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Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

ESTIMATES

(Additional Estimates)

THURSDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2009

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**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
Thursday, 26 February 2009**

Members: Senator Moore (*Chair*), Senator Siewert (*Deputy Chair*), and Senators Bernardi , Bilyk, Boyce, Carol Brown, Furner and Humphries

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Adams, Arbib, Barnett, Bernardi, Birmingham, Mark Bishop, Boswell, Brandis, Bob Brown, Carol Brown, Bushby, Cameron, Cash, Colbeck, Jacinta Collins, Coonan, Cormann, Crossin, Eggleston, Farrell, Feeney, Fielding, Fierravanti-Wells, Fifield, Fisher, Forshaw, Hanson-Young, Heffernan, Hurley, Hutchins, Johnston, Joyce, Kroger, Ludlam, Macdonald, Marshall, Mason, McEwen, McGauran, McLucas, Milne, Minchin, Nash, O'Brien, Parry, Payne, Polley, Pratt, Ronaldson, Ryan, Scullion, Stephens, Sterle, Troeth, Trood, Williams, Wortley and Xenophon

Senators in attendance: (Insert, in alphabetical order, the names of senators provided by committee secretary)

Committee met at 9.01 am

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

Senator the Hon. Chris Evans, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Executive

Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary

Ms Glenys Beauchamp, Deputy Secretary

Ms Robyn McKay, Acting Deputy Secretary

Mr Geoff Leeper, Deputy Secretary

Mr Bruce Hunter, Deputy Secretary, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer

Mr Bernie Yates, Deputy Secretary

Group Managers

Ms Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Women, Children and Parenting Support

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

Mr Barry Sandison, Group Manager, Families

Mr Steve Jennaway, Acting Group Manager, Business and Financial Services

Mr Sean Innis, Group Manager, Social Policy

Mr Tony Kwan, Chief Information Officer/Group Manager, Information Management and Technology

Mr Anthony Field, Group Manager, Legal and Compliance

Ms Peta Winzar, Group Manager, Housing

Ms Frances Davies, Group Manager, Disability and Carers

Mr Robert Knapp, Group Manager, Corporate Support

Mr Nicholas Hartland, Group Manager, Pension Review Taskforce

Cross Outcomes

Mr Stuart Long, Branch Manager, Public Law
Mr Ian Williams, Acting Branch Manager, Public Law
Ms Suzan Djura, Acting Branch Manager, Public Law
Mr Phil Brown, Branch Manager, Indigenous Programs Investigations
Mr David Fintan, Branch Manager, Commercial and Indigenous Law
Ms Kim Vella, Acting Branch Manager, Budget Development
Dr Loucas Nicolaou, Branch Manager, Audit and Fraud
Mr John Shevlin, Procurement and Risk Management
Mr Kurt Munro, Financial Accounting
Mr Scott Dille, Branch Manager, Financial Management and Governance
Mr Ben Wallace, Branch Manager, Social Security Policy
Ms Michalina Stawyskyj, Branch Manager, International
Ms Carol Ey, Acting Branch Manager, Research and Analysis
Ms Alanna Foster, Branch Manager, Seniors and Means Test
Mr David Agnew, Branch Manager, Property, Environment and Protective Security
Mr Andrew Lander, Branch Manager, Communication and Media
Ms Susan Black, Ministerial, Parliamentary and Secretariat Support
Mr Bryan Palmer, Branch Manager, Strategic Policy
Mrs Lynette Maclean, Branch Manager, People Branch
Mr Andrew Whitecross, Branch Manager, Pension Review Taskforce
Ms Christine Williams, Branch Manager, Long Term Strategies Unit

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**

Mr Andrew Whitecross, Branch Manager, Pension Review Taskforce
Ms Alanna Foster, Branch Manager, Seniors and Means Test
Mr Ben Wallace, Branch Manager, Social Security Policy

2.2 Support for people with disability

Ms Christine Bruce, Branch Manager, Disability Participation and Reform
Ms Helen Bedford, Branch Manager, Disability Policy and Coordination
Ms Nicole Pearson, Branch Manager, Disability and Carers Payments
Ms Vicki Brown, Branch Manager, Autism Spectrum Disorder
Ms Lee Emerson, Branch Manager, Carers
Ms Carol Brain, Branch Manager, Mental Health

2.3 Support for carers

Ms Lee Emerson, Branch Manager, Carers
Ms Christine Bruce, Branch Manager, Disability Participation and Reform
Ms Nicole Pearson, Branch Manager, Disability and Carers Payments

2.4 Addressing youth homelessness

Ms Kate Gumley, Branch Manager, Homelessness Taskforce

2.5 Support for women

Ms Sally Moyle, Branch Manager, Office for Women
Ms Janet Stodulka, Branch Manager, Safety Taskforce

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

Mr Ty Emerson, Branch Manager, Family Programs and Governance
Ms Fiona Smart, Branch Manager, Children's Policy
Ms Robyn Fleming, Branch Manager, Family Relationship Services
Mr Mark Warburton, Branch Manager, Paid Parental Leave Taskforce
Mr Peter Southwell, Acting Branch Manager, Family Policy Development
Ms Allyson Essex, Branch Manager, Children and Parenting Support
Ms Liz Stehr, Branch Manager, Money Management
Ms Elizabeth Hefren-Webb, Section Manager, Welfare Payments Reform
Ms Michelle Wilson, Section Manager, Welfare Payments Reform

3.2 Child support

Ms Pamela Kinnear, Branch Manager, Families Research and Data
Mr Ty Emerson, Branch Manager, Family Programs and Governance

Outcome 4—Strong and resilient communities**4.1 Housing support**

Mr Andrew Jaggers, Branch Manager, Social Housing Initiative
Ms Clare Wall, Senior Policy Advisor, Housing
Ms Cathy Walters, Acting Branch Manager, Office of Housing
Ms Kate Gumley, Branch Manager, Homelessness Taskforce
Ms Sue Ham, Acting Branch Manager, Affordable Housing Programs

4.2 Supporting financial management

Ms Jill Farrelly, Branch Manager, Community Investment
Ms Liz Stehr, Branch Manager, Money Management

4.3 Community recovery

Ms Beryl Janz, Branch Manager, Disaster Recovery
Ms Jo Llewellyn, Section Manager, Disaster Recovery

4.4 Community partnership and delivery

Ms Jill Farrelly, Branch Manager, Community Investment
Ms Beryl Janz, Branch Manager, Disaster Recovery
Ms Liz Stehr, Branch Manager, Money Management
Ms Jo Llewellyn, Section Manager, Disaster Recovery

CHAIR (Senator Moore)—Good morning, everyone. I declare open this hearing of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs considering additional estimates of the portfolio of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Under standing order 26, the committee must take all evidence in public session, and this includes questions on notice. Officers and senators are well versed in the privileges, protections and immunities in the scope of questioning for estimates. If you need reminding, the secretariat has a copy of the usual rules and is more than happy to give them to you. Those issues of advice are applicable to senators, as well.

[9.02 am]

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

CHAIR—I welcome Senator the Hon. Chris Evans, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, representing the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; the departmental secretary, Dr Harmer; and officers of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs—welcome back, everyone. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Senator Chris Evans—No, thank you. I am still reeling from you calling me ‘honourable’. Is that what it said in the script?

CHAIR—If it hadn’t been in the script, I wouldn’t have! We are going to go through the process as we normally do. I have not yet been asked to change the program today, but, if there are any requests, Dr Harmer, I will get them to you as quickly as possible so that we can see what we can do. We will have to talk about tomorrow because I have just been advised that there are no ministers available after lunchtime tomorrow. I just got that information now, so there will have to be some discussions about the cast of thousands that not only your department but also many others have provided as witnesses for tomorrow. We will work that out, but I thought I should warn you of that as quickly as possible.

Senator Chris Evans—Can I raise an issue there?

CHAIR—Yes.

Senator Chris Evans—This has not been one of the committees where it has been a problem, but I think that, during the week, we have had a bit of difficulty with officers being held around in large numbers till 10 o’clock at night and then the committees have not got to their programs. I think this department, under your chair, has always done much better than that, but I have had a fair number of complaints about certain committees not managing that well in terms of loss of productivity and unnecessarily inconveniencing staff. I urge all senators to have a conversation with the chair about who is going to be needed and those sorts of things; it makes life easier for everybody. As I say, this is not one of the committees where it has been a concern in the past, but there were a couple instances this week that, in my view, really were bad.

CHAIR—We try. Dr Harmer, I know that you have been speaking with the minister. We have some different ministers coming in and out at different times to cover different portfolio areas, so we will advise when that occurs, as well. I anticipate taking the break this morning at 10.30, which is to facilitate one of those ministerial changes. That is just so people know what is going on. I will give this a go—it did not work yesterday, but I will give it a go. Are there any questions on the portfolio overview? No? Then we will move on to cross-outcomes and corporate matters.

Senator BERNARDI—Dr Harmer, I will address this question to you. Once again, you may like to refer it to someone else. Did the department send letters to all eligible recipients of the Economic Security Strategy payments?

Dr Harmer—Centrelink is the agency that sends out the letters, but I may be able to help you. Do you have a specific question about it?

Senator BERNARDI—I want to go to the advertising that was attached to it. Was FaHCSIA responsible for aspects of that advertising?

Dr Harmer—We were asked by government to take responsibility for the advertising, yes.

Senator BERNARDI—Then perhaps this should go to the minister. Minister, given that people were in receipt of letters from Centrelink and that there was no need for them to actually do anything in order to receive payments under the stimulus package, what was the purpose of the \$5.12 million in government advertising?

Senator Chris Evans—There are a couple of assumptions in your questions that I reject. I think you will find it is one of the smallest spends on advertising from a government initiative in many a year. I am happy to debate with you, if you want to debate expenditure on advertising. But the officers will take you through the cost of the advertising of the programs, which were modest but necessary. Advising people about their entitlements and when payments would occur et cetera is a fundamental part of providing information to people. We were getting a lot of calls. I do not know about your electorate office, but I certainly got a lot of calls and the department and Centrelink were getting a lot of calls about who was entitled and when they would be paid et cetera. Certainly, it was necessary to provide some information to clients about those entitlements. As I said, the department can take you through the advertising spend. In historical terms it was extremely modest. If you like, I will run you through the previous government's campaigns and expenditure just so we can put it into context.

Senator BERNARDI—I do not think that is necessary.

Senator Chris Evans—Good. I did not think you would.

Senator BERNARDI—Let us put this into context. Are you aware that the Auditor-General held an inquiry into government expenditure and advertising and made clear some guidelines about what was appropriate and inappropriate? Clearly this is an inappropriate use of government advertising. Are you familiar with that?

Senator Chris Evans—Where did you get that information from?

Senator BERNARDI—Let me quote to you from your now minister Roxon, in 2004—

Senator Chris Evans—If you want to go through the program—

Senator BERNARDI—No, just a second—

Senator Chris Evans—Madam Chair, I am happy to—

Senator BERNARDI—This is not about government advertising; this is about your now government making statements that were different in opposition. You are playing by very different rules now that you are in government.

Senator Chris Evans—You have just made a series of accusations without asking a question. If you have questions, we will answer them.

Senator BERNARDI—I ask you whether you are familiar with the Auditor-General—

Senator Chris Evans—You are the last one to talk about appropriate public behaviour at the moment, I would have thought.

Senator BERNARDI—Oh Please! Give us a—that is such rubbish—

Senator Chris Evans—So, if you have got questions to ask, ask them—

Senator BERNARDI—Are you familiar—

Senator Chris Evans—and the officers will help you.

CHAIR—Could everyone please be quiet. I am not going to have yelling across the table in this committee. It is not the way we operate. There will be opportunities for senators to ask questions, and that is entirely appropriate. Minister, I think the allusion to Senator Bernardi was inappropriate. I understand that it is a difficult time, but I think the allusion was inappropriate in this process. Senator Bernardi, I expect questions; I do not expect people to be making a series of statements in that way. It is not how we operate. But, if there are questions to be asked, please ask them and the people at the table will respond.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you, chair. Minister, are you familiar with the Auditor-General's inquiry into government advertising and the conclusions that were reached?

Senator Chris Evans—I understand that there was a lot of activity after concern about advertising campaigns under the previous government. The government has issued guidelines for authorisation of advertising campaigns. The Auditor-General's policy and guidelines were fully followed by this department in relation to this campaign. If you would like, I will ask officers about the process and they will take you through it. But your assertion that it was not followed is wrong. We are more than willing to answer questions about the process and the compliance with the guidelines.

Senator BERNARDI—Do you agree with your colleague, Minister Roxon, who was quoted as saying, 'The guidelines have made clear that government advertising is legitimate if you're asking people to do something or if you're announcing important new initiatives that people have to apply for'? Do you agree with that statement?

Senator Chris Evans—What I have said to you is that the guidelines have been followed to the letter. The department will take you through them. The department provided advice to customers about their entitlements and when things were paid by Centrelink letter, not by glossy TV campaigns but through appropriate means, in accordance with the Auditor-General's guidelines. It went through the proper approval processes. If you want to know how that occurred, ask the appropriate questions; if you want to have a debate about what you think Ms Roxon said in opposition—

Senator BERNARDI—What she did say.

Senator Chris Evans—I am happy to engage you on your government's performance on advertising. It is one of the reasons why you are now on that side of the table.

Senator BERNARDI—This is now about your government's performance—

Senator Chris Evans—Ask the question and we will answer it.

Senator BERNARDI—and the double standards that are clearly on display here. We have established that nothing needed to be done for people to receive these payments.

Senator Chris Evans—No, we have not.

Senator BERNARDI—Nothing needed to be done; that has been established.

Senator Chris Evans—No, we have not.

Senator BERNARDI—That was established previously. They were going to be sent automatically to people.

Senator Chris Evans—We have not established anything. You have not asked one question. You have come in here—

Senator BERNARDI—I think that we know it. We have asked it previously and we do know that.

Senator Chris Evans—You have come in here and made a series of wrong accusations. If you want to know what processes were followed in relation to this committee, whether the policy guidelines were met with, whether proper approvals were made, ask the question and you will get the answer. If you want to come in here and have a political debate, I am happy to engage you. But you have a lot of baggage to carry.

Senator BERNARDI—But this is not about what has happened historically; this is about you and your government advertising unnecessarily and spending \$5 million worth of taxpayers' money.

Senator Chris Evans—No, that is an allegation. Ask the question and you will get the answer.

Senator BERNARDI—Have you spent \$5 million of taxpayers' money advertising a program for which people did not need to do anything in order to receive their payments?

Senator Chris Evans—No. People required information. It has been supplied in accordance with proper process. If you want to ask how that was done, what information was provided, how many letters, how many ads, how much was spent, ask away and we will tell you.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. Here is a question: if people did nothing—absolutely nothing—and they were entitled to these payments, would they still have received them?

Senator Chris Evans—I do not know whether you have just not done enough research to ask a sensible question, but this is estimates. If you want to ask questions about how the money was spent and whether guidelines were followed, we will answer those questions.

Senator BERNARDI—It was a very sensible question. You just have not answered it. Why don't you answer it?

Senator Chris Evans—I am happy to take you through what was done, how the money was spent and what communications went out to persons who were clients. If you want to then debate whether you think it was appropriate, that is fine.

Senator BERNARDI—No, this is a very simple—

Senator Chris Evans—We will have a political debate.

Senator BERNARDI—You are obviously answering a different question than the one I just asked. If people eligible—

Senator Chris Evans—I have not heard you ask a question yet about the process.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay: Dr Harmer, if people were eligible for payments under the last stimulus package, did they have to do anything in order to receive it?

Dr Harmer—I do not believe so. I understand the nature of your question about the need for a campaign. The government made a decision about the need to have a campaign. That was on the basis that Centrelink in particular—their call centres—were getting many calls from people who were confused about exactly what they would get. There were, as you know, multiple payments to families and to pensioners. Some crossed over. People were looking to find out exactly what they were to get. The government made the decision that it would be wise to not just rely on the Centrelink letter. While Centrelink do a very good job with their letters, very often the Centrelink letters—which are generated generally by a computer—are informative but relatively bureaucratic. Sometimes, they generate requests and calls to the call centres. Often in a complicated change where there are multiple benefits, it is wise, particularly in the environment of the government's announcement for the need to get money out there quickly, to get people understanding and feeling secure about it. The government obviously chose to have a campaign.

We conducted it for the government. We did it within the new and considerably tighter ANAO guidelines for conducting campaigns. At every stage of the campaign we submitted the proposals to the ANAO. We had quite some debate and discussion. They were very forensic in the way they looked at our proposals for the campaign in terms of justification of expenditure, of medium et cetera and they ticked off on every element of it, I am pleased to say. We were the first department to take a campaign through the new government's rules and I am very proud of the fact that my people did it extremely well.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you for that. I have no doubt there is a great deal of interest to your call centres, but I am wondering whether the campaign that has been waged is consistent with the statement made by now Minister Roxon that government advertising is legitimate if you are asking people to do something, if you are announcing an important new initiative that people have to apply for. Dr Harmer, given that you have told me that people did not have to apply to receive this money, there would seem to be an inconsistency.

Senator Chris Evans—The officer does not have to reply as to whether or not an opinion is consistent with something that Ms Roxon allegedly said at some stage.

Senator BERNARDI—It is a policy announcement. It is not an allegation.

Senator Chris Evans—We have here a public policy of the government and a charter for the Auditor-General. What Dr Harmer told you is that his department complied with those guidelines. If you want to take him through how they complied, when he got authority et cetera, that is fine. If you want to make a judgment after that, that is your call. But Dr Harmer has told you that the guidelines that are provided to his department for any campaigns he runs have been met. That is how he is held accountable and if the Auditor-General had any concerns it was his role to raise them with him. You may want to say you do not agree with the guidelines. You may want to argue that they ought to be tougher or you might want to follow the practice of the previous government and make them much looser, but that is not for Dr Harmer to comment on. His job is to comply with the guidelines.

Senator BERNARDI—Dr Harmer’s department has been instructed by the government to run an advertising campaign that is completely inconsistent and at odds with your policy announcement which was reflected by now Minister Roxon in 2004.

Senator Chris Evans—That is not true. If you want to state—

Senator BERNARDI—Which part is not true?

Senator Chris Evans—I am saying to you that this government announced a policy. That is the policy of the government. It is public. It involves a very serious role for the Auditor-General in monitoring and approving campaigns. Dr Harmer has assured you that the campaign met all those policy requirements of this government. You can examine him as to whether you are satisfied about that but, quite frankly, he is not asked to comply with something Ms Roxon said in 2004 or Kevin Rudd or anybody else said in 1997. He is required to comply with the government’s instructions and that is what he says he has done. If you want to test that, you can test it.

Senator BERNARDI—I am sure he has complied with the government’s instructions but then it goes to the instructions of the government. Given the condemnation of other advertising and their reliance on the Auditor-General’s comments previously, you seem to have completely changed your mind on this. Is it the case that whatever we say in opposition we will not be doing in government?

Senator Chris Evans—I do not know if you understand the purpose of estimates, but I am happy to have the political debate with you in the parliament. You can draw whatever conclusions you want, but the reality is that, on coming into government, this government sought to clean up the terrible abuse of government advertising that occurred under the previous government. We published guidelines. Those are the instructions to the department. The only relevant question is, it seems to me, a proper examination by the estimates committee—as is their right—as to whether those guidelines are being complied with.

Senator BERNARDI—I am trying to establish where the guidelines suddenly changed, from when Minister Roxon was clearly advocating for your own Auditor-General’s legitimacy of government advertising, to your policy announcement and then to squandering \$5 million-plus of taxpayers’ money on something they did not need do anything about in order to receive.

Senator Chris Evans—Senator Bernardi, \$5 million of taxpayers’ money was not squandered, and I will take you through the hundreds of millions that the previous government spent on advertising campaigns if you want to have a political debate.

Senator BERNARDI—This about \$5 million now.

Senator Chris Evans—I am prepared to provide you with a copy of the government’s policy and guidance for the Auditor-General. That is the policy of the government, and I think the important accountability mechanism is to ensure that the department complied with that.

Senator BERNARDI—Minister, I am a little concerned because you have said—and I do not want to verbal you so I will try to paraphrase it. You have rejected the assertion that people did not have to do anything to get this money. Dr Harmer has suggested they did not

need to. Senator Ludwig, the minister, said that as well. He is quoted in the *Australian*, saying:

Australians eligible for stimulus package payments don't have to do anything. Centrelink will deposit bonuses directly into people's bank accounts.

So they do not have to do anything. Under your charter, by your Auditor-General, announced by Nicola Roxon—

Senator Chris Evans—I am sorry, but I am not sure that Nicola Roxon in 2004 announced the government's charter. That is just not right.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. Under your policy you have said that this is an inappropriate use of taxpayers' money.

Senator Chris Evans—No, Senator.

Senator BERNARDI—That is what was said in 2004.

Senator Chris Evans—Senator Bernardi, get with the program. The government announced its policy and its guidelines for departments. I suspect it was in 2008, but I will get you a copy of the guidelines. I will get you the date of the announcement, and that is the relevant guidance to the department. If you want to question us about whether they have met those government policies, please do; it is an appropriate thing for you to do.

Senator BERNARDI—So you think it is appropriate to spend \$5 million of taxpayers' money telling people that they do not have to do anything because they will be getting funds lodged into their bank accounts? Is that a good use of taxpayers' funds?

Senator Chris Evans—Senator, what I have told you, and will continue to tell you, is that there was an advertising and communications campaign associated with the stimulus packages. All of that expenditure can be accounted for and it meets the Auditor-General's guidelines. Dr Harmer and his officers are happy to take you through the detail of that, and the government's view is that it was money well spent and that it was in accordance with the guidelines that we have published, and it received the approval of the Auditor-General. We do not think it was squandering the money and, as I say, the gall of you to argue about government advertising is just breathtaking.

Senator BERNARDI—This is about your government. We are in 2009—

Senator Chris Evans—Absolutely right.

Senator BERNARDI—This is a government that is under enormous financial pressure, and you are spending \$5 million telling the people of Australia that they will be receiving money in their bank accounts. You think that is a reasonable use of taxpayers' funds. I respectfully disagree and we will leave that to the people of Australia to make the decision.

Senator Chris Evans—Alright, Senator. I will also table for the committee the expenditure by federal governments over the last 12 years on advertising campaigns for government initiatives just so that you will have the full picture.

Senator BERNARDI—Minister—

Senator Chris Evans—No, do not thank me. I am happy to do it for you and I will give you the full 12 years.

Senator BERNARDI—You are living in the past. What you are trying to do is to justify your own performance—

Senator Chris Evans—Absolutely it will justify our performance.

Senator BERNARDI—Under very different circumstances you are trying to justify your own performance and your complete backflip on what was ‘holding governments to account’. We will leave it at that; it has been done and dealt with.

Senator Chris Evans—Senator Bernardi, I think you are so far behind on points that I would leave it too.

Senator BERNARDI—Thanks, but when I want your advice I will ask for it.

CHAIR—Senator Bernardi, do you have some questions?

Senator BERNARDI—No.

Senator SCULLION—I would like to ask a supplementary question on this, Dr Harmer. When these letters went out I heard, in a general sense, that they were to inform people about what they would be getting. Was this done by each of the demographics that were to receive the particular sums? Was it targeted at those people? Obviously you did not just send one to everybody in Australia. Obviously they were sent either to householders or to particular individuals targeted in each demographic; is that right?

Dr Harmer—They were sent out by Centrelink. I stand to be corrected but I assume that they did what they normally do, which is to send a letter to each particular group.

Senator SCULLION—Dr Harmer, would you have instructed Centrelink to do that? Would you have simply said, ‘We want this information out there,’ and Centrelink made the decision about who it went to?

Dr Harmer—We would have worked with Centrelink. We are the policy agency and we would have worked with Centrelink. One of my colleagues might know exactly the process we went through in liaising with Centrelink about where the letters went. Have you a specific question? Is your question whether we were involved with Centrelink?

Senator SCULLION—My question simply went to the fact that you said that Centrelink did that part of it and I am just working out whether or not, in the policy sense, you actually said this is how it goes out, or whether that is the task—

Dr Harmer—We are the policy department and we would have liaised with them and given them authority to send out letters.

Senator SCULLION—But you would have also dictated the demographics that it went to and the information that would be provided to each demographic.

Dr Harmer—The government did that through the decision about eligibility for pensioners, families et cetera. So it is crystal clear from the government decision—

Senator SCULLION—I am assuming that your department in all their wisdom would have sent it to only those recipients that were actually getting the money.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator SCULLION—There would have been a number of people who were not receiving the funds, for example. If they received it, then certainly Senator Bernardi's assertions would have been nailed on the head.

Senator Chris Evans—I think that sending people letters saying that they were about to get a cheque and then not sending a cheque would be a counterproductive exercise. I hope that we did not do that.

Senator SCULLION—Indeed. It is not beyond governments though.

Senator Chris Evans—I know. That is why I did not say with any confidence that it had not happened, Senator.

Senator SCULLION—In those policy discussions obviously a letter was sent to the pensioners—was that correct?

Dr Harmer—Correct.

Senator SCULLION—Because this was all vital information, did the information indicate that if they actually were working during the week of 24 October to the effect that they got a zero pension on that one particular day, they would not in fact receive the allowance?

Dr Harmer—I will need to take that on notice, unless one of my colleagues knows the answer.

Mr Wallace—I do not have the letter in front of me—Mr Lander may have a copy. These letters were sent to customers who were eligible for the payment and indicated that to be eligible for the ESS payment a person needed to be in receipt of an instalment of their primary payment on the test date.

Senator SCULLION—So that would have to be included in the letter?

Mr Wallace—That is my understanding.

Senator SCULLION—As you would be aware there is quite a large demographic of pensioners who worked sometime during that period. They may have fessed up to Centrelink, as they should do and said, 'I worked for a particular period of time so there is a part payment.' So the part payment went down and they actually received a dollar in the pension, and they will be paid the full bonus.

It seems that there was nobody out there that was not taken by surprise by that, Mr Wallace. I am not sure whether we have actually got a copy of that letter, but could we have that provided on notice just to ensure that there was some clarity in the letter? It was obviously essential for providing this information to people, because that is what the minister assures us was being done by this letter—not advertising—so that the pensioner would not have been confused at all. Every single one of them who spoke to me who did receive a pension on that day told me that had they known they would not have bothered working because it was simply not in their interest. Clearly, those people either did not read it all what you are asserting—and I am not suggesting any mischief at all, Mr Wallace; I know you better than that—or the letter did not make it clear. I would just like you to clarify for the record by tabling that particular part of the letter that clarifies for pensioners that working in that particular payment period would have an impact on their circumstance.

Senator Chris Evans—It might be reasonable for us to get a copy of the letter and table it for you. We will try to get you a copy.

Senator SCULLION—It would be useful if we could get one shortly.

Senator Chris Evans—I think we should be able to organise that soon and I will ask the department to see if I can get you a copy of the letter.

Senator FIFIELD—Perhaps you could ask department to get copies of all of the different categories of proforma letters that went out advising of stimulus package moneys. That might be useful. And on that same point, Chair, concerning the actual content of those letters, would that have been drafted within Centrelink or within the department?

Mr Wallace—The content of the letters—and again Mr Landers may have a view—is generally drafted in Centrelink with instruction from the policy agency. I note, just in addition to Senator Scullion's questions, that the test date for eligibility for the payments was the date of announcement—14 October—so, in respect of changes in decision about whether to work or not work, the test dates for these payments and the eligibility have worked in the same way as for the payments made to carers and seniors since 2004—and, I think, for families, as early as 2000. So we have had the same construction in terms of a test date and eligibility in relation to earnings from income for previous payments.

Senator SCULLION—The issue goes to what this letter was really trying to achieve. The minister asserts that it was simply informing people to ensure that they knew everything about the particular piece of money that was coming. I would have thought that, even if it would not have changed by the time they got the information because the circumstances were made on the date, it would have informed them to the tune that they did not need to be outraged when they were not in receipt of it. They certainly would not have had to ring Centrelink. They certainly would not have had to email me and ministers and do all those sorts of things. I am assuming that you would have been aware that there was a demographic of pensioners who would have been excluded. I am not sure about the announcement and when it was made—correct me if I am wrong. I will take this on notice: can you tell me whether or not, when the announcement was made, there was something in the announcement that would have clearly articulated that to those people. Whilst they still would not have been able to do it, unless they sort of left work halfway through the day or suddenly did not claim or something, people either knew on the date the announcement was made—or perhaps that was where the information was contained. So could you please supply me with any of that information around those announcements.

Senator Chris Evans—I am happy to provide you with the details of the minister's announcement and also get you a copy of the relevant letter. The key point to make, though, is that, as with all these policy changes, there is a cut-off date. As you know, under the previous government and under governments before that, when you have a cut-off date, there is someone who misses out because the next day there is a change in circumstances. While I am sure information was available on the date of announcement, the reality is the detail would not have been easily accessible for individuals out in the community. I am sure the press reports did not carry the sort of detail that you are now talking about. To be frank, there is a good reason why Centrelink ought to communicate with its customers. But we will get to the letter

and I will also find out what information was released on the day. As you know, ministers' press releases never carry the sort of detail that would properly satisfy those sorts of queries. But we will get you both bits of information.

Senator SCULLION—Most times we would make an announcement regarding a date, people say, 'Yes, I am obviously before that date'—whether it is a child or something else—'That is the date,' and they are concerned about that or otherwise. This was a case where the announcement was made that, if you are a pensioner, you should feel good because this money is arriving. It was as simple as that. They are always a pensioner. You ask anyone. You can ask the pensioner: 'What are you today?' and they are a pensioner. They were a pensioner on Tuesday and they were a pensioner on Thursday and on every of the day of the week, but on that particular day, if they worked—even if it was only for a short period of time—they were not a pensioner. I acknowledge there has to be a cut-off level. People have some angst inside or outside of that. But I think the issue is that—and I certainly sympathise with many of the pensioners around Australia—that they were simply not alert to that. Notwithstanding that they had no opportunity to change their circumstances—on the day of the announcement—that was the case.

The announcement certainly had them all feel that they were going to get a payment. Some of them tell me that they spent money accordingly. They had a little bit set aside. 'This is coming up now. Christmas is coming up. I can do these things.' Then, of course, the cheque did not arrive in the mail. That is what I am concerned about: that the letter that was to inform everybody of everything ensured that people in those circumstances understood clearly why—they believed—they were short-changed, and that was ameliorated by the letter.

Senator Chris Evans—I think that, when we get both bits of information, you will be able to draw conclusions about that. There is no doubt though that, until you get the letter, you probably will not have the sort of detailed information that I suspect was available on the day but has not been communicated more broadly. Quite frankly, that is an argument for the letter. But we will get you both bits of information, and then you can draw whatever conclusion you think is reasonable on that.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you, Minister.

Senator FIFIELD—I appreciate that Centrelink drafted the letters on advice and instruction from the department. Did the department itself then clear the letters before Centrelink issued them?

Mr Wallace—Yes. That is general practice.

Mr Hunter—We chaired a working group which had representatives from our department, Treasury, PM&C, Finance, Centrelink, DEEWR and DVA, and all of those letters were part of the package that went through the Auditor-General to make sure that there was appropriate clearance with the guidelines.

Senator FIFIELD—Were any of those letters passed either formally or informally through the minister's office at any stage before issue?

Mr Hunter—Clearance from the minister's office for—

Senator FIFIELD—For the letters issued to recipients of moneys.

Mr Knapp—The letters were signed by ministers, so they were cleared by those ministers before they went through. They were jointly signed by our minister and the Minister for Human Services. They were cleared with the ministers' offices before they went out.

Senator FIFIELD—Not being a recipient of any of these letters I was not aware who the signatories were. I know these letters have been characterised as the letters issued by Centrelink but they are really the letters of those two ministers. They signed those letters. They have ownership of the contents.

Senator Chris Evans—In accordance with normal practice the two ministers signed the letters as is consistent with the practice over some years but they were signed by both ministers, and for very good reason they would have checked the content before they signed them.

Senator FIFIELD—I am sure they did. My point is that these were letters which could be construed as being to the political benefit of the government of the day. They were not mere bureaucratic letters issued by Centrelink providing information. They were letters from the political office holders.

Senator Chris Evans—Again it is a question of whether you want to ask questions or make political assertions. The letters—millions of them—have been sent out to the Australian public. They are very public. They are available and we will make sure they are available to you today if you have not seen them before. They are signed by both ministers and the department can take you through expenditure and all the issues related to them.

Senator FIFIELD—Thank you. It was just that I had the impression from the previous answers that they were proforma Centrelink letters.

Senator Chris Evans—I think that is reasonable.

Senator FIFIELD—I thought they were of a different character.

Senator Chris Evans—They were drafted to provide the information by Centrelink on the instructions of FaHCSIA but they were signed by both ministers.

Senator FIFIELD—Thank you.

CHAIR—We will move on to other general cross-outcome issues.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I guess we got off to a bad start this morning, so I would like to change the subject to happiness, if I could.

Senator Chris Evans—I've written to Harry Evans asking if he could organise one for us!

Senator HUMPHRIES—We could do with one around here, I am sure, especially after a week of estimates. Could I ask whether FaHCSIA has organised any conferences, seminars or other organised events to promote the wellbeing and productivity of people within the organisation?

Dr Harmer—We do a lot of things in our corporate area to promote the wellbeing and productivity of our staff. Do you have a specific question?

Senator HUMPHRIES—I am asking you what you do in the way of promoting the wellbeing and happiness, general demeanour and outlook of your staff which is not directly related to providing some service to the community.

Dr Harmer—I would like to take that on notice, because we have quite a detailed people plan. Part of my responsibility is building the capacity of the organisation and ensuring the productivity of it. We have a range of programs directed to training staff, giving them skills and a whole range of things. We have actually just released a new people plan—a people strategy—for the department, which I am very pleased to say has been developed very carefully. It gives outlines for the way we operate with our staff but, if you want details of individual initiatives or expenditure, we can take that on notice.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Were any of those programs you have just referred to conducted outside normal FaHCSIA locations—was there a specially chosen place for staff to go to?

Dr Harmer—No.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The sorts of programs you referred to do happen from time to time on FaHCSIA premises?

Dr Harmer—Yes. Training programs, development programs, programs aimed at giving our staff skills, improving their capacity or providing information so that they can more effectively liaise with the public—there are a whole range of interventions. In a department as big as mine, we put a lot of energy and effort into making sure our staff are capable, well trained and well skilled.

Senator HUMPHRIES—But there was nothing you could identify which was specifically about their demeanour and attitude towards their job as opposed to giving them some skills related to their particular area of work?

Dr Harmer—No, it is almost entirely capability skills based.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Okay. Could you give me information about those programs and let me know what area of the department has been invited to them and the cost of each of those if they were provided from resources outside the department?

Dr Harmer—We can do that. It is quite a big job, as you can imagine. What period of time are you looking for?

Senator HUMPHRIES—Let us say over the last financial year and this year to date.

Dr Harmer—I can give you that. There has been no significant change in the nature of our expenditure on our staff in terms of development over the last four years that I have been running it. We have spent, I suspect, roughly the same amount in each of those four years. We have adjusted our strategy recently, but it is built on a very solid base that we have had going for the last three or four years.

Senator Chris Evans—Senator, would you be happy if they interpreted the question in terms of things that might be beyond the normal training of staff? In terms of the detail in the answer, I think you are interested in programs that are a little more creative than is perhaps normal.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Yes.

Senator Chris Evans—Rather than having them detail every counter officer's training, you are interested in those things that might have changed, that might have been in a slightly more creative—

Senator FIFIELD—Massages and backrubs, for instance.

Senator Chris Evans—They were very common under the previous government. Are they still continuing? I do not know.

Senator FIFIELD—You do not know?

Senator BOYCE—No, we were being patted on the back so often, Minister! That was what it was about.

Senator FIFIELD—It is not defensible at any time under any government.

Senator Chris Evans—I must admit I was always surprised by that development.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I think you know what I am after.

Senator Chris Evans—I just was trying to stop us doing unnecessary work, but I think I know what you are after.

Dr Harmer—The answer is probably no, but we will give you the information you want.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Moving to a less happy subject—the two per cent efficiency dividend—at the last set of estimates you gave us information about how the department was coping with that. What are you presently doing to provide for the savings necessary to deliver that dividend to the central budget?

Dr Harmer—I am going to hand over to Mr Hunter to give you some of the detail, but it gives me an opportunity to inform the committee about FaHCSIA's very good reputation in financial management, which we show in the number of B findings for an organisation that runs over a quarter of government outlays—\$72 billion this year. We have no B findings and we have only a few C findings. We came in exactly on target last year. We expect to have a balanced budget this year. Mr Hunter and his team manage whatever challenges we get extremely well in the financial space, and we are very confident we can manage the challenges we have been given in terms of increased efficiency dividend for this year. We are looking forward to the efficiency dividend dropping back to 1.25 next year, but we have a strategy in place to manage the efficiency dividend increase that we are having this year.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Did I see a little twitch of anxiety when Dr Harmer said that, minister? Did I detect a little concern about the statement about dropping back to 1¼ per cent?

Senator Chris Evans—No.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I am sorry.

Senator Chris Evans—Dr Harmer is much more familiar with the FaHCSIA budgets than I am, and I think you correctly directed the question to him. I could not have given you that amount of detail, let alone twitched or reacted to it.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I see. I will be less attentive to your twitches in future.

Senator Chris Evans—Yes.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Mr Hunter?

