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SENATE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

ESTIMATES

(Additional Budget Estimates)

THURSDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2008

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**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
Thursday, 21 February 2008**

Members: Senator Moore (*Chair*), Senator Humphries (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Adams, Allison, Boyce, Carol Brown, Lundy and Polley

Senators in attendance: Senators Abetz, Adams, Allison, Bernardi, Boswell, Boyce, Carol Brown, Colbeck, Crossin, Ellison, Heffernan, Humphries, Hutchins, Johnston, Lundy, Ian Macdonald, Moore, Parry, Patterson, Payne, Polley, Sterle, Siewert, Watson and Webber.

Committee met at 9.02 am

**FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS
PORTFOLIO**

In Attendance

Senator Evans, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Executive

Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary

Mr Geoff Leeper, Deputy Secretary

Ms Glenys Beauchamp, Deputy Secretary

Mr Bernie Yates, Deputy Secretary

Ms Robyn McKay, Acting Deputy Secretary

Major General Dave Chalmers, Commander, Northern Territory Emergency Response Operations Centre

Mr Roger Barson, State Manager, Northern Territory

Group Managers

Ms Amanda Cattermole, Group Manager, Indigenous Remote Services Delivery

Ms Julia Burns, Group Manager, Women, Children and Parenting Support

Ms Gwenda Prince, Acting Group Manager, Women, Children and Parenting Support

Mr Evan Lewis, Group Manager, Mental Health, Autism and Community Support

Mr David Hazlehurst, Group Manager, Families

Mr Bruce Hunter, Chief Financial Officer and Group Manager, Business and Financial Services

Mr Sean Innis, Group Manager, Social Policy

Mr Tony Kwan, Group Manager, Information Management and Technology

Mr Anthony Field, Acting Group Manager, Legal and Compliance

Ms Kerrie Tim, Group Manager, Indigenous Leadership and Engagement

Ms Peta Winzar, Group Manager, Housing

Ms Donna Moody, Group Manager, Indigenous Program Support

Ms Lynne Curran, Group Manager, Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination

Ms Frances Davies, Group Manager, Disability and Carers

Mr Robert Knapp, Group Manager, Corporate Support

Ms Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Program Performance and Network

Cross Outcomes

Mr Stuart Long, Branch Manager, Public Law
Mr Steve Jennaway, Branch Manager, Budget Development
Dr Loucas Nicolaou, Branch Manager, Audit and Fraud
Mr David Fintan, Branch Manager, Commercial and Indigenous Law
Mr John Shevlin, Procurement and Risk Management Branch
Mr Kurt Munro, Financial Accounting Branch
Mr Michel Lok, Branch Manager, Financial Management and Governance Branch
Mr Ben Wallace, Branch Manager, Social Security Relationships and Compliance
Ms Michalina Stawyskyj, Branch Manager, International
Mr Andrew Whitcross, Branch Manager, Research and Analysis
Mr Stephen Walker, Branch Manager, People Branch
Ms Lesley Daw, Branch Manager, Property and Security
Mr Andrew Lander, Branch manager, Communication and Media
Ms Susan Black, Branch Manager, Ministerial, Parliamentary and Secretariat Support
Ms Jill Farrelly, Branch Manager, Program Advice and Compliance/Network Support

Outcome 1—Greater self-reliance and economic, social and community engagement for Indigenous Australians

1.1 Whole-of-government coordination of policy development and service delivery for Indigenous Australians

Mr Brian McMillan, Branch Manager, Indigenous Programs Investigations
Mr David Fintan, Branch Manager, Commercial and Indigenous Law
Ms Ros Baxter, Indigenous Family Safety Branch

1.2 Services for Indigenous Australians

Ms Megan Lees, Branch Manager, Indigenous Housing Policy
Ms Amanda Doherty, Acting Branch Manager, Reconciliation and Repatriation
Ms Kari Ahmer, Branch Manager, Community Development and Employment Projects
Mr Geoffrey Richardson, Branch Manager, Leadership Delivery
Mr Robert Ryan, Branch Manager, Remote Delivery
Mr Gary Michajlow, Branch Manager, Northern Territory Emergency Response Accommodation Project
Ms Deborah Winkler, Branch Manager, Service Delivery and Performance

1.3 Incorporation, regulation and capacity building of Indigenous corporations

Mr Anthony Beven, Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations

Outcome 2—Seniors, people with disabilities, carers, youth and women are supported, recognised and encouraged to participate in the community

2.1 Support for the aged

Ms Alanna Foster, Branch Manager, Seniors and Means Test

2.2 Support for people with disabilities

Ms Christine Bruce, Branch Manager, Disability Programs
Ms Helen Bedford, Branch Manager, Disability Policy and Coordination
Ms Vicki Brown, Branch Manager, Autism Spectrum Disorder
Ms Carol Brain, Branch Manager, Mental Health

2.3 Support for carers

Ms Lee Emerson, Branch Manager, Carers

2.4 Support for youth**2.5 Support for women**

Ms Lynette Maclean, Branch Manager, Women's Programs Branch, Office for Women

Ms Janet Stodulka, Branch Manager, Policy, Research and International Branch, Office for Women

Outcome 3—Families and children have choices and opportunities**3.1 Support for families**

Ms Ros Baxter, Branch Manager, indigenous Family Safety

Ms Robyn Fleming, Branch Manager, Family Relationship Services

Mr Mark Warburton, Branch Manager, Family Payments and Policy

Mr Gregory Andrews, Branch Manager, Children and Parenting Support Branch

Mr Gavin Matthews, Ag Branch Manager, Income Management Implementation

3.2 Child support

Ms Pamela Kinnear, Branch Manager, Child Support Policy Branch

Mr Ty Emerson, Branch Manager, Child Support Policy Branch

3.3 Child care support**Outcome 4—Strong and resilient communities****4.1 Housing support**

Ms Clare Wall, Branch Manager, Housing Policy and Support

Mr Rod Burgess, Acting Branch Manager, Affordable Housing Programs

Mr Simon Rosenberg, Branch Manager, Homelessness Taskforce

4.2 Supporting financial management

Ms Elizabeth Stehr, Branch Manager, Community Support Programs

4.3 Community recovery

Ms Beryl Janz, Branch Manager, Disaster Recovery

Ms Carolyn Paterson, Section Manager, Disaster Preparedness and Recovery

4.4 Community partnership and delivery

Ms Elizabeth Stehr, Branch Manager, Community Support Programs

Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency

Ms Anna McPhee, Director

CHAIR (Senator Moore)—I declare open this public hearing of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs considering the additional estimates for the portfolio of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Under standing order 26 the committee must take all evidence in public session. This includes answers to questions on notice. Everyone here is well versed in the privilege protection and immunities and the scope of questioning for estimates. If you do need reminding, the secretariat has a copy of the usual rules applicable to estimates hearings. I do not propose to read them out now.

I welcome Dr Jeff Harmer and the officers from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. We will begin with general questions on the portfolio overview on pages 9 to 36 of the estimates statements. You have the agenda in front of you, which we will follow. Then we will move into issues around Indigenous affairs. We will finish those by lunchtime. Anything that has not been asked by then will go on notice.

Dr Harmer—Thank you for that outline. I was anxious to find out because I am always trying to manage by not having people here any longer than I need them. So it is good guidance to know that we will be finished Indigenous Affairs by lunch time and then move on.

CHAIR—If there is a need for a change—and we do talk amongst ourselves because, as you know, there a number of senators trying to work between different estimates hearings—we will talk with you before we make any decisions.

Senator BERNARDI—I have some general questions for the department secretary. Is it appropriate to commence while we are still waiting for the minister?

CHAIR—I sympathise, but I do not think we can start without the minister as it is his portfolio area.

Senator BERNARDI—If he is watching on TV I would encourage him to come down here.

Senator ALLISON—Madam Chair, may I ask Dr Harmer where the EACH package would fall.

CHAIR—That would be really useful. If anyone has got questions, as we always do, about where things fit, maybe this is a chance to ask those.

Senator ALLISON—Can we talk about the EACH package under output 2.3, Support for carers?

Dr Harmer—Could you elaborate.

Senator ALLISON—The EACH package; it is for carers of those with high-level needs who would otherwise be in nursing homes.

Dr Harmer—Yes, that would be where we would do it, under disabilities.

CHAIR—We now welcome the minister to the hearing.

Senator Chris Evans—I apologise for being late. I have no opening statement.

Senator BERNARDI—Could I ask some general questions in regard to the department. How many DLOs have been allocated from your department to each of the ministerial offices that your department serves? Could you also provide a breakdown of which ministerial offices and how many DLOs as well?

Dr Harmer—Yes, we have got that information. As we always do, we have stuck very closely to the guidance about how many DLOs and staff can be provided to ministers' offices.

Ms Beauchamp—We have two DLOs in Minister Macklin's office, one in Minister Plibersek's office and one in Parliamentary Secretary Shorten's office.

Senator BERNARDI—Is there a limit on any of the tenures, or are they permanent placements over the course of the ministry?

Ms Beauchamp—They are permanent placements over the term.

Senator Chris Evans—There is a personnel turnover.

Dr Harmer—We rotate them. We are permitted to and we have—just for completeness, Senator—provided an additional temporary person in each of the offices to set up the office, but that is for a three-month period, which is just about coming to an end, and we will be taking those temporary people back.

Senator BERNARDI—Have the DLOs that served under the previous government and served with the previous minister all been repatriated into the department?

Dr Harmer—Yes, they are back in their positions in the department.

Ms Beauchamp—They are ongoing departmental employees, so they have been taken back into the department.

Senator BERNARDI—And there has been no penalty by way of a sacrifice of employment or conditions.

Senator Chris Evans—Quite the opposite. I have actually kept both of Mr Andrews's DLOs.

Senator BERNARDI—They must have been so good.

Senator Chris Evans—They were, and they are very happy in their new employ as well. Just to indicate to you that it is not a political appointment, I have actually kept the two.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand that. I was just trying to establish how it has worked under this thing. I understand that the Public Service tries to be apolitical, so I just want to ensure that there is no penalty for people who participate in ministers' offices.

Dr Harmer—I can assure you there is absolutely no penalty. It is apolitical and we operate absolutely in that way.

Senator Chris Evans—They might regard staying with me as penalty enough.

Senator BERNARDI—They may indeed, Minister. Let us not explore that any further. Thank you for that. I wonder if you would be able to give us a brief overview of the current status of the Northern Territory emergency response?

Dr Harmer—We have come prepared to do that, but I would prefer to do that under outcome 1 if we can.

CHAIR—Senator Bernardi, as that is going to be the core element of outcome 1, it might be better for the flow to do the detailed questions there. Were you after something really general, or what?

Senator BERNARDI—No, just a general overview leading into outcome 1. That is essentially what I am hoping to do.

Dr Harmer—The short story is that it is proceeding. All of the elements of the intervention that were supported by the incoming government are proceeding according to the timetable that was present before the government was elected.

Senator BERNARDI—So how much money has been spent on the—

Dr Harmer—If we are going to go into some details on that, I would rather wait until we have got the people for outcome 1 here.

Senator BERNARDI—When are we going to get to outcome 1?

Dr Harmer—After we have finished cross-programs, as I understand it.

Senator BERNARDI—I am happy with that. Do you have any questions on cross-programs?

Senator SIEWERT—No, I want to get straight into outcome 1.

Senator PATTERSON—I have some questions on corporate matters.

CHAIR—This is the right area for that.

Senator PATTERSON—Dr Harmer, has the department been asked to make a two per cent productivity cut in the FaHCSIA spending?

Dr Harmer—I am going to give you a detailed answer to that. We have had an efficiency dividend applied to us, as senators would be aware, for some time under the previous government. There was an increase in the efficiency dividend last year and the new government has imposed a further efficiency dividend on us which will be for this year and for next year. I will take you through the detail of that if you wish. In 2007-08 the efficiency dividend being applied to FaHCSIA is the usual one per cent, which equates to approximately \$4 million per year; the additional 0.25 per cent that was increased by the previous government and has been extended to 2008-09 and out years, and equates to approximately \$1 million per year; and then we have the additional 0.46 per cent efficiency dividend which was issued by the department of finance estimates memorandum on 16 January, which equates to \$1.86 million a year. So the total efficiency dividend impact on the department for 2007-08 equals \$6.86 million. In 2008-09 we will still have the usual one per cent, which equates, as I said earlier, to \$4 million per year, and the additional 0.25 per cent, which equates to \$1 million. And the additional two per cent—the full two per cent of the new government's efficiency dividend—will apply in 2008-09, which equates to \$8.4 million, giving a total efficiency dividend for 2008-09 of \$13.4 million.

Senator PATTERSON—And how do you intend to achieve those efficiency dividends?

Dr Harmer—I am proud to say that FaHCSIA has a really good record of managing its resources. We projected a small loss last year of somewhere between \$4 million and \$5 million. We came in at just over that, about \$700,000 more—less than 0.1 per cent over our budget, which was an extraordinarily good result—because of good financial management. We are currently working through how we are going to manage with the increased efficiency dividend. We have quite a lot of flexibility. We will be looking supplier costs; we will be looking at travel and those sorts of things. We will be looking at any efficiencies. We will be looking to not recruit in areas that are not high priority for the new government, and move people within the department from areas of lower priority to high priority. We will be looking carefully at our temporaries and contractors, particularly those who are working on projects which are not the highest priority. We are currently working through all of those things. Nonetheless, we will not be able to run our balanced budget, which we were budgeting for at the beginning of the 2007-08 financial year and we will be looking to run a loss of about \$10 million for this financial year. We are still negotiating with the department of finance, because as soon as I am aware that we may be running a loss we have to seek approval, and that

negotiation is still going on. But we are pretty confident we can manage to the situation where we will, in a sense, make the adjustments that we need to this year so that we can budget for a balanced budget in 2008-09. We are reasonably confident we can get to that position.

Senator PATTERSON—I remember that, a long time ago when some people here were most probably just born, there was a two per cent efficiency to cover increasing pay, and sick leave was one area where it was measurable and it was going to be reduced. Are you looking at anything like that to reduce some of the cost to the department?

Dr Harmer—No, we are not looking at any conditions of employment in our reduction.

Senator PATTERSON—I am just saying that sick leave was up around—I have forgotten—12 days per year, on average, and there was an argument that reducing it by two days would save \$6 million. I cannot remember the figures; it is now 16 years ago, I think.

Dr Harmer—We have been very active over the last couple of years in looking to reduce the unexplained absences and our turnover rate to make ourselves more efficient. I am not sure I have the figures here but those things are coming down within FaHCSIA at the moment.

Senator PATTERSON—Maybe you could give us on notice the average number of sick leave days over the last two years but clearly indicate what is sick leave and what is compassionate leave, and then we can watch how it goes and whether there is additional strain on the department as a result of trying to find another \$10 million.

Dr Harmer—We will give you a breakdown. I do not think we have that information here but we will get it for you.

Senator PATTERSON—It is on notice. We can look at it in May and then others can look at it again.

Dr Harmer—Okay. We can get it.

[9.16 am]

CHAIR—We will now move to outcome 1, Greater self-reliance and economic, social and community engagement for Indigenous Australians.

Senator BERNARDI—Dr Harmer, in the brief statement you made about the Northern Territory intervention earlier, you stated that the measures that the incoming government supported are all in place for the Northern Territory intervention. Can you identify areas where programs that were implemented or endorsed by the previous government have now ceased with regard to this intervention?

Dr Harmer—They have not necessarily ceased but there were two areas of the intervention which the then opposition and now government in their incoming government policy had problems with. One was the way the CDEP changes were made and the other was the permit system. In both of those areas there has already been some change, but they are the only two areas.

Senator BERNARDI—Can you explain the changes to the permit system? Can we get on to that initially, please.

Dr Harmer—Essentially the incoming government, in their policy statements before the election, indicated that they did not support the removal of the permit system in the communities, which was one of the elements of the former government's intervention strategy.

Senator BERNARDI—Over what percentage of Indigenous land was the permit system removed?

Mr Yates—The actual effect of those permit provisions was, I think, that about 0.2 per cent of Aboriginal land would have been affected in a direct sense as a result of the legislation coming into place. That legislation would have had the result of giving open access to the relevant communities. The government has announced that it will take steps to amend the legislation so that the permits will remain in place, but it will ensure that there is open access continuing for government officers, for government contractors and for journalists working in a professional capacity.

Senator BERNARDI—When you say open access, there will be no requirement for approval or a permit.

Mr Yates—That is correct.

Senator BERNARDI—What about for police?

Mr Yates—As I understand it, this will not affect the access to those communities that the police currently enjoy.

Senator BERNARDI—Do the police currently require a permit or approval to enter into those communities?

Mr Yates—No. They have always been exempt from permits. There is a range of personnel who have always been exempt from the requirement for a permit.

Senator BERNARDI—I am just trying to clarify the situation, because I have information that they require a permit from the Northern Territory minister. Is that incorrect?

Mr Yates—I would have to take on notice the provisions as they relate to various categories of officials or ministers.

Senator BERNARDI—I am just trying to get to the point that a police officer is either able to access these communities without a permit, or they are not. Are you telling me that you cannot answer that question?

Mr Yates—No. I think I answered that question. The police do not require a permit to access communities.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay.

Senator Chris Evans—Never have, and never will.

Senator BERNARDI—I have received a suggestion that they required a permit from the Northern Territory minister. So that is incorrect. I am pleased you have clarified that.

Senator Chris Evans—We cannot advise on the Northern Territory government's policies. If you are asking about what the Commonwealth government's policy is—

Senator BERNARDI—I am just asking whether police have access to these communities.

Senator Chris Evans—The officer is indicating that, in terms of Commonwealth policy, there has never been any bar on police entering through the permit system. In fact, a number of the police have supported the permit system as a useful check on people coming in and out of the communities. Mr Yates said he would check the Northern Territory government.

Mr Yates—As we understand it, the Northern Territory ministers do have free access to the communities, under the legislation. If there are other categories of personnel that you would like us to provide a detailed report on, we can do that.

Senator BERNARDI—I would appreciate that. Similarly, you mentioned that journalists will be exempt from requiring a permit. Is there any limit on which journalists, or accreditation, as to how they gain access?

Mr Yates—The detail of that is going to be part of the bill that will give effect to the government's policy on this matter. As I understand it, in general terms, accredited journalists, working in a professional capacity, will have free access to the communities.

Ms Curran—I am the group manager of OIPC group. I understand that the legislation on this issue is going to be introduced in the House today so the full details will be available to you for perusal when the bill is introduced.

Senator BERNARDI—We will be able to have a look at it then, and perhaps expand the line of questioning.

Senator Chris Evans—Could I just make it clear to you, Senator Bernardi, that during the passage of the original legislation, the Labor Party, in opposition, moved these sorts of amendments at the time and they were defeated. I moved them in the Senate. They, at the time, provided for access for journalists, police, et cetera.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand that you have advocated this for some time. I am just trying to ascertain the impacts on the communities.

Senator Chris Evans—Sure. As the officer has indicated, the bill is just coming into the House.

Senator BERNARDI—The rollback of the permit system was intended to remove a cloak of secrecy and ensure that there was accessibility and accountability for some of the behaviour and conduct that went on in these communities. Do you see that there is any risk of the return to the permit system facilitating the negative consequences that have been taking place for some time?

Dr Harmer—I do not think it is fair to ask the officers to speculate or comment on government policy. We are implementing the current government policy, as stated. We would not want to comment on that.

Senator BERNARDI—I respect that. Will medical professionals have continuing full access to Aboriginal communities without the requirement for a permit?

Mr Yates—Senator, there is no change to the provisions in that regard.

Senator BERNARDI—Then the changes to the provisions in the bill, which I have not seen as yet, apply only to journalists and what other categories of people?

Ms Curran—Senator, under the Senate standing orders, as I understand them, we cannot actually respond to questions on legislation in an estimates committee. We are happy to take questions on notice after the bill is introduced, but I do not want to break the laws of the parliament.

Senator BERNARDI—Perhaps I will ask the minister.

Senator Chris Evans—I have not seen the actual bill, Senator Bernardi, but I will undertake to have it provided to the committee the moment it is introduced into the House of Representatives. If that is today, then it will come today. If it is not, then it will have to be as soon as it is introduced: obviously I cannot get access to it myself. But in terms of the debate about the permit system, I think it is fair to say the Senate *Hansard* has a long and comprehensive coverage of the debate. I think Senator Siewert made a number of very—

Senator SIEWERT—Erudite.

Senator Evans—Erudite contributions. I could not possibly point you to the Labor party contributions, but they were always solid, and the government of the day then argued its case. This is all on the record—the two policy positions of the government and alternative government are on the record. I cannot slash outside the off stump, but I think you will find that the bill will largely reflect the attitude we took in opposition over this debate. The parliament no doubt will have another crack at the debate in the coming months, but the idea was to allow the communities some control over who entered their community. It did not provide any bar on police, medical professionals and accredited journalists.

The idea was that people who should have access can get access, but the community could decide whether drug runners, alcohol runners and people of poor character were allowed to come onto their community, into their small communities. That was the intention of the permit system. So the political debate of that will continue in the parliament from today onwards.

Senator BERNARDI—Two areas that have been identified immediately are the permit system and the CDE Program. They have been changed. Are there any other priority areas for the government in regard to the Northern Territory intervention?

Senator Chris Evans—I will turn to the officials. As the officials made clear, prior to the election the two areas in which we committed to have a different approach were the CDEP and the permit system. I understand Ms Macklin has moved to effect both those election commitments, but Dr Harmer or one of his officers will probably best deal with the detail.

Dr Harmer—Senator, the Northern Territory intervention is proceeding, with the exception of those two elements that Senator Evans mentioned. The minister has made it very clear that the priority at the moment is that the government came in with a commitment to review the intervention at the end of the first year. There is a lot of work going on now in the department, preparing for that review, making sure that we will have adequate data and information needed to allow a review of progress at the end of the first year. So that is something that we are working quite hard on at the moment, as well as on all of the other elements of the intervention.

Senator BERNARDI—There are a number of review points, I understand, such as the effect of quarantining of welfare, the effect of drink bans or limits on drinking. Have all of those initial review deadlines been met? Are we approaching any immediately?

Dr Harmer—There has been no slowing or pulling back on the pace of the implementation of any of those measures that were introduced by this new government.

Senator BERNARDI—But what about the review of the effectiveness of them? Have there been any benchmarks or time lines that have needed to be met?

Dr Harmer—I stand to be corrected, but I do not think there were any evaluation or review time lines built in before the end of the first 12 months. A lot of the measures in the intervention are still rolling out, as was the original intention. For example, some of our business managers in some of the remote towns are still being placed. As was the original intention, some of the rollout of the welfare quarantining is proceeding, as it was always intended. It is impossible to introduce it all at once. We are doing it town by town, according to an analysis of the capability of the stores, et cetera. All these things are being put in place. I am not aware of any particular measure where there was any in-built evaluation or review point during the first year, but I stand to be corrected if one of my officers does.

Ms Curran—There is obviously ongoing monitoring, Senator, as things roll out. There has been a very close working relationship with the Northern Territory government, particularly on the alcohol bans. My colleague Mr Barson from the state office might be able to give you some further details on that. As the secretary has said, the income management and the quarantining and the licensing of the community stores have proceeded on a staged approach. The operational commander, Major General Chalmers, is here; he could address any specific questions on those sorts of things. But the scope of the review that the government has announced is yet to be determined, but I would imagine that it will cover the seven key measures of the emergency response which go to things such as income management, the alcohol bans, and other measures to support families and assure the safety of children, including law and order.

Senator BERNARDI—In regard to the safety of children, was there any evidence early in the research that the main sexual predators of children were residents within the communities, or were they external to the communities?

Ms Curran—The *Little children are sacred* report documented that the abuse of children was endemic. I do not think it went to the issue specifically of whether that was internal or external.

Senator BERNARDI—So the department has not made any inquiries or any research into the internal threats versus the external threats.

Ms Curran—We know that sexual abuse is a problem and that is what the intervention was about. This government has committed to continuing to put the safety of children as a paramount concern.

Senator BERNARDI—What I am trying to ascertain is whether the sexual abuse of children is driven by people who are already resident in those communities or have full access to those communities, or whether it was external parties moving in.

Ms Curran—The *Little children are sacred* report documented that there was abuse of children from external people, but I do not believe that there was any quantification of that in the report.

Dr Harmer—And, Senator, if I may, we do not have any precise information about the balance of sexual abuse that was occurring in 45 out of the 45 communities that were looked at by the people who produced the *Little children are sacred* report. It would probably be fair to say that we do know that there were instances of perpetrators both from within the community and from external sources. The Northern Territory police, who will clearly be involved in providing information to us for the review at the end of 12 months, will be able to provide some information on those sorts of things.

Senator BERNARDI—Can I take you back to the permit system again. When the permit system was enacted, it was identified that there were a number of external threats that either had access through the permit system or completely ignored it. So I wonder what degree of protection is going to be afforded to these children by the reinstatement of the permit system.

Ms Curran—I guess what we would always draw your attention to are the states of Queensland and Western Australia, which do not have permit systems. The cases of very substantial child abuse there are well documented in the press. If you are trying to draw a link between permits and child abuse, I do not think that you can make that generalisation—that the permit system itself causes child abuse.

Senator BERNARDI—I did not say it caused child abuse, but obviously it is not stopping it either. It does not appear to have a meaningful effect on it.

Senator Chris Evans—I do not think I have ever heard anyone claim that the permit system was going to stop child abuse, Senator. I think what the officers have said is what our understanding, yours and mine, would be: the problems of child abuse or sexual abuse have come both from within the community and from without. As you know, there is often a very close relationship in that the child abusers are close relatives et cetera. I accept that, but also what we are seeing is sexual abuse in exchange for drugs and alcohol. It is a broader problem than just necessarily the local community.

I think that what the officers are saying is that the evidence is that there is both, but that it is not directly related to the permit system. No-one claims it is going to solve it, and I think the previous government did not claim that taking it off was somehow going to solve child abuse inside those communities either. No-one I have heard yet has claimed that the permit system being applied or removed is actually going to deal with the very complex issues of child and sexual abuse in communities. I think the aim of the permit system is whether it gives the community some control over who comes in. Certainly the current government will not claim that reintroducing the permit system is going to end child abuse, and I think the previous government never claimed that taking it off was going to end it either.

Senator BERNARDI—But it has been claimed that the reintroduction of the permit system would reduce paedophiles' access to the communities, grog running, drugs and those sorts of things.

Senator Chris Evans—As I understand it from talking to communities—and I have to be careful; this is a personal view—is that communities have found if they identify a particular

person who is a problem, often that is done in conjunction with the police. I know that police have recommended to communities that they actually deny a permit to a particular character because of police concerns or community concern about them. So it does allow them to exclude, if you like, particular people visiting the community who have no connection with the community and who they think are there for the wrong reasons. That is part of the policy debate.

But I think we all understand that combating child and sexual abuse is a very complex and very difficult task. The previous government is to be commended for taking that issue seriously. They got bipartisan support, and this government is continuing the intervention to try to tackle those very serious problems. The review at the end of 12 months will, I think, help us all, because what I have always argued is that there is too much ideology and politics in this. We have actually got to work out what works and what does not and do what works and change what does not. I do not care if you thought of it or we thought of it, or whether it suits my ideological preconceptions or yours. We have got to take that out of this stuff and work out what works.

I know the minister is very committed to an evidence based approach. I hope at the end of 12 months we have a really good examination of the evidence and we have a debate about the evidence, not about what the traditional right-wing view of it is or what the traditional left-wing view of it is, because we have done that for the last 100 years and we have failed Aboriginal people. So I hope we can get beyond that. There have been some encouraging signs. I commend Dr Nelson for his actions in supporting the apology; I think it was an important first step.

In addition to that, we have to get down to the hard work. What I would like to see us doing at the end of the 12 months is having a really serious discussion. I think there is a role for this committee in how we assess whether something is working or not, and, if it is not, how we finetune it. I think the real key in this is that we have the flexibility to respond to the evidence. That is a responsibility for us all. I think there are encouraging signs that collectively we are starting to get the message about that.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand that we all aspire to better outcomes for Indigenous Australia but, with regard to the permit system, there are a number of differing views among Indigenous Australia as well that broach the political-philosophical divide. For example, there have been calls from Mr Mundine that the permit system is going to halt the economic development of the communities. I am sure the government must have paid some attention to his calls, as a Labor luminary.

Senator Chris Evans—I value Mr Mundine's opinion very highly. I worked closely with him when I was the shadow minister for Indigenous affairs, but it is equally the case that, as some people have put it, he is a Sydney bloke. Northern Territory people do not necessarily like Sydney or Canberra blokes telling them what to do. But I value his opinion very highly. He makes a useful contribution, as do Noel Pearson and a whole range of people, such as Lois O'Donohue. The point is you make your own judgements and the government comes to decisions after making judgements. You form a view. My only point was that we just want to take the old ideological debate out of it and respond to the evidence.

The good thing about the intervention is that it is a large intervention being run seriously, with a lot of Commonwealth resources—unlike the COAG trials, which were a disgrace in the sense that the political will disappeared and the assessments disappeared. I think there was a lot of blame from top to bottom for their failure. Let us hope this time we deal with the evidence of what occurs, react to that and continue the commitment to ensure that the commitment does not fade. I am hopeful that we will get that sort of commitment this time.

Senator BERNARDI—Will the changes scheduled to be introduced today in the permit system bill return the process to the way it existed prior to the Northern Territory intervention and the legislation of last year?

Senator Chris Evans—I have not seen the bill. All I can say is that I will get it to you as soon as it is tabled. If it is tabled today, I will provide you with the bill.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you.

Senator Chris Evans—I am not in a position to debate the detail of it with you. I just do not know.

Senator BERNARDI—Can I move on to the health check part of the Northern Territory response.

Dr Harmer—Before we move on, can I just add to a comment I made earlier, for completeness. When I talked about the two significant differences between the incoming government and the previous government in relation to the Northern Territory emergency response, I neglected to mention a very important commitment the government made and is carrying forward, and that is the commitment to consult with Indigenous people. The Prime Minister and my minister, Jenny Macklin, met with a group of Indigenous leaders in Darwin in December to start that process. There is a further meeting scheduled in the next couple of weeks in Darwin with a senior Indigenous leadership group, consulting about their views and perspectives on the intervention et cetera as part of the evidence gathering and data gathering process.

Senator BERNARDI—Just on the consultation process, the minister has terminated the national Indigenous advisory council program. Am I correct?

Dr Harmer—The National Indigenous Council?

Senator BERNARDI—I beg your pardon, yes.

Dr Harmer—The incoming government has a commitment to introduce a new body, and we are working on that. The government will be making comments on that at some stage.

Senator BERNARDI—Were there any costs associated with the abolition of the NIC?

Mr Yates—Senator, the NIC was not abolished. Its term came to an end in December of last year. So, in that sense, it was not abolished; it was simply not continued.

Senator BERNARDI—Is there a representative voice of Indigenous Australia that can talk at an official level with the Australian government now?

Mr Yates—Senator, the NIC was not a representative voice, and it was never purported to be such. It simply was a group of experts, who were Indigenous, who were providing advice in respect of a range of issues. There continues to be a quite extensive array of advisory

bodies, typically in areas of justice, health, education, higher education and the like, where Indigenous voices contribute to policy deliberations. They are continuing. Beyond that there are consultations on specific issues. There were extensive consultations for the apology. The secretary has mentioned the Northern Territory reference group that has been established, and work is commencing on the development of the government's commitment in regard to a new national representative body.

Senator BERNARDI—Is there a scheduled program of meetings between these representative bodies with the minister, or is it just on an as-required basis?

Mr Yates—Currently the expert groups that are long established would have a regular schedule of meetings with relevant personnel in departments and at times with ministers. In regard to specific issues, meetings are held as required. Once the new national body is established it will form another part of the government's engagement strategy with Indigenous Australians.

Senator BERNARDI—Can you provide me with some names of these expert groups?

Mr Yates—Certainly, Senator.

Senator BERNARDI—Are you able to do that now?

Mr Yates—I do not have it with me but I can take that on notice.

Dr Harmer—We will take that on notice. I should also make the point that the government continues to have access to advice from two of the key members of the National Indigenous Council: the chair, Sue Gordon, and Miriam Rose Baumann because they are both members of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Taskforce and continue to be members of that task force. The minister meets with that group.

Senator BERNARDI—The proposal for the establishment of a new—I will call it a peak—Aboriginal advisory body has been put forward by the minister. Would that be an appropriate description?

Mr Yates—I think the commitment is for a national representative body.

Senator BERNARDI—A national representative body?

Dr Harmer—That is the term the government is using.

Senator Chris Evans—I think the point of political difference has been between 'representative' and 'selected by the government'. The previous government made no claims other than that the previous body was selected by the government. The Labor commitment has been to a more representative structure where Indigenous people have some sort of ownership of the people who serve and some sort of reporting-back mechanisms. As Dr Harmer indicated, that is a proposal under consideration by the government. It is not in place yet. Obviously announcements will be made when the work is completed and the government has come to a decision.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay, so it has been announced that it is the intention to form an advisory body that is representative.

Senator Chris Evans—It has been Labor Party policy to have a representative body. The form of that—size, shape, functions—has not been determined.

Senator BERNARDI—When would you expect that to be determined?

Mr Yates—There will be considerable consultations around that. That is what the government's commitment is because whatever is established has got to be owned and supported by Indigenous people themselves. That is a process that the government will be progressing this year.

Senator BERNARDI—So it will be expected that the firm details of it would be at the end of this year?

Dr Harmer—It is likely that it will be by the end of the year but I do not think any specific timetable has been set and agreed to because, as Mr Yates said, the government's primary commitment is consultation and making sure that the shape and form of it is appropriate and has Indigenous people's support. But there has been no specific time frame set. But we would expect that, given we are doing some work on it now, it is likely to be this year. But we will not be held to that because the government has not made a commitment to a time frame yet.

Senator BERNARDI—How many health checks have been conducted as part of the emergency response framework?

Dr Harmer—General Dave Chalmers, the commander of the operations centre, can answer that.

Major Gen. Chalmers—We have done 6,619 health checks so far through the DOHA process of providing child health check teams into the Northern Territory. That is not the sum of the health checks though because existing services in the Northern Territory, such as the Aboriginal Medical Service, are also doing health checks, and they have done about 2,000. So in total probably eight-and-a-half thousand child health checks have been conducted.

Senator BERNARDI—What types of things are they looking for? Is it just a general health check?

Major Gen. Chalmers—It is indeed a check of children's general health. I am not a doctor; I can give you only a broad outline as I understand it. The doctor takes a history and then checks height, weight, skin condition, ears and eyes, and takes a blood sample, generally to test for iron deficiency.

Senator BERNARDI—Is there any check for diabetes and those sorts of diseases?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I do not want to talk in too much detail because it is not my area of expertise.

Senator BERNARDI—Would you be able to take it in notice and advise what the health checks actually do cover, particularly the blood tests.

Dr Harmer—Sure.

Major Gen. Chalmers—Yes indeed.

Dr Harmer—We will need to get the information from the Department of Health and Ageing, which is managing the health check regime.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand. Thank you. Are the health checks designed to detect sexual abuse?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Senator, as you are probably aware, checking for sexual abuse is a difficult and sensitive issue which requires a specialist. It is not something that can be done in the course of a half-hour general medical check up. The checks are not designed to detect sexual abuse. They would only detect sexual abuse if either the child volunteered information or there was immediate indication of some sort of trauma, in which case the doctor would follow up, using the normal processes for reporting such abuse.

Senator BERNARDI—Where a child has been identified as having deficient health, what follow-up and repeat contact is there with the child to check on the health condition and the progress of it?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Of the 6,600 children who have been checked, about 60 per cent have required one or more referrals.

Senator BERNARDI—Sixty per cent?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Yes, that is correct. But most of those would be for primary health care. They would be for relatively minor ailments, often skin conditions, scabies, dental problems and ear, nose and throat problems. The Department of Health and Ageing now has a program of completing the follow-up on referrals and they aim to build capacity to complete those referrals by mid-year. I understand that they will largely achieve that, although there may be some outstanding referrals beyond mid-year. That would constitute the next phase of the health element of the intervention before building primary health care capacity and specialist treatment capacity in the longer term.

Senator BERNARDI—Are there any other resourcing issues that are preventing a more rapid range of health checks, or a more rapid expansion of the health checks in children?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Resources are always a constraint. I think the provision of medical specialists is an issue for the Department of Health and Ageing. But, having said that, I deploy, at capacity, child health check teams each week. We generally have about four new teams a week going out and we have had up to 12 teams deployed at any one time.

Senator BERNARDI—How many people are in a team?

Major Gen. Chalmers—A team consists of a doctor and three nurses, generally. One of those is a remote area nurse. Generally that is the person who leads the team and then there will be another couple of nurses.

Senator BERNARDI—Are all the health checks carried out by the doctor, or do the nurses assume some preliminary responsibility? Are they able to see and assess a child by their own merit?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Again, I am not an expert on this, but the child health checks I have seen conducted are conducted by the doctor. The nurses do preliminary work but the doctor actually does the check. Again, as I say I caveat by saying I am not an expert. These sorts of general checks can be conducted by a nurse but they would always be signed off by a doctor, so the doctor takes responsibility that the check has been properly conducted.

Senator BERNARDI—Where the process identifies a serious health problem with a child, is there provision whereby the child can be placed into hospital or into medical care without reference to the parents at all?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I do not think that is a question I can answer, Senator.

Dr Harmer—We need to take that on notice, Senator. I am not sure where the Department of Health and Ageing is in the Senate estimates process.

Senator BERNARDI—They were here yesterday and they did not have that information.

Dr Harmer—Then you have missed it.

Senator SIEWERT—We are covering Aboriginal health tomorrow because we did not get to it yesterday.

Dr Harmer—That might be an appropriate question for that committee.

Senator BERNARDI—Yes, thank you.

Senator Chris Evans—The officers are not trying to be unhelpful, Senator Bernardi, but the health checks are run by the health people. If they can help, they will, but if it has to be at the hearing tomorrow morning, that is probably the best place if you want to explore the processes of the health check and the follow-up. Obviously it is an important question. I was interested in the answer myself in terms of after the health check, who follows up. The ongoing health care is the real challenge, it seems to me.

Senator BERNARDI—And, in particular, the challenge is if the parents are not as responsible as perhaps we would like them to be or are non-contactable, something along those lines. That is fine: I will take that up tomorrow. On another topic within the Northern Territory emergency response, I noticed in the budget—

Senator ALLISON—If we are moving off—

ACTING CHAIR (Senator Humphries)—I think the rest of the members have a lot of questions.

Senator BERNARDI—I am happy to wait, sure.

Senator SIEWERT—I have a lot of questions about this and we are jumping around the issues of the NT without being very strategic about it. I have some questions about health checks and a range of other things.

ACTING CHAIR—Perhaps if you could let me know what you want to ask about and we can try to slot those in as people are going along.

Senator ADAMS—May I talk to this?

Senator ALLISON—A lot of mine are follow-ups.

ACTING CHAIR—If you want to follow up, just let me know and I will be happy to let you jump in.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Are we coming back to that issue, or have we moved on?

ACTING CHAIR—We are on health checks. We are dealing with health check questions. Let us do those now, then we will go back to permits.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Okay.

ACTING CHAIR—If you let me know what you want to talk about, we will ask about that.

Senator SIEWERT—Can we be careful. We are going to have a full debate on the permit system very shortly in the chamber. There is a whole lot of stuff that is coming up that we are not going to have an opportunity to ask about. I would prefer to concentrate on things that we will not get another chance to ask.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I have one question about permits, which is a factual explanation, if I could ask that.

ACTING CHAIR—I am not going to cut off a question on the basis it might be discussed somewhere else later. I think that is not reasonable. If you have questions on health checks, Senator Siewert, that you want to ask about, we are happy to have your question now.

Senator SIEWERT—You told us that there are around 8½ thousand children who have been seen. What percentage of children in the NT does that represent?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Senator, that is a difficult question to answer because it is statistics, statistics and damned lies. Different data conflicts. But I will give you the broad figure that I understand is my target to try and check all those children, and that is a population of 17,000 children.

Senator SIEWERT—So you have done approximately half?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Over half, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you tell me if there is coordination? You have said that there are the health checks that are going in through this process and then there is the other—

Major Gen. Chalmers—Senator, I am sorry to interrupt you, but I should caveat that previous remark by saying that, whilst that 17,000 is the broad population to whom we will offer voluntary health checks, that is not necessarily the figure that we will achieve in the end of the child health check process. In other words, if they are voluntary checks, not everyone will come forward so we would not necessarily expect that we will finish up checking 17,000 children.

Senator SIEWERT—You outline the checks that are being done by the emergency team and checks that are being done by existing services. What is the level of coordination that is going on between those two sets of checks?

Major Gen. Chalmers—The Department of Health and Ageing is very closely coordinating with the Northern Territory government health services to make sure that there is not, for example, overlap or unnecessary checking. In some instances, some communities are now being checked by the existing clinic if they have capacity. That is the issue—they may not have the capacity to do it. If they do not have capacity, then there is another alternative where a child health check team can come in and work with the clinic, and checks are done by both the clinic and a child health check team. A third option is the child health check team—one or more—and in big communities we might have two or three teams operating concurrently. We will do that separately to the clinic, and the clinic will continue to manage its normal business of dealing with trauma and other ongoing issues.

Senator SIEWERT—We have had reports back that some of the health professionals who are going into that area are not trained in things like rheumatic heart disease, scabies, things like that. Is that being reported to you? What is the level of expertise that is going in? In other

words, we are being told that some of these issues are being missed because of the professionals who are going in. I am not casting aspersions on them, but if you come from an area that is not used to dealing with NT medical issues—

Dr Harmer—We are getting into the area where I think Major General Chalmers is giving about as much he can. He is very well aware of the progress, the numbers and managing, but once we get into what they are finding and what they doing, it really would be better directed to the health people.

Senator SIEWERT—I take that on board. I am not trying to push into areas that obviously are not your areas of expertise. In terms of the follow-up with ongoing health care, what is the process? We have talked about the clinics. Obviously there will need to be long-term follow-up. What is the process of handing that over to the existing medical services? What is the process for resourcing those existing medical services?

Dr Harmer—Again, they are questions that need to be asked of the health department which are, as Major General Chalmers said, liaising very closely with the Northern Territory government, which has primary responsibility for primary health care in the communities.

Senator SIEWERT—I will take it up tomorrow.

Senator ALLISON—A while ago Major General Chalmers said that not necessarily 17,000 children will be checked. Why is this?

Dr Harmer—Because it is voluntary, Senator, and we cannot be absolutely certain that all the children will be brought forward.

Senator ALLISON—What percentage of children are coming forward, if we can put it that way?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I do not have that figure in front of me, but I will tell you that it is in the ballpark of 55 to 60 per cent of children. Of the population that, so far, we believe was available to check, and we are well over three-quarters of the way through the program now, about 55 to 60 per cent of children have been checked. In some communities we have checked 120 or 130 per cent of what we thought was going to be the population. That means either some kids have come twice because they enjoyed it so much or, more likely, because the population is mobile and people come in from outstations and move around or the number of children was greater than we thought, and in other communities the take-up rate has been much lower. Particularly where the figure has been quite low that is because the community has broader concerns about the intervention and that manifests itself in some ways—for example, in parents not wanting to take advantage of any of it, including the child health checks.

Senator ALLISON—How many children, considered to be at risk in your estimation, have been checked?

Major Gen. Chalmers—You would have to define what ‘at risk’ is.

Senator ALLISON—Do you not have a definition for what a child at risk would be?

Major Gen. Chalmers—There is child sex abuse and child neglect abuse, and neglect abuse of course is much more widespread. I understand that children in communities confront

many challenges but I would also tell you that I meet many, many children in communities who are well cared for, well parented and very healthy.

Senator ALLISON—So you would dispute the claim that only 10 per cent of at-risk children have been checked?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I think that is a rubbish figure. I do not know who came up with that and I do not know on what basis they would have come up with it.

Dr Harmer—We would not know, Senator. I do not think there is any base line data about how many children are at risk in these 73 communities. The health checks were designed to make available to parents a health check. We keep records of how many are going through—as Major General Chalmers said, over 50 per cent. But how many of those are at risk compared to the ones that do not come through, we would not have detailed data on.

Senator ALLISON—But it stands to reason, does it not, that a family with a child who has been neglected or abused or had whatever serious diseases might not want to have that child checked?

Dr Harmer—That is possible.

Senator ALLISON—Can I suggest to you that it is highly likely? So what is the team doing about identifying those children? I am not suggesting coercion, but are there other ways of getting to such children?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I think that the intervention is a complex response to this issue. When you ask what other ways there are, I think you have to look at the seven broad areas that the intervention works in, the many policies and measures, all of which are designed to address the social dysfunction in communities which leads to either neglect abuse or sex abuse. The child health checks are one measure. They are not in and of themselves a complete answer. As you have rightly pointed out, they are limited in their effectiveness, particularly in the area of sex abuse, because of the way in which we need to go about the checks.

Senator ALLISON—What percentage of children require referral?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Specifically, 60.3 per cent of the 6,619 children who have been checked have required one or more referrals.

Senator ALLISON—Can you paint a picture of what happens when the check is done and two-thirds of the children checked require referral? What then is the process?

Dr Harmer—Senator, Major General Chalmers may be able to answer that, but, as I said to Senator Siewert, I think the specifics of what happens in terms of the interaction between the health check teams, the local community health services and the Northern Territory government would be best addressed by the health department, which is running these.

Senator ALLISON—So, for instance, you are not able to advise the committee about the time frame?

Major Gen. Chalmers—It depends on the nature of the referral. If it is a very urgent problem—

Senator ALLISON—Let us take a dental problem which might be urgent.

Major Gen. Chalmers—If it is an urgent problem, my understanding is that it is followed up immediately. I know that some children have been immediately evacuated from communities and taken to Darwin, Alice Springs or Adelaide with their parents to follow up on serious problems that are detected.

Senator ALLISON—How many are in that category?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I would have to take that question on notice; I could not answer you off the top of my head. Less serious problems—and the vast majority of problems, I think, would be categorised as requiring follow-up by primary health care or dental care; for instance, 25.5 per cent of children have required dental referral—would be, and are intended to be, addressed by the Department of Health and Ageing in an increase in the capacity of clinics and specialist treatment to deal with the referrals over the next five months.

