients, eligibility and all of those things went to DEWR, as they did for disability support pension. I think in the order of 300 staff transferred out of FaCS to Employment and Workplace Relations with that change.

Senator MOORE—I think that figure of how many staff from each section moved was provided to us at the last estimates. So it was a significant chunk in that way.

Dr Harmer—It was.

Senator MOORE—What I will do is put these questions on record, because I think it is important for this area to see why we are asking and why they are child care related, even allowing for the fact that they refer to parenting payment. We will go through and you will give me your answer.

Dr Harmer—Are you going to ask us to arrange for the answering of those questions on notice?

Senator MOORE—I will be asking whether you, from the child care perspective, can follow up whether this is something you can have. I am sure that they were asked to DEWR from the perspective of that policy change, and I feel certain that they were asked at PM&C as well. I just was not at those estimates. The questions were about the number of parenting payments. We are also interested, because of the particular child care relationships, in the sole parent pensioner recipients with children over six.

Dr Harmer—We would not have that information. That would be information held by DEWR.

Senator MOORE—You would have had that information in the past?

Dr Harmer—We would have had that information when we ran the program, yes. I need to be careful, because I do not know.

Senator MOORE—You were not here.

Dr Harmer—I have not got anyone here who does know.

Senator MOORE—Mr Kalisch, do you know the answer to that question?

Mr Kalisch—Yes.

Senator MOORE—From your previous experience with FaCS, was that the kind of data that FaCs would have kept?

Mr Kalisch—We would have had that basic information in that parenting and labour market branch.

Senator MOORE—I would imagine that would be a similar response to the next few, but I will put them on record. Future sole parent recipients with children over six?

Dr Harmer—I have a feeling that all of these questions are for DEWR. I also have a feeling that, given there is no-one here who was responsible for that program, it is potentially quite misleading for us to be making assumptions about whether we have the data or not. I would normally be turning around to one of my group managers or branch heads and asking, 'Have we got it?' rather than trying to guess. I would rather not guess.

Senator MOORE—Do you know whether FaCS received figures from DEWR about numbers moving from welfare to work in order for FaCS to determine how many are likely to need child care as a result of the changes?

Dr Harmer—No. The way the process operated to develop the package was that it was all done in the task force in PM&C. We had a person from Family and Community Services, someone from PM&C and someone from DEWR. They were developing the package. There would have been considerable daily and hourly interaction between the people in DEWR who

were operating with information out of the various divisions in DEWR, our person, the people in PM&C et cetera. So it was all done within the task force—the various estimates et cetera. I certainly do not—and nor does anyone else here, I believe—understand what information was being asked et cetera and what information was being fed into the process. I do know that through our person we certainly fed in some estimates about child care and those sorts of things. How it was dealt with once it got to the task force we have no idea.

Senator MOORE—Was the information which was developed through the task force—which does have, as we agree, significant child-care impact—then fed back to your branch, Ms Beauchamp, for the work you have to do in looking at child-care needs across the country?

Ms Beauchamp—The task force kept that information and only sought information from us where required.

Senator MOORE—So how are you able to do the effective planning for child-care allocation across the country from 2005-06?

Dr Harmer—We can do it very easily because we now have the allocation from the government decision in the budget about what we have to work with.

Ms Beauchamp—The implementation of these measures comes into force on 1 July 2006. Therefore we will be doing a lot of work over the next 12 months.

Senator MOORE—So at this stage there was no need for you to receive particular figures from the task force. You have received a budget allocation on which you will work but you do not have the data that led to the budget decision.

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator MOORE—One of the things that has come out in the minister's statements post the decision has been information about the people who are probably now going to need child care because of the expectation that they will return to work. In terms of information being fed to you, Ms Beauchamp, has there been any idea of the figures that are required, particularly for out of school hours care?

Ms Beauchamp—The government has announced the number of places that will be allocated—that is, 84,300 for outside school hours care, 2,500 for family day care and 1,000 for in-home care.

Senator Patterson—It is all in the budget papers.

Senator MOORE—I would like to talk about the background to those figures. How do you determine how much a child-care place costs? You have the 84,000 places for OSHC, 2,500 for the family day care places and 1,000 for the in-home care. How do you determine how much each child-care place costs?

Ms Beauchamp—The biggest component of the cost is child-care benefit.

Senator MOORE—That is the payment that is available?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Is there anything else that goes into that? Can you point me to where this information is held? We get the lump sum of how much budget is allocated and in these very friendly discussions we have at estimates every few months we talk about places, but how do we determine how much a place costs?

Ms Powell—When we allocate the places the budget estimates are constructed based on CCB being the principal component. For OSHC, family day care and in-home care places we also provide some establishment cost funding to those services.

Senator MOORE—Right.

Ms Powell—Some of them are also eligible for sustainability assistance and for assistance with quality. So there is some component for OSHC, family day care and in-home care places. The only funding that long day care generally receives is CCB, although there are some exceptional programs as well.

Senator MOORE—But that is a standard model. Is how you actually fund a place documented anywhere?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes, it is. There are a number of fact sheets on the web site. The two major components are the child-care benefit and the child-care support program.

Senator MOORE—I checked the web site and I could not find where there was actually a piece of information that told me how a child-care place is funded, but that could just be me looking in the wrong spot.

Ms Beauchamp—It is a combination of the child-care benefit which depends on the family and the person.

Senator MOORE—Numbers, yes.

Ms Beauchamp—And also the child-care support program, details of which are on the web site.

Senator Patterson—There is additional funding out of Treasury for the child-care tax rebate as well.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—At that goes in on top?

Senator Patterson—It is financed out of tax.

Senator MOORE—And is that in the fact sheet as well, Minister?

Senator Patterson—No, that would be in Treasury.

Senator MOORE—Do you know whether they have a fact sheet?

Dr Harmer—I think they would.

Senator Patterson—I presume they do.

Senator MOORE—So I would have to get an amalgam of the fact sheets to come up with the process.

Ms Powell—If I could just add to that, we do not actually pay for the child-care place. The government pays the CCB cost to the parent.

Senator MOORE—Sure, but we throw the figures around—this is how much budget you have got and this is how many places—to see how they link. I just think it is important to have that clear, and I am not convinced that everybody does bandy those around. Are the calculations that are now public on the augmentation of child-care places actually based on the expectation that people may require extra child-care through the welfare to work process?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Has there been any differentiation within the department between the expectation of usage? Is the flow that you have—the 84,300 for the out of school hours care, the 2,500 and the 1,000—based on the expectation of available jobs and available need?

Ms Beauchamp—We will be working on those figures closely with other agencies to see where the quantum needs to be, but in the first year, in 2005-06, it is on emerging demand.

Senator MOORE—Does that mean taste and see?

Senator Patterson—As you get lower unemployment and more people in the work force, you get an emerging demand—particularly as more women go back into the work force. We have seen that. We rolled out 40,000 places last year, and we have reallocated all the existing places where people have asked for more than they have used. We have just reallocated 2,000 of those.

Senator MOORE—Can I just have that figure again?

Senator Patterson—There are 175,000 places currently out there, aren't there?

Ms Powell—That is a ballpark figure, yes.

Ms Beauchamp—Outside of school hours.

Senator Patterson—Outside of school hours care. The department constantly reviews that. If somebody asks for 50 places and they are only using 20 or 35, then we ask them to relinquish those places so we can reallocate them where there is emerging need. But there is still emerging need over that, and we estimate it is about 10,000 places for this coming year. Those will be rolled out and then we will roll out the others of those 84,300 as we see people increasing their participation in the work force. I did go in and fight very hard for this issue, saying that if we were going to have those people returning to the work force one of the things we would need to ensure was that they had outside school hours care.

Senator MOORE—We have had a discussion before about the review and the request for the feeding back of places. Is that done on a regular basis or will a child-care centre or family day care let you know when surplus capacity appears and they do not need the places? Do you have a regular process of contacting them to ask, 'Are you using the places? Do you expect you will use the places? If not, give them back.' What is the relationship? How do you do that?

Ms Beauchamp—Where there is a substantial announcement of places, like we had last year and this year, there will be a process put in place to determine how they should be allocated.

Ms Powell—On top of that our state and territory offices are in close and regular contact with child-care service providers and will contact them on a pretty regular basis—not on a

particular cycle, but regularly—seeking information on places they no longer need so that they can be relinquished and reallocated.

Senator MOORE—That is the initiative of the department, contacting the child-care centre providers?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Is there a willingness to have these discussions about giving up places?

Ms Powell—My understanding is that broadly there is. Services are generally quite happy to give up places that they do not need. I do not think that is 100 per cent but it is a broad feeling.

Senator MOORE—I know Return to Work is a shared program. The working group would have looked at the range of jobs that are going to be available across the community. Certainly, one of the things we have been hearing from people is concern about access to child care as required. If a person has to work certain hours, will the available child care be there to give them child care at weekends and nights to allow people to travel to attend work? Do you have information about which child-care centres, and where, offer evening child-care places and out of standard hours child-care places, and about flexible child-care centres that are open at 6 o'clock to allow for travel and other variations in need? Does the department have information about where those services are available?

Ms Beauchamp—I do not have the details in front of me. Most of the flexibility would be through the family day care and in-home care program.

Senator MOORE—One of the issues is that we are going into an unknown area where people's expectation of work and the guidelines for what determines work are unknown. Family day care has been one of the options for that. Do you keep a list of family day care services that do offer those services?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—And in-home care?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—What about child-care centres? Are there very many that offer extended hours services? Do you keep a list, as a matter of course, of where they are?

Ms Powell—We will have to take that on notice.

Senator MOORE—Can we see whether there has been any variation in those services over two years? We are particularly interested in evenings and weekends for each of the types of services. You have taken that on notice for detail; do you have any estimates of how many are available?

Ms Beauchamp—I do not know off the top of my head.

Senator MOORE—You do not have any kind of percentage estimates? You will come back to us with accurate figures?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes. As I said, most of the flexibility would be through the family day care and in-home care systems, which are a small proportion of the total child-care system.

Senator MOORE—Discussions came back through this development of the programs. Was that an issue you had to do any work on? Is that an issue you keep an eye on—the flexibility of child-care arrangements?

Ms Beauchamp—The government did announce, as part of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, choice and flexibility in child care. It is that element of the Stronger Families and Community Strategy that is looking at providing for more flexibility in child-care services and the child-care program. We will continue to work with other agencies, particularly through the Welfare to Work process, to see what sort of additional flexibility is required.

Senator MOORE—We have discussed priority service provision in child-care centres at previous estimates. Can you remind me about the link between reserved places at child-care centres for people with special needs? There is a priority list, isn't there, for child-care need?

Ms Beauchamp—There is a priority of access depending on the needs of the family.

Senator MOORE—Who determines the priority of access?

Ms Powell—The priority of access guidelines are contained within regulations that relate to that.

Senator MOORE—Are they departmental guidelines?

Ms Powell—They are part of the legislative framework.

Senator MOORE—They are linked to the legislation?

Ms Powell—Yes, and it is a condition of approval of a centre that they abide by all of the regulations, of which this is one. The priority of access guidelines state that first priority will be given to children at risk, then to the children of working parents and then to others.

Senator MOORE—The current child-care places and also the new child-care places would be subject to that priority list?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—There is nothing that actually makes that happen? There are guidelines and an expectation that that will happen, but what happens if it does not happen?

Ms Powell—Centres are aware of the requirement.

Senator MOORE—Yes, we heard that last time—that centres were aware. The minister kindly offered to keep an eye on this process. It is our expectation that, with whatever is going to happen with the Return to Work program, there will be more working parents requiring child care. We are trying to find out exactly how the priority list will be enforced. I think that is the word I am looking for—the 'enforcement' of the priority list.

Ms Powell—As part of the work we will be doing over the next year to implement those places, that will be one of the issues we will look at.

Senator MOORE—Is there anything at the moment that enforces the priority list?

Ms Powell—It is a legal requirement for centres. If there was a particular breach it would be picked up in the same manner that any other breach of a regulation would be dealt with.

Senator MOORE—How do you find out whether the priority list is working? Is it only through complaint?

Ms Powell—We do have a rolling program of compliance for child-care centres which Centrelink conducts on our behalf. It covers a broad range of issues. The outcomes of those compliance issues could go in several directions depending on the nature of the breach. If there was a breach that involved a policy decision it would be brought to our attention.

Senator MOORE—A policy decision would include a breach of the priority list?

Ms Powell—It probably would, yes. If there was, for example, a pattern of breaching identified by our state and territory offices, by Centrelink or by the Family Assistance Office, I would expect that it would be brought to our attention.

Senator MOORE—There is a link between child care and Return to Work. What if someone is offered a job under the Return to Work program or offered part-time hours and they cannot find adequate child care? For instance, if a parent is offered part-time work outside school hours and they cannot find child care, or if they are offered work at weekends and cannot find child care, what is your understanding of their situation with the Return to Work process?

Ms Beauchamp—We will be working over the next 12 months with DEWR and other agencies to agree, in a sense, the rules around those sorts of situations.

Senator MOORE—At this stage you are not aware of all the rules? They have not been developed yet?

Ms Beauchamp—They are in the process of being developed. We have a year to develop the details around the program.

Senator MOORE—Would the linkage with child care be something that FaCS would be involved in—determining the role?

Ms Beauchamp—I hope so.

Senator MOORE—I hope so, too. The way the process is working now it falls down on accountability—who is responsible for what. At this stage it is your belief, through the information you have had, that the rules about what constitutes the enforcement of Return to Work have not been determined?

Ms Beauchamp—No, and I anticipate we would be consulted on that to make sure we have got an integrated process across agencies.

Senator MOORE—Also, then, to have a clear indication of where child care is available?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—And that clearly is your role, isn't it, knowing whether child care is involved?

Ms Beauchamp—The child-care component is really an enabler. We have to make sure from our portfolio's point of view that we do everything we possibly can to make that happen.

Senator MOORE—Yes—under the role of your department. I know that we talked about this in previous audits—and I am going back on this priority child-care list because it is something that is going to be critical as parents are expressing need—and I know that Centrelink are the agency that do the physical audit. I am interested to know from your point of view with the discussions you have with Centrelink exactly how they know whether someone is breaching the priority list. They go into the child-care centres and they also talk to the people who are receiving the payments; I know they do it in two ways. Exactly how do they find out how this particular rule, which I think is going to become more and more important as time goes by, has been breached? As the agency that owns the child care, how are you confident that Centrelink can find out whether this particular priority list is breached?

Ms Powell—There are probably a couple of comments on that. In the latest budget there was a compliance package that will include Centrelink working together with us to look at a whole range of compliance issues related to child care. One of the things that we are going to do as a result of that is review the compliance strategy that we have with Centrelink. This is the sort of issue that would be examined as part of that review process. Centrelink also runs a tip-off line that it responds to. I cannot provide you with any more detail on what else Centrelink does.

Senator MOORE—Ms Powell, I am sure Mr Hartland cannot wait to get in on this because the word ‘review’ was mentioned. You said that there will be a review of this area. From your point of view in child care, is it only this area that you are looking at compliance or other things as well?

Ms Powell—No. We have a broad compliance strategy with Centrelink related to child care. That is a strategy that is developed by FaCS and Centrelink together. We are going to have a look at that this year.

Senator MOORE—Mr Hartland, how do you think that is going to work, looking particularly at this element at the moment? It has been the subject of discussion now over a few months in these estimates?

Mr Hartland—The measure that we have received some funding for is an expansion of what we have described as forensic accountancy investigations. The measure is somewhat broader than just the priority list. It will be looking at the centre’s compliance with all of the regulations in the child-care program guide, I suppose you would say, and they are quite extensive. So we would be looking for any aspect where the centre might be receiving more funding than it was entitled to.

Senator MOORE—Over the last few years has FaCS done any internal review of child-care centres and their adherence to the priority list?

Ms Beauchamp—Not that I am aware of.

Mr Hartland—At any point in time there are some existing Centrelink based investigations of child-care centres going on. As Ms Powell said, we would expect that if there was a serious problem around that aspect of their operations it would have been brought to our attention.

Senator MOORE—How many child-care centres last year were found to be in breach of the priority list?

Ms Powell—I do not know, but I am not aware of any breaches of priority of access guidelines that have come to the point of formal action.

Senator MOORE—I am just reviewing the words ‘any breaches that have come to formal action’. That means that over the last few years you do not have records of child-care centres that have had penalties or some kind of action taken against them for breaching the priority list?

Ms Powell—No. My understanding of what would normally happen if there were a complaint is that it would be taken up probably by our state office, which has the close relationship with the service provider, to try to resolve the situation. I believe that usually is the outcome.

Mr Hartland—It is worth adding that, although we did seek some funding to expand this area of activity, we do not have a lot of information that suggests there is a big problem with child-care centres in any of the operations. Nonetheless, we think that it is prudent to look a bit across the sector.

Senator MOORE—To be proactive?

Mr Hartland—Yes.

Senator MOORE—What is your understanding, Ms Beauchamp, in terms of the expectation that there will be more people seeking child care and so the issue of the priority list may become more sensitive with a growth in sole parent pensioners and DSP people seeking child care—and seeking specialised child care as well?

Ms Beauchamp—Families and children using child care for working reasons probably comprises most of the use of child care at the moment.

Senator MOORE—Do we have any statistics that confirm that? Do we keep statistics about the proportion of people accessing child care who are working and the proportion of those who are not?

Dr Harmer—I think it is about 90 per cent. We will confirm that, but I think it is of that order.

Ms Powell—That is correct—90 per cent of child care is for work related purposes.

Senator MOORE—You have actually said that you are unaware, Ms Powell, of any complaint that has gone to the stage of action having to be taken. Do you have any records of how many complaints there have been about the use of the priority rule in child care, because I imagine people would contact your department if they had a complaint.

Ms Beauchamp—I would hope that if parents had a complaint they would take it up directly with the service. I would envisage that, where there were issues around families having priority of access, the service provider and the family could sort through that before it did become a breach.

Senator MOORE—Have any come to your branch?

Ms Beauchamp—I would have to ask Ms Powell, but I am not aware of any having come to the department.

Senator MOORE—And how long has that been now?

Ms Beauchamp—Centrelink administers it for us and I would have to consult and get information from Centrelink.

Senator MOORE—Can you just confirm for me how long you have been in the department.

Ms Beauchamp—I am not aware of any in the time I have been there since January this year.

Senator MOORE—Ms Powell, can you check that. You were taking the other questions.