Mr Hunter—We are tracking well this year. Of course, it is a challenging environment and we are certainly managing it well. This year, we are proud to say that in the last financial statements audit we were able to clear all of our ANAO B findings, so we are now down to zero B findings. In a portfolio the size of this, I think that is a significant achievement. In managing this year's budget, we allocated the budget last May, in 2008, and we set it as a balanced budget. The last two years prior, we had losses which we forecast and had been open with the committee about. Since the May budget was set, we did an internal budget review in December, and again we are tracking at a balanced budget. We are aiming to do another budget review as at the end of February to make sure that we are on track. There is one item which could push us into a loss, which I will talk to you about in a moment. Basically, since September 2008 we have been doing monthly financial statements. We are doing another March hard close this year to ensure that we are right on target to manage our bottom line, and we will set our budget again for 2009-10 in May-June this year.

The one item that I just referred to which could have potentially push us into a loss is the discount rate against the long service leave provision with the downturn in the economy with interest rates. That is the present value that we will take it as at the end of the financial year. It just means that interest rates are going down so the present value today need to go up. On that basis, that will push us into a loss. We are talking with Finance in respect of that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That has happened to all departments, presumably?

Mr Hunter—Yes, it has. It is a non-cash expense.

Senator HUMPHRIES—When the two per cent dividend was announced, what specifically did you do to be able to deal with that beyond the kind of financial monitoring and careful management that you just referred to? Were there any specific measures?

Mr Hunter—We manage it across the board, basically. When we start the year, it is a series of ons and offs. Each year, we have a base level of funding. He have our new policy proposals that lapse and terminate and come off. At the same time, over the budgets, we also receive additional funding through new policy that we take on. We have the efficiency dividend, the two per cent, the 1.25 per cent, then we get wage cost index supplementation on the other side. We then apply that evenly across all groups and states in the department so that we are managing to a bottom-line position and we know where we are up to. Then we look at other options where we may be able to find additional savings.

Some of the spots that we have targeted are travel—we are trying to have greater use of videoconferencing. With our recruitment strategies, we have looked to internally recruit first before we go out to the market so that we are promoting greater retention and corporate knowledge of our organisation. Also, we have cut business travel between Canberra and Sydney, which allows another reduction. All of these things are small. In the IT space, we have looked at how we can shut down PCs overnight and turn them on during the night if we need to do updates rather than have them going all the time. That helps with green IT as with savings. There are a number of measures like that that we have done.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What is happening to your staffing establishment over the course of this financial year?

Mr Hunter—At the moment, our staffing is sitting on 3,296 as a headcount. That has grown slightly since the last time we met. The department has taken on a range of new activities, which I think is evident. Part of that growth is that we have been insourcing our IT contractors to permanent staff, and that is a strategy we have been working on. We also have the graduate program. We took another intake in February, of around 73. So we have had growth and it is something that we monitor carefully on a monthly basis.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Are you spending as much on consultancies this year as you were last year?

Mr Hunter—Basically, year to date, we have spent around \$11 million on consultancies. Previous years have been around \$29 million, both 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. We believe we are on track to spend in the same order.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I will put some questions on notice for more detail about that.

Senator BOYCE—Aspen Medical, I understand, is an external consultant of yours. Is that correct?

Mr Hunter—I am not sure. It may be Health but we will just check—

Dr Harmer—It does not ring a bell either with me or—

Senator BOYCE—I can see all the head-shaking going on.

Senator Chris Evans—Senator Boyce, the list should be in the annual report if they are consultants.

Senator BOYCE—My questions relate to social inclusion and I think that they are probably best directed to the minister. The Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion has recently moved from the Department of Prime Minister to the department of FaCSIA—that is not the correct terminology but I hope you—

Senator Chris Evans—I think that the Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion, Senator Stephens, is a Parliamentary Secretary for DEEWA under the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard—

Senator BOYCE—Who is the minister for inclusion? However I understand that the Office for Social Inclusion, which was within the Prime Minister's department, is moving to FaCSIA. Is that correct?

Dr Harmer—I will check that. I do not think that that is correct. I think that the office will probably go to DEEWA. Senator Stephens, who has a dual responsibility as parliamentary secretary as recently announced, has two responsibilities: one as Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion—and I am pretty confident, working with the Deputy Prime Minister in that portfolio—and she is also responsible for the voluntary sector, which is in the FaCSIA portfolio. I need to just clarify the statement, but as I understand it from yesterday, I think she has a dual responsibility both in DEEWA and in FaCSIA. Her role in FaCSIA will be for the voluntary sector.

Senator Chris Evans—I am not sure whether Senator Stephens was there yesterday and got sworn in, so I am not sure whether it has actually happened yet, and I stand to be corrected. But the intention is that she also becomes Parliamentary Secretary for FaCSIA,

which helps solve, I think, that little problem that some of those areas were better placed within FaCSIA than they were in the Deputy Prime Minister's portfolio.

Senator BOYCE—Where does the Office for Social Inclusion sit? I understood that that was not to stay in Prime Minister's—

Dr Harmer—I do not know the answer to that. We will take it on notice. It would better be directed to Prime Minister and Cabinet, and I do not know whether they are still to come.

Senator BOYCE—They have been. But as I understood it, things have changed since they were in here earlier.

Senator Chris Evans—Senator Boyce, if there has been a formal decision we will get you the answer this morning.

Dr Harmer—We should be able to get it for you.

Senator FIFIELD—Dr Harmer, which is the lead portfolio or department for assistance to Victorian bushfire victims or is it something that is an interdepartmental group driven by PM&C?

Dr Harmer—It is very much an interdepartmental group but we lead the IDC—we chair it.

Senator FIFIELD—For reconstruction efforts, are you also the lead department for that?

Dr Harmer—For reconstruction effort we have a coordinating role. The truth is that the Defence department under Major General Cantwell, who is currently the operational head of the reconstruction authority established by the Premier and the Prime Minister, has that responsibility. So Defence is doing most of the heavy lifting from the Commonwealth end in the reconstruction authority. I think that they have got something like 500 personnel in the areas.

Senator FIFIELD—I guess that is for the immediate reconstruction task. But in the medium term I am just wondering whether you could take me through what the arrangements are particularly in light of Mr Shorten's appointment yesterday as the parliamentary secretary with the responsibility for reconstruction efforts. Could you take me through the department's role and what Mr Shorten's particular responsibilities will be as well?

Dr Harmer—I am going to take that on notice. That decision was made only yesterday and I do not have the details of it. But I am advised that, given that we know what you are going to ask, under 4.3 tonight we will have the people here who can give you some more detail on that.

Senator FIFIELD—Under 4.3, Community Recovery.

Dr Harmer—Yes. That is the area of the department that runs that and is coordinating the Commonwealth's activity with Victoria.

Senator FIFIELD—So, at the moment, you are not able to tell me what Mr Shorten's specific responsibilities are but the department will be in a position to by tonight under 4.3.

Senator Chris Evans—I think Dr Harmer is saying that that is the section within his department which has been working hard on those efforts. I think Mr Shorten's appointment

yesterday and the architecture of how all that will work will obviously be announced in the next little while. But, effectively, the decision was taken to add some government leadership at a parliamentary secretary level to the work already being done not only by Ms Macklin in this portfolio particularly but also by Mr Fitzgibbon and others. I think the Prime Minister was keen to make sure there was a focus on the Commonwealth effort. That is why Mr Shorten has been given that role. We have been lucky, I think—Ms Macklin is a Victorian and she has a good understanding of the local situation and has been down there an awful lot. The logic of Mr Shorten's appointment is seen not only in his capabilities but also in his capacity to work with people and to know who people are and what the situation is. I think the architecture of the federal government's engagement in the longer term reconstruction effort is developing, but certainly FaHCSIA have been providing the lead so far because it has been very much about immediate service support.

Dr Harmer—I can add a little bit to that. Ms Beauchamp has come to the table, so we may be able to answer some questions now. Senator Evans has talked about Minister Macklin's role. She has been extremely active. As you know, she is sitting in charge of a very big portfolio, and the Prime Minister has made it very clear that he wants the Commonwealth government to give every assistance to Victoria in the reconstruction. That is going to require quite a lot of ongoing activity, coordination and liaison with Victoria and coordinating assistance from this end. Jenny Macklin, who has been doing that, has spent quite a lot of time in Victoria and quite a lot of time in meetings with Victorian ministers and visiting the sites. She has been given some help in parliamentary secretary Bill Shorten, who is going to take some of this load off her in the longer term, and he is well-qualified to do that, as Senator Evans said. Glenys Beauchamp, who chairs the IDC here in Canberra for FaHCSIA, is meeting with Mr Shorten later to talk about exactly what role he will play—

Senator Chris Evans—In about two minutes, if she is excused.

Senator FIFIELD—Give him our best.

Ms Beauchamp—We have fairly robust governance arrangements in place internally. We are taking a lead role in tying together all agencies' contribution in supporting the government for the Victorian bushfire effort. Parliament Secretary Shorten is there to assist Minister Macklin in her role in the ministerial advisory group reporting to Premier Brumby. Both governments are working really closely together. We meet daily. Ministers were meeting twice daily at the start of the process. That has been pegged back to once weekly. We provide ministerial updates each day. Minister Macklin provides a weekly report to the Prime Minister. We are very busy keeping everybody informed and making sure we know what issues are emerging on the ground. If there are gaps then we will look at what the Australian government can do to assist the Victorian government.

Senator FIFIELD—Will Mr Shorten be joining the ministerial advisory committee that Ms Macklin is on with her relevant Victorian ministerial counterparts or will Mr Shorten be attending in Ms Macklin's stead? I am just wondering how that will work.

Ms Beauchamp—Those issues are to be sorted out in the next couple of days.

Senator FIFIELD—If you could take that on notice and let us know, that would be helpful.

Senator Chris Evans—Generally, I think you can say they are both going to be heavily engaged. This is a recognition of how much long-term effort is going to be required, as you well understand. So it is really about providing extra grunt to support Ms Macklin and there may well be need for more to be done as we get a better handle on the long-term needs.

Senator FIFIELD—But if you could give me the administrative arrangements, that would be useful to assist a number of people to know what the best points of contact are when issues arise.

Ms Beauchamp—Just to give you reassurance, it is a coordinated, whole-of-government view that either the minister or the parliamentary secretary takes to the Victorian government.

Senator FIFIELD—Thank you for that. You will be with us later tonight at 4.3?

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator FIFIELD—See you then. Thank you.

CHAIR—Are there any other cross-portfolio questions?

Senator SIEWERT—This may not be a question for now, but I am seeking clarification. Where do I talk about the truancy program?

Senator Chris Evans—Do you mean when do you ask questions about that?

Mr Yates—I would expect that to arise tomorrow in the context of the whole-of-government Indigenous hearings. It is a program that is administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Senator SIEWERT—It is administered by them but the policy is done by you, surely, because it is under Minister Macklin.

Mr Yates—Minister Macklin has an oversight role but the program—if you have questions around the program—is with that department.

Senator SIEWERT—That is the program. What about the policy?

Mr Yates—The policy has been set by government. The best time to ask that question is tomorrow because it is specially set up. We will all be there and we will all be able to deal with all aspects of it.

Senator SIEWERT—I will put it tomorrow. The point on that one though is that it is not supposed to be about just Indigenous children. I will be very pleased to ask the questions tomorrow but I repeat that it is not supposed to be just about Indigenous children.

Dr Harmer—We will give you a signal, but you want to ask about the extent to which we have some responsibility for that. We can do it in the families program, which is—

Senator Chris Evans—And we will try and make sure the relevant officer is here.

Dr Harmer—We will do our best to answer but Mr Yates is correct. The prime responsibility for the program will be in DEEWR but we will do our best to answer your questions in respect of our responsibility under families.

Senator SCULLION—I was wondering when we should deal with some issues about the basics card. I know most of that will be tomorrow but there were some elements of the non-

Indigenous elements that I wanted to discuss. I want to ensure that we do have an opportunity—to put you on notice—that I do not want to be told tomorrow, ‘Sorry, Nigel. That is not Indigenous stuff. We don’t have anyone around the table.’

Dr Harmer—We can do that to the extent that you want to ask broader questions. We can also do that in families this afternoon.

Senator Chris Evans—I thought this is what you solved, Chair, by doing the Indigenous hearings separately.

CHAIR—No, we just engage further.

Senator SIEWERT—The problem with that again is that it is not purely Indigenous. You are doing it in Cannington and you keep telling us it is not just about Indigenous—

Dr Harmer—We have made it clear that we are very happy to answer your questions on that and your issue in families this afternoon.

CHAIR—Thank you, Dr Harmer. A couple of issues were raised at the last estimates on exactly this same issue in terms of the focus of the program—and we understand—and the initiation of the program but in that time frame the area covered by the program has widened.

Dr Harmer—Sure.

CHAIR—So there will definitely be questions tomorrow on the implementation and the background in Indigenous communities. That goes under families.

Dr Harmer—I just note as we go past that the prime responsibility for the basics card itself in terms of many of the technical issues is with Human Services, not FaHCSIA.

CHAIR—Exactly. And that is the issue we are trying to solve.

Dr Harmer—That is one of the reasons—and not just because it is Indigenous—that the whole of the department’s session on the Friday is often the best place for those because they will all be there.

CHAIR—Free paid advertising.

Senator SIEWERT—Which is why we need more than four hours.

Senator BOYCE—Dr Harmer, I have asked this question of Centrelink but I thought I would also ask it of you in case I have missed anyone. I am looking for the total number of individuals who received government benefits both in the last half of 2008 and to date in 2009. Are there any individuals who would receive benefits under programs that you administer who would not receive them via Centrelink?

Dr Harmer—It is quite a big number and it crosses many programs. If the question is as broad as that, we would have to take that one on notice.

Senator BOYCE—I am not suggesting you would answer it now, but I am trying to—

Dr Harmer—Are you talking about FaHCSIA? You want our data—the people who—

Senator BOYCE—How many individuals receive benefits from the government under programs administered by FaHCSIA in 2007-08, the last half of 2008 and as current as you can be for 2009?

Dr Harmer—We will do our best. I should just point out that a number of our programs are very small programs that give small amounts of assistance—for example, the Emergency Relief Program. We give quite a lot of money out to the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul and those big organisations. They have a bundle of money to deal with emergency relief—people who come in off the street, who are destitute or have suffered a major problem and suddenly become homeless. These are cash programs administered by the non-government sector. I just do not know quite how good our information is about those.

Senator BOYCE—Alright then. What about regular payments made by programs administered by your department? Would they all be Centrelink?

Dr Harmer—The regular payments which are broadly of an income support nature would all be Centrelink—yes. If you are after that, we can certainly give you that.

Senator BOYCE—Could I have it split into ‘regular’ and ‘one-off’.

Dr Harmer—Yes. It is the regular ones which are much easier.

Mr Wallace—Or ‘regular’ and ‘irregular’.

Mr Innis—In relation to income support and family payments, we should be able to get you good figures. In relation to programs either where we benefit people through our agreements with the states or where we benefit people through providing money to third sector providers, as the secretary has indicated, it might be very difficult for us to get accurate numbers. So, if we limited it to income support and family payments, would that provide you with enough of an answer?

Senator BOYCE—I suppose what I am asking you is: does that provide me with enough of an answer? I am just trying to make sure I have caught everything in the net. I am trying to get a sense of how many people regularly receive government benefits.

Dr Harmer—If that is the information you want, the programs are generally run by Centrelink. They are basically income support or family payments, and we can get you that information pretty quickly.

Senator FIFIELD—Dr Harmer, obviously a significant part of the government’s \$42 billion stimulus package involves funding for community infrastructure— schools, housing and the like. With schools, for example, that funding will go through the department of education, rather than through your department.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator FIFIELD—What about the housing side of things?

Dr Harmer—That will go through our department.

Senator FIFIELD—What prompted my question on this is that the ACT government has said that it is going to ensure that housing built as a result of the stimulus package is accessible for people with disabilities. I am just wondering if there is any requirement that the federal government has for that to be the case or if this is something that the ACT government is doing off its own bat.

Dr Harmer—No; we are doing that more broadly. But, while we are happy to answer the questions on the advertising et cetera—which are truly cross-program—this one would be best asked under 4.1.

Senator FIFIELD—Sure. That is okay. I am just used to another committee where general questions are extremely general. Thank you. I will do that.

Dr Harmer—I do my best to make sure that those who do not need to be here can be back at work working.

Senator FIFIELD—I appreciate that.

Senator SCULLION—Could you briefly run me through how much the department spends on purchasing the daily media clips and on Media Monitoring to provide those clips?

Mr Knapp—In 2007-08, \$636,000 was spent on Media Monitoring.

Senator SCULLION—So that is the whole sum of the daily media clips?

Mr Knapp—That is for all the various ministers, and of course for that period that covers both this government and the previous government during that period. For 2008-09 and from 31 December 2008 the figure was \$159,000.

Senator SCULLION—Would there be any increase in the cost if the clips were actually circulated to the shadow ministers' offices? Perhaps you could give me an approximation of the cost of that particular circulation.

Mr Lander—I am not sure on that. I would have to check on that one, but I can get back to you quickly with that answer.

Senator Chris Evans—It is sure to be marginal, Senator.

Senator SCULLION—It would be very useful and we can obviously work it out as a percentage. The \$636,000 obviously would be the larger sum but it would be very useful to find out how much it would actually increase that cost for that circulation. Thank you.

Senator Chris Evans—When I was the opposition spokesman for FaCSIA I would have appreciated getting them.

Senator SCULLION—I have to say, Minister—and I will not embarrass the particular minister—that there are some ministers who just provide them because they know that it is a very useful process. Anything you can do to ensure that the \$636,000 is an investment for whole-of-parliament would be much appreciated. I do look forward to hearing about the relative cost involved.

Senator Chris Evans—You will find that a lot of ministers follow precedent in these decisions.

Senator SCULLION—Innovation is something that Australia has always looked towards, Minister.

Senator Chris Evans—Sometimes I give credit to the former government for the good things it did and this may be one of them.

[10.13 am]

CHAIR—I think that may end cross outcomes and corporate matters. As no-one has indicated they have further questions, we will now move to outcome 2.1, support for the aged.

Senator SCULLION—I would just like to start off by asking some questions on the pension review, and I just preface my questions by apologising in advance because I have to sneak out for a short while in about 10 minutes time. I might pass some of my remaining questions, rather than putting them on notice, to one of my colleagues. I understand that the pension review investigates a number of things—appropriate levels of income support, frequency of payments, a whole suite of issues. Does FaCSIA host the secretariat for the review?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator SCULLION—How many staff are allocated to the review and what levels are they at?

Mr Hartland—We have about 15 staff at the moment working in the secretariat, but we have also drawn on the expertise of various branches in the department.

Senator SCULLION—What other involvement have FaHCSIA staff had in the review?

Dr Harmer—The FaHSCIA team is supporting my review. They are doing the analytical work, the modelling, the policy thinking, the writing, running the consultations—all elements of the production of the review. We had extensive consultations around the country. We have had a reference group, which has met, I think, six times. We have had something like 1,800 submissions received from all around the country, which we have analysed and investigated. There has been a lot of work in the pension review since it was announced in May.

Senator SCULLION—Have the media team been answering the media inquiries, or is that hosted from within the secretariat?

Mr Hartland—Like every branch in FaHCSIA, if there is a media inquiry that is directed to the media team, we assist in providing an answer if it is required, but the media team in FaHCSIA are the first point of contact for media inquiries.

Senator SCULLION—Have any specific media clips on the review been paid for by the department? Have they been provided to the minister?

Mr Hartland—We do not have a specific separate media monitoring service outside of the department's process.

Dr Harmer—No; any media clips are contained in the regular daily media monitors.

Senator SCULLION—What has been the total cost to date of the review secretariat and the other associated elements you spoke about as being outside of the secretariat within FaHCSIA? If that is going to take some—

Dr Harmer—I think we are going to need to take that on notice.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you for that. I wonder if you could include the wages, travel, consultation fees, media advertising and any other fees like hospitality venue hire so that we can see the breakdown and the differentials.

Dr Harmer—We will provide that to you.

Senator SCULLION—How many members of the reference group are there?

Dr Harmer—It is about 13. I will give you the exact number. Mr Hartland is going to count them up.

Mr Hartland—We just want to make sure we get the figures right.

Dr Harmer—It is about 12 or 13.

Senator SCULLION—I am sure you will be able to tell me that in a moment.

Mr Hartland—It is 13.

Senator SCULLION—Are they remunerated? Are those paid positions?

Mr Hartland—Yes, they are. They are remunerated under Remuneration Tribunal guidelines.

Senator SCULLION—Have your wages or any other staff wages been increased as a consequence of the increased work and taking on the review role?

Dr Harmer—Mine certainly haven't!

Ms McKay—We are just going to go off and negotiate with the secretary!

Dr Harmer—We have just established a standard public service team of analysts, modellers, researchers and policy people, paying the rates which the level warrants.

Senator SCULLION—I was going to what additional sources were required for the review. Do you have any additional staffing numbers that were sought for the department to work on the review?

Dr Harmer—I have basically absorbed the costs of the review within the department's allocation. Many of the people who were in the department's analytical modelling and social policy research area have been diverted onto this particular and important task.

Senator SCULLION—So you will just make that decision from time to time?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator SCULLION—Does the department provide funding to any of the members of the reference group organisations, whether they be Older People Speak Out, the National Seniors Association or those sorts of organisations? Do you provide any funding to them to assist them?

Dr Harmer—Not specifically in relation to the pension review, but some of those organisations will receive funding from FaHCSIA through our program which supports non-government organisations.

Senator SCULLION—Indeed, but is this related to the pension review?

Dr Harmer—Not specifically related, no.

Senator SCULLION—How long has the reference group been appointed for? How long does that last? When will it be disbanded?

Dr Harmer—We had the final meeting of the reference group—

Mr Hartland—On 4 February.

Senator SCULLION—Apart from an acknowledgement, has the department or the minister's office corresponded or communicated with anybody who has provided their submissions?

Mr Hartland—Sorry; I am pausing because there are some submissions that would have gone to not only a comment about the policy settings but a request for information about their circumstances and what options they have. So I suspect that, though the review secretariat did not respond in detail to the submissions, some of them may have been referred to policy branches to assist the person with their personal circumstances.

Dr Harmer—Quite often it is difficult to distinguish between a submission and a detailed letter proposing changes or suggestions. The latter would have gone directly to the minister and she has probably got it.

Senator SCULLION—I think we could reasonably say that there were responses to a call for submissions. They may not be in different formats—I acknowledge that—but that is what I am referring to.

Mr Hartland—In relation to the submission aspect, no, we have not given people a letter back debating the issue or proposing a solution.

Dr Harmer—We have not entered into debate with the submission.

Senator SCULLION—Would you be able to table a list of the names of the people who have provided submissions—if 'submissions' is the right term.

Mr Hartland—There are over 1,800 people who have provided submissions.

Dr Harmer—Many individuals and some organisations.

Senator SCULLION—I am not requiring the submissions. I am simply asking if you could table a list of people who have made the submissions.

Dr Harmer—We will check. I am not sure we should or could provide you with the names of individuals who have provided submissions. We will check that. I do not think there is any difficulty in providing you with the organisations that have provided submissions, but I think there may be a privacy issue around providing you with the names of individuals who have written in, because some of the submissions are not much more than a letter to me or to the secretariat. Some are quite analytic documents. There is a whole mixture. Many of them have come from individuals. I am not sure that they would all want their—

Senator SCULLION—I acknowledge that any of the questions here are subject to a whole range of conditions. If you could check that for me it could be very useful.

Senator Chris Evans—I think we will take on notice not only the question but also the concept. It just occurred to me that there may well be public servants who have submitted based on their experience, and this may raise issues. We will just take it on notice.

Senator SCULLION—I understand those issues. Perhaps you could take that into consideration and just clarify the exact number. I think you said it was about 1,800, but could you please supply the exact number? Has the department been involved in any of the

modelling of the review, including information that was contained in the background paper that was applied on 11 August?

Mr Hartland—Yes, and most of the modelling in the review is sourced from the departments.

Senator SCULLION—Was that confined to the secretariat?

Mr Hartland—No, we have drawn on the expertise of other branches in this, but a lot has been done in the secretariat.

Senator SCULLION—When you say that you have drawn on the expertise of other branches, what other branches do you mean?

Dr Harmer—We have got a research branch—

Mr Hartland—My colleague Ms Foster—it is her branch that runs the age pension program—has assisted us with customer numbers and examination of that data. As the secretary mentioned, we have a research branch as well, and a disability branch. The housing branch has also assisted. It is a wide-ranging review and it has therefore drawn on a wide range of sources of expertise in FaHCSIA.

Mr Innis—The income support system is a primary business for the department, so Nick's team has drawn on a whole range of branches. Just to give you an illustration, my own group—the Social Security Policy Branch—has contributed to the review. The Seniors and Means Test Branch—which Alanna Foster leads—the Research and Analysis Branch, and the long-term strategies branch, which includes the modelling unit for the department, have all made contributions, as well as, in some expert areas, the International Branch. So there has been quite a lot of contribution as part of the normal work of those areas of the department.

Dr Harmer—Ms Mackay wishes to add something in relation to Senator Scullion's question.

Ms McKay—In relation to Senator Scullion's question about the list of people or organisations who had submitted submissions to the pension review, we actually made an undertaking that those submissions would be treated as confidential. Some of them have been posted on websites but that has been the choice of the organisation or individual involved. We made a privacy undertaking and I think we will probably have to observe that.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 10.25 am to 10.44 am

CHAIR—We will reconvene. We are still in consideration of outcome group 2.1, Support for the aged. Welcome, Minister Carr. Good to see you here. We will go to questions from Senator Humphries.

Senator HUMPHRIES—My questions follow from those of Senator Scullion before the break about the review into, among other things, the age pension. What modelling has the policy area of the department undertaken to examine the implications of an increase in age pension numbers?

Mr Hartland—The review has done a lot of modelling on a whole range of different issues. The analysis of what would happen for an increase under different scenarios is an

aspect of our advice to government on policy changes. So in a way it is somewhat separate from the mainstream work of the review.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Mainstream what? I am sorry, what did you say?

Mr Hartland—The review has done a lot of modelling on a whole range of things. As a part of that work and as a part of the department's general responsibility to advise government on emerging policy matters, we have modelled different aspects of different scenarios, but the modelling that is concerned with the impact of changes of rate and other parameters is really a part of our responsibility to advise the minister on policy.

Senator HUMPHRIES—In other words, you are saying you cannot answer the question?

Mr Hartland—I am saying that is the answer to the question.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I am asking what modelling you have undertaken to examine the implications of an increase in age pension numbers. Can you tell me about that modelling?

Dr Harmer—We have undertaken a considerable amount of analysis and modelling so that I can reasonably put a report supported by the facts to government. As you would know, this is a report to government that is imminent. They have made it clear that they will be considering it in the budget context. I genuinely think that we should not go into precisely what we have done; it very much is about me producing a report to government. It is very much advice to government, and it will be available to government very shortly.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You have done modelling on scenarios that the government might consider for increases in the age pension, widening the number of people who are eligible for the age pension and so on in order for them to make a decision about what to do under this review.

Dr Harmer—We have done considerable work addressing the terms of reference. One of the terms of reference was the adequacy of the age pension.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How recently has that work been done? Presumably it was done in earnest from the announcement of the inclusion of age pensions in the review.

Dr Harmer—We have been doing it constantly since the review was announced—we set up the team in May—right through to the imminent delivery of the report to government.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Let us pretend that there was not a review going on and I am just a senator asking you about how you are dealing with the number of people who are eligible to apply for pensions in Australia at the moment. I have seen media reports suggesting that there has been a significant spike in the number of people applying for age pensions. I think the report said that it had risen to 3,000 a week. Is that true?

Dr Harmer—We can answer that. Yes, there has been an increase.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Of that order?

Dr Harmer—We may have the figures.

Ms Foster—Claim rates have risen since October. Over the period from October to December, the weekly claim rate had risen by 40 per cent above the rate in the months before October. Grant rates have also risen. Normally we would see about 2,000 grants a week. It

rose to about 3,000 a week around December. At the moment, in the first two weeks of February, the average weekly grant rate is around 2,800.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So you are experiencing approximately a 40 to 50 per cent increase in the number of people made eligible or becoming eligible to receive the age pension. What do you attribute that increase to?

Ms Foster—There are a number of elements. Looking at the characteristics of people who have been coming on to the pension over the last three months, there are some differences in that group compared to groups who have come on earlier. For instance, their assessable assets are somewhat higher. There are more part-raters amongst them, which tends to suggest that there has been an impact on the value of people's income and assets. There are a number of other factors that could be playing a role, including the processes of normal ageing of the population. Also, the deeming rate reductions, for instance, may have had an impact; people can earn more private income and still be eligible for a pension.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Are you able to tell me what that does to the projected cost of the age pension budget as at the end of this financial year compared with the beginning of the year?

Ms Foster—In the updated economic forecast, the increase was expected to be around \$76 million.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do those figures project increases into future years as well?

Ms Foster—No, I do not believe so.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Can you tell me the projected number of people and costs for this financial year for people on part-rate and full-rate age pensions, for singles and couples and for homeowners and non-homeowners?

Mr Innis—We are happy to provide some of those breakdowns but we need to take that detail on notice.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Okay. When you provide them, can you also let me know when those figures were last revised. How current are they?

Dr Harmer—We will give you a date at which they are—

Senator HUMPHRIES—Very good. If you have projections for this financial year, do you have any projections beyond this financial year to subsequent years as well?

Mr Innis—As a matter of course, we do not do detailed analysis beyond the forthcoming financial year.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Okay. Can you tell me how many self-funded retirees are expected to now access an age pension because of changes to arrangements around the minimum amount of capital they must withdraw from their account-based pensions?

Ms Foster—I cannot answer that specifically, because it will depend on people's individual circumstances. For instance, it will depend on how much they may have already drawn down during the year and how much they have elected to take later in the year. It will also depend on things like their other levels of private income.

Mr Innis—To add to Ms Foster's answer, the number depends on the position and behaviour of the individuals. The government's decision provides them with the opportunity to change their behaviour in response to the financial crisis. Exactly how that plays out with respect to the age pension is not clear as yet.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You would ask people when they apply, though, whether they are applying for a pension for the first time, whether they have other sources of income and whether they—

Mr Innis—The population group for this particular circumstance is quite small in relation to both the stock of age pensioners and the flow coming into age pension. I do not think getting that level of granularity in the data is achievable.

Senator HUMPHRIES—All right. I still want to ask about the age pension but I might move on to the Commonwealth seniors health card if that is all right. Can you tell me how many people are expected to lose access to the Commonwealth seniors health card due to changes in the legislation around adjusted taxable income?

Mr Wallace—The income test changes announced in the last budget are projected to result in around 20,000 people losing eligibility for the Commonwealth seniors health card over the course of the forward estimates.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The forward estimates being the next three years?

Mr Wallace—That is right.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The figure I heard was 22,000. That would be an exaggeration, would it?

Mr Wallace—The more precise figure I have is 21,134. But, again, as we have discussed here before, these are based on estimates looking at a range of factors, so they will not be as precise as that.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I suppose you cannot be sure exactly how many there are, because some who are not be eligible for them now will not apply for them.

Mr Wallace—That is right. There are a range of factors that might influence how accurate that estimate is, including the changed global financial circumstances and, indeed, the government's decision to halve the minimum drawdown requirements on super, which may also affect people's gross income from super and, therefore, their eligibility for the CSHC.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So that means the figure might in fact be revised downwards?

Mr Wallace—There has not been a formal revision to the estimate at this stage. I am just noting that it is possible that the changes in relation to drawdown will have an effect on that as both this measure and the change to the minimum drawdown affect people's gross superannuation.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Could I ask about the national seniors reciprocal transport concessions—one of those ongoing and long-standing bugbears. It is indeed a very popular topic. I understand that a deal has been worked out for these to be offered for the first time on a national basis. I am also told that there are some teething problems. Has it commenced in all states and territories at this point?

Mr Wallace—The scheme has commenced in all states and territories other than Western Australia at this stage.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Why not Western Australia?

Mr Wallace—Western Australia has not as yet accepted the terms of the offer made by the Commonwealth.

Senator HUMPHRIES—When was the scheme announced?

Mr Wallace—It was announced in the context of the election. It was an election commitment.

Senator HUMPHRIES—But when was it announced that an agreement had been reached with the states and territories? There was a subsequent announcement, wasn't there?

Mr Wallace—There was a series of media releases in relation to agreements with individual states, which I do not have the precise dates for.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I know these things will be announced several times—as they usually are announced and re-announced and re-announced again. Is there a date at which agreement was formally struck with the states and territories?

Mr Wallace—There will be dates on which the agreements were signed by each of the states who have signed agreements, but I do not have those dates in front of me. I can take that on notice.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Okay. Has it commenced in Queensland?

Mr Wallace—Queensland is providing concessions in relation to their urban public transport system, but they have not yet extended the reciprocal transport concessions to their Traveltrain service, which is a long-distance rail service.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So, when you say, 'it has commenced', it is not a uniform reciprocal transport scheme, is it? Some states offer concessions which others do not.

Mr Wallace—The nature of the government's announcement in the election context and its objective is that people travelling away from their home state to another state are able to receive the concessions available in the state to which they travel, on the same basis as home seniors. So there will be some state-to-state differences in what those concessions are. To date, all states have implemented that fully—except for Queensland, which has not yet implemented it on the long-distance rail, and Western Australia, which has not yet implemented it.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I would not imagine New South Wales would be happy that Queensland pensioners are able to travel at whatever it is—half price—on their long distance train networks but a New South Wales pensioner going to Queensland cannot do the same thing.

Mr Wallace—The negotiations between the Commonwealth and Queensland are ongoing. The Commonwealth's position has been that the concessions are to be extended on all public transport services in each state. Funding under the national partnership arrangements has been flowing to Queensland, but until the formal agreement is struck with Queensland there is the

possibility of a reconciliation of GST revenues in the future reflecting the fact that the commitment has not been fully implemented.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How much funding has been allocated to each state and territory to compensate for this scheme?

Mr Wallace—New South Wales \$22,649,177; Victoria—maybe I will round the figures a little—\$6.272 million; Queensland \$14.491 million.

Senator HUMPHRIES—It is very strange that Victoria with a much larger population only gets half of the compensation of Queensland which is not fully taking part in scheme. Why is that?

Mr Wallace—The funding model was negotiated with the states. The Commonwealth contracted Access Economics to do some work to develop an appropriate funding model. That was discussed and negotiated between officials with the states. There are three factors that contribute to the final funding offer: overnight travel to the state for non-business purposes, so trying to capture the group that we are intending to capture here; the extent of public transport usage in that state and trying to break that down to the particular demographic; and the nature of the concession offered in that state. When you combine how many people are going there, how much public transport is available to be used or is used by that demographic in that state and the amount of concession provided by the state government, that results in a set of figures that does not look population based and it is not intended to be done on a population basis.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Are you saying there might be less public transport use in Victoria, for example, than there is in Queensland? Is that how that works?

Mr Wallace—It is a combination of how many people travel there. It also relates to the extent of the concession. New South Wales provides a very large concession to the seniors travelling on their public transport. I do not have the details to hand of the individual concession systems.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Do not worry. It is not important. You were down to Queensland. What are the other states?

Mr Wallace—Western Australia \$1.552 million.

Senator HUMPHRIES—No one uses public transport there.

Mr Wallace—I think it is highly concentrated around Perth and not so much long distance. South Australia \$1.401 million; Tasmania \$432,000; ACT \$649,000; and the Northern Territory \$278,000.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Will you be collecting data on actual usage of the concessions as part of this scheme to work out how many people from interstate actually receive the use of these concessions?

Mr Wallace—We would like to. The nature of the formal reporting requirement in the national partnership is consistent with the requirements for the extension of fringe benefits SPP which is that we require the states to provide an assurance statement that the concessions are being extended consistent with the agreement. The difficulty in breaking down this cohort specifically is that state and territory ticketing systems which are split across some state

owned and operated services and some state funded but privately operated services do not collect information on the different nature of concessions. So generally the system recognises that a concessional fare is eligible but not the subtype of concessional fare.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I know some transport options check that information and record it on an interstate card rather than a local card, but not uniformly I assume. But there are reporting requirements to the extent of their knowledge about how these things are being accessed by the states and territories to the Commonwealth.

Mr Wallace—The only formal reporting requirement under the national partnership is an assurance statement that the concessions are being provided in the terms of the agreement.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I want to turn the Broadband for Seniors initiative. That is \$15 million over three years—is that right?

Mr Innis—That, confusingly, is not a responsibility of the people at this table and I think it would be best handled in outcome 4. But I will make absolutely sure.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So output 4.4, Community partnerships—

Mr Innis—It is Community partnerships.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Okay, I will ask those questions there. Do you look after the Pension Loans Scheme?

Ms Foster—Yes, Senator.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Can you provide stats on the number of seniors currently accessing the Pension Loans Scheme and the value of their loans?

Ms Foster—Currently there are 477 cases involving about 680 individuals. I do not have the information on the value of their loans.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Can that be obtained? A total value or an average value would be fine.

Ms Foster—I will have to check with Centrelink on whether or not we can obtain that information.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Can you give me information as well when you are looking for that on the distribution between states and territories on those loans?

Ms Foster—I will check whether that is available, Senator.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What is the projected cost of the scheme over the forward estimates?

Ms Foster—I am advised that it is effectively no cost, in part because it is a loan and it is borrowed at the current interest rate is 5.25 per cent. So effectively the moneys are repaid at some point.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Fair enough. It is secured by a mortgage over the people's houses?