Senator ALLISON—As I understand it, the checks are discovering huge endemic problems—not that this is news to anybody. Ninety per cent of children, for instance, have serious ear problems. Can you confirm that?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I cannot confirm that 90 per cent of children have serious ear problems. I do not believe that that is the figure at all. The figure I have is that 7.2 per cent of children have required referral for ENT treatment. Obviously, that is quite a different figure to 90 per cent. These are chronic problems which are being detected. They are problems, particularly hearing problems, as you would understand, that lead to children having difficulty at school and not going to school, and that have knock-on effects through education and then to employment. There are chronic problems being detected, but I think 90 per cent would not be a figure I could support.

Senator ALLISON—It comes from an AMSANT briefing document. Are you familiar with that document, produced in September last year?

Mr Barson—Senator, I am currently responsible for the Northern Territory part of FaHCSIA. It is certainly true that a high percentage of children have glue ear, otitis media or problems with their hearing. That is treatable. I think what Major General Chalmers was referring to is the number that have had to be referred to ENT specialists for treatments. I do not have a 90 per cent figure but, yes, certainly a high proportion of children in remote communities have hearing or ear problems.

Senator SIEWERT—Did you say 7.2 per cent?

Mr Barson—Yes, 7.2 per cent have been referred to ENT specialists.

Senator SIEWERT—But you do not have figures on glue ear and other issues you can deal with without referral?

Mr Barson—No, but I am sure that my colleagues in the Department of Health and Ageing have those figures.

Senator SIEWERT—So I should ask tomorrow.

Mr Barson—Yes.

Senator ALLISON—It sounds to me, if you are still doing checks, that the next part of the strategy will be a long-term process. However, the funding only goes until June this year. Is the government putting forward a continuation of this funding?

Senator Evans—The officers could perhaps help, Senator, but clearly that is a decision for the budget process in the sense that the minister will not know the funding until the budget is finalised. The government has made a commitment to continuing the intervention—a serious commitment to that. No doubt that will be reflected in budget decisions. I do not know whether you have anything to say about next year's budget, have you?

Dr Harmer—No, other than that Senator Evans is absolutely right. It was always intended that funding beyond the stabilisation phase, 2007-08, would be considered in the 2008 budget. That is the process.

Mr Yates—There are some commitments that I think are being followed through in the additional estimates process. The Department of Health and Ageing will be able to give you the detail, but, as I understand it, the previous government committed some significant further resources in the health area for another couple of years and funding to back that is in the current additional estimates process.

Senator ALLISON—This whole process suggests to me that the real problem is not that we needed people to come in and do a health check once every year or so, but that the existing health services—the remote area nursing clinic service or the community controlled health centres in larger areas—needed to be boosted. There needs to be more of them on the ground. Would you agree with that?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I think that is clearly the case. I would add a caveat to that by saying firstly that, in my experience, the people who are on the ground are doing a wonderful job. We have tremendous people working in the Northern Territory health service. The issue for them is that there just are not enough. There needs to be some capacity building, and part of the intervention's longer term aim for health is to build capacity, both at the primary health care level in clinics and in the specialist services that are offered to communities.

Senator SIEWERT—What planning is taking place to do that capacity building?

Major Gen. Chalmers—That is an issue that the Department of Health and Ageing are working on and negotiating with the Northern Territory government on.

Senator SIEWERT—I should ask the Department of Health and Ageing tomorrow?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Major Gen. Chalmers—I am sorry, Senator. I do not mean to be difficult.

Senator Evans—The other point that is worth stressing is that you cannot fix the dysfunction and the poverty just by taking health measures. Senator Allison, I was struck when I visited Wadeye with Kim Beazley some years ago and I asked a doctor what we could do. I said, 'What can we do to support you and the health service?' He said, 'Fix the housing.' That was a doctor. He did not say, 'Give me more nurses.' He said, 'Fix the housing.'

Senator ALLISON—If you go anywhere, in any Aboriginal community, minister, this will be the answer. You cannot have 20 people sleeping in a house overnight and expect that they are making food, washing and looking after children—it is just not possible.

Senator Evans—That is the point. He made the point that he had lost a three-year-old with rheumatic fever a couple of days before and that, although he had been up there for years—very experienced, very committed—that had really rocked him emotionally, because no child of three should die of rheumatic fever. I am making the point that that is support for a holistic response. All the health systems in the world will not help if the housing, the water, the hygiene are not suitable—the very point you make. It does require a much more holistic response. That was the point I was trying to make.

Senator ALLISON—We look forward to your response, minister.

Senator Evans—My other point, Senator Allison, is that unless we all own the problem we will not find a solution.

Senator ALLISON—Indeed.

Senator Evans—Every Australian has to own the problem and contribute to the solution; otherwise, we will not make progress. This will be just another failed experiment.

ACTING CHAIR—Are there further questions on health checks?

Senator ADAMS—Major General Chalmers, what are the main issues that you are having problems with at the present time?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I would say that my job is the rapid and coordinated rollout of the measures, and that is across the whole of government and across a range of policies. It is a bit like being a bricklayer—the policies are bricks and I have to lay them in the right order, in the right place and at the right time. I am very pleased with the progress that we have made against our initial planning, bearing in mind that we are some eight months into the first phase and the first year, which was stabilisation.

Specifically to answer your question on problems or issues, the Northern Territory is huge and communities are isolated, therefore they are logistically difficult to get to. The wet season exacerbates that problem. So a first problem is just the sheer size and remote nature of communities. A second problem is dealing in the cross-cultural communication area. Communication to people is exceptionally difficult. It requires effort, and then more effort, and then we have not done enough effort and we need to do some more. I have quite elaborate processes to work with communities to make sure that we are communicating what it is that we are doing, why we are doing it and how we want to do it, and then to work with them to make sure that when we want to do things it is appropriate in a time sense for the community—in other words, that they are not engaged in ceremony or sorry business or some other issue.

I do that through the government business managers who live in communities and therefore have a very good understanding of the communities, who are able over a prolonged period to talk to people about the intervention, about the policy measures, and to answer questions and then answer them again or different questions as they come up over time as people process and start to have a better understanding and start to have more questions. I do that through

consultations with traditional owners and councils which either I or my deputy commander, Mr Stacey, conduct on a very extensive program of visits and then, of course, through coordinating the various government agencies, the Centrelink or Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations teams that are coming in to do work in communities. But that issue of cross-cultural communication, of working with people who have a different frame of reference than I might to consider an issue, is a substantial problem, and one which government officials should not underestimate and which we need to work very effectively or very hard on. So I think those are the two major ones—they are not problems, they are just challenges—that I work through.

Senator ADAMS—They are very time consuming.

Major Gen. Chalmers—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—That is the message that you are giving: that this must keep going. I look at the bipartisan effect of this. Most of us on this committee have been doing inquiries with the Indigenous communities so we are all pretty up to speed with exactly what you are dealing with. I did have some more questions on the remote area nurses and their orientation, but I guess I had better ask that tomorrow with Health. But you are doing a great job, so thanks very much.

Major Gen. Chalmers—Thanks, Senator.

Senator ALLISON—Can I come back to the question of ear, nose and throat, particularly ear, infections. As I understand it, one of the problems with follow-up treatment is the lack of specialists in this area, particularly surgeons, and that the Northern Territory has only two. Is that correct?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I could not confirm the number as two. It is a small number, and so the Department of Health and Ageing are now working to bring specialists into the Northern Territory in order to address the issues. They have begun work on that part of the planning, but they are probably best placed to give you the detail of where they are up to.

Senator ALLISON—Of course, if you are needing surgery the damage is already done, as we know. Are the health teams recommending any blanket antibiotic programs to deal with otitis media?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I have not seen that, Senator, so I could not say.

Senator ALLISON—When does that sort of thing happen in the staging of this whole process?

Dr Harmer—Once we get beyond the staging and the numbers, you really would need to direct those questions to the department of health, who are managing it on the ground—the teams and the interaction with the department of health in the Northern Territory.

Mr Barson—I am certainly aware that health check teams are working very closely with the local medical services and that things like an immediate ongoing treatment are part of that referral back to the primary health care service for antibiotic treatment or anything else. It is a matter best addressed by Health and Ageing, but I am certainly aware that those immediate referrals back for continued intervention, be it antibiotic or whatever, are happening immediately following the health check team visits.

On the referrals to ENT surgeons, I think every remote part of Australia has difficulty in attracting large numbers of medical specialists. It is certainly an issue that I know the Northern Territory government and the Department of Health and Ageing are grappling with. I am sure my colleagues in the Department of Health and Ageing will be able to give much more detail on how those continued interventions are going to be managed.

Senator ALLISON—I am just wondering, from a logistics point of view—and that is your business, Major General Chalmers—how that might happen. If you need travelling teams of people to come in and do health checks, then until you build capacity in remote area nurse systems or their centres will you not also need them to come back—whether it is to do antibiotics for all kids in the whole community, or for adults and kids probably, or whether it is ointment for scabies because there is no point in rubbing it on one kid because it gets picked up from the dogs or the parents or the bedclothes or whatever. It seems to me there needs to be a whole-of-community approach to a lot of these problems to deliver preventive measures. You cannot deal with individuals. That seems to me to be yet another logistical problem. I do not know how that fits in all of this.

Major Gen. Chalmers—It is, Senator. Right at the moment the Department of Health and Ageing are working on how they are going address, in the shorter term, the referrals issues. The planning for that is well in advance and they will start work, particularly in Central Australia, very shortly and then work their way up through the Northern Territory in addressing referrals, by building capacity, by providing additional people into the existing Northern Territory health service. In the longer term, though, the aim will be to increase, in the case of ENT for example, the rate of visitation of specialists in the Northern Territory. Exactly how that is going to occur I think is still the subject of negotiation between the Department of Health and Ageing and the Northern Territory government. I certainly could not give you advice on it. I am not sure that the Department of Health and Ageing could give you specific advice yet.

Senator ALLISON—Minister, in the budget process, will this next step, this broader community approach to health and prevention of the very preventable diseases that now affect so many Indigenous communities, be considered?

Senator Chris Evans—I think the officers are explaining the broad approach and the staged approach to the enormity of the problem, but if you are asking me what is going to be in the budget and what is going to be funded I cannot—

Senator ALLISON—I am really just asking you to consider it, Minister.

Senator Chris Evans—I am happy to consider it. Obviously I cannot say because (1) I have no personal knowledge of Ms Macklin's budget bid and (2) I am certain I have no idea what the outcome of that will be. But I think you will see reflected a continued commitment to the strategy and to tackling the issues. In May, the financial support for that will be clear.

ACTING CHAIR—Do we have further questions on the health issues, bearing in mind that we are coming back to health tomorrow?

Senator BERNARDI—Following what Senator Allison said, and I did not hear all her conversation, was any consideration given to treating entire communities for particular

illnesses, as opposed to individual patients, as was suggested in, I think, the *Medical Journal of Australia*?

Dr Harmer—Senator, I think we would be unwise to try to answer that. You would better off asking the Department of Health and Ageing about that.

ACTING CHAIR—We will move onto something else. We did cover permits before and I think Senator Macdonald had a question on the permits.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I do have a couple of very quick questions. But first, General, can I congratulate you and the work that you and your team are doing. It is the first evidence ever, certainly in my time, that has demonstrated a real attempt to do something for Indigenous people in northern Australia—unfortunately, you are only working principally in the Northern Territory. I am just looking a bit to the future. The minister has announced that government contractors will be allowed in without a permit. What does ‘government contractors’ envisage? How wide is this term?

Dr Harmer—There will be a bill introduced in the House today, I am told, that will go to the changes that the government wants to make to the current provisions around permits. I expect that there will be a definition of that, but it is probably unwise, unless Ms Curran has any detailed information, for us to speculate because I am not aware of the definitions.

Ms Curran—The current provisions in the legislation are very broad. Basically, it applies to anyone who is involved in the delivery of government services. But it is quite a technical area, so could we give you some detailed advice on that on notice, rather than attempt to answer it here?

Senator IAN MACDONALD—If an electrician in Darwin is phoned by a community or a government agency in a community to come and fix a switch on a community, is he then a government contractor?

Ms Curran—If he is phoned by the community, he is not a government contractor if the community is employing him.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Would he need a permit?

Mr Barson—Most of the people who have regular contacts in the community, such as electricians who are called in to do repair work on generators, or plumbers or other tradesmen, already have permits issued by those communities for the regular work that they do in those communities. In that sense, whether permits are more broadly lifted or not lifted is not actually having any effect.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Are politicians attending considered government contractors or government agents?

Mr Yates—We did touch on this a bit earlier in questioning. The land rights act does exempt a range of personnel, including, for example, members of parliament for the Northern Territory.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Thanks for that. If the bill is in the House and there is detail about the—

Senator Chris Evans—I have undertaken to the committee that if it is introduced today, I will make sure copies are distributed to the members.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Thank you.

Senator Chris Evans—I have not seen it so we cannot help with the exact provisions. As I pointed out to Senator Bernardi, we had this debate when we dealt with the original legislation. The changes are in broad understood, but the actual bill should be available to you this afternoon.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I can ask further questions on this in the committee stages of the bill. Just quickly, is it legal to charge a consideration for the issue of a permit?

Mr Barson—I will take advice and correct this if it is incorrect, but I do not believe there is anything in the act requiring these permits that provides for a fee for same. I will check that and if that is not right, I will tell the committee later on today.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Conversely, is it illegal to charge a fee or a consideration—not necessarily a fee?

Dr Harmer—We will take on notice.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—If you have the answer now, it would facilitate debate in the committee stage. I am interested in the arrangements between the Commonwealth and the various states. I am interested in Queensland, of course. Is that appropriate in this output, or should I wait until a little later on to do that? Could someone tell me?

Dr Harmer—It depends on the nature of the relationship. If you are talking about a relationship around Indigenous affairs, it would be appropriate now. If it was something broader, such as housing—

ACTING CHAIR—Ask the question and we will see.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I am impressed with what Major General Chalmers and his team are doing in the Northern Territory. There is a crying need for that sort of intervention in the north of Queensland—

Senator ADAMS—As there is in all areas of northern Australia.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—and, I suspect, in the north of Western Australia, with which I am not as familiar. I know there have been meetings between, if not ministers, certainly officials of the Commonwealth and the states to look at those sorts of things. My questions are relatively general. Are those things being discussed? Where are those discussions at? Is there any likelihood that there will be a more cooperative federal-state involvement in the problems of Indigenous people in northern Queensland and northern Western Australia?

Dr Harmer—Answering your last question first: it is certainly likely that there will be more cooperative arrangements between the federal government and the Queensland and Western Australian governments. There are discussions going on. There is a Council of Australian Governments subcommittee looking specifically at Indigenous affairs—at the closing the gap commitments the government has made. On that subcommittee are people

from Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory—in fact all the states. That is to report at the end of March to COAG and out of that report will come the next initiatives.

It is too early to speculate on where that will go, but certainly Minister Macklin has been holding discussions with the Queensland Premier about what can be done in Cape York, for example. We have some cooperative effort around the Cape York Institute's initiatives with Noel Pearson. We have also been working with the Western Australian government on the Kimberley area. I do not think it is likely at the moment, although it is still for government decision, that there will be a Northern Territory intervention-type response in either the north of Western Australia or North Queensland. I think there have been some comments made about that—that it is not likely—but there may be a considerable number of the elements of the intervention in the Northern Territory that are relevant, and clearly relevant, in those parts of northern Australia.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I appreciate you saying there are discussions. I am not going to ask you what is being discussed, but is the question of the Commonwealth taking over arrangements in parts, or the whole, of Queensland and Western Australia on the agenda? I acknowledge that the problems in the north are different from what they are in Sydney or Melbourne, where I know there are problems but they are different sorts of problems. I am not asking what has been decided. It seems quite clear that over the last 50 years the states have been quite incapable of dealing with these issues. It seems to be being addressed in the Northern Territory, if it is not wound back too far.

Daily, up where I come from in the north, I read of incidents involving Aboriginal children being put in a third-class resort for five months at a time without care. That passes as care for an Indigenous child at risk. They are shoved in a third- or second-class resort north of Cairns. Every day you read about things like that. Are the states at least talking about an acceptance that they have been unable simply to deal with the basics?

Dr Harmer—All I can say in relation your question is that at the COAG meeting in December it was agreed by the Prime Minister and Premiers that there would be a specific group to report back to the COAG meeting at the end of March. It will report on Indigenous disadvantage and how the Commonwealth and the states can work together on dealing with Indigenous disadvantage. So they have taken it seriously. It is one of only seven COAG subgroups. Minister Macklin is chairing that group. She has on it representatives from all the states and territories and the issues that are being discussed will go to the roles and responsibilities, and how the Commonwealth and the states can cooperate to deal with some of those issues.

Mr Yates—The constitutional capacity of the federal government to act in the Northern Territory is very different from the situation in regard to other states.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—The states can cede their powers or collaborate as corporations.

Mr Yates—One of the areas that the current government is working on is a national child protection framework. Under the umbrella of such a framework, there may be new opportunities for collaboration or the management of particular features of current support for children. That is really still evolving.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I do not think I can take that much further, but thanks for that. I hope Senator Evans might pass on my sentiments, which I know are shared by a lot of people. I mean no disrespect to the states, but I think the Commonwealth is the right entity to be dealing with these things, as the intervention has shown.

Senator Chris Evans—Senator Macdonald, we also have to recognise that similar efforts have been made in the past. Under the previous government, the COAG trials were initiated and were supposed to provide an opportunity to bring state and Commonwealth resources together. A lot of commitment was made by the previous government just after that. People like Mr Shergold and departmental secretaries took responsibility. This is a personal view, but I think in large part they were an unmitigated disaster. The assessments of their effectiveness were pretty damning and we dropped the ball. Attention moved elsewhere and the Commonwealth and the states have to share responsibility for that. I guess I am saying that we have all had the experience of failed experiments. The cooperation between Commonwealth and state agencies is the key. It has been long recognised, but we have actually just got to make sure we get it right and make it work.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I will not enter into a debate, but that is why I am saying that, if you look at what has happened in the Northern Territory, there has been a real start made, effectively—and I know that the Northern Territory was agreeable. I just urge Ms Macklin and the state Premiers to look at really what the end result is rather than at who is in charge and who might and might not get kudos.

Senator Chris Evans—We had that discussion earlier and I made the point then that this government is committed to the 12-month review to really assess the evidence of what works and what does not, to have a real evidence-based approach.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Another review.

Senator Chris Evans—To assess the evidence. We could go on for 10 years and find, like the COAG trials, that we had not made a difference—that we had wasted a lot of money and failed—or we can have an evidence-based approach and constantly check whether what we are doing is working. With the greatest of respect to everyone, we do not know yet whether even the Northern Territory intervention will have any long-term impact. We have to measure and commit to making sure that it does and that it is not just another intervention or experiment where commitment drops off and we do not measure whether what we think will work does work.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—If it keeps getting wound back, it will not work.

ACTING CHAIR—I think we have gone into debate now.

Senator SIEWERT—There is plenty of anecdotal evidence coming out that shows there are problems and a great deal of hardship caused with it. Before we all clap each other on the back, can we get down to looking at some of those issues?

ACTING CHAIR—We are not here to have a debate.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—We have been trying to do this for 50 years—

ACTING CHAIR—Order!

Senator IAN MACDONALD—and where have we got with the sort of approach that you have been pursuing in addressing these sorts of things?

Senator SIEWERT—Have a look at some of the evidence before your eyes to see that it is a problem.

ACTING CHAIR—Order! Senator Siewert and Senator Macdonald, we are not here to have a debate.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—It is the same old approach—hold an inquiry.

ACTING CHAIR—We are here to ask questions of the families, housing and community services portfolio.

Senator Chris Evans—You had 11 years in government to—

ACTING CHAIR—If we can please just calm down.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—We started to do something about it.

Senator Chris Evans—In the last year.

ACTING CHAIR—I think it is a very opportune moment to have a morning tea break and a hose down. We will resume at a quarter to 11. I propose to move off permits and to move to CDEP at that time.

Senator SIEWERT—Chair, you have skipped the beginning process, which is doing the budget and the overview. With all due respect, we went straight to the permit system and then we went to health checks and we were asking questions. Could we go back and do some of the budget stuff first and then move on? We are jumping all over the place and I would rather that we were systematic in our approach.

ACTING CHAIR—I was not here when the committee started; Senator Moore was looking after it then. I will ask her when she comes back and we will see what she wants to do. She will be back in the chair by then.

Senator BOSWELL—I have about two minutes on CDEP.

Senator ADAMS—I have some general things.

ACTING CHAIR—Let us talk about it over the break and we will come back to it at a quarter to 11.

Proceedings suspended from 10.45 am to 10.54 am

ACTING CHAIR—Minister, the suggestion was made during the break that, as there are a sufficient number of issues to be raised in this area, it might be worth our while extending, into this afternoon, the time that we take to consider indigenous affairs. Would your officers be available until, say, three o'clock this afternoon?

Senator Evans—That should be okay. I have a bit of a problem, but what lunch break are you suggesting?

ACTING CHAIR—The usual 12.30 pm until 1.30 pm, so we will have another hour and a half on indigenous affairs between 1.30 pm and 3.00 pm.

Senator Evans—Clearly, it is the committee's decision as to how it allocates its time. Do you have a more general view about other areas that people want to concentrate on—just to get some guidance on the use of officers' time?

ACTING CHAIR—It seems to me that members now want to go back and concentrate on overview questions about the financing of the Northern Territory exercise. We need to look at housing, law and order, CDEP and possibly a couple of other issues in those categories.

Senator SIEWERT—Quarantining?

Senator Evans—Would it be fair to say to the department that issues that are not included in the broad Northern Territory intervention category will not be reached until after three o'clock and that those officers will not be required until then?

Senator SIEWERT—I also want to address the whole-of-government approach. There are specific matters around, for example, municipal rearrangement of issues. A number of matters come under indigenous issues.

Senator Evans—No, I mean intervention in the broadest sense.

Senator SIEWERT—I beg your pardon.

Senator Evans—If officers here are involved in international relations and social policy, they probably will not be required until three o'clock. Is that right?

ACTING CHAIR—That would be the case, yes. I think we have enough on purely indigenous issues to go until three o'clock.

Dr Harmer—I seek clarification. Am I correct in saying that those officers present who may have been expecting to do disabilities or whatever after lunch are not needed now until after three o'clock?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Dr Harmer—Given that, can I ask whether, thinking about programming for the rest of the day, any areas will not be gone to during the day—

Senator SIEWERT—Issues that we will not get to.

Dr Harmer—and I can let those officers go, for example, or do you still think we will go through all the subprograms?

ACTING CHAIR—That is a reasonable question. In the next few minutes, I will circulate the agenda and ask people to indicate on what issues they will ask questions. If we establish that we do not have questions in a particular area, we will be able to let those officers go.

Dr Harmer—Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—The plan is to complete Output group 1 and Output group 3.1, Support for Families, as it relates to indigenous matters, by three o'clock this afternoon. So we will deal with all the indigenous issues at that time. We then will move to the other programs, specifically Output group 2.4, Support for Youth, from three o'clock onwards. In the next few minutes, we will check to see what issues people want to ask questions about, in case there are areas that we can dispense with altogether. We have already done that check,

but we will check again in case there are some areas that we can send away. I think that is agreed. We now move to general questions about the financial impact of the intervention.

Senator SIEWERT—How much money to date has been spent on the intervention?

Mr Yates—As you will be aware, as part of the legislation, around \$587 million was appropriated specifically for this year. The legislation was passed in August and we have been ramping up the rollout of the measure progressively since then. Our current assessment—it has been affected a little by machinery of government changes, such as functions being moved between departments and the like, that have occurred—is that just under one-third of that had been spent as at the end of January.

Senator SIEWERT—What is that?

Mr Yates—Just under \$170 million.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you break that down into broad areas for me: how much on quarantining, how much on medical checks and how much on housing et cetera?

Dr Harmer—We can probably do it by department rather than by specific measures.

Mr Yates—We have the broad categories of measures.

Senator SIEWERT—Why can't you do it by department?

Dr Harmer—We may be able to.

Mr Yates—We would not have the individual subcomponents, which are the responsibility of the particular department, but we can certainly go to the eight measures that comprise the overall intervention package. In the area of employment and welfare reform, the expenditure is \$72 million.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that specifically around CDEP, going to Work for the Dole and quarantining measures?

Mr Yates—As you know, about 36 individual measures constitute the response. They have been bracketed into about eight different categories. Employment and welfare reform would have some of the primary elements to that.

Senator SIEWERT—I am not purposely trying to take up time or be painful, but perhaps you could give us the eight broad measures and then, if it is possible, provide—hopefully not as a question on notice but more quickly—the specific breakdown of the more individual measures.

Mr Yates—I do not know whether we have the very specific item-by-item summation. That work is being undertaken at present with departments by the Department of Finance and Deregulation, but I can certainly give you the broad categories now.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Mr Yates—Employment and welfare reform, \$72.4 million; promoting law and order, \$23.7 million; enhancing education, \$1.3 million; supporting families, \$7 million; improving child and family health, \$14.9 million; housing and land reform, \$30.4 million; and the overall coordination measures, \$18.9 million. That adds up to \$168.6 million. That would be

an estimate. The reality is that certain charges are being made around expenditure that may not have been attributed yet, so that is an indicative estimate as at the end of January 2008.

Senator ALLISON—That is a long way short of the appropriation. What is the estimate for the overall cost? Are you suggesting that there is a big underspend there?

Mr Yates—The rollout of the measures has been progressive, so it was not expected to be pro rata over the course of the year. The individual measures have been progressively building up. Some were due to come on stream later; they did not all start at the beginning of the emergency response. We were not anticipating that we would have a pro rata spend of five or six months at this point in time.

Senator ALLISON—So will the whole appropriations be taken up within the period that they cover?

Mr Yates—That is the assessment that is being undertaken presently. In particular, the finance department is looking, with agencies, at exactly what will be their expected expenditure over the remaining part of this financial year.

Senator ALLISON—How many months is the \$168 million for?

Mr Yates—The response was announced in June, but the legislation was passed in late August, including the appropriations.

Senator ALLISON—So that is August to January.

Mr Yates—I think it is also important to appreciate that the assessment that was made that underpinned the appropriation was on the basis of no-win, no-loss. That is, if individual measures required additional funding, there was an opportunity to go back to that; but, if the estimate of expenditure for a particular measure were out, that money would be returned to the finance.

Senator ALLISON—But the appropriation was until the end of June, wasn't it?

Mr Yates—That is correct.

Senator ALLISON—So there remains over \$400 million not spent as at the end of January.

Mr Yates—That is our current estimate.

Senator SIEWERT—I am sorry to be pedantic, but I have seven measures: coordination; housing; child health; families; education; law and order; and employment and welfare. Did I miss one?

Mr Yates—Yes, I am sorry. There are seven; that is correct. The total is \$168.6 million.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it possible to provide a breakdown showing how much of that total relates to the administration of the employment and welfare program? Is that all administration with the changeover to quarantining?

Mr Yates—There would be significant administered funds as well as departmental costs associated with that measure.

Senator SIEWERT—So how do I find out what they are?

Mr Yates—We will take that question on notice and see what we can do. As I said, a comprehensive picture currently is being prepared by the finance department, but we will do what we can to give you an indication of any breakdowns.

Senator SIEWERT—I would appreciate a breakdown on how much of this funding is on the ground and how much of it is administration in changing the process and putting in place the quarantining system et cetera. I want to know what the full costs are of implementing these different measures.

Mr Yates—I understand your question. Administration includes the people who are implementing the measures—that is, on the ground. That would include, for example, our government business managers, who are on the ground working in communities. You do not want us to make judgments about what is on the ground versus what is not on the ground.

Senator SIEWERT—I am not casting any aspersions on the effectiveness of the business managers but, as far as I am concerned, that is administration. So far there is \$1.3 million on education, for example. What is that for, when compared with the \$72 million that is being spent on employment and welfare? I presume that ‘welfare’ does not include welfare itself, such as income support payments; it is how the quarantining processes are being put in place.

Mr Yates—That is correct. We will do our best to provide you with a breakdown. The normal split is between administered funds, which is your program activity, and departmental funds.

Senator SIEWERT—I realise that I might be pushing my luck here: is the housing money being used to provide staff housing in communities, or is it being used for providing for and improving housing for Aboriginal members of the community?

Ms Moody—The housing and land reform category includes staff housing, which is largely demountables, in remote communities for government business managers, the Centrelink people and other government officials needing to work there. It includes a range of other costs associated with land-servicing surveying and other costs associated with leasing. It does not include funding for indigenous housing, which is subject to a different program. A large amount of money in the ARIA program deals with the housing component.

Senator SIEWERT—We will come to housing. As tempting as it is, I will not dive in there yet, because we have agreed that we will do budget stuff first.

Dr Harmer—I just add to that to make a point. I stand to be corrected, but I am pretty confident that no houses have been built, certainly none from the allocation for Northern Territory indigenous housing, for departmental officials or contractors.

Senator SIEWERT—I am sorry. I may have misunderstood what I was just told.

Dr Harmer—I am going to go on because this may help. There have been no individual houses built. We are accommodating our government business managers, the police, the people from Centrelink and the people from the old DEEWR in demountables or containers. This is temporary type accommodation that we have either transported from South Australia or purchased from overseas, I think, in some cases. I just want to make sure that it is

understood that there has been no diminution of our effort in indigenous housing to house public servants and contractors.

Senator SIEWERT—An amount of \$30.4 million has been spent in providing those demountables and c-tainers.

Dr Harmer—That is the bulk—

Senator SIEWERT—I presume you are talking about c-tainers and stuff like that.

Ms Moody—Yes. Also there is a fair amount for cadastral surveys and associated costs.

Senator SIEWERT—Out of those resources, how many staff members have now been put on board for the specific Northern Territory intervention?

Mr Yates—Out of the overall resources?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Mr Yates—We would be able to make an estimate only in regard to our own organisation in terms of the measures for which we are responsible.

Senator SIEWERT—Who would I ask for the overall picture? Who has the overall picture?

Mr Yates—We are looking to maintain a picture of the overall spending, which is why I was able to give you the data before. In translating that into personnel that have been recruited by individual agencies to implement the measures, we have not sought to get that data from those agencies. I think we have a picture of their departmental spending and that will be a mixture of salaries as well as administration.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you tell me what it is for your agency?

Mr Yates—It is of the order of 150 people. That is the operation centre personnel, of which the government business managers are perhaps the biggest slice. Then, to support measures under the intervention, a range of other officers are employed either in the Northern Territory or in the national office.

Senator SIEWERT—So the 150 are spread between the national office and the Northern Territory?

Mr Yates—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—Do all communities now have business managers?

Mr Yates—No, not every one of them. They are being recruited progressively. Major General Chalmers could probably update us with the latest data. We have had a number of waves of recruitment to build up those numbers progressively. He can probably indicate the latest.

Major Gen. Chalmers—At the moment, 39 government business managers are servicing 62 communities. A further 13 have just been recruited, six of whom have almost completed their induction training and will deploy shortly, so that will bring the number up to 45. The remainder of that 13 will deploy early next month. My objective is to bring the government business managers up to about 60 servicing the 73 communities, and the town camps are serviced through the ICC network.

Senator SIEWERT—Town camps are serviced through ICC?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—In your opinion, are night patrols a valuable service to the communities?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I want to be careful here. As I said earlier, my job is the coordinated and rapid roll out of policy measures, so I am not certain whether my opinion is important here.

Senator ADAMS—It is. You are the one who is on the ground.

Senator Evans—Under our procedures, Major General Chalmers cannot offer his opinion, but obviously we want to facilitate the committee's understanding of the issues.

Senator ADAMS—I will rephrase the question.

Senator Evans—I think you should ask him of his experience of interaction between his operations and those patrols—something that does not result in him getting shot by the department or the minister. I am happy for him to be helpful without getting himself into trouble.

Major Gen. Chalmers—Perhaps I can couch an answer in terms of—

Senator ADAMS—I want to know the role of the night patrols.

Major Gen. Chalmers—Night patrols are a community endeavour, which is supported by government. Generally, they comprise half a dozen people from the community. They operate at night, as the name suggests, and provide a level of security. They do things like disperse gatherings and send home children who are out and about at night when they should not be. When domestic violence situations start to develop, they can often diffuse those situations. So they provide a low level of security in communities. Generally, communities value them and are very supportive of them. Clearly, they make a difference in law and order because they can address situations which otherwise would require intervention by police and, of course, that sometimes escalates situations.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you very much. Minister, could you explain to me why \$1 million has been taken away from the night patrol services?

Senator Chris Evans—No, I cannot, if that is right, Senator.

Senator ADAMS—Well—

Senator Chris Evans—I will get an answer for you; I am just not—

Senator ADAMS—It is on page 18.

Senator Chris Evans—I will try to get the right officer to answer the question for you.

Major Gen. Chalmers—Senator, I might add that the Attorney-General's Department is the relevant department for the night patrols, so they are probably best placed to answer that question.

Senator ALLISON—Ms Moody seems to have the answer.

Senator ADAMS—I think Ms Moody will have it. It is in the budget papers here.

Senator Chris Evans—I think Ms Moody might be helpful.

Ms Moody—Senator, it has not been taken away from the night patrol; it is actually being given to the night patrol funding.

Senator ADAMS—Why does it have a minus here?

Ms Moody—Because it has been taken out of FaHCSIA and put into the Attorney-General's portfolio. So it is just a transfer between the two Commonwealth agencies.

Senator ADAMS—It would have been good to have had a note there for us, because it makes it really difficult. We do not have the Attorney-General's budget papers.

ACTING CHAIR (Senator Humphries)—A number of transfers occur in this packet which are marked as transfers, and this one is not. So it is not surprising that a senator would assume this was a cut.

Dr Harmer—Thank you, Senator. We will make sure that—

Senator Chris Evans—I think the department will take on board the commentary about whether it is easily understood. I think that is important. Dr Harmer will take a note of that. Do you want to provide any more information about the overall funding of night patrols so that Senator Adams has a sense of what has happened to the funding?

Ms Moody—They are funded within the Attorney-General's portfolio, and I do not have the total. But they certainly received additional funding as part of the intervention for additional night patrols.

Senator ADAMS—I am concerned as I have spent a lot of time in Aboriginal communities and I was horrified when I saw this. I thought, 'Goodness!' I thought of all the people. A lot of women in the community man these patrols and, so far as I am concerned, those women are very good people and I would hate to see that job diminish.

Senator Chris Evans—Senator Adams, I agree with you. I will ask the department. It is not quite their area. But we will get an answer for you, which will explain what has happened to the funding of night patrols overall, even though it will require some consultation with the Attorney-General's Department. I think Attorney-General's Department has already been through the estimates process, so we will get an answer across the department for you so you get an overview. Obviously what has happened has misled you.

Senator SIEWERT—Senator Evans, just to add to that, it has only one year for their transfer this year, 2007 to 2008. Does that mean that in ongoing years it is just factored into the Attorney-General's budget and only this year's budget from FaHCSIA has moved over? Could that be explained when you get that brief?

Mr Yates—We can explain it now. The appropriation in regard to the Northern Territory emergency response was for only one year, with future years to be determined in future budgets.

Senator SIEWERT—This is additional funding provided to FaHCSIA for night patrols that you have handed over to Attorney-General's as part of the Northern Territory intervention?

Mr Yates—Essentially, that is correct.

Dr Harmer—Senator, we should apologise. We should have made it clear that it was a transfer. We will make sure that we pay attention to that next time.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you very much, that would help.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I would like to follow up that issue to try to understand how things occurred. Was it a decision of the incoming government that night patrols should be under the responsibility of the Attorney-General's Department? Was it just one of the washouts of the intervention that it made more sense for it to be in the other area? How do these things come about?

Ms Moody—Senator, you might consider it an accounting adjustment. The Attorney-General's portfolio has always been responsible for the night patrols. When the original intervention funding was worked through between the agencies and the Department of Finance and Administration, as it then was, some of the support costs for the whole-of-government intervention for agencies was given to FaHCSIA. So we provide a certain amount of logistic support, including vehicles and the like, for the whole intervention. As part of that, the Attorney-General's Department did not receive quite the right amount of money to fund the night patrols. It was just a difference between what bucket of money it got put into, but we wanted to adjust it here. So it does not reduce the amount of total expenditure. It was just that a decision was made at the time about what bucket we put it into and, in retrospect, it was not quite right.

Senator ADAMS—So long as they continue—that was my concern. Major General Chalmers, I have another question for you. What is the role of NORFORCE at the moment so far as the intervention goes?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Defence provided logistic support for the intervention and, specifically, through NORFORCE. NORFORCE has provided drivers and camp support for our child health check teams. In order to get a team of a doctor and several nurses out to a community, we have required some vehicles and drivers, and NORFORCE provides that capacity. It also remains in the community, if necessary—it is not always necessary; it depends on the accommodation arrangements that are available for the team—to provide camp services and to set up some tents, stretchers and so on for the team. Defence support to the intervention is very much limited to logistic support.

Senator ADAMS—You might be interested, or you probably know, that we have a Defence Force parliamentary program going out with NORFORCE for five days. I will certainly be doing that and I encourage members of this committee to come as well. I think it is a great opportunity for us to be able to get on the ground and see exactly the role that NORFORCE plays and to establish what is going on in your group. I am looking forward to that.

My third question relates to public health. As we know, in a number of Aboriginal communities dogs are an important part of their culture. Unfortunately, the dogs tend to breed rather rapidly and often carry diseases and, since the dogs sleep with the children, there are problems in that respect. I know that at one stage Alice Springs did have a big cull, but is there any follow up to limit the number of dogs in the community?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Essentially, dogs are a local government problem. But, as we discussed earlier and as the minister pointed out, particular health problems are caused by a range of vectors and dogs can have a significant impact on child health. It is of concern to me to help communities deal with dogs. Dogs are culturally important, particularly in central Australia, so culling is not necessarily an appropriate approach or response. I have worked with AMRC—I will embarrass myself by not being able to unpack that acronym—which is an organisation that works in particular in companion animal health but specifically in dog health. We have run a pilot program in Kintore through AMRC to examine the problem of dogs, to look at dog health and to make sure that people are educated in the care of dogs and in controlling the population. Whilst AMRC veterinarians will put dogs down if they meet certain criteria—ill health and so on—generally, that is not the approach. Culling is not the approach; the approach is education, dog health, and also sterilisation of animals.

Senator ADAMS—Yes, sterilisation. Being a farmer I probably used the wrong word, but that is what I meant. I visited Yuendumu on a very hot day—I went to watch the women doing their art—and I think I counted 42 bitches, all lying there and all with milk, so obviously there were an all awful lot of puppies floating around in Yuendumu. It was just an observation that I made. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Are there any further questions in that area?

Senator ALLISON—I have a question regarding demountables and the containers that are being used. They sound horribly hot. Presumably we have air-conditioners in them going 24 hours a day, seven days a week?

Major Gen. Chalmers—The government accommodation is air-conditioned. It can be very hot, though. It is a trade-off between getting accommodation into the communities, which already suffer from overcrowding and limited housing opportunities for government officials, and doing it quickly and, at the same time, not diverting resources away from housing programs.

Senator Chris Evans—Not to mention any commitment to climate change and reducing greenhouse gases.

Major Gen. Chalmers—Indeed, minister.

Senator ALLISON—I have no further questions.

CHAIR—Do I take it that that area is completed? We will move on to specific areas then.

Senator BERNARDI—Are you happy if we touch on law and order for a little while?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. We want to ensure that you are aware we have to cover a whole lot of areas.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand that. Just on law and order, in regard to the Northern Territory intervention: there was a commitment by the Commonwealth to supply Australian Federal Police officers in various communities. I understand there was a commitment that was to be matched by state officers as well as police officers. Has that commitment been fulfilled by the states?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Firstly, if I can slightly correct your statement: it is not a commitment that was to be matched. Different jurisdictions gave commitments to providing a number of officers to the Northern Territory intervention. Queensland provided 10, New South Wales provided 10, Victoria provided 10, South Australia provided five and Tasmania provided two. Those were commitments for between four and six months, depending on the jurisdiction. In the case of Queensland those officers have come, done a great job and have now been redeployed to Queensland. Similarly, the NSW Police have either finished or are about to finish their deployment.

The Commonwealth government committed to 66 AFP officers, six of whom would be allocated to the child abuse task force. Another number—it is eight or 10—will provide administrative support in Darwin to the AFP deployment into the intervention, and the remainder will be deployed into remote communities. At the moment we have 50 additional police on duty in remote communities compared to before the intervention. They represent a number who are AFP, some still from jurisdictions and Northern Territory police, who match. Generally, Commissioner White, the police commissioner, puts one Northern Territory police officer in a community with two from another jurisdiction—either AFP or from the other jurisdictions.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. Was it an oversight? You mentioned Queensland and New South Wales but you did not mention the contribution of the other states as having fulfilled their commitment.

Major Gen. Chalmers—We are still in that process. They started later. There were negotiations between the different commissioners, the state and territory governments and the Commonwealth government over issues like conditions of service and so on. So the deployments from each jurisdiction did not start at the same time—they were staggered—and the deployments were not all of the same length. Some have completed and some will complete shortly. As they complete, the AFP backfill in behind.

Senator BERNARDI—What states and territories have not fulfilled their commitment so far?

Major Gen. Chalmers—None have not fulfilled their commitment.

Senator BERNARDI—I should say have not commenced it.

Major Gen. Chalmers—And none have not commenced yet.

Senator BERNARDI—Can I assume that they have not all provided officers on the ground?

Major Gen. Chalmers—That is correct.

Senator BERNARDI—Which states have not provided officers on the ground to this point?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Western Australia chose not to provide additional police to the intervention.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay, but the other states and territories have supplied officers?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Yes.

Ms Moody—The ACT also chose not to provide officers.

Major Gen. Chalmers—That is correct. The ACT did not provide officers.

Senator BERNARDI—What are the costs associated with bringing in these officers from the states? Has that been borne by the Commonwealth or is it being borne by the states?

Ms Moody—The cost of the deployment of the state officers is borne by the Commonwealth.

Senator BERNARDI—How much is that amounting to?

Ms Moody—We expect it to be of the order of around \$4 million.

Senator BERNARDI—How many communities will they then be policing?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Before the intervention, and depending on how you counted them, there were about 18 permanent police presences in the prescribed communities. We will increase the number of permanent police presences by a further 18, so there are now an additional 18. There are 17 on line and Warruwi is about to come on line as we get the infrastructure and communications issues finally sorted out there. There will be 18 additional permanent presences. The nuance in your question, though, is that policing occurs either by a permanent presence or by a visiting presence. Other communities have a much more responsive visiting presence because they now have a permanent police presence closer to them than they did before the intervention. Across the board there is a significant increase in the amount of policing that occurs in remote communities.

Senator BERNARDI—How many Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory does the emergency response cover?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Seventy-three communities and five town camps.

Senator BERNARDI—How many of those have permanent police presences?

Major Gen. Chalmers—When Warruwi comes on line there will be 36 with a permanent police presence actually in the community. But, as I said, the remainder have a visiting presence. Some communities—for example, Yirrkala, which is close to Nhulunbuy—have a large police station policing both the Nhulunbuy-Gove area and the associated communities very close to them.

Senator BERNARDI—And a permanent police presence is defined as a resident police officer?

Major Gen. Chalmers—More than one, but essentially it would be a watch house with generally three, but sometimes two, police officers living in the community. They will have housing in the community and they will have a watch house there. We have had to acquire temporary or demountable watch houses and, most importantly, containment facilities. The infrastructure is around not just additional police people but also the support mechanisms they need to be able to do their job.

Senator BERNARDI—How many communities of a relative size—say, 200-plus residents—are currently without a permanent presence?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I would have to take that question on notice. The 73 communities are roughly communities of 100 or more. The Valentine review looked at communities of 200 or more, but I do not have the figure of how many of 200 and above would not have a presence. We could find that out.

Senator BERNARDI—Perhaps you could provide us with a list of the communities, their population, and whether there is a permanent police presence—

Major Gen. Chalmers—I certainly could do.

Senator BERNARDI—and how many police are present in a region.

Major Gen. Chalmers—Certainly. One would just have to be careful on the interpretation of the figures. Just providing a list of communities, their size, and whether or not they have a permanent police presence is not the whole story. If a community is very, very remote, it might require a police presence because the response time would be very long, whereas a larger community that is close to Nhulunbuy, which is the example I gave, might not have a permanent police presence because the police commissioner's judgment would be that a response within a reasonable amount of time could be provided. I just caution the interpretation of the figures will have to be a little careful.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you for that. You can take it from me that we will use the information wisely; as I am sure Senator Evans will attest to.

Senator Evans—As you know, the other factor is that there is often quite a bit of movement between communities. So what might be a community of 100 one day might be a community of 10 the next day. Sometimes I have flown into communities when they have been deserted because of cultural business or what have you. The other thing I suspect that the police are dealing with is the shifts. I know that the movement of the population is a huge issue in your state in the provision of educational services. I am sure with those caveats Mr Chalmers will give you the relevant information.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you. How many of the police officers are actually Indigenous?

Major Gen. Chalmers—That is not a figure I have. There are two kinds of police in the Northern Territory: mainstream Northern Territory police officers and what are called ACPOs, or Aboriginal community police officers. ACPOs are all Indigenous and have certain powers and training that is provided by the Northern Territory police, but they have lesser powers than a mainstream police officer. Of the 50 additional police who are currently working as part of the intervention, I do not have a breakdown of how many of them might be Indigenous or not.

Senator BERNARDI—Would you be able to supply that to us on notice?

Major Gen. Chalmers—The police commissioner would be able to give me that data and, yes, we can provide that to you.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you. There has been some talk about women's refuges within some of these communities. I would like to get your opinion on how these women's refuges are constructed and in how many communities they are operating?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I think you are referring to safe houses.

Senator BERNARDI—Safe houses or whatever.

Major Gen. Chalmers—There is a safe house program to construct another 14 safe houses—I think I am correct on that—in communities. Essentially, those are places for women to go. The Northern Territory government and the department have worked together to identify the communities of need. Some communities already have safe houses. I think it is important also to note that some communities are seeking a men's refuge—somewhere for men to go when they are either drunk or having difficulties so that they can be managed by other men away from their families. That is an important part of the program and it is part of the intervention.

Senator BERNARDI—How are the safe houses effectively made safe? Are there permanent staff attached to them, or are there security officers?

Major Gen. Chalmers—They are located next to or near a police station. That is one of the criteria for constructing the safe houses, Senator. But beyond that I am not able to give you an answer about their staffing. One of the other officers might.

Ms Burns—There are staff funded to be established in the safe houses, Senator.

Senator BERNARDI—What are the criteria for accessing a safe house? Talking about a woman's safe house, can a woman take her infant children there with her?

Ms Burns—Yes, Senator.