Dr Harmer—We can help with these, but it will mean us getting on to Centrelink who administer this. We could say you should go to Centrelink, but we try to be helpful. But it would be Centrelink who would primarily hold this sort of information.

Senator MOORE—But who owns the priority rule, Dr Harmer?

Dr Harmer—It is a policy ruled by us and administered by Centrelink, so it is the administering body.

Senator MOORE—They are the family assistance officers?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Dr Harmer—We can get information from Centrelink and provide answers to you.

Senator MOORE—In terms of the figure you gave me before and which has been highly publicised, Ms Beauchamp—the 84,300 places—can you confirm that those are open places? Would people who are already seeking child care have access to those places as well as people who are going to be part of the return to work?

Ms Beauchamp—In 2005-06?

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—That is definitely the case, and I think in further years we will have to work through exactly how many are required and for what reason.

Senator MOORE—So from 2005-06 the new places are just out there and whoever is able to access them can do so. They are not quarantined in any way?

Ms Beauchamp—It is a combination of emerging need, emerging demand and the return to work.

Senator MOORE—So it is basically the people who are seeking child care? When someone is seeking child care at present—and I know the other program does not start until 2006—there are no quarantined places?

Ms Beauchamp—That is correct. The welfare to work reforms do not come into play until 1 July 2006.

Dr Harmer—I imagine what the government would expect from us is to give them pretty early warning, given how important the success of the welfare to work policy is, from our

monitoring et cetera about whether there is a need for more places or whatever. I think they would be expecting us to give them as early warning as possible of that information, once the welfare to work initiatives click into place on 1 July 2006, about whether the right number of child-care are places there. We would be very busily and quickly informing government if there were not enough places.

Senator MOORE—Is the working group still in place for welfare to work?

Dr Harmer—No. As we discussed yesterday, there is a mechanism, established by Dr Boxall, to coordinate at a very senior level; two committees to coordinate the implementation.

Senator MOORE—So we are back to the processes discussed yesterday?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator MOORE—The funding has come out for the first round of places. They will be starting from 1 July 2005 and then you will be feeding in, through those existing processes, how the access to child-care is going this year?

Dr Harmer—Yes; in fact, Ms Beauchamp will be my nominee—I think she knows this—

Senator MOORE—Congratulations, Ms Beauchamp.

Dr Harmer—She has been selected from a long list of volunteers to be my nominee on the implementation group.

Senator MOORE—It does seem to make sense in terms of the process. Can you give me any indication of what the figure of 84,300 is based on?

Ms Beauchamp—No. I am not in a position to give that to you.

Senator MOORE—You said that you are working at the moment on developing processes about how they work. Have there been any preliminary decisions about how those places are to be spread across states and territories?

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Senator MOORE—Would that be something that would need to be done early in the financial year? With your experience in child care, how soon do you have to make child-care places available to make them effective?

Ms Beauchamp—The committee that Dr Harmer spoke about will be sorting out those issues through that process.

Senator MOORE—I know that Mr Hartland has left and I apologise for asking this question now. In terms of the review of compliance across a whole range of areas—but, in particular, this issue in my mind for the priority listing—what is the timing of the review of that particular process?

Mr Hartland—Excuse me while I look through the papers.

Senator MOORE—I am just looking at the whole progress of the policy areas. You will be working with the interdepartmental group and looking at a whole range of areas and the priority rule. I am just looking at the other program area to see what the timing of that is.

Mr Hartland—Have I made it clear that it was not only about the priority rule.

Senator MOORE—No, it is much wider, but I am focusing on this bit.

Mr Hartland—The initial set up will commence in July 2005 and the reviews of the individual cases will commence as soon as possible, probably around October 2005. That is the information we have. This is on a slightly faster track because it is an extension of a level of work that already occurs in the network.

Senator MOORE—Then that review will feed back through the interdepartmental group to see how they will work together with child-care operations generally, but in particular from this point of view of return to work.

Mr Hartland—Yes, in principle. If they found in those reviews that there was a problem in any of the aspects of the operation they would certainly be fed back to our policy branches, but I am not expecting them to find a problem with that aspect of the centre's operation.

Senator MOORE—It is always good to be optimistic, Mr Hartland.

Mr Hartland—Especially in compliance.

Senator MOORE—It is just one of those things, as we have discussed previously, that people talk about, but it does not often come through to the formal processes. It is one of those things also, as you said, that you hope works at the local level. Sometimes, as we discussed at the last hearing, if there are only very few child-care places available to complain too loudly to the person who is providing the child care may or may not be a wise issue. It is almost like self-regulation. If you are complaining to the group with whom you find fault, it is difficult; there is no easy answer. It is a concern about the way the system operates, particularly when there is no quarantine of the way people can go through. With the determination of the figures for the number of OSHC places, the way that figure came through, was that partly for modelling that was done by your department beforehand in terms of expected need and current need?

Ms Beauchamp—It came from the task force. We were asked to provide some information.

Senator MOORE—Was that advice that you were asked about your current unmet demand—the current need for OHSC places plus some idea of what the expectations of future need would be?

Dr Harmer—In the process operating within the task force there would have been to-ing and fro-ing. Ms Beauchamp would have been responding to requests for information from the task force, often without a great deal of time or a great deal of additional information but just enough to provide costings. We do not know once those costings and figures and estimates went in exactly how they were treated. So there is no direct line that Ms Beauchamp would be able to draw between policy advice and estimates we provided to the task force and exactly what came out.

Senator MOORE—On the process for allocation of child-care places, are there existing criteria that you operate now for how child-care places are spread across the country?

Ms Powell—The current arrangement for allocation of places is according to need for the places.

Senator MOORE—How do you determine that need?

Ms Powell—The planning advisory committees meet when there are a large number of places to allocate—so they met several times last year, for example. One of the outcomes of those meetings would have been advice about the places of greatest need and where the OSHC places should be allocated. There was a set of principles out of that. Places that were relinquished in the future were also allocated on the same basis.

Senator MOORE—Are those principles public?

Ms Powell—There were a number of conversations at previous estimates where I know the minutes were sought and we have agreed that we will provide them in future.

Senator MOORE—Is that from now?

Ms Powell—From the beginning of this year.

Senator MOORE—So it is that local discussion and knowledge that leads through to the process?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—That was the kind of knowledge that you had as a department that could feed through to the work force planning that was being done.

Ms Powell—That is right.

Senator MOORE—So that established knowledge of what was happening now could well have been some of the information that was passed on.

Ms Powell—That is right.

Senator MOORE—I keep going back to this because it is central, and you should keep confirming along the way how it operates. I want to clarify in my own mind that the decisions about these 84,300 places in this first year were made by Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Dr Harmer—They would have been government decisions in the budget—and this is why it is not possible to answer many of your questions—on the basis of advice provided to the government by the task force which built its advice up from little bits and pieces of advice coming from various departments.

Senator MOORE—I understand about the government decision, but it was actually through the task force which was chaired by Dr Boxall?

Dr Harmer—No—

Senator MOORE—Dr Shergold?

Dr Harmer—it was chaired by a senior person in PM&C. I am not sure of the name of the person who chaired it. It was a senior officer in PM&C. I do not think it was Dr Shergold himself.

Senator MOORE—So the PM&C chaired task force took the blocks that were offered by the various contributing departments and then provided advice to government, who made the decision.

Dr Harmer—Yes, exactly.

Senator MOORE—In terms of the new round of the child-care places that we know are out there, because they have been released, how are they going to be advertised? You mentioned this earlier but I would like to go through the process again. How is this new round going to be advertised and do you know when?

Ms Powell—We are thinking that we will advertise the places in the press. That, of course, is up to the minister, but that would be one option.

Senator MOORE—Is that what you have done before?

Ms Powell—That was what was done last year when there were 40,000 places to allocate. Coming out of that, the process that we have used in the past has been to convene the planning advisory committees to provide advice. We have yet to determine that process, but that seemed to work quite well.

Senator MOORE—Was last year the first time you went to the press advertising places?

Ms Powell—I cannot be sure about that.

Senator MOORE—But it was a special decision last year.

Ms Powell—There were a very large number of places available last year to be allocated all at once.

Senator MOORE—Yes, there were. Have you done any internal review about how effective that was? Have you got feedback from client groups?

Ms Beauchamp—All the places were taken.

Senator MOORE—I have no doubt of that. Was there any feedback. It was a significant decision to go to the press. Was there then any review of how that worked, how much it cost, how quickly people came, did you get feedback from people about how they found out, to find out whether it was a press advertisement that attracted them?

Ms Powell—We have convened a planning advisory committee that comprises officers who worked on that in each of our state and territory offices.

Senator MOORE—This is another planning group.

Ms Powell—Yes, this is just an ad hoc working group that is providing advice as to how we might want to proceed with this allocation based on their experience last year.

Senator MOORE—And the expectation is that may be the way you will go, but could you just clarify when you would be advertising these places?

Ms Beauchamp—Could I just say, the minister has already mentioned that we do have some applications for places already, so we would need to do a stock take of those places that services are seeking and what might be left. So we are still to nut through the process so we will be working on that over the next little while.

Senator MOORE—So it will be a stock take of how many places have already been requested and then you will be able to see what is left.

Ms Beauchamp—That is correct.

Senator MOORE—And it would be unwise to widely advertise if there is not much left, would that be a bit of a generalisation?

Ms Beauchamp—We would have to see the applications that we have got from existing service providers.

Senator MOORE—And hopefully early in the new year?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes, definitely.

Senator MOORE—At this stage do you have any idea of how many of the OSHC places will be allocated to services in the upcoming years 2006, 2007 and 2008?

Ms Beauchamp—No, I have not got those details.

Senator MOORE—Is that that you have not got them or they have not been determined?

Ms Beauchamp—Because it is a combination of demand and the welfare to work, and just reflecting on your comments earlier about making sure that we provide for as much flexibility as possible, I think it would be unwise of us to give a concrete number of places for each year.

Senator MOORE—How about a notional number of places?

Ms Beauchamp—No, I have not got that information.

Senator MOORE—Can you confirm that as of 1 July 2006 there will be less than 40,000 places because more than half of the funding for the places is not available until forward year 2008-09?

Ms Beauchamp—Could you be more specific about the actual question?

Senator MOORE—Looking at the flow of funding we are looking at more than half of the funding for the places comes in after 2008-09.

Ms Beauchamp—I think I said earlier it was a combination of emerging demand and welfare to work. Over the next 12 months we will be working on and clarifying exactly how many places will be required for the out years. I have not got a breakdown of the figures related to those dollars.

Senator MOORE—So at this stage it is still waiting for the clarification of what exactly has been used and how the money is going and what the feedback to the working group is.

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator MOORE—What is the exact cost of the new OSHC places? I am concentrating on OSHC at this stage.

Ms Beauchamp—I have not got a breakdown of those figures.

Senator MOORE—So you have not gone into that definition at this stage?

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Senator MOORE—Is it something you will be doing in the future?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—How far in the future?

Ms Beauchamp—As soon as 1 July this year; we will start working on it.

Senator MOORE—In terms of the flow of the funding across the period—and you said that you will be reviewing this and going back and seeing how it goes—if there is a massive demand in the first 12 months, in 2005-06, as places come online and people have this access and as you would have more knowledge of the modelling about the future need than anyone else I would imagine, will places be available then that are more than the 84,000?

Ms Beauchamp—I think the number of places around outside of school hours care, family day care, and in-home care are considered in the budget context so they would be considered during the course of next year's budget if there was a need to do so.

Senator MOORE—If there is that kind of huge demand in the first year it would then go back to a budget decision for 2006-07?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—To have a look and take on board, and that information would again be held by you as to what the usage was, what the expectations were and it would go back through the interdepartmental process.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Dr Harmer—We would be the main source of advice for that for government, yes.

Senator MOORE—But in this financial year 2005-06 is there any capacity to have extra places come on board before the next budget?

Ms Beauchamp—There is always an additional estimates process.

Senator MOORE—That would be the process, the additional estimates, but at this stage it is clearly defined the maximum available for this 12 months is the figures that we have?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any idea or do you keep records on how many disability support pensioners have child-care needs?

Dr Harmer—It is exactly the same answer as what I gave you for parenting payment. Because that payment and all the people who administer it now across in DEWR.

Senator MOORE—So the ability for you to model future demand is based on information from other places?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator MOORE—So you require figures from DEWR that feed back to you.

Senator Patterson—You have been left on your own, Senator Moore.

Senator MOORE—It often happens. It is something I have grown used to.

Senator Patterson—Keeping the fort.

Senator MOORE—Senator Crossin will be here imminently for Aboriginal hostels. Page 143 of Budget Paper No. 2—

Dr Harmer—While you are asking we will try and get someone to get us Budget Paper No. 2. Mr Jennaway is probably in the next room with it.

Senator MOORE—Minister, the last question in this particular section is to you while we are looking for Budget Paper No. 2.

Senator Patterson—I am trembling!

Senator MOORE—Can you explain what the \$210 million cited in your budget press release as the cost of the additional places means? How does this relate to the \$266 million that has been mentioned elsewhere?

Senator Patterson—I will need to look at that budget press release. I do not remember every detail and the very extensive notes I put out after the budget.

Dr Harmer—What page were you referring to?

Senator MOORE—It was page 143 of Budget Paper No. 2 and it is the breakdown of the \$266 million.

Senator Patterson—I think they are places in training. We just need to separate them out. Yes, it relates to places but there is additional funding in there for training; there is additional funding in there for the Childcare Support Program and also for family day-care, people starting up new family day-care. This just refers to the places.

Senator MOORE—So the \$210 million is specifically for the allocation of places.

Senator Patterson—The \$260 million refers to the extra child-care places.

Ms Powell—I think the missing amounts might be the funds that go to Centrelink for the administration.

Senator Patterson—Sorry, \$210 million; the balance.

Senator MOORE—Dr Harmer on my question about Budget Paper No. 2, is there any way of delineating in that \$266 million how much we spent on OSHC places, how much on family day care and how much on administration?

Dr Harmer—I think Ms Beauchamp has already answered that. The answer is, not at this stage.

Senator MOORE—But that will be able to be answered in the future?

Ms Beauchamp—I anticipate being able to do it, yes.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator MOORE—And Minister, your press release?

Dr Harmer—We might have to take that one on notice.

Senator MOORE—Going back to the question I asked about disability support figures; those figures are now owned by DEWR?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator MOORE—For the purposes of looking at proposed child-care need DEWR gave those figures to FaCS?

Dr Harmer—They would have been contributed, I assume, to the task force, yes.

Senator Patterson—Could I just clarify. The press release says that there will be a package of over \$260 million.

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Senator Patterson—Additional places costing \$210 million will be available over four years and then it goes through some of the things that the balance will be paid for. Support for 52,000 low-income people to assist them with the gap in meeting their child-care fees.

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Senator Patterson—Further support to improve the efficiency of JET. Practical help to support some parents to return to the work force, family day-care workers and more vocational education training places for parents and older workers and a communication package to address the shortage of child-care workers. So \$210 million for places and the balance is for all those additional issues. I think it is quite clear in the press release but I just could not remember off the top of my head. Hard won and hard fought it was. Or hard fought and hard won; maybe I should say it around that way.

Senator MOORE—Dr Harmer, because I have finished that bracket and even though it is a little bit before 6 pm, if Senator Crossin is going to go into Aboriginal hostels for half an hour it might be timely to do that and then there are other areas to come back to with child care after dinner if that is okay with you and then we should be able to move straight through and finish child care at that stage.

[5.59 pm]

Aboriginal Hostels Ltd

CHAIR—I just want to inform the officers that Senator Moore does have further questions after the dinner break and it is anticipated that it could be an hour or so or up to two hours. We will now move on to Aboriginal Hostels Ltd. I invite those officers to come to the table please.

Senator CROSSIN—Welcome. I think it has been a while since you have been at estimates.

Mr Clarke—That is right

Senator CROSSIN—I thought it was probably a good time to invite you back. We do read your annual reports and we do care about you so I thought we would give you a chance to answer some questions. Just for my background, what is the difference between the company owned and operated hostels and the community owned hostels?

Mr Clarke—The difference between company and community support hostels is that the company ones are owned and operated by Aboriginal Hostels Ltd, in other words our staff operate the hostel, compared with community hostels that we fund the community hostels to run theirs.

Senator CROSSIN—Community hostels that—

Mr Clarke—They run their own hostels but we fund them and they staff their own hostels.

Senator CROSSIN—Community hostels would have their own board of management, for example?

Mr Clarke—That is right.

Senator CROSSIN—How many of those are there?

Mr Clarke—There are approximately 80 community hostels and almost 50 of our own.

Senator CROSSIN—In the budget the appropriation for Aboriginal Hostel Ltd is about \$26 million and the appropriation for community owned hostels is \$6.7 million.

Mr Clarke—That is right.

Senator CROSSIN—Where do the community owned hostels then get their other funding from in order to operate?

Mr Clarke—They usually are able to access state governments and other agencies for funds. We only support the community hostels for the actual hostel operations and a lot of them are partnerships.

Mr Lane—It depends on the category of hostel. For example, if you are talking about substance misuse hostels they usually also get operating funds from OATSI as well as sometimes, not always, state health organisations. And if you are talking about some other categories of hostels they access other funds too usually through state agencies. If you look at our hostels, they are totally funded by Aboriginal Hostels. At least 80 per cent of the ones that are operated under the community hostels are only partly funded by Aboriginal Hostels. So if you are looking at operating costs it is apples and oranges.

Senator CROSSIN—Are all of those listed in your annual report each year?

Mr Lane—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—They are, the ones that you have funded are listed are listed in your report.

Mr Lane—That is right.

Senator CROSSIN—I will not ask you for a copy of them then if they are in that report. Now, do you still employ over 400 employees? I think your 2003-04 annual report said it was 416.

Mr Clarke—That is right.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the current number of employees that you have got?

Dr Sharma—It is over 400 staff.

Senator CROSSIN—That includes your operations in Canberra plus all company owned hostels?

Dr Sharma—Also all of our regional offices; we have eight regional offices around the nation in capital cities, including Darwin and Alice Springs.

Senator CROSSIN—Your annual report stated that in 2003-04 the staff was reduced by 89. Can you tell me why that was?

Mr Lane—It was largely to do with our cost saving exercises and efficiency reviews right across the company and the 89 positions were not actually a total loss of positions; some of those actually meant positions that were reduced from full-time positions to part-time positions.

Senator CROSSIN—Did they include people who might have gone that were not replaced?

Mr Lane—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Were there any redundancies as part of that?