Ms Foster—Yes. The loan must be secured by real estate owned in Australia. It is not necessarily houses; it is a real estate asset.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You project it to remain cost neutral over the period of the forward estimates and beyond, presumably?

Ms Foster—That is right.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Has any modelling been done on reforming the scheme in any way?

Ms Foster—No. We are monitoring the environment we are operating in of course but we are not doing future modelling. We were looking to see whether or not there might be, for instance, an increase in demand as a result of the economic circumstances at the moment, but we have not been able to discern any impact.

Dr Harmer—In that area, if we were doing policy work, it would be part of advice to government and we would not be able to talk about it.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Are there any consultants who are presently commissioned to do any work on the policy around the operation of the scheme?

Ms Foster—No.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The only other questions I have are on the Broadband for Seniors and I will ask those later.

[11.10 am]

CHAIR—As there are no further questions, we will now move on to outcome 2.2, Support for people with a disability.

Senator SIEWERT—Where are we up to with CSTDA?

Ms Davies—CSTDA 3 concluded on 31 December last year. As of 1 January this year we have the National Disability Agreement.

Senator SIEWERT—And where are we up to with that?

Ms Davies—It came into force, as I said, on 1 January. The intergovernmental agreement has been signed. The National Disability Agreement outlines the outcomes and performance framework for delivering disability services and officials are beginning to develop a detailed set of implementation plans at the moment.

Senator SIEWERT—When are the detailed implementation plans due to be finalised?

Ms Davies—I do not know that we have a definite date. Ministers will be meeting next week and officials will put to them a suggestion for endorsement about our way forward.

Senator SIEWERT—Where are the states up to in developing the plans? They are meeting next week. We have been trying to negotiate a new agreement for quite some time. I would have thought that they would have been ready to make rapid progress with the implementation plans.

Ms Davies—I suppose the disability part of COAG is slightly different in that the reforms that are outlined in the National Disability Agreement had been agreed earlier in 2008 by ministers. Each jurisdiction took responsibility for one of the eight priorities and there has been considerable progress in terms of planning and things like that.

Senator SIEWERT—Going back 18 months when the letters were written around those key areas—and that was under the previous government—I understood there was agreement to continue with some of those areas, like data collection and so on. What progress has been made on those sorts of issues?

Ms Davies—In those areas particularly of unmet demand?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, unmet demand, and there were also some key things around data collection, as I understand it—

Ms Davies—We have made substantial progress in terms of the development of the next survey of disability and carers. We talked about that last time at Senate estimates. It has already been road-tested and there is a special module in that that looks at unmet demand.

Senator SIEWERT—In the agreement there is a special module?

Ms Davies—In the next survey of disability and carers that is undertaken by the ABS.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that part of the ongoing implementation plans?

Ms Davies—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—I just want to get this straight in terms of time lines. You have got a meeting next week with the ministers where they will discuss the implementation plans or the timetable for developing the implementation plans?

Ms Bedford—The implementation time frames for the priorities that you were mentioning before have been agreed and have been progressing since the minister agreed to those previously. I can give you some updates on those time lines.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be appreciated.

Ms Bedford—Under the priority of better measurement of need, which includes the upgrade to the survey that Ms Davies was talking about, a national model to estimate demand will be developed by mid-2010. The ESDAC survey is part of working towards that model. The plan is being progressed with time lines to meet that deadline of mid-2010.

Senator SIEWERT—And that is across all states?

Ms Bedford—Yes, and all states have agreed to that. I must say that around all these priorities there is a very collaborative approach to implementation. There is a lot of work going on between officials of state governments and the Commonwealth government.

Population benchmarking for disability services also has a mid-2010 time line. A benchmarking framework will be developed and initial population benchmarking of disability services will be achieved by mid-2010. The Commonwealth has the lead on that priority. We have had a reference group working with a consultant to develop that framework. That is progressing well. We feel we will be able to meet that time line.

Making older carers a priority is also progressing. The Commonwealth has the lead on that as well. We have been working closely with states and territories on that. Part of that is around working out priorities. We are working closely with states and territories around progressing that one. I do not have an end date for that one.

Senator SIEWERT—Do you expect to have an end date after the ministerial meeting next week?

Ms Bedford—Yes. The next priority is quality improvement systems based on disability standards. This was one of those that were ongoing. The wording has slightly changed. It was an ongoing one from the previous work being done on the next disability agreement. That also has a mid-2010 delivery date. That will be a national disability quality framework with a national quality assurance system for disability services. It will basically be a national approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement. Victoria has the lead on that and it is progressing well.

Queensland has the lead on service planning and strategies to simplify access. There are a number of dates here. A framework implementation plan will be finalised by the end of this month—so we are expecting that in March. A copy with the updated progress report is to be provided when the plan is finalised. Once the framework implementation plan is finalised we will then progress work on the development of common definitions. That work is proposed to be established by June 2009. Work is continuing on a contemporary disability service system approach, which will also inform the establishment of those definitions. Between March and July 2009 consideration will also be given to determining the relationship between the access systems for the Home and Community Care program and disability services, because we often have crossover with clients.

Senator SIEWERT—Can we come back to the Home and Community Care program. Is this the agreement over Home and Community Care and disability services with the separation of responsibility where the Commonwealth is taking aged care and the states are taking disability—is that what we are talking about through that provision?

Ms Bedford—No, that is not what we are talking about here.

Senator SIEWERT—I had a nod from Ms Davies, so I am a bit confused.

Ms Davies—Sorry, I thought you were referring to that separate proposal.

Senator SIEWERT—But that is not what this—

Ms Bedford—No, this is about a number of organisations receiving disability funding as well as HACC funding. It is better to look at the quality systems so that we do not create a greater impost on services.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to come back to that separation later.

Ms Bedford—The next category it is early intervention and prevention, lifelong planning and increasing independence, and social participation strategies. This has a mid-2011 time frame. On 18 December 2008 disability officials endorsed a national implementation plan under this priority. Work is currently underway to establish a database of resources on early intervention and prevention, and lifelong planning to assist jurisdictions to exchange information and expertise. That is due to be completed around February-March—so around now. I can give you a bit more information about that priority if you like.

Senator SIEWERT—Is it possible to get a copy of the timetable?

Ms Bedford—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be really appreciated.

Ms Bedford—We could get that for you. Do you want me to keep going or just get a copy?

Senator SIEWERT—Just the last couple with just the time lines and perhaps the details. While I am fascinated, I am not sure if all my colleagues are.

Ms Bedford—Increased workforce capacity is another priority. That is an end of 2010 time line. That is a national workforce strategy that will be developed.

The last priority there is increased access for Indigenous Australians. That will be a framework by January 2010.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. That is much appreciated. There was an announcement towards the end of last year around the indexation of six per cent for the agreement. Am I correct in my understanding?

Ms Davies—The national disability agreement is not a funding agreement, so it does not actually contain information about indexation et cetera. That would be dealt with by Treasury/treasuries.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, please jump in, Senator Bernardi, because I am a bit perplexed.

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you. There was an announcement by Parliamentary Secretary Shorten that the Australian government's contribution to the national disability agreement will be indexed at around six per cent over the five-year agreement. That is what he said. I raised the issue of whether this was six per cent per annum or six per cent over the course of the five years. That is my first question. Can you tell me the answer to that, please?

Ms Davies—The factor in the indexation arrangement is nominal growth in GDP, which is projected to be approximately six per cent.

Senator BERNARDI—If we could just explore 'nominal growth in GDP' for a moment. I am not sure that I know of anyone who says it is going to be six per cent—accept you. Really, is that the expectation?

Ms Davies—That is right. That was the estimate at the time.

Senator BERNARDI—What is the estimate now? My understanding is that under the new indexation arrangements, it is CPI or thereabouts—whatever your inflation measure is going to be—plus increase in GDP. I raised the question: could indexation actually decline in real terms because of negative growth in the economy? I ask you that question now.

Dr Harmer—We are not responsible for the key parameters for these funding agreements; it is Treasury. I do not think we would have sufficient information in terms of what their estimate currently is for GDP over the next four years. You would have to ask them that.

Senator FIFIELD—Dr Harmer, wouldn't FaHCSIA itself ask Treasury? We can ask Treasury, but I am surprised that you would not ask Treasury.

Senator SIEWERT—I find it incredible because this has been an issue for ages. We have always talked about this issue in here. It has been a very significant issue. It was a major issue during the Senate inquiry into the CSTDA. It is one of the key things the service providers

and the states talk about all the time. I find it incredible that we are now being told to ask Treasury. We have never been told that before.

Dr Harmer—We have never been responsible for setting the indexation and the parameters on GDP.

Senator SIEWERT—But you will be absolutely aware—I know you are aware—that this has been a major issue with disabilities and we have always talked about this issue in here. You must know what indexation is going to be delivered through the agreement.

Ms McKay—Senator Siewert, the nature of the agreement is that the indexation factor has gone up from 1.8 per cent per annum to nominal GDP growth per annum. That is the agreement. We are not in a position to make projections about nominal GDP growth. It is not our responsibility and if we were to provide any of our guesses to the committee they would be as good as yours.

Senator SIEWERT—In other words, we do not know. Although there was a media release put out last year saying six per cent, we don't know, do we?

Senator BERNARDI—Basically, it is a guess.

Dr Harmer—We do not know what GDP growth will be over the forward estimates period. Treasury will have an estimate and they are the ones responsible for making the estimate.

Senator BERNARDI—This was asked to be clarified by the minister's office or the parliamentary secretary's office in December of last year, I think. I was unable to get an accurate answer then and you are still not in a position to tell me whether there could be a negative indexing factor to this funding.

Dr Harmer—I am not aware of your question on notice, but we are certainly not able to give you estimates for GDP.

Senator BERNARDI—It was not a question on notice. It was asked directly of the parliamentary secretary's office.

Dr Harmer—I am not aware of it.

Senator BERNARDI—I understand that and I accept that. But the indexation was changed.

Dr Harmer—It was changed—

Senator BERNARDI—It was. It was a change in the policy about how it was—

Dr Harmer—and Ms Davies gave you the change. It has gone from 1.4 to a relationship to nominal GDP.**Senator BERNARDI**—Which is CPI plus GDP growth—is that right?

Ms McKay—That is right.

Senator BERNARDI—My question has been and remains, and I think Senator Siewert's question also is: is there then a possibility for the funding to decrease in real terms? If you look at the inflation rate, which is CPI, and then if we have negative growth in the economy, which this government and other economists say is a real prospect, is there a guarantee that it will increase, that it will not fall below the inflation rate?

Dr Harmer—We are not the responsible body, no-one would expect FaHCSIA disability staff to be able to estimate GDP and we are not qualified to comment on that. We can regard it as a statement of yours but we cannot comment.

Senator BERNARDI—I find that extraordinary. I know, Dr Harmer, you do your best in here to be very straight with us, and I appreciate that. But you have to make plans about what is going on in your budgets and how things are going to be affected by budget cuts in the economy and things. You have not contemplated for a moment that there could be a contraction in the economy?

Ms Davies—I think that possibly the issue we are discussing is that under the new COAG arrangements the funding is done through treasuries. We are responsible for the agreement that outlines outcomes and performance monitoring. The appropriation that we formerly had under the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement is no longer part of our FaHCSIA appropriations; it has moved out. So we focus on what the states have agreed to deliver as outcomes, rather than how treasuries and premiers decide to allocate funding and indexation and growth factors.

Senator SIEWERT—In other words, when the parliamentary secretary made a statement about disability funding increasing through the indexation process he could not make that statement because he does not know.

Ms Davies—He was reflecting the decision that was agreed at COAG that the rate of indexation for this agreement would be nominal GDP per annum.

Dr Harmer—Presumably he was also reflecting what the estimate at the time was, which means he had perfect authority to give the Treasury estimate at the time, given the agreement that had been reached at COAG to change the indexation.

Senator SIEWERT—Not at the end of last year. We were heading into trouble towards the end of last year.

Senator BERNARDI—We spent \$11 billion.

Senator SIEWERT—Remember there was a motion in parliament about this.

Senator BERNARDI—I think there was something like that.

Senator SIEWERT—Senator Bernardi, it is very rare for me to agree or to admit that I was wrong and you were probably right over that motion. We will have to follow that up with Treasury with some questions on notice. I would like to go to the issue of the separations between HACC and disability services and where that discussion is up.

Ms Davies—Last November COAG agreed to further consideration during this year of reforms to roles and responsibilities and to funding and delivery of community based care. That includes possible reforms to the Home and Community Care program. COAG asked officials to bring back in the first half of this year specific proposals relating to community care for the aged, people with disabilities and those with mental health issues. In addition the Minister for Health and Ageing and our minister asked the National Advisory Council on Mental Health to undertake consultations with the community about proposed arrangements.

Senator SIEWERT—What other community stakeholders are being involved in that discussion.

Ms Davies—I will ask my colleague to answer that.

Mr Lewis—Could I ask you to repeat your question.

Senator SIEWERT—Ms Davies has just said that the National Advisory Council on Mental Health has been asked to consult stakeholders. There are obviously broader stakeholders than those involved in mental health. I acknowledge that they are of course the major stakeholders but there is a broad range of stakeholders involved. In my home state of Western Australia some concern has been raised with me about the matter of people not necessarily being opposed to the changes but being concerned with the impact they will have. I am concerned to ensure that they are consulted—and they are not just stakeholders in the mental health area.

Mr Lewis—The work that has been undertaken by John Mendoza, who is the chair of the National Advisory Council on Mental Health to Minister Roxon, involved workshops, I think, in every state and territory—Ms Brain can give me some more detail about that in a moment. I attended the WA one and Ms Brain attended many of the other workshops. There were people from a range of community organisations there; they were not just mental health. However, they were in the main primarily focused on mental health—I will say that—because that was the commission that John Mendoza was primarily given.

Senator SIEWERT—That is why I am asking if the peak bodies for some of the other areas have had similar consultation processes.

Mr Lewis—I can only comment on the process that Minister Roxon and Minister Macklin commissioned. I do not know for sure whether DoHA or others are having other consultations. They may be doing it. That is something that you may wish to put to the minister as a proposal. But I certainly cannot comment on the other general consultations.

Senator SIEWERT—Instead of listing it now could you table a list of the groups that have been at the consultation process so far. I do not want to chase it up unnecessarily if you are, through that process, already covering the groups that we all think should be there.

Mr Lewis—Okay.

Senator SIEWERT—Could we, Ms Davies go back to the time frame for the consultation processes that are being carried out. What is the time frame from here?

Ms Davies—COAG asked officials to bring back proposals in the first half of this year.

Senator SIEWERT—So, by June?

Ms Davies—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Does that mean that you will be formulating some finalised proposals?

Mr Lewis—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—With a view to implementing them when?

Ms Davies—I think it is more decisions about what the arrangements would be. It is hard to anticipate because the existing HACC agreement already has a time frame, so it would be up to COAG to make a decision about when any changed arrangements would begin.

Senator SIEWERT—So what you are saying is that there are no proposals yet for a specific time frame.

Ms Davies—No, I do not think so.

Ms McKay—Existing funding, under the existing agreements, continues until there is any change.

Ms Davies—That is right. The HACC arrangements will continue with minimal changes during the current training or planning period, meaning there will be no changes to service providers et cetera arising out of new funding arrangements.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. And when do the current funding arrangements finish?

Ms Davies—2010-11.

Senator SIEWERT—That is just the financial year after next.

Ms Davies—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. I do not know about my colleagues, but I want to ask about the special disability trust arrangements, if that is possible, and where you are up to with reviewing the excellent Senate committee report! I think last time we had estimates you were reviewing it.

Senator BERNARDI—Chair, I have questions on the National Disability Agreement before we move on. Would that be okay?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, that is why I said, ‘I don’t know about my colleagues.’

Senator BERNARDI—Just for a few minutes. I might have missed some of what Senator Siewert said, but have you detailed exactly what the benchmarks will be for the success or otherwise of the National Disability Agreement?

Ms Bedford—We have not at the moment. That is part of the work that we are undertaking and that is due for delivery in mid-2010.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. The report, or the outcomes and benchmarks, should also identify the penalties for failure to fulfil or reach those benchmarks; would that be right?

Ms Bedford—There will be a report to ministers and then they will agree on a way forward with those benchmarks. It would be bit early to say yet, Senator.

Senator BERNARDI—Forewarned is forearmed, I guess, in this business. Just a clarification as well: under the National Disability Agreement, there is \$5.3 billion in funding for disability services; do you have a breakdown of what that is going to be state by state? I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Ms Davies—The breakdown by state was, I think, made public when COAG announced these changed arrangements. But this is not a funding agreement, I guess. We are back to that previous point. That is Treasury’s bailiwick.

Senator SIEWERT—So you do not know what each state gets?

Ms Davies—We do, don't we?

Ms Bedford—We do. We can take that on notice. It was in the communique.

Senator SIEWERT—You are the people doing the policy, you are implementing it and yet we are told to go and ask Treasury about anything financial. It makes it extremely difficult for us to do our jobs if we are going to be told, 'No, you have to go and ask Treasury about finances,' because you cannot separate the finances from the policy and implementation of the agreement.

Dr Harmer—Senator, we will try and be as helpful as we can, noting that we are responsible for the agreement and accountability et cetera, and Treasury are responsible for the finances. In most cases we will have the information or be able to get it for you and we will do our best to do that.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Senator BERNARDI—I have another question, to do with funding. It is something in the additional estimates statement that I did not understand. It says the CSTDA 2008-09 estimate was \$747 million, and it has now been revised down to \$382 million. Yet the NDA, the National Disability Agreement, revised estimate is \$396 million, and that had no allocation at budget time last year. I just wonder where these figures actually came from—and am I correct in saying there is a slight discrepancy in them?

Ms Davies—I do not have them immediately in front of me. The \$396 million is the amount of money that would have been transferred out of our appropriations into the state treasuries; therefore, there would be a reduction in what appears in our appropriation, because we do not have a funding agreement. That is the difference between the CSTDA and the new National Disability Agreement.

Senator BERNARDI—Okay. What about the discrepancy between the \$382 million and the \$396 million? What is the relationship there?

Ms McKay—I think what you have got is the half-year funding under the CSTDA and the increased funding under the intergovernmental agreement that the National Disability Agreement is part of.

Senator BERNARDI—So they are not actually related? One is the conclusion of the CSTDA until June of this year? Is that right?

Dr Harmer—We will confirm it if that is not true, but I think that is—

Senator BERNARDI—Thank you, that would be appreciated.

Senator SIEWERT—I know this is in a new agreement, but I am wondering if you have an update on unmet need at the moment across Australia. Have you been able to get a handle on that yet?

Ms Bedford—No, and that is the work that is being done under that current—

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that, but I also know that you have been making efforts to look at that issue. So you do not have a handle on that yet?

Ms Bedford—No.

CHAIR—We now welcome Ms Emerson for questions on special disability trusts.

Senator SIEWERT—On the last occasion we met, you were reviewing the Senate committee report. I understand that this crosses over into the equipment committee—whose name has escaped me at the moment—that is about to report. I mean the group that is doing the review of funding at the moment.

Ms Emerson—The Disability Investment Group?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. I know that you reported that it is crossing over into what they are looking at as well. Could you give us an update on which areas of potential change to the trust you are considering? Could you also answer the perennial question: how many people have set up trusts since last we met?

Ms Emerson—To take the last question first, there are now 42 special disability trusts. I think our last reported figure was about 35—that is as at 31 December 2008. As to your other question about the status of the reportage, the group reported at the end of October, and government is currently considering a response to the report. Of the 14 recommendations that were made, the majority have both budgetary and legislative implications, so those considerations within government are still ongoing. The Disability Investment Group is also considering broader issues around private investment in disability support. They are currently finalising their report. It is not finished yet but we are expecting that report to government in the near future.

Senator SIEWERT—When you say ‘the near future’, how soon is that?

Ms Emerson—It will certainly be before the end of this financial year, but the committee themselves are still considering their final recommendations. We do not control that.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that. Will that be made public once it is—

Ms Emerson—The report will be to government, and it will be the decision of government whether to make that—

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. Has the department been asked by the minister or the parliamentary secretary to report back on the committee’s recommendations? Have you provided advice to government? I am not asking what it is; I know I cannot ask for that. I am asking whether you have been asked for advice.

Ms Emerson—Yes, we have certainly provided advice.

Senator SIEWERT—To the government and to the investment group?

Ms Emerson—We provide secretariat support to the investment group and we provide information to them at their request. It has included information about the special disability trusts and the Senate’s considerations.

Senator SIEWERT—How many new inquiries have you had about setting up trusts?

Ms Emerson—I would have to take that one on notice because I have to get that from Centrelink.

Senator BOYCE—The 42 trusts that have been set up would not necessarily include testamentary trusts because you would not necessarily be aware of their existence until they—

Ms Emerson—That is correct. Currently 316 people have been granted beneficiary status, and our usual assumptions are that a number of those will be seeking status in order to get a testamentary trust in place, if they so desire, later.

Senator BOYCE—What other work are you currently doing on lifetime planning—there are about a dozen different terms used—for support for people with disabilities whose parents are old or dead—I suppose that is the briefest way of putting it?

Ms Emerson—As you know, we have done work around the trusts themselves and done some other research—

Senator BOYCE—They are one example of a tool, but what else?

Ms Emerson—We have recently received a report from a consultant, which we are looking at at the moment, to examine international experience with both private savings and investment and future planning approaches. That report came to us earlier in January—

Senator BOYCE—Who was that consultant?

Ms Emerson—That was Allen Consulting.

Senator BOYCE—What other details are you able to provide? Obviously I would be very interested to see the whole report, but what can I see?

Ms Emerson—I hope that report will be available soon.

Senator BOYCE—Who will be releasing that—the department or the minister?

Ms Emerson—The minister will release that report. Basically it would include an international literature review, and some of the practices that we are now aware of overseas—and the early information we have is that the work is quite limited in fact.

Senator BOYCE—What is limited—the information or what is happening?

Ms Emerson—The experience overseas indicates that there is only a limited range of activities in this area by governments overseas. But the ones that are there—

Senator BOYCE—So you have only looked at government activity, or have you looked at government backed activity?

Ms Emerson—I would have to check the scope of the report, but essentially it would be government approaches overall. For example, the Canadian Registered Disability Savings Plan is the sort of example that would come up. There is the Gateway approach in the UK. There is a series of those, things that are described in some detail, and there is some examination of their applicability in the Australian context.

Then there is a separate part of the report which looks at some issues around succession planning and planning for the future by family members and it gives some examples from overseas. Again, they are quite limited in terms of what we have seen as innovative work overseas and in fact some of the Australian examples that have been piloted look quite positive when set against those. So we will have more information about those as well.

Senator BOYCE—Did the report look at non-government initiatives in this field?

Ms Emerson—Around the succession planning and planning for the future it did. It looked for examples and some of them are non-government sponsored activities. I think that there is a Canadian example in particular which is totally funded through the voluntary sector.

Senator BOYCE—So the plan—

Ms Emerson—Yes, exactly. There are also Australian examples that have been initiated in the non-government sector.

Senator BOYCE—I would be interested to receive any material that you can currently give me on that exercise and I would obviously like to see the report as soon as it becomes available. Would you take that on notice, Ms Emerson, and tell me what you can.

Ms Emerson—Certainly.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you.

Senator SIEWERT—I have one last question in terms of the beneficiaries' issue. If I understand you correctly, you said 316 have been granted?

Ms Emerson—Yes

Senator SIEWERT—That is overall?

Ms Emerson—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—You may have to check this on notice: how many people who have applied have not been granted that? Three hundred and sixteen people have been granted beneficiary status. Has anybody who has applied not been granted that status?

Ms Emerson—Yes. Twenty-four applications had been rejected.

Senator PARRY—I want to address my comments concerning the national autism centres which, I understand, is your area, Mr Lewis. Firstly, I draw your attention to a statement by the then shadow minister, Jenny Macklin, on 8 October indicating that there will be six specialised early childhood centres established in Australia—

Senator Chris Evans—What year was that, Senator Parry?

Senator PARRY—2007, just prior to the 2007 election. It was an election commitment. Subsequently, on 29 October on ABC radio Ms Macklin also confirmed that six centres would be established, saying that the first one would be in north-west Tasmania. What is the progress of the establishment of the six centres and in particular the one in north-west Tasmania?

Ms Brown—The six centres that have been announced by the government are progressing well. We have conducted an open selection process. We gave a notice of intention to advertise in terms of that selection process on 19 July last year. That was followed by national advertising on 16 August last year, with applications for that process closing on 26 September. Then there was a period of assessment of applications for all locations. As you are probably aware, not only was north-west Tasmania one of the locations, there were also five other locations across the country, so there was an assessment of all applications received for all of those locations during the period 29 September to 30 October last year. Since that time, we have been holding discussions and negotiations with potential providers for all of the sites.

Senator PARRY—Has any centre opened?

Ms Brown—No, there is no centre open.

Senator PARRY—Can you name the other locations apart from north-west Tasmania?

Ms Brown—Apart from north-west Tasmania, the sites will be in south-western Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne and Perth.

Senator PARRY—Has the tender process closed?

Ms Brown—The open selection tender process has closed, yes.

Senator PARRY—Have you appointed successful tenderers for the six locations yet?

Ms Brown—No; negotiations are currently underway.

Senator PARRY—Has any tender process been finalised with a successful tenderer appointed for any of the six locations?

Ms Brown—When you say tender process completed, there are no finalised agreements at this stage.

Senator PARRY—I understand that in December last year—it possibly was earlier this year—the Burnie City Council, possibly being the only north-west tender, received a document indicating that they were unsuccessful. Does that indicate that one was successfully appointed?

Ms Brown—That does not necessarily indicate that; that just indicates that the Burnie City Council application was not successful.

Senator PARRY—Can you provide on notice if there are any successful tenderers appointed if you cannot provide that now? You are saying that no-one has been appointed at this stage?

Ms Brown—There have been no agreements executed at this stage.

Senator PARRY—How would we have an exclusion of a tenderer if no tenderer has been appointed?

Ms Brown—Perhaps because a tenderer did not adequately meet the selection criteria.

Senator PARRY—In relation to the one in north-west Tasmania, has there been any approach to the department asking for that to be relocated to another part of Tasmania?

Ms Brown—Not that I am aware of.

Senator PARRY—Can you take that on notice and provide that?

Dr Harmer—We will take it on notice.

Senator PARRY—Maybe this is for the minister: is the commitment by government still to make the first centre in north-west Tasmania, as announced by the then shadow minister?

Senator Chris Evans—I will need to take advice if there has been any change to that. Has there been any change?

Mr Lewis—Not as far as we are concerned, certainly.

Senator PARRY—Is it proposed that the centres will be new greenfield sites or will be located with existing compatible agencies or suitable organisations?

Mr Lewis—My understanding—and Ms Brown can expand on this—is they are to be co-located and they are linked with existing providers.

Ms Brown—That is correct.

Senator PARRY—Where existing providers do not exist, what is the plan of action for those areas?

Ms Brown—Potentially, directly approach potential providers that we anticipate may satisfy the selection criteria.

Senator PARRY—Will each centre be staffed and resourced according to demand or are they going to be identical around the country?

Ms Brown—There is a component for operational funding that the government has committed to. That operational funding will contribute to the employment of at least 11 staff.

Senator PARRY—Per centre?

Ms Brown—Yes.

Senator PARRY—And that will not vary? That will be a minimum of 11 staff per centre?

Ms Brown—That is what the operational funding will go towards, yes.

Senator PARRY—When can we expect a conclusion for this process and for the centres to be opened?

Ms Brown—We indicated at the most recent estimates hearing that we had anticipated that there would be two operational before the end of this financial year.

Senator PARRY—Can you name those two?

Ms Brown—No, I cannot.

Senator PARRY—Can you take that on notice?

Mr Lewis—As Ms Brown has indicated, the negotiation with providers is still underway, so we would not—

Senator PARRY—So you do not have advanced planning for any particular location at this stage? You are just anticipating you have two?

Mr Lewis—We do have advanced planning for two sites, as we indicated in estimates last time, but we cannot give you the names of the potential providers until negotiations for commercial-in-confidence are resolved. It would be untoward of us—

Senator PARRY—Can you name the two sites? You cannot name them?

Mr Lewis—Again, that would be—

Dr Harmer—Given this hesitation, I would like to take that on notice. By naming the sites it may be that we in some way either compromise or pre-empt the negotiations if they are still going on.

Senator PARRY—I will accept that, but if there is advanced planning I would assume that it would also be geographically specific.

Mr Lewis—Yes.

Senator PARRY—Could that be taken on notice and addressed?

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator PARRY—Finally, with the taking on notice of the question about a request for relocation of the north-west centre in Tasmania, could any information that has been received to that effect also be provided? If it is not written, if there is any verbal approach, if you have that recorded in any memo, I would be interested to know that as well.

CHAIR—We have one issue from Senator Bernardi to do with a constituent and then we will move to Senator Fielding.

Senator BERNARDI—Dr Harmer, on 4 September last year, the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services appeared on *Q&A* on the ABC. In response to a question to do with the Helping Children with Autism package from an audience member who expressed concern that her daughter was not eligible under the package and yet still needed help, the parliamentary secretary said words to the effect of, 'Your child does not fit into the box but we still need to be able to help them,' which I think is a very appropriate sentiment. Are you aware of any follow-up with the lady—Ms Otton is how she was named on the show—and whether the issues that she raised have been resolved?

Dr Harmer—I am not aware personally but I will turn to Mr Lewis.

Mr Lewis—We understand that there have been discussions between the parliamentary secretary's office and the family concerned subsequent to that program.

Senator BERNARDI—I am reassured by that, but I have received a letter from a constituent who said that they also contacted the minister's office through a web email form and have received no response. It was described to me that this was immediately after the show, so we are talking five or so months ago, and it is regarding a similar issue. I am happy to provide the department or the minister with the information.

Mr Lewis—That would be useful.

Dr Harmer—It would be helpful if you could provide that.

Senator BERNARDI—Certainly there is some concern there. If there is a change in approach to this and other people can be helped, I am sure she would appreciate any information we could provide to her.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator FIELDING—I want to focus on the \$244 million COAG Younger People with Disability in Residential Aged Care Program. How much money has been spent?

Ms Bedford—For the first year, 2006-07, funding was \$4,190,136. That was the Commonwealth's contribution and would have been matched by states and territories. For 2007-08, the amount was \$14,179,231, and that also would have been matched. Then we are into the current financial year. Do you want those figures?

Senator FIELDING—Yes, thanks.

Ms Bedford—\$28,287,400.

Senator FIELDING—I think you are, roughly, half way through the overall \$244 million COAG program. Could you remind me how that figure is made up? How much is federal and how much is states?

Ms Bedford—It is half and half.

Senator FIELDING—So half is \$122 million?

Ms Bedford—That is the Commonwealth's.

Senator FIELDING—We have \$18 million and another \$28 million, and we are about half way through. I am trying to work out how it is going.

Ms Bedford—The first year was small. Different states signed up at different times. That was the year that the work was being done around finding out who were the eligible and priority group people. The money built up by another \$10 million in 2007-08. In 2008-09, we are up to \$28 million. In 2009-10, we go up to \$37 million, and \$37 million again in 2010-11. It was built up in that way in order to provide new accommodation if required et cetera. At the moment, we are doing a mid-term review. As you said, we are mid way through the program. That has commenced and we are expecting to have that for consideration by government in the first half of this year. That will give us a good idea of really how the program is going.

Senator FIELDING—Could you table, or take on notice, exactly where the money has been spent so far and what you are looking at spending the rest on? Obviously it is a big program and there would be details of where the money has been spent. Are you able to provide that?

Ms Bedford—The money is managed by state and territory governments.

Senator FIELDING—Yes, but I assume the Commonwealth would be keeping a close eye on it.

Ms Bedford—They do report to us.

Senator FIELDING—Rather than asking the five states, I wonder whether you could provide that?

Ms Bedford—Yes.

Dr Harmer—We will do it for you, Senator, but we probably do not have it with us, so we will have to take it on notice.

Senator FIELDING—I understand. Could you also provide detail on where it is going in the future? I am not suggesting there are any problems; I am just very interested in this project. It involves a lot of money, which is great, and there is a lot of need. It is about young people being in aged care. It is an area I would like to focus on and get a sense of how it is tracking, rather than just seeing reports.

Dr Harmer—We will do our best to help with that information.

Senator FIELDING—That will then help me with the targets for this program. I have some material on some of the reports from there, but I am wondering if you could summarise the targets you are trying to achieve out of the whole program. I know it is in some of the reports, but I would like to know how it is going. I know there is a mid-year report coming.

Ms Bedford—Do you want the targets or do you want the number of people?

Senator FIELDING—Targets would be great. As I said, I am not saying there is a problem.

Ms Bedford—Okay. At the national level, the agreed initial target ranges over the life of the program are: net reduction in the number of younger people with disability under the age of 50 in residential aged care of between of between 425 and 689; between 402 and 446 people under the age of 65 to be provided with services to assist them in moving out of residential aged care to more age-appropriate supported accommodation; between 213 and 256 people under the age of 65 at risk of admission to residential aged care to be provided with services to divert them from inappropriate admission to residential aged care; and between 345 and 282—though I might have to check those figures—people under the age of 65 to be provided with enhanced services within a residential aged care setting where residential aged care is the only available suitable supported accommodation option.

Senator FIELDING—Thanks. I look forward to getting the other information. It is a good program, thank you.

Senator CAROL BROWN—I would like to ask a question about the autism package, particularly the early intervention component. Could you give me an update on how the rollout is going?

Ms Brown—Yes. What in particular would you like to know?

Senator CAROL BROWN—How many people are starting to access the service?

Ms Brown—I have those figures, if you will bear with me.

Mr Lewis—While Ms Brown is looking for those figures, I might give you some other information. One hundred and twelve organisations were offered membership of the early intervention panel. Of the 112, 106 are already operating and they have been in place since 27 October last year. We have some numbers in addition to that around participants, and Ms Brown will find those for you. If she cannot find the information we will get it to you quickly.

Senator CAROL BROWN—I am particularly interested in how many families are accessing the package and also the families who will be accessing the one-off payments for families who live in rural and remote areas.

Ms Brown—The rural and remote payments? Yes, I can definitely give you those figures. In terms of the early intervention services that are being provided, we have assisted—I am just double-checking. I do not want to give you an incorrect number. In terms of the rural and remote allowance, as at close of business yesterday we had paid 192 rural and remote allowances to families. That is \$2,000 each, so that would total \$384,000.

Senator CAROL BROWN—I am assuming there are a number of applications still waiting to be processed.

Ms Brown—Yes, that is probably the case, but as of yesterday 192 allowances had been paid.

Senator CAROL BROWN—How do you reach those families? How are they made aware of this extra assistance that is out there?

Ms Brown—We have had various community strategies available. We have an information line available. We have an email system available and also, you may be aware, just the day before yesterday we launched a new autism website to provide information about the new package.

Senator CAROL BROWN—That is a pretty good result—192 so far since the end of October.

Ms Brown—That is correct.

Senator CAROL BROWN—You would be very happy with that. If you like, you can provide that other information to me on notice. I would like it if I could get it with a state-by-state breakdown.

Mr Lewis—We will confirm the figures this afternoon. We will have it back to you today.

Senator CAROL BROWN—Thank you very much.

Senator FIFIELD—This question is probably for Ms Brown. During estimates in October last year the department stated that 32 full-time equivalent autism advisers were expected to be available from 27 October. In answer to a question on notice, it was stated that only 18 autism advisers were available as of 27 October, and I understand that on 10 November only 26 advisers were available. I am wondering why the department was not able to meet that target and how many autism advisers are available now.

Ms Brown—As at today, there are the full-time equivalent of 30.1 autism advisers available across the country. We relied very much on the autism associations to conduct recruitment processes. In fact, we understand that the New South Wales autism association, which is known as ‘aspect’, currently has a recruitment process underway for two more autism advisers. It was a matter of the autism associations building the adequate infrastructure—having appropriate phone systems in place and extra space for the autism advisers. So it was just the initial requirements to set up the infrastructure for the advisers that took a little time. But we have been monitoring that, yes.

Senator FIFIELD—Is it still the government’s aim to have 40 full-time autism advisers?

Ms Brown—We are still monitoring that and liaising with the associations to assess need and demand, yes.

Senator FIFIELD—Is 40 the government’s aim, or was that a ballpark figure as to what could be supported by the associations?

Ms Brown—The funding was for up to 40 advisers.

Senator FIFIELD—So it was ‘up to’? It was not a definite objective to have 40; it was to provide the capacity to have 40?

Mr Lewis—I think last time we also had a discussion with Senator Bernardi about the definition of ‘full-time equivalent’. It is 40 full-time equivalents. So, in effect—

Senator FIFIELD—Sorry; I should have said ‘full-time equivalents’.

Mr Lewis—we are on track, and 40 is still the target.

Senator FIFIELD—Do you have a time frame for when you anticipate that the 40 full-time equivalent positions—

Mr Lewis—May 2009 is the target date.

Senator FIFIELD—And are you confident of meeting that date? ‘Hopeful’ might be a better word.

Mr Lewis—I shudder to say that after last time, when Senator Lundy asked a similar question. But we certainly are, as I said last time, endeavouring to get those numbers.

Senator FIFIELD—The autism associations are required to submit implementation plans. How many autism associations are there? Is it one per state?

Ms Brown—There is one in each state and territory.

Senator FIFIELD—So there is therefore one implementation plan from each jurisdiction?