Senator BERNARDI—At what age should her children be before they are not eligible to go in?

Ms Burns—I do not think we have seen anything in place, Senator.

Senator BERNARDI—So a teenage boy could go into a safe house?

Ms Burns—I imagine it would be subject to the expert opinion of the workers in the safe places, but we certainly have not set any rules about the age at which there should be a cut-off.

Senator BERNARDI—One has to presume that there would be a cut-off for an adult child. One would hasten to make that presumption.

Mr Barson—Yes.

Ms Burns—Yes.

Senator BERNARDI—So there is a limit but there is no upper limit apart from adulthood?

Mr Barson—It is not an age limit per se, Senator.

Senator CROSSIN—Senator Bernardi, with all due respect, I think that would depend on the view of the community and whether or not that teenage boy has been initiated, whether he would be allowed to enter a place that is available for women, or whether he would be able to go because he is still part of that family. In Aboriginal culture, once a boy is initiated, no matter what his age, even if he is 13, he is deemed to be a man in their eyes.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. I am not trying to score points here; I am really just trying to ascertain what is the vulnerability of children that are still attached to their mothers. How many people in the department have been employed in the construction, sustainability and ongoing maintenance of these safe houses?

Ms Burns—There is no separate group within the department responsible specifically for constructing or maintaining these safe houses; it is part of the overall rollout of capital works in the Northern Territory.

Senator BERNARDI—So it is not specifically allocated?

Mr Barson—Senator, in the Northern Territory office the number varies according to workloads and other priorities. But as at last week I had three staff involved in the safe house program, arranging with the communities the appropriate locations and timing of safe houses, ensuring the delivery of demountables, and things like that. At that stage I had three staff working on the safe house rollout program.

Senator SIEWERT—In which communities are these safe houses? Maybe you could provide that information rather than taking up the time of the committee. Are they being organised with the community? How many existing safe houses are you funding? For example, I am aware of at least one in Alice Springs. Last time I was there, which was not that long ago, it was suffering from funding troubles. How many existing safe houses are you funding and supporting, or are you putting new safe houses into communities, separate to existing ones and separate to the community efforts?

Ms Burns—We are establishing and expanding the safe houses program. They are going to up to 15 communities and two additional services are going to Darwin and Alice Springs.

Senator SIEWERT—Two additional services? Does that mean one in Darwin and one in Alice Springs?

Ms Burns—Yes and then there are 15 communities for which we can give you the list.

Senator SIEWERT—A new one is going to Alice Springs. Has that been done by working with the community, or how has it been organised?

Mr Barson—Absolutely. It is being done working with the communities in the town camps.

Senator SIEWERT—In the town camps?

Mr Barson—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that being done in Tangentyere?

Mr Barson—I cannot recall, Senator. I will obtain an answer for you and give it to you.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could. Are you supporting the existing one? Will you support the existing one in Alice Springs that has been operating effectively?

Ms Burns—I am advised that both the services in Alice Springs are expansions of existing services.

Senator SIEWERT—So there is not a new service?

Mr Barson—It is an expansion of the existing service, or an extension of an existing service.

Senator SIEWERT—Does the same thing apply in Darwin?

Mr Barson—Yes.

Ms Burns—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could provide the committee with that list it would be appreciated.

Mr Barson—Certainly.

Senator BERNARDI—Do you keep records of how many people access these safe houses over a given period?

Ms Burns—The safe houses are just being established, Senator. One existing service that received additional funding is operational and two more are soon to come on line. People are not yet passing through the services for us to keep those statistics.

Senator BERNARDI—I might have misheard, but there was a suggestion that there was an extension of existing programs.

Ms Burns—Previously those programs were not funded by us, so we did not have statistics on those services.

Senator BERNARDI—Are you not able to access records from the people that previously administered them?

Ms Burns—Not to my knowledge.

Mr Barson—No, Senator. The discussions that went on at the time were certainly convincing of the need for expansion of those services. Again, I can check back to see whether that produced any usage figures. If it did I will provide them to the committee.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. Finally, of the safe houses for males that are being proposed, how many have been suggested to be established?

Ms Burns—We are still in consultations with communities about what sorts of safe houses will suit those communities, so there is not a firm number about male versus female safe houses. It will depend on the communities' needs and expressed wishes.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you.

CHAIR—Are there any further questions under law and order?

Senator SIEWERT—With the safe houses for males and for women and children, what level of staffing is being provided? For example, is there ongoing rehabilitation? An issue that has been clearly outlined to me is that you are supplying safe houses for people to go in and sober up, but you are not providing ongoing rehabilitation services and those sorts of things. A lot of services, particularly in Western Australia, are now asking, 'Should we actually be providing a service', because there is an issue around a perpetuating cycle? People are saying that we need rehabilitation officers and strong support services rather than just drying people up and sending them out again.

Mr Barson—Senator, it is like many other things. The existing domestic violence situation, a complicated issue, is being created by all sorts of issues—housing, alcohol usage and unemployment. I am sure my colleagues would say that we are seeking to address those things from all those directions. Referring to safe house staffing itself, my colleague can answer that question.

Ms Baxter—The major safe houses will be staffed by one manager and three workers and the minor safe houses will be staffed by one manager and two workers. As I understand it, discussions are still under way with the Northern Territory government about the exact shape of workers for men's houses versus women's safe houses, depending on the express needs of the community. But there has been this model for major and minor safe houses with different workers attached to them.

Senator SIEWERT—What are the workers doing? Are they providing ongoing rehabilitation services and support or are they keeping the centres going?

Mr Barson—Senator, the primary purpose of staff in those safe houses is to operate them and provide an immediate safe environment. Of course, that lead to concerns about how those things are maintained. That is what the discussions with the Northern Territory government are focusing on at the moment.

Senator SIEWERT—The inevitable next question is: Are long-term rehabilitation services for substance abuse—I will deal with child protection in a minute—being provided?

Mr Barson—Senator, as Major General Chalmers said, beyond the immediate stage of the intervention that is where we are working very closely with the Northern Territory government about how those services can be put in place. Alcohol rehabilitation, for example, is a very complex issue, in which our colleagues in the Department of Health and Ageing and the Northern Territory government have an involvement. Within our scope, as I said, the focus is the creation of these safe environments. We are working very hard at the moment, but I have nothing yet to tell you, with the Northern Territory government on the longer term arrangements. It is a work in progress, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—Minister, is the federal government prepared to provide resources for that in the long term?

Mr Barson—Senator, that is a budget question.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it being considered in the budget?

Senator Evans—Clearly, no-one disagrees with your analysis, despite the fanfare about the start of the intervention when I think there was a lack of focus on it. Since then I think everyone understands that sending in the troops is not a long-term solution. So, even with the early part of the intervention, you have to move effectively to address what are issues of poverty. The solutions to those issues are not one-dimensional or simple. I think what the officers are saying to you is that they are working on putting in the immediate intervention building blocks, but they agree with your analysis that solutions are multifaceted, long term, and require a whole range of support services. I think that is self-evident.

Yes, the government is working through how it delivers those services and provides support to make the intervention successful rather than just a short-term move. As in the

earlier discussion about health needs, it is no good identifying that everyone has eye and ear problems if you do not have a program that prevents those problems occurring in the future. All you have done is identified the problem. The officers are not able to give you detailed information about what will happen next. Part of it is budgetary and part of it is moving to the next stage of having those discussions. No-one is disagreeing with your analysis, but it is a work in progress. It is a massive job, and they are moving through it stage by stage.

You were right to highlight some of those issues but you will not get answers to how they have solved all those issues today because I am sure that the answer is they have not. I think the people directly involved will be well aware of the problems, as you are, and the government understands that this will take long-term commitment and long-term financial commitment. I have already raised with officers—and I will raise with Ms Macklin—a method of ensuring ongoing engagement with the parliament on the progress and success or failures of the intervention. We must spread ownership of the solutions and ownership of dealing with the issues because this is something to which the whole parliament and the whole nation must commit. I will talk to Ms Macklin on how to better engage the parliament in that work.

At the start of today's meeting it struck me that a lot of these questions are capable of being dealt with outside estimates because they are trying to broaden parliamentarians' understanding of how it is working and what contributions can be made. I am happy to talk to Ms Macklin about how we might have a more constructive environment—not that this is not constructive—in which senators can be properly briefed, ask questions and explore the issues in an environment that is a little less formal and there might be better interaction. I will take up that up with Ms Macklin.

Senator SIEWERT—I think that is an extremely good idea. I have some questions about child protection, so maybe I will stop.

Senator ALLISON—I have a quick question: how many charges have so far been laid to do with child abuse as part of the Northern Territory intervention?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I do not have visibility of those figures, Senator. Those figures are very much something that the Northern Territory Police and the ACC work in. I think the Northern Territory police commissioner is on the public record as having said that of the order of 30 investigations are either in progress or have commenced, but he put a heavy caveat on that figure. I could not give that figure and I am not sure whether the department is able to.

Dr Harmer—We do not have that figure, Senator. It is information that the Northern Territory Police alone would have at this stage.

Senator ALLISON—So the Northern Territory Police are just doing what they have always done. There is no link between their activities in charging people and the intervention program—is that correct?

Dr Harmer—As Major General Chalmers said earlier, they are not doing what they have always done because they are now present in many more communities and a great deal more activity is going on. The Northern Territory Police are linked with other activities that are going on in the Northern Territory. We have a substance abuse desk in Alice Springs, which is linking with the Northern Territory Police. A lot more activity is arising out of initiatives

taken over the last couple of years by the Northern Territory Police. In relation to referrals or charges that have been laid, we do not have those figures, I am sorry.

Senator ALLISON—As a result of health checks how many referrals were made to the Northern Territory Police in this respect?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Again, that is not information to which I am privy, Senator. Clearly, there are privacy issues surrounding it and, frankly, I do not need to know in order to roll out the intervention, so I do not share that information.

Senator ALLISON—How many police officers came from each of the states? Is there a table or some figures available?

Dr Harmer—Senator, we have answered that question.

Ms Moody—A question was asked earlier about funding for night patrols under the Northern Territory emergency response intervention. The Attorney-General's portfolio received \$3.9 million as part of the intervention for night patrols. That includes the \$1 million that has been transferred from FaHCSIA.

Senator SIEWERT—Are we moving on from law and order?

CHAIR—I am just checking to see whether there is nothing else under law and order, and then we will move on to child safety.

Senator SIEWERT—I have another question. Reports are coming in from communities about the extra policing. I am not saying that we should not have extra police in communities, but the extra policing is leading to a significant increase in minor infringements. I thought the idea of the police was to provide for safer communities and better engagement with them. I do not necessarily think that an increase in minor infringements is the way to go. Are you getting reports back on that?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I would couch my answer by stating, firstly, that every community without exception that I have been to that does not have a permanent police presence seeks a permanent police presence. They seek police.

Senator SIEWERT—I am not disputing that at all; the point I am making is that maybe there should be more focus on effort.

Major Gen. Chalmers—You are now asking a question about community policing and operational police matters—in other words, how do the police go about their business? That is a question for the Northern Territory police commissioner. Clearly, police have to enforce various laws, and so they do. How they go about that though is sometimes a matter for judgment and for policy, and that policy and judgment derive from the police commissioner and flow down through to the stations. I would suggest that, where we have an additional police presence, there is a demonstrable change in those communities. People have said things to me like, 'I have finally had a good night's sleep. It's the first time that I've been able to sleep soundly at night' because of the diminution of noise, people on the streets and drunken violence in communities at night. So there has been a significant change. Whether or not that is also accompanied by police doing those other annoying things that police have to do, I could not say.

Senator SIEWERT—I take your point and I understand that police have to do the work. However, it does intersect with the task force trying to achieve their overall objectives, which is why I asked the question. We have certainly had feedback from communities that there has been a significant increase in minor infringements. The feedback has been that they do not necessarily think it is achieving the aims of the intervention.

Major Gen. Chalmers—I meet regularly with the police commissioner to make sure that where the work of the police intersects with the intervention we are of the same mind and we are working together. Because I visit communities regularly, I am able to raise issues with him that may have come up in policing where people have said similar sorts of things to me, and he takes those on board. He reminds me that I am not an expert in operational policing, and so therefore my views relate only to the feedback that I get from communities. So we provide information to him and feedback that we get from communities. But, at the end of the day, how they go about their business is very much a matter for the commissioner.

Senator SIEWERT—I take your point.

CHAIR—Law and order is complete. Is there an agreement that child safety be the next topic?

Senator BERNARDI—Would you like to get into that, Senator Siewert?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

CHAIR—I will take that silence as agreement.

Senator SIEWERT—I would like to pursue some issues around child protection. My questions relate to questions that I was asking before about rehabilitation. What additional resources have been provided for child protection? How many more people specifically with child protection expertise have been put on the ground and where?

Ms Burns—As part of the Northern Territory intervention there will be 10 to 12 new child protection workers for mobile child protection teams and 10 Aboriginal family and community workers to be placed in remote communities.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you repeat that?

Ms Burns—Ten to 12 new child protection workers, who will be mobile.

Senator SIEWERT—They are the mobile ones?

Ms Burns—Yes, and 10 Aboriginal family and community workers will be placed in remote communities. For both those categories, the Northern Territory government is working to recruit both domestically and internationally and it expects to have staff on board next month.

Senator SIEWERT—Will you provide me with a list of those 10 communities so that I do not take up the time of the committee? Could you provide the committee a list of the places that they will be working? Also, where will the 10 to 12 mobile workers be based? In which areas will they be based?

Ms Burns—Certainly.

Senator SIEWERT—They are workers provided by federal government funds?

Ms Burns—Federal government funds are paid to the Northern Territory government to implement this measure.

Senator SIEWERT—So they are being employed by the NT government?

Ms Burns—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—I asked you earlier to provide the committee with a list. You said that 10 workers would be provided for remote communities?

Ms Burns—They are the Aboriginal family and community workers and they will be placed in remote communities.

Senator SIEWERT—What support services will they provide? Will they be based in community centres? Where will they be based? Are they working with existing services, because some communities already have these services.

Ms Burns—We are still discussing with the Northern Territory government how it will place those workers. Part of that will be tied up with the discussions I was talking about before—discussions with the community about what they want their safe places to look like.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Mr Barson—These are augmenting the child protection capacity of the Northern Territory government, which is why it is a little difficult for us to say exactly where an individual is going to be placed. They are an extension of the Northern Territory government's child protection services.

Senator SIEWERT—So they are extending the Northern Territory services. They will not necessarily be placed with some of the community services.

Mr Barson—Yes.

Ms Burns—In some cases. In some cases, they will be with child protection officers. It will depend on where it will best meet the needs of that community. We are still in discussions with the Northern Territory government about the exact rollout and where to place those workers.

Senator SIEWERT—I am probably mixing up the two issues. There will be more formal child protection workers. Will further community based workers be provided?

Ms Burns—The Aboriginal family and community workers will be more community based.

Senator SIEWERT—So the 10 to 12 mobile workers will be the more formal child protection workers.

Mr Burns—Correct.

Senator SIEWERT—And the 10 Aboriginal family and community workers will be more community-based workers. Is that correct?

Ms Baxter—That is right. The idea is that they will be drawn from the communities that they will be servicing.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay, thank you.

CHAIR—Have we finalised child safety?

Senator BERNARDI—I have some broader questions in regard to some of the child services that are being implemented. I am not sure whether this would be an appropriate point to introduce them.

CHAIR—It appears to be a fair link.

Dr Harmer—Is it in relation to the Northern Territory intervention or is it broader?

Senator BERNARDI—It is in relation not specifically to the Northern Territory intervention but to some of Labor's policies regarding new mothers and babies services, home visitings and those sorts of things.

CHAIR—Is it linked to Indigenous services?

Senator BERNARDI—It is linked to Indigenous services.

Dr Harmer—We will try to answer your questions.

Senator BERNARDI—My first reference is to the minister. There was a policy paper put out early last year, in May, by the Labor Party about new directions for Indigenous Australians. One of the announcements in that policy paper included a mothers and babies service, which was a commitment for funding. Was this additional funding on top of existing programs or was it new funding?

Senator Evans—I will let the department answer that part of your question relating to funding issues. But certainly the Labor Party supported those programs through a number of successive shadow ministers, including me. We have been very impressed by a number of the schemes that were already operating, like the Mums and Bubs in Townsville. We were looking to build on what was already occurring in the community. There are some really fine examples of those sorts of programs. In terms of the funding issues, I defer to the department as to where we have got to.

Dr Harmer—That particular program is a Department of Health and Ageing program, so we do not have the detail of it here. We have details of other commitments that relate to the FaHCSIA portfolio but not that one.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. Would home visiting fall under the FaHCSIA portfolio.

Dr Harmer—No.

Senator BERNARDI—The Indigenous Mothers Accommodation Fund?

Dr Harmer—I think you are probably dealing with initiatives that are in the health area. I am told by Mr Leeper that it is ours.

Senator BERNARDI—Are you happy if we talk about Indigenous Mothers Accommodation Fund?

Dr Harmer—We know about that one.

Ms Lees—FaHCSIA has received \$10 million capital funding to establish new hostels and to expand existing services.

Senator BERNARDI—How many new hostels will be established?

Ms Lees—That is still to be determined. We are trying to have consultations now to see what exists and where it is most appropriate to locate services. The measure officially starts from 2008-09.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. Do you have an estimated cost of establishing a new hostel?

Ms Lees—Not yet, no, because the measure is a combination of either new hostels or expanding current facilities to meet demand.

Senator BERNARDI—How many existing facilities are there?

Ms Lees—I would have to take that question on notice.

Senator BERNARDI—If you would not mind, thank you. Has there been any discussion about where the new facilities would be located?

Ms Lees—No, we are still doing that sort of scoping exercise.

Senator BERNARDI—You are still doing that sort of work. Okay. Do you have any idea when tenders for this will be required or is it too preliminary?

Ms Lees—Not until we have a more formal idea of exactly where we will locate the services.

Senator BERNARDI—Sure. Thank you, Ms Lees. That line of questioning has expired for the moment. Are you happy to talk about parent-child services?

Ms Burns—Yes. Is that the Indigenous parenting support services?

Senator BERNARDI—It is part of the Indigenous platform that was released, yes.

Ms Burns—Fifty sites will be implemented across metropolitan and regional Australia over the next four years under that initiative.

Senator BERNARDI—Is there a commitment to employ Indigenous staff in any of these centres?

Ms Burns—We are working in the first instance with service providers who have a track record of delivering well in Indigenous areas. I would expect, although I do not have advice to confirm it, that there will be a high degree of Indigenous engagement in the workforce.

Senator BERNARDI—Is it your intention to work with people who have experience in the provision of these types of services in Indigenous areas, is there an expectation that it may be outsourced or would it remain within the department?

Ms Burns—It is a funded program and, like most of our community funded programs, they will not be operated by departmental officers; they will be community organisations in the first instance who are already demonstrating expertise in the field. So they will be community organisations.

Senator BERNARDI—And drawn from the local population rather than bringing in external people?

Ms Burns—Yes. The sites that are being implemented in the first round, which are based on existing service providers, will be local providers. They may well be national auspicing bodies, but they will be locally based providers.

Senator BERNARDI—An extension to this—and it touches on some challenges in the Indigenous portfolio—is the access to preschool education for all four-year-olds. I think it would be reasonable to say that there are particular service difficulties in ensuring that this takes place in Aboriginal communities. Would you be prepared to highlight some of the areas in which the challenges would be?

Ms Burns—Preschool education and childcare services belong to the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand there are cross-portfolio issues, but I think in a way it touches on Indigenous affairs because there has to be some method of ensuring that we deliver these outcomes for four-year-olds.

Dr Harmer—I do not think there is any disagreement. I think the government acknowledges that it will be very challenging to provide that in remote communities, but it has made a commitment. Where we can help our colleagues in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, we will. With the information and knowledge we have about remote Indigenous communities we will provide help to them. But it will be their responsibility primarily to implement that measure.

Senator BERNARDI—Perhaps I could address a question to the minister.

Senator Evans—I was going to say that I think the Prime Minister made it clear that one of the priorities for the rollout of the program was remote and regional communities and Indigenous communities in particular. It comes from our analysis, if you like, that the value of early learning has become much more established now that the early development of children is essential to their later life chances. Traditionally, the Commonwealth has invested in higher education, secondary education and primary education, and there is a bit of a move towards helping invest in those early life chances. Things like mums and bubs programs, about health in the early years et cetera, make a huge contribution to later life chances.

I think there is a shift of investment priority to the early years. I think the previous government was looking at some of those issues and made some initiatives. But, clearly, part of providing early opportunity is helping with child care and preschool education. If the kids turn up at their first year of primary school and they are already behind in their learning it is very hard for them to catch up. We think the preschool program is important. It is also important in those communities where kids are not necessarily turning up on the first day of school with an equal opportunity to learn from day one. So it is part of that philosophical approach. I think the Prime Minister made it clear that the sorts of communities we are talking about will be prioritised for the rollout.

Senator BERNARDI—What measures will the government take to ensure that appropriate staff are attracted to these centres?

Senator Evans—As the officials indicated, the policy drive for that comes out of DEEWR. I cannot help you with the policy detail. But, clearly, as with every other initiative, staffing in those communities is a huge issue that will have to be tackled. But, as you know, we have a skills and labour shortage across the country. We are facing those issues in all these programs. One good thing to say, though, is that I think there is a lot of interest in and support from people in teaching and in the medical professions to make a difference in these areas. I am not

surprised but I am always pleased to see how many highly skilled people with really good qualifications and the capacity to earn a lot more money elsewhere go out and work in these communities.

I am sure in the preschool area it will be just the same. People who are committed and who want to make a difference do take on these tasks, but staffing obviously is problematic. In my own state of Western Australia it is very hard to get people to work in the public sector if the mining industries offer them \$100,000. We are having trouble holding onto police and teachers. This is just part of what is happening in the economy, so there will be challenges. In terms of how they are doing it, I am afraid the officers here are not responsible for that program.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand that. Minister, are you in a position to give us an indication of when that program will commence implementation, or should I refer that to another department?

Senator Evans—I would put that question on notice. I would be guessing. I do not know the answer.

Senator BERNARDI—Will you take that question on notice and let us have an answer?

Senator Evans—I think what you ought to do is put the question on notice with the other committee, or put it on notice in the Senate, because the officers here cannot deal with it.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand. Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR—Is there anything else on the wider child services?

Senator SIEWERT—I have a question on the time frame. This morning you mentioned the national child protection framework. What is the time frame for the development of that?

Ms Burns—The minister said that a discussion paper will be out early this year. We are expecting that to be progressed within the next four to six weeks. We will be discussing it with state and territory officials and then there will be a public discussion paper and consultation process about the future of the child protection framework. Minister Macklin has made a commitment that that framework will be in place by the middle of the year.

Senator ALLISON—I wish to ask one question in this area. I refer to the Northern Territory intervention experience and petrol sniffing. Has anything been done, by way of Commonwealth services, to protect children from the availability of petrol? What is the current arrangement?

Dr Harmer—Quite a lot has been done. We probably have some information about what we have been doing.

Ms Moody—The Commonwealth has an eight-point Central Australian petrol sniffing strategy which has been in place for a couple of years. It was launched in September 2005. A number of Commonwealth agencies are involved in that, including the Department of Health and Ageing. FaHCSIA has some roles, particularly in youth activities. It deals with the rollout of non-sniffable fuels, for instance, which has been very successful in the Central Desert and Central Australian region. That has significantly reduced the number of sniffers in those regions. The Department of Health and Ageing also looks at treatment and respite facilities.

Senator ALLISON—Is that just in the Central Desert?

Ms Moody—The rollout of Opal at the moment, yes.

Senator ALLISON—How many communities do not have Opal?

Ms Moody—I do not have that information with me; I would have to take that question on notice.

Senator ALLISON—Was it the experience of the teams going out there that children were still affected by petrol sniffing?

Mr Barson—There are still children who are affected by petrol sniffing, yes. It continues to be a problem in the Territory generally and it continues to be a problem in Central Australia, even where we have Opal fuel. Unfortunately, children are still engaged in the sniffing of petrol or other substances. It is a continuing and serious area of concern. Certainly Opal fuel is one of the solutions to that but, again, the broad range of endeavours will give those young people something different to do from petrol sniffing. Some children who are addicted or habituated to that will continue sniffing, no matter what we do.

Senator ALLISON—Is there a service for those kids who have become addicted or habituated?

Mr Barson—Yes. The Department of Health and Ageing and the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services are the authorities that intervene with children who are designated ‘deemed to be habitual sniffers’. It is not our area. I do not know enough about it.

Senator ALLISON—I know you will say that it is up to the health department, but what typically happens in a health check if petrol sniffing is identified?

Major Gen. Chalmers—I could not answer that question, except to say that the doctor would refer, using the normal referral processes.

Mr Barson—There are processes for declaring a person—and I will not have the right terminology—who is a habitual sniffer. That is where those authorities step in with compulsory treatment.

Senator ALLISON—Compulsory treatment?

Mr Barson—As I said, a health treatment regime cuts in when a person is deemed to require that level of intervention. I can get the details for you, if you wish.

Senator ALLISON—It is Northern Territory legislation?

Mr Barson—It is Northern Territory legislation, yes. It is an existing arrangement and it is not our service provision.

Senator ALLISON—And it is not a service provided within communities?

Mr Barson—It is not a service provided by us within communities.

Dr Harmer—Not by FaHCSIA.

Mr Barson—Not by FaHCSIA, no. It is a Northern Territory government and health service. At that stage the issues are not ones of diversion away from petrol sniffing; they are actual treatment of the addiction.

Senator ALLISON—Has there been any assessment of the extent to which petrol sniffing is a factor in the broader problem of child abuse?

Mr Barson—Not that I am aware of, no, Senator.

Senator ALLISON—Does it make children more vulnerable to child abuse if they are dependent on these substances?

Mr Barson—Certainly some of the cases that have come up, or most of the cases that have come up, have involved either alcohol or drugs or some form of addictive substance, yes. But I would not say it is exclusively associated with petrol sniffing at all.

Senator ALLISON—That is not what I suggested.

Mr Barson—I know.

Senator ALLISON—I asked you whether it was a factor and you said—

Mr Barson—It is a factor along with alcohol and other drug use.

Dr Harmer—Senator, I suspect that the answers to some of your questions about petrol sniffing, what is going on, how effective it is, et cetera, will be answered. We have commissioned an evaluation of our petrol sniffing strategy, and that is due to be provided to us I think in April. We are looking forward to that evaluation to make an assessment of how the program has gone so far and what we need to do to adjust it to make it more effective.

CHAIR—FaHCSIA has commissioned an evaluation?

Dr Harmer—Yes. Other departments are involved in it, but we have commissioned the evaluation.

CHAIR—Are you the lead agency in that program?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

CHAIR—So you have commissioned that. Is it an external consultant?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

CHAIR—Is the name public?

Mr Yates—Senator, it is two-staged. The first stage is being conducted by Urbis, and they are providing an assessment of the implementation of the strategy over the last couple of years. Obviously, because we want to look at some of the longer term impacts, we have a more comprehensive evaluation strategy commissioned from Courage Partners and they will be submitting to us their proposed evaluation plan in April. So an initial report will be available on the implementation of the strategy over the last couple of years, which may go to some of the questions that have been raised. But we realise that you need to do a more comprehensive assessment of the impact of the program, its coverage and issues of effectiveness that evaluations normally address.

CHAIR—Senator Allison, have you finished with the petrol sniffing issue?

Senator ALLISON—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Are you using any of the evidence that was gathered by this committee's Senate inquiry into petrol sniffing? It was a very comprehensive report.

Dr Harmer—Certainly the consultants will use that information, or we will make sure that that report is drawn to their attention as they are completing their report, yes.

CHAIR—As a resource, Dr Harmer?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I thought I would ask OATSI these questions tomorrow. I must admit that I continually get confused about which petrol sniffing questions I should ask of FaHCSIA and which questions I should ask of Health and Ageing. Do the diversionary programs sit here? Should I be asking you?

Mr Barson—Senator, I was about to say that I do not want to give the committee the impression that we are doing nothing when we refer matters to Health and Ageing. It is just that a number of the questions have fallen in that area. And, yes, at the moment I am managing the rollout of a series of projects that are intended to divert youth away from alcohol and other substances.

Senator SIEWERT—So should I ask specific questions about Alice Springs and petrol sniffing here or tomorrow? I have a number of questions.

CHAIR—The diversionary program aspects of that would be yours, would they not?

Mr Barson—Yes.

CHAIR—Senator Siewert, we have 10 minutes until lunch. Do you wish to start your series of questions now?

Senator SIEWERT—I am happy to do so, if that is okay. I warn you that I have a significant number of questions. Could you explain or outline where funding that is currently allocated to diversionary programs is targeted in the central region? To which communities has it been rolled out?

Mr Barson—Senator, the measure in the Northern Territory Emergency Response, which included \$7.6 million for the youth diversionary measures in the current financial year—

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, can I just stop you there? I am talking about broader petrol sniffing. I am not just talking the Northern Territory intervention; I am talking about the broader petrol sniffing initiative. I want to be very clear what we are talking about. I apologise if I have misled you. This is about the whole of the petrol sniffing program, not just the Northern Territory intervention.

Ms Moody—Certainly within the context of the Northern Territory we are running petrol sniffing youth diversion activities and the Northern Territory Emergency Response youth diversion activities. We are looking at them in a holistic sense to make sure that we get best coverage for both those programs. But specifically on the issue of petrol sniffing—could you repeat the question for me?

Senator SIEWERT—I am sorry, I did not mean to be rude and cut you off. I refer to the petrol sniffing diversionary programs and ask: are you now saying that some of the Northern Territory intervention money is also being run through the same process as the diversionary programs that have been specifically targeted as part of that petrol sniffing package?

Ms Moody—It is being used for the same purposes, not necessarily run through the same process and not necessarily given to the same providers, for instance. So we would work through a range of providers. Within the petrol sniffing strategy itself there is a major contract with Mission Australia to provide youth diversionary services for communities in the central region of the Northern Territory.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you explain the process that was used to contract Mission Australia? Was it an open tendering process? Why not use existing providers who have proven runs in central Australia?

Ms Moody—Sorry, Senator, I was not responsible for the program at that point. I can tell you what I understand about it but I might have to seek more information for you. As I understand it, it was an open tender process, so existing providers would have had the opportunity to tender for those services. In going to open tender we seek to provide the best value for the Commonwealth from those funds and we were looking for a more comprehensive approach. We have had concerns in the past about individual services that were provided. We needed somebody who could provide backup and support to youth workers, because it is an important function and they can also burn out. We wanted to make sure that we did not throw some individuals at it; we wanted to come up with an approach that provided support to people and an ongoing service and connection with those communities. So we went to open tender and the result was that Mission Australia won that contract.

Senator SIEWERT—Did it demonstrate a connection to the communities involved?

Mr Yates—It satisfied the criteria in the tenders most successfully.

CHAIR—Can we have copies of the tender documents?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, please.

CHAIR—They would be very useful.

Senator SIEWERT—I do not know whether it is commercial in confidence, but could we find out how many organisations tendered?

Dr Harmer—We could probably tell you the number, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—Obviously who it is is confidential.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you tell me about the petrol sniffing prevention unit in Alice Springs, how much it costs and what it does?

Ms Moody—Is this the FaHCSIA unit?

Senator SIEWERT—I presume it is a FaHCSIA unit, yes.

Ms Moody—I just was not sure whether you meant the substance abuse intelligence desk, which is also based in Alice Springs.

Senator SIEWERT—I am told there is a petrol sniffing prevention unit, PSPU, in Alice Springs.

Mr Barson—The Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Strategy Unit is in Alice Springs indigenous coordination centre.

Senator SIEWERT—How much does that cost to operate?

Mr Barson—It is within my overall staffing, Senator, so I do not have a separate dollar split apart. As at last week, five staff were engaged on that program. I can do a quick analysis for you and give you a rough figure.

Dr Harmer—If there were five staff in there full time it would be about half a million dollars.

Mr Barson—That is the departmental cost, Senator. Of course, what they are doing for many of the programs is accessing administered funds from different sources to put those programs together.

Senator SIEWERT—What did you call it again?

Mr Barson—The Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Strategy Unit.

Senator SIEWERT—And it is based in the ICC?

Mr Barson—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—You will come back to me with the programs up there?

Mr Barson—I will come back to you with the cost of that unit in the last year, if you wish.

CHAIR—Mr Barson, can we have a structure of that unit level and title?

Mr Barson—Certainly.

CHAIR—We would just like to have a snapshot of the unit, not just the dollars. Senator Siewert is seeking the dollars.

Mr Barson—Certainly. It is headed by a substantive EL2 officer who is currently acting SES band 1. He has an EL2 officer as his deputy and as at last week he has an additional three staff, from memory, in the following staffing levels: two EL6 and an EL3.

Dr Harmer—They have quite senior levels, Senator.

CHAIR—I was thinking the same thing, Dr Harmer.

Mr Barson—It is unique in as much as it is it is headed by an acting SES officer.

Senator SIEWERT—Their role is to administer the program?

Mr Barson—Their role is broad. It is working with the Northern Territory government, health services and the police to try to add value to addressing petrol sniffing issues in general. But I have to say that while that unit continues to concentrate on petrol sniffing the issues are more complex than that. They also get involved in working with those other agencies on other substance abuse. So a more correct future title for that unit may indeed turn out to be focusing on substance abuse which, of course, includes petrol sniffing as an endemic problem. But, as I said before, even with the rollout of Opal fuel there are still habitual users

whom it seems were even adding substances to Opal fuel in order to get the same effects. As you know, It is not something that we will address easily in a short period.

Senator SIEWERT—An evaluation is being undertaken of the petrol sniffing program. Will that unit be included in that review?

Mr Barson—Certainly Senator, I can say that I will be very interested in the results of that review, because it will help to guide what our staffing arrangements should be and what our focus will be, both in Alice Springs and more broadly in the Territory. While I have concentrated on the unit in Alice Springs, each of our ICCs has an involvement in petrol sniffing issues in their area. In fact, just last week all the ICC managers and I met to talk about how we might learn from extending the work that had been occurring in Central Australia around the petrol sniffing unit—there has always been an involvement—but to start more actively to apply some of those approaches in these places. For example, just in the last few weeks there have been reports of an increase in petrol sniffing in and around Katherine. So we need to continue to address that as part of the overall approach.

Senator SIEWERT—I am also told that there is increasing petrol sniffing in the Pit lands?

Mr Barson—I am aware of several reports that have come in, in recent weeks over what I would call outbreaks of petrol sniffing and/or other substance abuse.

Senator SIEWERT—Are those increases or outbreaks of petrol sniffing occurring in places that currently have youth diversionary programs?

Mr Barson—They are places where there is some level of youth diversionary program. But, as I started to say before, we are now just rolling out other projects. The other day I approved another 30 projects which are being rolled out specifically, in most cases in cooperation with the Northern Territory government, existing youth workers, and existing community organisations to improve infrastructure, training, access to transport and to do other things that the local community people, our government business managers and our ICCs are convinced will assist those programs to run better. So I guess I am just adding to that in saying that we are trying at the moment, from now, this very specific additional effort—the \$7 million I was referring to before this year—to upgrade the capacity of those youth diversionary projects with the intention of attracting more young people into them, making it more a more positive experience, and extending them into places where those programs do not exist. Some details of those programs will be announced. I would be happy to share them with the committee when they are announced.

CHAIR—Senator Siewert, I know you have more questions, but I think it is better for you to stop there before we start with another series of questions. I think other people have more questions.

Senator SIEWERT—Chair, could I ask a question about something that witnesses may be able to obtain over the lunch break to share with the committee?

CHAIR—That is fine, Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it possible to provide to the committee the criteria that were used to assess tenders for the service provision we were talking about earlier?

Mr Barson—That would have been part of the tender documentation.

Dr Harmer—We will provide you with it.

Mr Yates—We will provide you with the figures.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

CHAIR—My understanding is that after lunch we are returning to indigenous services until three o'clock when we have a series of key areas to work through. Before we break for lunch, Senator Humphries has a couple of questions to clarify relating to where things fit, so it will make it easier.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I wanted to check to see whether officers here could answer questions in these areas. The commitment to establish new childcare service hubs in rural and remote communities, is that something FaHCSIA looks after under child care?

Dr Harmer—No. That is now the responsibility of DEEWR.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The Indigenous boarding colleges?

Dr Harmer—Also DEEWR. We may be able to answer the questions but, primarily, it is their responsibility.

Mr Barson—It is their responsibility. We have an involvement in a couple of them.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, are you the lead agency?

Dr Harmer—No.

Senator HUMPHRIES—But you might have some capacity to answer questions. There was a commitment to provide additional funding for housing in a way that builds construction skills for Indigenous people.

Dr Harmer—That would be us.

Senator HUMPHRIES—And community business partnership, as it affects Indigenous communities. Is that you?

Dr Harmer—That would be ours as well.

CHAIR—On that basis, will we will break for lunch. I confirm that we have received no questions in the following areas, Dr Harmer, so you should send officers home quickly in case we change our minds. We have some questions on support for youth, so we need Youth.

Dr Harmer—Senator, Youth is no longer under FaHCSIA.

CHAIR—No, we know that some have moved. It is clearly here.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

CHAIR—We have been told that they are needed. I will try again. Child care support, knowing that a lot of the areas have moved to DEEWR, and then the last four—4.2, 4.3 and 4.4.

Dr Harmer—There are no questions on 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4?

CHAIR—That is what I have been advised, Dr Harmer, so those poor people who are usually late may not be required this time.

Senator SIEWERT—We are still on 3.2 are we not?

CHAIR—Yes, we are.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that where JET comes in?

Senator Evans—FaHCSIA is not responsible for much any more. I think that has gone too, has it not?

Dr Harmer—Child care has gone but child support is still with us.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. Where does JET fit?

Dr Harmer—JET is also with DEEWR.

CHAIR—Is that as clear as I hope it is, Dr Harmer?

Dr Harmer—Yes. So 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 can go. We do not do JET and child care we do not do.

CHAIR—Child care is 3.3, and all the others we require. Thank you Dr Harmer.

Proceedings suspended from 12.34 pm to 1.38 pm

[1.33 pm]

CHAIR—What we are going to do is go back into petrol sniffing and diversionary programs and then go to the registrar of Indigenous corporations, then CDEP and Housing.

Dr Harmer—I have an answer to a question that Senator Patterson asked earlier which I might deal with here.

CHAIR—That would be wonderful.

Dr Harmer—Senator Patterson asked questions about what was happening to sick leave in the department, and I was reasonably confident I could get them. In the last two years our rate for 2005-06 was 8.55 days per full-time equivalent staff member and for 2006-07 it has reduced to 7.73 days per full-time equivalent staff member which is, as I understand, slightly below the APS average.

CHAIR—Thank you, Dr Harmer. Before lunch we were in the middle of issues around petrol sniffing and diversionary programs. I would suggest that we have about another 10 to 15 minutes in that area and see how we go.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to deal with diversionary programs, because I assume that the rolling out of the program I deal with under Health—the actual rolling out of the eight-point plan. Is that correct?

Ms Moody—Certainly, different agencies have responsibility for different aspects of the plan. For instance, Opal fuel, which is probably the biggest financial part of the plan, is a Department of Health and Ageing responsibility.

Senator SIEWERT—So anything to do with all of that stuff that we have been talking about in the past about communication of it, I deal with that tomorrow?

Ms Moody—If it is about communication about the rollout of Opal and the health education around petrol sniffing, that would be Health.

Senator SIEWERT—Thanks. I think where we left off at lunchtime was Mr Barson telling me that he had just approved another batch of programs, if I understood what you said correctly.

Mr Barson—Yes. There is a set of measures that we are working our way through at the moment which range from fairly small minor projects to more substantial ones which are intended to support organisations in the Northern Territory in their youth diversion work.

Senator SIEWERT—Are those on top of the ones that were announced I think in mid-January—some time during January? Are they on top of those programs?

Mr Barson—Senator, that was the first batch of them just this last week. As I said, there will be an announcement on the detail of them. We have put through the second round of those programs.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand there was a school holiday program run in Central Australia over this summer.

Mr Barson—Yes, there was.

Senator SIEWERT—Was that program tendered out?

Mr Barson—No, Senator, it was not.

Senator SIEWERT—Why not?

Mr Barson—With regard to that particular program, if I can explain, certainly while there was money available in the Northern Territory emergency response, some of our attention to that only turned to Central Australia very shortly before the school holiday programs at Christmas. We wanted to make sure that we could put a school holiday program in place very quickly, and in that particular circumstance we went directly to the organisation that had previously been subcontracted to run that school holiday program and entered into a program with them. We have since been talking to organisations in Central Australia about the subsequent two school holiday programs—that is, for May and June—this year and we have assured the organisations that the subsequent processes will be through normal tender processes.

Senator SIEWERT—Who was the contractor that provided the services for January?

Mr Barson—The contractor was Red Sun.

Senator SIEWERT—You said that they had provided services before. Is that correct?

Mr Barson—The organisation KLAs had previously provided some school holiday programs in Central Australia. I am advised that they had subcontracted some of that work to Red Sun. In this particular case, we went direct to Red Sun and asked them to carry out a school holiday program.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I ask why you did not go to KLAs if they were the ones that subcontracted Red Sun in the past?

Mr Barson—The situation at the time was that our understanding was that Red Sun had actually carried out the program for KLAs, subcontracted by KLAs, and so we went direct to that in that circumstance. As I have said, we have since been speaking to KLAs and to others

and assured them that any future school holiday programs will be by a more open and tender process.

Senator SIEWERT—Was the funding used for the school holiday program NT intervention funding?

Mr Barson—That particular batch of money that was used for that program was Northern Territory emergency response funding.

Senator SIEWERT—But you have provided other school holiday programs through normal FaHCSIA funding rather than enter into intervention programs. Is that correct?

Mr Barson—We have provided other school holiday programs through various sources of funding, but the job of the unit down there has been to put together those particular programs often from the flexible funding pool which was created for Indigenous services, from youth funding or from other sources.

Senator SIEWERT—Of all of the areas and regions that are covered in the extended eight-point plan, do they all now have full-time youth/diversionary programs running in those centres?

Ms Moody—I would need to confirm this for you, Senator, but I do not believe so.

Mr Barson—No, I do not believe so either, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you tell me which ones have not and why not?

Ms Moody—I will take that on notice.

Mr Barson—Certainly.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry?

Mr Barson—Yes, I will find that out and get back to you.

Senator SIEWERT—Is there funding available? So they are not all covered. Is the funding available and the process has not been entered into, or is it because funding is unavailable?

Ms Moody—There is funding available within the intervention funding to do that.

Mr Barson—But that is only this year's funding. Again, that is an issue where the funding has been appropriated for the current year and I have not been able to commit funds to organisations for next year until the budget process.

Senator SIEWERT—So in the extended eight-point plan area, not all the funding is available from that bucket of funding that has been identified for petrol sniffing. You are supplementing it with NT intervention funds; is that a correct interpretation of it?

Ms Moody—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Moody—Because of the issues on the ground. There is nothing different between the types of services that you want for alcohol diversion as opposed to a petrol sniffing diversion or, indeed, any form of substance abuse diversion in terms of the youth activity.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you remind me for what period of time the money has been allocated and the eight- point plan process? For what financial year has that been allocated out to?

Ms Moody—There is money allocated out to 2009-10.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Obviously, we already know the NT intervention money is just for this year for the time being.

Ms Moody—Yes. Sorry, could I correct something I said earlier when we were talking about the youth contract for petrol sniffing. I said it was an open tender. It was actually a selective tender, but 26 organisations were invited to participate in that tender. We are trying to get you a copy of the tender documents this afternoon.

Senator SIEWERT—A selective tender is when you invite people to tender.

Ms Moody—You invite people to tender, although in this case 26 people were invited to tender, which makes it a fairly wide selective tender.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, 26 people were invited to tender. I misunderstood you then. How many then ended up tendering?

Ms Moody—That information I am still trying to source.

Senator SIEWERT—I beg your pardon.

Ms Moody—And I do not know that I will have that this afternoon. We will answer that on notice if we cannot get it to you this afternoon.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. I will express my usual concern that when it is taken on notice I then do not get it for months, whereas if I get it today, I get it today.

Dr Harmer—We will do our best.

Senator Chris Evans—It is a new approach. I will make sure it is timely and I will make sure Ms Macklin knows as well.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I go back to my original set of questions around those services. The contractor that was selected, had they experience in central Australia?

Ms Moody—I will need to source that information. I am not able to answer that question here.

Mr Barson—Certainly, Mission Australia is involved. I know it is involved in a range of program areas in central Australia, but I think at the time the tender was let the answer is probably better given—

Senator SIEWERT—Had they been providing you services in central Australia where they had been based in central Australia?

Mr Barson—At that time? I think that is a question—

Ms Moody—I will have to take that on notice. I am not aware of that.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could provide information on whether they had previous experience providing youth services in central Australia specifically in the communities they were contracted for, I would really appreciate that.

Ms Moody—I think it is unlikely that they had a connection with those particular communities for youth services, but I will confirm if that is correct or not.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate you told me before that there was a selection criteria which these organisations were selected against. Was that done by FaHCSIA or was there a panel that provided you with some advice on how various organisations had performed in the past?

Ms Moody—My understanding was the evaluation would have been done within FaHCSIA, but I will confirm that for you.

Senator SIEWERT—So you may not have had anybody who has experience in providing those services in central Australia involved in that selection process?

Ms Moody—The issue with that, though, is—particularly when there is a broad spectrum of organisations participating—if you get those people involved in the tender process, then they have to disqualify themselves from being a party to the tender. The people with the experience are the people you might expect to be tendering. So I expect it was departmental only, but I will confirm that.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

CHAIR—It would not have been hard to find that experience in your department, would it—that kind of issue that you have to balance?

Dr Harmer—Yes, Ms Moody is right. We would not normally involve people who are potentially involved in the tender being involved in the evaluation. That would be a substantial conflict of interest. The department officials—while they are not experts in actually delivering on the ground, they are quite expert in making decisions about value for money and whether it meets the tender documentation and going through the selection criteria et cetera. This is something that we do all the time. They would be very good at that.

Senator SIEWERT—As I understand it, the successful tenderer did not have experience on the ground delivering these services in central Australia in these communities and won out against people who I know who applied and who had demonstrated experience on the ground in delivering these services. So I am really interested to know why an organisation that did not have this experience—and I am not reflecting on their abilities overall at all—why an outside organisation that does not have that experience was selected when more experienced people had provided those services.