Mr Lane—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—How many of those were redundancies?

Mr Lane—I think altogether there were about 22 redundancies.

Senator CROSSIN—Are there any further reductions planned?

Mr Lane—Not on such a big scale. It is a continuing process quite outside of efficiency reviews as we close and open hostels, but no, not on such a big scale.

Mr Clarke—That reduction also includes the fact that we had to close a couple of hostels this year to renovate and rebuild them. They were Galawu in Darwin and the one in Townsville. We accounted for the loss of staff there as well. They will come back on board when those hostels open again.

Senator CROSSIN—Has there been a loss of staff and has there been a reduction in funding over the last say two to three years?

Mr Clarke—No.

Senator CROSSIN—Has there been a reduction in your funding or is funding only increased in line with CPI?

Mr Clarke—Funding is only increased in line with CPI. When we do the workplace agreements, we look for efficiencies to cover any wage increases.

Senator CROSSIN—So you are not getting the funding from the federal government to cover wage increases, you have to find them inside the operation?

Mr Clarke—That applies to most other agencies as well.

Senator CROSSIN—Of your 400 or so staff, around 80 per cent are Indigenous, would that be around the right percentage?

Mr Clarke—That is correct.

Senator CROSSIN—This seems to be far higher than most other organisations. Do you have a specific proactive recruitment policy to encourage Indigenous employees?

Mr Clarke—We have had a pretty good history of Indigenous employment because we do take a proactive approach because a lot of our work centres have Indigenous clients that we provide a service to and it is one of our criteria that we ask that people who apply for jobs are able to work with Indigenous people and are able to communicate and that is part of the

success. I think there are a lot of Indigenous people who do apply for jobs with us because they get a sense of doing something for their particular group of people.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have any people on CDEP?

Mr Clarke—No.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I just say that is a welcome relief, a nice change.

Mr Clarke—We have tried some of that with part of our outsourcing of our handyman activities, gardening or something like that and we have not taken on CDEPs ourselves.

Senator CROSSIN—All your people are paid real wages?

Mr Clarke—According to the award.

Senator CROSSIN—So would you say you have a high retention rate?

Mr Clarke—Because of the nature of the industry we do have turnovers with cooks, domestics and night watchmen. But it is pretty good. We have a lot of staff who have been with us over 25 years and that is a proud record in itself we believe.

Senator CROSSIN—So would you say that you have got some best practices to retain staff?

Mr Clarke—We believe that we have best practices.

Senator CROSSIN—Would you recognise ceremonial or cultural days, for example, as part of their conditions of employment?

Mr Lane—We do; it is incorporated within our certified agreement. It is not highly used. We think it is used responsibly and we keep a check on that.

Senator CROSSIN—Have you ever done an analysis of why perhaps either Indigenous people are attracted to Aboriginal Hostels or why they stay with you?

Mr Clarke—We have not done an analysis but I think apples and oranges because we are a service agency. We provide cooks, domestics, night watchmen and gardeners. Other agencies provide APS level staff and that is a bit hard to compare with I think.

Senator CROSSIN—The 50 hostels that you own, are there any plans to expand on this number?

Mr Clarke—We hope to be able to expand by constructing a new secondary student hostel in Kununurra and a new aged-care home in Perth.

Senator CROSSIN—What is happening with Stuart Lodge in Alice Springs?

Mr Clarke—We are looking at a partnership with the Territory government. The Territory government has bought the Stuart Lodge. It has approached us to operate it and it will provide funds to renovate the place to an acceptable standard. We are going to work in partnership with the Territory government for the next three years and then see what happens.

Senator CROSSIN—Will that be one of the community owned hostels?

Mr Clarke—No. It will be run by us so we will probably call it an AHL hostel operated out of a Northern Territory government building.

Senator CROSSIN—That is for transient families and renal dialysis patients predominately is that right?

Mr Clarke—Yes. There is an Alice Springs working group that identified that families coming to Alice Springs needed accommodation. We have agreed to help run that on the conditions that our rules are implemented, such as ‘no pay, not stay’, no alcohol or drugs and there is 24-hour monitoring of the operation. Apparently there are a lot of families in Alice Springs that have no accommodation. Of course we have the Yipirinya Hostel which is mainly for families but they have been turning prospective residents away.

Senator CROSSIN—Because you are full?

Mr Clarke—Because we are full and we have had the renal dialysis hostel in Topsy Smith—you have heard of that—and we have been turning people away from there. So we will take some overflow of renal dialysis at Stuart Lodge.

Senator CROSSIN—All of your staff are currently employed under an enterprise bargaining agreement, is that correct?

Mr Clarke—That is right.

Senator CROSSIN—No staff on AWAs?

Mr Clarke—Mainly the executive and two others.

Senator CROSSIN—You two?

Mr Clarke—No, two others at Hetti Perkins.

Senator CROSSIN—Two at Hetti Perkins on AWAs. What is there; the managing director or the director of nursing or something?

Mr Lane—It is the director and our clinical nurse coordinator and then the other two are Kamlesh Sharma and myself. So four in all.

Senator CROSSIN—So four AWAs? The rest are enterprise agreements? When does the enterprise agreement expire?

Dr Sharma—The enterprise agreement expires in December 2006, next year.

Senator CROSSIN—It expires in December 2006.

Dr Sharma—Yes, so we will have to start negotiations early next year.

Senator CROSSIN—Has there been any indication from this government that your funding will be in jeopardy unless you offer people AWAs?

Mr Clarke—No indication.

Senator CROSSIN—No suggestion of that at this stage? You run aged-care facilities and student accommodation, so are your staff trained specifically for these services? Are they recruited with special skills? Obviously with aged-care you are looking at recruiting people who have aged-care qualifications or skills. What about the student supported accommodation?

Mr Clarke—Like you said with the aged-care we look for people with qualifications and experience in that industry. With students we would like to recruit people with experience and

we do but we also provide ongoing training for house parents and people at student hostels and there will be a course in Darwin in the very near future that is run by a group for an accreditation course for house parents.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you know who is running that?

Mr Clarke—NARSA.

Mr Lane—The National Association for Rural Student Accommodation and we are sending house parents from all of our hostels to one training session in Darwin and another that will be in Sydney later in the year. We are also sending some of the secondary education hostels that we fund, not just the ones that we operate and over the next two years we want all of our house parents to do that course and become accredited house parents.

Senator CROSSIN—I wonder if that has been extended to all of the other boarding facilities that are around the place, do you know?

Mr Lane—I think there is a plan for people from places like St John's College and Kamilda to do the same course. As I understand it, within three years time all people in those house parent positions will need to be accredited.

Senator CROSSIN—That is interesting. Can I just ask you some questions about some statements in the PBS? Page 252, under the heading, 'Measures affecting outcome 1' states:

AHL has one new measure that affects outcome 1 as listed below. Table 2.2 shows the financial impact of this measure.

And then it refers to 'connection to FedLink'. Can you explain to me what that is?

Dr Sharma—That is the secure gateway that all government agencies are required to have as a safeguard from outsiders hacking into the system and getting access to email.

Senator CROSSIN—It is an IT program?

Dr Sharma—It is an IT gateway which accredited providers should provide. I think Telstra is one of them.

Senator CROSSIN—I am glad you clarified that, because I was a bit puzzled as to what FedLink was.

Dr Sharma—It is a government policy. That is why we have been supplemented for the cost of it.

Senator CROSSIN—There is \$144,000 in the first year and then \$96,000 for the following years—is that correct?

Dr Sharma—It is higher in the first year because of set-up costs. The \$96,000 is the ongoing cost.

Senator CROSSIN—That is money that has been given to you by the federal government that you do not have to find yourself?

Dr Sharma—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Regarding 3.6 Evaluations on page 253, what is actually being evaluated? During this coming year is your secondary education program mainly student accommodation support—is that specifically what you mean there?

Mr Lane—Yes, it is. We are evaluating our complete role in secondary education in hostels we operate as well as hostels we fund. We want to have a more strategic approach in future as to where we continue to operate ones that we already operate and fund and where we might agree to place future funding, because we think some places may be oversupplied and some places may be undersupplied. We see ourselves as a gap provider and we only want to be involved in the game—in any form, whether it is community hostels or our own—where we think there is no other player that could actually take that particular role on.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the time line for the secondary education program review?

Mr Lane—It was actually due to be presented to our board of directors at their meeting next month but, because the principal researcher on that project fell ill and had to take some time off, it has been delayed. It will be presented to our board for consideration in August this year.

Senator CROSSIN—So that is a review that is almost completed then?

Mr Lane—It is almost completed.

Senator CROSSIN—What does the Community Hostels Grants program involve?

Mr Lane—That is basically a similar issue. We need to gather some facts and talk to the Department of Health and Ageing about our continuing role in those aged care hostels that we fund—not the aged care hostels that we operate—where we find we have a limited bucket of money. We need to assure ourselves that the money we have is enough to continue properly supporting the 16 hostels that are on our program with sufficient funds to maintain accreditation and certification standards for aged care homes. We have questions about the longer term viability of those homes without additional funds.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the time line for that review?

Mr Lane—We hope to have that done by about February next year.

Senator CROSSIN—So we will not see the outcomes of that in this year's annual report?

Mr Lane—No, you will not.

Senator CROSSIN—But we will find, perhaps, a comment about the review of the secondary education program in this year's annual report?

Mr Lane—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—In your 2003-04 annual report you say that your accommodation includes medical transient, including renal dialysis. Where exactly do you provide this facility?

Mr Clarke—I suppose the medical transient and the renal dialysis has a commonality, but we try to differentiate the renal dialysis hostels and separate them because they are longer term. We have a renal dialysis hostel in Alice Springs—the Topsy Smith Hostel; in Darwin it is the Nagandji-Nagandji-Ba Hostel—that is the old Gazelle Centre in Nightcliff; and there is one in Broome.

Senator CROSSIN—What is the nature of the support that you provide for this?

Mr Clarke—It is somewhere for people—not so much for families, because it is usually for singles and couples—who want to come to town for their treatment. Here they can live in an environment where they can eat the right food, relate to the other residents who have similar problems and not be humbugged by their family for money or eat the wrong types of food. Hopefully they will get well enough to be accepted for a transplant. We have actually had three or four residents who were able to get well enough to have a transplant.

Senator CROSSIN—How many would that be, do you think, over the last 12 months to two years?

Mr Lane—People who have received a transplant?

Senator CROSSIN—Yes.

Mr Lane—I do not have the exact figures, but I think we have had about five or six. It could be more.

Senator CROSSIN—Through the support of the hostel?

Mr Lane—Yes. As you probably know, it is quite hard to get a kidney transplant. Some of our residents have been more successful than people that perhaps are in communities or living at home, partly because at the hostel we put a lot of emphasis on having a proper diet and making sure people get to their renal appointments, plus the after care when they get back and are quite exhausted. I think a large part of it is having those people together. It is a supportive environment where they are actually eating the proper food. That is not to say that occasionally we do not have escapees that run over and get a bit of Kentucky Fried or whatever, but generally people eat well. I think that is the main factor.

Senator CROSSIN—Your student support accommodation is mainly provided where there are gaps in the system—is that correct?

Mr Clarke—Yes. We have a dilemma in Darwin, for example. St Johns College and Kormilda are meeting most but not all of the need. We probably will not go into Darwin because there is probably not the gap, but in places like Tennant Creek, Kununurra and maybe Katherine there may be a gap where we can meet some sort of need. If a player comes into Katherine, for example, then one day we may have to move out.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you assist at all, say, secondary school students who might come from Millingimbi and who want to study in Darwin? However, if I think about it, there probably are not too many at Darwin High School or Casuarina Senior Secondary College. By and large, they do not actually come into town, do they, unless they are going to Kormilda or St Johns?

Mr Clarke—I will give you an example. We would assist people coming in from the various communities outside of Kununurra who want to go to school, and we would provide accommodation and support for them. At the present moment, some of those students leave the outlying communities and go to Perth or even to Kalgoorlie, which is away from the Kimberley. Yes, if we can meet some need near the community to help—

Senator CROSSIN—Let me ask you about a new proposal from the government, the new Indigenous Youth Mobility Program. It will probably mean more Indigenous young people coming in from remote communities to bigger centres, to access training and employment

opportunities. Will AHL play a role in this program? Have you been approached to play a role in this program?

Mr Clarke—Yes. We believe we will be playing a major role by providing accommodation for those apprentices that come to these centres. We initially thought about putting them in some of our student hostels, but most of the apprentices will be adults and we cannot mix adults with under-age students. At the moment we are working with DEST to find appropriate accommodation. One of the first cabs off the rank that we hope to start is in Darwin, with a second one in Adelaide and possibly a third one in Perth.

Senator CROSSIN—What are you looking at there? Are you looking at either building a new hostel or supporting Indigenous students to find some sort of accommodation that already exists in places like Darwin?

Mr Clarke—To build a new hostel would probably be too costly at this stage, and it would probably take too long. We are looking at renting a four- to five-bedroom house, say, in Darwin which can be monitored by one house parent, to provide that support for the apprentice and their family.

Senator CROSSIN—It is envisaged, for example, that the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program might only attract four or five Indigenous people from the remote communities in the first instance, then; is that right?

Mr Clarke—It is very hard to put a number on because if we plan for 40 students for Darwin over five years not all of those 40 students will want to stay in our hostel. We will have a facility that could support those students if they want. Those ones who do stay at our hostel may, after three months, say, 'I want to go out and get a flat on my own,' or, 'I want to do my own thing and go and share,' so we will have a rotation of students. I would not envisage building a hostel for 40 students. But do you see what I mean, Senator? We will just have something small that we can have people go through and where we can provide hands-on support for the ones who are homesick and finding it very difficult. We will also have students who will be able to take that in their stride and do their own, independent thing.

Senator CROSSIN—This is a new program, isn't it?

Mr Clarke—That is right.

Senator CROSSIN—So negotiations are just under way about establishing this hostel support?

Mr Clarke—Yes. We may look at having three houses at a time; you never know.

Senator CROSSIN—We will come back to that. It gives us a reason to ask you back in the November estimates. Your annual report also mentions discussions with the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne to develop the medical transient hostel there. Can you tell me where this has gone?

Mr Clarke—There is good news there. Royal Children's Hospital and Aboriginal Hostels Limited have talked together. There is a need for accommodation for families who are visiting their children in hospital, and the Royal Children's Hospital has offered a property right opposite the hospital that we could use at a peppercorn rent. We are prepared to operate with minimal staffing—say two staff—and to fix the place up. It is exciting.

Senator CROSSIN—That would be for Indigenous families in Victoria, mainly, who need to access the hospital?

Mr Clarke—Yes. And some families come from the Territory and Western Australia to Melbourne.

Senator CROSSIN—That is true. I notice also the South Australian Department of Correctional Services are in discussion with you about a women's prison release and diversion hostel?

Mr Clarke—That is right.

Senator CROSSIN—Where is that up to?

Mr Clarke—We are actually running a hostel now in partnership with Correctional Services. It is another avenue for women. Rather than women going to prison they come to our hostel. Correctional Services refer residents there and we look after them.

Senator CROSSIN—Is that operating now?

Mr Clarke—That is operating now.

Senator CROSSIN—Previously you have come under ATSIC and AT SIS.

Mr Clarke—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Did you simply the funding with you when you moved into FaCS, after the demise of ATSIC?

Mr Clarke—There is another step to that. We were under ATSIC. Then we moved and were getting direct funding from the finance department. We moved to DIMIA, and with the latest changes to ATSIC we have moved to Family and Community Services.

Senator CROSSIN—Have you noticed any difference in the way the organisation operates, now that you are part of FaCS?

Mr Clarke—I must say that we have a very favourable working relationship with FaCS. FaCS staff have gone out of their way to be helpful and give us advice and to work with us.

Senator CROSSIN—Can I take you to the PBS again, page 247. I noticed in your annual report on page 9 that in 2003-04 the government funding was \$34.9 million. For 2005-06 the PBS shows the government funding is around the \$32.6 million. Is this a slight decrease in the funding you have been given—am I reading that correctly?

Dr Sharma—For the \$34.913 million on page 9 of the annual report, there is a further breakdown in the account itself on page 66 of the annual report. Apart from the department of finance appropriation, we had funding from other government agencies. We received \$31.435 million as government appropriation direct from the department of finance. We received \$32,000 from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations as a Step program subsidy. We had \$1.6 million as an aged care subsidy from the Department of Health for our Hetty Perkins home in Alice Springs. We got another \$1.6 million from the Department of Health and Ageing that we administer on their behalf to fund other aged care nursing homes that are run by the communities. We received \$70,000 from the ACT government for a

partnership at Isabella Plains—we are running a hostel there—and \$169,000 from the Department of Human Services in Victoria for a hostel we run in a partnership in Fitzroy.

Senator CROSSIN—So that \$34.9 million included all the moneys?

Dr Sharma—All of those.

Senator CROSSIN—Will you be getting subsidies, for example, from the Department of Health and Ageing to run Hetty Perkins?

Dr Sharma—Yes.

Senator CROSSIN—Do you have an idea of what your total budget for this year will be then?

Mr Clarke—Is this for Hetty Perkins?

Senator CROSSIN—If you are just getting \$32.6 million out of this PBS—

Mr Lane—Are you asking how much we will have to subsidise Hetty Perkins or how much in subsidies it will attract?

Senator CROSSIN—What other moneys are you getting from other portfolios in this next financial year?

Mr Lane—For Hetty Perkins?

Senator CROSSIN—No, for all of the programs that Dr Sharma just outlined.

Dr Sharma—We are estimating—it is on page 257 of the PBS at table 5.1—that we will be receiving \$32.641 million from the Department of Finance and Administration and a further \$2.8 million from the Department of Health and Ageing, which includes our subsidy for the Hetty Perkins home and the grant that we administer on behalf of the department.

Senator CROSSIN—How much is your total budget allocation that you will be working off in 2005-06—is it the \$32.641 million that I see on that page?

Dr Sharma—Yes, plus the \$2.8 million. The total will be \$35.441 million. We have not received any confirmation of what we will be getting from the Department of Health in Victoria yet.

Senator CROSSIN—Or the ACT government.

Dr Sharma—Or the ACT government, yes.

Senator CROSSIN—I think that is all. I have got about three or four left, but I am not sure if I will put them on notice. Thank you for your time. It gives us plenty to look forward to in November and in the annual report.

Mr Clarke—Particularly in Alice Springs with the hostels—Topsy Smith and Stuart Lodge.