Ms Brown—That is correct. And, if I may add, we have asked for weekly reports from each of the associations, just to monitor their progress, the numbers of inquiries they receive and the advice that they provide, and we are having regular teleconferences with them. We also held, back in December, the very first autism advisers conference, for all of the advisers to get together, to ensure we had a nationally consistent approach and we could discuss issues. We anticipate we will have another one of those forums in the middle of this year.

Senator FIFIELD—I assume that, if the aim is to have the 40 full-time equivalent advisers in place in May 2009, that must mean that all the implementation plans have long since been submitted to you and that there are none that you are still waiting on.

Mr Lewis—That may well be the case, but there are workforce issues and changing personnel; that is why I shudder to give you the certainty.

Senator FIFIELD—Sorry—that is within the autism associations?

Mr Lewis—That is right. You can have a plan with an organisation that says—

Senator FIFIELD—‘Subject to change’.

Mr Lewis—Absolutely.

Senator FIFIELD—Sure. Ms Brown, you said that there were 30.1 advisers.

Ms Brown—Full-time equivalent.

Senator FIFIELD—Full-time equivalent—sorry, I should keep saying ‘full-time equivalent’—advisers who are available now and are providing advice now?

Ms Brown—Yes.

Senator FIFIELD—Okay; that is good. Do you have a figure on how many families have accessed the advisers?

Ms Brown—Yes, we do. I think the figure is over 2,000. Yes—2,059 families had accessed the autism advisory component of the package.

Senator FIFIELD—That is good news. Were workshops for families with children with ASD due to start this month?

Ms Brown—In fact, the very first one has started today in Dingley, in Melbourne.

Senator FIFIELD—Very good. That is not far from my office.

Mr Lewis—Some very careful planning went into that, Senator!

Senator Chris Evans—Any complaints with the program will be referred to you.

Senator FIFIELD—That is right! How many workshops are planned over what area and over what time frame?

Ms Brown—We have 13 participants, and that workshop is being facilitated by Noah's Ark, which is an early intervention provider.

Senator FIFIELD—So this is the first of those workshops. How many workshops are planned?

Ms Brown—We are anticipating that the workshop program will provide up to 2,500 places for families each year. It is based on a demand-driven model, which means that, once a provider receives expressions of interest from a minimum of four participants, they will arrange to have a workshop. They will also give priority to rural and remote participants.

Senator FIFIELD—Does priority to rural and remote participants mean having workshops in rural or remote areas, or does it mean facilitating the access for people who are in either rural or remote areas?

Ms Brown—It could mean either.

Senator FIFIELD—Are we due to break at quarter past?

CHAIR—Yes. I am sure that senators have more questions on disabilities. Is it completed?

Senator BOYCE—I am happy to put the rest of my questions on notice.

Senator FIFIELD—Senator Humphries has more questions.

CHAIR—We will break but we will need to come back to outcome 2.2. After lunch we will go to output 4.2, Housing support, to suit the ministerial arrangements.

Proceedings suspended from 12.16 pm to 1.30 pm

CHAIR—Good afternoon, everyone. The committee will reconvene. We are going to output 4.1. Welcome back, Senator. It is your first time today here; welcome. We have questions from Senator Fielding and Senator Payne. Certainly, Senator Ludlam from the Greens will be coming in to do this area as well and there could be other people. So there are going to be a series of housing questions.

Senator FIELDING—Thank you. I wanted to ask some questions about the social housing being developed. Can you just go through, broadly to start with, social housing and where it is at? There has been a fair bit of money being earmarked for it.

Dr Harmer—Your question, Senator, is?

Senator FIELDING—My question was in regard to social housing and just how much money has been allocated in that area through the stimulus package?

Mr Leeper—Thank you. In the COAG discussions and agreements last November, above the base amount for housing there was a further \$400 million provided to support additional

construction, and that was to provide dwellings to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In the stimulus package, there are three main components. There is \$400 million over the two years 2008 and 2009—equally split—to support repairs and maintenance to public housing dwellings. There are also two components of construction activity. The first component is \$692 million, beginning in 2008-09 for ready-to-go construction. That is construction that has development approval and just needs money to kick it off. The second phase of that program is \$5.3 million. And those two amounts combined provided the additional 20,000 social housing dwellings. Those amounts of money go out in 2011-12 and the amounts of money were profiled in the appropriations bills.

Senator FIELDING—It is a sizeable chunk of money, which is good. This question is still in this area, but I will ask it anyway: how much of that social housing, will be designed or equipped to be ready to handle disabilities and ageing people? I just want to ask that question, generally, first?

Dr Harmer—Whether or not they will be accessible?

Senator FIELDING—Yes, that is it. The word is ‘accessible’. Most people out there do not understand. For them ‘accessible’ is the next street corner or down there. The technical term is accessible housing, which is basically for types of people with disabilities or ageing. I appreciate, yes, the technical term is accessible, but most people on the street think, ‘That must be on the street corner.’

Mr Jagers—The current profile of public housing tenants is that about 55 per cent are either ageing or with a disability. We would expect that the profile for the social housing dwellings that are going to be built under the Nation Building and Jobs Plan will at least match that profile. So we will be outlining conditions and guidelines for states and territories to comply with, and will be requiring at least the current percentage—which is, I understand, 55 per cent.

Senator FIELDING—Great. That was what I was really after, Mr Jagers. There was also some thought that rather than people—

Dr Harmer—Senator, I just want to point out that that is actually a new requirement that I do not think we have previously imposed through the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreements.

Senator FIELDING—That is what I understand as well. I think it is a positive move. I will not hold you to that set figure of 55 per cent, if it is a set figure, but I knew it was going to be some level around there.

Mr Jagers—Senator, if I could clarify, it is our expectation that we will meet that.

Senator FIELDING—Yes. I will be interested to know what that turns out to actually be, if that makes sense, rather than the expectation.

Mr Jagers—Yes.

Senator FIELDING—So I am putting it on notice that I would like to know, if I can.

Dr Harmer—We will be collecting information.

Senator FIELDING—Yes.

Dr Harmer—So at some point in the future, when the houses are built, we will be able to give you that information.

Senator FIELDING—I was just wondering also whether it would cost very much more, in the design phase of the other 45 per cent of new homes—I do not mean to pre-fit them per se with accessibility—

Dr Harmer—Wider doors and corridors, bars in the toilets—

Senator FIELDING—Yes, that sort of thing. I do not mean you should make it look industrial but to make it still look really good quality, because people who are in that 45 per cent will end up ageing and they do not want to shift out of those particular homes. All of a sudden, there is a huge cost to retrofit. Now, I have been through this. I do not want to go into too much detail. My wife was very ill last year and all our showers are upstairs. She could not come home earlier—being away for three months or something—because we did not have a shower downstairs. To put one in would cost a fortune but if someone said, when the house was being designed: ‘Just put another pipe there for a shower. Do not build it, but it just have it sit there,’ it would have been a lot cheaper when someone wanted to do it. Is that sort of thinking going into the design of these other 45 per cent? Obviously, we have got to be very careful about the cost going through the roof, otherwise we will get less housing, totally.

Mr Jagers—Senator, I guess our goal is to achieve universal design or adaptability for the highest proportion possible. We do know that a number of the houses we are yet to construct will have already had development approval.

Senator FIELDING—Yes, of course.

Mr Jagers—We would want, to the extent possible, to tap into that stock where there is development approval but where construction has not started. In some places it will not be possible to have the designs altered significantly without going back for another development approval. So there will be some limitations on what we can achieve, but we would want to achieve at least the current proportion that is in the existing stock.

Senator FIELDING—I suppose you can see where I am going with it though: that it could be considered for future houses—not the ones that are shovel ready or already planned; you would not want to see those delayed—or the ones in the following years? You could assure me that it is already in-built in those sorts of designs, but I am not so sure it has been in the past, because when people have asked about creating some of the things they have found it pretty hard. The expense is too high and they are told they have to shift or that sort of thing.

Dr Harmer—There has not been much focus on that in the past, but the government is highlighting the importance of that. Your proposition is accurate: it is much easier and cheaper to make a house accessible when it is built than, as you say, to retrofit it.

Mr Leeper—Certainly, Senator, our intention is that, when we go to the market—I anticipate that will be in April—for the second and most substantial portion of the purchasing, the \$5.3 billion, that will be one of a number of design issues that we will highlight as things that we will take into account. The national partnership agreements on the COAG website list seven different things that will be taken into account. Adherence to universal design principles is one of those seven. There are a number of those things, but we will be saying to people, in

terms of what comes back to us as proposals that we could fund, that this is one of the things we will be assessing against. Mr Jagers has made it clear, I think, that we would like what is clearly a significant proportion of these dwellings to be designed and constructed with disability occupancy in mind.

Senator FIELDING—Thank you.

Senator PAYNE—Can we go to the National Rental Affordability Scheme, please, Dr Harmer? I think it is the case that the application process for round 2 closes towards the end of March this year. Is that correct?

Mr Leeper—That is correct; 27 March.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you. Mr Leeper, can you the committee any advice on what the early level of interest is in this next round of funding?

Mr Leeper—I might ask Ms Ham to elaborate, but we designed the second round in such a way that incentives would be allocated on the way through the process for bids that came in and were compliant and would result in housing rental outcomes by 30 June. I might ask Ms Ham to elaborate.

Ms Ham—With round 2, we provided an opportunity for early applications to be received for any proposals that could deliver houses and dwellings that would be available for rent prior to 30 June 2009. We have received 12 applications through that early process and we are currently assessing 10 of those. One was withdrawn and one was viewed as non-compliant. The 10 that are currently being assessed are for slightly over 1,000 dwellings that would come on as additional numbers for this financial year.

Senator PAYNE—I am sorry, Ms Ham, did you just say one of them is for over 1,000 or total were for over 1,000.

Ms Ham—The total for the 10 proposals that we are currently assessing.

Senator PAYNE—If these are for delivery by 30 June 2009, they are obviously either under construction or completed construction?

Ms Ham—That is correct.

Senator PAYNE—Which of those?

Ms Ham—Both. Some would have been completed and some would still be under construction.

Senator PAYNE—What is the proportion of completed?

Ms Ham—I am sorry, Senator, I do not have that information. Those proposals are currently in the assessment process.

Senator PAYNE—That is a fairly different level of response from that received to the first round. I think the language that was used when we discussed the first round was that the department was swamped with applications.

Ms Ham—The normal closing time for round 2 is on 27 March and, through the information sessions that we delivered across the country, we had some 270 people registered

for those information sessions. My expectation would be that we would see a similar number of applications as to round 1.

Dr Harmer—Senator, in these sorts of programs—

Senator PAYNE—In the last month, they are going to come in.

Dr Harmer—Yes. In these sorts of programs, it is often in the last month that we get them.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you very much. What is the total of incentives that you are proposing to offer in round 2?

Ms Ham—During the establishment phase 11,500 incentives are available but, as Mr Leeper indicated, we are able to forward allocate over the full four years to the program. So we would certainly be keen to ensure that the full 11,500 for the first two years are allocated, and then whatever we can allocate in the latter two years we would do so as well.

Senator PAYNE—I have received representations, as have some of my colleagues, from people in regional parts of Australia who are interested in participating in the NRAS. But, because of the guidelines which require the construction of 20 units—which was the reduction for the first round to 100 units—and because of the, obviously, much smaller communities in which they are interested in constructing, they find that to be prohibitive and, in fact, a block to their capacity to participate. Is there any contemplation being given to addressing that in regional areas where there still may be rental stress and housing affordability issues but, in volume terms, it is just ridiculous to conceive of somebody trying to build 100 properties at a time.

Mr Leeper—Certainly, it is our intention after the consideration of the round 2 applications to do a review of how the scheme is operating and to listen to concerns that may have been expressed about whether the conditions of play, as it were, are causing people particular difficulty. If the scale that we have set out is a problem for regional areas, that is something we will look at.

Senator PAYNE—I appreciate that. Thank you very much, Mr Leeper. I am sure my constituents will appreciate that as well. In terms of dealing with the round 1 applications, can you advise the committee what the total cost of the consultancy services—any consultancy services—that were engaged for the assessment was?

Ms Ham—To date, we have spent on consultancy costs from 2007-08 and this financial year as well is \$149,922. We have also got contractor costs which relate to non-ongoing staff coming in and being part of the assessment process and also some other—

Senator PAYNE—What are they?

Ms Ham—The total figure is 131,546.

Senator PAYNE—And you were going to conclude with the third category, I think.

Ms Ham—I was just going to add that in those contractor costs there were also some costs in relation to the call centre that we set up for taking calls coming into the application process.

Senator PAYNE—Are those costs in line with the department's expectations, given that you did have a higher number of applications in that first round than perhaps you had anticipated?

Ms Ham—I think it is reasonable that the costs have matched our expectations.

Senator PAYNE—Will you be contracting external consultants again for future rounds, including this round 2?

Ms Ham—Yes, Senator. We do have consultants engaged to assess the financial sustainability of proposals and also to look at the financial viability of organisations that will be approved as participants in the scheme.

Senator PAYNE—And who are the consultants that have been engaged by the department for these roles?

Ms Ham—KPMG have been engaged to do the assessment for criterion 5 and Walter Turnbull is the company providing advice on the financial viability of organisations.

Dr Harmer—It is my understanding that they were both selected from a tender process.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you, Dr Harmer. That was my next question. How very prescient of you. Can you tell us how many incentives were finally offered in round 1?

Mr Leeper—Round 1 attracted 69 applications seeking incentives for over 13,000 dwellings. As Mr Ham has pointed out, there are always applications that are non-compliant and do not make it through the assessment process. On 4 December last year we sent letters of offer to 31 successful applicants for a total of 2,800 dwellings.

Senator PAYNE—Mr Leeper, of those letters of offer that were sent on 4 December, have applicants already had to have agreed to those? Has a cut-off date been reached for those?

Ms Ham—Yes. All offers have been accepted.

Senator PAYNE—Okay.

Ms Ham—And we are now in the process of sending them formal notification following that acceptance.

Senator PAYNE—Can you tell us, Ms Ham, how many of those first set of incentives will be tax offsets and how many will be payments, for example, to the not-for-profit sector?

Ms Ham—Endorsed charities received payments through the department account for 77 per cent of allocated incentives or 119, and 43 per cent of the reserved allocations, which is 1,142. So the balance would be paid as refundable tax offsets.

Senator PAYNE—How many of the round 1 projects have started construction?

Ms Ham—At this point in time, we have 154 dwellings that are available for rent or have already been tenanted and then we will have a further 676 dwellings that we expect to be available for rent by 30 June, which brings us to a total of 830. Under the legislation and regulations, we also reserve allocations for dwellings that are not yet ready for rent. We would have only some information at this stage in relation to how many have commenced construction, and I do not have that figure today.

Senator PAYNE—Could you take that on notice for me and come back to the committee, please, Ms Ham. So 154 are available to rent or are tenanted. How many of the 154 are the tenanted ones?

Ms Ham—We do not have that information. The only information that is required to be provided at this point in time is that the dwellings are available for rent.

Senator PAYNE—So at which point in time is the information about whether they have been tenanted or not required by you?

Ms Ham—The approved participants provide an annual statement of compliance and, at that time, they provide information on the number of days that that dwelling has been tenanted as well as other information.

Senator PAYNE—Does that mean that you might receive the incentive under the scheme for a property which is available to be tenanted—or available to be rented, I should say—and that it might go 12 months before you tell the government that have not rented it?

Ms Ham—Technically, but—

Dr Harmer—It is pretty unlikely that that would be the case, given the gap between demand and supply of low-cost rental dwellings throughout Australia. So I think it is most unlikely that they will remain vacant for very long at all, given the state of the housing market. We will try and get you some information—

Senator PAYNE—I appreciate that, Dr Harmer. It does seem like a teeny little gap in the process, though.

Ms Winzar—I think one of the most important drivers here is the loss of rental income that would be incurred by the owning organisation if they did not pick it up for rent. I cannot imagine very many, particularly in the not-for-profit space, would be willing to forgo that rental income.

Senator PAYNE—I understand that but, in terms of crossing the t's and dotting the i's, 12 months between the provision of the incentive and the report in relation to the property activity does seem like a very long time.

Ms Winzar—It certainly is a long time, but the annual compliance report is the vehicle which generates access to the grant and/or the tax credit for the claiming organisation, even if they have been approved, and if it has not been tenanted for a reasonable length of time then they would not get access to their NRAS credit.

Mr Leeper—The first report, in fact, would be due for the period to 30 June. So, with the incentives being announced on 4 December and then subsequently accepted, it would actually be a maximum of six months for the first round before we would be getting confirmation of occupancy. But Dr Harmer is completely correct: the financial incentive is very much to rent the property, and it is a strange business case to go for an incentive and then not rent the property.

Senator PAYNE—That does seem strange, Mr Leeper.

Dr Harmer—It would be particularly strange given that there is a pretty tight rental market for low cost rental housing and they would be forgoing significant income. So it would not be a very sensible business decision on the part of the person getting the subsidy.

Senator PAYNE—I would still be keener to see the government checking on the status of their money more often, that is all. Is the management process for identifying tenants carried out by the incentive recipient themselves?

Ms Ham—It depends. Approved participants under the scheme may have put in place property and tenancy managers. Ultimately they are responsible, but they may have got another organisation involved to undertake the assessment of tenants coming into the properties. The exception is Queensland, where tenants are sourced from the Queensland One Social Housing waiting list.

Senator PAYNE—I was going to ask about the involvement of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in the tenanting process. Is that the only area, in which the Queensland government is directly involved?

Ms Ham—That is correct.

Senator PAYNE—In terms of the engagement of state and territory governments, I think there is some information on your website in relation to Victoria, in particular, which indicates that, of the large number of incentives which we have talked about being offered—the 2,800 incentives in round 1—only 66 were offered in Victoria in 2008-09. They also had a relatively small number of HAF projects successful. Is that regarded as an under-representation for Victoria, given they also have significant housing affordability issues?

Ms Ham—It would be regarded as an under-representation. We do also have 10 conditionally supported applications from round 1 where additional information was required to be provided prior to a decision being made by the delegate.

Senator PAYNE—Are they all Victorian?

Ms Ham—No, they are not all Victorian, but there are Victorian proposals within those 10 conditionally supported applications.

Senator PAYNE—Were there any particular issues that can be identified in Victoria that may account for this?

Mr Leeper—We ran this as a competitive process nationwide, and bids for NRAS incentives were given some consideration by the states. That would be a matter for Victoria to determine why they made that initial response to the round. I would hope and expect that their response in future rounds will be stronger. We are about to announce a further 1,200 incentives next week. I would just like to find out, if we can, what proportion of those are from Victoria.

Ms Winzar—About one-third of them.

Mr Leeper—About one-third of those are from Victoria. So we had 66 in the first round from Victoria. We are about to announce a further 1,200 next week, and I am advised that around 360 of those will be in Victoria.

Senator PAYNE—And that announcement of 1,200 next week is for round 2, or is it continuing from round 1?

Ms Ham—They are continuing from round 1.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you very much for that clarification. In terms of the process of implementing the NRAS, do you expect that that will be reflected by a reduction in the amount of Commonwealth rental assistance that the government is paying, so that people who are able to participate as tenants in the NRAS may find themselves—

Mr Leeper—Access to rent assistance is categorical. If you are an income support recipient or a family tax benefit recipient, and you rent in the private market and meet the eligibility conditions, you will be paid rent assistance.

Senator PAYNE—So, even if you are in an NRAS property, you will still be—

Mr Leeper—If you are in an NRAS property and you meet, prima facie, the rent assistance eligibility conditions, the Commonwealth will pay rent assistance in respect of that tenancy.

Senator PAYNE—Can you tell us the total of all CRA payments made in 2007-08?

Mr Leeper—It is roughly \$2.3 billion. I may be corrected by my colleagues with more detailed information, but it would be in the ball park of \$2.3 billion.

Mr Harmer—It is about \$2.3 billion.

Senator PAYNE—But the CRA does not vary, does it? You just get CRA.

Mr Leeper—No. It does vary. The amount of rent you pay before you begin to be paid rent assistance is determined by your family composition and obviously the rent that you are paying for the property. Beyond that eligibility threshold, there is a sliding scale of 75c in the dollar until you reach the maximum rate. For the purposes of assessing rent assistance, NRAS properties would be assessed at the net rental. For an NRAS tenancy, there is a condition that the property be offered to the tenant at a 20 per cent discount. So, hypothetically, if the rent is \$400 a week, for rent assistance purposes we would assess the rent at \$320 a week. The rent assistance rules take into account the effective subsidy granted by the NRAS incentive.

Senator PAYNE—When I was talking about variation, I was thinking about the regional aspect around Australia.

Mr Leeper—Rent assistance does not vary according to locality. It varies only according to the rent that you pay, up to the maximum rate.

Senator PAYNE—At the last estimates, there was some discussion about whether the first home owners grant was going to have any particular impact upon housing affordability issues, particularly in the private rental market. I think it was Ms Winzar—it may have been Dr Harmer—who indicated that the department would be looking at an assessment of that impact. Can you tell us whether that has commenced and how far it has gone?

Mr Leeper—Do you mean the first home owners grant, or the first home owners boost?

Senator PAYNE—At the time, I think I meant the grant.

Ms Winzar—We have not done any formal work on assessing the impact of the first home owner grant or the first home owner boost on rental demand. But we have had some tentative discussions with our colleagues in Treasury, who are still exploring the issue.

Senator PAYNE—Are those tentative discussions expected to go any further?

Ms Winzar—We will do some work to monitor the overall impact, particularly of the first home owner boost, on overall rental demand. But it is a little difficult, as you would appreciate, to try and pick that apart from shifts in population, household formation and so on.

Dr Harmer—It is a pretty difficult exercise to identify one particular dimension when there are a lot of factors going into the demand for housing, including household formation rates, immigration et cetera. But we do our best.

Senator PAYNE—I know. I have this conversation on a range of committees. I do not have any more questions in relation to the NRAS.

Senator LUDLAM—What can you tell us about the locations where properties are being built? Can you give us a breakdown between inner city, middle ring, outer urban and regional?

Dr Harmer—I do not think we can give you a breakdown within the cities, but we can probably give you the breakdown between the capital city and the rest of state.

Mr Leeper—We can provide a table, for each state, of the properties which are ready for rent now in the capital city and in the balance of the state—that is, the regional areas. This refers to the 154 properties that Ms Ham identified and the further 676 that will be ready by 30 June. If it would be useful to the committee, I am happy to table that information.

Senator LUDLAM—That would be helpful. I am interested in whether the properties that we are providing for people under the NRAS are going to be on the outer fringe of our cities, for example, or whether they are going to be scattered in different parts of our cities.

Dr Harmer—I do not know that we can answer that yet.

Senator LUDLAM—I presume that is data that you are collecting?

Dr Harmer—But at some stage in the future, we will be able to answer that.

Senator LUDLAM—I guess you know where I am going with that.

Dr Harmer—Yes. Sure.

Senator LUDLAM—One of the criteria is access to public transport and so on.

Mr Leeper—Senator, let me give an example. Let me take an example of Tasmania. I could tell you that there are significant numbers of properties, that is, more than 10, in Burnie, Devonport, Huonville, Kingston, Launceston, Midway Point, New Norfolk, so those are definitely outside the capital city area. So out of the 592 reserved allocations in Tasmania, and I will make sure I get my terminology right here, there are quite a significant number which are outside what you would normally identify as the major urban area. That is one example. I am sure there are others. I do not know enough about the other geography, I am sorry.

Senator LUDLAM—That is helpful, and telling a Western Australian these regional Tasmanian towns, I am not sure how much that is going to help me.

Dr Harmer—But soon, we will be able to give you better information about the locations—

Senator LUDLAM—Do you know what I am on about? As in, within particular cities—

Mr Leeper—Western Australia, Senator?

Senator LUDLAM—Yes, go on?

Mr Leeper—Armidale, 94. These are reserved allocations. Ballajura, I do not know where that is, 25; Broome, 24; Midlands, 10; Pinjarra, 35, et cetera. They are by postcode.

Senator LUDLAM—That is interesting. The metropolitan places that you just listed, they are all outer-metro. So I do not want to dwell here now, but if you are able to provide for us, either on notice or the next time we are here, within cities, are we essentially just putting low income housing into the fringes or is it being scattered throughout the urban areas? That is the thrust of the question.

Ms Winzar—Senator, we are not able to provide you with that information beyond the suburb location and the numbers in each suburb at this point.

Senator LUDLAM—That is fine. That is where I am heading.

Dr Harmer—But also, if you are interested, as you are, I think, in accessibility to public transport, it does not necessarily follow that if they are in middle and outer suburbs they are not accessible. They may be, for example, on a train line. We probably have not got that level of information, but if that is—

Senator LUDLAM—That gets us somewhere. So moving on from there, did you make any changes to your criteria or the way that you are assessing NRAS properties between rounds 1 and 2?

Ms Ham—No, Senator.

Senator LUDLAM—Did you go back and do an evaluation, or maybe I heard you correctly before, you are not really doing an evaluation of criteria until we have led all the round 2 incentives?

Dr Harmer—As Mr Leeper said earlier, we are going to be doing an evaluation, taking into account feedback we have received from applicants and potential applicants after the second round is complete.

Mr Leeper—In addition to that first document I mentioned, we can table the location of the 150 NRAS dwellings by state and the actual postcode.

Senator LUDLAM—Great.

Mr Leeper—And the reserved allocations, again, state totals, some postcode numbers, but also some named suburbs. I am happy to table that now, if you like.

Senator LUDLAM—If you are able, that is great. How impressed or otherwise were you with energy and water efficiency in the properties that are coming forward?

Ms Ham—Certainly, in terms of all of the offers that have been made to applicants, they needed to get a satisfactory rating against those particular criteria. So certainly, they are offering sustainability and accessibility outcomes. We have made a condition for all approved participants that within three months of the dwelling being made available for rent they will provide a report to the department, using a checklist that we are developing in conjunction with the Housing Industry Association, which will give us detailed information in relation to energy and water efficiency and universal design.

Senator LUDLAM—Great. Are they just being obliged to meet the statutory minimums in each state and territory or are they being expected and asked to go a bit further.

Ms Ham—The assessment criteria are asking them to indicate what they will meet above the standards in each jurisdiction. And the checklist that HIA are developing with us is measuring what is above the jurisdictional standard.

Senator LUDLAM—All right. Thanks. Do you expect that by the next round of estimates, which I think is in June, you would be able to give us a bit more of a detailed breakdown as to how they are performing?

Ms Ham—Yes, we do. The information will have gone onto our funding management system, which will give us better ability to produce the type of information that you are seeking.

Senator LUDLAM—Thanks. I have got a couple more on NRAS. I am presuming you knew I was going to ask about this: the tax protection for charitable not-for-profit organisations. It was left not quite in limbo last year, just enough to get us on our feet. Can you tell us where that is up to?

Mr Leeper—For the first two rounds, the government has made a commitment that participation in NRAS would not affect the charitable status of organisations that seek access to the incentives. The position beyond that point remains a policy matter for the government and we will be doing some work on that.

Senator LUDLAM—Can you describe the nature of the work, because my understanding is that, as of the present time, it is starting to impact the way that community housing organisations are coming forward or not.

Mr Leeper—As I said, for the first two rounds, and we are about to close the second round, that charitable status has been guaranteed. We are very aware of the ongoing issue that needs to be settled, and it is a matter for us to do some work on and put proposals to government. That is as much as I can say.

Senator LUDLAM—Yes. So no expected timetable for an announcement or anything along those lines?

Mr Leeper—No, not at this point.

Senator LUDLAM—Can you give any comfort to the community housing sector? Are you confident? Are you concerned?

Dr Harmer—It is a government decision. It would be very unwise for us to speculate on it.

Senator LUDLAM—All right. Perhaps it was unwise of me to ask.

Senator PAYNE—It was worth a try.

Senator LUDLAM—It always is. Just lastly on the National Rental Affordability Scheme, Professor Disney, who I think we heard evidence from during the committee hearings into the bill, spoke about the need for—I will make this a two part question—as you are trying to bring aboard large institutional investors, about the need for an independent three-person panel to act as an interface between the department and those large investors. Firstly, do you

see any sign of investors, superannuation funds or suchlike, taking an interest? Secondly, do you have any thoughts on the merits of a panel?

Mr Leeper—In answer to the first question, I certainly have already been contacted by one representative, indicating that they potentially have a significant institutional investor ready to invest at scale. I have not had the opportunity to meet with that group yet, but it is a good first meeting, so that is a positive sign. On the second matter, we have not established such a panel. It is a matter we are considering.

Senator LUDLAM—You are considering it?

Mr Leeper—Yes.

Senator LUDLAM—I will leave the NRAS stuff there. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Senator Payne.

Senator PAYNE—If I could just move to a few questions on the housing affordability fund, please, Dr Harmer? When the first round of funding was announced—I think it is 33 projects listed by the minister in that announcement, which numbers about \$112 million—as I understood the 2008-09 budget, the provision in the appropriations there for the housing affordability fund was about the \$50 million mark and some of that being set aside for the electronic DA project. So are you intending to pursue additional appropriations or bring forward money from the 2009-10 year? What is the plan?

Ms Winzar—Senator, you are correct in observing some of the \$52.2 million in the housing affordability fund for this year is reserved for the electronic development application. The 33 projects involve a spend over the next two financial years, this one and the next, so there is no need for us to seek to bring forward any funds into this year.

Senator PAYNE—So you will just stagger it between the two?

Ms Winzar—That is correct.

Senator PAYNE—Those listed projects around Australia, have all of them submitted the further detail of their projects and the evidence of how savings are going to flow to homebuyers?

Ms Ham—Yes. Currently, they have all submitted their additional business cases and those business cases are currently being assessed.

Senator PAYNE—How long will the assessment process take, is it envisaged?

Ms Ham—We are expecting to be able to make some offers in the next couple of weeks, but some of those business cases will take a little longer to assess.

Senator PAYNE—Could I ask you about two in New South Wales. The first is the Edmondson Park development, which I think in the list is a recipient of \$1.5 million. The project description is ‘connecting and stormwater infrastructure.’ I am not quite sure what that specifically means, but can you indicate to the committee how it is envisaged that that is going to improve housing affordability in that particular development?

Dr Harmer—I will just give my colleagues time to look at that; I suspect they will not have that level of detail with them so we can probably take that question on notice. On

individual projects, I doubt whether they will have sufficient recollection of the application to be able to answer that.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you. I have a couple more specific questions.

Dr Harmer—If you give them to us, we can take that information.

Mr Leeper—On that one, Senator, from memory, it is a parcel of land a little north and east of Liverpool.

Senator PAYNE—It is.

Mr Leeper—In order for the land to become available to be built upon, there is some infrastructure that needs to be put into that, and the application to the Housing Affordability Fund was on the basis that there would be some flow-through benefits to people who buy a number of those parcels of land to put houses on.

Senator PAYNE—On \$6 million, for example, Mr Leeper, for the Renwick project in the Southern Highlands, an area with which I am even more familiar: that development is to deliver 600 dwellings. The description is ‘leading infrastructure to delivery 600 dwellings.’ I assume it means ‘deliver.’

Mr Leeper—That is a typo, Senator. It is ‘deliver’.

Senator PAYNE—Do you have any information on that?

Mr Leeper—Nothing further. We could take that on notice and provide further information, if that is okay.

Senator PAYNE—Perhaps you can clarify, then, for me where the lines of responsibility are being drawn as the HAF is being implemented. Why are these not the responsibility—these particular improvements or activities—of the New South Wales state government?

Ms Winzar—HAF is designed to offset the cost of infrastructure development. In a number of cases we would expect to get much more than a reduction in the price of the house because of our direct investment. In some cases we hope that it would facilitate some further reduction in the cost of the dwelling, which would be borne, effectively, by Landcom in the couple of examples that you have provided.

Senator PAYNE—Yes, they are Landcom.

Ms Winzar—Perhaps I should also note that the business cases for these 33 projects have been submitted. They are still being assessed.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you for that information. I am not sure that that really goes to the issue of my concern. This is a state owned developer. This is owned by the New South Wales state government; it is Landcom. They, I am sure, are entirely gratified by the bonus that they receive from the Commonwealth making this contribution. Is there any New South Wales state government input in the infrastructure components that we are talking about?

Ms Winzar—I would have to take that part of the question on notice. But the HAF itself is designed to be accessed by state, territory and local governments and local government associations.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you for that. If you would take that on notice, that would be helpful. This is an example in Western Australia, in I think it is called the Shire of Harvey. There is \$24 million for the Collie River bridge, which is intended to open up 3,000 development lots. Is there any Western Australian state government or local council contribution to that project?

Ms Winzar—Again, we will take that on notice.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you very much. Can you do the same in relation to the project for the Peel development? The entity is Peel Development; the project is Boddington. Again it is in Western Australia. There is over \$8 million for infrastructure for 909 lots, described here in the table as ‘created by the mining boom’. I wonder if you can indicate what contributions or otherwise there are by West Australian state and local governments and whether given what has happened in recent times—for example, with, say, the Ravensthorpe nickel mine—there is any review of those sorts of projects. You said the business cases are under review at the moment. What about the sustainability of those sorts of housing developments in the current climate.

Ms Winzar—Yes. We will add that to the list.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you. In terms of the conceptual issue I raise, and that is the impact of the current climate on housing developments in areas like this, is it possible to make any observation or response on that matter, generally speaking, without the specifics around this Boddington project?

Ms Winzar—We take into account advice about likely population projections in those mining boom areas and whether or not the current pressure, or the recent pressure, on rental affordability, particularly, was going to continue. But I think the other matter that will come into play here is that the business cases have been submitted progressively through December and January for the most part—with a few in February—and if we need to go back to the proponent and clarify any of those aspects, we will certainly do so.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you very much for that. Can you advise the committee what consultation there is in the process of allocating projects under the Housing Affordability Fund with Infrastructure Australia?

Ms Winzar—I might have to take that on notice to give a comprehensive answer. We have had a number of discussions with the infrastructure department about matters of common interest, including planning and form EDA and HAF generally. I am not sure if that goes exactly to the answer that you are seeking.

Senator PAYNE—Some of these are very considerable allocations; some of them are relatively small. But some of them are very considerable and it seems to me that if you were seeking to have a coordinated approach across Australia in response to the need for infrastructure development, in response to the housing affordability crisis and so on, then there are entities within government which I would assume would automatically consult with each other along those processes. We are talking about water, we are talking about transport, we are talking about access issues, and it seems to me that they are the bread and butter, as it were, of Infrastructure Australia in many cases. I just wonder what level of consultation there is in the allocation of projects under the HAF.

Ms Winzar—We did not get the department of infrastructure's formal sign-off on our proposed recommended projects for funding. But we have had, as I have indicated, quite an exchange with them over those matters of common interest through the last 15 months or so.

Senator PAYNE—If you can provide any more detail on that in due course, I would be grateful.

Dr Harmer—Ms Winzar's hesitancy there is that she is just is not aware of precisely how many meetings and who we have met with.

Senator PAYNE—I understand that. Thanks very much, Dr Harmer. What about the National Housing Supply Council and consultation with them?

Ms Winzar—There has not been any formal consultation with the supply council in respect of the Housing Affordability Fund proposals. But the supply council has had a series of meetings throughout 2008, and there has been quite an amount of briefing on departmental activities made available to the supply council.

Senator PAYNE—I do not want to particularly go to the National Housing Supply Council now, but when they are doing their work, what information and input do they get from the rest of FaHCSIA in terms of your broad housing responsibilities and how they approach the assessments that they make?

Mr Leeper—I am an ex officio member of the council so I might attempt an answer. Essentially, the council receives whatever data it needs from the department to enable it to undertake its work. So if they ask us to provide information that we hold, we make that information available to them.

Senator PAYNE—So, when we are looking at issues around the availability of serviced land, for example, and you have another part in your department that is dealing with the applications in relation to the Housing Affordability Fund, which is about ensuring that the sort of land that we need is available in the state in which it is required, I would have thought there would be a more formal interaction, if you like, between the council and the department.

Mr Leeper—The role of the council—that is, the role it has been given by government—is to prepare estimates of the supply of, and demand for, housing in this country. They are necessarily taking a longer-term view. We have drafted a report which is now in the process of being finalised. It is a much more aggregate and, at this stage, national picture than would be warranted by a side-by-side examination such as we have taken with the Housing Affordability Fund. So the HAF is a more localised micromasure of how we can unlock pieces of land and make them available for affordable housing. The work of the council is to look, at this stage, at the macro level around supply and demand factors. So I would not have expected that the council would have an interest in or any role in assisting us with housing affordability funds, examinations or decisions.

Senator PAYNE—Knowing some of the council members, I bet you a small amount of money, Mr Leeper, they would certainly have an interest. Whether or not it is an issue that they take up as members of the—

Mr Leeper—We want them to focus on their reports.

Senator PAYNE—I have no doubt they are very diligent. You talked about the assessment of the business cases that has been put forward in this second part of the process. How do you make that assessment? What analysis and testing is undertaken to look at the potential benefits of each of the applications in terms of housing affordability. Is there a quantitative assessment made so that you can lengthen, in order of affordability, benefits they generate?

Ms Ham—The assessment process for the second stage is really, I guess, ensuring that the business case is delivering what they said in their expression of interest process, and it goes to ensuring that what they indicated they would pass on to the home buyer is in fact going to be passed on to the home buyer. We also have involved consultants again to undertake a further risk assessment of the second stage process looking at the business case.

Senator PAYNE—So that is how you satisfy yourselves that the propositions that they advance in relation to housing affordability are going to be met?

Ms Ham—Yes, so we also go back to the value that will be generated from the investment through the fund, the demand for dwellings in the location where funding was sought, the affordability of dwellings that are being provided and whether projects would deliver accessibility and sustainability outcomes for home buyers. So that again assists in their business case. They would have provided information in the expression of interest, but more detail is provided in the business case.