Dr Harmer—Maybe they were able to convince the people who did the evaluation in terms of the price at which they were prepared to provide the service. They would have provided some degree of information about their capacity and experience elsewhere, perhaps. It is on that basis, I guess. It is always difficult for those who do not win the tender to accept perhaps that someone else who has not operated in the region gets it. But I would be reasonably confident that there was a proper evaluation of the process and that there were very good reasons. When you see the documentation and the selection criteria—it will be made available, I think, today—

Ms Moody—The tender document, certainly. Some of the other stuff we are still digging out.

Senator SIEWERT—The evaluation that you referred to before, do I understand correctly that that will now be evaluating the services delivered under this contract as well?

Ms Moody—It is to do with the implementation of the petrol sniffing strategy, of which the youth diversion and that particular contract is part of the implementation, so yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I am aware of an ongoing issue, too, about accommodation for workers in communities. Has that accommodation issue now been resolved?

Ms Moody—We are still working through those issues. It is part of the overall housing shortage on communities. We are looking at that at the moment. I am not sure I would describe it as resolved right at this moment, but I think we are closer to resolution. We are looking at using—we have a series of demountables available to us that have not all been used for government business, manager accommodation and the like. We are looking to see whether any of those will assist with that process as well.

Senator SIEWERT—And in how many communities do we still not have adequate accommodation for their youth workers?

Ms Moody—I will just have a look and see if it tells me in here how many. Also, we have put some money aside for more permanent accommodation for the youth workers, but clearly that takes time in the context to build. So we are looking at demountables as a short-term strategy until we can do something longer term. I do not think I have that level of detail here.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could provide that, that would be appreciated. I have some questions specifically about the rollout of Opal and the fact that it is not going into some of the roadhouses. I am presuming I should ask Health and Ageing about that specifically.

Ms Moody—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Dr Harmer, could you give us an indication of the expertise of those people who are doing the evaluation of the petrol sniffing?

Dr Harmer—I cannot offhand, but we will get you some information about that.

Senator ADAMS—I am very interested in that because I think an evaluation of a program—

Dr Harmer—You mean the company who have been contracted to do the evaluation; is that what you mean?

Senator ADAMS—Aren't you going to evaluate their results once they have done it?

Dr Harmer—We have given them the job of making an assessment of the effectiveness. I do not know the terms of reference.

Senator ADAMS—I just have a concern. I am fully aware of the other organisations that could have won the tender. But I am really concerned about the people who actually did the evaluation of the tender and who chose that particular organisation. What expertise did they have and had they been out in the central desert in the Northern Territory?

Dr Harmer—We may be talking at cross-purposes. Senator Siewert was talking about, I think, tenders for a service, not tenders for the evaluation.

Senator SIEWERT—I think we are talking about two things here. There are the tenders for the service and the evaluation of tenders for the service and then there is the evaluation of the program.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—I think it would probably come to the expertise of the people in the department who actually made the decision. That is what I would like to know.

Dr Harmer—Are you interested in the expertise of those who made the evaluation of the tenders for service provision or the expertise of those who did the evaluation for the—

Senator ADAMS—Probably all of them, thank you.

Dr Harmer—We will do our best to get you some information on that.

Ms Curran—In terms of the evaluation of the strategy itself, the two firms that have been engaged, Courage Partners and Urbis Consulting, are both very experienced evaluators. Urbis, which is doing the implementation review, has done quite a bit of work within Indigenous communities and I think are generally highly regarded in that area.

Senator SIEWERT—Will the report be made public?

Ms Curran—That will obviously be a decision for the minister.

Senator SIEWERT—Minister, will that review be released publicly?

Senator Chris Evans—I will take it on notice.

Senator SIEWERT—Do I take the same promise that we will get a speedy response?

Senator Chris Evans—The point is that I do not know the answer to that. All I can do is take it on notice.

Mr Barson—Can I add to the answer I gave before concerning staff. There is currently one vacant position. I did not want to mislead you.

CHAIR—In Alice Springs.

Senator SIEWERT—Which one?

Mr Barson—The EL1 position is currently vacant. There is a staff member on maternity leave as well.

Senator SIEWERT—They are responsible for implementing the rollout of the strategy in central Australia. Do I understand that correctly?

Mr Barson—They are certainly responsible for doing that.

Senator SIEWERT—Amongst other things or is that their sole responsibility?

Mr Barson—It is their responsibility, but, as I said before, a number of these issues blur into other substance abuse. Again, I did not want to mislead you by saying ‘only’ but predominantly, can I say.

Senator SIEWERT—So predominantly petrol sniffing but they do look at other substance abuse?

Mr Barson—Correct. Other substance abuse tends to stray into their area because the young people they are involved with and the young people the service providers are involved with are not necessarily just petrol sniffers.

Senator SIEWERT—I do not want to misunderstand what the unit does. So, for example, do they also look at the implementation of the communication strategy there, the rollout of Opal itself and the issues that involves and also the various youth diversionary programs that are funded as well?

Mr Barson—That is why I was careful about the specific label on what they do. They have obviously been involved in helping put together and assessing a number of the youth diversion programs because of their expertise in working with youth. I was careful not to say ‘exclusively petrol sniffing’. The answer is predominantly petrol sniffing with side issues into other substance abuse and therefore into youth diversion programs which are intended to deal with both areas of substance abuse.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. How long is the current contract for the diversionary programs?

Ms Moody—It is for three years and it commenced in April 2007.

Senator SIEWERT—And that is to go to four communities?

Ms Moody—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Are they Mutitjulu, Impala and Docker River?

Ms Moody—It is those three, and I was trying to find where the fourth one was.

CHAIR—Would that information be in the tender documents?

Ms Moody—The locations would be in the tender documents.

CHAIR—In that case, I will wait.

Senator SIEWERT—And the term of the contract?

Ms Moody—Yes.

CHAIR—If there is anything else we find in the document we can follow up.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

CHAIR—We now want to move onto some questions to the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations.

Senator JOHNSTON—I wanted to talk to you about the powers you have to intervene with respect to registered Aboriginal corporations that breach, firstly, their constitution and potentially the act. Can you touch on what your powers are there?

Mr Beven—We have a wide range of powers that we can use when there have been issues within a corporation regarding constitutional compliance. First of all we have a mediation role. So if it involves an internal dispute with regard to the interpretation of the constitution we can play a role in mediating between various parties.

Senator JOHNSTON—How do we get you to do the mediation?

Mr Beven—It can be a complaint lodged with us, information provided to us, internal information that we generate or documents lodged with us. There are various ways of doing it.

Senator JOHNSTON—So we just need to ask for mediation?

Mr Beven—That is right. Other ways that we get involved are that we can appoint special administrators under the legislation. If there has been a breach of the constitution we can appoint a special administrator. In addition to that, we have also got the power to appoint a special examiner who will go into the corporation, look at the compliance and look at any other issues that may have arisen within the corporation.

Senator JOHNSTON—What have you done with Waminda, which is the one I am interested in? I think you have a pretty fair idea that I am interested in that. Have we got a special investigator appointed there?

Mr Beven—What has happened in that case is that we became aware of a dispute within the corporation in December. It has been on our watching brief since then. In mid-January we took a decision to appoint a special examiner in relation to the corporation. We did that in mid-January. We appointed Pitcher Partners in Perth to undertake that. They are an independent accounting body. They undertook that examination on 31 January. They have prepared an initial report on their examination at this stage. But they have not submitted the final document to us. We are expecting that within the next 10 days or so.

Senator JOHNSTON—I will deal with the document. I suppose I have about 20 constituents who are pretty concerned about the state of the corporation. Is it a private document that is being prepared by your special investigator?

Mr Beven—Yes, it is a confidential document. We cannot release it to the public.

Senator JOHNSTON—You cannot release it?

Mr Beven—That is right.

Senator JOHNSTON—There is a prohibition on the release of it?

Mr Beven—It is a confidential document. It is not one of the public documents that we would ordinarily release.

Senator JOHNSTON—That tells me you might have a discretion in that regard.

Mr Beven—In most situations we do have a discretion but because of the nature of the examination and the issues that have to be covered in the examination in most instances we would not release that.

Senator JOHNSTON—So is there a privilege question?

Mr Beven—Not a legal privilege question but it is along those lines. We want the documents and the examination to be as open as possible and we want the examiner to be as open with us as possible.

Senator JOHNSTON—So we do not want any litigation flowing from the findings of the special investigator so we chop it off at that and it is up to you to receive the report and then to take some action.

Mr Beven—That is right.

Senator JOHNSTON—What action can you then take given the special investigator might find that various meetings were unconstitutional, people have been wrongfully terminated, people have not have been paid? What do you do then?

Mr Beven—We will look at the recommendations. We will look at issues coming out of the special examiner's report and look at the recommendations. He will provide recommendations to us and then we can look at the other powers that are available to us. We would look at the possibility of a special administrator and look at whether it warrants a further investigation. So there is a wide range of powers that are available to us. There is also the mediation role. In relation to Waminda, our initial look at the corporation is that it has significant assets that exceed its liabilities and it has a steady form of grant income coming into the corporation.

Senator JOHNSTON—That is what concerns me. If the administration is a bit wobbly—and I am putting that as politely as I can—or has a question mark over it, when it has half a million dollars of Commonwealth and state money in the bin we all should be concerned?

Mr Beven—That is right.

Senator JOHNSTON—And when it is subject to partisan factional disputation.

Mr Beven—I would just point out that, as with any corporation, the corporation belongs to the members of the corporation. At the end of the day we can assist in mediating disputes, and if there are any concerns about the solvency of the organisation or breaches of constitution we can become involved. But at the end of the day the corporation belongs to the 27 members, and it is up to the members of the corporation to make decisions in relation to who are the appropriate directors for their corporation.

Senator JOHNSTON—Ultimately, if the members are so divided as to make the executive functioning of the corporation unworkable, the responsibility must surely shift to you.

Mr Beven—There are powers that do lie with me, but at the end of the day it is a decision for the members. The members have a right to apply to the court for a just and equitable liquidation of the corporation. One of the grounds under the legislation is if there is a deadlock in management or a deadlock between the members. So there are legal options available to the members.

Senator JOHNSTON—That is very expensive for people who I am sure you would acknowledge have very limited resources, particularly when the Aboriginal Legal Service is conflicted. How do you deal with people like that? Do we just adopt the legislative framework and say, 'Go off and do it in court,' or do we roll our sleeves up and seek to solve the problem?

Mr Beven—That is what we have done in this case. We have appointed an independent person, Pitcher Partners, to prepare a report on what that actual situation is, and that is the first step in the process.

Senator JOHNSTON—How do we review your action flowing from the report if we cannot see the report?

Mr Beven—I appear before Senate estimates and answer questions. The majority of my decisions are reviewable before the AAT.

Senator JOHNSTON—So the AAT is where we go if we are unhappy with what you decide?

Mr Beven—That is right.

Senator JOHNSTON—Again, that is timely, expensive and people are not being paid whilst they are seeking to deliver services such as in the nature of delivery of dialysis. Do you know what Waminda does?

Mr Beven—Yes.

Senator JOHNSTON—Yes, it is pretty important stuff.

Mr Beven—Important stuff.

Senator JOHNSTON—I am interested to know whether your administrator—

Mr Beven—Examiner.

Senator JOHNSTON—If you move to an administration because you are unhappy with the status of the management, is your examiner going to have the power to hire and fire, pay wages, reimburse and conduct the business of the corporation?

Mr Beven—I do not want to pre-empt the recommendations coming out.

Senator Chris Evans—He will have general powers.

Mr Beven—Yes.

Senator JOHNSTON—I do not want to anticipate that is what you will do.

Senator Chris Evans—You could be accused of leading the witness in that situation, Senator Johnson.

Senator JOHNSTON—I am hoping to get this over and done with very quickly, Minister.

Mr Beven—In general terms, the special administrator stands in for the directors of the corporation. So the special administrator has the power to make changes to the constitution, hire and fire employees, make payments.

Senator JOHNSTON—Can you tell me how many special investigators you have appointed with respect to Aboriginal corporations since the act was—

Mr Beven—Examiners.

Senator JOHNSTON—Sorry, examiners.

Mr Beven—On a yearly basis we conduct 60 examinations per year.

Senator JOHNSTON—Goodness me. That is as a result of complaints, is it?

Mr Beven—No. We have a rolling program of examinations. About 45 of those 60 examinations are rolling programs where we select a number of corporations around the country.

Senator JOHNSTON—Good.

Mr Beven—And about 15 of those 60 are complaint or information driven.

Senator JOHNSTON—So 15 approximately are responding to complaints, question marks and issues?

Mr Beven—That is right.

Senator JOHNSTON—How many corporations have you got?

Mr Beven—There are 2,565.

Senator JOHNSTON—That is a revelation. So how many special administrators do you appoint every year?

Mr Beven—At this stage we have 18 special administrations ongoing around the country. It depends on the circumstances of information provided to us. At this stage we have 18 in place.

Senator JOHNSTON—Very good. Thank you, Chair. I am finished. Thank you very much, Mr Beven.

CHAIR—Are there any other questions to Mr Beven? Thank you, Mr Beven. The next area is CDEP.

Senator BERNARDI—Dr Harmer, I will direct my questions to you and you can perhaps pass them to the relevant official. Can the department detail any moneys that have now been paid to the Northern Territory government for the transition of CDEP positions to what I will call real salaries in the Northern Territory government?

Dr Harmer—We have some information on that, yes.

Ms Ahmer—In relation to CDEP job conversion for the Northern Territory, there have been discussions with the Northern Territory but to date there has not been a finalisation of the number of positions that will need to be converted. The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs is actually undertaking a lot of the negotiations with the Northern Territory government, but to date there have not been any positions converted.

Senator BERNARDI—Are you able to provide an indication as to when the positions will be converted?

Ms Ahmer—The negotiations are well underway, but I could not actually advise you on the date.

Senator Chris Evans—The Commonwealth has transferred some to permanent employment.

Senator BERNARDI—That is case with the moneys transferred to the Northern Territory government?

Senator Chris Evans—In terms of transferring some of those jobs to full-time permanent jobs, the Commonwealth has already made a number of those conversions inside its own jurisdiction. I think 600 or 700 is the figure.

Mr Yates—Just under 600 have been paid for. Jobs in Australian government services that have historically been supported through CDEP have now been put on a regular basis, not all

of them full time. Some are a mixture of full-time and part-time jobs in a range of different service areas.

Senator BERNARDI—What sorts of service areas?

Ms Moody—Things like night patrols; education support, such as teacher assistants; rangers, but that is an area where we have not converted any yet; aged care; child care; municipal services; art centre support; language; culture; broadcasting, so some of the Indigenous radio stations and those types of things. So they were areas where the Commonwealth funds the services normally but some of the costs were being picked up by CDEP. Now the Commonwealth is funding the full cost of those services.

Senator BERNARDI—I will address this question to you, Minister. Is the government intending to retain the previous government's FaHCSIA funded community managers in prescribed communities?

Senator Chris Evans—I am not across the detail of that program.

Dr Harmer—Senator, are you talking about government business managers?

Senator BERNARDI—Funded community managers.

Dr Harmer—Government business managers. Yes, that program and that element of the Northern Territory intervention is continuing.

Senator BERNARDI—How many of those community managers are now in place?

Dr Harmer—Major General Chalmers went through this. I am operating from memory.

Senator BERNARDI—Did he touch on that specifically?

Dr Harmer—Yes, he did. Thirty-nine are in place, another seven are to be in place by the end of next week and there are another six on top of that, I think.

Senator BERNARDI—I will refer to the *Hansard*, then.

Senator Chris Evans—I would have gone for 35. I do remember hearing that. But I am sure you are right.

Senator BERNARDI—Has the decision of the current government to review the previous government's abolition of the CDEP program had any effect on the current rollout of the program? Has it caused the cessation of it or has it caused disruption to the transition?

Dr Harmer—No.

Senator BERNARDI—So what are the implications of it?

Dr Harmer—It certainly has not done anything to the pace at which the various measures have been rolled out. We are currently working with our minister on options for reforming the program. Until that is done, the moratorium on the dismantling of CDEP is in place—that is, the one that was announced on 10 December.

Senator BERNARDI—What sorts of options are you considering?

Dr Harmer—I am not able to talk about the sorts of things we are speaking with the minister about. That goes to the form of policy advice and I am not able to speculate on that.

Senator BERNARDI—It is always worth a try.

Dr Harmer—It is worth a try.

Senator Chris Evans—I am a bit concerned that we might have confused two issues and I just want to be clear. The conversion of CDEP funded jobs to properly funded public sector jobs has been a long-term Labor policy. We supported the start that was made on it under the intervention and we will continue to support it and roll that out. That is different to the CDEP's role.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand.

Senator Chris Evans—I am told by officials that there are about 600 jobs converted. The plan is that about 1,600 have been identified that will become properly funded public sector jobs.

Mr Yates—We are hoping to have about 1,670 converted by the end of this financial year.

Senator BERNARDI—So we are not quite halfway there.

Senator Chris Evans—Yes. It is long overdue. We have used it as a source of cheap labour under successive governments for far too long.

Senator BERNARDI—How much money has been spent on the program thus far?

Ms Moody—On the conversion of the government funded jobs to date, we have expended \$5.6 million.

Senator BERNARDI—That is an additional cost to what it would have been otherwise in the transition from welfare effectively.

Ms Moody—An equivalent amount of money would have been spent under CDEP. That is the money now that will go to the service providers who actually employ those people to do the jobs.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. What sorts of jobs will be created through the reintroduction of CDEP in the communities?

Mr Yates—Are you talking about what activities will be covered?

Senator BERNARDI—Activities, yes. They are being paid to do things.

Mr Yates—The activities that will be contracted for will be determined by the contracts themselves, but they will not be doing government service work. They will be involved in a range of community development activities and other work experience roles, but they will not be involved in, as it were, subsidising government service delivery whether it is local, Northern Territory or Commonwealth service delivery.

Senator BERNARDI—What plans does the department have to measure the work outcomes or the service outcomes to those responsibilities?

Mr Yates—That goes to the terms of the program itself and the contracts that are let with providers. Ms Ahmer can talk about how that is handled.

Ms Ahmer—In terms of the CDEP program, we run an annual competitive funding process. Embedded within the contracts at the moment we have a component for wages to cover the costs of individuals who are undertaking CDEP activities. We negotiate on an individual basis with the organisations which are successful through the tender process—

looking at the needs of the community, the skills of the organisation and what activities need to be undertaken. Through that contracting process we identify particular activities that need to be undertaken, we put those in the contract and then we have an ongoing annual monitoring process. Our contract managers in each of the states go through and monitor and work with the organisations to see that they are actually being undertaken, that participants are actually getting the activities that they need. We have a contract that does specify at the moment all of the activities that need to be undertaken, and then we have routine contract monitoring processes throughout the year that actually look at how that is being performed.

Senator BERNARDI—So it is not a return to sit down money or anything like that. There will be specific outcomes that will be required.

Ms Ahmer—With most activities, there are. In relation to the concept of sit down money within CDEP, there have been changes within the program over the last few years to really focus on strengthening the activities and trying to get providers to really look at the outcomes for the participants. Sit down money is something we have been trying actively to avoid. The no work, no pay principle also works through within the organisations as part of the contractual obligations so that people need to turn up to work and undertake activities.

Senator BERNARDI—Can I ask a question briefly about the providers. Did you say that they are going to be open to tenders? Is that what I heard?

Ms Ahmer—Each year we run a competitive funding process.

Senator BERNARDI—Is that open to organisations outside of the Indigenous communities themselves?

Ms Ahmer—Yes. It is open to any organisation that wants to put their name in the hat to run a CDEP program.

Senator BERNARDI—Is there a document that discloses the criteria upon which selection is made?

Ms Ahmer—Yes. This financial year, for the 2007-08 year, we normally run the process through the Indigenous servicing program's funding process and that is managed by FaHCSIA. Early December is generally the time that it is advertised. There is an e-submission process that details the selection criteria for all the Indigenous programs that are being advertised through that process. CDEP has been one of the programs that is managed and that is on the website. We will find out where it is. It is actually on the internet and it is a publicly available document that organisations can access.

Senator BERNARDI—I will not look it up right now, but is having some sort of Indigenous administration or Indigenous personnel part of the criteria for successfully winning a tender?

Ms Ahmer—It is strongly encouraged. We have a number of selection criteria. One is the need for CDEP in the communities. The next one is the capacity of the organisation to deliver the program. One criteria where there is quite a strong focus—I should say that they are all equally weighted effectively, but there is a strong focus on this—is the demonstrated experience of all of the providers. They need to have significant experience in delivering Indigenous programs or services to Indigenous people; that is one of the equally weighted

criteria. Then of course we have the financial viability. So there are four key selection criteria that we look at, with the demonstrated capacity to deliver to Indigenous Australians being one of them.

Senator BERNARDI—What is the length of the contract terms?

Ms Ahmer—The contracts themselves are generally 12 months. In some cases we have organisations that meet the criteria but have a reasonable level of risk. So for some of those organisations we will have a contract period which is shorter than 12 months and we monitor those fairly closely. In a lot of cases we provide some assistance to the organisations because having capacity building and keeping Indigenous organisations in the space is important. So we look at assisting them to build capacity to get to a point where they can actually deliver more effectively.

Senator BERNARDI—Upon successfully winning a tender, is a lump sum of money advanced or is it advanced according to fulfilment of specific criteria?

Ms Ahmer—The payment against the contract can vary across each organisation. As I said, there are two components—one is wages, the other is the management and activity fees. The wages are really driven by the number of participants who are being paid by each of the organisations. The management and activity fees are often fixed costs. In some cases, it is quarterly in advance; in other cases, it is monthly in advance. It really depends on the circumstances of each organisation and the level of fixed costs that they might have at the inception of the contract. We do try to manage the releases of payments to the organisations to minimise risk to the Commonwealth and to also ensure that we have appropriate cash management practices in place.

Senator BERNARDI—I am approaching it from a risk to the Commonwealth, and I am pleased you acknowledge that. It is also important that there is some accountability within the programs themselves. Does FaHCSIA have a formal process of review over that course of the contract period? Do you send people in to assess whether people are actually working, or are you relying on the people within these communities themselves to report?

Ms Ahmer—We have in the past had a risk rating. We do a risk assessment of organisations and that will drive the extent of monitoring that is undertaken. As has been mentioned, in a lot of remote areas, there are reasonable distances to get to them, so we need to manage our resources to get the appropriate results that we need. We have site visits. So our contract monitoring staff go out to the individual sites on not a routine basis but according to the risk of the organisation. It could be more or less regularly according to that risk. We also have desktop monitoring so that we can look at what the organisations are doing and assess how they are performing.

Senator BERNARDI—Are you able to provide me with details of the number of and type of monitoring that has gone on under the program previously, and the number of breaches or contract failures that have been identified through that process?

Ms Ahmer—We can give you an overview of the types of contract monitoring, but because it happens at the state levels it can vary and it would involve going through a lot of files to work out for every single organisation, but we can give you a general view of—

Senator BERNARDI—Has there not been an audit report done on—

Senator Chris Evans—Has there not been an audit report done on the program in recent times?

Ms Ahmer—There have been a number of audits of the program through the Office of Evaluation and Audit.

Senator Chris Evans—Are they publicly available?

Ms Ahmer—No.

Senator Chris Evans—I am just checking. I thought there was some public auditing done, but not through the Auditor-General's office at all.

Senator BERNARDI—I would be interested in information that you could supply as to how often these programs are visited, the types of criteria they are assessed against, and where breaches have been identified and the consequences of those breaches—because I am sure that we do not want to see a return to a dysfunctional system, if it ever existed. I just want to ascertain the level of dysfunction.

Ms Ahmer—Just on the breaches, some of the breaches occur because of not meeting time lines, or within the duration of the contract there are certain actions that they have not fulfilled. Where that occurs, the contract managers will generally go out and work with the organisation, alert them to the fact there is a breach and try to work through the process. Once they have completed that action the breach has actually cleared. So there are periods where we would reflect a breach, but it would actually be cleared because action has been undertaken by the organisation—

Senator BERNARDI—I am sure you can highlight these for me as well.

Ms Ahmer—Yes, we can.

Senator BERNARDI—Because it is a contractual obligation and so I guess it is a breach. Thank you, Chair.

Senator BOSWELL—I would like to ask some questions on CDEP. In the Torres Strait the local councils were charged with the responsibility of administering the programs. The island councils cease to exist, and I want to know who will administer the CDEP from there.

Mr Yates—Just so we understand the situation in regards to CDEP on the Torres Strait, that program is actually administered by the Torres Strait Regional Authority. They receive separate appropriations to manage their own programs including CDEP. So our department from time to time meets with the TSRA to advise them about the reforms that are going on in the program, but it is the responsibility of the TSRA itself as to how it delivers and organises—

Senator BOSWELL—What is TSRA?

Mr Yates—Torres Strait Regional Authority. They are a portfolio agency of this portfolio. I do not think they are on the list to appear before the committee today but if the Senator has some questions on that we can refer them—

Senator BOSWELL—I am just trying to understand how it would work. Maybe you can help me. There are 17 or 18 islands that are inhabited; there are many more islands that are not. How does a program become approved for all the islands? Does every island put in a bid? How will that happen now?

Mr Yates—We are not aware what changes may have occurred there. We would have to direct your questions to the TSRA to give you an effective reply.

Senator Chris Evans—Senator Boswell, I think to be helpful the officials are basically of the view that it was done through the authority, not the councils. Therefore, if the councils have been abolished—

Senator BOSWELL—Yes, I understand.

Senator Chris Evans—Have you been told there is a problem and if so—

Senator BOSWELL—No, but I have been up there and it seems to me that the money and the jobs were distributed through the local island councils. In other words, the Islanders would rock up at 8.30 or eight o'clock and say, 'What jobs have we got today?' They would say, 'You know the airstrip. You go and do this and that.' It was administered from the council. I am just trying to get my mind around how it would be administered now with no councils.

Mr Yates—Our expectation I think, Senator, would be that they would need to contract for the delivery of the CDEP program from other appropriate organisations if they no longer exist. They would need to go to other organisations.

Senator BOSWELL—So the money goes to the Torres Strait Regional—

Dr Harmer—Torres Strait Regional Authority. We distribute the funds. As you say, I think they were contracting to councils.

Senator BOSWELL—They are now contracting to councils.

Dr Harmer—Yes. They will have to contract to alternate providers now that the councils do not exist.

Senator BOSWELL—But there would not be any alternate providers there unless someone—

Senator Chris Evans—Senator Boswell, I just asked Dr Harmer and you raise a legitimate issue. The officers are not here because the Torres Strait authority is not here, but I will ask Dr Harmer to brief you. I am sure he would be happy to brief you this week or next with the detail if you like.

Dr Harmer—Yes indeed.

Senator BOSWELL—All right.

Senator Chris Evans—I am not trying to stop you asking questions here, but they are not going to be as helpful as they would like to be because the authority is not here.

Senator BOSWELL—If I could get a briefing, thank you for that.

Dr Harmer—We can do that. We might get some information from the Torres Strait Regional Authority along the lines of your question so that we can inform you about that.

Senator BOSWELL—Some islands have got 20 people on them.

Dr Harmer—Sure.

CHAIR—We have half an hour for the remaining questions. I just thought I should mention that at this stage.

Senator SIEWERT—The jobs that have been converted to real jobs, you said there were art centres. Have all CDEP funded positions in art centres been converted?

Ms Moody—No, Senator. At this point I do not have a figure for arts separate to language, culture and broadcasting. I have them as a group. For that group which includes the arts centres, we project that there will be 259 positions converted and to date paid positions converted—so the actual number converted might be slightly higher because it takes a little while for the money to catch up with it. The paid positions are 81 to date.

Senator SIEWERT—81 to date?

Ms Moody—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—But that is in that whole sector?

Ms Moody—That is in that sector. I do not have a lower breakdown than that.

Senator SIEWERT—The issue with the ranges, have all of those been converted because I had heard that some had and some had not.

Ms Moody—The ranges under the department of—I have forgotten what the acronym stands for but—

Mr Yates—Environment.

Ms Moody—Environment, water, heritage and the arts. There are 140 positions projected to be converted and at the moment none of those have been for—I am not sure whether we know some have been converted and are in transit to being paid but at the moment there are no payments against that allocation.

Senator SIEWERT—But it is projected there will be 140?

Ms Moody—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—And in the arts it is projected that there will be 259 in that whole sector?

Ms Moody—In that sector, yes.

Mr Yates—These are estimates necessarily. What we are doing is we have the funds which are earmarked for these conversions in a single pool, and that means that if fewer of them were expected in one area but more in another then we were able to easily redirect the funds so that we maximised the number of jobs that are established rather than we did not bid for enough and suddenly we cannot create all the positions. That is how we are innovatively managing this so we can try to reach as many conversions as we possibly can.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. At the risk of incurring wrath, of the 259 art centres in that sector that have been identified, in the art centres where there has been a large issue around art centres perhaps—a lot of them are saying they are going to have to close down if they do

not get the positions that were previously CDEP positions supported. What happens in those centres that do not get their position converted?

Ms Moody—We would have to go back to the department of environment about that, because they deal with their service providers. So we are managing the finances of the converted positions, but they have the relationship with the service providers.

Senator SIEWERT—So they are with the service providers and they are the ones that are flagging which jobs should be converted?

Ms Moody—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Ms Ahmer—On that question, with some of the art centres there is business assistance that may be provided, so the viability of an art centre is broader than the cross-subsidisation. So some of that assistance can be provided. Where it is within a CDEP provider's purview, then the CDEP program can work through with that. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations would be working on and looking at some of the business assistance. Also with Indigenous Business Australia as part of the Northern Territory intervention, they were also looking through across the CDEP providers, including art centres, as to what business opportunities there were. I understand that they have been working through that process and there is some additional assistance that they might be able to provide to help art centres become viable organisations, especially where there are good revenue streams.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

CHAIR—We have 25 minutes left, and I propose that the last 10 minutes will go to Senator Humphries with general questions about Indigenous issues—not NT intervention—which gives us 15 to 20 minutes for the rest of this issue. I have four items in front of me and I am actually seeking some direction as to what we can get to, because the rest will go on notice. The items I have in front of me are housing, quarantine and royalty issues. Senator Bernardi, it is your call what you would like to go to.

Senator BERNARDI—Can I just go to the lifelong royalty payments initially, because it will be brief. There has been a proposal for lifetime royalty payments for the sale of Indigenous art. Are you aware of that policy?

Mr Yates—That is the responsibility of the Arts portfolio, so the policy and any action around that should be directed to that portfolio. We do not have any direct involvement with that.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you. Have you had any involvement—while I am on the topic I might as well exhaust them now—or do you have any involvement in the cutting of funds for CrocFest?

CHAIR—That might also be Arts and Heritage.

Mr Yates—Sometimes multiple agencies are approached for funding. We would have to take it on notice as to whether our portfolio has had any historical involvement and whether there has been any change in funding and we would let you know on notice.

Senator BERNARDI—There has been a change in funding for CrocFest, but it is just a question of—

Mr Yates—Yes, whether it has involved us in any capacity. We will take that on notice.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you. I will make the presumption you are going to refer me somewhere else as well, but going to the education of children in Indigenous communities, is FaHCSIA responsible at any level for the maintenance of attendance rolls or recording when children have been to school and the implications of that for welfare payments and services?

Dr Harmer—We are not responsible for taking the rolls and maintaining the rolls. That would be legitimately the responsibility of the Northern Territory education department, but to the extent that we link welfare payments to attendance at school we will be dependent on that information to make decisions.

Senator BERNARDI—Do you know how often the rolls are taken in schools? Do they just simply do it once a day, or do they do it multiple times of the day to ensure that children are attending?

Dr Harmer—I do not know, Senator, and I suspect it varies from school to school, frankly. But it would be the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations that is in direct contact with the Northern Territory education department. They would be best placed to answer those questions.

Senator BERNARDI—How often do you monitor school attendance when it is with regard to quarantining of welfare?

Dr Harmer—We have not started to quarantine welfare in relation to school attendance yet.

Senator BERNARDI—When do you intend to do that?

Dr Harmer—The commitment I think is to start it during the first term, so that is still in place and the—

Senator BERNARDI—So the next three years?

Dr Harmer—We are working on that.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. Are you in a position to identify any potential consequences of children failing to turn up to school for parents or caregivers?

Dr Harmer—Not at this stage, Senator.

Senator BERNARDI—Will it be the intention of the department to make these figures publicly available over the course of when the policy is implemented?

Dr Harmer—I am not sure because we have not settled how the policy is going to be implemented yet, Senator, and at the end of the day it would be a matter for the minister and the government about the way it was developed. It would be a matter for the minister and the government whether it was published or not.

Senator BERNARDI—Chair, I am relatively happy with that.

CHAIR—I know there are some questions about the quarantining process and, as you have already alluded to that, maybe we could go on with that for the 10 minutes we have. Are you agreeable to that?

Senator BERNARDI—I certainly am happy to, but I do not know if Senator Siewert had a bit.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, you know there will be a considerable number of questions on notice in this portfolio, as usual.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that in relation to some of the questions I may ask you will say it relates to Human Services. Can you please tell me straightaway so I will continue on other lines. How many communities now have had quarantining of income support rolled out?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Senator, 24 communities and two town camps have had income management rolled out so far.

Senator SIEWERT—Rather than go through them now, could you provide me with a list or tell me where I can find the list of places that has been rolled out to?

Major Gen. Chalmers—We can provide a list of those communities.

Senator SIEWERT—Whose decision was it to issue the gift cards and call them gift cards?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Senator, gift cards have not been issued.

Senator SIEWERT—I am sorry; I have seen them.

Major Gen. Chalmers—Senator, gift cards have not been issued by Centrelink. Stored value cards have been issued by Centrelink for major supermarkets such as Coles and Woolworths.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, what are they?

Major Gen. Chalmers—A stored value card but a store card that is a normal card that Woolworths or Coles might issue. There may have been isolated incidents where—and I think in Katherine in Woolworths this may have occurred—staff in the supermarket sold a gift card to someone who used their store card to buy it, but that is against both government policy and Woolworths policy. Where that may have happened, there has been staff education to prevent that happening again.

Senator SIEWERT—I was handed one by a member of an Aboriginal community last week that said ‘Coles gift card’. I have circulated the photocopy of it. I am sure you have seen it. I was handed one by a community member last week who said that that is what she was given as her income support—how she accessed Coles—and there was a whole lot of women at that meeting who all said the same thing. So I am sorry, but there is and I—

Major Gen. Chalmers—I accept what you have said there, Senator. This issue had been brought to my attention. I asked Centrelink to investigate it. The advice that I was given very firmly yesterday was that no gift cards have been issued, but I will follow up again—

Senator SIEWERT—I will provide you with a photocopy of the one that I was given last week from a member of the community from Alice Springs.

Dr Harmer—Senator, it is possible that the member of the community who gave you that card did exactly as Major General Chalmers is suggesting—that is, went to the store with a Centrelink stored value card and was given the gift card or was sold the gift card by the store, in an unauthorised manner as I understand. If they were, they could be mistaken for thinking that was part of the system.

Senator SIEWERT—It was not an isolated incident. There were a number of women at this meeting—

Dr Harmer—But it may have been from the same store.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Senator Chris Evans—There is a way of dealing with this, Senator. I think Major General Chalmers was responding to the policy question. He can make that clear; you can explore that with him. If you have concerns about them not being applied appropriately, then you ought to advise the department and I would be very keen for them to follow that up. But I just think we are confusing the two things at the moment; I am not clear in my own mind. Major General Chalmers was telling you the policy and what should be happening. If you want to explore that, that is fine. If you have an incident or a group of people who have been, you think, treated outside of the policy, then I know Dr Harmer would be very keen to take that up.

Senator BERNARDI—I have a question. General, are you suggesting that Coles has two types of cards? If I wanted to get a stored value card from Coles now, it does say ‘Coles gift card’. There are two different kinds of cards?

Major Gen. Chalmers—There are.

Senator BERNARDI—One is a gift card and one is the stored value card. They are clearly different cards and Centrelink does not issue gift cards.

Senator SIEWERT—So people take the stored value cards that they are given and they are converted to gift cards?

Major Gen. Chalmers—The policy of Centrelink is that that would not happen. If it has happened, it has happened in breach of policy and it has happened at the supermarket. They would be issues we would be concerned about and follow up on.

Senator SIEWERT—So who deals with the supermarkets? Do you deal with Coles as a supermarket or do you deal with the individual—I do not like to use the words ‘service provider’ but I cannot think of a better term at the moment—as a service provider, because that is what they are essentially being used as? Do you deal with them as an entity and then not with the supermarkets, or are you dealing with the supermarkets?

Mr Hazlehurst—I might answer that question. It is actually Centrelink that deals with both the supermarket and the customer. Centrelink prepurchases the cards and then provides those to the customers as part of the process of working through with individuals how they want to manage their income managed funds, which is the reason the General makes the observation that the policy is that they only get a certain kind of card. Centrelink do not

repurchase the other cards; they only purchase certain kinds of cards, which are then made available. So naturally enough, though, it is of course open to you to raise a similar question with Centrelink about their precise processes for doing that repurchasing of the cards.

Senator SIEWERT—We have Human Services tomorrow.

CHAIR—Can we have a copy of the policy about the cards as there have been statements made and confusion about the type of card? You mentioned there was a policy that your process had. Can we get a copy of the policy document that talks about how these cards work and what they look like?

Major Gen. Chalmers—Certainly. It is Centrelink policy, and I am sure that—

CHAIR—We will ask Centrelink as well, but we try to look at you as a policy department and them as the—

Major Gen. Chalmers—Sadly, I am not policy; I am a simple soldier who implements.

Senator BERNARDI—Just on this—and I do not want to labour the point—is there any working difference between the stored value card and a gift card apart from the description of it?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, both Coles and Woolworths have various types of stored value cards, some of which you can purchase anything with and others of which certain items are excluded. It is the latter that Centrelink repurchases.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you.

Senator Chris Evans—A gift card would defeat the purpose of the whole project.

Senator BERNARDI—I accept that, but I did not know there was a screening process. I just made the presumption that Coles was not selling unwanted substances.

Mr Hazlehurst—No, there is a differentiation.

Senator BERNARDI—Yes. I accept that. Thank you.

Senator SIEWERT—Committee members are saying that they are not receiving financial counselling as part of this process. I understood that part of this process was in an effort not only to ensure that money was only spent on the things that government wanted the money spent on but that people would be in a better position to manage their finances. Can you tell me that the people I have been talking to are isolated incidents or that financial services have not been provided?

Mr Hazlehurst—I can answer that. Under the intervention itself at present, the process of income management does not of itself involve financial counselling per se. What it does involve is Centrelink sitting down with each customer and working through with them what their expenses are, particularly those in relation to priority needs as defined in the legislation, and then setting up with the individual a range of deductions in respect of those expenses. So the person would indicate, for example, that they spend this much on rent, or this much on food, or this much on whatever and those deductions are then made to the various providers of those goods.

Senator SIEWERT—There are no processes of appeal. What I am getting at is that some people have complained to me not only about the whole process, which you can probably imagine there have been lots, but also when they have been doing those deductions inappropriate deductions have been made in terms of they do not agree with the deductions or assumptions are being made that are incorrect and they do not feel that they are able to change them. So they are just not getting their money.

Mr Hazlehurst—There does not need to be a process of appeal, because the person can change those deductions at any time.

Senator SIEWERT—That is not what is happening on the ground. I have had repeated instances of people saying, ‘This money has been taken out for this. I don’t actually live in that place. I need to be paying it here. I do not actually need to pay.’ In their view, quite paternalistic decisions are being made for them that they feel that they do not have any control over. They believe they have no appeal process because, as you know, you cannot appeal against the quarantining process. So they feel they are helpless and that they cannot actually change those deductions.

Mr Hazlehurst—The most I can say, without going into the details of how Centrelink operates in those circumstances—but again, by all means ask those questions of Centrelink tomorrow—is that the person can change those arrangements at any time. They can do that by telephone. In addition, there is a formal process of review available up to the level of the authorised review officer within Centrelink. But as I say, in respect of the actual setting out of the deductions, it is not actually necessary to appeal them; you can just change them. So it sounds like it is more a question of people perhaps not understanding what options are available to them.

CHAIR—I think any further questions on that issue will need to go on notice, although I think that interaction is a Centrelink implementation issue which can be raised with Human Services tomorrow. Senator Humphries, you have been very patient.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I have just a few non-Northern Territory intervention related questions, or essentially non-NT related. You were answering some questions before from Senator Bernardi about the preschool education for four-year-olds issue. I think you said that it was essentially in DEWHA. Are you able to tell me what proportion of Indigenous children today are receiving preschool or early learning programs?

Dr Harmer—I certainly cannot. I doubt whether anyone at the table could, and I think if you were to give that question to DEWHA they would probably say that they would have to get some information from the Northern Territory government. But they would certainly be the best port of call for that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Okay. I just noticed that a figure is mentioned in the policy document from which this promise is drawn, quoting a figure of at least \$21 million to provide preschool to Indigenous four-year-olds. I just wonder where that figure would come from if some estimate was not made of the size of the unmet need.

Dr Harmer—It would be an estimate of the number of children around that age, and that would be possible, but what proportion of those are getting some form of education at the moment is the question you asked earlier. I do not know what that is. I suspect it is quite

small. I suspect the \$21 million probably covers most of the four-year-olds in the Northern Territory.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Sure, I would think so. There were questions before about holiday programs funded under the intervention. Are there any preschool or early intervention type programs currently being funded under the intervention package for NT Indigenous youth?

Dr Harmer—I will just check with Ms Moody and Mr Yates.

Ms Moody—Could you repeat the question? I know you referred to funding, but which particular part?

Senator HUMPHRIES—Does any of the NT intervention funding include funding early intervention, as in education type programs, or preschool for preprimary children?

Ms Moody—There was childcare type funding, which was with this department and it has now moved to DEWHA. Within the money that education got, I do not think there was something specifically for preschool, no.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I will leave that in that case and direct some questions to DEWHA. I wanted to ask about the Indigenous boarding colleges. I understand that it is possible some questions could be answered about this at the moment. What can you tell me about this proposal in terms of where it is proposed the colleges might go, whether the cost is going to be borne entirely by the federal government or whether it is going to be shared with the Northern Territory government? I understand each college has proposed to accommodate about 150 students. Are there any criteria that have been determined for how those students might be chosen?

Dr Harmer—Again, I am afraid it is the education department that is responsible for that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—When I raised this before you said that you might be able to tell me something about the program, but you cannot tell me anything about the program.

Dr Harmer—The person who I thought might be able to tell me something has just told me that it is DEWHA, I am sorry.

Mr Barson—That may in part have been me responding, saying that we have some involvement in Indigenous boarding colleges but not in the program you are referring to. I misunderstood your reference.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So you are saying you have an involvement, but until the other department frames the initiative you will not know what your involvement really is?

Dr Harmer—The program you are referring to is the other department. In the Northern Territory of course we have some involvement with various boarding colleges. I thought that was what you were referring to before but, no, the program is the other agency.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I am going to come back later, Chair, and suggest a different method of dealing with these questions because this is just hit and miss half the time in this committee and I am sure across other committees as well. We have to find a better way of determining where these questions should be directed, but that is for another day.

Dr Harmer—Could I suggest that we would be very happy with that as well, because we like to be as helpful as we can and we are embarrassed by not being able to deal with some of these questions which might seem to be ours but actually are not. So, in advance of these hearings, if we had some idea, we could feed back to the committee secretariat that that is not ours and we could quite easily identify which portfolio is the responsible one. We could be quite helpful in that way.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I hope so, and we will discuss that a bit later on. But you do have responsibility, I understand, for the commitment to provide additional funds for housing delivered in a way that builds construction skills leading to increased employment for Indigenous people.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I assume that is not the CDEP, as such; it is something different?

Dr Harmer—No, it is our housing program.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That is the one referred to on page 175 of the additional estimates statements under 'Indigenous housing and infrastructure reforms'; is that right?

Dr Harmer—That is right.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I see that the main intent of that is to establish more housing for Indigenous people, but can you explain to me how it is intended that this program will actually result in building construction skills among Indigenous people and therefore employment?

Dr Harmer—Indeed.

Ms Cattermole—The housing and construction program that you are talking about is a new program that will be coming online this year, and it is a new contracting methodology which is called alliancing. The way in which it is going to work and we are going to develop training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people through the program is that—the way the model works is that design and construction companies come together in a sort of consortium approach and will bid for work on that sort of basis. The idea is that, when they respond to a tender, that will be a go-to-whoa package of work on a large scale. So it is a scale that has sufficient economies in it for a start to then obviously build economies of scale into that, as well as around the ability to have more employment and training outcomes built in.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Specifically for Indigenous people?

Ms Cattermole—For Indigenous people in the communities. Now, what will happen is that the program level—that is across the entire alliancing program, which, by the way, is more than \$A500 million government dollars. We will almost certainly set targets for Indigenous employment and training across a broad spectrum of matters that will be part of the program. At the program level there will be targets set so you have something to work to. Then embedded in the way in which we tender for the work will be KPIs around the way in which people are going to meet their employment and training outcomes for the work. Those KPIs will be not only ones that have financial penalties related to them. So they will be as embedded in the terms of expectations as, for example, our targets will be on cost. They will be up-front.

Key performance indicators will be identified at a community level. So although we will have a full target across the program at a community level we will have people going out assessing what the opportunities will be on a community-by-community basis, and that will be based on the size of the community, the size of the job that will be involved in terms of the housing and construction in that community, the capacity of the community and their willingness to be involved. At that level there will be an identification which will scope essentially what the opportunity for employment and training outcomes will be there. That will then be fed into the KPI process, which will then be built into the tender. Each of these consortiums will not only have financial penalties if they do not deliver on their commitments, which they will then bid for as part of their tender process, but also impact on the opportunities they might have for future involvement in the work because it is a significant body of work over a four-year period of time.

Dr Harmer—Senator, it represents a very significant reform of the way we are going to contract and construct housing in remote locations, whereas in the past in combination with the Northern Territory governments we have contracted for small parcels of housing. We have not put specific requirements on what the contractor should do in terms of employing Indigenous people or training. We are remodelling and streamlining that. We are having, as Ms Cattermole said, an alliance model where contractors who will bid for a panel will bid for large numbers of housing. They will have explicitly in their contracts targets for training and for jobs et cetera with the clear objective to get more Indigenous jobs and more Indigenous training into the house-building industry in remote Australia.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I seem to have run out of time. Can I put a couple of questions on notice about that. I want to know what level of Indigenous employment there already is in the construction industry, preferably by state/territory.

Dr Harmer—Senator, we will do our best on that. I doubt whether we are going to be able to get that information but we will try.