Senator CROSSIN—I look forward to that.

CHAIR—Thank you to the representatives of the Aboriginal Hostels Ltd.

Proceedings suspended from 6.32 pm to 7.37 pm

Senator MOORE—Returning to child care—and before we get onto the next round of questions, which relate to parents with special needs—I want to confirm two answers that you gave before the break. I do not have access to *Hansard* so I want to clarify those answers. Dr Harmer, one was my question about the numbers of DSP recipients who are parents. Those figures would have been given to the task force, not to FaCS. Is that right?

Dr Harmer—Correct.

Senator MOORE—So those figures are now owned by the task force and FaCS only give advice on child-care issues.

Dr Harmer—The information on the expected number of DSP recipients who need child care would have been given to the task force by DEWR.

Senator MOORE—Ms Beauchamp, I know I asked you about a breakdown of the new child-care costs—the \$266 million. As we now have the places about to be announced and also publicised, why is it impossible to break down those budget figures into the different programs at this stage?

Ms Beauchamp—The first-year program relates to outside of school hours care places that meet emerging demand. They are not part of the Welfare to Work package.

Senator MOORE—Why then can we not have it broken into the OSH, the family day care and the other areas in that \$266 million?

Ms Beauchamp—I think the minister referred to the 210—

Senator MOORE—The 210 places and things in terms of other initiatives, not by budget amount but by composite number.

Ms Beauchamp—That is right.

Senator MOORE—Again, why can't we get the specific budget allocations to each of those elements of the \$266 million?

Ms Beauchamp—Beyond 2005-06, we have not worked through the details of those numbers. We would have to do that in consultation with other affected agencies around the entire package of Welfare to Work reform.

Senator MOORE—What about the funding for 2005-06?

Ms Beauchamp—It is primarily to meet the emerging demand for outside of school hours care.

Senator MOORE—On page 143 of Budget Paper No. 2 is the announcement of the whole budget allocation as part of the Welfare to Work package. Why then is 2005-06, which is the introductory phase, part of the Welfare to Work package? Secondly, why can't we have it broken down into the particular areas at this time?

Ms Beauchamp—Beyond 2005-06, we have not got it broken down. As we said earlier, most of the places will be taken up by parents—

Senator MOORE—Urgent demand.

Ms Beauchamp—requiring assistance in their return to work anyway, as part of the normal child-care program.

Senator MOORE—So it is your calculation that most of the places will be taken by people returning to work or changing work who are not necessarily part of the Welfare to Work package?

Ms Beauchamp—It is an estimate. Based on the existing use of child care, we anticipate that most of that will be taken up by parents returning to work.

Senator MOORE—In the first year?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Which is how much of the funding for 2005-06?

Ms Beauchamp—\$11.4 million.

Senator MOORE—The estimate for that expenditure is really based on the knowledge you had before the Welfare to Work program kicks in.

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator MOORE—We are still unable to get how much of that funding goes into each form of child care?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—When can we expect to have the breakdown between the different forms of child care?

Ms Beauchamp—For 2005-06?

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—I could take that on notice and provide that.

Senator MOORE—Correct me if I am getting the gist of your answers wrong, but the expectation, after the Welfare to Work package kicks in, is that you will be looking at the way that is going to operate, the way the funding is going to be distributed and also the various rules and guidelines during the year 2005-06 in preparation for the implementation in 2006-07.

Ms Beauchamp—That is correct.

Senator MOORE—My next lot of questions particularly relates to kids with special needs, but it relates to a letter that has been sent to the minister, so I might leave that. I will go onto the child-care census and then come back to that. Can you confirm that FaCS does a comprehensive census of child care, an audit of places available plus unmet demand every two years?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—That is in the work plan and is an expectation every two years?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Was the last census in the middle of 2004?

Ms Beauchamp—It was towards the end of 2004.

Senator MOORE—That particular census is yet to be released?

Ms Beauchamp—The report from that census, as per previous censuses, is on track to be produced in the next little while.

Senator MOORE—I am concerned that we are now more than halfway into 2005. I think at the last estimates, when I asked a question about where it was, I was told that the data was still being cleaned but it was hoped that it would be released very soon. Where are we at now? How clean is the data?

Ms Beauchamp—We are in the process of preparing and validating the tables, and it should be available in the next little while. That is not dissimilar to the time frames for previous censuses.

Senator MOORE—How long have we been doing this form of collection? How long have we been doing child-care census work?

Ms Powell—I am not sure exactly when it started, but we have done quite a few of them.

Senator MOORE—The standard process has been that every two years you do a census but the actual census report comes out about 12 months later. Is that about right?

Ms Powell—That is about right, yes. They are actually quite thick, extensive tables.

Senator MOORE—Yes, we have seen previous ones. They are big documents.

Ms Powell—We check them very thoroughly. We go back and check the data with each service provider. When we put the tables together—and we are doing the final checks of the tables at the moment—whenever a number looks odd, we contact the service provider to check it, so that we are quite confident of a high level of accuracy.

Senator MOORE—Do you go back to every service provider or is it just ones where you think there is a bit of a strange result?

Ms Powell—Only where there is a strange result.

Senator MOORE—My understanding is that you put it out to all providers. That is part of the process, which is a significant task.

Ms Powell—That is right. In fact, we have been doing the census since 1986.

Senator MOORE—Can you, on notice, give me some idea about the past time frame so we can get an indication of how long after a census was done the report was published. It would be nice to have a bit of a pattern and then we can work on that in the future. I take it from your answer, Ms Powell, that the data has moved on from being cleaned to being formatted and the tables being checked.

Ms Powell—That is right.

Senator MOORE—We can expect that, you said, Ms Beauchamp, ‘in the next little while’. I am going to interpret that as about two months. Would that be fair? I do not want to put words in your mouth, but I would like a little bit more direction of ‘in the next little while’. Is that in your area, Ms Powell?

Ms Powell—It is. I was reluctant to be too specific.

Senator MOORE—Getting our hopes up!

Ms Powell—We are checking the numbers and it depends on how easy that is. If people come back and say, ‘Yes, that’s fine,’ then that is easy, but if there is a complication, then that holds things up.

Senator MOORE—My understanding of the process is that this particular census goes to the minister first. Is that right?

Ms Powell—That is right.

Senator MOORE—And we wait on ministerial satisfaction and approval before it goes public?

Ms Powell—That is right. It has not gone to the minister.

Senator MOORE—No, it is still being clarified. Has there been any preliminary summary or report from the census that has been forwarded on to the minister or anyone else?

Ms Powell—No. There is a summary document we produce and it has not yet been finalised.

Senator MOORE—Does the summary go before the whole document or does it go as a composite set?

Ms Powell—I think we do it at the same time.

Senator MOORE—Neither the summary document nor the completed census has left your area at this stage?

Ms Powell—That is right.

Senator MOORE—Was there any information from the census that went to the work force considerations for the Welfare to Work changes?

Ms Powell—There is nothing that springs to my mind.

Senator MOORE—Whilst the final document has not been concluded, have chunks of information out of it gone to anywhere?

Ms Powell—Bits of the census are used in the annual report and in the *Report on Government Services*. Some of it was also provided at the previous Senate estimates hearings.

Senator MOORE—Were elements of the census available for the last annual report in 2004 or will they be available for the 2005 report?

Ms Powell—In each year we put the data from the census. For both the annual report and the *Report on Government Services* it is preliminary data, so it is not as accurate.

Senator MOORE—And it is clearly marked that way?

Ms Powell—Yes, it is clearly marked that way.

Senator MOORE—One of the things that the minister has made comment about is the strength of data, the strength of figures that people use to make statements and to make estimates and so on—not government but when people have been making complaints or making statements. The minister has made comments in the past about accuracy of data, strength of data, in particular the use of data that has not been verified or in terms of stats data. Minister, I am using your name here! If the durable data is the census result, which

would be true, it is then difficult when there is such a gap between when the census is done and when we get data. From the department and the minister's point of view, how durable is the data that we would have? The last public data would be 2002. Is that right?

Ms Powell—That is right.

Senator MOORE—Is that data that is the most available public information about various things?

Ms Powell—At the level of detail that the census goes into, yes.

Senator MOORE—Is that accepted as the standard?

Ms Powell—Yes, I think so.

Senator MOORE—Have we seen a copy of the census survey? Have we asked for that in the past?

Ms Powell—You did not ask for it in February.

Senator MOORE—Can we get a copy of the survey?

Ms Powell—I can take that on notice.

Senator MOORE—My question is: what were the child-care centres asked as part of the data collection? We have asked for a copy of the questions. Were the centres asked about their current unmet demand or waiting lists? Is that part of the census collection?

Ms Powell—I do not think it is. You can get a copy of the 2002 census off the Internet.

Senator MOORE—Yes. The 2002 census asked exactly the same questions as the 2004 census? There was no change to the questions?

Ms Powell—I am not sure of that.

Senator MOORE—We have seen the 2002 one and we did not presume that it was identical.

Ms Powell—A large chunk of the questions would be identical. I do not know to what extent there was variation.

Senator MOORE—When were the questions for the 2004 census asked? I know forms to complete were sent out. Can you remember when that process was done?

Ms Powell—I think they were done in March 2004.

Senator MOORE—How long were the various centres given to complete them? What was their return date?

Ms Powell—I would have to take that on notice.

Senator MOORE—You may well have to take this on notice, too, in view of your previous answers. Have there been any changes in the methodology between the 2002 census and the 2004 census?

Ms Powell—I will take that on notice too.

Senator MOORE—When you take that on notice can we have any changes highlighted, and perhaps some explanation of why you changed the form of the question or the particular way it was asked?

Ms Powell—Sure.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any idea of how much the census costs? Is there a particular budget item for the conduct of the census? There would be two things: the conduct of the census and then the analysis and preparation of the result of the census.

Ms Powell—I do not have costing information on the census with me.

Senator MOORE—Can we put that on notice as well. The following questions would be in the same area. How many full-time equivalent FaCS staff have been employed from the start of it? Is there a dedicated unit or number of people that are responsible for the census? What is their classification? Have there been any elements of the census outsourced in terms of the process and, if yes, to whom and how much?

Ms Powell—I will take all of those on notice.

Senator MOORE—Has your unit received any FOI requests about elements of information in the census?

Ms Powell—I would have to take that on notice.

Dr Harmer—Senator, the FOI requests would not come to Ms Powell. They would come to a more central area, so she may not know.

Senator MOORE—What is your FOI process, Dr Harmer? Do you have a specialised unit?

Dr Harmer—I need to rely on advice for that answer.

Senator MOORE—Most agencies do. Could we get some information about whether FOI requests come to a specialised area of the department?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator MOORE—It would be interesting to know whether there have been—

Dr Harmer—Senator, I am told it goes to legal branch. Our legal area takes the FOI requests.

Senator MOORE—Are there dedicated FOI personnel within Legal?

Dr Harmer—There is an FOI officer within the legal branch, yes.

Senator MOORE—When we find out about the FOI requests can we find out when they arrived and what the results were?

Dr Harmer—We can probably tell you when they arrived. I am not sure whether we can tell you what the results were.

Senator MOORE—Could you tell me whether the information was able to be given out; whether the request was accepted or refused?

Dr Harmer—I will take that on notice. I am not sure what information we can give you about an individual FOI request.

Senator MOORE—Different departments have different approaches. I have not asked this question before, so it would be good to find out about your area. What exactly is the census used for? I know it provides data, but from your professional area relating to child care, what use do you make of the census information?

Ms Powell—The data from the census feeds into a range of policy consideration and advice that we provide. It is used by community groups, by NGOs, by academics, by members of parliament.

Senator MOORE—Members of parliament, absolutely! We seem very fond of it. In terms of the final document, 2002 is on the web site.

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—And the expectation is that 2004 will be on the web site. I know you keep stats of usage of the web site. Is it possible to define what people look at on the web site or do you just keep stats on how many clicks there are? Would you have any idea about how many people access the survey on the web site?

Ms Beauchamp—I would have to take that on notice. It would be separately identified.

Senator MOORE—Yes, because it is one thing to get a request for a copy of the census. You know that Claire Moore has requested the census and you post it out, but, by having it on the web site, it is very difficult to see exactly how many use it. I do not know whether you can define those clicks or not. In terms of finalising this census, that is imminent?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—In a little while, yes. It is at the stage now of being finally formatted. The cleansing of the data has been done. We are waiting for it to go through the process of internal approval?

Ms Powell—Some of the tables are still being checked, so they are not finalised yet. The formatting happens after that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Is this the usual time line for release of the census data?

Ms Powell—I understand that it is quite usual.

Senator HUMPHRIES—It has not been held up in an unusual way?

Ms Powell—It is not unusually late, no. I checked with ABS publications the other day and found out that their similar survey, which I believe is smaller than ours, takes 11 months to produce.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How long did the 2002 census take to release? Do you know?

Ms Powell—No, I do not know, although I do know that it was sent out in December 2003.

Senator MOORE—The final document was sent out in December 2003?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—Way ahead of schedule.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So we would be ahead of schedule at this point?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Then we will be able to look at comparable experiences with previous censuses back to the eighties when we get your answer on notice.

Ms Powell—Yes, that time line.

Senator MOORE—That was the 2002-03, but more than one census a pattern makes.

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator Patterson—You will find there are not many child-care places, Senator.

Senator MOORE—You keep reminding us of that, Minister.

Senator Patterson—I do so because there has been a significant increase. There are thousands of extra places.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do you know how many child-care places, Minister?

Senator Patterson—Before this announcement, there was an 84 per cent increase in child-care places. There are another 843,000 outside school hours care, 2,500 family day care and 1,000 in-home care.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Very impressive. Thank you, Minister.

Senator Patterson—It would have been more impressive earlier today. But it is getting late, at eight o'clock.

Senator MOORE—Ms Powell, can you confirm the data you just gave us on the bureau of stats and how long it took for their survey?

Ms Powell—The ABS survey took 11 months. I did not get that from the ABS. That was my rough working-out from the dates, so it may be wrong. It was rough.

Senator MOORE—That was from the time they collected to the time it went public?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—This round of the survey was in March 2004?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—We are now up to more than 11 months.

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—That gives us some idea that it took 11 months. This one is taking just a little bit longer than that.

Ms Powell—They are quite different surveys.

Senator MOORE—Yes, they are different surveys.

Ms Powell—The child-care census is, I think, a much bigger questionnaire and goes to a lot more people. It is a much more complex document.

Senator MOORE—We have gone past the 12 months in terms of when we go back and have a look at the process again. I am concerned about the strength of data that we are always being questioned about. You spend hours sitting in this place being asked questions about data, when it is always 12 months behind in terms of using it in that way.

Minister, the next series of questions relates to information that we have had in our offices. I know a letter has been sent to the minister and to various other politicians from a sole parent pensioner in Queensland. She is particularly concerned about having a child with special needs and the availability of support for children with special needs now, let alone in the Welfare to Work process. She is very keen to have questions asked about how issues of special needs child care are being considered by the Welfare to Work process. I know that the Welfare to Work is owned by DEWR and that you are only a consultant on the issue of Welfare to Work, but her particular concerns relate to child care and special needs child care. On that basis, has there been any special consideration of child-care issues for special needs children in looking at the child-care projections for the Welfare to Work changes?

Ms Beauchamp—The child-care support needs of families with children with disabilities are being picked up in a separate program under the Child Care Support Program. The minister is on record as saying that the child-care support for those families accessing existing special needs child-care services will not change.

Senator MOORE—Special needs child care has very specialised processes and Senator McLucas has a couple of questions on that. Does that extend to OSH and family day care?

Ms Beauchamp—It is in-home care for special needs children.

Ms Griffin—It does. The Special Needs Subsidy Scheme and the DSUPS scheme extend to OSH, family day care and in-home care.

Senator MOORE—The questions raised by this particular woman relate particularly to having a child with special needs at six and being unwell, not being able to be in child care because of the ability to catch different things, and being off a long time.

Dr Harmer—Senator, Mr Kalisch might be able to help.

Senator MOORE—I am pleased Mr Kalisch has come up.

Mr Kalisch—There is also some understanding within the Welfare to Work package and you would have to ask DEWR the specifics about.

Senator MOORE—I was hoping to be given some spontaneous answers on the Welfare to Work package, Mr Kalisch.

Mr Kalisch—It goes to very much the provisions around the participation requirements for parenting payment recipients, which is their responsibility, but there are some broader exemptions for parents with disabled children that are going to be applied within those new participation requirements.

Senator MOORE—Have they been made public, Mr Kalisch?

Mr Kalisch—No. I believe that the details are still being worked on and will be part of the legislation that comes forward shortly.

Senator MOORE—This was particularly the issue raised by this person. I am happy to table the letter and I think I will table it so that people can see the range, but her particular concerns related to exactly the area you have mentioned about the impact of the government expecting a sole parent pensioner of a special needs child to declare, in their application and

so on, their ability to work in holidays because of access to special care, ability to work whenever the child is sick, and the expectation that some children with special needs—and I see Ms Griffin understands them—are more subject to getting ill, so mum or dad are called away from work. Is it your understanding that, in the discussions to which Ms Beauchamp referred earlier, those issues will be taken into account?

Mr Kalisch—Yes. There certainly was some understanding and expectation that there would be some special flexibility around the requirements for parents with children in those circumstances.

Senator MOORE—And the way the activity test will operate.

Mr Kalisch—I understand this issue may well have been raised in the DEWR estimates hearings earlier.

Senator MOORE—It may well have been. In terms of the knowledge that FaCS have, it is that the child-care needs, particularly for children with special needs, will be fed through to the people developing the policy and there are a range of questions that have been considered at the task force about activity test exemptions, ability to make special argument and so on.

Mr Kalisch—Yes. Now it is in the phase of really making those broader arrangements operational.

Senator MOORE—Ms Beauchamp, you referred to that earlier as well. Are you aware, in the work that you are doing in terms of those processes, if there is any kind of time frame for when those details will be made public? Is there more awareness of how the package is going to work?

Ms Beauchamp—Over the next 12 months?

Senator MOORE—Over the next 12 months. To the best of your knowledge, there is no kind of expectation in the first quarter there will be something released and so on?

Ms Beauchamp—Through the committees that Mr Kalisch and Dr Harmer referred to earlier I am sure they would be developing a work program with particular milestones.

Senator MOORE—I will table the letter. The issues and these questions I have on record, but I think it is worthwhile tabling because it is a very good letter. I will give it to the members of the committee so they can see it. Regarding waiting lists, unmet need and growth in demand for child care: around the night of the budget the figure of 35,000 children waiting for before or after school care places was discussed. Particular media comments asked about that number. Is that a number the department supports?