Senator PAYNE—I do not have more questions about the HAF but Senator Ludlam probably does.

Senator LUDLAM—No. For the NAHA, if it was me.

Senator PAYNE—Can we go to the National Affordable Housing Agreement, Dr Harmer. If I have got my dates right, I think the agreement came into effect on 1 January this year, having been finalised at COAG at the end of November last year.

Mr Leeper—That is correct, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—What is the amount of additional funding that this agreement provides for public housing, compared to the last CSHA?

Mr Leeper—Two components: one is that there is an increase in indexation payable, which, from memory is around \$40 billion over the forward estimates period. And, as part of the agreement process, an amount of \$400 million is being provided through a national partnership agreement to provide additional social housing construction.

Senator PAYNE—Can you define for us from FaHCSIA's perspective—it seems that people do have different perspectives—what your department defines social housing as?

Ms Winzar—In a technical sense it is defined in the National Affordable Housing Agreement, in the data definitional sense, as including public housing, community housing and transitional and crisis accommodation program dwellings. But I do not believe it includes state owned and Indigenous housing as well. If your questions goes to whether it includes the National Rental Affordability Scheme dwellings that attract credits under NRAS, then I think the answer is no.

Mr Harmer—Generally not-for-profit housing is synonymous with social housing.

Senator PAYNE—So when we are ticking off developments in relation to, say, the 20,000 social housing properties, you will not be allocating NRAS dwellings to that list?

Ms Winzar—That is a sort of complicated picture. It may well be that some of the capital under the stimulus is available to go to community housing organisations who use some of that equity to construct or purchase dwellings that would attract NRAS credits, but it is a bit of a moot point because we have not received any proposals of that nature yet.

Mr Harmer—It is theoretically possible that there could be some overlap between the capital under the social housing as part of the stimulus package and the NRAS scheme. In fact, in some respects it would be quite sensible to have that combination.

Senator PAYNE—I am a little confused then, because when Ms Winzar was outlining to me the definition of social housing as including public, community housing, transitional housing, crisis accommodation, state-owned Indigenous housing, but not NRAS. Having just sought clarification there, I think we have come back to a point where it does potentially include NRAS.

Ms Winzar—Under the NAHA it does not because that definition of ‘social housing’ in the NAHA is strictly constructed so that we can monitor the number of those social housing dwellings as described over the course of the five-year agreement. Outside the NAHA perhaps the language is a little loose, but certainly in the NAHA itself, NRAS is not contemplated in the agreement that we have with the states per se.

If I can make that specific for you: at the moment we have 386,000, or something like that, social housing dwellings which cover the categories that I have mentioned, but that 386,000 does not include NRAS dwellings, and that 386,000 figure is the base from which we will measure progress over the National Affordable Housing Agreement period of five years.

Senator PAYNE—I might have to come back to that on notice, once I have re-read *Hansard*, I suspect. So in your national partnership on social housing, as part of the NAHA, which is different from the social housing initiative—

Mr Leeper—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—As I said to DEEWR yesterday, I wish they had chosen different acronyms for some of their projects—no, I think it was to local government. That is intended to deliver an additional 1,600 to 2,100 dwellings before 2009-10. Is that correct?

Ms Winzar—That is correct.

Senator PAYNE—And they are not in the 20,000?

Mr Leeper—No.

Senator PAYNE—So what formal steps are in place for the delivery of those additional dwellings?

Ms Walters—We have sought proposals from the states and territories for 2008-09 and 2009-10. The 2008-09 proposals are due to be lodged with us by 2 March this year and the 2009-10 proposals are due to be lodged with us by the middle of May.

Senator PAYNE—They are not the implementation plans, are they? They are different?

Ms Walters—No, they are different. Once we have the proposals we will then negotiate with the individual states on those proposals and put in place implementation plans.

Senator PAYNE—Aren't the implementation plans targeted for finalisation by 1 April this year for the 2008-09 year?

Ms Walters—Yes, that is right, and—

Senator PAYNE—So you are going to do that in a month?

Ms Walters—Yes, we can.

Senator PAYNE—What level of detail is going to be in those implementation plans?

Ms Walters—There will be detail on the location and type of dwellings and the contribution by the social housing MPA funds plus any other funding that is being leveraged from other sources.

Senator PAYNE—What does that mean?

Ms Walters—That means that the states may put in their own funding; they may provide land that they already own; and they may go into partnership with a not-for-profit organisation which will also provide some funding.

Senator PAYNE—So that is 1 April 2009 for the 2008-09 proposals.

Ms Walters—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—What then is the implementation plan timetable for the 2009-10 proposals?

Ms Walters—We would aim for the middle of June.

Senator PAYNE—Right. So in the NAHA and the new arrangements under the NAHA, effectively, as I understand it, that removes the requirements for the states and territories to provide matching funding to the Commonwealth funding. Instead, we have built a performance framework against which we are going to measure the key outcomes of the agreement. Have the key outcomes been determined?

Mr Leeper—Senator, I might just rephrase the question, if I may, with respect. We have not removed any requirement for the states to match or not to match. What we have done is we have provided Commonwealth funding balanced against a set of outcomes and some performance indicators. How the states determine their own level of effort is a matter for them. So we have not matched or unmatched. There is no question of matching.

Senator PAYNE—How good is that for the states?

Mr Leeper—It is a matter for the states.

Senator PAYNE—How good is that?

Mr Leeper—The states have committed to a set of outcomes. In our area, I think there are five broad outcomes and we have got performance measures which will allow us to see how progress is going.

Senator PAYNE—And the key outcomes, are they determined? I think that was where my question was actually going.

Mr Leeper—Yes. Yes, the key outcomes have been determined and agreed through the COAG meeting of last year and that is what is in the agreement itself.

Senator PAYNE—So they are all public?

Mr Leeper—Yes, certainly. You can get them on the coag.gov.au website.

Senator PAYNE—Yes, that is all good, and will there be public reporting against the outcomes by the department?

Mr Leeper—Not necessarily by the department, Senator. Our understanding is that the public reporting process will be carried by the COAG Reform Council and presented to COAG, and I would imagine those will be public documents. That is a matter we would need to check with the Prime Minister's department.

Senator PAYNE—We can do that. So if we are keen to see how our own governments are tracking against their respective performance indicators and outcomes we, hopefully, will be able to check that, Mr Leeper?

Mr Leeper—Certainly, and if you look at the National Affordable Housing Agreement on page 6, the performance indicators are set out in paragraphs 16 and 17.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you. Just in terms of the numbers of housing and numbers in terms of payments, under the CHA that operated from—what was it—July 2003 to June 2008 plus the extension—

Mr Leeper—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—I know you cannot do this now, but can you provide the committee with a list of the payments that were made to the states and territories under the CSHA over those years, broken down annually and by state and territory? And then can it be broken down to the allocated purpose for each state and territory as well?

Ms Winzar—All of that information will be in the Housing Assistance Act, at least in terms of the quantum of payments paid to each jurisdiction, and it will certainly be in the report on government services that is released each year. I am not certain, Senator, what you mean by information on the purpose of the payments.

Senator PAYNE—The purpose as it is recorded by the states and territories.

Ms Winzar—We can certainly split the base funding for the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, the component that was for the Aboriginal Regional Housing Program, the component for the Crisis Accommodation Program and community housing. Is that what you are intending?

Senator PAYNE—If you can split it that way, yes.

Ms Winzar—Okay.

Senator PAYNE—That would be helpful. Then, in terms of housing stock, can we have a look at the numbers, please, for numbers of housing stock for each state and territory and then for each funded category as you have just outlined them at the start and end of those reporting periods under the CSHA over the 2003-08 period?

Ms Winzar—Yes, Senator, we can, but, again, that information will be in the annual report on government services.

Dr Harmer—We have got a table here which, I think, probably addresses most of what you want from—

Senator PAYNE—All right. If Mr Leeper is keen to give us a copy of that, it would be helpful. And trying to decipher the information that I have been looking at in the National Housing Data Agreement is not the simplest task. I think I have confessed to not being overly numerate before in this public environment.

Mr Leeper—Improving the transparency of the information is one of our objectives, too, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you, Mr Leeper. I am going to make a note of that and put it in my diary. Your colleagues across the Public Service may regret your making that statement. I am very grateful.

Mr Leeper—I was talking about the state data, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—So the additional houses under the agreement—we have discussed those. At the moment, can you tell us the total number of residential dwellings that are supported by the funding that NAHA provides? Is that the 386,000 number you gave me before, Ms Winzar?

Mr Leeper—Yes, that will be one of the baseline pieces of data.

Senator PAYNE—And do you have a projection on the total number of dwellings that you expect to see growing each year over the term of the agreement?

Mr Leeper—Not as far as I am aware, Senator, no. The states and territories run their housing operations according to their own general government guidance. Our role in the new agreement is to provide money against a set of outcomes and the states need to determine the level of their effort and how best to achieve those outcomes.

Senator PAYNE—That leads me to the housing components of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, so I will not go off the NAHA because I assume Senator Ludlam has got some questions there. I will wait, Madam Chair.

Senator LUDLAM—I was mainly wanting to ask about the governance arrangements surrounding the NAHA, if I may. Do we still assume that legislation will need to be put through the parliament to formalise the NAHA?

Mr Leeper—Not the agreement itself, but legislation will be required and will be carried by the treasury portfolio to give authority to the forms of payments. Yes, that will be done. The payments will be made by treasuries to treasuries, whereas in the past, under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement, funds were distributed from our departments to the state housing departments.

Senator LUDLAM—I know it is matter for government, but do you have any sense of when we might see those introduced into the parliament?

Mr Leeper—My understanding is the intention is that the legal and appropriation cover will be provided by 30 June.

Senator LUDLAM—30 June.

Mr Leeper—30 June, by the end of June.

Senator LUDLAM—Sorry. So you would expect it right through the parliament and out the other side by 30 June, is that what you—

Mr Leeper—That is my understanding of what is intended, yes.

Senator LUDLAM—Yes.

Mr Leeper—It is a matter for treasury, Senator. I am not being obstructive, it is just not something that I can speak with authority on.

Senator LUDLAM—We will not hold you to it. I am just wondering whether there are likely to be consultations with the community sector in the course of the drafting of that legislation—which I presume you are advising on, or has that really just become a matter of setting up the bank accounts now?

Mr Leeper—It is a matter of the appropriations and bank accounts, Senator. The actual National Portable Housing Agreement is in force because it has been signed off by the Prime Minister and the chief ministers and premiers.

Senator LUDLAM—Can you just provide for us, at a fairly high level, an overview of how the governance arrangements for the NAHA differ from how it has previously been done under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement and SAP?

Mr Leeper—This might be a short response, and I will do my best. The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement was an agreement between the Commonwealth and the individual states. Reports on the operation of the agreement were prepared by the Commonwealth minister based on input from each of the state jurisdictions and that led, under the Housing Assistance Act, to the preparation of an annual report each year on the operation of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreements.

Similarly, I think for the support of the Accommodation Assistance Program, there was also annual reporting. Under the NAHA the broad reporting, as I mentioned before, will be carried through the Prime Minister's portfolio and prepared and provided to the Council of Australian Governments. We would make input to that, I would expect, but we would no longer be the sole agency with carriage of that, so it will be part of a whole of government process providing data and commentary where relevant in support of consideration of papers by first ministers at COAG.

Senator LUDLAM—And it is your understanding that that governance arrangement is reflected at state and territory level, that it is treasury receiving the funds but it will be the Departments of Premier and Cabinet around the country that are reporting?

Mr Leeper—I believe that is accurate, Senator, yes.

Senator LUDLAM—So does that run the risk of potentially sidelining the housing departments who have been working on these issues for years? I mean, where the competencies lie, you would presume, is in the state and territory housing departments and your own department rather than treasury.

Mr Leeper—I think a tenant of the broad agreements and the National Affordable Housing Agreements—one of those agreements—the broad intention was that money would be provided from the Commonwealth to the state treasuries. There are some general rules. For example, money provided for housing should be spent in the housing area. It cannot be taken, for example, to health or to education, so there are some little walls within the general funding. How the state cabinets—governments—decide to spend that money is a matter for them to consider.

We would expect that the large funds—or in some cases all of the funds—would flow through to the housing authorities, but what the Commonwealth is doing here is providing money in return for states achieving a set of outcomes and the states need to determine how best they can achieve those outcomes using whatever resources and avenues they have. I would expect the housing departments to be heavily involved but perhaps not solely involved.

Senator LUDLAM—Given that the NAHA is a rolling agreement, can you tell us when and how it is reviewed and against what criteria it will be reviewed.

Mr Leeper—I think we are getting into matters of the broad architecture of the Commonwealth-state housing agreements. The National Affordable Housing Agreement would be consistent with the broad architecture for how the agreements would be carried. It is a living agreement. There will be revisions from time to time. We do not have anything on the horizon at the moment that would require or result in us looking to revise this agreement at this point.

Senator LUDLAM—There are no formal processes of review that are likely to be embedded in the legislation or within the agreement?

Mr Leeper—The agreement does say in paragraph 5 that it is ongoing but may be amended as necessary by the agreement of the Council of Australian Governments—so it is a COAG matter.

Senator LUDLAM—There is nothing structural in there.

Mr Leeper—What it means is, in effect, the Commonwealth could take a proposal to amend the agreement or any one or more of the states could bring a proposal to amend the agreement.

Senator LUDLAM—Can you tell us—and forgive me if this question has arisen already—have the bilateral agreements on the three national partnerships been signed already? If not, when is that expected?

Mr Leeper—My understanding is that all the national partnerships have been executed and they have been executed as a complete set of signatories to the one agreement.

Senator LUDLAM—That has already occurred?

Mr Leeper—Yes.

Senator LUDLAM—Do they run for a specified time or are they rolling agreements in the same way as you were just describing?

Mr Leeper—The social housing national partnership agreement, for example, which is an agreement intended to promote the construction of dwellings over a two-year period,

specifically ends on 30 June 2010. However, the homeless national partnership agreement commences on signature and will expire on 30 June 2013. So, in general, my understanding is that national partnership agreements are intended to have a five-year life. I beg your pardon, the Indigenous housing national partnership agreement has a 10-year life. So it may be that they vary.

Dr Harmer—But they are fixed terms.

Mr Leeper—So our three national partnership agreements go for up to two years for social housing, up to five years for homelessness and up to 10 years for Indigenous housing.

Senator LUDLAM—I wanted to get in to the homelessness part, in particular.

CHAIR—I might let Senator Bilyk clarify something on the printout first and then we will return to you, Senator Ludlam.

Senator BILYK—On the National Rental Affordability Scheme handout we have just been given, I notice for Tasmania that the totals do not add up. You have got 35 ready for rent or rented now, 240 ready for rent by 30 June and a total of 174.

Dr Harmer—We will have a look at that.

Senator BILYK—Thanks.

Mr Leeper—We gave you our copy, so we are a little disadvantaged.

Senator BILYK—Do you want to have a look at it?

Dr Harmer—We probably need to get it back, I suspect.

CHAIR—It is a Tasmanian question, so she is very keen.

Dr Harmer—We can find out that and get back to you.

CHAIR—That would be fantastic.

Mr Leeper—Let us examine the data, please, and we will give a correction if necessary.

Senator LUDLAM—This might just be a misapprehension on my part, so please correct if I am wrong. The interim targets in the COAG IGA on homelessness appear to be different from those in the white paper. In the IGA, we have a main interim target for 2013 of a 20 per cent reduction in homelessness and that has been amended to seven per cent.

Ms Winzar—The difference is essentially because the white paper covers a lot more than the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness does. For example, there are a whole raft of Commonwealth only measures which are not captured in the partnership agreement. For example, you might recall in December there was an aged care funding round that provided some capital and some quarantine places for aged care provision for homeless people. That is not in the partnership agreement, but it does go to meet that broader 20 per cent target.

Senator LUDLAM—Can you just spell out for us then, while we are here, the other key areas, aged care being one, that would account for that discrepancy?

Ms Winzar—There are a whole raft of them. Centrelink community contact offices and the expansion of those services. Putting a flag on Centrelink records to improve services to

homeless people and improve the service offered to them. I think in a number of portfolios at the Commonwealth level, they are initiatives which will go to contribute to that 20 per cent improvement target.

Senator LUDLAM—Thanks. That is very helpful. As we go out towards 2020, can I presume that the homelessness targets that you are benchmarking against will be benchmarked against future census rounds?

Ms Winzar—It is a bit difficult for us with the Partnership Agreement on Homelessness because we have two sets of baseline information. The intergovernmental agreement asks us to use 2008-09 data wherever possible as the base point. But we will need to draw on the 2006 census as our base measurement point for a number of homelessness targets because, of course, it is a convenient census and not too far removed from 2008-09.

Senator LUDLAM—But, for example, we get to the interim target in 2013; will that be benchmarked against the most recent census?

Ms Winzar—We will use the data in 2011 census to provide us with approximate measurement.

Senator LUDLAM—That is what I was checking. Going to the money that the states and territories are meant to provide under the homelessness national partnership, presumably that is intended to be new money. Can you tell us whether you are aware of whether any states or territories are rolling in previously announced funding and how you are evaluating that?

Ms Winzar—We have asked the states to complete a template on their proposed matching funding. Collectively, they have to provide \$388 million worth of matching for the Commonwealth's funding. They are allowed to take into consideration any new and additional funds in their 2008-09 budgets only which represent activity that would be a direct contribution to the targets in the white paper. So as well as, for example, states identifying areas of expenditure that they think are relevant, we are asking them to draw a direct line between that new and additional expenditure and particular outputs that are specified in the Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

Senator LUDLAM—So you are expecting that reporting to be fairly transparent?

Ms Winzar—We are. To date, I think most states and territories are in the situation where they have to take their proposals back to their cabinets before they submit them to the Commonwealth, and we would expect to get them in the next month.

Senator LUDLAM—Can you tell us what consultation is happening that you are aware of in each state and territory as part of the development of each jurisdiction's implementation plan? Have you specified any particular framework or has that just been devolved to the states?

Ms Winzar—We have allowed states and territories to make their own decisions about consultation. It varies enormously between what arrangements they have in place in terms of standing consultation or reference group arrangements or one-off exercises around the partnership agreement and the white paper. A number of states are choosing this as an opportunity to review or refresh their state homelessness strategies and going through some consultation process as part of that.

Senator LUDLAM—Are you maintaining any kind of oversight role over that or are you just leaving that to the states and territories?

Ms Winzar—We are not overseeing it in a controlling sense, but we are certainly engaged. I might ask Ms Gumley to talk about some joint information sessions that are about to commence.

Ms Gumley—Over the next month, there will be some information sessions that will be held out in capital cities and some regional centres. They will be discussing the white paper, given it was launched fairly close to Christmas. We have asked the state governments during our implementation plan negotiations to take part in those discussions with us, and then they will be able to discuss changed plans for the sector that are coming up. We expect that there will be ongoing conversations with the sector over the year and that we would be involved jointly in doing those. But, again, the states will have their own issues that they want to put forward.

Senator LUDLAM—In addition to that. That is helpful.

CHAIR—Can we get a list of where those consultations are taking place?

Ms Gumley—Yes, certainly, Senator.

CHAIR—Good, thank you.

Senator LUDLAM—The white paper sketches a pretty wide range of different initiatives that the states and territories are meant to provide. Will each state and territory implementation plan be expected to include all of the programs that are outlined in the white paper?

Ms Winzar—It is not a formal requirement, but it is our expectation that states and territories will do their best to cover the list of not just the core outputs but as many as possible of the additional outputs that are specified there.

Senator LUDLAM—Can you just describe the core requirements that all implementation plans must have? Is there a set of benchmarks?

Ms Gumley—The core outputs are the implementation of the Place to Call Home initiative; the Street to Home initiatives for chronic homeless people, or rough sleepers; support for private and public tenants to help sustain their tenancies, including through tenancy support advocacy, case management, financial counselling and referral services; and assistance for people needing child protection services, correction and health facilities to access and maintain stable, affordable housing.

Senator LUDLAM—What sorts of powers have you reserved or what are the consequences for states and territories that do not meet their targets under the implementation plans?

Ms Winzar—The partnership agreement on homelessness is a facilitation agreement. So once the implementation plans are signed up with the states and territories, we will advise Treasury to commence making monthly payments to jurisdictions. The only reason that we would have to suspend those payments, or to cease them completely, would be if we felt that

there were significant problems with states making progress towards their undertakings around the deliverables.

Now, it may well be that there are lots of reasons why a target like a seven per cent reduction in overall homelessness will not be met within five years, and one of those might be broader economic circumstances, for example, or more recently the bush fires in Victoria, which have rendered a lot of people temporarily homeless. So those sorts of things will obviously have an impact on targets. Failing to meet the targets in themselves will not necessarily compromise a state's access to ongoing funding, but we will need to monitor fairly closely, through the course of the agreement, to make sure that the effort that is being put in is consistent with our expectations and their undertakings.

Senator LUDLAM—I have probably got about an hour's worth of questions here, so I am just going to cut it short.

CHAIR—Senator Ludlam, can some of those be easily put on notice?

Senator LUDLAM—They can all be put on notice, except for this last one that I want to ask.

CHAIR—That is fine.

Senator LUDLAM—Can you tell us a little bit about how you are anticipating the No Exits into Homelessness policy to actually function on the ground, because it is a pretty complex area?

Ms Winzar—You are right that that cannot be taken on notice. Perhaps that would have been a question that might take an hour to answer. It really does depend very much on what sort of arrangements are in place in a particular state or territory at the moment. In our discussions with the states on implementation planning, most of them recognise that they are going to have to set up some sort of inter-agency forum. The question about whether that work is best done, for example, in the justice department in terms of exits from correctional services or whether most of the effort needs to be done in care and protection agencies is a matter for each state to work out. We expect it will take them some time to test and, I suppose, solidify arrangements in their particular state.

Senator LUDLAM—I presume you will be able to play quite a valuable convening role or a high level policy role in each of these domains, whether it be the justice sector or the hospitals? What role are you assigning for yourselves in coordinating those efforts so that we are not reinventing the wheel in the different states and territories?

Ms Winzar—There are a number of ministerial councils that have interests that are relevant to this question, and the major ones would be both the Community Service and Disability Ministers' Conference and the Housing Ministers' Conference. We would expect each of those ministerial conferences to take an ongoing monitoring and facilitation role around promoting best practice and keeping things broadly heading in the same direction. We are certainly not intending to dictate or require states and territories to adopt particular strategies. We recognise that we will have to be quite specific to jurisdictions. We would expect that their pre-release planning will be increased quite a lot, because they do know when prisoners are released from prison; they do know when young people are exiting care

and protection systems. We will be asking them to certainly talk to us to show us how their planning processes work. We will also be asking the community organisations themselves to give us regular feedback on how they think it is going from their perspective.

Senator LUDLAM—One last question, just to go to specifics: the ‘no exits into homelessness’ policy for prisoners only applies to prisoners with a custodial sentence longer than 12 months. Can you explain why the line was drawn there?

Ms Winzar—It is really a matter of expediency. Our estimate is that about 6,000 long-term prisoners are released each year. There are close to 30,000 or 35,000 prisoners overall who are released each year, but some of them have only very short sentences. We are aware that even a short sentence can disrupt people’s accommodation and, in some cases, they might find themselves kicked out of their accommodation on exit after a month in custody, but we think the situation is more severe for long-term prisoners, who are likely to have lost social support networks, become a bit more removed from their family and so on, and probably need a bit more help.

Senator LUDLAM—I will leave it there.

Mr Leeper—Madam Chair, could I just correct one question, if I may? Senator Ludlam was asking about management arrangements for appropriations and payments to the states under the COAG arrangements. The [Federal Financial Relations Bill 2009](#) was, in fact, introduced by the Treasurer on 12 February, and it is currently before the Senate economics committee for report by 3 March. I am advised that that is consistent with a start date for the legislation of 1 April 2009, not 30 June.

Senator PAYNE—I might place most of the questions I have on homelessness on notice. There are also some which flow from the discussion around the social housing in the stimulus package, so I will go to that.

CHAIR—Is this general homelessness or youth homelessness?

Senator PAYNE—I am not going to pursue those.

CHAIR—Okay.

Senator PAYNE—So it does not really matter. It was general homelessness, in fact, in conjunction with what Senator Ludlam was pursuing. Let me go to the social housing 20,000 that we were talking about before, as opposed to the other social housing, which is, I am sure, devised in that manner just to confuse me—or senators. Of the 20,000 social housing dwellings which are proposed under the stimulus package, can you first advise me whether we are working with the same definition, Ms Winzar, that you enunciated in our previous discussion about social housing?

Ms Winzar—I do not think we have actually got to defining social housing under the nation building and jobs strategy. It is a different construct. Rather than a base funding agreement which attempts to do some measurement of activity over the five years of the National Affordable Housing Agreement and so on, the nation building and jobs social housing schedule proposes a certain number of outputs, which is around 20,000 dwellings, in exchange for \$6.4 billion.

Senator PAYNE—How are you categorising those dwellings? Are you categorising them in the same way that you do, generally speaking, under the NAHA?

Ms Winzar—I think we would, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—So if I go back to my consistently illegible writing from that point, it is public housing, community housing, transitional housing, crisis accommodation and state owned Indigenous housing.

Mr Leeper—State owned and managed.

Senator PAYNE—State owned and managed, I am sorry. That is the word I cannot read.

Mr Leeper—SOMIH is state owned and managed Indigenous housing.

Senator PAYNE—I was trying to write it in full. What about NRAS houses, dwellings?

Mr Leeper—Dr Harmer has indicated that what we are going to do in the second stage, the \$5.3 billion stage of the program, is seek proposals from the states. I would think it is unlikely that we would want to see social housing capital money fund the complete costs of a dwelling that is then brought back to us under NRAS.

Senator PAYNE—Right.

Mr Leeper—It may be possible that we are prepared to entertain proposals where we might contribute up to a quarter, for example, of the capital for a dwelling which might then come back to us under the NRAS scheme. From a community housing point of view, I would anticipate that such an arrangement would actually make NRAS much more attractive. The contribution of a small amount of capital by the Commonwealth, or some other capital contributor, would make that scheme quite an attractive scheme for a number of community housing providers and, potentially, institutional investors. So it is something we are looking at. It is not something we have made a decision on.

Dr Harmer—That is a theoretical possibility. We just want to make sure we do not rule it out, because it is something that was a theoretical possibility at least, and it may be a sensible outcome. The vast majority of the 6.5 billion would be in what we would term as classic social housing or not-for-profit housing owned and run by state housing authorities, community organisations or crisis accommodation managers.

Senator PAYNE—Can the department give the committee a breakdown of the dwellings that it proposed be accrued in this social housing package by state and territory, and then within each state and territory, by area—so, rural, regional, metropolitan, even if it is capital city and not capital city—and then by type of dwelling, whether we are talking about units or houses, four bedroom, two bedroom, and so on.

Mr Jagers—We can give you a breakdown of the funding per state, which corresponds to numbers of dwellings. We do not have that in a table for you now, but we can provide that.

Mr Leeper—Sorry, Senator; this is the Commonwealth contributing money on a per capita share basis to each of the states and territories. We want to see what sort of proposals the states and territories bring forward to get the best value out of that contribution. So whilst we can indicate quite clearly, jurisdiction by jurisdiction, how much money they will get, we cannot give you—and I do not think we have set out the data in such a way—an amount of

dwellings per jurisdiction. It will vary according to where they are built. In Sydney they will be more expensive to build; in regional areas they will be relatively cheaper to build. We are really looking for the state and territory governments, with the community and developer parts of their building sector to come forward with proposals to give us the best possible return on the \$6 billion of construction activity.

Senator PAYNE—I understand that, and I think the committee is interested in ensuring the best possible return on the \$6 billion as well. The issues that we have discussed over some time in this committee and elsewhere in relation to the nature of the housing crisis in Australia, and now having that discussion in the context of the stimulus package, as it is called, means that the sort of detail about what is expected to be constructed by the states and territories using \$6 billion of Commonwealth money is the sort of information I think the committee is interested in seeking. I would have hoped that you, in your consultations with the states and territories, over what is really a phenomenal proposed spend in relation to public housing, would have been able to give to us the sort of information that enabled us, as senators representing the states and territories, to understand exactly what is going on.

Mr Leeper—There are two objectives from the agreement: one is to increase the supply of social housing through new construction and refurbishment and the other is to provide increased opportunities for people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to gain secure long-term accommodation. As a by-product of both of those, the objective is to stimulate the building and construction industry. Beyond those objectives—

Senator PAYNE—Just a minute, Mr Leeper. I am not sure why you are telling me that, though.

Mr Leeper—Because what we are saying to the states is, ‘Here is an amount of money; these are the broad outcomes you want to achieve, which is economic stimulus through construction activity and better housing outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.’ We then want the states to work out, in circumstances that suit and reflect each of their jurisdictions, what the mix of dwellings might be, where they might be located. It is consistent with the Commonwealth/state relations framework. We talk about outcomes; we then get out of the way, to be frank, and let the states work out how best to apply the Commonwealth’s funding to produce what are jointly agreed outcomes.

Senator PAYNE—With due respect to the state governments concerned, that does not leave me and, I suspect, a number of my colleagues with a great deal of confidence about where the \$6 billion of the Commonwealth’s money in a \$42 billion stimulus package actually is going in terms of what is going to be built to address the points that you made at the beginning of your response to me there and how we, as a Commonwealth parliament, as a Senate and as an estimates committee can examine that expenditure.

Dr Harmer—We will know what happens with the \$6 billion. We are estimating that we will add 20,000 units of housing. All Mr Leeper is saying is that he cannot be sure precisely how many New South Wales will or Victoria will produce for their per capita allocation because we do not know, for example, the composition of multi-unit dwellings versus detached dwellings, et cetera.

Senator PAYNE—Do you want to know that, Dr Harmer?

Dr Harmer—We will want to know that, but we do not know it yet because they are still coming forward with the proposals.

Mr Jagers—Could I add that states and territories will be making proposals to us, so we will be assessing those proposals.

Dr Harmer—We certainly do not want to leave you with the impression that the Commonwealth is not fundamentally interested in getting this money out there into housing stock and making the states accountable for it.

Senator PAYNE—That was the impression—

Dr Harmer—The Prime Minister has announced a special arrangement to ensure accountability. There is a coordinator-general in the Prime Minister's department coordinating the whole of the infrastructure spend. Mr Jagers is acting as the Coordinator for Housing, which is a new position aimed at ensuring accountability and looking at how this is done. So this is a whole new game for the Commonwealth in heavily involving ourselves in making sure this happens.

Senator PAYNE—Indeed; and a whole new game, therefore, for us in following the money as it moves around Australia.

Dr Harmer—It is just a little early, Senator. It is a little early to be giving you all the detail you want. We will be able to give you that, but we cannot give it today.

Senator PAYNE—Okay. I appreciate that assurance, which means that it stands on notice, as it were, that they would be issues in which this committee is interested in receiving information at the appropriate time.

Dr Harmer—And appropriately so, Senator.

Senator PAYNE—I understand that the proposal period is under way now. When are the state and territory governments required to provide that to you, Mr Jagers?

Mr Jagers—There are two elements of the housing package here. The second element is the repairs and maintenance program.

Senator PAYNE—That is the 400 million.

Mr Jagers—That is the 400 million: 200 million this year and 200 million next year. These were required under the agreement by 15 February from states and territories. We received these from all jurisdictions by 13 February. Those bids have been assessed by the department and we are in the process of finalising advice to the minister so she can make decisions in relation to those proposals.

Senator PAYNE—What is the next step in that?

Mr Leeper—Can I add there, Senator, that we do not have the material with us, because it is literally folders and folders, but the repairs and maintenance proposals from the state give us street addresses, unit numbers and exactly what needs to be done. It is extraordinarily detailed information. That is the kind of material we are collecting. We are just not in that position yet for the construction stages 1 and 2. We expect that we will get the same degree of detail and the same amount of information in relation to those two construction components when the time comes.

Dr Harmer—We will be looking for exactly the same information that you want, I can assure you.

Senator PAYNE—I appreciate that very much, Dr Harmer. What is the timeframe for the construction stage?

Mr Jagers—The timeframes for stage 1 construction are that proposals should be with us by 15 March from states and territories. We have been working with the states and territories to bring that forward a bit and we are hoping we will have most of them at around 2 March.

Senator PAYNE—That is Monday, by the way.

Mr Leeper—That is right. We are moving very quickly.

Dr Harmer—This is very rapid action, Senator.

Mr Jagers—We would have advice to the minister and hope to have approvals by 1 April for the first stage of construction.

Senator PAYNE—I assume you have been consulting before the advertising. I think Senator Boyce just said to me in passing that there was advertising in the newspapers in Queensland yesterday.

Mr Jagers—Yes, that is right. There were some Queensland-specific ads in the paper.

Senator PAYNE—Over what period had you been consulting with, for example, the Queensland government before the advertisements appeared yesterday?

Mr Jagers—We have been working with all of the state and territory governments since the package was announced, since 3 February. We have set up a government structure that involves the Coordinator General in PMC and me as Acting Housing Coordinator. The states all have housing coordinators appointed as well, and we have been meeting with them on a weekly basis by teleconference, with their directors-general.

Senator PAYNE—I do not have the advantage of—

Dr Harmer—We had our first meeting with all of the housing authorities' senior people the day after the announcement here in Canberra. We brought them to Canberra.

Mr Leeper—I think it was 6 February.

Dr Harmer—Well, 6 February, the day after that. Since that time Mr Jagers has been working with them constantly.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you very much, Dr Harmer. I do not have the advertisement in front of me—as I said, it was a passing comment from a colleague—but apparently the advertisements appeared yesterday in Queensland. Is that correct? What do those advertisements say?

Mr Jagers—I have not got the advertisement in front of me either. The process for the second stage of construction is that we are developing guidelines about what we want from the second stage of construction. States and territories will put out tenders, but we would like those to be in accordance with the guidelines that we are developing so that we ensure that we get certain things in the proposals that come back, because we will be doing the assessments. We will be putting out guidelines to the states and territories very soon and

procurement activity will take place. State and territory governments are required to have proposals to us by 30 June for the second stage of construction so that we can finalise assessments and recommendations to the minister and decisions by 30 August.

Senator PAYNE—For the first stage, you told me, they were due on 15 March. That is part of the construction process as well, yes?

Mr Jagers—That is right. The construction is in two stages. The first stage was for dwellings—

Senator PAYNE—Ready to go?

Mr Leeper—Yes, with development approval.

Mr Jagers—Things in the pipeline with development approval.

Senator PAYNE—That is the \$692 million?

Mr Leeper—Yes.

Mr Jagers—That is correct.

Senator PAYNE—What proportion of the 20,000 is envisaged to be included in that \$692 million first-stage round?

Mr Jagers—The target is 20,000 dwellings for both rounds, but we expect about 2,300 from the first stage.

Senator PAYNE—Okay. So 30 June for the second round?

Mr Leeper—No later than 30 June, yes, to us.

Senator PAYNE—That is to take up the \$5.3 billion?

Mr Leeper—Yes, and decisions from the Commonwealth, I think, by the middle of August.

Mr Jagers—End of August.

Mr Leeper—No later than that.

Senator PAYNE—I think you said to me, Mr Jagers, in relation to the first round, ready to go component, you are hoping—optimist; I like that—to be receiving most of the required information by Monday, which is 2 March.

Mr Jagers—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—That would indicate to you—perhaps I seek your guidance on this, Dr Harmer—that in that component of this package you would be able to give us quite a good idea of the sorts of dwellings and the locations, state by state, territory by territory, that comprise that stage? The return date for answers to questions on notice is 17 March, so that would give you an ability to respond to us in relation to those questions for that part of the package.

Dr Harmer—We will do our best, but our priority will be given to making the assessment. The first priority is to make sure that we do the assessments and get approvals and create jobs and growth, which is the purpose of the money, and social housing.

Senator PAYNE—Absolutely.

Dr Harmer—So, within those constraints, if we can provide the information in the time frame we will.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you; I appreciate that very much. Can I ask a more specific question about the delivery process for these dwellings which has been discussed in this committee's inquiry and in other arenas, and that is the proposal to use the spot purchase method of purchasing house and land packages in existing and new private housing estates. Can you give the committee some idea of what proportion of the spend, if you like, is intended to be targeted in that regard? Then I will come to another question.

Mr Jagers—If I can just work backwards for a moment, for the second stage of construction, the \$5.3 billion, we would not expect any of that to be spot purchase of already constructed dwellings. For stage 1 of construction, we are leaving open the prospect that there might be some spot purchase—we think a small amount, but we will see what comes forward in proposals. Essentially, if states and territories are able to demonstrate the employment and the economic impact of doing that—so the builder can move on to other construction activity; perhaps even that they are intending to purchase from that builder—we would consider it. So we are not closing it off, but we would not be thinking of much more than around the 10 per cent mark, I guess, of the \$690-odd million, but we will await the proposals that are due in shortly.

Dr Harmer—We can give you a pretty good indication of the intent and the broad guidelines—

Senator PAYNE—I appreciate that.

Dr Harmer—but, as Mr Jagers just indicated, we will not know the precise composition until we have got proposals in.

Senator PAYNE—I appreciate that, and I also appreciate the fact that I am a tad beyond the chair's preferred deadline. I think the Housing Industry Association advanced a proposition that, in their view, a greater proportion of spot purchasing, a greater degree of this approach would help free up quite a bit of stalled activity. What is the perspective that you take on that?