Senator HUMPHRIES—It raises the problem that you may have. I would not be surprised if you had very low numbers of people already employed and you have to train a large proportion of those that you are bringing into the industry. How much of the training costs are expected to be borne by the consortia as opposed to other people? I have forgotten what the second question is, but I will put it on notice to you in writing.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, thank you very much for that session. There will be a number of briefing requests coming out of it. As a committee we are going to be doing that much more: asking for specific briefings, through the minister of course, to get that approval. But a number of questions came up today that indicated there needed to be a lot more discussion and awareness before the questions, so thank you.

Major Gen. Chalmers—Chair, before you close this session, may I seek your indulgence to correct a figure I gave you earlier?

CHAIR—Certainly, General.

Major Gen. Chalmers—The number of child health checks that we have done as at yesterday, I am advised, is 6,199, not 6,699 as I said. So 6,199 is the correct figure.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. What I am going to do is call a 10-minute break for afternoon tea to allow the various officers to come to the table. We will come back to questions around Women.

Proceedings suspended from 3.03 pm to 3.15 pm

CHAIR—Welcome, Senator Stephens. We are now going to move on to the afternoon program. The first group is output group 2.5, Support for women.

Dr Harmer—While that group is coming to the table, I have the documentation that Senator Siewert was after in relation to the select tender. I have that documentation to hand to the senator. I will just repeat a couple of things we mentioned before. First of all, there was a select tender, not an open tender. Twenty-six organisations were invited to apply. Three applications were received by the due date. Mission Australia's application was judged to best meet the requirements of the Northern Territory integrated youth services project, and therefore Mission Australia was the preferred provider. The assessment panel, which Senator Siewert was interested in, comprised three FaHCSIA staff, one staff member from each of the Department of Education, Science and Training at the time, the Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Health and Ageing, and an additional FaHCSIA staff member was the quality assurance officer. So it was quite a significant—

CHAIR—Is that about 11 people?

Dr Harmer—Quite a few people.

CHAIR—Is that usual, Dr Harmer?

Dr Harmer—Eight people. The assessment panel received a probity briefing prior to judging the applications from the Australian Government Solicitor. So it was actually a pretty rigorous process.

CHAIR—An extensive process. Thank you, Dr Harmer. We will make sure the committee sees that. Senator Payne.

[3.16 pm]

Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency

Senator PAYNE—I will start with some questions to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency. I just wanted to go to the agency's release of last month in relation to the research that you had done. The media release is entitled 'Report exposes salary gaps in Australia's Top 200 companies'. In terms of the gaps that have been outlined by the data that was collected for this particular examination, what policies and actions have been taken by the agency to look at addressing the pay gap that is consistently identified?

Ms McPhee—The data came from the 2006 collection. We will be collecting that data again at the end of 2008 as part of the Census of Women in Leadership to look at what may have changed over that period of time. The agency works actively with employers to address issues of pay. We have in place tools such as a pay equity tool, which is a tool that enables employers to do pay audits and pay analysis and to understand where the pay gaps might appear in their workplace.

As part of the Employer of Choice for Women citation, which the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency bestows on employers who reach a set of standards, we announced new criteria in 2007 but later this month we will be releasing a new list. Employers who receive that citation must demonstrate a pay gap less than the national average at every salary level and less than their industry level in order to receive that citation from the agency. We work with employers as part of the reporting process or the administering of legislation. Employers are required to look at issues of pay, explore them and show what they may or may not be doing to address pay gaps in their workplace. We talk annually with employers about focusing on that area. So we are doing a number of different things with the employers whom we work with.

Senator PAYNE—Is that through a specific program within the agency or is that an agency wide activity?

Ms McPhee—It is agency wide. In administering the legislation, the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act, employers are required to have a workplace program that addresses the issues of discrimination in the workplace. Work conditions, being pay, is one of the things that organisations need to have an action plan in place to address. So annually we work with employers specifically on pay. Outside of the legislation, in relation to raising awareness and raising the benchmarks for employers, the Employer of Choice for Women citation, which is an initiative of the agency, is about trying to reduce the pay gap within those leading-edge organisations and encouraging the pack to follow.

Senator PAYNE—How many citations would you award in a year, for example?

Ms McPhee—In 2007, 114 organisations received the Employer of Choice for Women citation. It is outside of the legislation, as I said. Organisations must apply for it annually and demonstrate a range of initiatives and actions that they are taking. We have set some new benchmarks for 2008. Organisations must, as I said, demonstrate a pay gap less than the national average and less than their industry average overall. They must have paid maternity leave of six weeks after one year's service. They must be able to provide positions of part-time management. They must have women managers at a percentage greater than the national average or greater than their industry average, and they must have compulsory sex based harassment training every two years in their workplace.

Senator PAYNE—When you say apply annually, they cannot get it more than once, can they?

Ms McPhee—They can but they must reapply for it every year. If they do not meet the standard then we will not give them the citation. In 2008 we will be seeing changes on the list.

Senator PAYNE—Rather than how many organisations were awarded the citation in 2007, perhaps a better question would be how many new organisations were awarded in 2007?

Ms McPhee—About 10.

Senator PAYNE—Of 114?

Ms McPhee—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—Is that an average representation of yearly increases?

Ms McPhee—Year on year it changes. Those employers who seek to achieve the citation are those employers who understand that attracting and retaining women is important to their workforce planning and important to their organisation. There are many organisations out there, however, which meet these benchmarks but do not seek the citation. They do not see it as an important differentiating brand to their organisation.

Senator PAYNE—Going back to the question of funding, you said the citation process is outside your legislative obligations—that is, outside the requirements of the act.

Ms McPhee—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—So you fund that from within your global budget.

Ms McPhee—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—So there is not specific funding allocated to that as a program?

Ms McPhee—No.

Senator PAYNE—In your annual report, I noted your observations about women's participation in employment in the total workforce. In fact, we have over the last three years a decrease indicated in full-time employees. There is a slight decrease but it is still a decrease. Is that correct?

Ms McPhee—A slight decrease but a significant increase in part-time employment, which I think is an indicator of organisations becoming more able to manage flexibility in their workplaces and more willing to take on Jane for four days a week than Jane not at all.

Senator PAYNE—Is that a turn of phrase you use a lot? I know it is very small, and I think it is around one per cent when you average it over the different components of the workforce—full-time, part-time, casual and so on. Is it something that you think the agency and in fact government policy more broadly needs to look at, to keep a sharp eye on?

Ms McPhee—I think over the last 20 years women's workforce participation has increased overall—

Senator PAYNE—Significantly.

Ms McPhee—Significantly, and men's workforce participation has declined.

Senator PAYNE—That is why I noticed even a slight decrease.

Ms McPhee—I think it is the opportunity that they are able to manage and balance. I think in some instances it is a choice. They are opting out of full-time work in order to better balance work and family, and employers are better able to or in better positions to offer that flexibility.

Senator PAYNE—Just finally, I will ask Ms McPhee some questions about women in leadership positions in the workplace, particularly chairs of boards, for example, CEOs and executive managers. They remain very low, relatively speaking?

Ms McPhee—A term of phrase I often use is 'glacial'. As I mentioned earlier, we will be doing our benchmark again in 2008. I expect, given high-profile departures, that the numbers actually could go backwards at the most senior levels within business, but certainly we will see an increase in women in executive management positions, CEOs and those who

specifically report to CEOs. We are certainly seeing an increase in women in management across the board through the ABS data and our own data.

Senator BOYCE—How would you characterise that increase—significant or minor?

Ms McPhee—It is at a faster rate.

Senator BOYCE—Semi-glacial. The ice is melting slightly?

Ms McPhee—Yes. It is certainly at a faster rate than at the most senior levels, but for middle management it sits at around 32 per cent—27 per cent to 30 per cent of women managers at that middle management level.

Senator PAYNE—In terms of the analysis that your organisation does, when you try to identify reasons—I think of women on boards as a non-government external group that does some work in this area. When you try to identify reasons for why this is, as you call it, glacial—I would probably be even less complimentary—what does your analysis tell you? Are we talking about a lack of critical mass of people who are regarded as appropriately qualified? Are we talking about a lack of inclination for unidentified or identified reasons?

Ms McPhee—There is no one simple answer. I think the pay research that we did and released in January highlights some of the issues that women experience in the workplace. Female graduates earned less than male graduates in 2007.

Senator PAYNE—Across the professions?

Ms McPhee—Not completely across the professions but in professions like business, law and medicine—which excludes nursing—women are earning less. Female graduates are earning less than their male graduate peers. It is very difficult to explain why, but she is on the back foot from day one. Pay determines her status within the organisation, and we are seeing the compounding effect of being on the back foot from day one, and that is a pay gap of 58 per cent of the median salary of men at the most senior levels in the ASX 200. It is not only about flexibility, which is certainly important and we are seeing employers take action on; it is also about changing cultural behaviour within organisations and removing bias against women and their commitment to careers and the assumptions that she will leave the workforce and have children and not return.

Senator PAYNE—I am going to, as I said, only stay briefly. Madam Chair, thank you very much for that. I assume, though, Ms McPhee, that your agency could be awarded its own citation?

Ms McPhee—We have 14 weeks paid maternity leave which is above the general standard of government paid maternity leave.

Senator PAYNE—It is indeed.

Ms McPhee—And we have a woman chief executive.

Senator Stephens—For completeness of the record, it may be useful for you to know that in August last year the gender pay gap was 16.3 per cent and that the gap is greatest in health and human services, as you have just heard. In that sector it is 32.6 per cent.

CHAIR—Thank you. Senator Boyce, do you have questions for the agency or for the wider Office of Women?

Senator BOYCE—The agency. I do apologise if any of my questions relate to things that might have been asked this morning. I just have a few nuts-and-bolts questions to start with. EOWA has moved from DEEWR to FaHCSIA. Perhaps the minister might be able to help me here in terms of the thinking behind that move.

Senator Stephens—The thinking behind moving?

Senator BOYCE—Moving a group that is related to women in the workplace out of the workplace portfolio into a primarily welfare dominated portfolio.

Senator Stephens—I think the way in which the government has restructured the departments is about meeting its broader agenda and ensuring we have a much more complete view of the services that will allow people, not just women, to participate. The way in which the department has been structured allows us to think about a range of other pressures on women and work and family balance as part of a broader change, not just the workplace itself. I think that is part of the discussion around this restructuring, but wherever the office is placed it is certainly going to be serviced well.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do male members of parliament have a wage freeze but not women members of parliament?

CHAIR—I think that should be a finance and public admin question.

Senator Stephens—I do not think we deal in hypotheticals, Senator.

Dr Harmer—Can I add to the minister's position. There are obviously two possible places for the agency. One is linked to the employment department and the other is linked to the minister who has responsibility for women's issues.

Senator BOYCE—That was my next question. Social inclusion has been put under PM&C. Some of the reasons that you seem to be giving me for EOWA to be here are social inclusion reasons. I suppose we should discuss those.

Senator Stephens—I am sorry, Senator, we could talk about that all day because the social inclusion agenda is across government. This is the decision that has been made. As Dr Harmer has said, it also has to do with representation by the minister.

Senator BOYCE—I just want to clarify for myself the logic behind some of the moves that have been made. Your output primarily—sorry, I am now asking the agency—is the encouragement of Australian employees to improve equal opportunity outcomes for women in the workplace. How do you measure that outcome? There was nothing I could specifically find that says 'and we did this by'.

Ms McPhee—I think it would be in our annual report, or maybe in the PBS, actually.

Senator BOYCE—Sorry, I am having trouble hearing you.

Ms McPhee—Employers are required to report on seven employment matters. We measure on a number of different indicators the provision of part-time work, the provision of quality part-time work i.e. part-time work at management level, the provision—

Senator BOYCE—I meant more in terms of the agency's work itself. How do you know that you have encouraged rather than—

Ms McPhee—By the outcomes for women in the workplace, so looking at the data that the organisations provide to us annually; looking at what organisations are doing; what they are providing for women in their workplace; how women are advancing within an organisation through leadership structures; issues of pay equity; the provision of sexual harassment training; and looking at promotion and transfer opportunities for women. What we have seen particularly in recent years is an increase in opportunities for women across those measures.

Senator BOYCE—A lot of which is driven by the employment market at the moment, I would imagine.

Ms McPhee—Some, maybe yes.

Senator BOYCE—Are you able to have any sense of what might be attitudinal and what might be market demand?

Ms McPhee—I could not split it completely, but women continue, regardless of market demand, to face particular barriers within the workplace that we work with employers to remove.

Senator BOYCE—I suppose in a bizarre sort of way higher unemployment rates for women would be a positive measure for you in that more women are trying to participate?

Ms McPhee—Yes, I suppose.

Senator BOYCE—You were talking a little before about the increase in women working part time or the number of women choosing to enter into the market and work part time. I must admit I was surprised during the last election campaign at the number of times I came across industries you would have seen as very male dominated in the past going out of their way to create flexible positions—for example, mines that have mothers driving trucks during school hours. I was told the prawn trawlers in Darwin do not get unloaded until 9.10 in the morning for exactly the same reason—abattoirs with a shift composed completely of women who choose to work a daytime, part-time shift. Do you disseminate any of that role model material to show how you might go about producing flexibility in the workplace? If so, can you give me some details of that?

Ms McPhee—My priority in leading the agency has actually been to unlock a lot of the information that we hold and collect and give it back to business so that they can learn from best practice that the fact that they are compliant does not change behaviour or culture or practice within the workplace as effectively as demonstrating and showing best practice. We do that through a number of ways. We do it through the citation, demonstration and showcasing of what those employers are doing. We do it through an awards program—the business achievement awards—to again demonstrate diversity of leaders and organisations. We do it through various publications and industry verticals, which look at a specific industry and the issues that it is facing and how employers are addressing general workplace and workforce issues and putting in place diversity measures. We do it through our website, which can be accessed by all employers, seminars and workshops and generally through the media leading debate on issues publicly.

Senator BOYCE—This might include inquiries. Do you have any measure at all of the number of companies that are new to your ideas? A lot of what you are talking about is people

who are committed to the cause and people who are participating in this. How do you bring in people who are not aware?

Ms McPhee—Reporting is mandatory.

Senator BOYCE—I realise that.

Ms McPhee—We have certainly seen a shift over the last five to 10 years. More organisations are becoming focused on these issues and understand the importance of changing the culture within their organisations. You mentioned a few in your remarks earlier—for example, male dominated organisations or workplaces where it could not be thought that a woman could work; an abattoir is an example.

Senator BOYCE—Only if you have a group of them, I think.

Ms McPhee—Organisations are working hard because they understand that employing just 50 per cent of the potential workforce does not make business sense.

Senator BOYCE—Do you have a way of measuring new inquiries—more than just simply ticking the box?

Ms McPhee—We have an internal measure of the standard of organisations and where they are at. We are certainly seeing more organisations moving to a better standard rather than just being compliant.

Senator BOYCE—Can you rate that in any way?

Ms McPhee—We do not make that public. We do not classify those organisations and provide that to them and say, ‘You are at a certain stage.’ It is an internal measure.

Senator BOYCE—It is qualitative material.

Ms McPhee—That is correct.

Senator BOYCE—Where do we sit internationally? Do you benchmark us?

Ms McPhee—It depends is the answer. It depends on what you are looking at. Take the pay gap, for example. There is a smaller pay gap for women in Australia than in our major trading partners like the US and the UK. In terms of pay at the most senior levels—this is similar to a study that we did in January—seven per cent of top earners in the ASX 200 are female and 11 per cent of executive managers in the ASX 200 are female. That is fairly comparative to the US: seven per cent of the Fortune 500 top earners are female and about 16 per cent of executive managers are women. Certainly CEOs and boards are much closer to the Australian experience. Scandinavia is very different altogether.

Senator BOYCE—Much.

Ms McPhee—Yes. It is very difficult to compare because of different—

Senator BOYCE—So there is no real index? There are lots of little comparisons but there is nothing that says, ‘This is the equal opportunity world index’?

Ms McPhee—There is a world index that measures four things. It measures women’s economic activity—that is, their activity in the paid workforce—their health, their survival at birth, their education and their participation in leadership, in politics. Australia is one of 170-odd countries where the gap in education has been closed. In Australia and 12 other countries

there is no gap in the provision of education between men and women. Australia is ranked—and the last time I saw it was February last year—around 13th in its participation across those four areas.

Senator BOYCE—Out of 170 or so, did you say?

Ms McPhee—Something like that. Yemen is last.

Senator BOYCE—Now we know where we are going for our holidays.

Ms McPhee—But Australia ranks No. 1 in education with a number of other countries.

Senator BOYCE—That is good. You are moving to biennial reporting; is that still the case?

Ms McPhee—The previous government responded to the Banks inquiry report, which looked at regulation for business, making the recommendation that the agency move to biennial reporting. That decision has not been reviewed at this stage by the current government.

Senator BOYCE—When does that make the next reporting round?

Ms McPhee—It would require a legislative change.

Senator BOYCE—So you are still annual?

Ms McPhee—That is correct.

Senator BOYCE—Minister, do you know what the intention might be there?

Senator Stephens—No, I do not.

Senator BOYCE—I am trying to remember what the time line was on this but I cannot. There were 13 non-compliant companies listed on your website. How do you get people off that list?

Ms McPhee—They get themselves off the list.

Senator BOYCE—But obviously you would encourage them?

Ms McPhee—That is correct. We work with 7,000 employers annually—

Senator BOYCE—So there are 7,000 companies that report to—

Ms McPhee—They report to us either through their parent company or directly. Some 13 were non-compliant in 2007. The process of administering the legislation goes for about four months. We work with employers directly on the phone, through correspondence, through providing workshops and through a great range of assistance to help them. The 13 that are on the list either have not submitted a report to the agency or have not submitted enough information to the agency. They can be removed from that list at any time by submitting a report.

Senator BOYCE—I am not sure how careful I need to be here. What might be some of the reasons for not reporting?

Ms McPhee—Businesses that do not believe in regulation of any kind, businesses that do not believe in equal opportunity and do not believe that they have equal opportunity in their

workplaces so they feel no need to report to the government. Generally it is organisations that do not believe in regulation of any kind.

Senator BOYCE—I can name them if you want me to, Cory, but I do not think we should.

Senator BERNARDI—I want to know how many of these organisations there are who do not believe in regulation.

Ms McPhee—They do not submit a report to us. We know who they are but they do not submit a report. We talk to them but they do not submit a report.

Senator BOYCE—There are 13 companies that are by legislation named in parliament as not having complied with their requirements. I want to talk a little about them. One of my questions was going to be how that would be handled when the reporting went biennial, but we do not know yet if that is going to happen.

Ms McPhee—The reporting would be much the same. Organisations would report every two years.

Senator BOYCE—In terms of current thinking around social inclusion, do you have any involvement? That is the shortest way I can think of asking the question.

Ms McPhee—Not directly, no. We are focused on our machinery-of-government changes at this stage.

Senator BOYCE—Would you like to talk about those?

Ms McPhee—That just means in relation to how I manage my appropriations to deliver and administer the legislation?

Senator BOYCE—Yes. What is the current staff of the EOWA? Pick a date.

Ms McPhee—As of today, 19.

Senator BOYCE—Is that 19 full-time equivalents or 19 staff?

Ms McPhee—That is 19 staff—about 15 full-time equivalents.

Senator BOYCE—Are you being asked to contribute to the efficiency dividend?

Ms McPhee—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—And what will that involve in terms of the budget?

Ms McPhee—This financial year it is about \$8,000. Next financial year it will be an additional \$60,000.

Senator BOYCE—Can you tell me how that will affect your operations?

Ms McPhee—At this stage I manage both appropriations and revenue from other sources. So I supplement my operating budget through revenue from other sources.

Senator BOYCE—That is sales of publications and the like?

Ms McPhee—Events, partnerships and such, and workshops—fee-for-service consultancy activity. So we would be increasing that activity.

Senator BOYCE—I have run out of questions. Thank you.

Senator POLLEY—I was wondering if you could give me an overview of the structure of your agency and also how many people are employed and whether or not all those positions are filled currently.

Ms McPhee—Yes. We have a permanent staff and a temporary staff. The permanent staff includes me as director and then the agency is divided into the regulatory component, the reporting component. We have an education team which runs our workshops and consultancy and general education for employers, communications, finance et cetera of running an agency. During the middle of the year the workforce expands with a temporary team of approximately eight people who assist us in assessing the reporting process, assessing the organisation's reports. Currently all permanent positions are filled.

Senator POLLEY—Would you be able to outline your priorities for your programs for the next 12 to 18 months?

Ms McPhee—We do not administer programs; we just administer the legislation, and our priority is to increase women's workforce participation and remove discrimination against women in the workplace by assisting employers to put in place a program in their workplace to do that.

[3.50pm]

CHAIR—Thank you very much. We would like to ask similar questions, Senator Stephens, of the wider office, not just the agency. Thank you, Ms McPhee. Senator Bernardi, you can lead off on general questions.

Senator BERNARDI—I would like to touch on some revised figures that are in this additional estimates statement. Specifically, in the total administered appropriations on page 44 there is a change from \$414 million—I will round it; this is third from the bottom in Appropriation Bill (No. 3)—to \$456 million. This does not seem to correspond with the figures that I observed in the appropriation bill in that the difference, looking at this, is some \$41,212,000, whereas in the appropriation bill it is \$41,224,000. It is only a tiny amount of money, but is there a mistake?

Dr Harmer—It is for the whole outcome, so the people at the table will not be able to answer that. I have finance people who are probably watching next door.

Senator BERNARDI—It is a tiny amount of money but I wonder where the error is.

Dr Harmer—I will get you an answer.

Senator BERNARDI—That would be great. On the same page, on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) the finance minister stated that FaHCSIA was going to receive an additional \$189.8 million to assist people with disabilities. In the actual bill it says that \$163.3 million is needed for FaHCSIA. Do you understand why there is a difference between those two figures?

Dr Harmer—Both of those answers will be able to be provided by my finance officers.

Senator BERNARDI—I will just keep going. I presume they will pick it up and be able to refer to it.

Dr Harmer—They will be watching.

Senator BERNARDI—I hope they are.

Ms Beauchamp—Can I just clarify: are you looking at both administered and departmental funds, because those ones down the bottom are looking at administered? When you are talking about the total allocation of budget around something like disability, that is both administered and departmental.

Senator BERNARDI—So in that one down the bottom, where I would find that other \$12,000?

Dr Harmer—It would be under ‘departmental’.

Ms Beauchamp—Under the departmental appropriations on the next page.

Senator BERNARDI—Is it the sum of a number of programs?

Dr Harmer—I will give my chief financial officer an opportunity to come to the table. It may be useful if you repeated your question.

Senator BERNARDI—I am happy to. I do not want to be that picky. I know \$12,000 is a very small amount of money. I just wonder where it is accounted for. Welcome, Mr Hunter. I am trying to track down \$12,000 in the changes to budget estimates.

Senator Stephens—Good luck.

Senator BERNARDI—Yes, it is quite picky.

Dr Harmer—It is not \$12 million, is it?

Senator BERNARDI—No, it is not. In Appropriation Bill (No. 3) in budget estimates—it is on page 44, down the bottom in administered appropriations—there has been a change from \$414,843,000 to \$456,055,000. Have you got that?

Mr Hunter—Yes.

Senator BERNARDI—That is a difference of \$41,212,000. Yet in Appropriation Bill (No. 3) the figure comes to \$41,224,000. I am wondering where the difference is. Senator Stephens is saying I am very picky—internally, you are, Senator Stephens; I know. I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Dr Harmer—If the chief financial officer cannot answer it immediately, we will take it on notice.

Senator BERNARDI—Quite right—and it may be that I have missed something in the departmental figures but I will just go on to these other ones.

Dr Harmer—If we can possibly do it, we will try to find out during the sittings and get back to you this afternoon.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you. I will repeat this: in the recent second reading speech for Appropriation Bill No. 3 the finance minister stated that FaHCSIA will receive \$189.8 million to assist people with disabilities. In the actual bill, it says that \$163.3 million is needed for FaHCSIA. How do you account for the around \$25 million difference between the actual bill and the minister’s second reading speech?

Dr Harmer—We will come back to you with all of this, hopefully quite shortly.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you.

Dr Harmer—You have another one, too, I think.

Senator BERNARDI—Yes, I do have another one. I may even have two more. In the second reading speech for Appropriation Bill No. 4 Minister Tanner states that FaHCSIA will get an increase of \$33 million to go towards disability services. The actual amount as set out in the bill is actually \$35.5 million, but this includes an equity injection of \$2.5 million. I do not understand what an equity injection is in this circumstance, so perhaps you could explain it to me.

Mr Hunter—An equity injection is basically for capital investment. It is your capital expenditure. That is how they flow it through, so it a balance sheet item that flows through.

Senator BERNARDI—So can you tell me what that \$2.5 million is going to be spent on?

Mr Hunter—I cannot off the top of my head.

Dr Harmer—We will include that in the answers we get you this afternoon.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you. There is an additional \$354 million allocated for the Commonwealth, state and territory agreements. What is that going to be used for?

Dr Harmer—This is for the disability agreements?

Senator BERNARDI—Yes, disability agreements.

Dr Harmer—We will be able to answer that when the disability people come, Senator. That is a program type question, not a finance question.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand; that is fine. Madam Chair, that is all of the general questions I have. I have specific program questions with regard to disability.

CHAIR—We are still with the officers from the Office for Women, I would have thought. Is that right, Dr Harmer?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

CHAIR—I just have a couple of questions about the structure of the section as I normally ask and need to ask again. It is just, Ms Beauchamp, to update what the structure of your office is, how many staff there are, if all positions are filled and that kind of standard thing. I am happy to take that on notice if you want to give us a document.

Ms Beauchamp—I am happy to provide an outline.

CHAIR—Okay. That would be lovely, Ms Beauchamp.

Ms Beauchamp—The Office for Women is actually an office that sits within a group within the department. Julia Burns heads up the Office for Women but is also the group manager responsible for a range of services. So the Office for Women was transferred to the department some time ago and is basically in place within the department.

CHAIR—And unchanged from the last round of estimates?

Ms Beauchamp—That is correct.

CHAIR—Any vacant positions?

Ms Beauchamp—Across the department, as I think Dr Harmer mentioned this morning, there is always turnover and the like.

CHAIR—Sure.

Ms Beauchamp—So there probably would be some vacant positions.

CHAIR—If we can just get something from you in terms of the current staffing and structure, that would be good.

Ms Burns—I can tell you things now, if you like.

CHAIR—Yes, Ms Burns.

Ms Burns—Senator, we have 54 full-time equivalent staff, which is about the same number as I last told, and we have, not surprisingly, a number of part-time officers—about nine—within that.

CHAIR—Good. My other question was to do with Indigenous programs within your office—that is, the programs for which you are responsible. I know there is the Indigenous women's leadership program in some part of the organisation, but I do not know whether it is with you or not. Within your programs, are there any that relate specifically to Indigenous women?

Ms Burns—Not a program as such but a fairly significant mechanism which is actually a Commonwealth-state mechanism. It is called NATSIWG, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gathering. It meets every year with the Commonwealth and state women's ministers, and it has done for the last couple of years. It has a gathering before that where the Indigenous women representing each state and territory and the Australian government gather to talk about issues that are important to them and then bring them to the attention of women's ministers. We also have opportunities to work with that group at the officials level through the year.

CHAIR—When is it scheduled to happen?

Ms Burns—The next one is at the end of May.

CHAIR—Senator Polley, did you have any other questions beyond the structure for the Office for Women?

Senator POLLEY—No, that is fine.

Senator BOYCE—You continue to administer women appoint?

Ms Burns—AppointWomen; yes, we do.

Senator BOYCE—Could you talk about the success or otherwise of that program at the present time?

Ms Burns—The program was refreshed last year to have a more up-to-date database. The process is that we encourage women through our networks and by publicity to register on the database and then in particular government agencies can come to us and ask for advice about people that they can consider for board appointments. It is not a requirement of those agencies to then come back and tell us necessarily if they use that information and whether any of those people were successful.

Senator BOYCE—That is annoying, is it not? So how many women would be registered with AppointWomen at the present time?

Ms Burns—There are about 1,200 or just over that registered on AppointWomen.

Senator BOYCE—That program had run for some considerable time. You are confident that they are 1,200 women actively seeking appointments at the present time?

Ms Burns—Yes, Senator. They are people who have registered since we updated the database, so it is only since mid last year and so they are very current.

Senator BOYCE—How many people have you referred? Since you are not able to tell me how many have been appointed, how many referrals have you responded to?

Ms Burns—We have provided details of more than 140 female candidates in response to requests by government agencies and departments.

Senator BOYCE—How many requests from government agencies and departments have you had in a period of time?

Ms Burns—I do not have that number, Senator. I would have to take it on notice.

Senator BOYCE—Okay, but would it be fair to assume that you referred 140 people but would it be one person each time? It would be multiple—

Ms Burns—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—It would be a couple of options at least.

Ms Burns—Yes, at least a few each time.

Senator BOYCE—So it would be reasonably accurate to suggest that you are not being rushed off your feet by government departments seeking referrals; is that right?

Ms Burns—Rushed off our feet probably would not quite describe it. However, there has been an increase in the appointments of women to Australian government boards over the last period—about a 2.9 per cent increase.

Senator BOYCE—Would you like to give us the actual numbers there? Can you do that?

Ms Burns—I do not know that I have the numbers. I know that in 2006-07, 36.5 per cent of all new appointees to Australian government boards and bodies were women, which was a 2.9 percentage point increase.

Senator BOYCE—So it had been roughly 34 per cent and now it is roughly 36 per cent.

Senator POLLEY—Can I just ask for a breakdown, state by state, for the state governments with their appointments?

Ms Burns—No. The state governments largely operate their own government board strategies, although through the Commonwealth-state women's officials group we do collaborate around that information but we do not have their data.

Senator POLLEY—Thanks.

Senator BOYCE—I refer to conferences that you might be intending to plan or organise. Some of us here in fact have been talking recently that the last conference that I am aware of organised by your office was when Senator Amanda Vanstone was the minister. People I know still speak of that conference very favourably in terms of the networking opportunities and the information that was produced there. Are there any plans in this area?

Ms Burns—There are no plans formed to hold a conference specifically for the Office for Women. The last significant conference, if you would call it that, that we were involved in was for APEC last year where the Women Leaders' Network was hosted by the then minister and—

Senator BOYCE—That was the one in Port Douglas?

Ms Burns—In Port Douglas; that is right. So that is the last significant large event that we have been involved in. There is nothing that we are sponsoring of that scale in plan at the moment.

Senator BOYCE—With regard to efficiency dividends for your office, can you tell me what that is going to require?

Ms Beauchamp—The efficiency dividend does not actually apply to the office; it applies to the whole of the portfolio. I guess Dr Harmer takes responsibility, but it is up to all of us to look at making sure that we are putting resources into high-priority areas. It is being considered across the whole of the portfolio.

Senator PATTERSON—Across the board, yes, good. I was not here in the beginning.

Dr Harmer—I will just add to that. You can assume that it will be very difficult—

Senator BOYCE—They will quickly bear the pain.

Dr Harmer—They will bear some of the pain, yes.

Senator BOYCE—I am not sure I should say thank you, Dr Harmer, for telling me that.

Senator PATTERSON—In the campaign Violence Against Women—Australia Says No, a DVD was made for schools, and the person who featured in that DVD got a number of invitations to various functions as a result of the DVD. It would seem to me from having had discussions with her and her family that there is not a very clear arrangement with her and the office. These invitations arise out of that DVD, and she is doing a tremendous job. She has just been to a UN conference with a lot of help from a lot of people.

It would seem to me that it would be appropriate that either she was advised that the office did not need her services any longer—and I think she has fallen between the stools, with all due respect—or there is a method where any invitation she gets then comes to the department and she is told whether or not she can have expenses to travel to it. If that could just be clarified for the family's sake, that would be important for her. Let me add this: I would hate to see her skills and the information she transmits about the terrible outcomes of domestic violence lost. Can somebody please clarify it for her and her family? I do not even need your answer, but if you can you will let me know.

Ms Burns—I can offer you some information. We have been in touch with the person you speak of over the last short while. She has been reimbursed for costs incurred in the work she has been doing for us. Under the new National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children, we are about to reconsider what material is used in schools et cetera and that would be the mechanism for formalising any arrangement we might have with that particular person. If we need her to continue to play a role, it will be formalised under those new arrangements.

Senator PATTERSON—Senator Stephens, I hope you could pass on to the minister responsible that she plays an incredibly important role. If there is a way in which she could contribute it would be a great advantage to young women, and also, I must say, an email today focused on the fact that there should be some emphasis on young men and their role in domestic violence. This should be formalised. I think the way it has been left has been very messy. Thank you for having done what needed to be done to clear up the backlog.

CHAIR—Ms Burns, I will follow up on that because I have heard a little about the issue. In terms of arrangements with the department and for future reference, is a contract signed when someone does that? This is a case seemingly where the process has happened as we have gone along and we have had to negotiate that. In terms of processes for the future, is there any understanding that this arrangement could be in a contract that is signed at the time? Everybody would then be clear about the future expectations and the important element of cost recovery. There could even be prepayment, because from my own experience with people attending boards and so on sometimes it is very important to have the money before they actually go rather than have it reimbursed. We have had that with people who have been on advisory committees. It can sometimes be quite difficult for them. I am just wondering whether out of this experience there will be a process for all future activities.

Ms Burns—Yes, we certainly will be clarifying these arrangements in the future. I think in the particular case of which we speak sometimes people see the DVD, which was circulated by our office, and they contact the person direct and get her to speak. We then get into this awkward situation where, while we are fully supportive of the message she is conveying, we have not asked her to do it. So we absolutely think we need to tighten this in the future.

CHAIR—The responsibilities and those things have to be tightened.

Ms Burns—That is right, and I take on board your point about prepayment.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator ADAMS—I am very interested in programs that you administer that pertain specifically to rural women. Could you advise me of those?

Ms Burns—We have some programs that have been particularly targeted at women in rural areas which my colleagues can talk about. We also have as part of the four funded women's secretariats a National Rural Women's Coalition. I am not sure if you are familiar with that. We fund four women's secretariats to represent overall about 70 women's organisations. One of those four is the National Rural Women's Coalition. It is a very active member of the secretariat process that is in regular contact with us about rural women's issues.

The other thing that may be of interest to you is that under Women's Leadership and Development Program grants there have been some grants made to rural areas over the past years. I would need to take that on notice to give you that in detail. My final comment would be that we had a pilot program—the Young Women's Leadership and Mentoring Program—that was run in s, which were largely rural areas. The outcome of those pilots is still being evaluated, but they were very popular programs with the young women in those areas.

Senator ADAMS—Yes, one was held very close to where I live and they were very happy with that. Would you be able to supply the committee with a list of all the rural programs?

Ms Burns—Everything we funded in the rural area in the last year?

Senator ADAMS—Yes, that would be fine.

Ms Burns—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—If there are no further questions for this program, I thank the officers very much. We will now move to outcome 2.1, Support for the aged.

[4.12 pm]

CHAIR—Welcome, Senator McLucas.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I want to ask about a couple of initiatives that have been announced for this area, and I assume they fall in this area. Dr Harmer, you would be aware, I am sure, that the committee is presently in another guise considering an inquiry into living standards of older people.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I note that there is a commitment by the government to adjust the cost of living index for older people—this is age pensions—by the CPI, by 25 per cent of MTAW, as is the case now, or by the living cost index for age pensioner households that is published by the ABS. What information can you provide about this policy? When does it commence? Is there a budget against that as to how much it will cost?

Ms Foster—The government has made a commitment to index pensions by the living cost index for age pensioner households that is published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the consumer price index or 25 per cent of the male average total weekly earnings benchmark, whichever is the greater. It is anticipated it will be taken into account to index age pensions from 20 September 2008. It depends on the relative movements of each of the indices about when it will actually come into play.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Indeed. I assume in the budget that will be brought down in May we will see some estimate of what that might be. I suppose there has to be some figure put in the budget to cover any anticipated increased cost. At the moment, you cannot answer that question if it is going to begin in September. Had such a method of calculation been applied over the last few years, what would have been the extra uplift in the cost of the age pension? In other words, how often in, say, the last five years, has the cost of living index exceeded either the CPI or MTAW?

Ms Foster—I believe it exceeded CPI on one occasion in the last 18 indexation points. So that is over the last nine years.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Right, once. You cannot tell me whether on that one occasion it also exceeded 25 per cent of MTAW?

Ms Foster—It would have on that occasion exceeded MTAW, so it would have driven the change.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You said 18 indexation points.

Ms Foster—That is right.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That is 18 quarters; is that right?

Ms Foster—Pensions are indexed twice a year, so that is over the past nine years.

Senator HUMPHRIES—On that basis, assuming that this is consistent into the future, you would not expect this indexation method to result in an increased outlay all that often?

Ms Foster—It does depend on what is driving the pension increase in terms of wages or prices.

Senator HUMPHRIES—But once in nine years does not suggest it is going to happen a lot in the next nine years, either. Perhaps that is an observation that I can—

Ms McKay—It is pretty hard to speculate about what the relative movement is going to be between MTAW and prices going forward. The commitment has been made by the government that whichever is the higher of those indices will be the measure by which pensions are indexed. Obviously movements in wages depend a lot on the state of the economy and bottlenecks and things of that kind. It is too hard to speculate.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I appreciate all that, Ms McKay, but the point I am making is that to get an idea of what impact this measure is going to have it is not unreasonable to look back over the last nine years, to see that it would have made very little difference in the last nine years and to assume that something very extraordinary would need to happen before it made a much bigger difference in the next nine years. But that is more of an observation than a question so I will leave it there.

Could I ask about the proposal to provide for a national reciprocal transport entitlement for older people. I assume that falls in this area. I was looking at the joint media release on 1 November by Mr Rudd, Ms Macklin and you, Senator McLucas, about that. I see there was a comment that previous efforts to enable state government Seniors Card holders to access public rail, ferry, tram and bus connections throughout the country have failed because the Howard government has been unwilling to put sufficient funding towards realising this important outcome. As I understand it, the Howard government offered \$70 million to the states and territories in 2002 and \$80 million in 2004. I am surprised, therefore, to see that the policy says that the federal government will sweeten this deal with \$50 million. It is not clear to me how \$80 million will not be enough to buy the cooperation of the states but \$50 million will. Is there something special about this \$50 million that is different from our \$80 million?

Dr Harmer—Senator, we cannot make a comment on that. We need to respond to a specific question.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The specific question is: why do you expect this proposal to be acceptable to the states when an amount two-thirds greater than that just three years ago was not acceptable to the states? Is there anything that you are adding into this deal which would be more likely to make the deal acceptable to the states?

Dr Harmer—Senator, I do not know the precise detail of how it has been negotiated, but it may have something to do with the COAG framework and agreements more broadly in other areas. It is possible that this might be considered as part of a larger package; I do not know. I am suggesting that might be the case. It may be in the context of something broader that this being done.

Mr Innis—Senator, Dr Harmer is right: we are considering the implementation of this commitment in the context of the government's broader work under COAG to revise Commonwealth-state relations. That is the context in which we are currently considering its negotiation with the states.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So we would expect, presumably, there are other elements of give and take in that package that might incentivise the states to accept this offer when they have not been prepared to accept it in the past; is that what you are saying?

Mr Innis—I cannot comment about the give and take, but it has been considered in the context of that broader set of discussions with the states.

Dr Harmer—We would not disagree with your comment but we cannot go any further in terms of our position in relation to the states, Senator.

Senator PATTERSON—All I can say is good luck with \$50 million.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Indeed. So FaHCSIA has not been involved in any specific negotiations at officer level on this question with state counterparts at this point?

Dr Harmer—Not at this point, Senator.

Senator HUMPHRIES—We will ask about that in May.

Mr Innis—I have a slightly different figure than the \$80 million that you have mentioned, so I would just like the opportunity to check why I have a different figure from yours.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What figure have you got?

Mr Innis—I have \$22 million.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I would not call that slightly different; it is very different.

Mr Innis—Which is why I would like to check.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That was a figure that was before our inquiry, so if you have a better figure I would be very interested to hear it.

Mr Innis—I am just not certain what it is covering.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I think the answer to that question was there was a figure in the budget in 2002 or 2004 which was going to be supplemented had there been agreement from the states but it was not agreed to. That figure was on the table as a public announcement by the former government. We will leave that there and come back to that in May. I just want to ask about the telephone allowance increase. I understand that we are proposing to increase the telephone allowance for people with disabilities and for carers and for older Australians from \$88 to \$132 a year. When will that commence?

Ms Foster—The increase in the telephone allowance for people with a home internet connection is going to start from 20 March 2008.

Senator HUMPHRIES—This is only for people with a home internet connection?

Ms Foster—That is right.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So a person without a connection is not eligible for the increase?

Ms Foster—That is right.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do we have an idea of how many older Australians—I have heard the figure of about one in five older Australians having an internet connection. Is that right, or is there a better figure available?

Ms Foster—We are anticipating that there will be about 700,000 telephone allowance recipients who will benefit from the increase, but I cannot answer the question about how many—

Dr Harmer—If 700,000 is our estimate, that would be more than one in five, I would think.

Senator HUMPHRIES—It sounds like it, yes. I also saw in that same policy talk about grants of up to \$20,000 to aged organisations to help offer training for older people who want to get on to the net and entry points to computers in establishments to allow people to use it there rather than in their own homes. That is additional to the increase in the telephone allowance?

Ms Foster—Yes, that is the seniors internet fund. The commitment was framed in terms of grants up to \$10,000 for community organisations to help people learn to use the internet, provide internet kiosks and things like that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—And up to 2,000 eligible organisations would be—

Ms Foster—Yes, that is right.

Senator BERNARDI—Have any of the locations of the kiosks been identified as yet?

Ms Foster—Not as yet. The implementation is still being mapped out.

Senator BERNARDI—When would you expect that to commence?

Ms Foster—It is \$15 million for three years from 2008, so next year.

Senator BERNARDI—Next financial year, so after June or July. Would the department be calling for requests and submissions prior to that so that the rollout could commence as soon as possible after the funding becomes available?

Ms Foster—How that program will be implemented is still being organised, Senator.

Dr Harmer—But we will be anxious to learn as quickly as we can once it is—

Senator BERNARDI—I am sure you are. We will watch this space.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I will come back to the telephone allowance. There is no arrangement for people who live in remote areas of Australia who at the present time might not be able to gain access. I suppose this comes into communication issues of broadband access. I will leave that. That is all the questions I have, thank you.

Senator BOYCE—I am not sure whether I am reading this properly. At table 2.2.1 of the additional estimates page 44 the total figure for the age pension is revised to come down. Is that correct?

Ms Foster—That is correct.

Senator BOYCE—Why is that?

Dr Harmer—It is a special appropriation so it is an estimate of numbers. The government will pay whatever it costs to provide the pension to eligible people.

Senator BOYCE—But why is the provision less?

Dr Harmer—It may have something to do with our estimate of the number of part-time pensions versus full-time ones.

Senator BOYCE—That is what I am asking.

Ms Foster—There is a range of movements in that number. Overall there is a decrease. There is a slight decrease in customer numbers anticipated as we have observed an increase in wealth amongst new entrants to the age pension, for instance. People are better off. Our numbers are not growing quite as quickly as we thought. That number encompasses the increase in telephone allowance. It also takes into account a very minor decrease in expenditure as a result of a DVA measure to index disability pensions to MTAW.

Senator BOYCE—Despite the increasing numbers of people of pensionable age, you are anticipating that we will spend less on pensions because people of pensionable age are too well off to need the pension?

Ms Foster—Or they are coming in—

Dr Harmer—Many of them have superannuation income which takes them out of the pension income test, I guess.

Mr Innis—That is right.

Senator PATTERSON—Have many people have taken up the option of choosing which day to have their pension paid?

Ms Foster—I understand that the majority of people continue to be paid on Thursday.

Senator PATTERSON—Are they advised that they can choose?

Ms Foster—They are advised that they can choose any day. I understand about 60 per cent are still paid on the Thursday.

CHAIR—Are there any more questions under the age portfolio? There are a few questions that are in two areas so they may flow over. I know Senator Bernardi wants to talk on disabilities. I know Senator Patterson has a question about young people and nursing homes. It would seem we may handle that one first, if that would be okay. It is a single issue.

Dr Harmer—So we have finished with aged?

CHAIR—I think so. I think we can go to outcome 2.2 with some confidence.

Senator PATTERSON—If we could just start with young people in nursing homes first. In July 2006 the then government and the states and territories agreed to match funding of up to \$244 million to jointly establish a capped five-year program managed by the states and territories. Could you advise us how much money has been committed by the Commonwealth for each of the five years from June 2006?

Dr Harmer—While my colleagues are looking for the answer to the question from Senator Patterson, Mr Innis would like to go back to Senator Humphries's question about the difference between the \$80 million and the \$22 million.

Mr Innis—Our understanding is that \$22 million of the \$80 million was for reciprocity in transport concessions and the balance was for extending core concessions to CSHC cardholders. So there two component of the \$80 million, only one of which was for reciprocity of transport concessions.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So the reciprocity concessions were for self-funded retirees as well; is that what you are saying?

Mr Innis—There were two components of the offer. One component was for reciprocity of transport concessions for state cardholders.

Senator HUMPHRIES—State Seniors Card holders and things like that.

Mr Innis—The remainder was about extending to Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders the basic set of state concessions.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Including transport concessions?

Mr Innis—Including transport concessions.

Senator PATTERSON—The question would then be: the \$22 million in 2004, what would it be indexed to in real terms now?

Mr Innis—Without knowing off the top of my head, it is well short of \$50 million.

Senator PATTERSON—I do not want to know it is well short. I want to know what the difference is.

Mr Innis—We will take it on notice.

Senator PATTERSON—It gives you a better comparison.

Mr Innis—We are happy to take it on notice.

Senator PATTERSON—Have you got the figures for my other question?

Ms Beauchamp—We provided that in question on notice No. 127. So we have the total breakdown of the Commonwealth contribution by state.

Senator PATTERSON—We can look that up.

Ms Beauchamp—I can table that.

Senator PATTERSON—Thank you. How many agreements have been signed so far?

Ms Davies—They have all been signed.

Senator PATTERSON—So every state has signed. In that table have you got how much each of the states have committed over the five years?

Dr Harmer—I will pass to the secretary—

Senator PATTERSON—When she comes back we will see if it is there. Have you got that there?

Ms Davies—We have that table.

Senator PATTERSON—Would you mind tabling that as well?

Ms Davies—We will have to do a bit of work on it.

Ms Beauchamp—That information you requested was information that was provided in the question on notice.