Ms Beauchamp—In relation to?

Senator MOORE—On the night of the budget the minister was asked a particular question about confirming that there were approximately 35,000 children waiting for before or after school care placements.

Ms Beauchamp—The minister said earlier today that we have applications from service providers of around 10,000 places.

Senator Patterson—It was a fictitious number that was dreamt up out of the ether by somebody.

Senator MOORE—It was not one that you had heard before, Minister?

Senator Patterson—No. It has been repeated innumerable times by the shadow minister, but our figures show that it is 10,000. There was a review done by the previous minister of the unmet need. We provided those 40,000 places. As Ms Beauchamp said, there has been an emerging demand, which we believe is 10,000 places.

Ms Beauchamp—It would have been a lot less back then when those numbers were quoted.

Senator Patterson—Yes, it would have been less. It would have been fewer places when that 35,000 kept floating in the ether. But that is what happens; all this false information goes out. I am happy to have an argument on the facts but when I have stuff that is not factual I get very irritated, as I was this afternoon. You are not guilty of it, Senator, let me say, nor would I expect you to be.

Senator MOORE—How do we get the facts, Minister?

Senator Patterson—We have told you what the facts are.

Senator MOORE—But they are actual applications.

Senator Patterson—There is an emerging number. They will change. As we have a sound economy with a reduced unemployment rate, with more people participating, we will have increased demand for child care. It will keep emerging and increase in number as a result of sound economic management and more opportunities for people to have jobs.

Senator MOORE—Ms Beauchamp referred to a question on notice that we had in February 2005 that said there were 5,621 places. The emergent numbers between February and now are about another 5,000.

Senator Patterson—There are more people in the work force, yes, and you will get increased demand.

Senator MOORE—The figure of 35,000 was discussed in the budget lock-up, we believe, Minister. It came into discussions in the budget lock-up from Treasury people.

Senator Patterson—Treasury people do not keep the figures; we do. I do not know whether that is right.

Senator MOORE—Have you heard that before, Minister?

Senator Patterson—I have heard it from the press. Senator Moore, let me just say: I am not saying you do it but some of your colleagues do allege things that are not the case. I was not in the lock-up; I do not know what was said. I would not imagine that was said. We have the figures of people, indicating their preference for increased places or for new places. Our figure is that it is currently around 10,000.

Senator MOORE—Minister, we have been given a letter that you sent to Kevin Rudd in Queensland when he was requesting some extra places for West End in central Brisbane. He was advised at that time that there were no available places.

Senator Patterson—That is right. There was a period where we met the need for 40,000 places, rolling those out last year.

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Senator Patterson—Since then people have been sending expressions of interest in extra places—the emerging numbers. That is one of the reasons why I went in to argue very strongly for increased outside school hours places, on the basis that there would be increasing interest from not only the number of people moving into the work force because unemployment has gone down but also through our measures to increase participation of people with children over six years of age to at least do 15 hours of work a week. At the time I wrote that letter to Mr Rudd we did not have any places. I think it might have been before we reallocated those 2,000 places. I cannot remember exactly. I do try and write to all my colleagues and answer them as speedily as I can. I take an interest when Mr Rudd writes to me, but I do not remember the exact date.

Senator MOORE—The date of Mr Rudd's letter was April 2005.

Senator Patterson—That was after we had filled those others and we saw the emerging need. We then had some extra places. Had I waited and hung out and not answered the letter until the budget, I would have had better news for him. At the time I wrote it, I most probably knew I had been in there bidding for extra places.

Senator MOORE—The process that happens is that the child-care centres request, to your section, some more places and, depending on what the budget is like—not the big budget but your ongoing budget—they are reallocated at that time. That is how you have explained it in the past.

Ms Powell—It depends on the number of places that are available. It is not a function of the budget.

Senator MOORE—So when Mr Rudd wrote in April, there were no places. Does that application from, at that stage, the West End centre stay live, so that when you have places available the centres that have formally asked for more places are then contacted again to confirm?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Then they would get the first—

Ms Powell—That is right. There is an ongoing process where services relinquish places that they are not using and they are reallocated.

Senator MOORE—That was the process you described earlier before the break—using the local knowledge and the local state offices.

Ms Powell—Yes. Again, it would be on the basis of relative need.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any data on the number of OSH places that have been requested and refused this year because there were not enough?

Ms Powell—There is a question on notice from Ms Plibersek and we are working on that.

Senator MOORE—Can you tell me when that question on notice was asked?

Ms Powell—It was asked on 10 May.

Senator MOORE—That would pick up the same time. You are working on that?

Ms Powell—That is right.

Senator MOORE—Minister, in the process of the response you said that the current unmet demand, the need for new OSH places, was known: that you had considered it and it had been factored into the budget calculation.

Senator Patterson—That is what I just said.

Senator MOORE—Yes, I wanted to restate it. You took the request that you had—the unmet need, of which you were aware—and that was part of the basis of arguing for extra places in the budget.

Senator Patterson—There were two things. One was the emerging demand and the second was an argument that I put very strongly: that when we are asking people with children of school age to work at least 15 hours a week, many of those people will require places. We had the shadow minister running about saying there would be a hundred and whatever thousand people wanting it; all of those people will not use outside school hours. Some people will get employment during school hours; some will have informal care arrangements; some will share arrangements with other people working at different times; some will want before school hours care; some will want only after school hours care; some will want vacation; some will want none.

One person going into the work force does not equal an outside school hours place every day of the week, which is the assumption that is being made by the opposition. We estimate that the number of places we have allocated will cover the requirement. If it does not, I will go in and argue strongly again, as I did this time. But let me say that we offered in this budget more outside school hours places than existed in total when we came into government.

Senator MOORE—Ms Beauchamp, we have talked about unmet demand and I know you have answered questions about this in the past. Is the only method of calculating unmet demand the formal application for places?

Ms Beauchamp—We need to be clear on what we mean by ‘unmet demand’.

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—Around the outside school hours care process they are applications from service providers.

Senator MOORE—That is the only mechanism that you have?

Ms Beauchamp—That is the application from service providers. When we come to distributing places on the basis of need, we then go back and say, ‘Do you actually want or need these places?’ We validate that with each of the applicants that asked us for extra places.

Senator MOORE—The expectation is that, if they need them, they would use them immediately?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Ms Powell—Within a reasonable time period.

Senator MOORE—Yes. You could not be preplanning it 12 months down the track. It would be need that you would have within a reasonable period.

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Do you have current information on what the unmet demand is, from your figures, for long day care, family day care and occasional care?

Ms Powell—Again, that is one of the questions that Ms Plibersek has asked.

Senator MOORE—That is being calculated on notice?

Ms Powell—Yes. The answer is due on 9 July.

Senator MOORE—They will be answered on 9 July?

Ms Powell—That is when they are due, yes.

Senator MOORE—Does the department use the term ‘hot spot’ for need, or is that a term that we use? Is that a departmental term?

Ms Powell—Not in any formal sense.

Senator MOORE—But it is used? It is common parlance?

Ms Powell—I think it was used at this last hearing.

Senator MOORE—It has now become common parlance. Have you identified hot spots? Are there areas that the department believes have greater need than others at the moment?

Ms Powell—Again, that is one of the questions that Ms Plibersek has asked.

Senator MOORE—One of the issues would be, in terms of experience, that if you do not have an existing child-care centre in your area, you do not know what the unmet demand is. Is that something that the department takes into account? It is another way of looking at emergent need, where areas have grown and there is a need for child care, or the demography of an area has changed and there is no existing child-care centre. How do you assess demand in an area like that, where there is no locale for a family to put in an application so that the child-care centre would be able to put in an application? Are there any demographic studies that you do?

Ms Powell—Again, Ms Plibersek has asked—

Senator MOORE—A similar question?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—9 July?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Fabulous! This is a standard question. Is there any reason, if a question has been put in in another way, why the question on notice takes precedence over an estimates question?

Senator Patterson—Because we are not going to answer it twice.

Senator MOORE—In terms of information, is it that it needs considerable research, so that is why we have to wait to 9 July to get an answer?

Ms Beauchamp—In this particular case Ms Plibersek on 10 May asked six questions on notice which have 100 different elements.

Senator MOORE—I do not have anywhere near that number of questions.

Senator Patterson—No. I am asking the staff to keep a note of how long it takes and I will be giving Ms Plibersek a costing of how much it has cost us in time, for people who really need to be getting on with the major issue of rolling out these places. I will be making a point of that.

Senator MOORE—I consider asking questions and getting answers a normal part of democracy.

Senator Patterson—It is, but these are very extensive questions and they could just as easily have been asked here. I just said to the department that we really do not need to answer them twice and, with a bit more coordination, Ms Plibersek might have had the courtesy to tell you that she had put these questions on notice so that you did not spend hours writing them.

Senator MOORE—Some of these questions, Minister, are very standard and are asked regularly at estimates, like the issue of unmet demand, I think. I have been here for only a couple of years, but I have been asking unmet demand questions at most of these estimates, so I would have thought that it would have been standard for that data to be produced. Is there any particular reason why the unmet data question cannot be answered before 9 July? I am not going to go back and go through each question I have asked, but—

Senator Patterson—No. We will answer it and we will just refer Ms Plibersek to the estimates questions.

Dr Harmer—Senator, when we were preparing for the estimates and I was being briefed by my Families and Children people, Ms Powell said, ‘We’ve got a whole stack of questions on notice from Ms Plibersek that we’re answering,’ and I said, ‘Well, we don’t need to worry about those because we’re working on those.’ Had they not been put on notice, we would have been expecting those, but given they were on notice we would have assumed that the senators would have known that they were being asked of us and we would be preparing answers. I think 9 July is the date.

Senator MOORE—This is the pack where the issue of ‘on notice’ as opposed to ‘this evening’ has come up: the issue of OSH places that have been requested and refused because of lack of available places; the question of the current unmet demand in the range of services; there was one other and I have not marked it; and you said you have another 100. Is that right?

Ms Beauchamp—There are 100 different elements included in the six questions on notice we have.

Senator MOORE—And you do not have the information for the ones I have asked here at your disposal this evening?

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Senator Patterson—We presumed you would have known that the questions were there, Senator Moore.

Senator MOORE—I have been asked to particularly ask a question about a previous response that we had. Senator Collins asked the question. It was question on notice No. 58.

Senator Patterson—Where is Senator Collins? I am missing Senator Collins. She is usually here asking child-care questions.

Senator MOORE—The question was:

What are the areas of unmet need in long day care?

The FaCS answer said:

FaCS does not collect data to answer this question.

Ms Powell—That is correct.

Senator MOORE—That does surprise me. Can you explain why you do not collect data to look at unmet need for long day care when there is obviously data for the other forms of child care?

Ms Powell—There is no cap or restriction of places in long day care of any sort at all, whereas the OSH and family day care places are allocated by us on the basis of relative need.

Senator MOORE—Your expectation is that every demand for a long day care place is filled because there is no cap to it. Is that the expectation?

Ms Powell—We just do not collect data on it.

Ms Beauchamp—And there are no controls on it.

Dr Harmer—There is not much point in us keeping that data because there is nothing we can do with it.

Senator Patterson—I believe some councils keep a check on it and some councils—I will stand corrected—actually have within their planning rules that if there is not a need then they will not give an approval. I have written to the local government ministers suggesting they may take a lead from the councils and do that, because it does (a) give some sort of a picture of the demand in their area, and (b) impact on their approvals. Some councils do not have that as a clause within their planning and so, even if there is not demand, they will permit the building of a child-care centre, which I find rather interesting and unusual. I do not know if we have had a reply from the local government ministers. It would seem to me that that would be a way of doing it, because some services have double counting; some person will put a child down on a waiting list for three or four services. As I said, some local councils take a very keen interest and know what is happening in their local area and can actually include that in their planning. If they approve the building and there is a demand, we pay the child-care benefit and there is a child-care tax rebate.

Senator MOORE—As you say, that is a gap in the knowledge of what is available.

Senator Patterson—That is why I have written to the local government ministers suggesting that they may encourage their councils to do what some councils already do.

Senator MOORE—It does limit the sense of having a clear picture of exactly what the full demand is for child care across the area. You have it for the ones that are capped. But this area, long day care, has been specifically mentioned: something about an increase in long day

care. I think it could be in the preamble in the portfolio page. If you do not know what the situation is, it is hard to then give authoritative advice about what is available. But that issue is being taken up in another way, Minister?

Senator Patterson—I believe that is one way in which we could address it. As I said, some councils do that and have it within their rules. Others do not. There are sometimes more child-care places than are needed, which I would not think was a very sensible way for a council to go about its approval process.

Senator MOORE—No. Because of this lack of information about this one stream of child-care options, have you done any internal consideration of methods to get an accurate picture of the demand in long day care?

Senator Patterson—As I said to you, I think one of the best ways of doing it is to have local councils look at the demand within the area.

Senator MOORE—Are there any other methods, Minister? That one does jump to mind.

Senator Patterson—There are a myriad methods you could think of and devise, but you always have the problem of child-care centres having multiple listings. Local governments know the child-care centres and their places. They would not have a huge list to have to manage and they could get a very good grip on the demand in their local area, which would, as I said, help them with planning and planning authorisation for the building of child-care centres.

Senator MOORE—Minister, do councils write directly to you and express their concerns about the lack of child care?

Senator Patterson—I am just trying to think. I have had one council in particular, Port Phillip, write to me.

Senator MOORE—Port Phillip raised those issues quite publicly and talked about their growing needs.

Senator Patterson—Yes, they did. I have discovered that there are some empty child-care places in Port Phillip.

Senator MOORE—And you have shared that information?

Senator Patterson—And I have been talking to some of the providers. Port Phillip have a task force that they are working on.

Senator MOORE—That is at the local government level?

Senator Patterson—Yes. There are a couple of people who are specifically associated with it. I think Ms Powell has met with them. Have you met with them?

Ms Powell—Yes, I met with them.

Senator MOORE—They have been active?

Senator Patterson—There is a difficulty in terms of inner city areas just not having land space. Some jurisdictions have done things like leasing land to child-care providers to co-locate them in schools. There are some creative things that can be done, but I cannot make

space. That is where councils have a responsibility to try and look at ways in which they can encourage providers into their areas to meet need.

Senator MOORE—Would an action group like that involve FaCS? The nearest FaCS office to Port Phillip would be Melbourne, would it not?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Would there be any involvement of the local FaCS office in an action group like that? The minister said that you had met with them, Ms Powell, but have they asked for support and activity and that kind of process?

Ms Powell—I met with the council, not with the action group.

Senator MOORE—Is that something that could come under your banner?

Ms Powell—Meeting with the council?

Senator MOORE—Meeting with the action group.

Ms Powell—We meet with community groups from time to time, and there would be no particular barrier to that.

Senator MOORE—As part of the normal outreach of the department?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—I will ask a couple of questions about metropolitan services, leading on from the minister's comments, because it flows. My understanding is that there is no particular subsidy of any sort for child-care centres in metropolitan regions. Is that right? Is that a simple yes/no answer? You will possibly not have to answer too much on a question on notice if it is a question of just giving a yes or no answer.

Ms Griffin—It is not a simple yes or no.

Senator MOORE—So there could well be subsidies of some sort for child-care centres for long day care?

Ms Griffin—Yes.

Senator MOORE—But it is not simply a yes or a no?

Ms Griffin—No, it is not.

Senator MOORE—Are we waiting for that for 9 July?

Ms Griffin—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Fabulous! I know that there are particular subsidies, which we have discussed here on previous occasions, about incentive schemes for rural and regional areas. Is there a similar scheme for metropolitan areas?

Ms Griffin—Sorry, could you repeat the question?

Senator MOORE—In the past we have discussed here incentive schemes, particularly for regional and rural areas where there has been an identified lack of servicing. Is there a similar subsidy scheme for metropolitan areas, such as Port Phillip?

Ms Griffin—I think that is related to the question that Ms Plibersek asked on notice, Senator.

Senator MOORE—Did Ms Plibersek ask that question or is it a new question?

Ms Griffin—It is a question that she has asked.

Senator MOORE—I take it from that that there is no yes or no answer to that—you cannot say, ‘Yes, there are subsidies; no, there are no subsidies for metropolitan areas’?

Ms Griffin—I do not have the information with me.

Senator MOORE—The minister said that it is an issue to which she has addressed her consideration—the issue of long day care and how you determine whether there is a need or not. Is there any particular work going on in FaCS to look at whether there are any initiatives to help the establishment of long day care centres in cities?

Ms Griffin—Again, that is a question that Ms Plibersek has asked.

Senator MOORE—There are particular questions related to special shortages for children under two, which we have talked about a lot.

Senator Patterson—Senator Moore, that is almost an impossible question to answer, because we do not build child-care centres; we fund children in long day care.

Senator MOORE—But you have the area of expertise, Minister, for people who are considering building child-care centres.

Senator Patterson—We do not give them advice and say, ‘You ought to go and build a child-care centre in X, Y or Z.’

Senator MOORE—No. I have never wanted to build a child-care centre, but my understanding is that if I were going to build one, the expectation would be that one place where I could come to ask where there is a need, where other child-care centres are located and what the process is for doing it is FaCS. Potential developers ask you for information, don’t they?

Ms Powell—We provide information to potential service providers on populations and places that are available.

Senator MOORE—On other centres that are there and places that are available. Amongst the range of preliminary work that someone who is considering going into this business does is to contact the department. It is almost like they have a check list: talk to FaCS, talk to other centres, talk to the local council, find out how much it costs to build—all those things.

Ms Powell—I would imagine that they would.

Senator MOORE—That would be my understanding, and I know there has been a burgeoning interest in this area as an industry. Minister, I would think that there is a transfer of information between the department—about what is happening in the community—that may lead to some consideration of where there are special needs in city areas.

Ms Powell—We do not undertake market research, for example, on behalf of potential service providers. We just provide them with general demographic data that is already publicly available.

Senator MOORE—I know Ms Plibersek has not asked this question, because I have just thought of it: in terms of the kinds of information in the survey, a copy of which we are going to get, is there a question there that asks current providers and people who are using child care about whether they have considered other options for child care? That could be one way of finding out whether people are looking at other forms of child care.

Ms Powell—I would have to take that on notice. I am not aware of it.