Mr Jagers—Certainly there are a number of dwellings that have development approval. I think the HIA are particularly concerned about dwellings that have approval but have been stalled because they cannot gain access to finance. Construction has not started on a vast number of dwellings, and we would hope to pick up through this process, through state authorities, contracts for those types of dwellings.

Dr Harmer—I should say that the HIA has been particular constructive in working with us on this.

Senator PAYNE—They have certainly been providing a lot of public information to their members, and a lot of activity. Just on the roles of the state and territory governments, I know in the partnership agreement there is a clause about the reporting processes required of state and territory governments. Are the reports that they make going to be available publicly or tabled in the parliament, for example?

Mr Leeper—I think we would have to take on notice, only because I would need to check with Prime Minister and Cabinet people about the general rules for COAG reports. If the COAG reports in general were to be public, you would expect these would be. I do not think there is anything particularly secret about the information.

Mr Jagers—If I could add, the reporting that we are going to require will be on a dwelling-by-dwelling basis, so we will be seeking from states and territories, addresses and details, so that we can track the progress of individual dwellings through this. We would not want to make the individual addresses of public housing dwellings public.

Senator PAYNE—No, I have no intention whatsoever to go down that road.

Dr Harmer—On an aggregated basis.

Senator PAYNE—Can I ask a couple of questions about activity in the public housing area in recent times. Can you us how many new public housing dwellings, in net terms, have been constructed in the last 12 months in Australia?

Ms Winzar—We will be able to give you figures on the net change in the number of public housing dwellings, but how many of those would be new constructions we would not know.

Senator PAYNE—Is that information that can be obtained from the states and territories?

Dr Harmer—I do not ask them the split between purchase and construct, but we certainly asked them additions, sales et cetera—totals.

Senator PAYNE—From the information that you do have, Dr Harmer, and in terms of the constraints under which you operate—and I understand that; you have explained that again to me this afternoon—can we have a breakdown by state of that and then a total figure for the nation? If you do not have it here today, is it information that you have had that you use to take into account when coming up with the numbers in this particular package?

Dr Harmer—The numbers in this package are a factor of the amount of money and then per capita allocation to the states. So they are not related.

Senator PAYNE—It is related, though, to capacity to produce, I would have thought, by the states.

Mr Leeper—The states will not be the only source of construction. We deliberately are asking them to bring forward proposals that encompass their own public sector construction efforts, the community housing companies that have got development arms and the private developers. We are trying to tap the entire building capacity base.

Senator PAYNE—Can you help me with the average costs of construction of a dwelling in the public housing context? I know they are different, I understand we are talking about apartments in some cases and homes in another, but can you help with the average cost of construction in the last 12 months and in the five years proceeding that?

Ms Winzar—No, we would not hold that information; we do not collect it. The only information we can give you is the average cost of the bids for funding under the social housing partnership agreement.

The first of those bids is in and that would give us some indication of what the unit cost is. We would not be able to disaggregate that by unit size, by type or number of dwellings or by the nature of the construction. It would be a very high-level figure, if that would be helpful.

Senator PAYNE—Okay.

CHAIR—Senator, I want to end at 25 past three because Senator McLucas has to go. Is there a priority in what you have left? We will take a break at 25 past three. This one has been going for almost two hours now.

Senator PAYNE—Yes. I am sorry about that. Can I just ask a very brief question about the homelessness aspects of the package? It seems to me that it actually depends a little on what you read as to how heavy the focus is on homelessness in a range of documents that I have seen. That is an observation I make; I do not expect you to comment. Can you indicate what proportion of the 20,000 social housing dwellings is intended to be allocated to homeless Australians? How will they be identified and selected, for example?

Ms Winzar—We cannot give you an explicit number of the 20,000 dwellings that will be allocated to those who are currently homeless or those who are at risk. We have asked the states to drive their allocations off the high end of their public housing waiting list to achieve two objectives: one is to address homelessness and the other is to halve the waiting time for people in that high-need end of the waiting list to be placed in accommodation. In our discussions with the states around implementation of the partnership agreements on homelessness and social housing and Indigenous housing, we have been exploring issues about how their waiting lists operate and what they might do to use this extra injection of funds into social housing to better address homelessness in their jurisdictions.

Senator PAYNE—Should I be differentiating the funding for the A Place to Call Home initiative, which provided funding for 600 new homes for individuals and families that experienced homelessness, from this funding and from the funding in NAHA for social housing?

Ms Winzar—Yes.

Mr Leeper—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—So they are all completely separate?

Mr Leeper—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—Can you indicate to me, briefly, if possible, what support programs are intended to be put in place for those who are moved from their state of homelessness to a state of accommodation through this program?

Ms Winzar—Through A Place to Call Home?

Senator PAYNE—No, through this program—that is, through the social housing program. If you are taking people from a state of homelessness to a state of accommodation in this program, how are you going to support them?

Ms Winzar—The Commonwealth funding under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness we intend to be directed towards service provision. That would include life skills and other supports needed to keep people in their tenancies. We would see that as the

main avenue for providing the housing supports—tenancy supports—needed to keep people housed where the housing was provided through the Nation Building and Jobs package or the social housing partnership agreement.

Senator PAYNE—So that does spread across both?

Dr Harmer—Yes. We certainly do not want the stimulus package—\$6½ billion—to be spent on anything other than construction and purchase and creating jobs and houses.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have a range of other questions which I will place on notice.

CHAIR—Thank you. That will end questions on housing at 4.1. Thank you very much. I propose we now have a break for 10 minutes. I then propose we go back to disabilities and finish that area.

Proceedings suspended from 3.27 pm to 3.40 pm

CHAIR—Dr Harmer, I know the minister is very close, so we may as well get started. Senator Humphries is going to continue with his questioning on disabilities. Was there information you wanted to share?

Dr Harmer—Ms Bedford wanted to clarify something that we had before.

CHAIR—We will do that now and get it on the record.

Ms Bedford—Senator Fielding asked me about national targets for the Younger People in Residential Aged Care Program, and I said I would check a couple of those figures because I thought they looked wrong. They were wrong, so I will just correct those. Between 235 and 282 people under the age of 65 are to be provided with enhanced services within a residential aged care setting where residential aged care is the only available suitable supported accommodation option. It was just those figures. Thank you.

Dr Harmer—Before we go to Senator Humphries, I have a couple of tables that we agreed to provide, one on children accessing early intervention services in the states and territories, and the autism advisory activity table by state. I also have the organisations that are consulted in the national advisory consultations on mental health.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The Personal Helpers and Mentors Program comes under this outcome, I believe. I understand we have got through rounds 1 and 2. Round 1 was announced in April 2007 and round 2 in September 2007. Is that right?

Ms Brain—Round 1 commenced operation in May 2007, so it probably was announced just a bit before that. That would be right. And round 2 commenced in November 2007.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What stage are we at with round 3?

Ms Brain—The round 3 sites were announced yesterday.

Senator HUMPHRIES—It is a long gap between 2 and 3. What is the reason for that?

Mr Lewis—There are a whole range of issues that may have impacted on that, but certainly the process was quite exhaustive. It involved consultations with states and territories.

As you know, we had an election in between, and other issues have impacted on timing. But certainly the decision was a decision made recently and has been announced.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What can you tell me about round 3? It has been announced; how many places will it offer?

Ms Brain—Round 3 is our biggest round, with 79 sites.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How many mentors and helpers will there be across those 79 sites?

Ms Brain—There will be five personal mentors and helpers per site, so very close to 400. It is five FTEs—full-time equivalents—so there could be a mix of part-time and full-time staff.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How many FTEs did we achieve in the first two rounds?

Ms Brain—76 sites, so almost the same number.

Senator HUMPHRIES—From memory there were just under 1,000 positions that were originally proposed in the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program, so does round 3 take us up to approximately what that target is, or is a round 4 envisaged after that?

Ms Brain—There is a round 4 that is envisaged after that. Planning for round 4 has commenced, but funding is not available until next financial year for round 4, and at that time there will be approximately 20 additional sites.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So you obviously cannot tell me how many applicants are applying for round 3 because it has not closed yet?

Ms Brain—No, round 3 has closed.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Sorry, I thought you said it had been announced.

Mr Lewis—The outcome of round 3 was announced yesterday.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How many applicants applied?

Ms Brain—There were 775 applicants that applied across all of the sites.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Obviously the expectation is that we would start to fill in some of the gaps that existed in the previous rounds. I will refer to the announcement in more detail to see what the broad outcome is, but are there areas of the country that were oversubscribed in terms of applications or areas where there were few or no applicants?

Ms Brain—In terms of each of the sites that were announced, we were able to fill each of those sites with a successful applicant. Really round 4 is designed to fill the gaps, so we will be doing quite some analysis between now and round 4 to determine those gaps. That was always the intent of round 4.

Senator HUMPHRIES—In all the areas for which placements will be made, is there a full five placements in each location or is it in some cases fewer than five full-time equivalents in each of those locations?

Mr Lewis—In some cases, there are more. It is a bit like the discussion we had earlier about autism. The funding is for FTE, so with five FTEs you may be able to spread that—

Senator HUMPHRIES—I accept that you could have 10 people and five FTEs, but I am asking if you have five FTEs in every case or have you not been able to get enough people to fill the level of five FTEs in some locations?

Mr Lewis—There has been a turnover in some of the sites. I think on average they range between four and five, but in some sites they had difficulty getting numbers up early on. That is partly due to a broader workforce capacity in this area. I think we have discussed that at previous Senate estimates sessions with you.

Senator HUMPHRIES—With the announcement of round 3 can you give me an approximate picture of where the gaps are? I assume it will vary from place to place, but are there any patterns you see in the areas where gaps are occurring?

Mr Lewis—Before we do that, to give you a bit of background to that, the selection of the sites that we go to is done in partnership with state and territory governments. It is done in the context of demand that they are seeing on the ground in the clinical space and in the broader community space. It is also done with advice from our state officers around expectations and demand. So in terms of gap filling, per se, it is actually a complex picture of advice from clinical, advice from our colleagues in DoHA through the IDC process, advice from our state and territory officers, and in some cases what you might call a gap. To illustrate this, in some inner urban areas you might find that your demand is so significant that in fact you have a clustering of these service providers which is quite dense. So it is not easy to give you an answer around gaps in that sense. Does that cover part of your question?

Senator HUMPHRIES—Yes, I understand what you are saying. Let me put it this way: when round 4 is completed, would you expect that all areas of Australia, or all significant population centres at least, would have coverage?

Mr Lewis—I think it is a reasonable expectation that significant populations where demand has been agreed with state and territory governments would have some representation. That is a reasonable expectation.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The applications originally closed back in July last year; is that correct?

Ms Brain—Yes, that is correct.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Why has it taken so long between the closure of the applications and the announcement of the successful applicants?

Mr Lewis—The process from closure of applications in terms of assessment and advice, and consideration and discussion by new government of its options—some of the issues that we have had to consult with state and territories on that you would be aware of from public documentation—involve what the Commonwealth's relationship is with state and territory governments around those functions we talked about earlier today in relation to the consultation that has been commissioned by ministers—

Senator HUMPHRIES—But they would have been happening during rounds 1 and 2 though, wouldn't they?

Mr Lewis—No. COAG discussion was not an issue between round 1 and 2. That was a new thing that came as part of this new government initiative, so there have been impacting

factors. The decision, though, ultimately sits with the minister and the minister has made a decision.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How have you communicated the delay and kept people in the loop over that seven or eight months?

Mr Lewis—We have had regular meetings with the sector and, in fact, only two weeks ago we met with the community mental health peaks, alongside DoHA and with PM&C, to talk with them about a range of things, including the state of play, so we have attempted to keep people abreast, but obviously a decision is the remit of the minister, and that is where we sit.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I assume, over seven or eight months, the details in the original applications might have become out of date or stale. It is possible for people to be able to refresh their applications?

Mr Lewis—The decision in terms of the process would not need to be revisited in terms of the criteria and their bona fides. If you are saying we would need to go back to start afresh, then no, because the process is quite exhaustive. So the decisions insofar as applicants still wish to proceed when they are approached after an announcement—that might be a different question. They might say, ‘Okay, our circumstances have changed,’ and that is quite a legitimate concern for us and for those potential providers, but certainly in previous experience where there has been some slight delay in any process, it is very unusual that you have to go back out to the world, so to speak.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I think you would see it was a reasonable question for people to ask. If we have got a major exercise like the white paper on homelessness, for example, engaging a lot of stakeholders, with a lot of things to happen, and that is to be delivered in a timely way, it is not auspicious that programs like this, which are quite small by comparison, experience these extensive delays. Can I ask whether it is the intention of FaHCSIA to continue to deliver this program or whether there has been any discussion about it being moved, say, to the department of health or, for that matter, to the states to deliver?

Mr Lewis—There are public communiqués that government has put out about its intentions in relation to its negotiations with COAG that clearly indicate that that is a matter for discussion between the federal government and the state and territory governments. That is not something that we would speculate on here, because it is a COAG matter.

Senator HUMPHRIES—But it is under contemplation, obviously, if it is in those communiqués.

Mr Lewis—I refer you to the public media that has talked about the government’s intent.

Senator HUMPHRIES—What evaluation of PHaMS is going to be undertaken from this point?

Mr Lewis—I will just check my notes, Senator. I have got a brief on it. We gave an answer a couple of times about this in previous Senate estimates and the answer goes like this: every single participant who is involved in the PHaMS program has an entry process and that entry process involves a quite exhaustive questionnaire which we developed in partnership with psychiatrists and practitioners, across the board through a series of workshops. We then ratified that entry process or assessment process through the Mental Health Standing

Committee, which includes directors of mental health from every state and territory and members from the Mental Health Council of Australia et cetera. That tool allows us to identify the situation in which a person who presents to the program is in. That includes the severity of the impact on them of the severe mental illness that they are suffering. So the PHaMS program is only for people with severe mental illness who are severely impacted, and that is what this tool gauges.

For each individual who is involved in the program, a case management plan is put in place, and this program is about linking people with clinical and community care. So the case management program sets goals and targets and, obviously, measurable improvement and incremental improvement as part of that process. So the whole process involves people coming in, talking to their PHaMS case worker who, obviously, is exploring with them their progress along their agreed case plan—life goals, getting a job—

Senator HUMPHRIES—Can I just interrupt. The question I asked was not about how individuals are evaluated for their illness or whatever; it was about how the program was being evaluated for its effectiveness.

Mr Lewis—In terms of the program overall, the data from this evaluation allows us to look at whether we have got people into jobs; whether we have got them into houses; whether they are socialising or not; whether they are on medication and are participating more socially or economically in the community; whether they are readmitted to hospital more frequently, if at all; whether they have ever seen a clinical service; and whether they have seen one now and they are on medication. This is the data that we have.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That is provided by the providers of the service?

Mr Lewis—That is right.

Senator HUMPHRIES—And is there a time frame for that to be collected, collated and published?

Mr Lewis—It is part of our regular scrutiny and monitoring with the providers. We also have had a series of workshops with all providers to work through how we can better understand and capture that life progress for participants in the program. One of the concerns for us early on—and it is partly why we developed this entry tool as a new instrument, for want of a better term—are that at this stage, nationally, there is not an agreed outcome measurement instrument that is agreed across all states and territories. There are different ones which many of the states and territories use, but they do not consistently use one outcome measurement framework for progress of people in this circumstance. So we have had to develop some of this from the ground up and then there is a reliance on tertiary and secondary data to validate the patterns of involvement from participancy.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So I can keep asking these questions at estimates committees to see how that progress is rolling out?

Mr Lewis—Sure. I should add to that that we are part of a broader evaluation process in partnership with DoHA, because there is an agreement that the whole National Action Plan on Mental Health, of which we are a part, will have a mega-evaluation and DoHA are leading

that. I am sure they would have mentioned to you if you have asked them in the past. There is a framework in *Hansard* that they talk about.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR—Thank you. Are there any further questions in the area of disabilities?

Senator BOYCE—I have got a few questions ranging across a few areas. This is just a one-off question, Dr Harmer. It is possibly fortuitous that Senator Evans is the minister here at the moment. Has your department been asked for your input at all about potential changes to the criteria for immigrants who have a member of their family with a disability?

Senator Chris Evans—Perhaps I can answer that.

Senator BOYCE—That is why I said it was fortuitous you were here.

Senator Chris Evans—Yes. Mr Shorten and I are close to finalising the terms of reference. There is a bit of toing and froing, and it is actually my fault at the moment because I was not quite happy with the last draft I saw. In fact, it is in my tray to deal with today if I ever get out of estimates.

Senator BOYCE—I will make this short then, shall I?

Senator Chris Evans—We have received advice from FaHCSIA as part of the process with Mr Shorten and we have also had some advice from AGs, so we are trying to make sure we get the terms of reference right. But I hope to send them to the committee next week.

Senator BOYCE—To the committee next week?

Senator Chris Evans—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—Make a reference to them?

Senator Chris Evans—Yes. I said I would and I always have with those joint committees so that they can have a look and say if they have any concerns, and then it will be formally put to the committee. But I want to get it going, and it is very close to being finalised.

Dr Harmer—The answer is yes.

Senator BOYCE—Yes. Is there anything further you can tell me about that?

Dr Harmer—I do not think we will need to add anything, unless you have a specific question.

Senator BOYCE—What is the nature of the advice you provided?

Dr Harmer—We cannot tell you the sort of advice we give to government about these sorts of matters. We can say that we have advised.

Senator BOYCE—Yes.

Senator Chris Evans—But at the moment the only consideration, Senator, has been about terms of reference, making sure we pick up all the areas. It is not a policy decision. The policy is what do we do about that part of the immigration act, and there are some more general questions about the assessment of disability, which FaHCSIA and others have provided information on. I am just trying to make sure it does not become an inquiry into disability but is focused on the immigration act and how we make that work better. Some of the terms of

reference, I thought, were going to lead us too wide, to the point where we did not actually focus on the problem. But we are actually now in a policy-making position. I want the committee to find the answer for us.

Senator BOYCE—We did have a discussion over lunch about the efficacy of adding any other related matters to the end of terms of reference, so this probably is not one of those times.

Senator Chris Evans—It just means, quite frankly, that the report will take longer. My concern is that it would then drag into a major inquiry, which does not actually focus on the real issue we want to get an answer on.

Senator BOYCE—I would like to turn now to young people with disabilities in residential aged care. Can we have an update on how successful we are in getting them out?

Ms Bedford—Would you like some numbers? Is that what you are after?

Senator BOYCE—Yes, please. And I would like some information on where people have been moved to.

Ms Bedford—It is not data collected through the minimum data set; it is manual data. We are trying to get more frequent data. We have three objectives: moving out of the residential aged care settings; diversion, so that they do not go in; and enhanced services. As at December 2008, under the first objective, New South Wales had two; Victoria, 19; Queensland, 25.

Senator BOYCE—Was that 12 in New South Wales, or two?

Ms Bedford—Two.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you.

Ms Bedford—South Australia, 17; Western Australia, three; Tasmania, one; ACT, one; and the Northern Territory, two. So that totals 70.

Senator BOYCE—And where have those people moved to?

Ms Bedford—They have moved to a variety of settings. Some have been moved to their own homes and some to supported accommodation in other settings. I think, previously, under questions on notice we have provided some summaries around where people had moved to.

Senator BOYCE—Yes.

Ms Bedford—Under the diversion element objective, there were two in New South Wales, and another 23 are in the process of moving out.

Senator BOYCE—That is in New South Wales?

Ms Bedford—Yes. There were 41 from Victoria; Queensland, 35; South Australia, 19; Western Australia, 16; Tasmania, three; the ACT, seven; and the Northern Territory, six. And under program objective 3, which is enhanced services, overall a total of 360 people receive enhanced services. Would you like me to go through what those services are?

Senator BOYCE—Could you put those on notice for us, perhaps, Ms Bedford? Would that work?

Ms Bedford—Yes, or I could read them out.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, read them out. There are only a few states, aren't there.

Ms Bedford—I was going to read out the types of services.

Senator BOYCE—How long will that take?

Ms Bedford—About one minute.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, please.

Ms Bedford—The enhanced services include: community access; aids and equipment; transport assistance; case management; holiday support; and therapy and other supports, such as gym membership, massage and in-home support.

Senator BOYCE—Would the people in programs 1 and 2 be the recipients of program 3? We are not talking about extra individuals, are we? Those services are provided to the people in programs 1 and 2. I am just trying to confirm that information.

Ms Bedford—The enhanced services are for those who remain in residential aged care.

Senator BOYCE—From the figures you gave it would seem that New South Wales, in population terms, is not progressing people out as quickly as, perhaps, other states. Could you comment on why that is?

Ms Bedford—The states list a number of reasons why some of these elements are taking a bit longer. Overall, program 1 is not moving as fast as we thought it would move. There seems to be a much greater uptake on the diversion and the enhanced services objectives. I read out the funding levels for the first year and second year of the program. The first year of the funding was only for \$4 million from the Commonwealth, which is matched by states, so it was always going to be a developmental year. The majority of funding comes on board in the last three years of the program, and that is when facilities are being built. So different states are at different stages.

Senator BOYCE—But is it true to say that it is not just about capacity constraint, that also there would be some ideological issues involved, with some states being less keen to move people into what are seen as young people's nursing homes instead of nursing homes for the aged?

Dr Harmer—I do not think we would be terribly well qualified to comment on that, Senator.

Ms Beauchamp—I think this was an agenda that was signed up by all states and territories. There was a forward work program. Most of those dollars have been put into the out years of the forward estimates, and so we are looking at tracking over a number of years, not necessarily in these first couple of years. But the states and territories have certainly signed up to this.

Senator BOYCE—Ms Bedford, you said the facilities will come on stream towards the end, but at what stage are they now? Have tenders been let? Have development applications been approved?

Ms Bedford—I would have to take that on notice and give you an update of where they are up to. I think, at the last estimates or the estimates hearings before, we provided an update of what was going on. We can update that for you again.

Senator BOYCE—If you could, please, that would be good. There is another side, I suppose, to people with disabilities ageing. It has been brought to my attention that some people who live in supported accommodation and work in business services or attend day care centres, when they age, like everybody else, would perhaps just like to stay home and watch telly. There is no funding currently available for the services that support these people to enable that to happen. ‘Forced’ is too strong a word, but people who would prefer not to are having to go to work. They may be given lesser or less onerous work or jobs may be invented for them; nevertheless, it is not what they would like to do nor what the services that are supporting them would like them to be doing. Has that been brought to the attention of the department?

Ms Davies—Yes, it has.

Senator BOYCE—And?

Ms Davies—It is true that employees in Australian Disability Enterprises are ageing in general, and there is an issue about the capacity of the system as a whole, not just in our part, for people to retire. We have commissioned research into that. A couple of our services have also asked for money to pilot ways of dealing with the subject, and I understand some Australian Disability Enterprises actually do have some programs in place, but the issue of people ageing is a broader issue.

Senator BOYCE—I realise that, but there is that specific funding gap.

Ms Davies—Yes, for people to be able to retire.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, that stops older people with disabilities from retiring.

Ms Davies—We know it is an issue and we are looking into it.

Senator BOYCE—Can you be a bit more specific?

Ms Davies—I might hand over to my colleague.

Ms Bruce—As Ms Davies mentioned, we are doing some research to get a bit more of the exact nature of the problem across our Australian disability enterprises. We have obviously got data on the age of our supported employees. There are a number of Australian disability enterprises that, off their bat, have worked with their state government counterparts to develop more streamlined options for older supported employees. It is quite a complex area. A lot of our supported employees have been going to the same place for many, many years and they like going there. It is part of their broader social network. It is quite a complex area.

Senator BOYCE—Exactly. Some people’s only social networks would be at work.

Ms Bruce—That is right. It is an area, as Ms Davies said, that we are very aware of and we are actively looking at how we look at pilots and work with our state and territory colleagues.

Senator BOYCE—Are you aware of any pilots that are functioning? You said the states were doing some.

Ms Bruce—I am aware that there is one in the Wollongong region that is working quite well. We have also been approached by a couple of disability services in Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and in the Bega area in New South Wales. We are looking at running some pilots in some of those areas.

Senator BOYCE—Would you be able to provide information on notice about those pilots?

Ms Bruce—We can. It is not very well developed at this point in time, but perhaps at next estimates we would certainly be in a much better position to give you more detailed information about what we are proposing.

Senator BOYCE—I would be very interested to see that, Ms Bruce. Thank you very much for that. My other questions relate to the Australian disability enterprises. Are all the business services covered by Australian disability enterprises? Are they all Commonwealth funded?

Ms Bruce—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—How many organisations are there?

Ms Bruce—We have 215.

Senator BOYCE—I am assuming this has improved the focus on employment of people in business services. Do we have a complementary sharpening of focus on employment of people with disabilities in open employment?

Ms Davies—Senator, that is a question really for DEEWR.

Senator BOYCE—That is what concerns me, Ms Davies; that the two are not complementary and running side by side. Do you have conversations with DEEWR on this issue? Is there a formal group that discusses it?

Ms Davies—There is no formal group, but we do have routine conversations with DEEWR on a range of issues, including things like transition from Australian disability enterprises into open employment.

Senator BOYCE—Who keeps the figures on that transition, or are figures kept?

Ms Davies—Both departments were covered by the census, where we—

Senator BOYCE—The dataset?

Ms Davies—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—Okay. Does that continue to happen?

Ms Davies—It may not be the census, but the collection of information under the new disability agreement will continue for open employment and for supported employment.

Senator BOYCE—Who would, for want of a better word, ‘monitor’ those figures?

Ms Davies—As part of the new arrangements for the new national disability agreement there is a monitoring framework.

Senator BOYCE—Who is the body or the individual saying, ‘We’re not doing as well on transitions as we were 12 months ago,’ or some such?

Ms Davies—There would be an annual report on the sort of work that is coming under the national disability agreement. I am not sure that they would actually focus on just the transition issue, though.

Senator BOYCE—No.

Ms Bruce—I think both departments run their own systems, which look at the people in the various employments streams. FaHCSIA, for example, has data on the supported employees. We collect data on reasons why supported employees might exit, and some of those reasons might be that they move to open employment. Conversely, I know that DEEWR collect similar amounts of data within their own income stream.

Senator BOYCE—Is transition something that the department actually encourages?

Ms Davies—The issue of transition is, of course, the issue that we are concerned about and pursuing.

Senator BOYCE—Can you tell me what you mean by that?

Ms Davies—Previously, when we were the same department, there was not an issue because they were the same thing. Now, we have to formally address those sorts of issues because they are done under different portfolios. We have to actively and consciously pursue it.

Senator BOYCE—How do you do that?

Ms Davies—In routine conversations with the department.

Ms Bruce—Also with DHS. We are in regular contact with DHS about referrals from Centrelink staff, for example.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you.

CHAIR—There being no further questions on disabilities, that finally ends output 2.2. Thank you very much.

[4.17 pm]

CHAIR—We will move to output 2.3, support for carers.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Thanks, Chair. I have some questions that I might put on notice, but the main question I wanted to ask was about advocacy for carers. We have done a lot in recent years, I think, to improve the financial position of carers by, for the first time, starting to directly provide them with some funding in recognition of their contribution to the social fabric of Australia, but we do not appear to spend much on advocacy for those carers whereas we do in a number of other equivalent areas of public support. Is there any funding of carer advocacy organisations and, if so, at what level?

Ms Davies—Before I hand to Ms Bruce, our department funds 63 advocacy organisations that fund under a different series of models, and some of those do cover carers.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Such as?

Ms Bruce—One of the advocacy models that the department does fund is family advocacy and that, by the nature of it, takes into account the whole family, which could include carers. There is no specific stream, under that particular program, for carers in their own right.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Yes. Those carer organisations, which advocate specifically for carers—and I am sure you are aware of some of them, at least—are concerned that they do not get any share of that pie.

Ms Davies—I think they do get some money. I am aware of the issue. I think probably the answer is that under the new national disability agreement the issue of the national treatment of advocacy is flagged as a piece of work for future work, and that will encompass this issue.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Good to hear that it is being looked at, but does that preclude consideration of any funding for carers advocacy groups as an interim measure?

Ms Davies—The funding arrangements for the existing advocacy agencies are more or less set. There are no plans to expand the funding or change it, at this point.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I am told that there have been some discussions with Carers Australia about that question of better support, including advocacy funding—is that correct?

Ms Davies—There have been a number of discussions, yes.

Senator HUMPHRIES—It has been put to me—and I do not express any view whether this is the case or it is not—that if Carers Australia provide services to carers, then, in a sense, they might be one of the organisations about which a carer's advocate might choose to make comments or advocate about. It could be said that there is a conflict of interest in that arrangement. If the department is dealing with Carers Australia at the executive level to develop ideas for advocacy, can we be reassured that there will be acknowledgement of that potential for a conflict of interest and that consideration will at least be given to the separate funding advocacy organisations?

Ms Davies—There are a few points there. I think the Department of Health and Ageing funds Carers Australia. The issue in terms of advocacy for us is more what the national arrangements are as a country that we wish to pursue in the future for advocacy generally, including perhaps for carers. Even though we have had conversations with Carers Australia, it is not in any formal sense to input into that national policy development, because that is a Commonwealth/state set of issues.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Yes, but is it not the case that the Commonwealth is already in that field with direct funding for carers? Just as it supports its funding in other areas by some funding for advocacy, are you saying that it is Health and Ageing's problem, not your problem?

Ms Davies—No, I am just remarking that Carers Australia is actually not funded by us.

Ms Bruce—It is for some services—

Ms Davies—For some services, that is true.

Ms Bruce—but not for advocacy or carer advocacy services.

Ms Davies—It is funded as a peak group, I think, by the Department of Health and Ageing.

Senator HUMPHRIES—This department, through Centrelink, provides payments to carers.

Ms Davies—Yes.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Are you saying it could be either this department or the other department which would have the theoretical responsibility of funding advocacy, if it were to be established that there was such a need?

Ms Davies—No. I think I am saying that, in terms of the particular issue of carers being funded to do specific advocacy, it is possibly going to be considered under the new COAG agreement, the national disability agreement, which makes reference to the fact that policy for national arrangements for advocacy is something to be pursued in the near future.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That does not deal with the issue of whether it is dealt with by the Department of Health and Ageing or by FaHCSIA.

Ms Bruce—If I could just add something that, hopefully, will be helpful. Carers Australia write to FaHCSIA reasonably frequently and put submissions in about policy ideas that they think we should consider. Advocacy for carers is usually part of that, and it is part of what we are looking at in terms of where we might take advocacy more broadly, as Ms Davies mentioned, or where we might take carers matters more broadly. At the moment, we do not fund carers advocacy as such. The only funding is around the family advocacy model.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I will just finish by commending to you the budget submissions from a number of carers organisations that were made to the federal government. That is all my questions on the carers.

Senator FIFIELD—Ms Emerson, I think during the October estimates you mentioned that there were a number of research reports that were coming out regarding young carers—‘Young carers: costs, impacts on welfare’ and ‘Young carers: their characteristics and geographical distribution’, from the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW. Have those been published yet?

Ms Emerson—As yet, neither of those have been published, but I understand they will be shortly. The ‘Young carers: costs, impacts on welfare’ has gone out for refereeing, which is part of the quality assurance for that piece of work. We anticipate that will be published later this year. The DEEWR project, ‘Young carers: their characteristics and geographical distribution,’ I have been informed will be published very shortly.

Senator FIFIELD—On the costs and impacts on welfare one, you said later year. Do you know whether it is first or second half of the year?

Ms Emerson—I cannot be more specific at this stage because the referee process is not something we can readily control. I am hoping it will be the middle.

Senator FIFIELD—Also last October, I think Ms Bruce mentioned that a primary school kit was being developed for young carers who are still in primary school. I just want to know if that kit has been completed?

Ms Bruce—That is my understanding, yes. It has been distributed.

Senator FIFIELD—It has been?

Ms Bruce—If that is incorrect, I will correct the record.

Senator FIFIELD—Is it something that all primary schools will receive?

Ms Bruce—It is being distributed through Commonwealth Carelink respite centres. They are managing the distribution through primary schools, I guess, on a needs basis.

Senator FIFIELD—Are you able to give me just a brief outline of what is actually contained in the kits?

Ms Bruce—Not off the top of my head, I am sorry. I can get that detail for you quickly.

Senator FIFIELD—If you could get it, that will be great.

Ms Bruce—From memory, it is a diary and a wristband thing. I can get the details.

Senator FIFIELD—No kit is complete without a wristband, is it?

CHAIR—If there are no further questions on carers, output 2.3 is complete. Thank you very much.

[4.27 pm]

CHAIR—We will now move to output group 3.1.

Dr Harmer—Senator, I have an answer that I can table on a question that Senator Siewert asked about inquiries fielded by Centrelink on special disability trusts.

CHAIR—Thank you. Senator Siewert.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. I have questions around SEAM.

Ms Beauchamp—If I can clarify our role in SEAM. The policy responsibility for the school enrolment and attendance measure is DEEWR. We have notified DEEWR officers that you are interested in questioning and so they are at the ready, I think, next door. Our role around welfare payments reform, more broadly, is that of coordination. In this particular element, we have a small amount of information in terms of progress, but in terms of any policy issues it is a question for DEEWR.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Dr Harmer—We do our best to be as helpful as we can, Senator, within the areas that are our responsibility.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. I am not sure, in that case, whether you will be able to answer my questions in terms of whether there has been any correspondence from the West Australian government about the trial in Western Australia.

Ms Beauchamp—On the school enrolment and attendance measure?

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—Not that I am aware of, but DEEWR may be aware.

Senator SIEWERT—They are not doing education next door; they are doing—

Dr Harmer—Employment.

Senator SIEWERT—Presumably, they will be available tomorrow?

Mr Sandison—I am aware that the employment component of DEEWR has finished and they have moved to workplace relations. There has been some correspondence between Minister Macklin's office in Western Australia in relation to the proposal because, as Ms

Beauchamp has said, our minister has overriding policy authority for the welfare payment reform measures. There has been some engagement between the offices.

Senator SIEWERT—On the trial?

Mr Sandison—Correct.

Senator SIEWERT—Has the West Australian government formally told the minister whether WA is going to be participating or not?

Mr Sandison—No. There has been no letter, as far as I am aware, from the Western Australian government back to Minister Macklin.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Do I ask here about the location of the eighth trial?

Mr Sandison—The other jurisdiction that was raised at previous Senate estimates?

Senator SIEWERT—The government announced that there would be eight trial locations. Only seven have been publicly selected. I have asked previously about the eighth one, and at that stage I was told it had not been selected. I am wondering now if it has been.

Mr Sandison—It is still the same status. There has not been a decision or an agreement with the jurisdiction for an additional location.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. I have some specific questions that relate to the NT the trial. I presume I am better off dealing with that tomorrow in Indigenous communities.

Dr Harmer—If it is specifically Indigenous, probably, but we may be able to deal with them now. I just do not want to deal with them twice. Maybe there are other senators with questions in that area that are expecting tomorrow. I do not know. If we can deal with them now—

Senator SIEWERT—I am happy to deal with them tomorrow as long as I do not get there tomorrow and get told, ‘You should have asked those yesterday.’

Dr Harmer—No, they are specifically Northern Territory. They would be okay tomorrow.

Mr Sandison—One of the sites with SEAM incorporates Katherine and therefore is not identified as Indigenous only. We can pick it up as part of the NT activities, and we will answer as we can.

Dr Harmer—Why don’t we have a go at them today, if you have some questions?

Senator SIEWERT—I know Senator Scullion, for example, will probably want to do some of those.

Senator Chris Evans—Have a crack now. What cannot be answered will be on notice, if you like, for tomorrow, and be dealt with quickly tomorrow.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Senator Chris Evans—Why don’t we see how you go? If it is proving totally fruitless and the officers are of no help at all, we will adjourn.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Senator Chris Evans—If, as I expect, the answers are brilliant and informative, then we will get it done. Do not feel any pressure, though.

Senator SIEWERT—I do want to go back to Cannington for a moment, though, to see where you are up to in the potential rollout in Cannington. As I understand from your answer now, the West Australian government has not written to the minister yet. However, as I understand it from media in Western Australia, the West Australian government has not progressed very far with implementation of this initiative. Would that be an accurate understanding?

Mr Sandison—All we could say is that we read the same media, Senator, and it is an issue for the Western Australian government. There is no formal response from them. How far they are in their thinking I could not answer.

Senator SIEWERT—You said that there had been some correspondence between Western Australia and the Commonwealth government. I am wondering how far, in fact, therefore, you had gone in terms of putting in place any measures that could start implementing this in Cannington. I think some letters have gone out to schools. Is that correct?

Mr Sandison—It is getting into the territory of the operational side and the policy—that is the DEEWR space.

Senator SIEWERT—So I need to talk to them, thank you. How closely are you working with the Northern Territory government to roll out the appropriate levels of support that are needed for this measure?

Mr Sandison—Again, we are engaged in helping facilitate, but primarily the engagement with the Northern Territory government that is DEEWR activity. On the ground it would be through Centrelink engagement as well. So again, it is primarily about the operational engagement, to make sure that those activities run properly.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you perhaps then tell me what role FaHCSIA has as opposed to DEEWR? I am fairly clear about what the state and territory has to undertake, obviously, because they are responsible for the schools. But how do you work with the states and with DEEWR on this initiative?

Mr Sandison—Primarily our role is overarching, because it is part of the overall welfare payment reform measures. So it sits as one of those, and that is why it sits with Minister Macklin with overarching authority. But DEEWR has got the authority to run it as an initiative in itself and therefore it is primarily through DEEWR where the engagement with the Northern Territory government happens.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you tell me how it fits into the overall welfare reform?