Senator PATTERSON—How many beds have been opened so far in each state?

Ms Beauchamp—Can I clarify by beds that have been opened—reductions in clients—

Senator PATTERSON—How many facilities are there, how many beds are in each of those facilities and where are they located?

Ms Bedford—Do you want me to give you a breakdown by states?

Senator PATTERSON—The ones that are open and have people in them.

Ms Bedford—Yes. In New South Wales there is a house for three people that has recently opened in the Hunter region.

Senator PATTERSON—That will make a big difference.

Ms Bedford—There are number of other projects that are in train but you only want those that are open?

Senator PATTERSON—First of all the ones that are open.

Ms Bedford—There has been a purchase of seven specialist disability packages for people remaining in residential aged care, so to put extra services into them.

Senator PATTERSON—So they are still in their environment?

Ms Bedford—Yes.

Senator PATTERSON—Is that acceptable?

Ms Bedford—That was one of the three elements of the program. One was to reduce the number of younger people in residential aged care, one was to enhance services to those that wanted to stay in residential aged care and one was to stop admission to aged care.

Senator PATTERSON—So you have got three.

Ms Bedford—Yes.

Senator PATTERSON—And there are how many? Seven did you say?

Ms Bedford—I can give you the gross mark.

Senator PATTERSON—No, I just want to add them up. In which state is that? The first one is in New South Wales. What are the aged care packages in?

Ms Bedford—New South Wales.

Senator PATTERSON—For nursing homes?

Ms Bedford—Yes. There was a capital grant to procure 10 accommodation places in the Sydney metropolitan area.

Senator PATTERSON—There were, sorry, what?

Ms Bedford—A grant.

Senator PATTERSON—Are people there? Are they in beds?

Ms Bedford—I am not sure.

Senator PATTERSON—The grants do what?

Ms Bedford—There was a capital grant to do it. I am not sure—

Senator PATTERSON—How much was the capital grant and to whom did it go?

Ms Bedford—That would have been up to New South Wales to do because they would have—

Senator PATTERSON—But we have not followed up? It is Commonwealth money being spent.

Ms Bedford—Well, it is half and half. It is match funding.

Senator PATTERSON—But it is Commonwealth money, so do we know?

Ms Bedford—We know that there has been a reduction of 21 people nationally in the under-50-years age group by January 2007.

Senator PATTERSON—That has not answered my question. This grant in New South Wales: to whom has the grant gone?

Ms Bedford—I will have to follow that up and provide that on notice.

Senator PATTERSON—Ten beds, is it?

Ms Bedford—It is a capital grant to procure 10 accommodation places in the Sydney metropolitan area.

Senator PATTERSON—Could you also find out whether that is in a specific facility or if they are located living alone or what sort of arrangement it will be?

Ms Bedford—I will have to take that on notice.

Senator PATTERSON—That is 10 in Sydney. That is New South Wales. That is now about 10, 13—whatever it is—six, 19. We have got another few to go. Where else has opened up? What about Youngcare in Brisbane? Are they under this program?

Ms Bedford—Yes. There has been recurrent and capital funding to two non-government service providers for a total of 26 high-care-need spaces in Queensland. Of these one is auspiced by Wesley Mission and one is by Youngcare in suburban Brisbane which was opened in early December.

Senator PATTERSON—And has the Wesley one opened yet or just on its way?

Ms Bedford—On its way, I think.

Senator PATTERSON—Do you know when that is likely to open?

Ms Bedford—I can follow that up for you as well.

Senator PATTERSON—Thank you. Now, we are nearly up to our 51, are we not?

Ms Bedford—Two people in Queensland were supported to return to live at home with their families, so they were provided with care there. In South Australia four people who were considered at risk of entering residential aged care were provided with disability accommodation, so that could have been in group homes or in other sort of supported accommodation.

Senator PATTERSON—This program also covers people at risk, not people currently in nursing homes. The ones at risk ought to be looked after by the state, but that is beside the point, without Commonwealth funding. We were talking about getting ones currently out of nursing homes, so we have now spent some money on people who might have otherwise gone into a nursing home?

Ms Bedford—Yes.

Senator PATTERSON—Far out.

Senator McLucas—The original design of the program under your government was threefold, as the officer has described, and one of the areas that was strongly advocated by the young people in nursing homes alone was that we needed to ensure that this did not become a route—via a nursing home to get into disability supported accommodation.

Senator PATTERSON—I understand that.

Senator McLucas—So that is why that third tranche is really important to the operation of the program.

Senator PATTERSON—When you have got the people currently in nursing homes out, that is fine. Any others? We have got another three. How is Victoria going? There is a Victorian senator. Have they got any signed up on track?

Ms Bedford—Victoria went through. They have had recurrent funding announced for a 10-bed high-care-needs facility in inner Melbourne. That was a recent announcement.

Senator PATTERSON—Who is going to provide that? Which organisation?

Ms Bedford—I can provide you with all of that on notice if that is okay.

Senator PATTERSON—But do we know?

Ms Bedford—We do know.

Senator PATTERSON—Could I know now, please?

Ms Bedford—We will get it for you in a minute.

Senator PATTERSON—We have got one—we do not know who is running it—in Victoria for 10. We are getting close to 51. Where else is there?

Ms Bedford—Six people in Western Australia we have provided with recurrent services to enable them to remain living in their own homes or with family to stop them entering aged care.

Senator PATTERSON—Who is running that?

Ms Bedford—That would be a number of different services. It is to cover those people in their own homes, so it would be different service providers probably. But I can get that for you as well.

Senator PATTERSON—Thank you. What about Tasmania?

Ms Bedford—Tasmania has been doing assessments on all persons under 50 in residential aged care and they have indicated that they will have to design a specific program to be able to meet the needs of those people.

Senator PATTERSON—And have they indicated when they anticipate the first one will have accommodation outside of a nursing home?

Ms Bedford—They are still in the planning phase at the moment.

Senator PATTERSON—How long has the program been up and running? July 2006—a year and a half. We have done Tasmania.

Ms Beauchamp—I just want to mention that it is a five-year program. There was a net target reduction of 700. It is still in the early stages. Minister Macklin and Parliamentary Secretary Shorten raised this issue with disability ministers only two weeks ago and really wanted to increase the pace of implementation. Mr Shorten has proposed to meet with state and territory officials, because responsibility for the rollout is with the state and territory governments, and he is very keen to get it moving faster than it has been.

Dr Harmer—He is naturally concerned, as you are Senator Patterson, about the pace. Even though we are in the early stage of a five-year program, the pace is pretty slow. He has already made a commitment to take it up with his state and territory counterparts.

Senator PATTERSON—With all due respect, and this is a comment I make, it seems to me odd—and I appreciate Mr Shorten's desire to speed it up, when we know how slow the states have been—that we have now got the CSTDA money that was going to be used for people over 60 with dependent children over 40 with a disability going back to the states to go through this whole slow process, and I hope they can whip them as much into shape in that area as well, but I will be asking some questions about that in a moment. Now, accreditation—

Senator POLLEY—Can I just follow up from your question? I was wondering if I could have a breakdown of the areas of those in Tasmania—whether they are in the north, the south or city locations. Where are those people residing now?

Ms Bedford—We can get that for you, but we would have to take it on notice and go back to Tasmania.

Dr Harmer—We can provide the locations.

Senator POLLEY—That would be helpful, thank you.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Can we get them for all the states and territories?

Ms Bedford—Yes.

Senator PATTERSON—Has the Northern Territory been able to accommodate anybody out of a nursing home yet?

Ms Bedford—They have done assessments of their client groups and have been developing a service model as well.

Senator PATTERSON—For nearly two years? That is interesting. What I really would like is a table that gives me—because this is a bit of a shemozzle now, so I put this on notice—all the ones that are actually up and running and where they are and who is responsible. And if it has been allocated to a number of services, if it is four people or five people that have been nominated out to various services, we would like that information as well. And how many beds are likely to be opened in each state before 2008 and between June

2008 and May 2009? We should have some sort of indication of that and where they will be located.

Ms Bedford—They will not necessarily be beds, Senator.

Senator PATTERSON—I mean places, beds, packages or whatever—people out of nursing homes and where they will be, in what sort of facility. Okay?

Ms Bedford—Okay.

Dr Harmer—We will provide that, but we will have to be a little careful where there are small numbers in certain locations to make sure that we do not identify individuals, and we will have an eye to that because of privacy issues around the identification of individuals.

Senator PATTERSON—I am just thinking about that. We can be a bit precious in some ways that somebody is going to go trawling through *Hansard* to find that there is a disability provision that has been made by the Salvation Army in Hawthorn. I mean, you know.

Senator McLucas—No, Senator Patterson, it is following on from Senator Polley's question. Senator Polley wanted to know where there are young people in nursing homes, as I understood her question. I mean, if we end up with 'St Stephen's Nursing Home that has one person under the age of 50', that person is identifiable and I think we have to be careful about that.

Senator PATTERSON—I was meaning more where they are going to in the new program.

Senator McLucas—Well, for the same reason. We need to be careful in the way we provide the information.

Senator PATTERSON—I don't think we need to be careful, but we also need to be fairly open about how we are achieving this over—we have only got three a bit years to go to get to 500.

Ms Davies—Of that table, that would include some people who have decided to stay in the residential aged care and get some add-ons within that.

Senator PATTERSON—And that can be indicated with an asterisk. I understand that people in rural areas, rather than be in some swanky facility in Brisbane, want to stay in a nursing home with extra services in a rural or an outer metropolitan area. That is perfectly understandable. With regard to accreditation and quality standards, we have passed over the money to the states. The criticism from the disability sector is that the standards required or the standards achieved by various disability facilities is in some cases appalling. Did we require a similar accreditation and quality standard to that which we expect in nursing homes? What was done in the agreement about quality and standards?

Ms Davies—Senator, the negotiations around the Commonwealth-state disability agreement 4 include a commitment by state and territory ministers to introduce quality standards.

Senator PATTERSON—What happens if they do not do that?

Ms Davies—We are still in the process of negotiating.

Senator PATTERSON—What happens if they do not do that? Are we going to be funding young people in facilities which do not reach the same standards of the facility they have just come out of or might have been at risk of going into?

Ms Bedford—In the bilateral agreement with states and territories around the issue of younger people in residential aged-care programs, there is a section in the agreement that covers provision of services within quality frameworks and that program services should be provided with all applicable quality frameworks including the national standards for disability services, with ‘services’ meaning all relevant quality assurance requirements.

Senator PATTERSON—So are there spot checks like there are in nursing homes? Do the states do spot checks on these places?

Ms Bedford—Victoria does have a quality system amongst its disability services.

Senator PATTERSON—Do the other states?

Ms Bedford—Some of the other states do have a third party or an independent assessor. Not all states do that.

Senator PATTERSON—So we have funded young people into facilities that do not have quality standards or spot checks?

Ms Bedford—Not all of them would be going into facilities, as we said. But as Ms Davies said, we are working with states and territories to ensure that we have a consistent quality system across Australia.

Senator PATTERSON—Given the fact that we were funding them, might it have been possible to have the nursing home accreditation standard people monitor these places as a part of the agreement since there is a whole system in place for doing that? Painful as it has been sometimes, there is a system in place. We give them money for the CSTDA directly to the states. This is more of an agreement between the Commonwealth and states, slightly different from the CSTDA. Wouldn't it be better to have a greater hold on the standards and qualities using the already existing structure?

Ms Bedford—That is one way that we could have looked at doing it. It means that you would be crossing quality standards across a number of sectors. As you know, the disability sector has a different framework.

Senator PATTERSON—We overcame that with nursing homes, I think, under Labor when we had Victoria running in checking nursing homes and the Commonwealth checking nursing homes. An agreement came that one agency would do the checking. It just seems to me that, sadly, some people could fall between the stools. We know that some facilities that house young people with a disability—not in this program but under the CSTDA—are less than satisfactory, disgraceful I have to say. We have now allowed young people to move out of nursing homes where there is proper checking to go into places where they are not checked.

Senator McLucas, I would really appreciate it if you could just have a look at that. I think you would be as concerned as I am that they get appropriate accreditation and monitoring in facilities. It might have happened under our government—I do not know—but irrespective of whoever it happens under, we should ensure that there is appropriate quality and accreditation

for each of these services, whether they be packages. The ones who are in nursing homes with extras I suppose are safer, but those going into group homes or into facilities need to have some sort of assurance that it is going to be appropriately monitored.

Senator McLucas—Senator, the issue of quality assurance is going to be part of the negotiations around the next CSTDA. There are a number of states that have quite advanced quality assurance systems, not only for supported accommodation or group homes but across the whole disability service spectrum. The important thing though to recognise is why we are actually running this program. The whole reason that this program has started is because it is the view of many, if not all, people that a nursing home—an institution—

Senator PATTERSON—I think I understand that, Senator McLucas.

Senator McLucas—is the wrong place for younger people.

Senator PATTERSON—I understand that.

Senator McLucas—So in doing so and moving people out of an institution into a more home-like environment, to apply a quality assurance system that is about institutional living is probably the wrong QA system.

Senator PATTERSON—But some of these people are in larger facilities—

Senator McLucas—Your point is well taken and the quality assurance systems that are being developed—some, I agree with you, need to be moved on a bit more quickly in some of the states—need to be able to be delivered in the range of disability services that are delivered by the states.

Senator PATTERSON—Unless this is going to be incorporated in the CSTDA—this program—which I do not know whether it is going to be—

Ms Davies—Senator, it would be a part of the ongoing bilateral part of the CSTDA negotiations.

Senator PATTERSON—What should not happen is it should not fall between the stools and not be subjected to the same sort of accreditation requirements that Senator McLucas is indicating.

Ms Davies—But state and territory ministers agreed that looking at quality assurance systems would be part of one of the eight priorities for the next CSTDA.

Senator PATTERSON—But what I am saying is that you need to then ensure that this program, which is not part of the CSTDA but sort of—

Ms Davies—It is part of it.

Senator PATTERSON—It is a bilateral within it, so we need to ensure that it actually gets the same treatment. It is not at the moment.

Dr Harmer—Senator, the quality assurance that Senator McLucas talks about, which will be a very important part of the negotiations of the next CSTDA, will apply to these places.

Ms Beauchamp—Can I just add the government was very clear and all state and territory ministers agreed that the quality improvement systems would cover all CSTDA services. I

think that was in agreement around the table on 1 February. So that is going to be negotiated through the—

Senator PATTERSON—Thank you. I know I was not there, so it is nice to know. Thank you very much. With regard to the work that was undertaken by Centrelink for the department—and I could not find out whether I should ask Centrelink these questions or the department, but I presume they gave the report to the department—where Centrelink was commissioned by the department to actually go out with social workers, I think it was, and interview older carers over 60 with somebody living with them who had a disability pension, what was the oldest carer that Centrelink identified? Does anybody know?

Ms Beauchamp—98.

Senator PATTERSON—Because I heard it was 105.

Ms Beauchamp—Our advice is it is 98.

Senator PATTERSON—Whether it is 98 or 105, we are seriously talking about significantly old, old people doing caring. So 98 is the oldest carer we identified. If you could provide for me the data of how many people there were between 60 and 65, 66 and 70—I am happy to take this on notice—70 to 75, 75 to 85 and 85 and over and how many in every category were caring for more than one child and/or a child and spouse or other dependants. I was doorknocking in Bendigo and I found a woman who had been visited by Centrelink and she had not only an adult child but was caring for her husband with Parkinson's disease.

Ms Davies—Senator, we can give you the age breakdown but we cannot give you whether they are caring for a partner because we have not analysed that part of the information yet.

Senator PATTERSON—But it was provided to you?

Ms Davies—In some cases it was, so we will have some idea.

Senator PATTERSON—Could you take that one on notice?

Ms Davies—Yes.

Senator PATTERSON—Have you also got that broken down by state—how many in each age group in New South Wales, Victoria et cetera?

Ms Davies—Yes.

Senator PATTERSON—If you could provide us with that, that would be fantastic. Did Centrelink get any additional data from that like how many of them were on waiting lists? One of the things we found from the Senate inquiry was that the states did not know the unmet need, because people gossip amongst themselves and said, 'Well, she's 10 years older than I am and her daughter's three years older and she's been on a waiting list 15 years. Why would I put my name down?' Some of those are hidden; a lot of them are hidden. What other information were they asked by the social workers?

Ms Davies—Social workers went out with sort of a template that asked people what sorts of services they may be using now or that they would like to use. In some cases, they obviously were not aware of some. That information was written down in text form and we are analysing it at the moment so we will have some information.

Senator PATTERSON—Was there a written report?

Ms Davies—Each visit had a written report.

Senator PATTERSON—Was there a written report provided by Centrelink—a general overall report?

Ms Davies—Yes, there was.

Senator PATTERSON—Is it possible for that to be tabled?

Ms Davies—Not the individual ones.

Senator PATTERSON—No, I mean the overall summary.

Ms Davies—We are aggregating that information at the moment. There will be a finalised report and that can be tabled.

Senator PATTERSON—When do you expect that to be finalised?

Ms Davies—It is taking longer than we thought to actually analyse the information in the written reports. We are aiming for May or June at this point.

Senator PATTERSON—How about we try to aim for May so we can have it for the May estimates.

Ms Davies—We will see what we can do.

Senator PATTERSON—That would be very valuable. Of course, that was aimed at the situation where the one point something billion dollars was going to be matched with the states and it was only Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the ACT that agreed. Now that the money has been brought back to be allocated to the states, what has happened with the bilateral arrangements with the Northern Territory, the ACT and Western Australia?

Ms Davies—The bilaterals will be part of the overall CSTDA 4 negotiations.

Senator PATTERSON—So they will go ahead doing what they were doing using that money to look after older carers?

Ms Davies—It has not been decided yet because we have delayed the beginning of the CSTDA until June 2008.

Senator PATTERSON—So Western Australia had signed up to get the money—

Ms Davies—Western Australia, the ACT and—

Senator PATTERSON—with Western Australia and the Northern Territory, but they are not getting the money?

Ms Davies—No. It has not been decided because we have only just commenced negotiations.

Senator PATTERSON—No, they signed up. Didn't the previous minister sign an agreement and get the money on the way?

Ms Davies—We have not actually entered into negotiations, so I cannot be definitive about it.

Senator PATTERSON—So when they said, ‘Yes, we’re in this,’ it did not go any further, there was no agreement signed?

Ms Beauchamp—Whilst there was a commitment, that would be included in the negotiations around the next CSTDA.

Senator PATTERSON—That was the agreement from the previous minister, was it? Or did the previous minister sign something with Western Australia?

Ms Davies—As I understand it, they are not signed agreements.

Dr Harmer—As I understand it, the previous minister made a commitment. I do not think agreements were signed, but the commitments I think are going to be honoured as part of the CSTDA.

Ms Davies—It has not been decided yet, so we cannot actually say.

Senator PATTERSON—I hope the new minister whips the states into shape because they have not done very well in the past and it is sad. I hope all that data will be useful to the states. Is that what is going to happen with that data?

Ms Beauchamp—We will be certainly using all the data and evidence base we have in terms of the negotiation process, yes.

Senator PATTERSON—Is somebody looking after the 100-year-old and the 98-year-old? Senator McLucas, some of those ‘old, old’ people, as they are described in the literature, really ought to be brought to the attention of the states, if they have indicated in there that they really need assistance—anybody over maybe 85.

Ms Bruce—We have put some interim arrangements in place to make sure there is a continuity for the older carers who have been identified as part of that customer group. Centrelink will continue to make three-monthly phone calls to all older carers and check on their circumstances. Should their circumstances change, they will make a home visit if that is required.

Senator PATTERSON—It would be awful to leave them up in the air, having gone out and sought them, so I am pleased that is happening.

Senator BOYCE—Are you confident that you have identified all the carers of older people with disabilities in Australia?

Ms Bruce—The eligibility criteria, as it was announced, was linked to a quite specific payment type. I guess what we became conscious of is that there are probably a number of older carers who could potentially be eligible who we did not identify through the Centrelink data because they were not on that particular payment type.

Senator PATTERSON—They could be on vets payments.

Senator BOYCE—They could be on no payment. Do you have any idea whether there are more of them that are currently not on a payment?

Ms Bruce—We do not have a quantum around that figure.

Senator BOYCE—Are you seeking one?

Ms Bruce—Not at the moment, no.

Senator McLucas—There is no way you can actually find those people who are not on any social security payment at all. You are absolutely right: there are quite a number of people—I do not know how many—who for a whole range of reasons have not been brought to the attention of anyone.

Senator BOYCE—Some choose to, but others simply pick up the sort of thing you were saying before where they hear, ‘It’s hopeless,’ ‘They run you around in circles,’ ‘The money’s not worth having,’ or ‘My Billy didn’t get a package for five years,’ so they don’t bother. So there is nothing that can be done about that?

Senator McLucas—You cannot.

Senator BOYCE—I would think you could pick them up through some of the groups, through the disability organisations.

Senator McLucas—You make the point, Senator Boyce, that many of these people intentionally do not want to come to the attention of authorities.

Senator BOYCE—As long as the invitation has been made. I am not confident that all those who would be on a payment are aware of the payment.

Senator PATTERSON—What if we missed people who are carers not living with their son or daughter? Wouldn’t we pick them up in that new measure of carers who do not live with their son or daughter? Say they are in independent living—and there are some with quite significant disabilities where the parent visits on a very regular basis—you would have picked them up because they would have been on a carers not living with a—

Ms Bruce—No, the transition support worker initiative was very targeted. One of the criteria was that they needed to be co-resident. The carer and the adult child with the disability needed to live together.

Senator PATTERSON—At least they are most probably in the state system if they are in an independent living with support. Senator McLucas, you were on that hearing when we went around and heard some of the tragic stories of older carers, and it seemed to me there was not a way of finding some of these people and that the Centrelink process is a very good one of identifying people. Are you anticipating continuing to use that tool to find these people who would otherwise go unnoticed because they have not put themselves on waiting lists?

Senator McLucas—Not to my knowledge, but officers may have more information.

Ms Davies—I think Ms Bruce answered that before when she said we are looking at some transition arrangements. Given that the quantum of money is being transferred to the states and territories, we have commenced a process with Centrelink transition workers. There is funding for that for this financial year. We will be in the process of negotiating with the states some arrangements for ensuring continuity. The driver would be that those people have been identified, we understand their needs and we want to make sure—

Senator PATTERSON—No, I think you misunderstood what I was saying. We have done that, but every six months more people will be added to that queue and we would have stopped doing that process. What I am saying is this: is it anticipated that Centrelink will be asked to continue to look for those new people who come on, those who turn 60 and who have got a person living with them who has a disability pension?

Ms Bruce—We could certainly ask Centrelink to refresh that data periodically to make sure if they are on the payment type they are included as part of the program. It does come back to the—

Senator PATTERSON—It is really a policy issue and that is why I was asking Senator McLucas.

Dr Harmer—Clearly, it is an option, and it makes pretty good sense if it continued so we would pick up new people.

Senator PATTERSON—It helps the states to identify them. In fact, when it happened I thought, ‘Why didn’t the states commission Centrelink to do it in the past?’ We all sat, nutting our heads, trying to work out how you could find these people and it seemed a brilliant idea to use Centrelink. Also, having the social workers meant it was a much more gentle approach to them, rather than a letter coming out where they had to tick boxes and stuff and then people feeling frightened that someone was going to come and take their kid away. Hopefully, I will have an opportunity to ask some more questions in May. There is one more thing I want to ask a couple of things about, and that is disability trusts. Is it possible to ask those questions here?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—I thought we were on carers.

Dr Harmer—We have mellowed a bit between disability and carers.

Senator BOYCE—I had one more question in the carer area. The Institute of Health and Welfare yesterday mentioned that it was looking at the feasibility of informal care data collection and sort of developing a national framework for that. I am hoping this department is involved in that feasibility. Could you tell me where you are at and what you are hoping to achieve?

Dr Harmer—Senator, I did not hear the evidence. Was it evidence at Senate estimates from AIHW?

Senator BOYCE—Well, I asked them about their annual report. They said they were looking into the feasibility of how one might go about collecting the data collections.

Dr Harmer—They would certainly consult with us and we would want to be involved in something like that, yes.

Senator BOYCE—Centrelink would be doing that, not you?

Ms Beauchamp—I think us and Centrelink.

Dr Harmer—Us and Centrelink.

Senator BOYCE—Because you are the ones who asked Centrelink to look at this and—

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—And we have that qualitative work that you did with Tony Blunn, running it around informal care?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—So you are involved, or you are not yet involved?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes, we are involved.

Senator BOYCE—What is your involvement at the present time?

Ms Beauchamp—The process normally with AIHW is that we do work in partnership and where we can provide information we do so.

Dr Harmer—I am not sure, but I think what you were hearing from AIHW was that they were considering this as part of their work plan.

Senator BOYCE—They were looking at the feasibility of being able to collect that data.

Dr Harmer—I am not sure yet whether they have made contact with us on that proposal, but now that we know about it we will make contact with them and we will make sure that they are involved.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you. You obviously have a complaint from people who care for people with disabilities or the aged that they spend an awful lot of time answering surveys and filling in forms and often do not get to see results for it. Perhaps some way of standardising that collection would be useful.

Senator POLLEY—In relation to the young people you are trying to assist to stay in their homes, without identifying those people can you let us know whether or not they are in regional or rural areas? I would suspect, coming from those areas myself, that there are more challenges in assisting keeping young people in their homes.

Ms Bedford—We can provide that to you on a question on notice.

Senator POLLEY—Is there much data around that?

Ms Bedford—States and territories know where the people are, so we can give you that breakdown. Some of the plans that states and territories have been talking to us about take into account the difficulty of getting service provision in some areas, so we can give you a flavour of that through that information.

Senator POLLEY—What comes to mind is there is a facility in northern Tasmania where there are a reasonable number of young people who are in such care. So I do understand there are challenges. I would be interested to see if that was reflected in other states as well.

Ms Bedford—Yes.

Senator PATTERSON—I have come across a constituent who has sold their home in order to build another place that has an apartment at the back where their child with a disability can live. It is going to take longer than 12 months to build the house. Because they have put the money from the sale of the house into the bank—I think I have written to the minister about this, and I am not criticising the minister for not answering but it has been a little while—that money is being assessed as an asset for the purpose of the pension. So the parents have lost their pension. I wonder if the minister has discretion to exempt assets for a period of time. I know that during the Canberra bushfires they could be exempted for that period of time. I am wondering if someone can advise me whether there is any system whereby somebody who is doing this is not penalised or whether the minister has discretion.

Ms McKay—My legal adviser just advised me as I was coming to the table that he is not aware of any discretion.

Senator PATTERSON—When the bushfires were on—and I hate people who say ‘when I was minister’ so I will just say ‘the then minister’—the then minister was able to exempt the asset for an additional 12-month period because they could not get enough people to build the houses. They were given a 12-month exemption and then it was extended for another year. There must be some power or I did it illegally—the then minister did it illegally—to make it exempt.

Dr Harmer—I am sure that would not happen, Senator.

Senator PATTERSON—Can you look into that to see if there is that discretion? I think it would be a rare occasion. If a family is trying to do something to provide for their son or daughter with a disability, we ought not be penalising them if they have the money and they genuinely put that back into a second house. When you are in a housing situation like we are, it is difficult to find plumbers and builders and get it done in 12 months, especially also caring for a disabled child. That is maybe why the letter has not been answered, because nobody can tell me, but it seems that if you can do it for bushfires we should be able to do it for disability.

Senator McLucas—You and I know the legislation well. I do not recall in that legislation when it went through the parliament whether there was an opportunity for discretion. We will have a look at it.

Senator PATTERSON—Well, there was during the bushfires. When people got their money from the insurance company—

Senator McLucas—Special disability trusts have their own legislation—

Senator PATTERSON—No, this is not a disability trust. This is a family who has sold their house and put the money in the bank while the builder is building the house. The building is going to take longer than a year and that asset is being counted. It is very similar to people who got their payment from the insurance company during the bushfires, and because there was a shortage of builders in Canberra the then minister was able to give an exemption for 12 months, which was extended for two years, whereby people could indicate that they were in the process of building the house but they could not get it built in the time because of lack of builders. All I am saying is that there seems to be a provision there. Can it be used for someone—

Ms McKay—Senator Paterson, I thought there were hardship provisions. I am going to go away and talk to the legal blokes and come back to you.

Senator PATTERSON—Thank you. It just seems when they are trying to help their child we should not disadvantage them. People in bushfires can be treated the same way. I would appreciate that. Now, disability trusts we will get on to. How many people have now set up a disability trust? We cannot tell who has done it in their will, but—

Ms Davies—As at 31 December there were 22 special disability trusts in operation and 184 people with a disability had been granted beneficiary status.

Senator PATTERSON—So the beneficiary status has increased?

Ms Davies—Yes.

Senator PATTERSON—I have always thought it needed to be modified over time, but have you had any concerns expressed about people who said they did not fit into the category? What we tried to do was make sure people did not have to go through yet another assessment process, and I argued very strongly when a debate was going through the House that it should be looked at if there were people who really fitted, but we did not want to open the doors and let through people with bad backs. Have you had any representations of people who say they did not fit the criteria?

Ms Emerson—We have not had very many representations as such, but what we did get out of the consultations that were done after the trusts were announced, you might recall, was that was one of the issues that was raised quite clearly and was reported in our consultation feedback.

Senator PATTERSON—But you have not had a lot of people saying, or representations through ministerial letters, that they could not get into the system?

Ms Emerson—Not a lot, no.

Senator PATTERSON—Some people have a little bit of difficulty with the carers payment. They have never bothered to apply for carers payment—I think Western Australia. It may be there is a bit of a difference between some of the Centrelink offices in interpreting the guidelines, but if it has not been a landslide—

Senator SIEWERT—I have had representations from people in Western Australia who are having problems. They are having to apply for carers payment. They do not want to but they are having to in order to become eligible. That is an issue.

Senator PATTERSON—Maybe, Senator McLucas, a tweak that does not open the floodgates but that allows them to have some form of assessment is needed. It seems Western Australia is the one that I get complaints from; I do not know why.

Senator SIEWERT—Maybe in other cases people have not complained. Maybe Western Australians are just more vocal.

Ms Emerson—We will follow that issue up departmentally, anyway.

Senator PATTERSON—The other issue that has been raised with me about trusts is that, if people purchase a place in a facility which I think someone will do some time—whether it is a company title in a facility or the right to be in a group home or a house—and the trust purchases it because the person does not have the capacity and then the parent dies or the sibling leaves and they have to relocate the person to Queensland, that property then attracts capital gains tax because it is not a principal place of residence. If there is any review being undertaken, it seems to me that would be worth looking at. If it can be deemed to be a principal place of residence, it really should not attract capital gains tax on the transfer. We have not got a flood of people. I think we were all very careful because we were worried we would have hundreds of thousands of people. It seems to me that these are genuine people setting up these trusts. I know that Senator Boyce has had some issues raised with her. We could have a Senate committee but it might be appropriate to have a quick and dirty review of some of the issues with some of us giving input on the concerns that have been raised with us. They like it but they have little things they would like to see tweaked.

Another example I have been given is a woman whose mother died of melanoma. It is one of those awful complicated stories. The timing is wrong—dad had put \$500,000 into the trust and they have someone living in the home who is not a relative but if they had had to use a relative they could not pay a relative for the care of the person living in the home. It seems to me that the guidelines need some tweaking. If you could look at that as well, because everybody is positive about it but they have little complaints.

Ms McKay—I have just checked with the legal branch in the department. There is a provision that was put into the legislation early last year to enable that 12-month rule in respect of the assets test to be extended for up to 24 months on a case-by-case basis. We cannot comment on whether it would be extended in a particular case that you would raise as a committee, but there is a provision that enables it to be considered.

Senator PATTERSON—If you get it, can you pass it from the department to me, to Minister Macklin, which I am sure Minister Macklin would like returned ASAP for her signature.

CHAIR—Ms McKay, that is the general provision for all assets tests?

Ms McKay—The assets test for the age pension in circumstances where people have ceased being homeowners and have become non-homeowners and have the money from their home sitting as a financial asset as opposed to a physical asset while waiting for a new property to be complete or something like that.

Senator PATTERSON—Or they may be living with relatives and waiting to get into an aged-care facility.

CHAIR—I think that issue was raised in this committee by Western Australians, in particular, a couple of years ago. That provision is for all age pensions and all assets tests in that process.

Ms McKay—Yes.

Senator PATTERSON—Thank you. That is very good news.

CHAIR—I think we have ranged across the programs. We have finished outcome 2.1, Support for the aged. I think we have moved into outcome 2.3, Support for carers. I have a question for both the senators and also the department in terms of where we go from here. We have significant questions on disabilities. I am wondering whether we ask the people we have scheduled for dinner to come early?

Senator BERNARDI—I have questions on disabilities. I might have half an hour's worth. It depends how it pans out, I guess.

CHAIR—My own feeling is that we should proceed and if we finish before 6.30 we take an early dinner break rather than try to change it around. I just wanted to put that on the record for everybody. We are still in the carers-disabilities area. Senator Siewert, you have questions on the trust process.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, I do. I have had significant issues raised with me about the trusts. The points that have been made to me are that we have had 22 people apply for the trusts but the issues with the trusts are what is stopping people setting them up. While I think

the concept is a good idea, there are more than a few things they want to tweak. There are significant difficulties with the trusts. I am wondering how we go about fixing those.

The issues that Senator Patterson has raised have all been raised with me, but in addition there are other quite fundamental issues about, for example, what the money in the trust can be spent on. For example, for health care it is only to be spent on the disability. Many, many people are saying, 'How do you divide up my general health and my disability?' That is fundamentally stopping people setting up trusts. There are issues around the assets and capital gains. I am sorry I have not got the brief in front of me so I am going off the top of my head. There are issues with the capital gains that is paid on top of the additional money that is earned over the half a million—those sorts of things. You are paying more in that trust than if you were to set up another sort of trust. It is not just a few small things. I know that people really do want to set these up. It is a really good initiative. How do we go about fixing this, because it is not just a bit of tweaking?

Ms Beauchamp—Thank you for that. It would be useful if we could get those details because we have not provided advice on options to our ministers either around this, but it sounds like it does need some tweaking and looking at. Given the stage of implementation, we would probably need to do that imminently.

Senator McLucas—Senator Siewert, can I suggest that you write to the parliamentary secretary outlining some of the concerns that you have. Given that you are from Western Australia, I know exactly the people you are talking about. I have spoken to them myself, and I have provided that information to the parliamentary secretary. But I am sure he would be very keen to receive some commentary from you.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Dr Harmer—I am sure we will have received some of that through other letters and things but we probably will benefit from your—

Senator SIEWERT—I am absolutely happy to provide it to the committee. I am sure the people who have been raising these issues with me will be very happy to contact you as well, and I know they have been speaking to the parliamentary secretary. I think there is general will from everybody to try to fix it. What we are keen to do is move it along as soon as possible. They are not complaining about the lack of support; they are complaining about some key blocks in the actual legislation. I will do that as a matter of urgency. I have another disability question. Is the department involved in the review of the Job Network program? Is it a joint initiative or have you just made a submission?

Ms Beauchamp—No. DEEWR has the lead on it and we are providing input given our responsibilities to look at implications for people with disabilities and Indigenous people in particular.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Senator BERNARDI—I have some questions in regard to the Commonwealth State-Territory Disability Agreement. They are quite broad ranging so I hope you will indulge me. The government went to the election with quite a comprehensive policy in this area. Have there been any policy costings done by the department?

Ms Beauchamp—The new government has made commitments about folding some of the disability assistance package money back into the CSTDA. We are in the process of negotiations. A lot of those funding envelope type questions that you were asking are subject to budget and cabinet, and we are not in a position to provide the details. That will happen over the next little while, whilst the government agreed to extend the current disability agreement until 30 June.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand they have extended the agreement to 30 June, but surely there have been some costings of the government's policies in this area ahead of the budget.

Senator McLucas—I am not sure what you mean.

Dr Harmer—Nor do I. What do you mean?

Senator BERNARDI—The costings to implement the policy programs that were taken to the election by the now government.

Ms Beauchamp—The Commonwealth state/territory disability agreement is a funding agreement. The government has agreed with all state and territory ministers to eight key priorities. We will be looking at costings as part of the negotiation process and the matching component that the Commonwealth provides and the states and territories provide. So it is all part of the negotiation.

Senator BERNARDI—You cannot provide the approximate costs of implementing the programs until the negotiations are complete. Is that what you are saying?

Ms Beauchamp—The actual programs that will be implemented will be negotiated on a state-by-state basis because there may be differences in how they want to implement and deliver against those eight priority areas under the CSTDA.

Senator McLucas—Senator Bernardi, just so you are clear, the Commonwealth does not deliver the service.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand that.

Senator McLucas—I am sorry.

Senator BERNARDI—What I am trying to establish is this: what additional injection of funds will be required to deliver on the Labor Party policy outcome?

Dr Harmer—The now government made a range of commitments. We are working to implement all of them. It is very clear early that there will not be one of those commitments that will not be implemented.

Senator BERNARDI—I am not suggesting that. I am just inquiring as to the cost of those commitments.

Dr Harmer—In all of them there was a costing. At the moment we do not have any variation on the costing that was announced by the government.

Senator BERNARDI—Is there any cost attached to the extension of the CSTDA for a further six months until June outside of the normal extension of funding?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator BERNARDI—But outside of the continuation of the current funding? Are there additional costs that have been incurred in any way?

Ms Beauchamp—There has been funding provided and appropriated for extending the agreement for a further six months.

Senator BERNARDI—Is that in excess, though, of what previously would have been expected?

Ms Beauchamp—It is based on the agreement that was already struck as part of the previous agreement.

Senator BERNARDI—So there have been no additional costs or anything along those lines?

Dr Harmer—No additional costs to that extension.

Senator BERNARDI—That is what I was trying to get to. There was \$962 million in funding for disability services earmarked in Labor's election policy. This money was going to the disability sector anyway, so has any new money been earmarked for disability services?

Dr Harmer—Any new money that flows into disability services out of government commitments in the election or subsequently will be part of the budget. We are not able to speculate at the moment on work we are doing or numbers or amounts that are being considered by the government in the budget. This is normal practice. On 13 May, when the budget is brought down, the financial commitments for these programs will be made clear.

Ms Beauchamp—Could I add to Dr Harmer's comments: the additional commitment made during the election around putting the \$962 million back into the Commonwealth state/territory disability agreement is on the proviso that the states match that funding, so there will actually be extra dollars going into supporting people with disabilities.

Senator BERNARDI—From the states?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator BERNARDI—And, if the states do not commit to it, will that \$962 million be staying outside of that CSTDA?

Ms Beauchamp—That really is all part of the negotiations around the whole funding envelope for the new CSTDA. I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful, but they are part of—

Senator BERNARDI—No, I accept you have constraints.

Ms Beauchamp—They are part of the budget and cabinet processes.

Senator BERNARDI—I accept that. I am just trying to shine some light into some cupboards, I guess, and open them up.

Dr Harmer—Senator, you could imagine that we are in the middle of a great deal of work in relation to the implementation of the new government's election commitments in this area. Many of them have budgetary implications. We are also in the middle of preparing the budget, so we are actually quite constrained in terms of providing information along the lines that you want at the moment.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. What processes has the department instigated to better measure current and future needs for disability services, if any at all?

Ms Bedford—As part of the work between states and territories and the Commonwealth, a group of disability officials, public servants, from around the country meet under the auspices of the disability ministers. Unmet need is one of the priority areas that was agreed to by ministers on 1 February. We are working on how to better measure that unmet need. There has also been a report from AIHW on unmet need. There is work in progress and there has been an agreement amongst the Commonwealth and all states and territories to progress that work as a priority.

Senator BERNARDI—So what are the current processes you use to measure unmet need?

Ms Bedford—It is through data collection as part of the AIHW data collection, but there are varying degrees of measurement and knowledge around states and territories, so there is a lot of work to be done in that area.

Senator BERNARDI—Is there a degree of cooperation in this area?

Ms Bedford—Yes.

Dr Harmer—The measurement of unmet need and the focus on unmet need will be a key element of the negotiations around the new agreement. It was one of the previous government's priorities and it is already one of the new government's priorities around the CSTDA.

Senator BERNARDI—I accept that. Ms Bedford, you have already started this process of reviewing how to better measure unmet need. What has come to light as a consequence of your start in this area?

Ms Davies—I can answer that. Under the existing agreement, the AIHW that Ms Bedford mentioned has given data and that is publicly available. That information is being used for the funding injections to meet the unmet need that we knew of then. We have had two funding injections of \$700 million for unmet need in the existing agreement.

Senator BERNARDI—When was that \$700 million injected?

Ms Davies—I would say it was probably 2005-06.

Senator BERNARDI—If we move towards some national population benchmarks for key disability service types, who is going to be responsible for setting them?

Ms Bedford—That is another area of joint work with the states and territories. We actually met yesterday to talk about all these priorities, including unmet need and national benchmarks. At the meeting with the ministers on 1 February, they agreed to the national benchmarks priority as well, but also understanding that disability has a different service structure and I suppose focus for people with disabilities. The aged care benchmarking is on a population base—for a number of places per people—and what we are doing at the moment is looking at what would be an appropriate way of measuring a benchmark for people with disabilities and the sorts of services. So it is not just about residential aged care or supported accommodation for people with disabilities.

Senator BOYCE—Who is contributing to that discussion? Is it just the officers at the present time?

Ms Bedford—At present, it is just the officers but there will have to be a fair bit of work, including talking with experts in the field around how we could do that.

Ms Beauchamp—It is officers covering each state and territory.

Senator BOYCE—But it would not just be service providers who might end up being asked?

Ms Bedford—No.

Senator BOYCE—Good.

Senator BERNARDI—So you had a couple of meetings—one with the relevant ministers and one yesterday with department officials, was it?

Ms Bedford—National officials.

Senator BERNARDI—In all of these things the buck has to stop somewhere. Will the responsibility lie with FaHCSIA for the ultimate establishment of these national benchmarks?

Ms Beauchamp—It will be a joint responsibility as part of the CSTDA and the working group of officials that sit under all the ministers, who may have to commission expert advice and the like. So it will be an agreed process as we work through it.

Senator BERNARDI—I think I know the answer to this question but I am going to ask it anyway. Have you identified any of these benchmarks already?

Ms Bedford—No, we have not identified any of those, because it is quite a complex area to work through which benchmarks may be the best benchmarks to use. One of the warnings we have received from people with disabilities is that we need to make sure we do not have benchmarks such that people end up in supported accommodation. They might be better off, happier and more comfortable living in the community. So you do not want to have funding that goes to supported accommodation benchmarks when there could be other types of service and support that would be better for people with disabilities.

Ms Beauchamp—I should say there has been a fair amount of work done in this area already with the officials. We are not in a sense starting off with a clean slate, but from the Commonwealth perspective it is to make sure we have some consistency in outcomes as to whether people are supported in place or in accommodation with support and the like. It is about what that actually means for outcomes for the person with a disability.

Senator BERNARDI—Obviously, you have to draw conclusions before the new CSTDA can be implemented. So we will expect a response to all of this or a conclusion to this process in the next couple of months ahead of the budget.

Dr Harmer—We certainly expect to complete the process before the finalisation of the CSTDA.

Senator BERNARDI—Well, it would have to be, wouldn't it? In a similar vein, are the quality improvement systems, which are based on the national disability service standards for all CSTDA services, going to be completely new?

Ms Davies—The detail of what they will look like is yet to be determined. The starting point, though, was that the Commonwealth government has a set of quality assurance standards with independent assessment. That may end up being the national program, and some states have similar ones, but the final outcome still has to be negotiated across the states and territories.

Senator BERNARDI—It is not as though you are starting with a clean sheet. You are prepared to acknowledge there have been—

Senator PATTERSON—No, there have been several sheets.

Senator BERNARDI—Well, they are not all going to be clean, I would guess. Ultimately, how will the standards be drawn up? You will take a proposal to the state and territory ministers and—

Ms Davies—It is the same process as Ms Bedford described. It could be that officials will work out a set of options to provide to ministers.

Senator BERNARDI—What is the provision if you cannot reach agreement with all the states and territories? Do you implement what the majority determine, or will FaHCSIA have the final say?

Dr Harmer—We will have to get agreement but it is not always possible, in which case we put the considered view of the various elements and have a discussion around that. But most times, we are able to get to something that is recommended by officials. We do get, as Ms Bedford and Ms Davies mentioned, some expert advice to help us. We do not just muddle around with officials. We get some good expert advice and usually with that and with a series of meetings—and sometimes it takes longer than you hope—we do get to a position that is agreed to take to ministers.

Senator BERNARDI—Dr Harmer, I will not question your reference to expert advice being outside of your department.

Dr Harmer—We have both internal and external expert advice.

Senator BERNARDI—I am sure you do. How much of the advice that the department relies on is external? Do you have a figure that you spend on external—

Dr Harmer—It depends on the issue that we are dealing with. If it is a particularly technical issue we often rely more heavily on external advice. If it is policy and experience around service provision, we are pretty good internally with people who are experienced. It depends on how technical the question is.

Senator BERNARDI—Are you able to provide me with a figure of what you have spent on external consultants in the last financial year?

Dr Harmer—You mean in this particular area?

Senator BERNARDI—Yes.

Dr Harmer—The annual report that we produce each year gives you a full list of the consultancies that we fund. It was just published—

Senator BERNARDI—That is fine. You do not have a figure to hand. I am happy with that. In the absence of any definitive outcomes, we know what the policy intention is but there has not been an earmark of how it is going to be delivered exactly. Are you prepared to talk about the strategies to simplify access to services?

Ms Davies—That is one of the priorities. Again, we have only just started the process of working out the detail of each of them. It is very early days.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand that. I keep flying these kites hoping that one of you will say, ‘Yes, we have an idea about how we want to deliver this,’ but obviously you are waiting for the final negotiations and outcomes to take place; is that right?

Ms Bedford—Some of the states have done some recent work on simplifying access. Yesterday Queensland brought a paper to the officials group on their process for looking at that area, and the other states and territories will take that away and have a look to see how we might be able to apply that on a national basis. So there is—

Senator BOYCE—I am not sure that would give a lot of comfort to the carers in Queensland, but anyway, good luck with it.

Ms Beauchamp—Each of these areas are going through the eight priority areas for the new negotiations. Papers, proposals and options will be built around each of those areas to take back to state, territory and Commonwealth ministers. So there is work that is occurring on each of those eight elements in a cooperative manner now.

Senator BERNARDI—Will those papers be available publicly?

Ms Beauchamp—Not at this stage, no.