Senator MOORE—I am thinking just in terms of the kind of work and the kind of knowledge that the department may have out of the expertise that you have accrued. We have been told that there is considerable work being done in looking at raising awareness about and availability of child care for kids under two. That has been said at previous estimates. Can you tell us what work is being done within the department in looking at the availability of baby child care?

Ms Powell—We have data on the number of nought to two-year-olds in care.

Senator MOORE—It is an issue that the department keeps an eye on, isn't it, because it is one that comes up all the time—the shortage?

Ms Powell—We only keep information on the number of nought to two-year-olds in care.

Senator MOORE—Has the availability of child care for nought to two-year-olds risen?

Ms Powell—Yes, it has. It has risen both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the nought to two-year-old population.

Senator MOORE—That would mean both the number of nought to two-year-olds in Australia and how many are using child care?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Do you have that data?

Ms Powell—Yes, I do.

Senator MOORE—Fabulous: a question and an answer!

Ms Powell—Nought to two-year-olds in child care represent 25.2 per cent of nought to two-year-olds in the population.

Senator MOORE—Is that from births, deaths and marriages type of data?

Ms Powell—That would come from population data and Centrelink's administrative data.

Senator MOORE—So 25.2 per cent of kids between zero and two are using some form of child care?

Ms Powell—Formal child care, yes, and that has grown from 21.9 per cent in 2000.

Senator MOORE—That is significant. There were two pieces of information I was clutching onto desperately there. What was the other one?

Ms Powell—Numbers of nought to two-year-olds in child care.

Senator MOORE—These are the raw numbers?

Ms Powell—Yes. We currently have 188,510. In 2000 there were 166,073.

Senator MOORE—I will not ask you for this data at the moment, Ms Powell, but can we get some idea of where they are—not location but states?

Ms Powell—Yes. I will have to take that on notice.

Senator MOORE—That would be somehow reflective, I think, of the demography of the area. Was there a special study being done to look at the issue of nought to two-year-olds in—

Ms Powell—There is some analysis being done.

Senator MOORE—By your area?

Ms Powell—We have commissioned it.

Senator MOORE—It says here, ‘Why does the study stop at 2002?’ Was that information that you had given to us previously?

Ms Powell—‘Why does the study—’

Senator MOORE—Why does the study stop at 2002, since there is more recent data available?

Ms Powell—I am not sure which study you are referring to.

Senator MOORE—No. But there is a contracted bit of work being done in this area.

Ms Powell—There is, yes. Also 2002 would be the year that CCB was introduced, so that is possibly relevant.

Senator MOORE—I have a question also in terms of growth in formal child care. It says on page 177 of the FaCS PBS that between 1998 and 2002 the proportion of all children using formal care doubled from 12 per cent to 25 per cent, which is a significant increase in that period. Do you have any estimates for the expected rate of growth in the numbers of people using child care in the next four years?

Ms Powell—I do not think we have done that.

Dr Harmer—The reason we will not have that, Senator, is because it will be impacted on substantially by the welfare to work changes, and they have been put together by PM&C, advised by us et cetera, as I mentioned before.

Senator MOORE—And that is actually being developed over the next 12 months, so that when we all gather together here in 12 months time, there could be a more formal consideration of that?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator MOORE—According to my reading of the PBS, funding has been maintained for JET in the 2005-06 budget, but there is no additional funding. Is that an accurate assessment—that the JET funding has been maintained for 2005-06 but there is no additional funding for this program?

Ms Beauchamp—For 2005-06?

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator MOORE—We have maintained it for 2005-06 but in terms of the future there is no additional funding to that program.

Ms Beauchamp—Only what was announced during the budget process as part of the welfare to work process.

Senator Patterson—We were talking about it earlier, if you remember—that \$55 million?

Senator MOORE—Yes, that is right—there is some enhancement but it is not growth aimed particularly at that program. The big thing for JET in terms of the change has been the change in eligibility for people who can access the JET scheme—for people who are doing study courses over 12 months?

Ms Beauchamp—As part of the welfare to work reforms from 1 July 2006 there will be a new work-study test applied.

Senator MOORE—Is the key element of that work-study test the eligibility for the duration of the training period for which people are enrolled?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Ms Beauchamp, I am sure you could tell me how many people are currently accessing JET at the moment. While you are searching for that, is there any data, Ms Griffin, kept on people who are currently accessing the JET program who have study courses of more than 12 months duration? It is my understanding, from people who have talked to us, that a number of people doing apprenticeships and that kind of thing—and longer study courses—are now using JET, and most of them go for longer than 12 months. In the data that you keep, do you have figures on that? I imagine you would have, to make a significant change like taking it from over 12 months to less than 12 months. How many people are currently using JET that have a study course of longer than 12 months?

Ms Beauchamp—Before Ms Griffin answers that, the access to the JET fee assistance is done on an annual basis. Those people who are currently undertaking study and may be halfway through a course or the like will not be affected by the changes that come into place in 2006.

Senator MOORE—Right.

Ms Beauchamp—We do expect people in welfare to work to be looking at short courses that directly relate to returning them to the work force. I think you mentioned a couple of occasions there which I would have thought were covered under apprenticeships. Those sorts of people would not be accessing JET services.

Senator MOORE—Trainee hairdressers, motor mechanics and social workers—it is my understanding that if you were studying social work you would be accessing JET.

Ms Griffin—Possibly, but apprenticeships that attract a wage, Senator, would preclude entitlement to JET child care because it is for income support recipients.

Senator MOORE—Using the term loosely in terms of training, if you are studying social work, if you are studying nursing, if you are studying those kinds of things—

Ms Griffin—Currently, entitlement to JET, though, is assessed on a 12-month basis at a time.

Senator MOORE—But my understanding is that people who are receiving JET apply on an annual basis and then reapply until they complete their training. Until now, that has been, on my understanding, quite a common activity. I am wondering whether we can have data from you that indicates how many people have had JET for subsequent periods of 12 months—which I suppose is not more than a 12-month period but is subsequent periods of 12 months—and would be affected by the change.

Ms Griffin—As Ms Beauchamp said earlier, Senator, people currently engaged in a course of study who are receiving JET child-care assistance, provided they remain eligible at each 12-month period, will be able to conclude that course of study.

Senator MOORE—So that is a particular preclusion in the change—that if you are already getting it, you will not lose it when you finish your 12 months, but if you apply after July 2006 you will not be eligible for JET if—would you be eligible for the first 12 months? Is that degree of detail known?

Ms Griffin—No. We are still working through the micropolicy to that extent.

Senator MOORE—So micropolicy has not been determined but the macropolicy is that you cannot have it for more than 12 months? Right. Do we have any idea how many parents in the last three years used JET child care to study for courses of more than 12 months?

Ms Griffin—Our data indicates that, on average, individuals only access JET for 12 months.

Senator MOORE—How do you get that kind of average? Do you put in every person who has claimed JET for the last few years?

Ms Griffin—I do not know how it is calculated, but that is what I am told.

Senator MOORE—Can we find out how that is calculated, Ms Griffin? Can we put that on notice? I know you will not have that at your fingertips.

Ms Griffin—Yes.

Senator MOORE—How many parents accessed JET child care in the financial year 2003-04?

Ms Griffin—There were 9,462 parents.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any estimates in your planning for how many will apply for JET in 2005-06 and 2006-07?

Ms Griffin—No.

Senator MOORE—Is that because of the impact of welfare to work and the microdetail not being done?

Ms Beauchamp—The period 2005-06 does not relate to the welfare to work reforms.

Senator MOORE—Not even in the transition period?

Ms Beauchamp—No. I think there is a lot of development work to do between now and the implementation. From 1 July 2006 onwards, that will be the case.

Senator MOORE—Minister, I would not ask the department this question: I am trying to work out the basis of this particular program change.

Senator Patterson—Are you asking me a question?

Senator MOORE—Yes, I am asking you a question, Minister. I am sorry. I would not ask the department this question. What was the rationale for this particular program change—reducing the eligibility for periods of 12 months for JET—for a program where people were accessing it for longer?

Senator Patterson—Because the average length was a year.

Senator MOORE—If you are not average, you cannot get JET?

Senator Patterson—This was the general usage of the JET program. That is the advice I am being given.

Senator MOORE—I do not have too many questions on family day care. In the budget press release that the minister gave out, it said that some parents would be given practical support to return to the work force as child carers, which would address some work shortages. In terms of the payments to parents who set up as family day care workers, which was one of the particular things mentioned, where in the budget papers is the payment described, and what kind of allocation is there for payment for new family day care workers who were parents receiving payment? Where would I find that?

Ms Beauchamp—The detail still needs to be worked out. It is part of the overall package of \$266 million and it would be included in the figures. I do not have a breakdown of those figures—

Senator MOORE—You will have but you haven't now?

Ms Beauchamp—From 2006-07.

Senator MOORE—So that is one of the things we are waiting for more definition on?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes, and it will be worked on over the next 12 months.

Senator MOORE—The general figure has been determined but the specific allocation has not been?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any expectation of how many people are expected to take up this particular option?

Ms Beauchamp—Which option?

Senator MOORE—The option of transferring from being a recipient of some form of child care to being a provider through family day care.

Ms Beauchamp—Of becoming a family day care worker?

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—No, I do not have that level of detail.

Senator MOORE—That is one of the things that will be being worked on?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Will the parents need to establish anything less or more than the current family day care arrangement? There are quite clear guidelines for what you have to establish to be a family day care operative now. Is it proposed that this particular group of parents caught up in welfare to work will have any different guidelines in order to prepare to be family day care workers?

Ms Beauchamp—I expect the guidelines will be similar. There will be additional assistance provided through a grant process.

Senator MOORE—As you do not have any particular data or modelling about how many people do it, have you thought about what happens if a lot of people say, ‘This is for me. I’m a carer. It could be a good way of meeting the formal requirements of this particular scheme. I want to be a family day care worker’? Is there a limit to how many people can do it? Is there a cap?

Ms Beauchamp—There is always a cap within the existing budget allocation. If there was a rush on family day care workers, it would be necessary to go back to government and for the government to consider the allocation provided.

Senator MOORE—This question has been asked in lots of other places over these last couple of weeks, but is there a particular education stream for this option? This is one of the more specialised proposals in the whole Welfare to Work program. You are looking at generating occupation within the industry. In terms of the general publicity around this, has there been any particular proposal?

Ms Beauchamp—I think the package specifically refers to a communication and education and awareness raising campaign for family day care workers. It is yet to be costed.

Senator MOORE—And using the existing networks and so on?

Ms Beauchamp—That is correct.

Senator MOORE—Are there any changes being made to the funding methodology to the ‘occupied’ basis under family day care? Are there any changes being made to how that is operating?

Ms Griffin—Senator, the family day care network support payment is paid under the Child Care Support Program, which is the child-care broadband program renamed. As a result of extensive public consultation and the recommendations of the report, done and announced in June 2004, all assistance paid under the Community Support Program will be aligned with utilisation.

In the case of family day care, they currently provide three representative days that indicate their level of usage. Their annual funding is calculated on that. For the first year of the new arrangements, 2005-06, family day care services can choose to retain that methodology or to move to the new utilisation model. It is their choice. From 2006-07 when the department has gathered more extensive utilisation data from the sector, all family day care services and all care types will be moved to the utilisation model.

Senator MOORE—So there is that 12-month period for people to settle?

Ms Griffin—That is right.

Senator MOORE—You have been keeping a close record of all the correspondence from Tanya Plibersek to the department and the minister. There is a copy here of a letter that Ms Plibersek sent to the minister on 15 April 2005. It starts ‘For specific issues and a briefing about these changes’. Ms Plibersek has not received a response to that letter yet. Is that letter familiar?

Ms Beauchamp—We will chase that up.

Senator MOORE—Do you want another copy of the letter?

Ms Beauchamp—I know where to go to if we cannot find it.

Senator MOORE—It particularly relates to the changes, as Ms Griffin has pointed out, and a particular concern about the way that family day care schemes currently receive funding on the basis of care that they have agreed or contracted to provide, rather than on the actual daily occupational basis. That is the key issue. Ms Griffin, have you heard that concern before—that family day care providers are concerned that they could be in financial hardship?

Dr Harmer—Could you repeat that please, Senator?

Senator MOORE—Family day care schemes currently receive funding on the basis of care that they have agreed or contracted to provide, rather than on the actual daily occupied basis.

Ms Griffin—Our definition of ‘occupied places’ is care for which the family is charged. Fee rates and charging practices are for the service to determine. If a family books care and does not use it and the service does not charge them, that is their business decision. Occupied places relate to care charged for.

Senator MOORE—I will be able to pass on to the minister that you will get on to that letter, so that we do not answer the same questions twice. In terms of the family day care process, Ms Beauchamp, you said that the only cap on family day care was a budgetary one. Is that right?

Ms Beauchamp—In the context of the budget measure that was announced this year?

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—We do have to work within that appropriation.

Senator MOORE—But there is no other formal cap on family day care, is there?

Ms Beauchamp—There is a cap on the number of places.

Senator MOORE—But in terms of people training or being part of it, there is no cap? It is just whether you actually can occupy the number of places?

Ms Griffin—They can be as big as they need to be, as long as they are complying with state regulations in relation to—

Senator MOORE—It is a duplicate authority, isn’t it?

Ms Griffin—It is, in terms of staff to child ratios and the physical environment. Those things are regulated by states.

Senator MOORE—The issue that has been raised in discussion is that cuts to operational grants mean that services will lose money whenever parents' child care needs change. Have you heard that complaint?

Ms Griffin—No, Senator.

Dr Harmer—Excuse me. Because I have quite a few people from my communities division sitting in the background who have been there for some hours now. Can I get an estimate of whether we are going to need them tonight or whether I can send them home?

Senator MOORE—I will confer with the chair. There are not many questions in the communities area, but we will get an answer for you.

Dr Harmer—Thank you.

Senator MOORE—They will be so disappointed, if they have been there that long.

Dr Harmer—I suspect they will be just as happy to go home.

Senator MOORE—Ms Griffin, I am interested in whether one particular issue that has been raised in discussion has been raised with you or not. That issue is the question of whether, if a service has extra administrative costs associated with talking to parents and carers—reducing the hours of care from the number first agreed to—that service will have their grant reduced.

Ms Griffin—The family day care network support payment is in recognition of the deal of work involved in coordinating a group of carers in their own homes. The new funding arrangements provide more assistance where there are more places being utilised within a scheme.

Senator MOORE—So the negotiations between individual services and the carers—

Ms Griffin—Is the purpose of this funding. It is to facilitate a coordination group to enable that to occur, including recruitment and training of family day carers, support, home visits. That is the purpose of this funding.

Senator MOORE—Of this funding change?

Ms Griffin—It is the purpose of the funding, full stop, but it is now being aligned to actual utilisation.

Senator MOORE—I have some very straightforward questions on family day care, so I will run through those quickly while we are waiting to see what is happening.

CHAIR—We are investigating whether there are a few questions in outcome 5. Senator Allison also has some questions in this area of child care, so we will let you know as soon as we know.

Senator MOORE—What is the process family day care schemes need to go through to apply for additional places? We have been through the process for other services. How does a family day care scheme apply?

Ms Powell—The application process is the same.

Senator MOORE—So it is exactly the same—if they have capacity, they ask for extra places and they wait until they are available. When I asked a question about how and when

child-care centres apply, the answer was that there was no standard time and it was in consultation with your state offices. When there was a capacity change, they contacted you. Is that the same in family day care?

Ms Powell—There were a large number of family day care places made available as a result of the budget before last.

Senator MOORE—Yes. That was a significant vote at that budget period, wasn't it?

Ms Powell—That is right. They went through the advertising and applying process.

Senator MOORE—At one time.

Ms Powell—Yes, that is right. Since that time, from time to time they put in to our state offices expressions of interest regarding having places allocated.

Senator MOORE—It is not every quarter? There is no set formal round?

Ms Powell—No.

Senator MOORE—What is the criteria for determining applications?

Ms Powell—The criteria for allocating places when they are available is again based on relative need.

Senator MOORE—That is from the information that you already have on where they are available?

Ms Powell—Yes, that is right.

Senator MOORE—Were all the new family day care places funded in 2004-05 allocated?

Ms Powell—All of the requests for places were met. There was no outstanding demand.

Senator MOORE—Were some returned?

Ms Powell—I am not sure about that.

Senator MOORE—Can you take that on notice?

Ms Powell—Sure.

Senator MOORE—Do you have any record of the current number of places being sought?

Ms Powell—Again, that is a question that Ms Plibersek has asked.

Senator MOORE—Have any family day care places been requested and refused? Has there been a request similar to the one we had from the West End Child Care Centre—that they wanted extra places?

Ms Powell—I would have to take that on notice.

Senator MOORE—Regarding extra child care for non-working parents, which is the other side of access to child care, what is the policy rationale underlying the increase in the number of hours for which parents who are neither working nor studying can claim CCB?

Ms Powell—Are you referring to the increase from 20 to 24 hours in the last budget?

Senator MOORE—Yes.

Ms Powell—That was a reflection of the fact that there are some people who work less than 15 hours a week but are still working. We wanted to ensure that they still had access to CCB.

Senator MOORE—So they are still workers, but they did not have that process?

Ms Powell—That is right.

Senator MOORE—Was this in terms of an expenditure priority? When you were doing your discussions, was this particular area seen as a priority of need?

Ms Powell—The change was made to the work and study or training test, to reflect the focus on work for use of child care.

Senator MOORE—Is the current policy that parents who are working have a greater claim to taxpayer subsidised child care than non-working parents?

Ms Powell—Could you repeat that, please?

Senator MOORE—Is the current policy that working parents have a greater claim to child-care places than people who are not working?

Ms Powell—They are given priority under the guidelines.

Senator MOORE—Which goes back to our ongoing discussion about the priority list.

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—When does the change to 24 hours become effective?

Ms Powell—Legislation will have to be passed to bring it into effect.

Senator MOORE—That is a legislative basis. Do you have any idea what the demand will be for the increase in child-care hours as a result of this policy initiative?

Ms Powell—I cannot quantify that, other than to say that we know that 90 per cent of child-care places are used for work related purposes.

Senator MOORE—Is the percentage of child-care benefit used for non-work-related work or study expected to increase? On page 187 of the FaCS PBS it says that 10 per cent of CCB is paid to parents who do not access child care. That is what you said—10 per cent of people are accessing CCB for other than work or study related purposes—so is there an expectation that the percentage of CCB use for non-work-related work or study will increase?