Mr Sandison—There is a suite of five things that primarily fit within the role. Our work that was being done at Cape York was one of them; the child protection measures; income management; SEAM; and voluntary income management.

Dr Harmer—There are a number of dimensions to the welfare payments reform: school attendance and child protection; as Mr Sandison said, there are the welfare reform trials in the Cape; and there is a Northern Territory intervention income quarantine. There are a number of dimensions. Minister Macklin has responsibility for the overarching payments reform, but individually the school element of it will be run by DEEWR.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Is this where I ask about issues around the voluntary income management area?

Mr Sandison—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—As I understand it, it has been rolled out into communities in the Kimberley now, and in Cannington it is not voluntary.

Ms Wilson—Voluntary income management has been rolled out to all of the areas where the child protection measure is in place. That includes Cannington and now the entire area of the Kimberley.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Wilson—So it is available in all of those areas.

Senator SIEWERT—It is available in Cannington.

Ms Wilson—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—But it is only available where the child protection reform has been rolled out.

Ms Wilson—That is right. That is because of Centrelink's service delivery is set up in that way.

Senator SIEWERT—I am aware that there will be a lot of these issues that we might cover tomorrow, because I want to cover the basics card and the rollout in areas like Cannington. While I am fully aware there will be a lot of Aboriginal families caught up in the Cannington region, it does apply to other non-Aboriginal families.

Mr Sandison—Correct.

Senator SIEWERT—Would I be better dealing with it there tomorrow, because we may be repeating issues?

Dr Harmer—To the extent you want to get into the basics card application et cetera, it would be better tomorrow, because we will have Centrelink there and the Department of Human Services, who are responsible for that. For more general policy questions about the intent, the locations et cetera, ask here.

Senator SIEWERT—That is here, okay. Could you provide us with a list of the locations now in the Kimberley and in Cannington, the suburbs that are now subject to the child protection measure? When I say child protection measure, do you then take that as income management?

Dr Harmer—We may have to take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT—I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Dr Harmer—No, sorry, I think we have already given it to you.

Senator SIEWERT—No, I want the new list. You are now rolling it out—

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to know if it is in fact being rolled out into all the suburbs you said it is being rolled out into. If it is, you do not need to give me the new list.

Ms Beauchamp—The two sites that were mentioned by government in the last budget was the Kimberley and the Cannington area. I think we have defined, on notice, the scope of what is in that rollout.

Senator SIEWERT—So that is exactly now where it is being rolled out?

Ms Beauchamp—Where it is available, yes.

Dr Harmer—It has not changed—not that I am aware

Ms Beauchamp—No, it has not.

Mr Sandison—No, the 39 suburbs that were identified in the question on notice remain the same for Cannington. We can identify the actual communities. The last answer was that it was starting in a couple of areas, and we discussed about whether it was all Kimberley. That was actually consultation with state government about the rollout. We can provide you on notice with the answer of the communities where there actually is voluntary income management.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you, because you have just made an announcement, in fact, this week—or was it the end of last week—about the communities, which is why I want to know about that.

Ms Beauchamp—That is correct.

Mr Sandison—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—So in Cannington, in the boundaries that you gave me, it is now operating there? It is not been rolled out progressively? It is operating now in all of those suburbs?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Mr Sandison—Practically, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—That is what I am trying to get to is, were the intentions that—

Ms Beauchamp—I will just clarify: it is a child protection measure. It is available to the child protection authority in Western Australia, so we are relying on referrals from those areas to income management.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, okay. But you have just said the voluntary measure is there also.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—So it is not just applying to people that have been identified by the child protection in Western Australia?

Ms Beauchamp—Correct, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Could you tell me the towns it has been rolled out to and the regions in the Kimberley on notice? Could you then tell me, in the Cannington region, how many people have already been put under the child protection measure on income quarantining?

Ms Beauchamp—At this stage it is in the early stages of rollout in Cannington. The numbers are quite small. I would be concerned about providing those numbers in a public

forum like this. I am happy to provide a private briefing on that compulsory nature of those referrals from the child protection authority.

Senator SIEWERT—I am not actually asking you, of course, to identify anybody. I am just after—

Dr Harmer—What Ms Beauchamp is saying is that the numbers are so small it is possible for—

Ms Beauchamp—I am happy to provide that privately.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, okay, I would very much appreciate that. Also has anybody in Cannington voluntarily gone onto income management?

Ms Wilson—Not as yet, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—I understand that there have been a number in the Kimberley.

Ms Wilson—There have. There has been a high number in the Kimberley.

Senator SIEWERT—I know that we have covered this extensively in the past, but if I understand it correctly in the Kimberley, you have actually had the financial counselling process—I might not be using the right title, but the people who are doing that financial counselling and support have already been operating in the Kimberley, have they not?

Ms Wilson—Yes, that is right.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes. Do I understand the process correctly: you have been going in and offering the financial counselling. So people who have gone onto the voluntary process—is it generally the case that they are going on once they have had the financial counselling, or are they deciding they want to go on and then they are getting the counselling?

Ms Wilson—We would have to take that on notice, because it is done through a service delivery agency. Many people in the community have access to those services—and not just people who are on voluntary income management. Some people come to voluntary income management as a result of those services. Some people go to those services after they come on voluntary income management, but I will defer to—

Senator SIEWERT—Oh, sorry. I am going down the route of wanting to know how many people have been using these services as well.

Ms Stehr—Senator, you may be aware that there has been a money business site which has been in place in Kununurra for a few years now. So that site is well established and they have been seeing clients over the last few years and, because they are established in the community they will have been seeing people and may have been interested in involuntary income management. Other sites have been rolling out progressively since November, and some have come on in November and then some in February and establishing their staffing and their training in the communities.

Nevertheless, the informal feedback we have had so far, given that it is very early days, is that they are doing a range of community education, and some people have been coming to them and expressing interest in voluntary income management. Whether that is a chicken and egg thing and whether they have had some money management education and then said, 'I think I would like the opportunity to have my money voluntarily managed,' I could not tell

you exactly which sequence, but people are coming and starting to be aware of those services in those areas and taking advantage of the sort of money management education support that they will be providing.

Ms Beauchamp—Can I just add to that? All people that are on income management are offered those services.

Senator SIEWERT—So they are being notified via Centrelink that these services are available?

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator SIEWERT—I absolutely appreciate that it is early days, but if you could provide some detail on the number of people who are starting to use the services, that would be appreciated.

Mr Lewis—We might combine that with the briefing that you have discussed with Ms Beachamp. That might be a good way to do that.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. That would be appreciated. In Cannington, I realise it is a different situation and we went through quite an extensive process during last estimates around who was getting funded. Has that funding now been sorted? Could you tell me how that is—

Ms Stehr—For the financial counselling services?

Senator SIEWERT—For the financial counselling in the Cannington area.

Ms Stehr—Again, Senator, you may be aware, under our program, there has been some funding from the financial management program for some time in the Cannington region.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Ms Stehr—Because government has given a commitment to support the people who may come through the income management referred from Western Australia, there are two financial counselling positions being established at a service in the Cannington district. The Jacaranda Community Centre is the name of the service. In addition to this service that has been set up for the trial, the Western Australian government has seven financial counselling services in the Cannington district and, of course, people may choose to, if they have had an established relationship, continue that relationship with one of those other financial counselling services and not be using the FaHCSIA-funded one.

Senator SIEWERT—My understanding from those financial counsellors, though, is that they are absolutely full to capacity. That is what I have been told, anyway. They are to capacity and I could only imagine that the capacity is going to be increasing, given the current economic circumstances. That was the \$90,000 that was allocated, was it not?

Ms Stehr—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—So they took on that contract for \$90,000.

Ms Stehr—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. That is for the income management side of it, or are they picking up the truancy trial as well?

Ms Stehr—No. They are not involved in the SEAM measure. This is for the child protection measure. Now, of course, being a financial counselling service in that area, they may see people before, during, post income management and also people who are interested in voluntary income management.

Senator SIEWERT—So they can access those too?

Ms Stehr—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I realise that we are now talking about a hypothetical, because we have not started the SEAM trial in Cannington yet, but those people who do get their income suspended are going to need financial counselling. Are those people able to access this service?

Mr Lewis—Senator, I visited Jacaranda quite recently and sat down and talked with them about how they operate. They actually have a multiple skill capacity in that site. I do not know whether the seven state operators have the same sort of flexibility, but certainly the Jacaranda team have quite a large team of people who have multiple skills. So in terms of capacity, there may be some scope there to take up increased workload, but it is certainly something we should monitor.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. In terms of the support that you are getting and working with the Western Australian department in terms of the people who are being referred through, are you satisfied with the level of support that the Western Australian government is putting in to help the families that are now being subject to the child protection measure?

Ms Beauchamp—With those families who are the subject of the child protection measure, the child protection authority in WA has seen this as only a tool in a suite of tools and support that we would expect the Western Australian government to undertake to support those families as they would if they had come to notifications and substantiations.

Senator SIEWERT—My understanding from our previous discussions here and from debate in the chamber when we were debating this measure, was that there was an expectation that the Western Australian government would be putting in, I thought, additional resources to assist these families with the underlying causes of the—for want of a better word—‘dysfunction’? If they have been subject to this measure, you can pretty well take it that there is some dysfunction going on, I think it would be fair to say.

Ms Beauchamp—I could not confirm whether they are additional resources or a redirection of their current resources in their budgets. I have not got a breakdown of that.

Senator SIEWERT—I beg your pardon. Sorry, I worded that badly. Whether it is redirection, it is up to the Western Australian government, but are they offering support for these families and what is the nature of that support?

Ms Wilson—I understand that the WA department are providing their parenting support services in all of those areas. The program is actually called ‘parent support’. We do not know whether they have redirected resources or whether they—

Senator SIEWERT—Is that all they are offering?

Ms Wilson—No, and they are working with normal case management that they would work in the child protection space. That is within the bilateral agreement, but they are also doing one-on-one work with parents in their homes or other appropriate venues to improve parenting skills and parent-child relationships. The service also provides group-based parenting education and skills training and intensive home visits to support parenting as well. That is our understanding. I do not have the figures about the Western Australian government funding put towards those programs or whether they are new programs.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that is not your problem. Your problem is to make sure that those families, who are part of this program, are actually getting support. How the WA government does it is their business.

Ms Wilson—It is their responsibility under the bilateral agreement to provide those services to people who are incoming.

Senator SIEWERT—That is what I want to know. Are they providing those services and are you auditing to make sure that they are providing those services?

Ms Wilson—I would have to take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could, that would be appreciated.

Ms Wilson—I know that it is included in the evaluative activities, if you like, how those parenting support programs are going to support the people who are on income management, but as to going as far as auditing them, I do not know.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. That would be much appreciated, thank you.

Ms Wilson—Sure.

Mr Sandison—I think the commitment has been the extra effort: as a result of the tool of child protection being used or available from the Commonwealth, then the commitment from the state was to make extra effort, and so it is working through those. Once identified with some issues, they will help the families or the individuals who are identified through the scheme. But, again, it was through the bilateral that that was the responsibility of the WA government.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that. I am aware of that. What I am trying to check is that those resources are actually being committed. I know lots of bilaterals and things are signed and they are nice on paper, but I want to know if it is delivering.

Mr Sandison—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be appreciated. I have got some more Kimberley questions but I should probably leave that for tomorrow's cross-portfolio. I realise that I did stray through a whole lot of Kimberley issues when I was asking those questions and I apologise, so I will save the rest of my questions because they are linked to the Kimberley and the broader issues of Indigenous welfare reform.

I have got other family questions, however. You would be really bored if I did not go to the Family Support Program and the family relationship centres, wouldn't you?

Ms Beauchamp—I would be very disappointed, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—I thought you might be! I might do the data ones first. We are talking about the Family Relationship Services Program and the data collection. One day we will finish doing these. Have there been any changes to the data collection system, the online one, since we last spoke, at the last estimates?

Ms Fleming—No significant changes at this stage.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. As I understand it, though, the family relationship centres are still manually collecting data. Is that correct or has every one converted to the online process now?

Ms Fleming—It is my understanding that most of the data is being collected online.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Fleming—But there may be some data that is collected for the Attorney-General's Department manually.

Senator SIEWERT—Are any of them producing manual reports or are all the reports now produced—

Ms Fleming—I will take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could that would be appreciated. I thought one of the reasons that this system was being produced was so that there was one lot of data collection and that it was shared, so why would they have to collect the A-G's ones separately?

Ms Fleming—When we developed the system there was a primary set of data requirements indicated and then there were some adjustments to that that were not put into the system. We are just waiting for those to be put into the system. So there was a manual collection until the online system was fully operational to meet all of the requirements. I will take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be appreciated. Is there some data that is collected that is in fact not included in the online process—in other words, that you do not think is appropriate to be included online?

Ms Fleming—It was not a question of appropriateness; it was a question of priorities. There was a requirement in the early stages of the establishment of the family relationship centres to collect some data more frequently than we were collecting it, to monitor some of the trends earlier than we were getting the information. So we went to a manual system together with the centres.

Senator SIEWERT—So they are doing that and the online process?

Ms Fleming—That is correct. I think the online system did not collect walk-in data, and so there is a manual collection to try and see how many people, roughly, are using the centres and are walk-in data. It would be more onerous sometimes to put that in the system than it would be just to ask people for a general take-up rate of walk-in clients.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Fleming—I think that is one of the issues, but I will just check that for you, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. Thank you. Where are we up to with the collection of confidential client data?

Ms Fleming—All of the system is fully compliant, and through the working group that we have with the Family Relationship Services Australia board we are looking at some alternative business processes that would see us put in a linkage key that would potentially remove the need for us to keep names.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay.

Ms Fleming—But we just need to make sure that the business process is there within the centres before we enact that.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. We talked last time about the number of people that are signing the consent form. Has that percentage changed?

Ms Fleming—The number of people registering as clients oscillates between 70 and 80 per cent, depending on the time period that we are looking at. On average, it is about 75 per cent, so it is about back where we were before we introduced the FRSP online system for registered and unregistered.

Senator SIEWERT—That has gone up since the last estimates.

Ms Fleming—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Quite considerably.

Ms Fleming—That is right. It went down to somewhere in the high 60s.

Senator SIEWERT—That is what I thought.

Ms Fleming—Now it is up to about 75. It was at about 80, but it has dropped back down again to about 73.

Senator SIEWERT—You changed the form. Is it the same form now as it was when we last spoke?

Ms Fleming—There is an agreed form that our service providers are using and a set of words that they put into their forms, should they elect to use their own data collection forms, because providers sometimes see clients under the FRSP program and they sometimes see them in their own rights as agencies.

Senator SIEWERT—So there are, in fact, two versions of the form.

Ms Fleming—Two versions but the same legal consent.

Senator SIEWERT—Has that changed since you gave it to me last time?

Ms Fleming—I do not believe so, Senator, but I can resend you the latest version.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could, then I will be sure.

Ms Fleming—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—I realise it has taken a while to get the process right, but is the data now starting to be useful? Have you started to use the data for anything useful—and I really am not trying to be rude.

Ms Fleming—The data is considerably more robust than it was before. We import data from provider systems—those technical difficulties that we had last year are also nearly largely resolved; I think there are only one or two providers that we are still working with—and that enables us to check not only this year’s trend data but last year’s trend data, this year’s period against last year’s period, to see whether there are any shifts in the demand for services. We are sharing that with the services, and the services themselves, through our information portal, can generate their own reports. In fact, 8,000 reports have been generated in the last period.

Senator SIEWERT—Can I just summarise my understanding: it is generating useful information and you are generating reports that you make accessible to the service providers.

Ms Fleming—They actually use the system themselves. We do not generate reports for them. They have got direct access to the system and they can apply whatever filter questions they want of the system against their own service and the national or state average. So they can benchmark themselves.

Senator SIEWERT—Am I allowed to ask what trends you have picked up? I do not know if that information is confidential. What have been the trends in the last 12 to 18 months?

Ms Fleming—Could I take that on notice so that I could do a more comprehensive report.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Ms Fleming—It would go to changes in fluctuating presenting needs.

Senator SIEWERT—That is what I am very interested in. That leads me to my next question—that is, are social researchers and planners, who are not necessarily running a family relationship centre but are interested in this sort of data for other social research, able to access this data in some depersonalised form?

Ms Fleming—We have not shared it with researchers at this stage, other than those researchers that we have funded to look at the research. The Australian Institute of Family Studies would look at this research as part of evaluations of programs and activities. But we have not made it more generally available to other researchers.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. Some of the issues that come to mind are: given the financial pressures we are under, what sort of impact is that having? Do we need to be altering the services that we are providing?

Ms Fleming—In order to answer those questions, we had to make sure that the data was robust enough before we really looked at that.

Senator SIEWERT—I appreciate that. Thank you. The other issue on that is tracking people across the system, and we have had this discussion many times. So is that, in fact, now happening, and is it useful?

Ms Fleming—We have got very good data about referrals into the services. We are working with the providers around more rigorously tracking referrals out of the system. I think there are 130 referral points into the system from state and other agencies, and we are looking at where people are going once they are in the system. But the tracking out is not as strong as the tracking in.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you.

Senator BOYCE—My questions relate to the adult survivors of child abuse. There has recently been an awareness program launched by a volunteer group called the Adult Survivors of Child Abuse. I want to talk about government programs or departmental programs supporting adult survivors of child abuse. What is available?

Ms Smart—At this point in time it would be very difficult for me to indicate programs that are specifically targeted within FaHCSIA to adult survivors of child abuse. That is not to say there are not programs across other portfolios, particularly in mental health areas. But within FaHCSIA there is not a specific program targeted towards those people. Also, state and territory governments provide, particularly in the therapeutic area, programs that are targeted towards people who have experienced the traumas of abuse in the past.

Senator BOYCE—That cohort has a sense that there is no focus on their issues. They might be picked up incidentally by another program or for another reason, but there is no sense that people are paying attention or concentrating on their issues. Has that issue been raised with you?

Ms Smart—The issue has been raised within the context of the work that we are doing on the development of the national framework for protecting Australia's children.

Senator BOYCE—In fact, there are some very grown up children who still need protecting.

Ms Smart—Yes. In terms of adult survivors, that issue has been raised by quite a number of groups and academics with us, and it is part of what we are considering in the development of the framework.

Senator BOYCE—So we just await the framework to see what happens next?

Ms Smart—There is some consideration being given to those issues as we work through that development exercise.

Ms Beauchamp—I would also add that it is an issue in terms of who provides these services and who is well placed. The states and territories do offer, as Ms Smart said, a range of therapeutic services. In terms of Commonwealth-state relations, it is not likely the Commonwealth Government would pick up that responsibility.

Senator BOYCE—No, but I think what the group is looking for is recognition by a national body—namely, the federal government—that child abuse is not just an issue for children.

Ms Smart—That is certainly an issue that has been raised within the context of the framework. We are working with the state and territory governments and the non-government sector in developing that.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you.

Senator SIEWERT—I want to ask about the Family Support Program that has been fairly recently announced. Could you tell me what the intent of the new program is, Ms Beauchamp?

Ms Beauchamp—I can tell you broadly but will hand over to Mr Sandison to fill in the detail. The minister announced on 16 February a new Family Support Program. That has come out of Minister Macklin's desire to look at all of our community based programs and make sure they had a focus on families, particularly disadvantaged families and children at risk. She wants to know what we could do that would complement, support and coordinate state, territory and local government programs, particularly community based ones, to help these families. She is looking for a much more coordinated, integrated and flexible program which focuses on improving outcomes for families through a whole range of different systems—at the Commonwealth level, at the state level and at the local government level. So we are now working with providers to see what sort of business model or service delivery model would help in that process.

Senator SIEWERT—What changes do you see under this program? I am not against change, but what is going to change under this program? How are you going to be delivering things differently to achieve the outcomes you have just articulated?

Mr Sandison—One of the intentions that Ms Beauchamp just talked about—the streamlining of red tape, the delivery of flexibility. The minister is very keen that we look at one overarching program or construct for all the different streams of services that are delivered under families, children and parent services just now. The aim is that services that might identify an adult with some issues or in need of help would also think about the child and that, where services are delivering a response to a child, they are thinking about the adults and their family members. To do that we have to look at the mixture of programs that are run by different services in different locations and at whether we can streamline the schedules to agreements under which they operate to give more flexibility, to allow services to engage more with the local community and to identify the actual needs that might exist within that community area so that they are not so much tailored in what they have to do based on a series of contracts from the Commonwealth but given more freedom to move across what would have been seen as four, five or six different schedules, while still being accountable for the Commonwealth money.

Senator SIEWERT—So what are the timelines for putting in place the new program?

Mr Sandison—Primarily, the aim is to do this as an evolutionary process over the next couple of years. The minister does not want to go racing out and changing things around over the next few months. It will be an engagement process. The minister stated in her speech that within the next two months there would be engagement with the sector to work through what the needs are and what the rights ways of providing that flexibility will be so that it is not our perspective sitting here in Canberra but with engagement with providers in the communities. A lot of services already have contracts in place running for a number of years, and others are waiting for news about renewals now. It is an issue of trying to make sure that we give some certainty while evolving to a more flexible environment. A lot of that would be by engagement with individual providers to work towards a new agreement for them that might give them more flexibility, even if it is not necessarily time to sign up to a new agreement. That would be a consultative approach with them.

Senator SIEWERT—So will the programs that exist now eventually disappear? Is it more the case that they will still be available, within an overarching theme of flexibility, better delivery—all the things you have just been talking about?

Mr Sandison—I think in part it would depend on how the consultations go, because the minister does not want to commit to one thing or another. Her intention was to go out and talk about what the best way is to achieve an outcome and then to work with the sector to move towards that. But, certainly, in the short term people would still see the same services and similar outcomes, but what we are trying to do is work on the flexibilities. It is the usual argument: let the front-line workers get on with the work and try and trim out, as much as we can, some of the red tape in between.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay, thank you.

Ms Beauchamp—And there might be a change in the service type at the locational level, depending on the need, rather than duplicating the effort of the state and territory or local government. It would be us working together to define what those needs are and fill the gaps. I think a lot of that will be, as Mr Sandison said, evolutionary in terms of how we do work together and make sure that we do support these families through a system approach.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. What is happening with the Local Answers program? Does that continue or is it going to be part of this process?

Ms Beauchamp—The Local Answers program is not currently part of the Family Support Program. As I said earlier, the minister has asked us to look at all of our community based programs, with the objectives of streamlining, reducing red tape and improving flexibility. That is another area that we are currently looking at in terms of Local Answers and financial management and a range of other community based programs we have got, and no announcement have been made about that.

Senator SIEWERT—But is it likely that that then becomes part of this process—or it may do, depending on the consultation.

Ms Beauchamp—There could be some elements of the Local Answers program, as you would know, that would fit more suitably with parenting programs and the Family Support Program.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes, that is what I was thinking.

Ms Beauchamp—So that is what we are going to be working through—those issues.

Senator SIEWERT—So the decision is not made, but there is a potential there that it could, in fact, be then at least delivered in part with the other—

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you; that is much appreciated.

CHAIR—We will move to output 3.2, Child support.

Senator SIEWERT—I do not intend to keep you long. Now that the process has been running a while, I am just wondering whether you have actually now got a more robust set of data around how families are coping with the ups and the downs in the payments. Particularly, as you know, one of our concerns was the drop in Newstart when single mothers

went from parenting payment single onto Newstart, and also coping with the potential drop in child support. And at the time there was not a lot of data. You were going to be working to get some data.

Mr Sandison—I think overall, as a starting point, the last lot of data we had came through at the end of December, so that is what is being looked at now. We have had some engagement with stakeholder groups around the country and obviously we have looked at the nature of phone inquiries and/or ministerials that have come into the minister or direct to the department. I think at the last estimates we said that our advice to the minister would continue in relation to keeping a monitoring report going, and that does continue. The overall level of complaints, if you like, and ministerial queries has plateaued or dropped, so we are not receiving a lot of information or a lot of queries about problems. Obviously the Child Support Agency or the Child Support Program in the Human Services portfolio would have a perspective through its systems. Basically our role just now is monitoring and keeping the minister up to date with where things are just now. There has not been a significant change or upswing in issues or complaints since the last estimates hearing.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you for that. When do you expect to have analysed the data that came in in December? I realise it is only six months worth since the changes kicked in, so I realise that it is limited data. But when do you expect to have looked at that?

Ms Kinnear—We only recently received the December data, so the data is as of December, and we will be analysing that. We expect over the next probably six to eight weeks to have some analysis done. It is a bit more of a complicated analysis this time than it was last time, because we are essentially comparing three time periods this time. We are comparing before July, after July and then after a six-month time period has passed. There are a few more complications as well, because, obviously, some of the change that has happened since then is not related to the reforms, so we have to make some assessment about the extent to which any of the change that we might be seeing is change that you would expect in the normal course of events or change that is associated with the reforms. To some extent, the further away you go from the 1 July date the more complex the analysis gets.

Senator SIEWERT—Will that be publicly released once you have done that?

Ms Kinnear—It will be provided to the minister and it will be for the minister to decide what she wants to do. We certainly advised the minister that a really good, full picture will not be available until a good 12 months has passed, until we can start looking at some of the FTB outcomes—although that, in itself, is a complicated analysis as well.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—We will have a short suspension.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. As I understand it, in Commonwealth financial counselling programs there was an increase in allocation of \$10 million over four years. Am I correct?

Ms Stehr—That is correct.

Senator SIEWERT—And there is a further \$10 million over four years for developing and distributing easy to understand and practical financial information kits. That was announced in the budget in May last year.

Ms Stehr—In 2008, yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Can you tell me what progress there has been in rolling it out. As I understand it, it is only just beginning to roll out now.

Ms Stehr—Yes: \$3.5 million of the funding from 2008, the additional funding, was allocated to help existing Commonwealth financial counselling services increase their capacity to meet demand. On 29 January, Minister Macklin announced that there was also funding of 16 organisations to provide 20 new additional financial counselling positions.

Senator SIEWERT—Were these new organisations?

Ms Stehr—Some of the 16 had applied for funding again, but it was 20 additional financial counselling positions.

Senator SIEWERT—In existing service providers?

Ms Stehr—No, there were some entirely new service providers. We looked at areas of high need and called for proposals from organisations across Australia. We got a range of applications for that, some from existing organisations who wanted to extend their services and some from entirely new organisations.

Senator SIEWERT—On 29 January, the minister announced that they had been successful in getting funding.

Ms Stehr—Yes, that followed an open competitive selection which opened on 25 October 2008 and closed in November. Then the assessment process happened with the announcement of the successful organisations following on the 29th.

Senator SIEWERT—It opened in October and closed when?

Ms Stehr—On 25 November.

Senator SIEWERT—What date did they open in October?

Ms Stehr—The 25th.

Senator SIEWERT—So it was open for a month?

Ms Stehr—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—The announcement was made on 29 January?

Ms Stehr—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—Has the \$3.5 million now been allocated?

Ms Stehr—That money was allocated already last year and went out to the existing providers. The additional money for the new financial counselling services is just being finalised now.

Senator SIEWERT—How much is that?

Ms Stehr—That is \$1.6 million—for a full-year service, it would be \$1.6 million.

Senator SIEWERT—I got caught by this last time. The \$1.6 million is for a full-year service, but it is only to the end of the financial year.

Ms Stehr—Those new financial counselling services will be funded for 18 months, rather than just giving them a funding agreement now and saying, ‘We have to give you another funding agreement.’

Senator SIEWERT—That was my question. It seemed like we were getting very close to the end of the financial year and I wondered if we were actually going to be able to spend the whole amount.

Ms Stehr—Yes, it was to reduce the burden on the service providers of having to have another funding agreement so quickly. It is just a more sensible arrangement to give them that 18 months.

Senator SIEWERT—I just want to get this clear. The \$3.5 million went out when to the existing ones?

Ms Stehr—That went out early in the 2008-09 year. Because it was being allocated to existing service providers, that funding was provided to them for the new financial year.

Senator SIEWERT—How did you work out who got what?

Ms Stehr—I have to say I was not in the job at the time, so I may need to check the exact details, but there was a process that identified the ratio, I guess, of funding levels of existing organisations. I think the amounts were pro rata across those organisations.

Senator SIEWERT—If you could double check, that would be great. As I understand it, for the open and competitive process for the rest of the money, you actually did look at where the greatest area of need was et cetera. That is what I understood you to say.

Ms Stehr—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—And they are getting \$1.6 million for 18 months?

Ms Stehr—Because the funding is being finalised now with those organisations, the amount may vary but the equivalent of a full year cost would be around \$1.6 million.

Senator SIEWERT—Sorry, I am really not trying to be dense here, but they are getting \$1.6 million for the equivalent of a full year, plus some extra to take them out to 18 months.

Ms Stehr—That is my understanding. We could check for you, but my understanding is that the \$1.6 million is to cover a year and there will be a pro rata amount for the remainder of this year.

Senator SIEWERT—But the bottom line is that they are not having to close their doors in six months.

Ms Stehr—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—Has all the money been allocated for this financial year?

Ms Stehr—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—All right. So even though the process has been slower, there is not going to be money that is rolling over? We actually have those services on the ground?

Ms Stehr—No.

Senator SIEWERT—Now, as I understood it, this extra money was for four years. There are two lots of \$10 million.

Ms Stehr—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Presumably, the money that we have just been talking about is actually the counselling services. Is that correct?

Ms Stehr—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—And what is happening with the other \$10 million over four years?

Ms Stehr—The major piece of work for this year is that we have engaged a researcher to map, if you like, what financial information products and services are existing, because there are a plethora of services. So before we made the major commitments about the best way to use that money, we wanted that research done rather than, for example, do a brochure on mortgage stress. So that work has just started. We have engaged a consultant and that will be completed this financial year. In addition to that, we have been working with Centrelink to provide some joint financial counselling and using their financial information service officers to run a series of workshops around housing stress and mortgage stress.

Senator SIEWERT—All right.

Ms Stehr—So that is just being set up now, but they will be in place also before the end of the financial year.

Senator SIEWERT—The process with Centrelink, you mean?

Ms Stehr—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—Is that money allocated from that \$10 million going to all be spent this year?

Ms Stehr—Yes, this year's portion of that money will be spent.

Senator SIEWERT—That is largely being spent through that process you have just articulated, through the consultant and Centrelink, et cetera?

Ms Stehr—That is right.

Senator SIEWERT—And then the other money will be allocated following the outcomes from the consultant's report? Is that a correct understanding?

Ms Stehr—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—So part of the money for the \$10 million increase in financial counselling has been allocated for this financial year?

Ms Stehr—Yes.

Senator SIEWERT—What happens for the following financial years?

Ms Stehr—The selection of those new 20 financial counselling positions and the existing ones will use the \$5 million a year.

Senator SIEWERT—Basically, you have been making decisions this year that actually go for the rest of that additional funding?

Ms Stehr—Yes, with the financial counselling positions. With the second lot of money, I know it is confusing. The second lot of money, if you like, is complementary to the range of existing financial management services that are out there.

Senator SIEWERT—Yes.

Ms Stehr—So it will help support emergency relief organisations in their work, help support financial counsellors. We are expecting and anticipating that the sorts of decisions that will be made about how to use that money will be able to be utilised by existing community organisations that are working with people who come to see them.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you. I will just double-check that I have got all the questions out that I actually wanted to ask on that one. Does anybody else have any questions on this one while I just double-check that I have been thorough?

CHAIR—On financial management?

Senator CAROL BROWN—No, I was going to ask about the structure of the Office of Women.

Senator SIEWERT—I have got one more question. In the financial stimulus package, there was another \$50 million allocated for various issues: financial counselling, NILS and a matched saving scheme. Has there been any process started on that yet?

Ms Stehr—It is very early days. We are actually looking at that and we will be talking to a range of stakeholders too about that. I would also expect that before we would finalise the use and the allocation of that funding that that research I mentioned before about mapping what is out there, that consultant will also be doing interviews with people and service providers about their needs in the financial management space and what are the barriers that they might be perceiving? So that research will help inform the best use of that \$50 million over two years.

Senator SIEWERT—It was not meant as a criticism, by the way, I just started thinking about it. The other issue that has been raised with me is that around access to actual financial counsellors. A number of NGOs have said to me that, in fact, it is pretty hard to get a financial counsellor, particularly given what NGOs can pay, compared to what they can get elsewhere. Is that proving to be a significant problem?

Ms Stehr—It does vary from place to place. As you can imagine, particularly in remoter communities, it is more difficult. One of the ways that we have helped those organisations, or are starting to, is that some of that funding will be used to train additional financial counsellors. Where organisations have come to us and said, 'We have not got someone who we can use straightaway, but we have people who we could train and have on board in a few months,' then we have agreed that that is a sensible thing to do to build that capacity.

Senator SIEWERT—Thank you very much.

[5.39 pm]

CHAIR—We will go to 4.4, Community partnership and delivery.

Senator BOYCE—I just wanted to work through some of the strategies and programs in the area first off. Has the purpose and objective of the stronger Families and Communities Strategy remained unchanged?

Ms Beauchamp—As we mentioned earlier, the Family Support Program picks up some elements of that older program. I also mentioned that the minister had asked us to look at a range of the other community based programs, some of which fall within that Stronger Families and Communities Strategy of the previous government, to see how we streamline, make sure they are focused on this government's agenda and the like. So there has been an announcement about the Family Support Program, which includes some elements of the Stronger Families.

Senator BOYCE—I guess what I am trying to get my head around is what is where and where is the budget at for this? I mean, has Stronger Families gone?

Ms Beauchamp—No, there are still some elements that are operating.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, exactly.

Ms Beauchamp—Of course, the minister has made a commitment that where those programs are working, like the Communities for Children, they will continue to operate. We have just got to make sure that they work better and more closely with state and territory governments and local governments and other NGOs.

Senator BOYCE—So what are the programs that remain within the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy

Ms Beauchamp—All the programs are there remaining. There are contracts until the end of this financial year.

Senator BOYCE—No contracts past the end of this financial year?

Ms Beauchamp—There are some contract beyond this financial year, yes.

Senator BOYCE—What programs would they be for?

Ms Beauchamp—I will have to take that on notice. I have not got the officer here for some of those. Sorry, Mr Lewis was just reminding me that some of the Communities for Children programs do extend beyond this financial year, but, as I said, I have not got that information.

Senator BOYCE—Could I then get a list of all the projects? I realise this is probably quite a long list, but all the projects that are currently funded under Stronger Families and for how long they are funded.

Ms Beauchamp—Sure.

Senator BOYCE—Certainly, the Stronger Families program would continue past June 09, that is the current—

Ms Beauchamp—The minister has made announcements about some of those programs already, but I have not got the detail in front of me, so I would prefer to take that on notice.

Senator BOYCE—But you say that some of the programs within Stronger Families have contracts that extend past June 2009.

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator BOYCE—And they would continue within the Stronger Families program, to your knowledge, at the present time.

Ms Beauchamp—They would continue under the banner of the Family Support Program—and any other decisions that the minister made about reshaping some of the other programs which I spoke about earlier, like Local Answers.

Senator BOYCE—So they will be transferred out of Stronger Families. In fact, that concept ceases to exist.

Dr Harmer—It will be under a new banner, Senator. I think that is what—

Ms Beauchamp—It could be under a new banner.

Dr Harmer—It could be.

Senator BOYCE—Are there transitional arrangements, then, for programs that would transfer out of Stronger Families to Family Support?

Ms Beauchamp—Mr Sandison made the comment that in moving to the Family Support Program, for example, we would be working with the sector and a range of providers. This will be an evolutionary process, and it really is to ensure that those community based programs are targeted to those most in need and to disadvantaged families to support children at risk and other priorities of the government. So it is not so much a transfer in and out, because I guess having a banner over a range of projects is probably not that relevant.

Senator BOYCE—If it is just a name change it probably does not excite the concerns of anyone too much. But is that what you are telling me?

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Dr Harmer—It sounds like we should take the question asked and give you very specific answers.

Senator BOYCE—To what?

Dr Harmer—To the question of which programs continue under what name.

Senator BOYCE—We have projects within Stronger Families, and you are going to tell me—

Dr Harmer—Which are those?

Senator BOYCE—The ones that currently are under Stronger Families, and when they are due for their contracts to expire. Can you then tell me about projects that would be transferring into Family Support?

Ms Beauchamp—I can outline broadly which programs are under the Family—

Senator BOYCE—Can you tell me who is under which banner and how long their contracts are?

Ms Beauchamp—Sure. If I can take that on notice, to clarify, that would be good.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, of course you can. I have just been asked to inquire about a trial program being run in the Peachy Belt part of South Australia. Can you tell me a bit about that and what it is designed to do, please. Does it come under Stronger Families?

Mr Lewis—Yes, it does. It is one of the projects funded under Local Answers and it has been funded for some years. Ms Farrelly can tell you a bit more about the detail of it.

Ms Farrelly—For the Playford North project the government has committed \$1.9 million—

Senator BOYCE—Sorry, I just missed the first part of that, Ms Farrelly.

Ms Farrelly—The Playford North project is a project the government has committed \$1.9 million to over three years. It is a program to improve outcomes for families and children. Anglicare South Australia is the lead agency and has established local networks. The government is working with Anglicare to trial different methods of coordination of government services. The Playford North project covers Davoren Park and Smithfield Plains in Adelaide's northern suburbs.

Senator BOYCE—So it is trying to develop the 'one-stop shop' approach?

Ms Farrelly—It is trying to bring together and to harness the benefit of all of the services so that, by making better connections, people have better access to services in the area, yes.

Senator BOYCE—And how long has that program been operating and when is it due to finish?