Senator BERNARDI—No, but will they—

Dr Harmer—It will be up to ministers. We will be preparing these papers for ministers, so they are ministers’ property at ministers’ meetings. If they decide to make them public, they can. It is entirely up to them. It is not up to us to make decisions about whether they should be public or not. We produce a whole lot of material for ministerial meetings and that is the property of the ministers. Sometimes they decide to release some of it; sometimes they regard it as policy advice and do not release it.

Senator BERNARDI—I do not have any further specific questions on the CSTDA, but I do have some questions as to other parts of the negotiations. It might be opportune for others to ask any questions they have in this regard.

CHAIR—Senator Bernardi, can you tell me what areas of disabilities you have questions on and then we can see whether it matches—

Senator BERNARDI—It is about the day care centres that have been promised, the Companion Card scheme, national consistency of parking, giving people with disability access to community aged care programs, which could have come into the other one, transition periods and those sorts of things. It is very brief.

Senator BOYCE—I do not have anything that logically fits in there. I go across about four groups. I would not mind asking two or three of them now.

CHAIR—Does anyone have any questions on the CSTDA?

Senator BOYCE—I have one that is possibly related.

CHAIR—Go with that one, Senator Boyce.

Senator BOYCE—On page 46 of the additional estimates, we have a significant increase in the number of packages. I think it is about 225 or something new packages that you are intending—or it is your revised figure for contracts and service agreements that will be managed relating to people with disabilities. Is that correct? It has gone from 598 to 823. Do we have any sense at this juncture of where those are or what it means?

Ms Davies—I think Ms Bruce can give you the detail—

Ms Bruce—I can give you the difference in the figures. Of the 225, there are 135 new funding agreements that have been put in place for the provision of respite services which was part of the disability assistance package. There are funding agreement variations to 80 employment contracts to take into account additional funding also as a result of the disability service package.

Senator BOYCE—So that is block funding that has been changed to put a few more people into it. Is that how it works?

Ms Bruce—They are new funding agreements or variations to existing funding agreements. So these figures for people with disabilities—

Senator BOYCE—But who is your agreement with—a service provider?

Ms Bruce—Many service providers, and there are 10 funding agreements for children's services.

Senator BOYCE—Have we got any sort of sense of a geographical breakdown of these? How many in each state?

Ms Bruce—The respite funding agreements are in Home and Community Care regions, except for two. There were two HACC regions that we did not get funding agreements for. One was the Pilbara and the second was Peninsula.

Senator BOYCE—Where was the second one, sorry?

Ms Bruce—Peninsula.

CHAIR—Peninsula where?

Ms Bruce—Queensland.

Senator BOYCE—As in Cape York?

Ms Bruce—Yes. We had a national selection process and just did not get any applications from those two areas. The variations to the 80 employment contracts are in the existing business services funding agreements, so they are also throughout the country. The 10 children's services—

Ms Emerson—We have four in New South Wales, two in the Northern Territory, one in the west, three in Queensland and I do not have details of the others, I am sorry.

Senator BOYCE—We have got eight of them covered there; is that right?

Ms Emerson—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—I am just making sure that I wrote that down properly. That was my only question in relation to that. One other question I had I think relates partly to the changes that are planned for the CSTDA. The previous government had announced a fairly large package of funds for supported accommodation and had undertaken consultation around provision of that supported accommodation. That money has disappeared back into the CSTDA pot, has it not?

Ms Bedford—Part of that money is a \$62 million commitment.

Senator BOYCE—Yes. It has gone back there?

Dr Harmer—It has not yet, but the commitment is that it will.

Senator BOYCE—There was probably, by my reckoning, around 1,000 or so parents who spent a day at a workshop talking about what they hoped the supported accommodation or variations and options for their child—adult child in most cases—with a disability would look like. Do you have some statistics on those consultations?

Ms Davies—We have an interim report that has not been released yet but, yes, we do have a fair amount of data.

Senator BOYCE—Are you able to give us the basic statistics on how many people went along?

Ms Davies—I think it was 1,200 individuals.

Ms Bedford—There were 1,200 individuals that participated in the consultation. About a thousand attended workshops around the country. There were 27 face-to-face meetings and consultations.

Senator PATTERSON—For members of parliament?

Ms Bedford—For members of parliament, state and territory.

Senator PATTERSON—Very few.

Ms Bedford—And 320 written submissions. There were 27 locations—all capital cities and a number of regional centres—that had meetings.

Senator BOYCE—So what we are talking about is a huge commitment of time from carers of people with disabilities.

Ms Bedford—Yes, and a rich source of information from them. That has been put together in a report that is going back out to the people who attended the consultations, and that report will be on the FaHCSIA website as well once it is cleared.

Senator BOYCE—When is that likely?

Ms Bedford—I would say within the next week or two weeks.

Senator BOYCE—And then what?

Ms Bedford—We will be talking to states and territories about that information. That information is part of that negotiation of the 960, that commitment going back to the CSTDA.

Ms Davies—Because the issue is one of the priorities for the new CSTDA core.

Ms Bedford—Yes.

Ms Davies—So it will be a very useful source of research and background to inform the actual outcomes.

Senator BOYCE—Good, thank you.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, as we have a series of issues, I thought one of the things we could do is actually call Mental Health, because this committee has an ongoing relationship with that group. Senator Humphries has some mental health issues and I think other people have as well.

Dr Harmer—I am not crazy; I am pretty confident of that.

CHAIR—I said that deliberately. I was wondering whether you would pick it up.

Dr Harmer—I will bring the whole team in, then.

CHAIR—You are very, very quick. I did that quite deliberately. We will have some questions on the mental health program and then in the time remaining after that we will go through the individual issues as identified by Senator Bernardi, and if we have too many we will put them on notice.

Senator BOYCE—I have one more issue that I would like to make sure I ask questions about.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I was really wanting to get a brief update on where we stand with the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program, particularly on how many of those helpers and mentors are now active in the community.

Mr Lewis—Since we last talked—and I think that was at May budget estimates—we have rolled out another set of sites and we are now up to 76 live sites, which means we have approximately 400 personal helpers and mentors on the ground. So it is rolling out well, and our early data is quite clear that the activity and uptake is really responsive.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How many clients do those 400 have?

Mr Lewis—It is approximately 5,000. So for each worker the estimate is that they would have a case load of about 12. If you sort of extrapolate from that, it is approximately five depending on a point of time. We have another round of 400 to roll out this year, which will bring us up to 800. That is almost the full implementation of 900. That will give us a 10,000 client capacity by the time the next 400 are rolled out.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I know that there were issues of geographical coverage of those workers who are already mentors and helpers on the ground. I know in the ACT, for example, certain areas of the city have coverage and certain areas do not. We have gone to certain lengths to be able to count in the areas where there is coverage to get access to one of these.

Mr Lewis—Sure.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Will the 400 extra that have been rolled out this year actually deliver coverage to the whole of Australia or will there still be gaps?

Mr Lewis—It is interesting that you should ask that. The process by which the sites were chosen, just to refresh the history, was one which involved quite extensive collaboration with the states around where they saw the hot spots and where they were already working, because

one of the flagships under the planning was that we would collaborate and coordinate, not duplicate. In the ACT's case, there were two sites, I recall, in the first round. I might ask Ms Brain if there are any in the second round.

We have been discussing with all states a process in the last couple of months to look at the sites for the next 400 round. Our expectation and intent is to cover as broadly as we can, but we do take advice from our state colleagues in doing so. The commitment expectation under the plan was also that states would complement the funding allocated through the national action plan. So there is an implication that the states, if they decide they want more sites, will provide appropriate clinical support or make sure that there are clinical support pathways that can service these people and the PHaMs—personal helpers and mentors—can then tap into that. Resourcing allocations are a state decision. I will hand over to Ms Brain to talk about the next round.

Ms Brain—Specifically in relation to the ACT, there are actually no planned sites for round 2 in the ACT.

Senator HUMPHRIES—But there is another round, presumably to roll out from 800 to 900, which will be the financial year after next.

Mr Lewis—That is right—well, early next calendar year maybe.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Is it anticipated that once the 900 are rolled out there will be workers in every area of Australia, or will there still be gaps?

Mr Lewis—Again, because of the nature of this program being, in a sense, complementary to state programs, many of the states and perhaps particularly Victoria and New South Wales have approached this separately and have got key coordination workers that they have set up to complement the work done. Even when the 900 are fully on the ground and you extrapolate out what the Mental Health Council of Australia and the General Practice Network and others say about the population of people with severe mental illness, this program would not cover the whole market if you want to put it that way. So the expectation is that states will continue to expand their matching input into this. An example of that, as I think I mentioned at the last estimates, is that the Queensland government, seeing that this was important, decided to create 20 new care coordinator positions across Queensland and announced them. As an example, other states are doing similar things. What we have been able to do through the collaboration and the discussion about the absence of services is to drive that agenda.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That is good. Can I flag that it would be good at the May estimates hearings to get a bit of a report on where we stand with those complementary actions by state governments. I think they are very important and we need to know where we have got gaps based on a failure to bring forward those sorts of complementary services. So can I ask that that be flagged for attention by May.

Mr Lewis—Sure. We will pursue that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I assume that one of the key issues that emerges out of having the personal helpers and mentors on the ground is that they are there to help direct clients into areas where services can be accessed. Presumably it is a two-way street. It enables the

department to get an idea of where there are gaps and lack of services. Are you collating that information in a way which you can help feed back to state governments?

Mr Lewis—The eligibility screening for entry into the program has, I think, some 30 questions. We have changed a number over time, but those questions are captured on a database and they capture reasons for turn-away entry. We will have data on our programs certainly in terms of capacity where we are full—if our books are full, and that happens—and/or if we turn people away and/or what the volume is at different points. So we will have indicators to that. But it comes to your previous question about matching that with state data as well and making sure we get a complete picture, because our picture will be part of that national turn-away issue. But certainly we could look at that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That is good. Thank you.

CHAIR—Are there any other questions on mental health? I have a couple if no-one else does. Senator Webber cannot be here; she is in another estimates and she has a couple of questions. One is on Indigenous services. In the second round there was a regional service in the Northern Territory. I take it that that is not Indigenous specific, that anyone who happens to be in that regional area would be covered. Would that be right?

Mr Lewis—That is true. We made provision in planning for the second round to do some remote service work. Ostensibly, we expect the population where the sites will be to be Indigenous clients. We are doing some good exploratory work with our colleagues in DoHA around complementary thinking in terms of matching that sort of investment. We do have more scope to do some more work around that and intend to do so.

CHAIR—In the mental health inquiry, one of the areas we visited was Port Hedland, and the particular issues of that region were mentioned in the report. Whilst there were significant Indigenous issues in the area—and they were there—there were a lot of issues from mining families and dysfunctional situations in that area. With regard to the Western Australian rollout—I know the wheat belt is not but I am referring to the other two; Senator Adams would know—I do not know whether they are remote and regional. Ms Brain, do you know?

Mr Lewis—I might check on Port Hedland. Is there a Port Hedland one—

CHAIR—Port Hedland does not have one yet, but there were three that were rolled out in the second round. I was wondering whether any of those fitted that definition.

Mr Lewis—They might have given it to us as another name for the next round, so I just want to check that. We will find out for you.

CHAIR—Sure, and the same issue in terms of Mount Isa and Cloncurry and those areas that are significant towns with some medical provisions—a mental health unit in some cases—but great demand and isolation linked into it. With regard to the other one from a Queensland perspective, the Yarrabah contract was not met in the second round and the information I got from the department was that there were no tenders.

Mr Lewis—Yes, and this comes to the comment about remote service delivery. As a consequence of that, we went north and sat down with the local Indigenous leaders in partnership with our local Indigenous site manager—ICC manager—and our state colleagues and Professor Ernest Hunter from Queensland Health who also does other work in this area.

We explored with them how we might put together or create a capacity to do this work given that we did not have the tender process. Certainly, we put some of this in abeyance over the election period, but it is timely to revisit that thinking.

CHAIR—I do not want to take up too much of Senator Bernardi's time, but I turn now to respite services. There are a number of things for which you have responsibility, but the two ones we have concentrated on in this committee have been the personal mentors and the respite services. I was wanting to get an update on the rollout of respite and the response to that, because we had talked at previous estimates about eligibility awareness and also availability of carers in that it was put with the existing Commonwealth respite services, and my understanding is that they are already very busy. So when we add a program, how do we then compete with competing needs?

Mr Lewis—You will recall last time we talked about how we had as a consequence of some of those issues split that program into two distinct elements. We did go to the CCRCs—the Commonwealth care respite centres—and we had some issues about some of them wishing to take up this work, partly because they did not understand the nature of the work and wanted to focus on what they saw as core business. We got through that. We then had some issues which again, I think, I hinted at which were emerging around some of those centres not being able to do the work—not being able to do it in terms of not understanding their role and doing that work. So we went to market for what we call the national respite development fund. It was a public tender process and we did not get as strong a response in that tender process as we had hoped we would.

As a consequence of the patchy take-up rate from activity data from the CCRCs, we have gone back out to some of those and said—those who are really busy—'How is your funding stream going in terms of activity in terms of take-up rate?' We have also then talked to some that are not getting the activity that we had forecast about why, so we are doing some analysis of that. In addition to awarding the money to the tenderers in the past—the tender process—we have put together a list of reasons for perhaps why some of the tenderers were not successful. With standard criteria and putting them all in the same category—that is, it might have been something to do with their financial application or it might have been something to do with a legal issue that was a technical issue in the criteria—we have gone back out to those potential providers to get them to answer a series of questions, particularly in those areas where there is a low activity and we see that there is a deficit in capacity. So we are doing some very proactive engagement with the sector on the ground to find out why and to assist them in some way to connect up with the CCRCs.

CHAIR—What is the time frame for that?

Mr Lewis—I think the discussion with those people will be finalised within the next couple of months. Is it two months from now?

Ms Brain—Yes, about two months.

CHAIR—That will take it to April. What is the time frame for that funding round? I know it is over a five-year plan. But you were seeking to give out those tenders three months ago.

Mr Lewis—In November we went through the process of finalising contractual documentation with them. I think it is three years, depending on what they are doing with the

contractual arrangements. You will remember last time we had a detailed discussion of why it was of that length.

CHAIR—I have two final questions. One is about where you fit with the COAG process now and the ongoing relationship with health. The same questions will be given to Health and Ageing tomorrow—the communication between them, how the ongoing relationship works, who does what, and that kind of thing. How is that working now?

Mr Lewis—The IDC is still alive. We have not met since late August, early September.

CHAIR—Since before the election.

Mr Lewis—Just before. So we have not met since then. Having said that, last week we had two COAG meetings. We had two the week before and I think next week it is Victoria and New South Wales. The process we adopt prior to those meetings is that the Commonwealth departments with responsibility in this area have a premeeting. Having said the IDC has not met does not mean we have not sat and worked through the issues in relation to states or nationally regularly.

CHAIR—The formal IDC has not met but the working relationship continues.

Mr Lewis—That is right.

CHAIR—The last question is more a statement. This committee is continuing its work with mental health and we will be requesting through the minister, before we get to submissions and those things, a briefing from both you and Health about the state of the nation now before we go forwards.

Senator BERNARDI—I will take you back to a couple of other issues if I may, Dr Harmer. There was a commitment to build six long day care centres to provide early intervention for children with autism. This was in addition to the \$190 million commitment through the Helping Children With Autism package. Where will these six new long day care centres be built?

Mr Lewis—Part of the election platform for the new government was a commitment to have one of those sites in north-western Tasmania. There has been no decision by the minister about the sites the other five will be in. Obviously, we will need to provide advice to the minister to that effect. To give you a sense of how that might track, we wrote to Rosemary Calder, who is the division head of mental health in DoHA, and I wrote jointly to the chairs of the COAG mental health groups seeking their assistance to set up working groups in each state to work through autism related issues in those states so that we did not basically tread on each other's toes and duplicate work. We had a meeting two weeks ago with representatives from education, disability, community, family and so on from Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. It was a half-day meeting and we worked through very productively some of the issues that those states are confronting. One of the emerging issues was the people who manifest autistic conditions at an older age; that was certainly an issue raised by the states.

We agreed to develop some principles as a consequence of those discussions and we have now had subsequent meetings with Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland separately to work out how that would best work. There has been a very positive response and

engagement by those states to understand better what happens, particularly for school-age children and older people who might manifest autism at a later age.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you for that. You said there is a commitment for north-western Tasmania.

Mr Lewis—There is.

Senator BERNARDI—Maybe the parliamentary secretary can answer this: is the government's commitment that it will ensure that each of these centres is located in a different state or territory?

Senator McLucas—No decision to that effect has been made.

Senator BERNARDI—So it may be the case that a larger population centre, such as New South Wales, may indeed have two of these centres?

Senator McLucas—Those decisions will be informed by the discussions that Mr Lewis has just described.

Senator BERNARDI—As a South Australian, I am pleased you have consulted South Australia. I hope there is some consideration for that area.

Senator McLucas—We would never leave you out.

Senator BERNARDI—Do you have an idea of how much it will cost to construct each centre?

Mr Lewis—If you recall the original announcement, the money was to be drawn from the child-care inclusion support money, the 260 places. To some extent we are working with DEEWR around how that best will flow, so I cannot give you a categorical figure. We could probably give you an estimate on the sorts of things we talked with them about, but I would not want to be held to it in terms of where we are. Certainly, it is up to them in terms of that part of the element in the package.

Senator BERNARDI—What is the ultimate function of these centres? It is to provide long day care, but is that pre school? There has been a mainstreaming in many instances of children with autism into government schools. So is this a pre school facility or is it a schooling facility? What is the intention?

Mr Lewis—That detail has not been agreed to at this time. In terms of what a child-care autism centre actually does, where they are and what their role is, we have not worked through that detail as yet with the minister.

Senator BERNARDI—You are just going to build some centres and decide what to do with them afterwards?

Mr Lewis—No. We will have a framework and a policy around it, but it is not for us to predetermine at this time.

Senator McLucas—The intent of the policy announced during the campaign recognised that much of the research around autism indicates that early intervention is important. You are right that, historically, we do try to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream child care, mainstream schooling, whatever it might be. But the evidence clearly shows that a

withdrawal for a period of time—probably around two years—for very severely autistic children is extremely valuable to those children. In many cases, not all, it will ultimately mean that those children will be able to be mainstreamed after that two- or 2½-year period. That was the research on which the policy was based and it flowed from there.

Senator BERNARDI—So the withdrawal is—

Senator McLucas—When I say ‘withdrawal’, withdrawal from mainstream child care, for example, so these services are for all children with autism.

Senator BERNARDI—Upon identification that they have autism.

Senator McLucas—And that is another issue—diagnosis—as you would know.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you for that. When do you expect that this program will commence?

Mr Lewis—Again, I can say that we are dependent partly on the time lines in partnership with DEEWR. I would hope that some time this year we would have a pathway certainly to do it.

Senator BERNARDI—This financial year or calendar year?

Mr Lewis—Our expectation is but we cannot predict what they will do.

Dr Harmer—It will be certainly this calendar year, and preferably this financial year. We will be trying to do it as quickly as we can. The government is very keen to implement the commitments as soon as possible, so if we can do it this financial year we will be doing it.

Senator BERNARDI—I will be sure to follow it up later in the year. Can I turn briefly to the national Companion Card scheme and the desire to achieve national consistency in disability parking. Where is the inconsistency in disability parking?

Senator McLucas—I will start at the beginning and fill up three hours.

Senator BERNARDI—I do not want to fill up three hours.

Senator McLucas—That will give you a notion of the lack of consistency.

Senator BERNARDI—What is the brief overview of the inconsistency in disability parking? It begs the question: isn’t this a state issue?

Ms Bruce—We will be working closely with the states and territories. It is fairly early days for us looking into this issue but, as we understand it, the disability parking schemes are administered through different arrangements in the states and territories and there are different rules and eligibility criteria for them. I guess the difficulty that we are trying to overcome is that we want people with a disability parking sticker from one jurisdiction to be able to move across the country and have the same rules apply.

Senator BOYCE—Go on holidays.

Senator BERNARDI—Can you identify some of the inconsistencies for me? Can you give me specific instances?

Ms Bruce—No, not specifically at this stage, I am sorry.

Senator McLucas—They are things like eligibility. Some states allow people with disabilities to park in certain—

Senator BERNARDI—I want you to name names; that is what I want. I am looking for you to name names.

Senator McLucas—I cannot recall.

Dr Harmer—If you want, we can take it on notice and get you some information about the inconsistency, the conditions and the eligibility criteria in some states and how it compares with other states. We can get that for you.

Senator BERNARDI—I think it would be beneficial, actually. I know there would be a number of senators in particular who would have some interest in ensuring—

Ms Bruce—We just have not got that far into looking at the issue at this time.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand that. I just want to go a little bit off topic. I am not sure what this summit is called of the thousand brightest minds that Mr Rudd has—

Senator McLucas—The national 2020 summit.

Senator BERNARDI—Has there been any consideration of including people with disabilities at that summit?

Dr Harmer—It is going to be open for people to nominate. I would think that the government would be pretty keen to make sure there is widespread representation.

Senator BERNARDI—But quite often a number of people might be turned off nominating by the cost of getting here, particularly if they face increased burdens due to caring for someone with a disability.

Dr Harmer—I am not sure, because we are not running the funding arrangements. I do know that it has already been advertised and a lot of people have been nominating. I would think the Prime Minister is interested in getting a very wide perspective. I think he is after clever, creative views about some of the big problems facing Australia. He is interested in people who have clever, creative views about disability, I would have thought.

Senator BERNARDI—A lot of the problems facing Australia in the future reside in this portfolio and they need to be addressed.

Dr Harmer—They do.

Senator BERNARDI—I would simply support the department and the minister to encourage as many people who are affected by the areas in this portfolio to attend and provide whatever support is necessary to help them to get there.

Senator McLucas—In terms of the question of cost that you raised, the Prime Minister has indicated that all attendees will be paying their own way. However, he has recognised that there will be some people for whom financial support will be required. If you have any people you would like to encourage to come who do need financial support, do not discourage them on the basis that their finances would preclude them.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you for that.

CHAIR—You said earlier, Senator Boyce, that you had one question that you would particularly like to ask face to face as opposed to putting it on notice.

Senator BOYCE—There is one follow-up question I wanted to ask a question in relation to the parking permit. This, of course, is not the only area which irritates Australians as they travel about the countryside—I refer to eligibility. What other standardisations is this department considering looking at being responsible for?

Dr Harmer—There is a range across the program areas. I can take that on notice. It is not just in this portfolio area but other areas, too, like Education—

Senator BOYCE—But the concession card is yours?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—The Companion Card?

Dr Harmer—Yes. There is a range of things in disability and range of things in some of our other program areas.

Senator BOYCE—Are they all being handled one by one or is there someone doing a standardisation program?

Dr Harmer—There is not someone doing standardisation. They are best handled in the individual program areas as we direct with each of the states either in our ministerial forums or officials meetings.

Senator BOYCE—Is there a timetable?

Dr Harmer—For each of the initiatives there will be a timetable. The Prime Minister has already made it clear that he is expecting quite rapid progress with the COAG agenda. There are four meetings this year. We are on a very tight time frame in terms of the two COAG working groups that I am involved with which are housing and Indigenous affairs. The other issues—the Companion Card, for example—are election commitments which we are under the gun to implement quickly. There is a lot of different work going on. There is not a standardisation, overarching piece of work going on.

Senator BERNARDI—You are not just under the gun from the government; you are under the gun from the opposition, too.

Dr Harmer—We are working very hard on these.

Senator BOYCE—FaHCSIA contract Centrelink to deliver the actual benefits and the like and to negotiate with your people receiving benefits in terms of problems or issues or anything else; is that correct?

Dr Harmer—Centrelink make payments on behalf of us in relation to age pension, carers, families, disability support pensions et cetera.

Senator BOYCE—So you have an involvement in the quality of delivery of Centrelink's service?

Dr Harmer—Yes, we do.

Senator BOYCE—You are probably aware that Senator Joe Ludwig recently announced that the program for parliamentary liaison officers who were located within Centrelink, Medicare and so forth had been stopped?

Dr Harmer—I was not aware of that.

Senator BOYCE—Were you aware of the parliamentary liaison officer program?

Dr Harmer—Yes, I was.

Senator BOYCE—What involvement had you had with that?

Dr Harmer—Because it was not specifically delivering a service for FaHCSIA, it was not something that we were involved in. That initiative came out of the Department of Human Services, which is now Minister Ludwig's department. It was not a program funded by—

Senator BOYCE—I realise that, but it was part of the service that Centrelink were providing in terms of quality of their service delivery?

Dr Harmer—It was a service they were delivering on behalf of the portfolio of Human Services.

Senator BOYCE—Were you consulted at all about the ending of the parliamentary liaison officer program?

Dr Harmer—I was not. Maybe some people in the department were. I do not know. It was an issue for the other department; it was not an issue for us. We are one of the departments that uses Centrelink as a service provider. A range of other departments use Centrelink. The Department of Human Services, which is the department where Centrelink resides, also has authority over and responsibility for what the various service agencies in that department do.

Senator BOYCE—I am aware of this. As you mentioned, you have an interest in the quality of service delivery on your behalf. Were you consulted about the ending of the parliamentary liaison officer program?

Dr Harmer—I was not. I have to be really careful; I am not sure whether FaHCSIA was. I will take that on notice

Senator BOYCE—If you could that would be good.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, with your indulgence, Senator Colbeck has a couple of questions on autism. He has come in especially to ask them. If we could finish this session off with those questions and put the rest of this program on notice.

Senator COLBECK—I was listening and watching downstairs, so I caught most of what you talked about with Senator Bernardi before. I have caught up on most of that. I do have a particular interest in the Tasmanian site that has been selected. When Senator Bernardi was talking to you about the consultations with the states, I was interested to know what discussions you had in particular with Tasmania. If we can start by just having a bit of a discussion about that particular discussion.

Mr Lewis—Tasmania's COAG meeting is not for another couple of weeks. Certainly, we have had response back from the letter that went to them that they would be keen to talk about

this area of activity. So we have not had specific discussion about where the site would be or how it will work in Tasmania as yet.

Senator COLBECK—During your discussions and consultations, would you be going broader than just to the government, to other providers of services in that area as well? I am aware of—and you probably are, too—an organisation called Giant Steps, which based is Deloraine. I suppose I have a bit of a concern about the potential impact. It may be that it complements it. I do not know the details of the program; hence, the reason for the questions. But that is a concern of mine. It is a very good organisation that has received government support in the past.

Mr Lewis—We have an autism advisory group, the spectrum disorder advisory group, that is an internal departmentally formed group which includes specialists and providers from across Australia. We also have a separate group called the expert reference group, which includes the authors of a recent study and report. Margo Prior and Jacqui Roberts advise us on how and where we should put our resources and how best to do that. Certainly that is part of our complement. We have also, as part of the announcement of the original package, offered money to the eight peak bodies that represent autism—multiple NGOs including Giant Steps and others—across this country to do some early work in line with the intention of the package. But I suspect they will also be advising us more broadly as part of that role. We have not spoken specifically to Giant Steps as yet, but certainly when we talk to Tasmania in the next couple of weeks face to face then I am hoping they would say that is someone we should talk to, amongst others.

Senator COLBECK—Will your consultation process be looking at other individual service providers in the regions, taking it more broadly than just Tasmania, so that you can effectively complement rather than potentially have a detrimental impact? I would expect that would be an objective.

Mr Lewis—Yes, it certainly is. I suppose you heard the comments I made earlier in relation to the state liaison. It was quite clear from our discussion with the states a couple of weeks ago that the states in some cases have done considerable work themselves in this area and have strong rules about what works and does not work. In WA, for example, Professor Fiona Stanley, as part of her work arising from early childhood, has done quite a lot of work. There is a register in WA as an example of children with autism and quite a different process that they have to other states.

Apart from the consultation with the providers, it is quite interesting to hear the different models of approach that are around. There are providers who are quite strongly of a view that a certain type of intervention is the best way to work with children. There are others—and I come back to Senator McLucas's comments about the childcare issue. Some people are advocates of a model called play group and some are not. Some are advocates of a model which focuses on 20 hours of early intervention. Some would say that intervention needs to be of a certain type, and others would say that intervention can be anything almost as long as you get 20 hours face to face, one on one, with a child over a period. So it is not just the providers who are part of the picture of consultation, I suppose I am saying. It is the experts working in the field. It is the families who are confronting this issue.

There is certain research out of South Australia that says the best diagnostician for a child with autism is a parent. Eight out of 10 times a parent will be far more accurate and early in assessing or analysing that a child might have autism than a doctor in the field because they get to watch the child every day. They get to see the behaviours that might indicate that that child might have what might be autism spectrum disorder.

Senator COLBECK—And have to attempt to manage it.

Mr Lewis—That is right. And we do have consumers and providers on our advisory group—people who have been through it and have lived through it with their children.

Senator COLBECK—I think that settles my concerns, Chair. As long as there is that strong level of consultation across the spectrum.

Dr Harmer—Can I just go back to Senator Boyce's question and provide some clarification. I am advised that we were not consulted on that measure, nor would we have expected to be because the funding of the parliamentary liaison people was not funded from FaHCSIA. It was an initiative of the human services department with Centrelink, possibly funded out of Centrelink's infrastructure money, which they get directly. So it was not something that we would have expected to be consulted on.

Senator BOYCE—I just thought you may have been as a courtesy, given that it had the potential to affect the quality of service delivery on your behalf.

CHAIR—We will now break for dinner and come back at 7.30 to look at 3.1, except for Indigenous issues, which we covered, I hope, this morning, and then 3.2 and 4.1.

Proceedings suspended from 6.33 pm to 7.32 pm

CHAIR—Welcome back. I think we can start. Dr Harmer, one of the senators, who is looking at homelessness, needs to get away. When those housing officers arrive, can you let us know and we will do that. You wished to start with some answers to Senator Bernardi?

Dr Harmer—I do. My chief finance officer is here for that.

Mr Hunter—We took on a couple of questions previously and I can go through those for you. The first one was the disability assistance package—a \$2.5 million equity injection which relates to capital. That is for fit-out—that is, desks, phones, carpet and PCs—because we needed to take on some extra accommodation and needed to fit that out in the ACT and Brisbane. So the \$2.5 million relates just to the fit-out, not the operating costs.

Senator BERNARDI—Spread across those two locations?

Mr Hunter—Yes. The next question was to do with Minister Tanner's second reading speech, referring to \$189.8 million to assist people with disabilities, their families and carers. I probably need to step you through that. There are two parts to this. You were referring to the \$163.3 million on page 32 of the PAES. It is the net movement.

Senator BERNARDI—Yes.

Mr Hunter—There are two parts. Page 32 relates to the annual administered items plus the annual departmental. The \$189.8 million referred to by Minister Tanner is a combination of special appropriation, annual administered and departmental. Out of the \$189.8 million, \$132.3 million relates to special appropriations, and if you want to cross-reference it, that is

back to page 36 of the PAES, under 'special appropriation'. Page 32 is the total amount of annual administered adjustments and some new measures that are coming through on the departmental side for the department for 2007-08. That does not include the extra \$33 million that comes through Appropriation Bill (No. 4), which I will talk to you about in a moment. That is that question.

The next question I had was to do with CSTDA, page 44. We spoke about Minister Macklin's announcement by media release on 9 January, I think it was. The question was, 'How does the \$315 million relate to the \$636.9 million, which has now moved to \$669.952 million as the estimate?' I will just talk you through that. The \$315 million announcement basically is the second half. The CSTDA agreement expired at the end of December.

We spent around \$315 million per six months to the states. So two lots of that is around the \$630 million amount; \$636 million is the first estimate. We had the full-year impact for the states already factored into the estimate for 2007-08. The adjustment from \$669.952 million to \$636.916 million is \$33,036,000, which aligns with the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) adjustment, which is the unspent, uncommitted disability assistance package funds that have been redirected to the states for 2007-08.

The next question was about consultancies. The spend on consultancies for 2006-07 was \$29.6 million. If you want them, I can give you 2005-06 and 2004-05 as well. In 2005-06 it was \$39.7 million, so we had seen a spike there and there was a bit of a drop in 2006-07. In 2004-05 it was \$21.2 million. That gives you a bit of an idea of how it all flows through.

Senator BERNARDI—Are you able to give me a brief expansion on what that was spent, in broad terms; on legal and so on.

Mr Hunter—Consultancies across the department are used for research evaluation, program support, corporate support, IT.

Senator BERNARDI—Do you have figures attached to any of these?

Mr Hunter—No, I do not, Senator.

Dr Harmer—Our annual report gives you a breakdown of that expenditure.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you. I will look into that.

Mr Hunter—Then to the last one, which was huge. Some could say it was a Mitsubishi moment.

Senator BERNARDI—You watch the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves.

Mr Hunter—The \$12,000 difference. I could say: 'Trust me, I'm from the government. I'm here to help!' At page 32, outcome 2 says \$41.224 million, then you relate that back to page 44, which is the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) total, \$41.212 million.

Senator BERNARDI—Yes.

Mr Hunter—That is our \$12,000 difference. Basically, page 32 is the appropriation, and because of the appropriation—it is a bill; it is legislated—we have to recognise it. Page 44 recognises an adjustment to do with the machinery of government change through to DEEWR that we have allowed for the youth engagement. It is only small, but that makes up the majority of that \$12,000. The first one on page 32 aligns the appropriation bills.

Senator BERNARDI—Which is what Minister Tanner said. Okay.

Mr Hunter—The second side is the revised estimate. It is a section 32 Financial Management and Accountability Act transfer between the two departments for that changing the machinery of government; AAOs, basically.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you very much for your efforts.

CHAIR—Mr Hunter, why can't there be a little notation to say that? On these documents often you have to read everything on the top of the page, and then you have to go to the bottom of the page where there are a whole lot of footnotes that explain things. Why would there not be a footnote of that kind to explain that? Maybe I should not have asked.

Mr Hunter—No, it is just that the trick there is that the numbers we are talking about in that document are significant.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Hunter—I think to spot that was outstanding. I mean that sincerely. It was not an easy one for us to work through to actually justify because of the number. But you are right: we need to be able to justify these things. But given the magnitude of the numbers in the book that does not even show up on the radar in the green.

Senator BERNARDI—I accept that. I understand that it could be deemed a rounding error in terms of the whole budget, but because it was printed there and it differed, I thought it did warrant checking.

Mr Hunter—Yes.

Senator BERNARDI—But I am not available to head in to the financial audit office.

Mr Hunter—No, I know.

Senator BERNARDI—Don't think of making me an offer! But thank you very much. I do appreciate it.

CHAIR—Now, as the officers have not arrived yet—

Dr Harmer—They will be here at eight o'clock, Senator, I am told.

[7.40 pm]

CHAIR—We will move to item 3.1, 'Support for families relating to matters other than Indigenous matters'.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to ask about family relationship centres and follow up on the line of questioning that we have now gone through in several estimates rounds. I do appreciate that you have been working on the system. I refer to FRSP online. We have had this ongoing discussion about it being a primary data collection system. Last time I was asking about the sensitive nature of the data that was being collected and you were then reporting that you had commissioned a privacy impact review, if you remember. Can I follow up some of that review? Has that been released publicly?

Ms Beauchamp—It has not been released but I am happy to hand over to Robyn.

Ms Fleming—The privacy impact assessments have been completed. The report is only just completed and the reports are with the minister for consideration.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Will they be released publicly or has the decision not been made yet?

Ms Fleming—The decision has not yet been made.

Senator SIEWERT—That makes my next line of questions very difficult because you are obviously not going to be able to tell me anything about it. When you say, 'Just been given to the minister,' is that last week, last month? Is it recent?

Ms Fleming—It is very recent.

Mr Hazlehurst—It is recent, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—I am trying to establish how long it is likely to be.

Mr Hazlehurst—We have been working with consultants and a legal firm to work through the issues. The reports, in a draft form, became available towards the end of last year, but obviously with the caretaker period, the election and the incoming government, we have been working through those issues and are now in a position to actually engage the minister on those issues. We would anticipate wanting to work with the sector, as we have been to date, around what has come out of those reports, but we are not in a position to really discuss them in detail today.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry. You have already started talking to the sector about it?

Mr Hazlehurst—We have been engaging with the sector around the system and their concerns around privacy issues right from the beginning, so it would be our intention to continue to do that.

Senator SIEWERT—Do I understand that what you said earlier was that you are already looking at the recommendations and looking at the draft and talking to some solicitors? Does that mean that you are actually already starting to progress some of the recommendations that have come out of the report: you have already started to think about how to implement them? Would that be a correct interpretation, without verballing you?

Ms Fleming—In framing our advice to the minister, we have obviously had some discussions around some of the findings of the reports and considered things, but we have been discussing with the board some options for discussions with the sector.

Senator SIEWERT—You probably will not tell me this, but I am going to ask it anyway and you can just tell me no: have there been issues identified with privacy, with the way the data is being collected and what data has been collected, through this review?

Dr Harmer—Senator, we would be unwise to talk about it. If we have just given it to the minister and the minister is considering it, we really ought to do her the courtesy of allowing her to have a look at the information first, rather than reading it in *Hansard*.

Senator SIEWERT—I do appreciate what you are saying. As you know, the service providers have been very concerned about the collecting of this data. Feedback to me is that they are not very comfortable with collecting this data, as you know from discussions we have had previously. If it turns out that there are issues, obviously the service providers are going to

want to know fairly soon—well, straightaway—if in fact their concerns are confirmed and start putting in place alternative measures. That is why I am interested in it. I am obviously interested in the report, but I am interested in the outcome.

Mr Hazlehurst—Senator, if either of the reports had provided us with advice of any significant concerns about privacy, naturally enough we would have acted very quickly.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Mr Hazlehurst—But that is probably about as much as I can say.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. I am not trying to make you uncomfortable.

Dr Harmer—That is about as much as he can say, but that gives you a guide as to—

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, thank you. I appreciate that. Last time we also talked about the voluntary nature of the provision of some of this information and you undertook, if you recall—and I know it was some time ago—

Dr Harmer—I remember well, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—to go back to the service providers and actually reinforce that it is voluntary so that that could then be conveyed to the clients. Has that been done and how was it done?

Ms Fleming—It has been subsumed within some of the studies that we have undertaken as part of the privacy impact assessment, and recommendations around that have been brought in. But we have had discussions with the sector generally.

Senator SIEWERT—I was a little bit worried when you first started answering, but you have had actual discussions with the service providers to reinforce that voluntary nature of the information?

Ms Fleming—Through the FRSA board and other mechanisms.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, I did not hear that.

Ms Fleming—The peak body, Family Relationship Services Australia.

Senator SIEWERT—Through their board?

Ms Fleming—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Thanks. Do you have any data on what proportion of clients are now volunteering that information?

Ms Fleming—Yes, Senator—because there remain some data transitioning issues between systems.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Fleming—Just by way of background, some providers have their own systems and so their data system is transferred to our data system, and that has not been as smooth a process as either parties would have liked.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Ms Fleming—There are approximately 190,000 registered clients on the system for 2006-07 and approximately 49,000 unregistered clients, but those unregistered client numbers are not yet complete because of the transitioning issues we are having with some of our providers.

Senator SIEWERT—So 190,000 clients.

Ms Fleming—Registered clients and 49,000 unregistered clients.

Senator SIEWERT—I do not know if you collect this type of information, but is that portion lower for Aboriginal clients?

Ms Fleming—We do not analyse the unregistered client data, so I would not be in a position to tell you that.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that.

Ms Fleming—Of the registered clients we had for 2006-07, 1.7 per cent were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Senator SIEWERT—I do not know if you were riveted to the debate that was held when the Family Law Act was changed and the centres were developed. The question that was asked at the time was: how do you meet the needs of remote and regional clients, particularly Aboriginal clients? It seems to me that that 1.7 per cent means that we are not meeting the needs of Aboriginal clients. Am I correct in interpreting those figures that way?

Ms Fleming—I would not interpret the figures that way. Registered clients are those clients registered for a particular type of service intervention. It might be a parenting plan; it might be a contact service; it might be a counselling service. Unregistered clients are not necessarily those that have declined to give their personal details. It is often associated with group work around marriage, education and other group work where it is not practical for people to give their details. One point seven per cent is generally proportionate over the population, but we are endeavouring to do more within the service structure to meet the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

Senator SIEWERT—I think the proportion is slightly lower. I might come back to that in a minute. If people refuse to provide details, are they limited in their access to services in any way or do they receive the same services?

Ms Fleming—No, they receive the same service.

Senator SIEWERT—Other than the information interface problems they seem to be having, are service providers having any further problems with the data collection process?

Ms Fleming—My understanding is that most of the system is working correctly from the data collection. There is a problem with the transfer between some of the larger agencies, because they use a particular internal data system, but everyone else is uploading the data onto the system and the system is operating effectively.

Senator SIEWERT—I bounced straight into this process and I forgot to ask my budget question—and it is probably for the minister—and that was in relation to the ongoing funding commitment to the centres. Is that something that the government envisages?

Senator McLucas—It will be a part of the budget process, as all decisions will be.

Senator SIEWERT—Has the dividends cut also been applied to this program?

Dr Harmer—The efficiency dividend?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Dr Harmer—No; that applies to departmental running costs only. It does not cut across this. Ms Fleming might be able to answer in relation to the current forward estimates and commitment for the program.

Ms Fleming—The program at this stage, as we understand it, for the FaHCSIA part of the program has ongoing funding, and service providers are having their contracts renewed. That decision has been continued by the current government.

Senator SIEWERT—Did you say renewed?

Ms Fleming—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—When do the current contracts expire?

Ms Fleming—There is a rolling program of expiries. We have a series of program grants running from 2005 to 2008. All of those funding programs are being renewed for three years. We have another period of grants that started in 2006-07, which were being funded for two years. They are having a one-year extension, which brings them up to a three-year period, and of course the 2007-08 funding was announced in January and they will have three years. So everyone within the FaHCSIA programs will be on three-year rolling funding.

Senator SIEWERT—In relation to those that are being renewed, you have not had to go out to tender again? You can just roll over their—

Ms Fleming—The decision has been taken by the previous government to extend those contracts for three years, and that was confirmed by this government.

Mr Hazlehurst—Subject of course to satisfactory performance.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. I take it as read that you would not fund anyone that was not meeting their KPIs. Thank you for that. Are you able to tell me how much it has cost to implement the online system?

Ms Fleming—Yes. By the end of June 2008 it will be a little under \$1 million.

Senator SIEWERT—Have you done any evaluation of the online system? Is it actually doing what you want it to do?

Ms Fleming—We have not undertaken a formal evaluation of the system, but our expectation is that the system reporting portal will be released to the sector in March, and that will give providers online access to their own data at any time. The reporting function for the department is operational and we hope to be releasing the reporting function for service providers in March. So it is fulfilling its functions.

Mr Hazlehurst—It is worth flagging that the system itself commenced its operation beyond its pilot phase at the beginning of 2007—

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, so we have had 12 months worth of—

Mr Hazlehurst—and we are continuing to work through and review some of the issues that have emerged in that time. The actual implementation will be complete in March, when this portal will become available for service providers to run their own reporting.

Senator SIEWERT—I asked that question because it is my understanding that one of the reasons you want to do this is so you can track people through the system, and we had a long conversation about that last time. I would like to know if that is proving effective. Is it doing what you wanted it to do?

Ms Fleming—I would like to clarify that it was not so that the department could track people through the system but, rather, so that service providers could facilitate transfer of a client from one service provider to another so that they themselves could assess the client's data. It is not for the department; it is just that we run the database for the sector.

Senator SIEWERT—That is a bit of a different interpretation from what I got from our last discussion and what I have been told by service providers. Was it here or in Attorney-General's that we had a discussion around tracking people through the system and multiple users of the system et cetera? I thought that was one of the reasons the government wanted to have it in place.

Ms Fleming—One of the issues that we continue to work on with the sector body—the industry board—is communication of the purpose for this data, and we are hopeful that, once the reporting portal is available to the sector, they will be able to confirm for themselves the data and its uses and be reassured about how the data is being used.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand the point that you are making. Thank you. I have some more questions but I am aware that I am taking quite a bit of time so I will hand over.

Senator BOYCE—I do not have any more questions in that area but I do have a couple of general questions. I want to confirm page 48, table 2.3.1, childcare services support and Jobs Education and Training childcare fee assistance.

Dr Harmer—Senator, if you have got any questions on child care, child care is no longer with us. Did you know that?

Senator BOYCE—That is why I have this question; why is there still \$142,000 in the revised estimates for you?

Dr Harmer—Which page did you say?

Senator BOYCE—Page 48.

Dr Harmer—Childcare services support, is it?

Senator BOYCE—And the next line too, of course.

Dr Harmer—I will need to get my chief finance officer to answer the questions on the numbers on this page.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you.

Dr Harmer—I am sure he will be able to figure it out. He is very good at this.

Senator BOYCE—They always are. Are you right to go, or will I keep going?

Dr Harmer—You might have to repeat the question, Senator.

Senator BOYCE—Page 48, table 2.3.1: administered appropriations: childcare services support and Jobs Education Training childcare fee assistance. I understood that they disappeared out of this department. It is not as if it is a half-year figure or something. I do not understand the figure.

Mr Hunter—Senator, we are reflecting there what our actual spend has been. We have done the section 32 administered transfer to the gaining agency, DEEWR, but we are basically saying there that the figure for childcare services and JET, from the date that we have made that adjustment, would be based on the end of January data.

Senator BOYCE—So it is for seven months?

Mr Hunter—Yes. That is taking the actual, whereas the residual budget has been transferred to DEEWR, and that would be showing up in their estimates.

Senator BOYCE—Sorry. I had initially looked at it and thought, ‘Well, if they’re both 50 per cent, that’s for six months.’ So there was a considerable underspend in the JET childcare fee assistance. Is that what you are telling me?

Mr Hunter—Yes, basically. From that point, we are saying that we have taken the total budget and allocated out for the time that we have had it, up until the end of January, what we have spent. The residual budget we have then transferred to the gaining agency under that section 32 administered transfer, and that is now in DEEWR. So the residual balance would be under DEEWR’s PA.

Senator BOYCE—I do not quite understand what child care is doing in DEEWR but I am trying to understand how the finances got moved across. That is the only question I have in that area. My other question related to support for families, within the context of the social inclusion agenda. What involvement has FaHCSIA had in social inclusion and agenda setting?

Ms Beauchamp—That is a very broad question but I can attempt to answer it through some of the programs that we administer. When we are looking at social inclusion, obviously we are looking at services for families with children, people with disabilities, and Indigenous people. It probably cuts across all of the client groups that our whole department is responsible for. In the context of what we are looking at through this output, it is primarily for services for families with children that revolve around things like the Family Relationships Services Program and parenting appropriation. It provides playgroups and those sorts of things. They are the types of programs that we fund.