Ms Beauchamp—Given the focus of the measures on welfare to work and the work first approach—

Senator MOORE—The expectation will be that the focus on work will be the priority?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—What is the allocation for the budget measure for extra child care for non-working parents—the increase to 24 hours?

Ms Beauchamp—It is included in part of the package, but it has not been separately identified.

Senator MOORE—It is part of the bulk package>

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Once again it is a definition issue, which will become clear over the next period of time?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Does the department rely exclusively on the parent self-identification for the reasons that they need child care? Is that the only methodology of assessment?

Ms Powell—Centrelink administer that. My understanding of the process is that when parents claim CCB—

Senator MOORE—They are asked why.

Ms Powell—and likewise when they apply, they are asked, yes.

Senator MOORE—In terms of any relationship between a department and a client, the expectation is that the client will be totally truthful on the form and the onus is with them. That would be how you would see it?

Ms Powell—I think that is how it is. The form that they sign is, of course, a legal declaration.

Senator MOORE—Yes, and there are penalties. In terms of wage rises for child-care workers—our ongoing discussion about the impact of wage rises—does the department monitor what is happening with wage cases in the child-care industry across the country? Is that part of the standard review?

Ms Powell—We have an awareness at a general level of what is happening.

Senator MOORE—Are you aware of the number of outstanding wage claims at the moment, and for which states and territories?

Ms Powell—I am aware of the recent decision for wage rises for child-care workers in Victoria and the ACT. I believe that there have been similar claims lodged—or they are under consideration—in other states.

Senator MOORE—In terms of the impact of the claims in the ACT and Victoria, has the department done any work on the extra annual staff costs for long day care centres?

Ms Powell—We do not monitor the annual staff costs of centres. I am aware that the impact will vary, because some centres already pay above award rates or they have different staff ratios that are able to be changed. There is a whole a range of strategies. Of course, many centres were aware that the wage rise was coming and have adjusted their fees accordingly over a period of time.

Senator MOORE—But the department does not formally monitor the cost impact of wage cases?

Ms Powell—Not in a formal sense.

Senator MOORE—Have you done any work on the annual financial impact of the wage rise on long day care centres, family day care centres and after school or out of school care? That is not a project that the department is involved in?

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Senator MOORE—Have you done any work on modelling the flow-on cost to parents of child care?

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Ms Powell—That would be a business decision for the centres to make.

Senator MOORE—In terms of the policy side of the department, and the stuff in the budget papers about the rise in child care and those things, is there a research capacity for doing work on the impact on families of the cost of child care? Is that the kind of work that the department has done in the past or could do in the future?

Ms Beauchamp—It is the kind of work we could do, yes.

Senator MOORE—It is my understanding that in various areas of social policy FaCS does do very specialised research about the impact of the economy, the minister's comments about the impact of the booming economy on child-care needs—all of those things. That is something that FaCS has done in other areas. But specifically on the impact of the cost of child care on families, that is not a research project that you have done or are considering doing?

Ms Powell—There is data around on CCB and the cost of child care. We do not do any special modelling on things like expectations of changes that might, for example, flow on from the wage case.

Senator MOORE—When you say there is data around, where is the data from, Ms Powell?

Ms Powell—The child-care census has related information.

Senator MOORE—Some of that is in the child-care census.

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Was it in the 2002 census?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—There are other things that impact on the affordability of child care, too, and what parents and families are paying. If we are going to look at one side of the equation we certainly have to look at the impact of CCB, the tax rebate and other things as well.

Senator MOORE—Yes. It is looking at the whole picture. As the usage of child care has increased so significantly over the periods—and we had those figures earlier—it seems to be an area of research that could have some real value in looking to the future.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Has the department modelled the family income thresholds at which it becomes uneconomic for two-parent families to have both parents working? Is that kind of modelling done? You have working parents, age of children—one child below five. We have been asking a lot of questions about kids under five.

Dr Harmer—I do not think we have. If there was such modelling to be undertaken now, it would probably need to be driven by DEWR, who have the working aged payments.

Ms Powell—Yes, I think so.

Senator MOORE—It could be driven by DEWR, but would you be the policy department to do the research, Dr Harmer?

Dr Harmer—As you said earlier, because of our links with universities and various contracts, we do have a great deal of capacity for research. I am not sure that one would be our central business, given that we have no income support payments for the working aged any more.

Senator MOORE—The core question is about when something becomes uneconomic, so people make choices based on—

Dr Harmer—It is similar to the working aged question.

Senator MOORE—Yes. My understanding, Minister, is that in the past you have made statements that you are monitoring the effect of the cost of child care on parents and also the impact on families making that decision. Is that something you have made a public statement about?

Ms Powell—Sorry, we missed what you said.

Senator MOORE—She has lost me again?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Minister, it is my understanding that you have made comments about looking at and monitoring the impact of the economic situations of families and the cost of child care—with people making choices about work and child care.

Senator Patterson—When did I say that?

Senator MOORE—In various places the minister has said she would monitor the effect of the cost of child care in the community.

Senator Patterson—Who said that?

Senator MOORE—My file note says that.

Senator Patterson—You keep referring to these files. What are these file notes everyone keeps talking about? You tell me where I have said it.

Senator MOORE—We will follow that up, Minister.

Senator Patterson—I am not saying I have not said it, but I do not want you to put words in my mouth, because it is not very hygienic, Senator Moore.

Senator MOORE—In terms of the process of planning for child-care needs in the community and also looking at where you need to have child care available, it would seem that knowing what income levels parents have and what fees they have to pay and what impact that has on their choices would be a natural thing for you to study.

Ms Beauchamp—It is not a static process. There has been strong wages growth, for example.

Senator MOORE—For many years.

Ms Beauchamp—For many years, yes, and it really depends on the number of children you have, the sort of income you have, what you pay out in child-care fees, what you are accessing in CCB and child-care tax rebate. There are a range of factors that influence the affordability of child care for a particular family.

Ms Powell—We do keep information on the cost of CCB, the cost of child care, the gaps, and we look at that in relation to family income.

Senator MOORE—I knew you had to have that data as part of the work you do, but I am interested in the use of that data and whether you have done research on the impact of changes and so on.

Senator Patterson—I think they are having the same difficulty as I had with the question you asked me. Maybe it is the way you are asking the question.

Senator MOORE—It could be. My file note has just updated that it was just after the ACT and Victorian wage rise that you made a statement that you would monitor the effect of the wage rises and the cost of child care.

Senator Patterson—That means I would look at it. It does not mean I was going to do research on it.

Ms Beauchamp—We do monitor these sorts of things through the census, and it does change.

Senator MOORE—The last census would not have picked up the last wage rises.

Ms Beauchamp—No. That probably would not have picked up the child-care tax rebate or the other family assistance measures that have been announced since then.

Senator MOORE—No. That reinforces the issue about the currency of data in terms of the process.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—It is just difficult to see, when this area is very much an area of flux in terms of usage, availability and expectations, why there would not need to be some kind of specific research into all these factors that are having an impact on the whole industry. But at this stage the whole area of preplanning and monitoring and making decisions around a family's income is not a research element of the department?

Ms Powell—We monitor affordability of child care by looking at CCB, child-care costs and issues related to things like disposable income of families at different income levels.

Senator Patterson—Disposable income, family benefits, the sum of \$7,000 on average that families now get, the \$2,000 they now get in child-care assistance, on average, before you take into account the child-care benefit—all those—and the fact that their wages have increased significantly since 1996.

Senator MOORE—That reinforces the point, Minister.

Senator Patterson—They are the sorts of things we might look at, yes.

Senator MOORE—That reinforces just how dynamic the issue is.

Senator Patterson—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Particularly when we are looking at a significant increase in the use of the area. What do you do with the data?

Dr Harmer—Senator Moore, I think one of the reasons we are struggling is that we have a variety of sources of information, both formal and informal, that we use to give policy advice to government about changes in demand and affordability and all those sorts of things. Those include: information from the interaction of our state office people with providers and parents; the HILDA research survey that the University of Melbourne did for us, which picks up some of those things; ABS data, which, clearly, we look at; our census; and other things. There are many sources of information, including some of our links with other universities. We have links with ANU and the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. They do not have specific research focused on exactly these questions, but they no doubt do research which we tap into. So I think we are struggling because there is such a wide variety of sources of information that we piece together to provide policy advice.

Senator MOORE—That really reinforces the need to have some sense of who the authoritative source for getting up-to-date information on the affordability of child care is. That is the crux of the question. Over the last period of time, as the minister enunciated, there have been so many impacts on this industry. My particular range of questions started with the specific issue of the ongoing wage increases in the industry, about which there has been much written in the media. From your point of view, where is the authoritative source for monitoring—not just having a look at but monitoring—the affordability of child care across the country now?

Ms Powell—The principal source of that data is the child-care census, together with ABS figures and the HILDA research.

Senator MOORE—On that basis, Ms Powell, it is troubling me that we have had the specific issue of wage rises in the industry. We have been talking for at least 10 years about the cost of labour in this industry. We have now gone through a process of increasing that slowly, state by state. If anyone was asking, ‘Where is the cost of child care now?’ the most authoritative data that we have now is from 2002, before any of this happened. The next one we will get at the end of 2005 will still not pick up this range of child care, so where do we go to get information?

Ms Powell—The information on the cost of child care is reported in the *Report on government services 2005*, released in January of this year, drawing on the 2004 census.

Senator MOORE—Which I still do not think picked up the wage cases.

Ms Powell—No.

Senator MOORE—I am sure that the department is aware that the peak child-care bodies have been doing their own research and publicising it, and that the view of Child Care Australia is that the wage rise will lead to a hike in fees of \$25 to \$30 per child per week in a long day care centre. I am sure you have seen that information. In the discussions you have had with the various consultative groups, was that the kind of figure being discussed?

Ms Powell—Those issues have not been discussed in any of the consultative groups that I have met with. It is not a topic that they have raised with us.

Senator Patterson—Senator, some child-care centres have already factored in increases in wages. Others pay above award wages. As I said, people are now getting more assistance and child-care benefits than they ever have before. They are getting more family assistance—on average, \$7,000 a year—and from this year onwards they have access to the child-care tax rebate.

Senator MOORE—There are government initiatives that have factored that in in terms of increased costs as well, responding to that?

Senator Patterson—It is more assistance for families to afford child care. The child-care tax rebate is new.

Dr Harmer—That probably would not have been factored in.

Senator MOORE—Minister, have you received any other estimates of the impact of the wage rise from child-care industry reps? Has that been raised with you?

Senator Patterson—I would say no, but somebody may have written me a letter and made some comment in a paragraph there, but—

Senator MOORE—But it has not been a key area.

Senator Patterson—it is not an issue that has been foremost in discussions.

Senator MOORE—Do you have your own views about the cost of the wage rise to normal fees—

Senator Patterson—As I indicated to you, some child-care centres have factored it in already. Some child-care centres pay above award wages. We have increased assistance to families to make child care more affordable—the latest being a child-care tax rebate up to \$4,000, brought forward by six months for people currently accessing child care and rebatable when they put their tax return in for 2006-07.

Senator MOORE—Minister, we had long discussions about that particular policy at the last estimates, and it was seen as coming in—

Senator Patterson—What did you say? Never coming in?

Senator MOORE—When it was coming in. We did not say ‘never’.

Senator Patterson—But it has been brought forward by six months, so people are getting more assistance than they would otherwise have.

Senator MOORE—I know that the Child Care Australia people met with people from your office earlier this year. As part of their media comments they said that they had met with the minister’s office. Was the issue of the impact of the increase in child care an agenda item at that discussion?

Senator Patterson—I would have to go back and have a look at the notes.

Senator MOORE—Can we ask you to do that?

Senator Patterson—No. They raise a range of issues. I know the taxpayer pays me, but I do not think that I need to go over every issue that is raised with me by everybody I meet with. I could be spending my life going back through my diaries.

Senator MOORE—Minister, it is just in terms of the significance of this issue. The industry was waiting for the results of these wage cases and, throughout the media and throughout child-care discussions that were had, the impact of the wage cases was discussed.

Senator Patterson—We are giving families up to \$4,000 more annually through a child-care tax rebate to assist them with out-of-pocket expenses not covered by the CCB.

Senator MOORE—We accept that you are. We accept that the government has brought forward a number of initiatives looking at the cost of child care. My question related to what the particular expected increase in child-care costs was going to be as a result of the wage cases. It seems that the department, while having a look at these things, has not come up with their own figure in terms of what that cost will be.

Senator Patterson—As I said to you, one of the issues is that some services have already factored that in. Some services pay above award wages already.

Senator MOORE—My understanding is that in other parts of the department they have come up with averages. We heard tonight that in other areas there have been averages worked out about different things, but there has been no average in terms of what the—

Senator Patterson—What do you mean, averages have been worked out in other areas?

Senator MOORE—There was a previous question—

Senator Patterson—You tell me!

Senator MOORE—where we worked out that there was an average impact. It has just gone from my mind, but—

Senator Patterson—The person that does file notes might sort of zoom one up through the ether.

Senator MOORE—No, they have not, Minister. I forget what the average impact was, but it was something.

Dr Harmer—The reason we are not focused on calculating precisely what individual elements of cost do is that the government does not fund, on a formula basis, the cost of child care for families—so individual elements of increase do not need to be factored in. The government makes a contribution to the cost of child care through various sources: as the minister said, the family tax benefit, the child-care rebate and a whole range of methods. We have been advising government about the additions in assistance to make child care more affordable over a substantial number of years.

Because it is not formula driven, as a department, we do not feel that there is a need to precisely measure every element about how it is increasing child care. We keep an eye on it. It would clearly be a factor in the way we advise government, but the government has responded to our advice on assisting families through the child-care rebate et cetera. If it were a formula driven thing where the government has chosen to pick up a particular component or

a proportion or whatever, which it is not, then it would be difficult for the department to argue that it does not monitor every impact of everything, but we do not do that.

Senator MOORE—I accept that, Dr Harmer. In terms of the balancing of the effectiveness of the child-care system in our country and the accessibility to it, the costs involved are important to families making that decision.

Dr Harmer—Indeed.

Senator MOORE—It has been identified as a key element of future government decisions in terms of access to child care and, in that case, the cost has specifically been built in. As you look at the return to work of people, the cost of their child care is one of the key elements of that whole budget strategy. I was thinking that, as there has been one stream of increase in child-care costs—which is publicly known and has been calculated by some industry groups as being \$30 a week, which is major—that was one area that may have generated some specific research. You have made it clear that it has not and the minister has said that it is not something that has been raised with her in a very significant way. People may have said things but I take it, not quoting you accurately, Minister, that it has not been a major concern that people have raised with you.

Senator Patterson—People raise a range of issues. The thing that has been raised with me most strongly is regulation of child care and the fact that Victoria has not regulated outside school hours care and Victoria and New South Wales have not regulated family day care. The accreditation and quality council and other people have raised it with me. There are other issues that people raise more often—

Senator MOORE—That are more memorable.

Senator Patterson—and more strongly.

Senator MOORE—That is what we are asking.

Senator Patterson—I do not think people understand that. If we are going to pay child-care workers a reasonable remuneration for the work that they do, there will be increased costs. The government is making an increased contribution through, for example, the child-care tax rebate. Parents will pay an increase because of that but, as I said, many of the services have indicated that they have incorporated that or that they already pay above award wages.

Senator MOORE—We had that information at the last estimates, Minister. We are talking about the preparation for the impact of this change. At the last estimates we talked at length about preparation in the industry for the impact of the wage decisions. Since then we have had the wage decisions. I was following up on whether that has been a major issue, but the department and the minister have clarified that at this stage it is not. You are keeping an eye on it again. My file note has magically said that my average response was to the use of JET for 12 months. I knew that there had been a response.

Senator Patterson—It must be nice to have a disembodied person out there producing notes for you.

Senator MOORE—It is magical, Minister.

Senator Patterson—It didn't happen when I was in estimates!

Senator MOORE—My next line of questions, which is a natural follow on, relates to the number of child-care workers and the training. We looked at this at the last estimates as well. We looked at the wage cases, followed by what is happening. What data does FaCS have on the number of child-care workers leaving the child-care sector? Do you keep data on the ins and outs of the sector?

Ms Powell—No.

Senator MOORE—The AIRC assessment that the sector is facing ‘a critical shortage of qualified staff’ was given wide publicity, and I am sure the media monitoring which you heard about yesterday would have picked that up. Is that an assessment that FaCS agrees with?

Ms Powell—We are working with state governments on a project looking at child-care workers, trying to get a good understanding of what is happening in the industry: is there a problem; what the nature of any problem might be, and what measures may be worth considering to encourage retention and entry into the child-care work force.

Senator MOORE—Because there have also been widely publicised comments by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the AIRC that there is a severe shortage of child-care workers across the industry. Your research will be looking particularly at that as well?

Ms Powell—Looking particularly at the reasons behind that, too.

Senator MOORE—DEWR’s data says that there is a statewide shortage of child-care workers in all states. Have they shared that data with you? They obviously seek data from you a lot. We have heard about it in the workplace. Have you sought that data from them and have they graciously given it to you?

Ms Powell—I have had some discussions with DEWR about areas where we might work together to encourage people to consider child-care work as a career.

Senator MOORE—Promotion?

Ms Powell—That is right. I know that DEWR is doing some work in that area. Also the Department of Education, Science and Training through its VET program has targeted child-care workers specifically.

Senator MOORE—Is the project to which you referred recent, Ms Powell?

Ms Powell—It is being done at the moment.

Senator MOORE—It is currently being done?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Do you have a time frame for that?

Ms Powell—The lead on the project is being taken by Victoria.

Senator MOORE—As your state office in Victoria?

Ms Powell—No, by the Victorian state government.

Senator MOORE—The same one the minister just referred to?

Ms Powell—Yes, it is being done collaboratively with all states and territories. I believe that they are hoping to provide a report to the children's services subcommittee on child care later this year.

Senator MOORE—Calendar year?

Ms Powell—Calendar year, yes.

Senator MOORE—In terms of the shortage of child-care workers, is this the kind of project where we are looking at how many more are needed to meet a full demand across the sector?

Ms Powell—I am not sure that the project is going to that level of detail. It is looking more at barriers and incentives and the encouragement that might be required.

Senator MOORE—Has the department done any work themselves internally about how many more child-care workers are actually needed across the country, through the advisory group or anywhere else? Has that been an issue that has come up?

Ms Powell—I do not think we have done any work directly.

Senator MOORE—Has the department or the minister had any correspondence about this labour shortage from child-care centres, workers or peak bodies?

Ms Powell—I do not know.

Senator MOORE—Not that you are aware of?

Ms Powell—None that springs to mind.

Senator MOORE—Minister, is that in your notes or is that going back too far—whether there has been any specific correspondence about the labour shortage in the industry? Once again, if it was a significant issue that you remember, fine.

Senator Patterson—Senator, I remember issues where a large number of people write about an issue.

Senator MOORE—A single issue.

Senator Patterson—There may have been some letters on it but it is not the sort of thing that—

Senator MOORE—Okay.

Senator Patterson—There are some issues where you have a lot of letters from colleagues and stakeholders but this is not one of them.

Dr Harmer—A number of those questions imply a role that the Commonwealth government has not chosen to take in child care, which is to be the overall controller or manager of the supply. The role of the Australian government in child care is to help parents afford the costs and not to control or manage the supply, nor to provide assistance with the costs of it in a formula based way et cetera. It is to help families afford the cost of child care. That positioning means that there are certain things we need to do. We need to keep an eye on these things but we do not feel responsible or collect data for how the supply is going et cetera. It is obviously a policy interest to us but it is not a focus because we are not responsible for the supply.

Senator MOORE—I am looking at the outcomes to see how that works, because I thought the second point of the agency outcome under child care was:

- promote, support and enhance quality child care;
- improve access to child care for children and families with special or additional needs; and
- support equitable access to child care for children and families in areas and/or circumstances where services would not otherwise be available.

Dr Harmer—That is right, and that is through our mechanism to make sure it is affordable. That is how we ensure access to it. We make sure that parents have the money to pay for it and that lower income parents share in it, which is the equitable access et cetera.

Senator MOORE—It may be a misconception, Dr Harmer, but as I said earlier, in terms of the authoritative area for policy to do with child-care issues—

Dr Harmer—I am not being defensive but I am trying to explain.

Senator MOORE—No, I am just looking at the focus.

Dr Harmer—I was worried that you were thinking the department was somehow neglectful in its research and analysis part by not doing all these things. I was explaining to you that because of the government's positioning in the way it chooses to provide assistance for child care, we do not feel a need—as we might if the government, for example, took responsibility for supply—to be keeping tabs on all of those things.

Senator MOORE—It leads on to this question: what role does the department play in work force planning, monitoring and addressing the shortage of qualified workers and overall shortage of child-care workers across Australia?

Dr Harmer—We have an interest but it is not a direct interest because we are not formula driven. We have an input. If there is emerging a shortage of supply of workers, in our interaction with Education, Science and Training, for example, the minister and I, with my colleagues, would be talking to DEST about trying to make this an area of an effort which we have been doing—

Senator MOORE—Which you are doing.

Dr Harmer—and they are doing.

Senator MOORE—In terms of acknowledging the issue, that has happened?

Dr Harmer—Yes. We would be realising that there is an impact in that area but not getting ourselves directly involved in taking responsibility for, for example, the supply of workers, which we do not.

Senator MOORE—It is more professional involvement rather than direct involvement?

Dr Harmer—It is acknowledging that there is a link but it is not taking responsibility for it directly.

Senator MOORE—Ms Powell indicated that the work that is currently being done is looking at the coordination of attracting people, training people—all those things—and, as you have just said, Dr Harmer, discussion with your counterparts in the department of education. Has there been any formal approach from your department to Education about the

need to create more opportunities for training? We have talked about the general things. Has there been a formal response to training as an area of key shortage?

Ms Beauchamp—We have spoken to the department of education and training, yes, particularly in the context of the Welfare to Work reforms.

Senator MOORE—With the anticipated growth that could be there?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—How long does it take to train a child-care worker?

Ms Beauchamp—There are different periods and different levels.

Senator MOORE—One of the issues we have had in other agencies has been the length of time it takes to train a professional for which you have a shortage now. My understanding is that there are different levels of child-care work.

Senator Patterson—Family day care takes a different length of time to long day care, and it depends on which level of training you have for long day care. There are ranges, depending on whether the person has a certificate. Some of them have more than a certificate and—

Senator MOORE—Yes. There is now formal regulation from state levels about what qualifications people have to have and so on.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator Patterson—If they are regulated.

Senator MOORE—Where they are regulated there are these issues. There has been formal discussion in the sense of approaches between your department and Education on those issues. Is FaCS aware that the department of immigration has had applications for working visas from child-care coordinators who have not been able to recruit workers in Australia, and had them knocked back because DIMIA does not have particular information about a skill shortage in this area?

Ms Powell—My understanding is that child care was identified in the last round of announcements of particular areas to be targeted for skilled migration.

Senator MOORE—Had you been aware of issues previously where people had wanted to come to Australia and work in child care and that was not a key priority at that stage?

Ms Powell—I personally have not been in the job long enough to have known that.

Dr Harmer—It may have been the case in the past, but Ms Powell is saying it is not now.

Senator MOORE—Is there any particular concern or issue for your department about overseas trained child-care people?

Ms Powell—The training of child-care workers is normally the area of responsibility of state governments.

Senator Patterson—Is that a responsibility of DIMIA or DEST? Who does the equivalence?

Dr Harmer—DEST does the training.

Senator Patterson—DEST does the testing of the equivalence of the training.

Senator MOORE—Yes. In terms of DIMIA, it is now an area where people can say that there is a skill shortage? The qualifications and processes would be accredited through DEST and then state governments have their own particular issues.

Dr Harmer—It is regulated by state governments.

Senator MOORE—A lot of them have not only professional training but child safety issues as well, the people who work there, so that is regulated at the state level?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator Patterson—That is why I think Dr Harmer keeps emphasising that what we are doing is assisting parents with the costs of child care through the CCB, child-care tax rebate and the other program which supports areas like family day care, in-home care et cetera.

Senator MOORE—That continuing coordination role which is the focus of the government department, but it is establishing which group is accountable for what.

Dr Harmer—Yes. The responsibility, as you can see, is divided across a range of jurisdictions, including Commonwealth, state, different Commonwealth departments et cetera.

Senator MOORE—Yes, and that is part of the whole-of-government approach.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator MOORE—Ms Powell, you have indicated that there have been recent changes with immigration. Has FaCS had any specific discussion with the department of immigration about changes to laws or procedures regarding child-care workers working in Australia and people from overseas wanting to train as child-care workers in Australia. Has there been any interdepartmental formal discussion about those issues?

Ms Powell—There have been some very general discussions about the issue. Those sorts of formal discussions would happen again with the states as they are the regulators in this area.

Senator MOORE—In terms of the general discussion about the shortage of labour in the industry, that being DEST and AIHW, have low pay and conditions of service in the area been among the things that have been discussed?

Ms Powell—Not that I am aware of.

Senator MOORE—So FaCS has had no particular discussions where that has been an agenda item?

Ms Powell—No.

Senator MOORE—Minister, I hesitate to ask but I am going to jump right in. Have you received any letters on the issue of low pay or conditions of service? Is that an issue? Once again, in terms of that threshold, has that been an issue that has led to significant correspondence with you?

CHAIR—Senator, I think a lot of these questions are really getting down to the minutiae that budget estimates are not about. Asking the minister repeatedly to recall every detail of meetings and every detail of correspondence is really—

Senator MOORE—Senator, I do apologise. I am not asking if you recall every meeting. I am asking for key issues to do with the industry that have led to people in the community contacting the minister with their concerns.

Senator Patterson—Senator, I do not answer every single letter that somebody sends to me.

Senator MOORE—I understand that, Minister.

Senator Patterson—I answer all my colleagues. I answer the major stakeholders. I answer letters where I think it is appropriate, where there may be some quite personal issue. But the department answers some letters on my behalf, so I do not always get an absolute view of a level, but I would be advised, I am sure, if there were—

Dr Harmer—We would inform the minister if there was a loud cry out there.

Senator MOORE—Dr Harmer, that is exactly my point, and I hope I have not belaboured the point too much.

Senator Patterson—You have a bit because the thing is that it does not stick out in any of the letters I get. If it is an issue, usually you have a lot of colleagues—you do not get just letters that the department answers; your colleagues start to write to you. I write to all my colleagues, irrespective of their political party. They have not been issues that I have had a flood of letters about.

Senator MOORE—Minister, I accept that response.

Senator Patterson—I get a very clear idea if there is an issue out there in the community: (a) people talk to me about it and (b) I get a lot of letters on it.

Senator MOORE—Minister, I hope that was the question I asked. I thought that was the line of my questioning.

Senator Patterson—I do not judge issues just on that as a measure. There are other things over which I would address an issue. But I do take notice of those sorts of things.

Senator MOORE—Minister, I have taken notice of your answers about the fact that those things were not significant: the issues of labour shortage, the issue of wage cases and conditions and also another one which I have just forgotten, and that may come to me.

Senator Patterson—I am not saying people do not write to me about them but they are not—

Senator MOORE—It has not raised itself as a major issue as a result of the volume of your correspondence. Is that fair?

Senator Patterson—The thing I would most have people be concerned about is that people be paid appropriately for the level of work that they do as child-care workers. If anything came out of the letters, that would be the issue that would be most common; a common thread over the time I have had child care.

Senator MOORE—That passed the test which I was seeking—

Senator Patterson—It is not all that long, I must say. I have only had child care since the last election, which was November.

Dr Harmer—Perhaps the reason, Senator, that the minister has not been getting a wave of letters is because those in the industry that understand this know that the minister does not have all the levers; the levers that are required to be adjusted to deal with it are spread all over the place in different departments and in state government et cetera.

Senator MOORE—I have made a list of what was raised as a significant issue and what not. Child-care planning: you said earlier, Ms Powell, that we are going to get the minutes of the advisory committee planning groups from now on. Can you tell us how many times these committees have met in the last 12 months?

Ms Powell—In the last 12 months?

Ms Beauchamp—There was a question on notice in February and we provided that information following the last estimates process.

Ms Powell—It has also been asked by Ms Plibersek.

Senator MOORE—And we are going to get the minutes from now on. Minister, do you attend those meetings?

Senator Patterson—No.

Senator MOORE—Do you attend any of those meetings of the formal advisory group on child care?

Senator Patterson—No.

Senator MOORE—As a result of those—

Senator Patterson—Which committee are you talking about?

Senator MOORE—This is the state, territory planning advisory committees?

Senator Patterson—No. I do not think I have ever been expected to attend.

Dr Harmer—You are not supposed to.

Senator MOORE—A straight question, Minister, and you said no.

Senator Patterson—I have recently been to a child-care one. I wanted to make sure it was not the one that I had just been to.

Senator MOORE—In terms of child-care shortages, is there a regular briefing to the minister provided by the department specifically on that issue?

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Senator MOORE—It is part of general briefings but there is no particular briefing format on child-care shortages?

Ms Beauchamp—No, there is not.

Senator MOORE—We touched on this earlier, Ms Beauchamp, about prospective child-care operators seeking advice and information from the department. Is there any particular information to which prospective child-care operators have access apart from the web site?

Ms Beauchamp—Aside from the web site?

Senator MOORE—Yes, in terms of the public domain. You can get into the web site.

Ms Beauchamp—There is a range of information available from a number of sources including the *Report on Government Services*. There is population data; there is data on the number of children zero to five; there is information available on number of places that are in existence, number of services, the names of services. There is quite a range of information that is publicly available.

Senator MOORE—There is no specific access so that prospective child-care owners can contact the department and get particular information about demographic forecasts or planning or zoning aspects that the department would hold?

Ms Powell—They can contact the department and get information on population and on child-care places.

Senator MOORE—On the current need, current access?

Ms Powell—No, on places that exist.

Senator MOORE—Can you tell me how many written requests for information have been made by prospective providers or existing providers, specific requests.

Ms Powell—That is a question that Ms Plibersek has asked.

Senator MOORE—Is that a 9 July question?

Ms Powell—Yes.

Senator MOORE—What data is made available as a matter of course to prospective child-care operators by state branches of FAOs?

Ms Powell—By FAOs? I would be surprised if there were any. FaCS would be the source of information.

Senator MOORE—The FAO is not an information source for prospective providers?

Ms Powell—No. They may well contact them but I do not think they would get any information.

Senator MOORE—Are you able to provide us with the number of requests from individual providers, such as ABC?

Ms Powell—That is a question Ms Plibersek has asked as well.

Senator MOORE—A 9 July question?

Ms Powell—Yes.

CHAIR—Senator Moore, it has really got to the stage now where this has become just an exercise of familiarisation with the process.

Senator MOORE—For whom, Senator?

CHAIR—I have not spoken to Senator Patterson about this, but if there is a request for familiarisation of process, of how the whole show works, I am sure the minister would facilitate a briefing to explain how it works in preference to going through, line by line, how this does that and this does that, here in budget estimates, when it is meant to be related to the budget and the estimates surrounding it. That might be of assistance to abbreviate what now seems to be a very long, drawn-out procedure of very inconsequential questions.

Senator MOORE—Chair, I do not agree that they are inconsequential. They are all linked to the budget in terms of the particular headings about which I have asked questions this evening. They have all been subject to questions which I have asked at previous estimates.

CHAIR—But there is someone is sitting on the other end of a computer feeding through, ‘But ask the minister this; but ask the minister that. Has she read this letter? Has she spoken to that person?’ and so forth. Those sorts of questions do not relate specifically to the budget—asking about conversations, meetings, this, that and everything else. If it relates to a line in the budget, that is fine, but we are getting down to the minutiae now. It is something that is quite extraordinary.

Senator MOORE—Chair, can you give me a specific example of where a question I have asked tonight does not lead specifically to questions about budget planning, about looking at the impact on child care and how the child-care system works, leading from the budget to the Welfare to Work process?

CHAIR—I can give you a number.

Senator MOORE—I do not want to take up the department’s time.

CHAIR—I can give you a number, but the number of times the minister has been asked about details of meetings, of letters, of correspondence, I think is now getting a little bit beyond a joke. Also, there were a number of questions that related to the centres themselves. The setting of fees is not done by the Commonwealth government. It is not done in this room. We need to try and progress. I understood that we were going to have about an hour and a half on this subject after dinner and we are now up to two hours 20 minutes or thereabouts.

Senator MOORE—Chair, I will not enter into a debate because I do not think it is appropriate for me to debate here at this process, and I will not hold the department up on this, but we will discuss this later, because I have sat through many hours of estimates where people have asked just as detailed questions as the ones I have asked tonight and this is the first time that someone has been pulled up before they have finished with their area.

I take the point and I do apologise for taking up the time of the department. I am responding to specific questions that I was requested to ask on this particular budget issue of child care, particularly in terms of planning for future needs of child care and how the system works. But I will not go there.

CHAIR—I am not trying to stop you, Senator.

Senator MOORE—I have four more questions relating to a particular issue around CCB and I will ask for the indulgence of the department while I ask those four questions.

CHAIR—Senator, I want to make it clear that I am not trying to stop you asking questions. In fact, quite the reverse: I am encouraging you to ask questions. But if you could make them pertain to the budget, it would be a big help, instead of asking questions that are just being fed through by someone on the other end of the computer.

Senator MOORE—In terms of access to CCB for people who are going through the now preschool process, there has been debate in the community about this area. Is there any process within the department to look at Australian children below school age having access to minimum education programs and curricula? This pertains to the payment of CCB into the

future budget and whether this has been a consideration for the number of states that now have formal preschool elements for kids who are five, who under normal elements would be—if they were accessing formal child care—going to a child-care centre. There has been significant interest and questions have been asked about the role of the child-care benefit and whether any consideration has been given to that particular program extending to the preschool years.

Ms Beauchamp—The minister is working with other ministers around the National Agenda for Early Childhood. The minister has sought more collaborative work around understanding the impact of preschool kindergarten learning outcomes of children both in child care and other settings. I am not too sure when the minister wrote.

Senator MOORE—I hesitate to ask any questions of the minister about her letters at the moment, Ms Beauchamp, but in terms of the process is this an issue that is being considered in an interdepartmental sense?

Ms Beauchamp—Across jurisdictions.

Senator Patterson—And I cannot tell you exactly when.

Senator MOORE—In terms of that discussion, are the department and the government per se aware that in some parts of Australia there are no child-care centres but there are preschools? Is that the kind of data the department keeps?

Ms Beauchamp—We have information on where child-care centres are. We have not correlated that to where the preschools are.

Ms Powell—Because we do not keep data on where the preschools are.

Senator MOORE—Is there any kind of general policy decision or budget requirement that says why CCB is not payable for children whose parents choose to take them to a preschool arrangement as opposed to a child-care centre or any other form of child care?

Ms Beauchamp—The purposes of CCB are to contribute to the costs of children in child care. That is government policy.

Senator MOORE—It is a policy decision?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator MOORE—I am finished. I will put any other questions that I have after discussion on notice.

CHAIR—Thank you, Senator. I believe Senator Allison is on her way, so we will have a little break.

Senator Patterson—Senator Knowles, could I ask that all questions are on notice by close of business on Friday, because sometimes we get them so late. We are answering questions on notice from the House. We will take any questions on notice by Friday but, after that, they will have to go into the general pool of questions on notice in the Senate.

Senator MOORE—The estimates period is by the end of Friday, otherwise they go through the same process of being used by Ms Plibersek.

CHAIR—Minister, the questions on notice have to be on notice by the end of estimates.

Senator Patterson—That is very good. Then it is by close of business on Friday.

CHAIR—Thursday night of the estimates process.

Senator Patterson—Good. Thank you. I did not know that rule had come in. It is a very good rule. I think we used to have to have them in at the time. We did not have people at the end of the ether on the internet sending us little messages either.

Proceedings suspended from 9.56 pm to 10.02 pm

CHAIR—I understand that Senator Allison has commenced asking questions in another committee, so I think it would be fair to say that if Senator Allison does have questions she may place them on notice. It is my understanding that there are no further questions. I thank Dr Harmer and all of the officers from FaCS for their attendance on these two days. In closing, I thank all the officers of the department, who have become very familiar faces to me over a very long period of time. As my last estimates for FaCS, thank you all from me in particular, because I have sat in both opposition and government. I have always found the officers of the department exceptionally cooperative, and I commend each and every one of them for their professionalism and the true professionalism of the Public Service. I would like you to convey from me to them, Dr Harmer, my appreciation over a very long period of time.

Dr Harmer—Thank you, Senator. We have enjoyed working with you, too. I have worked with you on a number of committees and I have enjoyed working with you. Good luck in what you do next.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. The committee stands adjourned until Health and Ageing tomorrow morning at 9 am.

Committee adjourned at 10.02 pm