Dr Harmer—Minister Macklin and the department will be quite heavily involved in the social inclusion agenda. We have been having discussions with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, who have prime responsibility for setting up the unit. I think Senator Stephens has some responsibility, as has our minister, and the Deputy Prime Minister in DEEWR also. There is a lot of work going on in terms of what the social inclusion agenda means for the new government. It is very important to this portfolio and we will be heavily involved.

Senator BOYCE—What we had in the past was an implicit social inclusion agenda; we now have an overt social inclusion agenda. I was trying to work out what that meant in terms

of inputs from FaHCSIA into that unit within PM&C and resources that you would be contributing towards it.

Dr Harmer—We have already contributed some resources to it.

Ms Beauchamp—To the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Senator BOYCE—What are those resources?

Ms Beauchamp—They are only departmental resources. The sorts of things where we would be able to provide some real value-add in terms of the whole agenda is looking at those community based programs and other supports for the less advantaged. It has been made clear that the government does want to take both a case based approach to disadvantaged families and a place based approach. Our department is well positioned to do that with some of the community based programs and income support measures for families. We will have quite a bit to add in terms of some of the programs we have.

Senator BOYCE—When you say ‘departmental resources’, what do you mean by that?

Ms Beauchamp—On page 22 of the portfolio additional estimates paper, we have provided departmental funds to contribute to the establishment of that unit.

Senator SIEWERT—Going back to the data issues—

Dr Harmer—Chair, we now have the Housing people here.

CHAIR—They have arrived. Senator Siewert, if you could hold that question, and with the agreement of the department—and we do appreciate your help—if we could have the Housing people come forward. Senator Payne.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I must particularly thank the committee. I do really appreciate your assistance in facilitating this and, Dr Harmer, your departmental officers in doing the same. I have very brief questions in four areas; I do not think it will take very long. The first is in relation to the recent announcement on homelessness and the development of the green paper and then white paper on homelessness. When I had a look at the announcement—both the statement and the document—particularly in relation to homeless young people aged between 12 and 24, it calculates 36,173 people between those ages as homeless. I understand that they are probably 2001 census figures. Are there any current or updated figures available?

Mr Rosenberg—The 2006 census figures are being analysed now. We do not expect them out for another four or five months.

Dr Harmer—We would like to have more recent data, Senator, but we have to rely on the census for this.

Senator PAYNE—You cannot invent what you do not have, Dr Harmer, I understand that, although it does put an interesting perspective on the timing that the government set on the green and the white papers in terms of dealing with the real numbers.

Mr Rosenberg—We are obviously talking to the relevant authorities, like ABS, to see if we can get some early preliminary data.

Senator PAYNE—They do guard it very jealously, though, I think.

Mr Rosenberg—They do, and also we have to be careful about the status of preliminary data just because of the level of analysis.

Senator PAYNE—So the green paper and the white paper will be put together without the benefit of those updated figures, basically?

Dr Harmer—I suspect that we may have pretty good information about the 2006 census data by the time the white paper comes out. We certainly will not by the time the green paper comes out.

Senator PAYNE—In the document which accompanied the announcement, there are obviously the figures of analysis which indicate that very significant number of young homeless Australians. In the new approach that this statement has flagged, is there a specific proposal or plan to address youth homelessness?

Mr Rosenberg—It is a bit too early to say, Senator. As you pointed out, the minister and the Prime Minister only recently announced this process. As part of the process, there will be a green paper developed which will have some tentative ways forward, and that will be tested through public consultation. There is clearly a wealth of literature and experience from the last decade and more about what works and what does not work, and we will be drawing that together in the green paper. But it certainly would be pre-emptive to talk about particular measures right now.

Senator PAYNE—One wonders whether former Commissioner Brian Burdekin will be tempted to make a foray into the policy area again. You referred, Mr Rosenberg, to the last decade. There have been a number of programs over the years and recently things like Reconnect, YouthLinks, Transition to Independent Living and JPET, Job Placement, Employment and Training. Is there a commitment to the continuation of those programs?

Mr Rosenberg—There are current commitments to those programs. I cannot pre-empt government decisions into the future. There is evidence around the impact of those programs which we take into account in this process.

Senator PAYNE—When you look at the dollars that go into dealing particularly with youth homelessness, where does the division lie between the Commonwealth and the states? Can you give me some idea of the Commonwealth contribution vis-a-vis the states.

Mr Rosenberg—It is complex, because of course homelessness is such a complex phenomenon and the services that apply to it and impact on it are so diverse. But if you look at the most core, familiar service—that is, Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, SAAP, which would be the youth refuges and other shelters—that is a Commonwealth-state program, as you are probably aware, and essentially it is fifty-fifty. So the Commonwealth puts in half the money and the states put in a proportional share each. At the moment the SAAP 5 agreement, which we are halfway through, has commitments from all jurisdictions to continue that until 2010.

Senator PAYNE—SAAP 5—is that the \$932 million?

Mr Rosenberg—Correct.

Senator PAYNE—And you are telling me that the \$932 million is a fifty-fifty split?

Mr Rosenberg—Yes, it is \$930 million. That is the Australian government's share.

Senator PAYNE—That is the Australian government's share, yes.

Mr Rosenberg—So double that is the total SAAP budget.

Senator PAYNE—Has the proportion of the state contribution changed over the years or has it been consistent?

Mr Rosenberg—It has been roughly consistent. I think some states have occasionally put in differing amounts but very broadly it has been fifty-fifty.

Senator PAYNE—In conclusion on this particular issue, the National Homeless Strategy, which the previous government brought forward in the 2005-06 financial year, was about a \$10 million budget allocation. What is its current status?

Mr Rosenberg—There is funding for that program.

Senator PAYNE—So that continues, pending this whole process of green and white paper and—

Mr Rosenberg—That is right, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—In terms of FaHCSIA's own approach to the process, when you are trying to pinpoint effective service delivery, is there a view about the effectiveness of web based delivery—access to that by young people. Do you have a specific focus on that sort of service information available via the web for people who may be homeless and seeking support?

Mr Rosenberg—There is no specific view on that, but that is certainly one of the routes of engagement for young people we will be looking at, and we will certainly be looking at the evidence that already exists with programs that use a web approach.

Senator PAYNE—One of the initiatives which was announced during the election campaign period and has been confirmed since, as I understand it, is the scheme known as the National Rental Affordability Scheme. Am I still in the right area, broadly speaking?

CHAIR—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—I know that that got some coverage this week with the very large conference in Sydney. As I understand it, the arrangements of the scheme would allow, for example, a superannuation fund to build new dwellings—either homes or units—and to rent those to a sector of households, low and middle income basically, at 20 per cent below the market rate of what are described as equivalent properties in the area. Have I got that basically right?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—Then the investors who are doing that construction get a per dwelling incentive of \$6,000 a year?

Mr Leeper—The Commonwealth's contribution to the subsidy would be \$6,000. We are also looking for a contribution from the states of at least \$2,000 to add to the Commonwealth contribution.

Senator PAYNE—And that goes to the investor as well?

Mr Leeper—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—So an investor develops a property with the sorts of dwellings that fit the criteria which we have established and people move into them. That is fine. What happens if the ownership of a dwelling changes hands in that process? What happens to the incentive payment?

Dr Harmer—The program that you are speaking of is due to start from 1 July. The funding is for 2008-09. There is a process underway at the moment that was kicked off on 5 December with the COAG meeting. There is a housing working group. That housing working group is working through the detailed implementation plans for this program and a range of the other commitments with the new government. Clearly, in the housing area these programs will be most effective if the Commonwealth and the states are working together. Here, there is a commitment from the state of \$2,000, as well as the \$6,000 from the Commonwealth, and local government are involved in some of these. The sorts of issues you are talking about—how it will work, how we will avoid leakage of the subsidies when houses are sold et cetera—are currently being worked through. There is already a pretty well-developed plan looking at those specific issues and making sure that we have something we can recommend to government in terms of the detailed implementation plan of that policy.

Senator PAYNE—Does that consultation process include perhaps peak body representatives of those potential investors?

Mr Leeper—Yes. We are doing that at the moment, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—So they are having an input into how this practical side of the process would work for them?

Mr Leeper—Yes. We are consulting them about the broad design parameters of the scheme, yes.

Senator PAYNE—There may be a couple of other questions here which fall into the same category. Please just tell me they are part of the process, and I will move on. If you are the government and you are trying to work out who is entitled to receive the incentive and also which areas are the appropriate areas—I am sorry, may I ask how an appropriate area for the development is determined? Can investors build them wherever they wish to?

Mr Leeper—Those are design details that we are working through at the present time and those decisions are yet to be taken by the government.

Senator PAYNE—Would that be the same answer to how you actually go about determining what is the market rate and then subtracting 20 per cent from that?

Mr Leeper—I think that is a bit more objective. We would be relying on some objective indicators of the relevant market rent, and we imagine that at the end of each tax year somebody will need to certify that the market rent for the property was X, the tenant had been charged X minus 20 per cent, and therefore the investor was entitled to the tax credit, just on basic verification.

Senator PAYNE—Say the renter is in the lucky circumstance of enjoying an increase in their income, perhaps has a job and so on. What if they wanted to stay there and pay a higher

rent? Are those sorts of things going to be negotiable, or will they be asked to leave the premises?

Mr Leeper—Again, I think those are design parameters which we are yet to have considered by government, so I probably could not comment here.

Senator PAYNE—These are perhaps questions for the parliamentary secretary, not necessarily the department. You could characterise the policy approach as giving quite wealthy investors pretty significant tax breaks and also then suggesting that state governments make direct transfers to investors. I am curious about the government's view on how this really assists in addressing whether or not we have sufficient rental properties in the first place. I mean, is this addressing the root cause, do you think?

Dr Harmer—The government certainly believes it. There are a lot of people who have been working on proposals to increase the supply of affordable housing for some time, and they have been speaking with us, including involving industry and academics et cetera. The National Rental Affordability Scheme is quite closely aligned to some of the work that had been done by academics, with industry and interested bodies. So this idea, as a way of increasing the supply of affordable rental housing, has been pretty carefully worked through, frankly. We have got quite a good start, as we work with our colleagues in the states, and as we have consulted, as Mr Leeper has said, with people in the finance industry et cetera, about the workability of it.

Senator PAYNE—There is obviously a bit of detail that you are still working on, Dr Harmer.

Dr Harmer—So it is.

Mr Leeper—The key to it is that it is easy to give someone some financial assistance to reduce the impact of rental stress on the household income. That can be done by subsidy. What this program also seeks to achieve is to increase the stock of dwellings which are available for rental, which will put downward pressure on overall rents. About 150,000 buildings—dwellings, units, whatever—are constructed in Australia each year. By the end of the fourth year, the plan is to have 50,000 dwellings constructed under this program, which is a significant net addition to the stock of new buildings. So it is not just an individual renter effect.

Senator PAYNE—No, I understand that.

Mr Leeper—It is also a significant supply-side response.

Dr Harmer—And the plan is to make it attractive to investors and organisations that are not currently investing in housing to invest in housing.

Senator PAYNE—While we are talking about numbers, the minister is quoted in a report in the *Australian* on 30 January in relation to the first meeting, I think, on the National Rental Affordability Scheme, as saying:

... we are now over 30,000 homes short across the country.

I wonder if you can indicate to me where that number comes from. It is not a number that I have been able to pin down elsewhere.

Mr Leeper—The housing working group first met on 31 January.

Senator PAYNE—Yes. The report was on the 30th, that is all.

Mr Leeper—I believe the 30,000 is an industry estimate of the difference between the supply of dwellings coming through the pipeline and the natural population requirements, household formation, all the demand-side factors.

Dr Harmer—I suspect it is an industry estimate.

Senator PAYNE—Could you confirm that for me on notice.

Dr Harmer—We can, and it will be based on, as Mr Leeper said, the household formation rate, the migration numbers would be a factor, and the completion figures for housing. The gap is how that figure is derived.

Senator PAYNE—I would appreciate the clarification that that is where that does come from—thank you. Briefly, on the CSHA which I referred to earlier in the discussion, the new CSHA is under negotiation at the moment, is it? No, actually I was talking about SAAP before, not the CSHA—sorry.

Mr Leeper—The Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement expires on 30 June this year. In the election commitments and in subsequent policy statements, the government has emphasised that it wants to develop a new national affordable housing agreement, which would comprehend the territory covered by the CSHA plus some additional factors. For example, Commonwealth rent assistance, which is about a \$2.2 billion program for private renters, was outside of the CSHA, but it is potentially inside the boundary of the national affordable housing agreements.

Senator PAYNE—I see.

Mr Leeper—Again, that is work that is ahead of us, and it is advice that we need to provide to the government. So, apart from indicating general timetables, I do not think I can go much further.

Senator PAYNE—I appreciate that, though. Are there any other additional factors that may also be in contemplation, such as that?

Dr Harmer—Within the proposed national affordable housing agreement, in addition to rent assistance, it may also include—

Senator PAYNE—That may also fall into a new CSHA.

Dr Harmer—Yes, it may be a much bigger, broader, encompassing agreement, which maybe even includes reference to some of the other initiatives that the government has talked about including, even the National Rental Affordability Scheme and the Housing Affordability Fund and various other matters.

Senator PAYNE—On the question of public housing, can you clarify for me, in terms of the Commonwealth CSHA contribution, whether part of that goes to maintenance of improvement in public housing stock?

Ms Wall—Yes, it goes towards maintenance and improvements, as well as capital funding for new accommodation and for some of the recurrent costs of public housing program.

Senator PAYNE—On numbers of additional public housing, over the life of the current agreement, which is about to expire, how much additional public housing have the states and territories actually contributed?

Dr Harmer—It varies from state to state, but because of the high costs of maintenance and management of the dwellings, and the heavily subsidised rentals that are charged—a proportion of the income support payment usually, 25 per cent—most state housing authorities are running at a loss. The additions to the stock—and I am giving Ms Wall time to have a look—have been very small indeed. In some cases, states have added to the stock. In many states the stock has declined as states have sold stock to maintain their balance sheets and fund refurbishment and maintenance et cetera.

Senator PAYNE—Notwithstanding how much they get from the Commonwealth to support public housing—interesting.

Senator BERNARDI—On that, whilst you are still searching for information, do you have access to the number of houses or accommodations that are still in public housing that are uninhabitable due to the state of repair or disrepair?

Dr Harmer—I am not sure we do.

Ms Wall—We have houses that are not inhabited, so to speak, but we do not necessarily have figures for houses that are uninhabitable. As you will appreciate, there is a certain amount of turnover at any point in time. So when we get our figures at 30 June of the financial year, there will be some dwellings, as there would be in the private rental market, that are not occupied. But it is a very small number.

Senator BERNARDI—Yes, but are they not occupied because they are not in a fit state of repair for occupation?

Mr Leeper—I think Ms Wall is indicating that we can only tell you about the number of vacant dwellings. They are vacant because either they are turning over or because they are awaiting repair. We cannot separate them.

Dr Harmer—We do not have a breakdown of the reason for vacancy.

Ms Wall—I should say, there is quite a bit of information in the Housing Assistance Acts annual report that is tabled in parliament on public housing, including the stock.

Senator PAYNE—So you cannot give me a figure now of the number of new houses that the states and territories have contributed?

Ms Wall—It depends which time frame you are looking for. I have got figures here, for example, from June 1998 to June 2006, but that is not exactly the term of the current agreement.

Senator PAYNE—No.

Ms Wall—The term of the current agreement will be in this, and I will see if I can find you the figures.

Senator PAYNE—No, that is fine. You can have a look at that but, Ms Wall, if it is easier to clarify on notice, then that would be helpful. Chair, I have two other questions about Commonwealth land. There was a statement made by Mr Rudd on 16 October, which was

released publicly, which indicated an intention to revamp the Commonwealth property disposals policy. Is that in this area as well?

Mr Leeper—Yes and no, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—Yes and no?

Mr Leeper—It is one of the five election commitments in the housing area which is being looked at by the housing working group of the Council of Australian Governments, but the principal carriage of disposal of Commonwealth land is held by the Department of Finance and Deregulation.

Dr Harmer—So it is a continuing initiative which we have some involvement with, but it is not under our carriage completely.

Senator PAYNE—Dr Harmer, based on your department's involvement, can you indicate what progress has been made on the revamping?

Dr Harmer—We have had quite a lot of discussion in the COAG working group, which includes Treasury, premiers department people and housing department people. Minister Plibersek chairs that group, and I cannot say very much. We have got a paper that will go to COAG at the end of March on that issue.

Senator PAYNE—Does your department contribute to the audit process for the audit of Commonwealth land?

Mr Leeper—Not directly—as far as I am aware, no. That was conducted by the department of finance or Treasury. I do not recall which.

Senator PAYNE—Chair, can I again thank you particularly, the committee members, Dr Harmer and his officers for their assistance with these issues. I appreciate it very much.

CHAIR—Are there any other questions under this outcome while we have the officers at the table?

Senator BERNARDI—Chair, I have some questions, but I am happy to cede the floor to anyone else.

CHAIR—Does anyone else have anything on 4.1? I think, Senator Bernardi, you have worn them down, so if you have questions on 4.1—

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you, I do. Can I take you to homelessness again, and I know Senator Payne has touched on this. A chair has been appointed to the steering committee: Mr Tony Nicholson. Have the other members of the steering committee been appointed?

Mr Rosenberg—Yes. The minister announced the appointments a bit over a week ago, and they are Anna Buduls and Heather Nancarrow.

Senator BERNARDI—Just three of them on that steering committee?

Mr Rosenberg—Just the three. Correct.

Senator BERNARDI—Has the department allocated some staff to assist them in their pursuit of this white paper?

Mr Rosenberg—Yes, we have. In fact, I head up a task force that will be assisting the steering group.

Senator BERNARDI—How many of you are there in that task force?

Mr Rosenberg—In terms of the direct task, there are around seven staff. There are also a number of others, obviously, who will have an indirect role because of their knowledge of programs and related policy issues.

Senator BERNARDI—And the journey to a green paper is expected to take how long?

Mr Rosenberg—The minister has announced that the green paper is likely to be publicly released in May.

Senator BERNARDI—Is there an expectation of when the white paper—

Mr Rosenberg—In September-October.

Senator BERNARDI—That was covered before by Senator Payne.

Mr Leeper—August-September, I think, Senator, is the time frame that was indicated in the public announcements.

Senator BERNARDI—Is that task force reporting directly to the minister?

Mr Rosenberg—That is right.

Senator BERNARDI—The steering committee, I beg your pardon.

Mr Rosenberg—The task force is assisting the steering group to do so.

Senator BERNARDI—And the task force would report to the steering committee and to the secretary.

Mr Rosenberg—That is right.

Senator BERNARDI—Is the department working with other agencies to develop services to assist the homeless outside of simply providing accommodation for them? I am talking about areas such as education, training, financial literacy and things of that nature—things that have contributed to them being homeless in the first place.

Mr Rosenberg—In the statement that was issued by the Prime Minister in late January, there was explicit mention of programs and services that are outside housing and shelter and the importance of looking at broad service systems. There are things like education, general engagement with the labour force, juvenile justice, mental health, drugs and alcohol—a whole suite of critical services—that need to be looked at in our homelessness response.

Senator BERNARDI—What plans do you then have to incorporate that suite of services and facilitate it within the realm of FaHCSIA?

Mr Rosenberg—Again, it would not be so much in the realm of FaHCSIA. The task that we have in front of us, that I think the Prime Minister has been quite clear about, will be a national approach. So it will need to have a collaborate relationship with states and territories, certainly across the Australian government as well, to look at the broad range of programs and services it would impact.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you for that. Dr Harmer, the department has revenue from other sources in the additional estimates. Could you share with us what the revenue comprises in broad terms?

Dr Harmer—I will need to get my chief finance officer—

Senator BERNARDI—He will be watching!

Dr Harmer—He will be watching.

Senator BERNARDI—He does not have a personality, he told us.

Dr Harmer—He will be here soon.

Senator BERNARDI—I will wait for him to come down. There was a large special appropriation for disaster recovery payments. What was that for?

Dr Harmer—It will be making payments for victims of floods and cyclones and fires and all the things that the government has initiated the Australian government disaster recovery payment for. The minister has just signed off on a new AGDR for the Mackay floods. Previous to that, there were a range of other disasters, including Cyclone Larry in Innisfail et cetera. That is what the appropriation is for, and the fluctuations in it depend on the nature and the magnitude of the disaster, the number of people impacted by it and the number of people eligible for the disaster recovery payment.

Senator BERNARDI—The most significant that I can see was the equine workers hardship fund. Has the equine workers' hardship been resolved, if I can put it like that?

Dr Harmer—I will need to take that on notice.

Mr Leeper—The general principle is that, in disaster situations or situations where income assistance is provided, it can be left open for a while because people may test their eligibility some time after the formal circumstances of the event have passed. About this time a year ago, I think we were actually handing back unspent moneys for Cyclone Larry because fewer people had come forward than had been anticipated. I have just been advised that, in relation to the equine assistance, there was an extension of the period, so we will probably need to make further provision for that in the appropriations.

Senator BERNARDI—It is quite a significant amount of money, of course. It is \$28 million. Before I get off this topic, what is community engagement? There is a figure here of \$2.3 million for community engagement.

Dr Harmer—What page are you on, Senator?

Senator BERNARDI—It is table 2.4.1, but it is on outcome 4. I have a copy here.

Dr Harmer—Do you have a page reference, Senator?

Senator BERNARDI—It is 52. You will see that community engagement has lifted from \$63,377 to \$65,682. I will refer that to your financial officer.

Dr Harmer—If my chief financial officer does not know, there are program people who can explain that. I think my chief financial officer is indicating that he does not know.

Senator BERNARDI—I am happy to take it on notice. I do not want you running around.

Dr Harmer—We can certainly provide it for you.

Senator BERNARDI—Yes, please.

Dr Harmer—Senator, I am told that the people who would know the answer to that very quickly are not here, so we will take it on notice.

Senator BERNARDI—That is fine. Yes, I am happy with that. The other revenues?

Mr Hunter—Is that in the financial statements or in a table that you are looking at, Senator?

Senator BERNARDI—We are looking at table 2.2.1, revenue from other sources, section 31 of the financial management—

Mr Hunter—Page 45?

Senator BERNARDI—Once again, it is a relatively small amount of money, but I am wondering what commercial operations there are.

Mr Hunter—Senator, I think I will have to take that one on notice, because we have other revenue that comes through in terms of the financial statements on the departmental side, which is in the order of \$29 million.

Senator BERNARDI—I am happy for you to take it on notice. I think that is all I have on housing.

CHAIR—We have a general question on that same table. Senator Carol Brown has it. Thank you, Senator Bernardi.

Dr Harmer—I will make sure my chief finance officer does not leave the table.

Mr Leeper—We are on page 45. Is that right?

CHAIR—Page 52, with the ex gratia payments. We thought that while we had the finance officer here, we would get the—

Senator CAROL BROWN—Can you explain, at the beginning, the ex gratia payment for ‘Brendan’s fund’. What is that about?

CHAIR—We ticked off the other ones and we knew what they were, but we did not know what ‘Brendan’s fund’ was.

Senator BERNARDI—That was the guy who intervened in that kidnapping.

Mr Jennaway—Brendan was the individual who was shot in that mid-city Melbourne incident when he was helping a woman, and so a fund has been set up in response to that.

CHAIR—The department set up the fund?

Mr Leeper—No, this is a measure. The previous government provided money through the appropriations and that is being brought to account through additional estimates.

Senator CAROL BROWN—How does it work? Is it for medical expenses? What is it for?

Mr Leeper—I think it is an Australian government contribution to the foundation which has been set up. To look at how the money might be used, you would need to look at the terms of the foundation itself.

CHAIR—It would be on the ‘Brendan’s fund’ website?

Mr Leeper—I imagine so.

Mr Jennaway—Senator, it says here that it is a one-off grant of \$0.4 million to Brendan’s fund. I do not have any additional details.

CHAIR—That is what the table says, Mr Jennaway—that it is a one-off grant to Brendan’s fund—but we will check it out.

Dr Harmer—I understand why it would raise a question.

CHAIR—We have not seen it before. Thank you very much. Senator Bernardi, have you finished on homelessness?

Senator BERNARDI—Yes, thank you.

CHAIR—I am checking around the table—4.1: Housing.

Senator BERNARDI—I am pretty right with housing, Senator.

CHAIR—Senator Siewert, do you have anything on housing? Last chance!

Senator SIEWERT—No.

Dr Harmer—The chief finance officer can now answer the senator’s question.

Mr Hunter—In relation to those tables that you were referring to—the 2.1—that is allocating the total departmental other receipts. If I take you to table 1.8 on page 34, it totals \$29.2 million for 2007-08. That is our estimate at this point in time. That is picked up by a few things. We have got resources provided free of charge by the ANAO. That is the audit that they do for financial statements. That is around \$1.3 million. We have got sale of goods—that can be anything up to photocopying that we could charge for. We have got some other revenue with lease incentives that are coming through there; also the Common Services Agreement, which is a contribution that we manage but is a contribution by other departments, flows through to that.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Mr Hunter—That is the total of the \$29.2 million. The table that you are looking at at 2.2.1, 2.11 and so forth, as it flows through the outcomes, is the attribution of that other revenue applied across the outcomes for departmental.

Senator BERNARDI—You are earning your money tonight, aren’t you!

Mr Hunter—I am.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you for that.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I ask a question about Aboriginal housing here, or is that a no-no?

Dr Harmer—I am afraid the people who would know the answer were in outcome 1.

Senator SIEWERT—I will put that one on notice. We ran out of time this morning, and I was just trying to be cheeky. On the issue of homelessness, my understanding is that one of the large contributors to homelessness is family dysfunction, and we have been talking about that. This might go to the issue I was talking about before in relation to family relationship centres and what they assess for. Do they assess against the risk of homelessness during that process?

Dr Harmer—I do not know that and the people at the table do not know, but when Mr Hazlehurst comes back he may be able to answer that question.

Senator SIEWERT—It stretches across both that program and this program.

Dr Harmer—Yes, but your point is correct, and we know that. In the work that the task force and the steering group will do in terms of the green paper, we will clearly be looking at reasons for homelessness. We know that.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, but the point I am making is the link through to family relationship centres and, obviously, picking that up in any of the recommendations that the task force or the steering committee comes up with. There is that link. It seems to me to link across to the social inclusion issue as well.

Mr Rosenberg—It is on our list.

Mr Leeper—Yes, certainly—not just addressing homelessness but trying to look at policy options to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place through preventative strategies.

Senator SIEWERT—Exactly.

Mr Leeper—That will be within the mix, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Then I will ask about whether it has been assessed at the next point and I will put my original housing issue on notice.

CHAIR—That finishes output group 4.1. Now we will return to groups 1.1, 1.2 and 3.1. Mr Hazlehurst, you were in continuation with Senator Siewert.

Mr Hazlehurst—We took the opportunity while the committee was asking some questions of our colleagues around housing to confer on a couple of points that you raised before, and I thought it would be helpful to clarify one specific issue. I think you mentioned that the previous time we discussed these issues around FRSP Online we discussed one of the features of the system, which was that, in terms of us evaluating the effectiveness of the new family law system and the related services under that system, the FRSP Online system would help us in that evaluation because it would help us to understand the flows of FRSP clients through the system.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, we are mixing up two different questions that I asked. I was asking about the online system and the discussion we had previously about tracking, but it was not related to the changes in family law.

Mr Hazlehurst—No, I accept that. What I am getting at is that you are quite right to remember from the previous hearing that we did talk about the way in which FRSP Online would help us to track the flows of customers through the system because the records would be linked. As Ms Fleming pointed out before, the most important reason for the new system is

to help the services to link the clients and be able to transfer clients between services, but all related to a system that is meant to be better integrated than it has been in the past.

Senator SIEWERT—Are service providers using the system to do just what you said? It seems to me they could do it without that system.

Mr Hazlehurst—Absolutely.

Senator SIEWERT—They could do it by phone or other methods rather than such a complicated system.

Mr Hazlehurst—The issue is that they are able to add to the records, in a way that is confidential, further transactions in respect of a particular customer. Doing that by phone is similar but not automated in the same way.

Senator SIEWERT—So what you are saying is that I can sit in my office and, if I am a second service provider, I can call up Joe Blow and add to the records. Is that right?

Mr Hazlehurst—I will let Ms Fleming expand on precisely how it works, but by definition, because a lot of the work that is done through the FRCs—family relationship centres—for example, is actually then linking people to other FRSP service provision, the system is there to support that process as well. I will let Ms Fleming expand upon it.

Ms Fleming—I would like to take two questions here. The first one was regarding referrals and whether that is working within the system. We have not done a formal evaluation, as I said before, but we are doing some monitoring. What I can tell you is that 62 per cent of our service providers indicated that referrals have increased demand for services within the system network, and we are tracking how that system is working effectively, where there are issues, how we can work with the sector to make that system work more smoothly in the cross-referrals between providers of different service types, and the data that we are collecting and discussing with the sector will help inform those discussions.

In terms of what data is relayed from one service provider to another, a service provider who receives a client who they think would benefit from a service from another provider can, with the agreement of the provider and the client/customer, give them access to their record to know that they have received a service. Have they been in the system before? Are they dealing with someone that has had many services? It is my understanding they do not see the case file of the client. What they see is that this person has actually had some assistance—it might be with a substance abuse issue or a mental health issue—so that they are not dealing with the client blind. It can help them make an assessment around how to intervene in the process. That is my understanding.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you for that clarification. That raises an issue for me—that is, who can access files on the system?

Ms Fleming—The data that is recorded in FRSP Online is not a client's case record. If I use the analogy of a doctor, the doctor would have the record of their conversation with their patient, the social worker would have their record of their conversation with a client. What we see on the system is that a client walked in and received these service types.

Senator SIEWERT—You do not see a name?

Ms Fleming—We can. We do record the name and the administrator of the system has access to those names. There are strict protocols around and monitoring of any changes to that data. There are audit logs and access times—who accessed the data and why—and we can track that back at any time, but I do not have access to that system, for example. I have no access.

Senator SIEWERT—And no third party can come in?

Ms Fleming—An agency can see its own files within its own authorised protocols within its own organisation, but again we do not have the case files of an individual on the system; just the service type that they accessed.

Senator SIEWERT—Does the service provider maintain ownership of their data? Whose database is it?

Ms Fleming—FRSP Online is the department's database. We have about 105 registered service providers. Some 92 of those service providers only use FRSP Online for recording their data and therefore, for those service providers, it is important that the client details are registered on that system because, for the small providers, that is the database that they use. Some of our larger providers use their own system and they transfer—upload—the data from their system to ours.

Senator SIEWERT—In relation to that, if I am a service provider and I do not continue for some reason—I fold or decide I am not going to continue—what happens to the data? Does that stay on the system?

Ms Fleming—The data is recorded on the system and it stays on the system, except where you might have your own system and then you would have your own—

Senator SIEWERT—I am thinking of the 92. They do not have another system?

Ms Fleming—Not that I am aware of. They are using this system.

Senator SIEWERT—So if they fold, that data stays on the system.

Ms Fleming—That is my understanding.

Senator SIEWERT—I will not labour the point on the cost methodology, but you did release the report, and thank you. I am presuming that is getting widely read by service providers. I presume it was circulated fairly widely?

Ms Fleming—There was a process around the cost methodology report. We tabled it to yourself. We then went to the service providers who were participants in that report and asked them whether they would mind us circulating the data—with the confidentiality process that we went through at the time to remove that data—to the rest of the sector. They said that they would not mind, so some elements of the sector have seen it. We are now seeking approval from the minister to release that data. It is the subject of ministerial advice.

Senator SIEWERT—Subject to the fact that it has not been—

Ms Fleming—Again, caught up in the same process as the other.

Senator SIEWERT—Are the recommendations or points made in that report now being incorporated into your ongoing costing methodologies?

Ms Fleming—Through our discussions with the sector board, we are in the process of establishing some working groups to look broadly at some of the issues that are of concern to the sector, and funding is one of those issues.

Senator SIEWERT—At the time of the debate over the family law, I clearly remember that one of the issues we raised was the lack of available expertise for the centres, in particular around violence. I understand it is now proving to be an issue that there is a lack of trained staff available for some of the centres. I have certainly had some of the centres say that to me, and other agencies have said the same thing. Have people spoken to you about that and are you thinking about training programs or how we make sure there are enough people for these centres?

Ms Fleming—We have a workforce development strategy that we have had with the sector for some time developing competencies around some of those issues, using CSHISC, the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council. When the new family law system first rolled out, we rolled out 33 special violence services attached to the new family law system. Because of the issues around domestic violence, we rolled them out in the first tranche of the service rollout. I understand that the Attorney-General's Department is doing some more work around domestic violence and some of the FRCs but you would need to talk to them about supplementary work that they are doing in that area.

Senator SIEWERT—You are doing some and they are doing some?

Ms Fleming—Correct.

Senator SIEWERT—How is yours going?

Ms Fleming—The services have been operating for two years and we understand that they are fulfilling the function that they were set up to do—to help people who are in the separation process where there are violence issues—but we have not yet formally evaluated the services. That is an agenda item for this calendar year.

Senator SIEWERT—I am sorry, I was not clear. I was talking about the workforce development processes.

Ms Fleming—The workforce development processes? We have developed some competencies around marriage education, Attorney-General's have developed some competencies and we have some further competencies being developed around dispute resolution. Perhaps I have not understood the question.

Senator SIEWERT—No, I am thinking aloud. I am glad that competencies are being developed but I can tell you for a fact—because I had reason to deal with these issues over the Christmas-New Year break—that there is a severe lack of counselling and support services for people, particularly around sexual abuse. What is actually being done, besides developing the competencies, to make sure that there are people that are there and available? I know particularly of people that have been waiting for two or three months even to access counsellors.

Ms Fleming—Workforce issues are always a long-term structure. That is just the nature of building up the workforce capability.

Senator SIEWERT—That is why we said this when the law was being changed.

Ms Fleming—What the workforce competencies do is recognise skills in other sectors for application within a formal process so that it allows more flexibility across the different sectors within the health and community sector, to allow people to flow between those sectors. Are there workforce issues? Yes, there are. It is a step, not—

Mr Hazlehurst—If I could just add a couple of things there.

Ms Fleming—Sorry.

Mr Hazlehurst—I think we have mentioned this before but it is probably worth reiterating. The previous government was very mindful of the pressures that would emerge around workforce issues and so decided to roll out the additional services in a number of tranches. In fact, of course, the workforce that is now employed in the family relationships space is substantially larger than it was three or four years ago. It has grown, in effect, by 300 per cent, in the same way that the funding has increased by 300 per cent.

It was to be expected that that would still create some challenges, even with spreading it over a number of years. It is certainly the case that the competencies that have been developed, as Ms Fleming has described, have helped to facilitate—and will continue—the flow of trained, qualified people into the services. But as I think you are suggesting as well, the pressure on the workforce in relation to community services in general is one that we would acknowledge is still a challenge.

The other very specific thing that I think is worth touching on is that of course the family relationship centres themselves—and, indeed, the FRSP—we do not fund directly to do sexual assault counselling.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, I appreciate that.

Mr Hazlehurst—They are state funded services in general. There are linkages, naturally enough, but it is not quite the same. We would not be fixing that workforce issue through this set of programs.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, I take your point. Thank you.

Senator BERNARDI—Could I go to savings measures in outcome 3. I am reasonably hopeful that you will not have to call the financial officer in.

Dr Harmer—He will be very disappointed.

Senator BERNARDI—The call centre supplementation has been reversed some \$5.1 million, I understand. Is that correct?

Ms Beauchamp—That is a Department of Human Services program, not ours.

Senator BERNARDI—Has it been transferred to that department, or has it never been within FaHCSIA?

Ms Beauchamp—When we talk about a supplementation of Centrelink call centres, it has always been part of the Department of Human Services.

Senator BERNARDI—It just appeared in here. I would like to ask you then about the booklet *NetAlert—Protecting Australian families online*. Is that a FaHCSIA booklet?

Ms Beauchamp—No, that is the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. It is a different portfolio.

Senator BERNARDI—FaHCSIA has nothing to do with that?

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Dr Harmer—No.

Senator BERNARDI—I have fewer questions than I thought I did, Chair. Family tax benefit B might be on the money. How much will the means-testing of family tax benefit B save the government?

Ms Beauchamp—Are you talking about the government's commitment?

Senator BERNARDI—Yes, the commitment to family tax benefit B payments to those with an annual taxable income of over \$250,000.

Ms Beauchamp—What was your question? Sorry, Senator.

Senator BERNARDI—How much will the means-testing—

Dr Harmer—How much will that measure save?

Senator BERNARDI—Yes, how much will that measure save?

Mr Hazlehurst—It is in the order of \$65 million over four years.

Senator BERNARDI—Sixteen or so million dollars per annum.

Mr Hazlehurst—That is correct.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you. I want to go to something that you may say is in another department as well. Can FaHCSIA advise us of the reimbursement required of Mr Rudd for his nanny?

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Dr Harmer—No. That is not with us.

Senator BERNARDI—No?

Ms Beauchamp—No, it is not ours.

Senator BERNARDI—That would be in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet?

Dr Harmer—Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Senator McLucas—That was attempted humour.

Senator BERNARDI—No, it was not attempted humour. It was quite a genuine question actually. I was intrigued as to what it was. I know child care is not here any more. Things are moving all over the place, but they will be settled in a few months, I trust. Chair, that is all I have, thank you.

ACTING CHAIR (Senator Humphries)—Are there any further questions? No? Good. The only other area to cover tonight is output group 3.2, Child support. Someone indicated that they had questions on this area earlier today but I cannot remember who it was. Was it you, Senator Siewert?

Senator SIEWERT—I had some, but I have to acknowledge that the questions I had may in fact be for Human Services.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you want to ask and find out?

Senator SIEWERT—This area is always split between so many agencies. The new formula starts 1 July this year, isn't it?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—That's right? You were going to be doing the—was it you or was it Community Services?

Mr Hazlehurst—The Child Support Agency, which is under the Human Services portfolio.

Senator SIEWERT—That is right, which comes under Human Services. They were going to do all the calculations and have them ready for 1 July?

Mr Hazlehurst—I can give you a thumbnail sketch of some of that and then, as I think you are hinting at, your more detailed questions would be more capably answered by the Child Support Agency.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Mr Hazlehurst—In broad terms, the agency has already been engaging with child support parents to collect the information that is needed to construct new assessments under the new formula. The assessments will start to be sent to parents from the beginning of March. They do not have effect until July but they will start flowing from the beginning of March.

Senator SIEWERT—The actual new assessments? So there will then be time for them to be sent back. I am presuming the same process for child support will continue, whereby if you do not agree with it, you write in and provide evidence and that sort of thing.

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—So they will get an opportunity to do that between March and 1 July?

Mr Hazlehurst—Yes, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—You will also be aware—I am sure we had this debate through the legislation process—that a number of us have been keen to look at this process, because there is still the argument that redoing the formula is going to have quite a significant impact on people, single parents particularly, in combination with Welfare to Work. A number of us have been saying, 'Could you do some modelling beforehand.' You will obviously have the new payment structure on 1 March. Has there been any further thought to doing some of that modelling or at least trying to look at what the combination of these new payment structures and the Welfare to Work process means, particularly for those parents that have actually had a decrease in income support due to Welfare to Work?

Mr Hazlehurst—We have certainly done a lot of analysis—much of which was also included in the original task force report—around specific scenarios.

Senator SIEWERT—If I remember correctly, the original task force report was before Welfare to Work came into play.

Mr Hazlehurst—It is certainly possible to then apply the Welfare to Work change into that and see how it affects a case. That information is generally available as well.

Senator SIEWERT—I recall that at the time we were having discussions around what overall impact the decrease in child support and Welfare to Work are going to have on single mums, because we know that it is predominantly single mums that are impacted by Welfare to Work.

Mr Hazlehurst—We have certainly done analysis of persons in these sorts of circumstances and they are affected in these sorts of ways through child support. They might also be affected through changes in their income support, and we have looked at those sorts of things. Indeed, a number of the peak groups have also done that kind of analysis and made it publicly available. We have in place a number of projects that are going to be doing survey work that look at the combined impacts of the child support changes and other changes that have been occurring, including family law system changes. The Attorney-General's Department is also heavily involved in that. Much of that work is also being done with the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Senator SIEWERT—When are those projects likely to be reporting, or commissioned? Have they started already?

Mr Hazlehurst—They have started, but of course some aspects of those are about collecting baseline data, and then of course living through and collecting it after the changes occur. Obviously the reports and analysis will be conducted after that.

Senator SIEWERT—I realise that the preliminary assessments are what goes out in March and the final assessment obviously is what is implemented in July. Is it possible to do some of that project work with the preliminary information that comes out in March?

Mr Hazlehurst—I am encroaching a little bit into the service delivery aspects here, but if you will indulge me I will do it a little bit and you can ask some further questions of the Child Support Agency tomorrow. The assessments are not going out all in one hit. Okay?

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. Yes, all right. It is progressively—

Mr Hazlehurst—They are actually going to be released over, I think, about a 10- to 12-week period to help manage both the systems load and the call centre impacts that will flow back to the agency.

Senator SIEWERT—You get, however, many thousands of people ringing you all in one day.

Mr Hazlehurst—Indeed. So the agency has quite a sophisticated plan in place to manage all of that. But what that means is that we will not have all of the data at the beginning of March. It is not just that the sending out is occurring over a 10-week period; it is that the actual assessments are being determined over a 10-week period, and then the system automatically will be sending them out.

Senator SIEWERT—Send you a letter.

Mr Hazlehurst—It is certainly our intention, with the agency, to be progressively building up a picture of what is happening. We are anticipating that there will be some feedback loops occurring when customers receive their assessments. As I think you were suggesting, they might then query them, but also potentially there could be some changes in people's arrangements. They might, as a result of the assessments they receive, look to revisit their parenting arrangements. Hence when we have been thinking about how do we best test what the overall impacts have been, using the real data as it flows through, to be honest, we are actually also thinking when is the best time to do that, because one might reasonably expect that there will be a period of settling down within the child support population in general, which may well take until the end of the calendar year. That may well be the best point to see, 'Well, what has actually happened here?'

Senator SIEWERT—That raises another question for me. I suspect that there will be disputes from people feeling aggrieved.

Mr Hazlehurst—Indeed.

Senator SIEWERT—Are the family relationship centres going to be picking that up? What is the process that you see will be able to deal with that?

Ms Beauchamp—There is an appeals process.

Mr Hazlehurst—There is a variety. Would you like me to take you through a few?

Senator SIEWERT—I just heard you mention the appeals process. The appeals process is within child support, but where Mr Hazlehurst was then talking about maybe changing the arrangements, you may well find you need the family relationship centres to negotiate those changes. Has that been factored into a great big cohort of people that will now suddenly be going to family relationship centres because they want to address issues raised by child support?

Mr Hazlehurst—There are a number of things I should say about that. The first is that there are already arrangements in place for the warm transfer of customers from the Child Support Agency into the whole new family law system arrangements. When we have been, with the agency and with the Attorney-General's Department, thinking through what will be the flow and the peaks in terms of the numbers of customers flowing into the system, we obviously imagined that in the period from about now through till at least a few months into the next financial year you would expect to see a significant increase in that flow. The agency itself has built up its capacity to deal with that. Part of that involves the things that they would be able to provide you in more detail around building a better CSA, which is around improved service delivery to their customers and a more intensive service delivery to those customers that need it. The Social Security Appeals Tribunal have been gearing up for what they anticipate to be a significant increase, and with the new family law system side of it as well, we are anticipating there to be—

Senator SIEWERT—I thought the changes to the family law processes were not retrospective.

Mr Hazlehurst—I am not sure I follow you.

Senator SIEWERT—I may be going over to another area here, but they were not supposed to be able to go back to court and redo the settlements.

Mr Hazlehurst—I see what you mean. It is obviously still open to parents to negotiate alternative arrangements, financial or otherwise, and the FRCs and related services could play a role there.

Senator SIEWERT—So they can play a role in those negotiations.

Mr Hazlehurst—Mediation, counselling et cetera, but the specifics of the family law changes themselves probably are a matter more directed to AG's.

Ms Beauchamp—Looking at the child support scheme reforms is one part of the total—family law reforms, FRCs and the like. The rollout of the new child support scheme had started on 1 July 2006. So there has been ongoing engagement through Child Support Agency and key stakeholders to prepare people around the introduction of the new formula on 1 July.

Senator SIEWERT—When you say 'key stakeholders', are you talking about the family relationship service providers et cetera?

Ms Beauchamp—That is correct, and other non-government organisations that represent particular client groups.

Senator SIEWERT—Again, I know that this is probably going into tomorrow, but I have noticed there is a budget cut in the communications package. I do not know if you are aware of that, but I am a bit concerned that there is a cut there just at the time when you need to be telling clients what is going on.

Ms Beauchamp—That was announced in Mr Tanner's list of savings. That is the responsibility of the Department of Human Services and the Child Support Agency, but of course we have very close engagement. One of the things that we have been looking at and working with the Child Support Agency on is getting the messages out there within the budget funding envelope. There is still going to be print, radio and engagement with Child Support Agency customers. What we have looked at trimming, or what the Child Support Agency might tell you tomorrow, is exactly some of the elements of the campaign that I think they no longer require.

Senator SIEWERT—I will obviously raise that with them tomorrow. Thank you.

CHAIR—I am checking with the rest of the senators to see whether that is the last question. Thank you, it is. Senator Bernardi, you don't have any more?

Senator BERNARDI—No.

CHAIR—Just double-checking.

Senator BERNARDI—I will put them on notice.

CHAIR—Dr Harmer and your officers, thank you very much. As always you have been particularly helpful and supportive to us. You will receive a large number of questions on notice, as you would expect. We will be in contact and certainly we have mentioned we will be contacting you through the minister about a number of specific briefings on key issues. I cannot remember this Senate estimates ever finishing before 11 o'clock. There are many questions on notice, but we have never finished this early before.

Dr Harmer—It is a record. Thank you.

Senator PATTERSON—Wait till May!

CHAIR—There is child support, Ms Beauchamp.

Senator SIEWERT—There are lots more Indigenous questions we could have raised.

CHAIR—What we will do is work with the department to look at the structure and see whether we need to reschedule in a different way, because it has changed a bit.

Dr Harmer—I would be happy to do that.

CHAIR—Thank you, and thank you, Hansard.

Committee adjourned at 9.21 pm