Ms Farrelly—I do not have that information but I could take that on notice. My understanding is that I think it is this year, for another two years. But I am not absolutely sure; I would like to check on that.

Senator BOYCE—If you could take that on notice, that is fine. What evaluation was done of the Stronger Families programs?

Ms Beauchamp—There has been quite a lot of evaluation done of the Stronger Families and Community Strategy program.

Senator BOYCE—Has that been made public?

Ms Beauchamp—One element that has been made public, and I think that is the better practice for fathers document. We are currently developing and putting together the remaining elements for consideration by the minister.

Senator BOYCE—And you would anticipate that they would be made public in due course?

Ms Beauchamp—I would anticipate they would be made public in due course.

Senator BOYCE—And that would cover every other element of the Stronger Families program.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—Who has conducted that evaluation?

Mr Lewis—I can answer that, Senator. It is the Australian Institute of Family Studies in partnership with the Social Policy Research Centre from Sydney University.

Dr Harmer—New South Wales university.

Mr Lewis—New South Wales university, thank you.

Senator BOYCE—Sorry, I missed that bit.

Mr Lewis—Dr Harmer is correcting me. It is New South Wales university—but it is the Social Policy Research Centre, I think.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—As an external consultancy, they have they conducted that evaluation?

Mr Lewis—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—Can you tell me a bit about the evaluation itself? What was the extent of it? What were they evaluating?

Ms Beauchamp—They were evaluating all elements of the program. It was quite an extensive evaluation and it has been happening over a number of years. The research methodology is very robust, so it has been quite a substantial effort over a number of years.

Senator BOYCE—Could you perhaps list for me some of the major things that would constitute all elements?

Ms Beauchamp—I think looking at the number of people that have been accessing the services and whether there were any gaps in terms of people that were not able to access services; the relationship between a number of the NGOs and state and federal government services, and how the connections were being made at the local level; and looking at outcomes and whether there had been improvement in outcomes for children.

Senator BOYCE—In both the Stronger Families and the Family Support programs, how are the contracts administered? Are they administered by the department?

Ms Beauchamp—That is correct.

Senator BOYCE—So all that information is kept in the department's database, is it?

Ms Beauchamp—Information about funding agreements, yes.

Senator BOYCE—Does it set out the electorates that projects are in, or would it just be your physical location?

Ms Beauchamp—We would normally collect that information on our systems through postcode areas.

Senator BOYCE—So how would you get from information about a project within your system to knowing what electorate it was in? What would have to happen?

Ms Beauchamp—We would probably need to extrapolate that and do it manually.

Senator BOYCE—And has that been done?

Ms Beauchamp—I would have to take that on notice. I am not sure.

Dr Harmer—We do not usually do it by electorate; we mostly do it by postcode, Senator. When a minister or Prime Minister goes to an electorate, they look for briefing. We may be asked to provide some information by electorate, as we have been doing for years. But then it is a manual exercise.

Senator BOYCE—We have recently had Minister Macklin writing to MPs about successful recipients for some grants within their electorates. But later on other MPs were told

that the results could not be broken down by electorate and that they were only available by postcode.

Dr Harmer—Sometimes the manual work is done in the minister's office rather than by the department.

Senator BOYCE—Checking which postcode is in which electorate?

Dr Harmer—Yes. I do not know in this case, but that certainly has been part of the practice in the past and it probably still is.

Senator BOYCE—But if this information was being made available to some parliamentarians and not to others, that would seem to be a rather partisan use of your data, wouldn't it, Dr Harmer?

Dr Harmer—Not if we did not do it, Senator.

Senator Sherry—I will take the question on notice for the Minister's office.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you, Minister Sherry.

Dr Harmer—We do not normally do that. We normally provide the information by postcode or whatever, and the letters are prepared by the office.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you. The area of volunteer grants was the other area I had some questions about. When was the last round of volunteer grants completed?

Ms Farrelly—Successful organisations for the last round were announced in January.

Senator BOYCE—How many applications were there for that program?

Ms Farrelly—There were 13,399—so around 14,000.

Senator BOYCE—Successful ones?

Ms Farrelly—No, that is the number that was received.

Senator BOYCE—Sorry; that is the number of applications. Can we break that down into successful and other?

Ms Farrelly—Yes. With regard to successful organisations, over 7,200 organisations will benefit from the volunteer grants program.

Senator BOYCE—Does 'unsuccessful' mean everyone else, or were there some who were ineligible or—

Ms Farrelly—Some were ineligible and some were not ranked as highly as others.

Senator BOYCE—Could I get a list of the successful groups by electorate?

Ms Farrelly—The list of successful organisations is on the FaHCSIA website.

Senator BOYCE—Is that done by electorate? How is it done?

Ms Farrelly—It is done by location.

Dr Harmer—It will not be done by electorate on their website. It will done by, presumably, postcode.

Senator BOYCE—I had better ask the minister's office to do that for me, Dr Harmer.

Dr Harmer—You could, Senator.

Senator FIFIELD—Could your department break those down by electorate?

Dr Harmer—It is clearly possible.

Senator BOYCE—Would you be able to do that for us?

Ms Farrelly—It could be done, yes.

Dr Harmer—I would need to check whether that is something we should divert our resources to, given our department is very busy.

Senator BOYCE—Depending on—

Dr Harmer—On how long it takes and what the exercise is.

Senator BOYCE—My ideal would be to get the list of successful grants by electorate and unsuccessful grants by electorate. I suppose that, if you can do one, doing the second would not take much longer.

Dr Harmer—Can I just take it on notice now—

Senator BOYCE—You can.

Dr Harmer—noting that it is a significantly big exercise for resourcing. I might have to come back and say I am not prepared to do it.

Senator BOYCE—That is all right. Certainly if we can have them by postcode, for a start—

Dr Harmer—We can do that.

Senator FIFIELD—Dr Harmer, you may, in fact, find that the exercise has already been done, because I would not be surprised if relevant members of parliament have been advised either by your department or by the minister's office of—

Dr Harmer—They will not have been advised by my department.

Ms Beauchamp—Could I also clarify, too, something with regard to the list of 'unsuccessfuls', which is in the many thousands. I would assume we would need their permission to provide that information as well. They may not want people to know that they were unsuccessful in the process.

Senator BOYCE—Perhaps, if you are not able to provide the information on the unsuccessful ones as a full list, could we look at bundling them in such a way as to not distinguish them?

Ms Beauchamp—We could look at numbers.

Senator BOYCE—Numbers by statistical division or some such?

Ms Beauchamp—Postcode—

Senator BOYCE—Postcode would probably be best.

Dr Harmer—Yes, we could do that. That is the basis on which we usually keep our—

Ms Beauchamp—I am concerned, I guess, as one of the program managers, about diverting significant resources for quite a large exercise when we have got a lot of priorities to

meet, so can I make an assessment about how long this will take officers and how much, in terms of resources, will be required?

Senator BOYCE—Giving us the list of unsuccessful ones by postcode, I would not imagine—I would have thought that is something you would have, anyway.

Dr Harmer—We will try to be as helpful as we can. We will give you what we can—what is available—and, if it does not require significant diversion of resources, we will give you exactly what you want.

Senator BOYCE—We talked a bit about why people might have been ineligible. Could you tell us a bit about the weightings that were given to volunteer grant assessments?

Ms Farrelly—When we sought applications for the grants, people were able to apply both as a single organisation or as, what we called, a multiorganisation. This was the first time that we enabled organisations that run branches to apply for funding for their branches that could be administered by the parent organisation. Applicants were assessed against a number of selection criteria. For single organisations, we looked at the size of the organisation's budget and organisations with a smaller budget were rated more highly. You realise these grants, of course, were small amounts between \$1,000 and \$5,000. We assessed them against the cost of the requested item; the smaller the requested item, the higher it was rated.

Senator BOYCE—The smaller the requested item?

Ms Farrelly—Yes; the smaller the amount requested by the organisation, the higher the application was rated. We assessed whether the requested item helped attract new volunteers to the organisation and encouraged more people to become involved in volunteering and whether it supported social inclusion and community participation, the volunteer-to-staff ratio and the number of volunteers—the more volunteer-to-paid staff in the organisation, the higher the application was rated—and the number of volunteers who would benefit from the items requested. The more volunteers who would directly benefit from the items, the higher the application was rated. That was for the single organisations. The multis were similar. We assessed the cost of the requested item, the volunteer-to-staff ratio, the number of volunteers who would benefit from the items requested, whether the items requested would help to attract new volunteers, how the items would assist volunteers to encourage more people to become involved in volunteering and support social inclusion and community participation and, finally, how the role of the parent organisation and the branches would involve people in volunteering or encourage participation in sport because of a dual purpose.

Senator BOYCE—So whether it was a metropolitan, regional or remote organisation was not relevant?

Ms Farrelly—No, not in this round of grants.

Senator BOYCE—Were applicants aware of these weightings?

Ms Farrelly—Applicants were given this information. All the information about the application process was made very clear.

Senator BOYCE—Were letters of support taken into account in the weightings at all?

Ms Farrelly—No. You would appreciate the size of this type of grant and the—

Senator BOYCE—Are you asking who had time to read them?

Ms Farrelly—Yes, the volume and the cost per unit of administering a grant program of this type is, obviously, reduced the less administration time is put into it. Obviously, other grant processes and letters of support are highly important.

Senator BOYCE—Sorry?

Ms Farrelly—You would appreciate that it took a few months to process this number. Even to pay this number of recipients is taking a couple of months, with a large number of people. So we are looking at efficiency as much as making sure that it is the best use of the government dollar.

Senator BOYCE—How are people advised of the outcomes of the applications?

Ms Farrelly—My understanding is that applicants were each written to, advised of the outcome of their application and offered an opportunity for a debrief if they were not successful.

Senator BOYCE—I presume you are hoping that not all 13,000 took you up on that offer.

Ms Farrelly—Several did. I have the statistics—

Senator BOYCE—How many have taken you up on the offer of a debrief?

Ms Farrelly—I could take it on notice rather than fluff around in my papers. It is quite high.

Senator BOYCE—But is it in the tens or the hundreds?

Ms Farrelly—I will have to look that up.

Senator BOYCE—Okay. I imagine if it had too many zeros on it you would have it almost emblazoned on your brain.

Ms Farrelly—One of the opportunities with the debrief is to give people an opportunity to know that it is really important to read the selection criteria and to address the selection criteria so that, hopefully, having had the benefit of the debrief, they are better able to apply and be successful next time.

Senator BOYCE—You mentioned that you are in the process of paying out these grants. How many of them have been paid to date or to a convenient date?

Ms Farrelly—I do not have the specific number, but I expect we will finish paying by the end of March.

Senator BOYCE—But, right now, could we say that half have been paid or a few have been paid? I do not want a number but—

Ms Farrelly—I would have to take that on notice.

Senator BOYCE—If you could let me know.

Ms Farrelly—Sure.

Senator BOYCE—If you can just pick a convenient end date—tomorrow or something—and tell me how many were paid up until then, that would be good. But they can all expect to get their money by the end of March—is that correct?

Ms Farrelly—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—I had a few questions on social inclusion which, I am told, should be asked now, if anyone else wants to talk about this subject before I change tack.

Senator FIFIELD—I am just wondering what safeguards there are in place to ensure that the money is actually spent on what was applied for.

Dr Harmer—In the volunteers?

Senator FIFIELD—Yes, in the Volunteer Grants Program.

Ms Farrelly—At the end of the financial year we do random checks on the acquittals of these grants.

Dr Harmer—As you can imagine, some of these are very small amounts of money, so it would not be cost efficient to do a wholesale audit every year. But we do random checks on that. We do some random checks.

Senator FIFIELD—Indeed. I recall, before the election, handing across a cheque for a portable meat mincer to a Greek community group, because they wanted to mince meat for the pasta that they cook each week.

Senator BOYCE—I think that probably qualifies as small in all accounts.

Senator FIFIELD—I think it is small in all accounts. Not that I doubted their good intentions, but I did wonder.

Senator BOYCE—Very good at bringing volunteers together, I am sure.

Senator FIFIELD—With the Volunteer Grants Program, community groups can also apply for fuel reimbursement?

Ms Farrelly—Yes, that is right.

Senator FIFIELD—And so the 7,200 organisations who are successful, that includes fuel reimbursement grants, does it?

Ms Farrelly—That is correct. Around 3,000 organisations received subsidy for fuel to support their volunteering work.

Senator FIFIELD—Three thousand, okay. And is it possible to break that down by state?

Ms Farrelly—Yes. There were 911 in New South Wales; 874 in Victoria; 620 in Queensland; 170 in South Australia; 291 in WA; 123 in Tasmania; 29 in the NT; and 75 in the ACT. So the total is 3,093.

Senator FIFIELD—So you can break these down by electorates, speaking as a senator. What is the range of the amounts of reimbursement for the fuel vouchers?

Ms Farrelly—I would need to take that on notice, Senator.

Senator FIFIELD—If you could, it would just be interesting, the range—whatever it goes from, \$50 to whatever. And what is the total cost of providing the fuel reimbursements as part of the 2008 round?

Ms Farrelly—We have not broken that down by the total administration cost, but when designing how to deliver on this election commitment, it seemed that to bring the support for

fuel subsidy into the volunteer grants process would be the most efficient way to do it. And when you run a process like this, if you add another component, I would have thought that the accountability for this probably added a small amount but not as much as it would have if it was run as a separate piece on its own.

Mr Lewis—We have got a rough proportion of 19 per cent of total funding. And Senator Bernardi last time—

Senator FIFIELD—Sorry, that was 19 per cent?

Mr Lewis—Nineteen per cent of the total funding. And that is of the \$4 million.

Senator FIFIELD—Is it possible to get a breakdown by general category, not necessarily a specific percentage of meat mincers, but just broad categories: petrol, kitchen equipment?

Ms Farrelly—To go back to these applications and break down by what it was they were funded for would be a huge amount of work.

Senator FIFIELD—Sure. So that was not done at the time?

Ms Farrelly—No.

Senator FIFIELD—Is that something that could be done for future rounds at the actual time of administration, so it does not create a post-assessment burden?

Ms Farrelly—If you were to do that extra step, you would need to ask what value that added in terms of the overall purpose of the grant round.

Senator FIFIELD—What value it added to whom?

Ms Farrelly—In the assessment of the applications, you would need to work out the value versus the cost of doing that, because this was equipment to support volunteering effort, which was not specified by any particular item because no item had any particular weight.

Dr Harmer—I think what Ms Farrelly is saying, Senator, is it would be quite difficult to classify some of the items.

Senator FIFIELD—Really?

Ms Farrelly—We do not do that usually.

Dr Harmer—We can classify very broadly, as in petrol subsidies and other.

Senator FIFIELD—I just mean broad categories. You might include pie warmers, fridges and other things as kitchen/food.

Mr Lewis—We will come up with something creative, Senator. Cookers, warming devices, sporting equipment, et cetera.

Dr Harmer—There is a wide range.

Senator FIFIELD—Indeed. But that would just be something that would be helpful, I think. That is all I have got on the volunteer grants.

Ms Beauchamp—May I make a clarification around the evaluation of all elements of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy?

CHAIR—Certainly. Ms Beauchamp. This is for Senator Boyce?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes. I am just making a clarification around you asked me whether all elements of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy were being evaluated.

Senator BOYCE—You said to me you were evaluating all elements, and I thought that was a very broad statement. I was looking for some suggestions on what constitutes all elements.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes, and I just wanted to correct myself and say that the elements in relation to child care, given that child care is no longer part of the portfolio, are not included in that evaluation.

Senator BOYCE—All right. Thank you.

Senator FIFIELD—Chair, I have got some more questions on 4.4.

CHAIR—Yes, certainly.

Senator FIFIELD—Dr Harmer, National Volunteer Week runs from 11 to 17 May. I was just wondering if the department provides any funding for Volunteering Australia in the context of that week.

Mr Lewis—The short answer, while Ms Farrelly is just checking that, is that Volunteering Australia, as part of the secretariat program, get peak body funding for a whole range of activities, including, as with other secretariat members, promoting their sector and representing.

Dr Harmer—We would expect them to fund it out of that secretariat funding.

Ms Farrelly—Senator, in 2009, Volunteering Australia will receive \$74,000 to fund the promotion and coordination of National Volunteer Week activities, including launches in all states. And the theme this year, you might be aware, is ‘Everyday people, extraordinary contributions’.

Senator FIFIELD—I am now. ‘Everyday people, extraordinary contributions.’ And so that \$74,000 is in addition to the secretariat funding that they receive. And how much do they receive in the secretariat funding?

Ms Farrelly—The secretariat funding is \$268,276.

Senator FIFIELD—And how does that compare with the previous year?

Ms Farrelly—I could take that on notice, Senator.

Senator FIFIELD—Okay. And with the previous years, they received funding for National Volunteer Week again?

Dr Harmer—The secretariat funding is likely to remain roughly the same, and probably a similar amount for Volunteer Week as well, I suspect. But we will check it.

Senator FIFIELD—Thank you for that. If I can just move to the Community Response Task Force which the government announced, that falls in this section, does it?

Mr Lewis—It is PM&C.

Senator FIFIELD—Is this were we came to before, that Senator Stephens’s role as parliamentary secretary for Social Inclusion comes under employment, education?

Dr Harmer—I will just check, but I am pretty confident the answer I gave you this morning is correct, in that Senator Stephens is now parliamentary secretary assisting the Deputy Prime Minister in relation to social inclusion and parliamentary secretary assisting Minister Macklin on volunteering.

Senator FIFIELD—So support for the not for profit sector through the Community Response Taskforce is not something which your department has any involvement with?

Mr Lewis—PM&C are leading that work at this time. But as you understand—a bit similar to the answers that Dr Harmer and Ms Beauchamp gave you in relation to the role of Parliamentary Secretary Shorten—obviously, we would need to look at how things work going forward.

Senator FIFIELD—So PM&C is the lead department for the Community Response Taskforce.

Mr Lewis—Yes.

Senator FIFIELD—But FaHCSIA is part of that task force?

Mr Lewis—We are certainly heavily involved, and, in fact, met only this week with PM&C around these matters.

Senator FIFIELD—I was going to ask you if it is appropriate to ask you, rather than PM&C, whether the members of that task force have been chosen.

Mr Lewis—I understand that the PM&C and the Deputy Prime Minister have chosen the members of that task force. It would be appropriate to ask them.

Senator FIFIELD—But you are on it; you have met?

Mr Lewis—We are not on the task force. The task force is not public servants; it is external.

Senator FIFIELD—So is there a PM&C secretariat below that?

Mr Lewis—Certainly, there are people within PM&C who are managing this.

Senator FIFIELD—Sure. But you are not members of that secretariat?

Mr Lewis—No, we are not.

Senator FIFIELD—You are not. So what capacity is FaHCSIA represented?

Mr Lewis—We, for example, as a department with an obvious stake in this area through the whole range of issues we have just gone through, are preparing briefing notes on a range of matters that the task force may be commissioned to talk about or advise government on.

Senator FIFIELD—So you are providing advice to, rather than participating in the taskforce or the secretariat which is supporting the taskforce.

Mr Lewis—That is right.

CHAIR—Are there any other questions under 4.4?

Senator BOYCE—I was earlier asking about details related to social inclusion and was told that this was the time to do that.

Ms Beauchamp—In relation to the compact?

Senator BOYCE—Yes. And that is really my first question. I am trying to understand how the national compact advances the cause of social inclusion. Perhaps you could outline for me how that happens.

Ms Farrelly—The compact is primarily aimed at improving the relationship with the non-profit sector.

Senator BOYCE—The relationship between whom and the non-profit sector?

Ms Farrelly—Between the government and the non-profit sector. So it is between the government and sector organisations and the people that they serve and the volunteers who work with them.

Senator BOYCE—What elements of the relationship were you hoping to improve.

Ms Farrelly—It would be true to say that we came from a relationship that was, perhaps, more conflictive between the sector and government, and there have been—

Senator BOYCE—They asked you for money and you said ‘no’, is that the way?

Ms Farrelly—It is a very strong drive. There is a balance in that relationship between seeking accountability for funds that organisations manage and having a partnership between government and—

Senator BOYCE—You saw yourself as a policeman. Is that what you are saying?

Ms Farrelly—I did not see myself as a policeman.

Senator BOYCE—Sorry, I did not mean you, the person.

Ms Farrelly—I am saying that in recent history the relationship was one in which there was probably less of a partnership. What the compact is trying to do is to bring more opportunities for the non-profit sector to talk to government for consultation in building a compact. Our understanding of compacts, both in the states, where they exist, and in other countries, is that the process of building a compact type arrangement is, itself, an important way to start having a better dialogue between the parties.

Dr Harmer—One of the things that has been happening over the years is that governments are increasingly relying on the not-for-profit sector to deliver a lot of the programs. Everyone knows, as well, that they are finding some difficulty in terms of resourcing and training. As they bear an increasing burden on delivering the various programs for government, there are common problems that exist across the not-for-profit sector. I think the compact is about recognising that and recognising the important partnership that exists, and trying to have some sort of a framework within which to deal with the whole sector, rather than individually with elements of it.

Mr Lewis—We recently had a visiting academic from America talk to key officers in the department about some of these matters. He was able to inform us about similar work right across the industrialised western world in terms of governments trying to forge and establish, in some cases, legally binding new relationships with the non-government sector. And there are a range of terms: charter, treaty, compact—a whole range of terms that he used across international governments around how they are doing this. Canada features in that, and the

UK. In fact, the UK has got an organisation that focuses on this almost solely as their business. Your question was about international implications.

Senator BOYCE—Are we still in the getting established or negotiating part of the compact at the moment?

Mr Lewis—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—When it is anticipated there would be a compact?

Ms Farrelly—We have done the initial consultation phase and ACOSS led that on behalf of the government. And the report—

Senator BOYCE—ACOSS led it on behalf of the government?

Ms Farrelly—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—With a range of not-for-profits?

Ms Farrelly—That is right.

Senator BOYCE—Were they all peak bodies?

Ms Farrelly—Many were, but there were also many individual organisations that were brought into the consultations.

Senator BOYCE—And they are listed in that report?

Ms Farrelly—Yes. The outcome of the report was to say that there is an interest in moving forward with the compact. One of the important things in developing a compact is the partners in that compact. You might be aware that just before Christmas a group of sector leaders came together to look at how they would build a leadership group going forward, and that group met in December and also in February to look at how they would become a good partner with government in the compact. So part of the way forward, in developing a compact, is working with leaders in the community to do that and working also with Senator Stephens, who is the parliamentary secretary responsible for this.

Senator BOYCE—Is it the intention that the national compact would be legally binding?

Ms Farrelly—That is an element that would need to be part of the discussion and building of the compact over the coming months.

Mr Lewis—It is probably premature for us to even characterise the contract as being a document of that sort. Certainly, in other western countries the process has been exhaustive and taken significant time and has involved, perhaps, a set of agreements to start off the relationship change. To pre-empt that and go to legally binding documents and assert that would be unwise.

Senator BOYCE—So the form of the compact is yet to be ascertained, is that what you say?

Mr Lewis—It is to be owned, and the whole point of the consultation to date is that it is jointly owned with the sector.

Dr Harmer—The answer is yes.

Ms Beauchamp—Can I say that process is probably more important than what the final document looked like. Having been involved in previous development of compacts, it is looking at a real partnership arrangement between the third sector and government. It is around behaviours and expectations of both parties in doing business, really, and working in that partnership; working in alliances. So the process is probably more important than the final document.

Senator BOYCE—I have got a few more questions but Senator Humphries is under a time constraint.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Yes, sorry to jump around. I want to ask about the Broadband for Seniors program if I could. Before I do that, I might just ask another general question. Tomorrow, of course, we have our session with Indigenous issues. I understand the Prime Minister made a statement in the House today about closing the gap. I am unable to find anything on any of the government websites about what the Prime Minister had to say and I cannot wait until the *Hansard* of what he had to say comes out. I assume that what he had to say was not a secret. Is there somewhere that you are aware of where we can find what the Prime Minister had to say about closing the gap?

Dr Harmer—We will do our best, Senator. I have not got a copy of what the Prime Minister said.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Where is his speech?

Dr Harmer—I would be surprised—

Senator HUMPHRIES—Apparently it is not on the Prime Minister's website; it is not on the FaHCSIA website.

Dr Harmer—When was this speech, in parliament today?

Senator HUMPHRIES—Today. Senator Moore has it. She will distribute it to us all; we will be fine.

Dr Harmer—We can get it. We would be able to get it if it was made today.

Senator HUMPHRIES—If you could before tomorrow morning, that would be great, please.

Dr Harmer—But I do not know about getting it before tomorrow morning, Senator.

Ms Beauchamp—We will just go through the normal processes.

Dr Harmer—Yes.

Senator FIFIELD—So what are the normal processes, sorry?

Ms Beauchamp—When ministers make statements and put out press releases, we do try and keep our website as up to date as possible. So, depending on where the people are in the department that do put these things on the website—

Dr Harmer—It is probably going up virtually as we speak.

Senator HUMPHRIES—My experience is that they go up a great deal more quickly after a minister has made a statement. But this is five or six hours after it was made, so this is unusual—

Dr Harmer—I have been here all afternoon, so I do not know the answer to that question.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Yes, okay.

Senator FIFIELD—I have no doubt that the gallery have copies and that the caucus training and support unit have forwarded copies to—

CHAIR—My understanding is that it is tabling speech because it brought down the report in tabling the first annual report on closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

Senator HUMPHRIES—The report itself is not available on the website, as I understand it.

Ms Beauchamp—I understand you want some information before tomorrow morning. I understand the speech is being televised on Sky News at 6.30.

CHAIR—You can get the full impact.

Senator FIFIELD—The laws of physics might defeat Senator Humphries.

Senator HUMPHRIES—My shorthand isn't that good.

Senator Sherry—I will get one of my staff to go and check on the speech and on a copy of the report straight away.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I want to ask a few questions before I have to go. The Broadband for Seniors initiative, which I understand will cost \$15 million over three years, was supposed to deliver seniors internet kiosks in early 2009. I understand they are not operational yet. Are they still expected to arrive early this year?

Ms Farrelly—Yes, Senator. We have selected the provider—that is, NEC Australia—and NEC is leading a consortium of other organisations, with Adult Learning Australia, the Australian Seniors Computers Clubs Association, or ASCCA, and the University of the Third Age. We are very close to concluding our contractual arrangements with NEC. Part of the time taken to do this has been to build a really comprehensive set of expectations, because for the three-year program NEC are our people on the ground who are going to be rolling out these 2,000 kiosks. They have already had it in place on the NEC website and it has been advertised in the Centrelink seniors newsletter that people could apply to run kiosks. NEC have received a number of expressions of interest. So to cut to the chase about your timing question, Senator, we expect to have the agreement signed next week, and we would expect that some of the first kiosks would be rolled out probably a couple of weeks after that, so by about mid-March.

Senator HUMPHRIES—But no idea of how long it will take to get all 2,000 rolled out.

Ms Farrelly—They will be rolled out progressively over the three years. We have already got 38 pilot sites that are being considered. Once the contract is signed and it is ready to go, we would expect those 38 to be the first to go out and then progressively over the three-year period the rest will be rolled out. It is really important that they get it right in the first instance, and we are very confident. We are very excited to have NEC and their partners to work with because, as you can imagine, it is quite challenging choosing an organisation that understands and can cater to the needs of seniors in a conducive way and can also be able to provide the technical back-up and support to make sure they run properly.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That is great.

Ms Farrelly—It is taken a little longer than expected, but we think that the waiting is worth it.

Senator HUMPHRIES—How do you ensure that there is a good geographical spread of these kiosks? In particular, how do we make sure regional and rural areas get a fair share of them?

Ms Farrelly—The kiosks are expected to be rolled out in a number of areas that have been prioritised, based on the needs of seniors in the areas.

Senator HUMPHRIES—So when you say they are ‘expected to be’, does that mean there is a contractual obligation to roll them out in those areas or simply a hope that they will?

Ms Farrelly—There were three categories of postcodes. The first category was high-need postal areas that required more than one kiosk. Another was high-need to medium-need postal areas that required one kiosk, and there is also low need. We will be working on this and expecting regular reports to make sure that they are going out into those high-need areas. ‘High need’ was established based on the demographic needs of seniors, educational level, income level and socioeconomic index.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Would we expect a number of regional and rural centres to be high-need areas?

Ms Farrelly—I can do a check on the regional and rural aspect. I would need to check that further, Senator.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Could we have a list of the high-need postcodes, please?

Ms Farrelly—Yes. I have the list of postcodes with me, if you are interested.

Senator HUMPHRIES—Great. If you could table that, that would be much appreciated. Thank you, Ms Farrelly.

CHAIR—Senator Humphreys, I can advise you that that full report is on the FaHCSIA website.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That is very good. Thank you very much.

Dr Harmer—We are usually very efficient, Senator.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I will hold you to that standard in the future, Dr Harmer. The funding is for the rollout of the computers. It includes, presumably, ongoing maintenance of the computers, software, costs and other overheads. Are we looking at some of the providers to actually share those costs or are they all covered by the \$15 million?

Ms Farrelly—The standard kiosk will have two computers each and also the broadband connection and the training and support. Because we have a large company provider, we expect to be able to make the money go a long way because of the ability to buy a large number of computers in bulk. But notionally each provider will get up to \$10,000 worth of support and equipment. The funding is intended to support the function in its entirety. But, of course, community organisations we are expecting to have as providers are able to provide a

range of services. But it is not set up that they would necessarily have to cost share in order to be able to provide the service.

Senator HUMPHRIES—I might ask you to take a few questions on notice. How much of the \$15 million has been spent and in what way to date?

Ms Farrelly—I can answer that, if you would like me to, now.

Senator HUMPHRIES—No, I would rather you took it on notice if you would not mind.

Ms Farrelly—Okay.

Senator HUMPHRIES—You can table it after I have gone. I have got to race off.

Dr Harmer—Senator, we have the postcodes and we are tabling them.

Senator HUMPHRIES—That is excellent, thank you. How much are each of the three providers—that is, as I understand it, Adult Learning Australia, the Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association and the University of the Third Age—receiving? Who will own the computers after 2010-11?

CHAIR—On that basis we will go back to Senator Boyce.

Senator BOYCE—Let us go back to the national compact. I will start with the findings that you made about not everyone in the not-for-profit sector being entirely thrilled by the prospect of a national compact. Can you tell me about some of the thinking behind their concerns?

Mr Lewis—Senator, bearing in mind that, as you have rightly pointed out, that is an ACOSS report and that it was at arm's length in the sense that that was a consultation undertaken by ACOSS, we did sit in on—

Senator BOYCE—Nevertheless, you would have wanted to understand.

Mr Lewis—We did ask them about that, and we did attend some of the sessions as observers. We went to a separate space when the community members consulted and they provided their input separately from government. It was a quite deliberate process, I should say. But having been involved in it, I know there were issues about cost of change for small organisations. There were issues about whether this would be more complex. It is more about perhaps early days in understanding what the compact's impact might be. It was not such an adverse reaction as to characterise it as strongly anti; it was more like something akin to concern about the implications, in a legal sense and in an operational sense, going forward for these agencies, the providers.

Senator BOYCE—And there were no concerns expressed about some organisations perhaps seeing their role as being to at least act as advocates for their people to government, and not to be of government?

Mr Lewis—It is interesting that you ask that because one of the things that has gone hand in hand with the consultation is the removal of the gagging clause, which across government meant that non-government organisations that did business with government had to seek approval from government before they could make comments about a range of things. That has been removed, so in a sense that flavour that you have articulated did not come forward strongly. You may have had one or two people say, 'This might mean that we are so closely

aligned with government that we might need to rethink our role and our purpose.’ That might touch on your issue, which is: does that mean that our advocacy capacity—

Senator BOYCE—Our independence is impaired by our—

Mr Lewis—Yes. I am sure that some agencies were concerned but it was not vocalised in a strong way in that sense as the key issue.

Senator BOYCE—Okay. The only other thing I want to do is to go back to that first question I asked. As for the compact, I suppose it is about having a process with teeth in that it does expect accountability and does have a requirement for good governance within it.

Mr Lewis—Yes. To give you an example of that, under the compact arrangements in the UK, although their government system is different to ours and the focus is slightly different, there are formal legally binding implications of their compact, which has meant that in the UK—

Senator BOYCE—Is it compulsory to be happily involved in the compact in the UK?

Mr Lewis—As we understand it—

Senator BOYCE—If you want some funding, it probably is.

Mr Lewis—There is an expectation that county governments will comply with the compact’s intent and the relationship it espouses between government and non-government providers. To that extent, non-government providers have mounted legal challenges—and I think there has been some success—in a court in the UK for the principles that were in the compact not having been met by, for example, a local council, in our context, in its relationship with a non-government provider. So there have been legally—

Senator BOYCE—So because there was a national compact, not-for-profit organisations have sued local councils for what?

Mr Lewis—They have gone to the commissioner or equivalent to raise the issues and they have pursued legal proceedings against a local council for not complying with the intent, more so than for the legal micro-issues in the compact. It is as to the intent of how you do business with government. My understanding was that the particular council concerned went to market without fully including a capacity for all comers to be included in that particular market exploration and, as a consequence, some providers who felt that they should have been given a chance sued—took legal proceedings—and said, ‘This is against the spirit and the intent of the compact, which we are all party to.’

Senator BOYCE—So is it the intention here that state and local governments would be bound by this national compact?

Mr Lewis—We certainly have not gone to that point, and I think we mentioned earlier it is still early days.

Senator BOYCE—Because, clearly, the UK one does.

Dr Harmer—I think we are a long way short of a decision.

Ms Beauchamp—And as to the form and what that compact might look like, we are a long way from that process.

Senator BOYCE—Okay. Once again, can someone put into words for me how this is going to improve social inclusion?

Ms Beauchamp—It is part of a suite of tools that are going to improve social inclusion.

Senator BOYCE—I realise that, but how does the national compact help social inclusion?

Dr Harmer—Senator, that is a difficult question. One possibility is that if we improve the capacity of non-government organisations, not-for-profit organisations, then their behaviour, the way they run programs and the effectiveness of the programs will support people who are socially excluded more effectively. There are lots of ways you could defend why it might be an element, but it would only be an element of—

Senator BOYCE—I appreciate that it is not social inclusion.

Ms Farrelly—A main part of being socially included is having a voice, and a main function of a compact is to find practical ways that communities and people in those communities can have a voice. So a key part of the compact and how it rolls out will be that element. I see that a main value of a compact in terms of the social inclusion part is about having that voice.

Senator BOYCE—But the people involved to date are not-for-profit service providers in the main, aren't they?

Ms Farrelly—Yes, and they represent a large number of individuals. Part of the dialogue with the—

Senator BOYCE—How do you mean they represent a large number of individuals?

Ms Farrelly—Because many of the nonprofits are providing services, advocating for a range of individuals—

Senator BOYCE—But they are not representative of them. They are service providers to them.

Ms Farrelly—Some organisations in the non-profit sector are representing a range of individuals in their communities in an advocacy way.

Senator BOYCE—But there would be very few large organisations doing that.

Mr Lewis—There are large organisations—Families Australia and philanthropic organisations—who certainly have no axe to grind and represent their communities. Through the expert panel process that Senator Stephens set up in relation to this work, the large sectors were quite aware of the difference between 'for the community' and 'of the community'. At the meeting that they held here of their own volition, which in part prompted the Community Response Task Force that we talked about earlier, they were articulating the fact that they really wanted to make sure that they were 'of', not 'for'. Coming to your question about social inclusion, the intent is that the relationship and the voice of the community be part of this process. That is certainly the intent.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I am sure there are many questions on notice. Are they the same officers for 4.3?

Dr Harmer—Some are. There is just a slight changing of the guard.

CHAIR—We are saving 2.5 for last.

Senator FIFIELD—Dr Harmer, you directed me to this output in relation to the Victorian bushfires recovery and response. I was wondering if you could give the committee an update on the initial response and recovery phase and also the plan for reconstruction as it currently stands. Could I suggest that, given the reconstruction is going to be a long and significant effort, it might be an idea that at each estimates, when we start output 4.3, you or your officers provide the committee with an update on the reconstruction efforts in Victoria. Would that be a useful approach?

Dr Harmer—Absolutely, and we are the right department to do that because we are coordinating the Commonwealth effort. It is a long and very detailed story. The amount of effort the Commonwealth government is putting in to assist the Victorians stretches across a range of Commonwealth departments, starting with Defence. As I said this morning, they are probably doing most of the heavy lifting in this regard, certainly in the early stage of supporting the clean-ups and the centres that have been set up, with tents and all of these sorts of things where they have equipment. FaHCSIA, Centrelink and a range of other departments have been involved in the policy and delivery work on the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment, the fuel benefit that was announced and a range of things that we have been involved in. There are various health initiatives around additional assistance for mental health. There are people from the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service working with Centrelink people and the Victorian Department of Human Services on case management. There are AFP people as part of the effort helping Victorian police. There is a huge list and it would take me a long time to give it to you. I would prefer, having given you a flavour of the magnitude of our involvement, to perhaps do something on notice in terms of reporting where we are at.

Senator FIFIELD—That would be great. I think that the chair might have been briefly out of the room when I started my comments. Chair, I have suggested that, given the duration of the recovery effort in response to the Victorian bushfires, it might be useful if, at the start of output 4.3 each estimates committee, the department provides us with an update and an overview. To that end, Dr Harmer, it might be of assistance to the committee if, at the start of 4.3, you could table for the committee an update, an overview, of the task at hand and of progress that has been made. That is something the committee would probably find quite useful.

CHAIR—That is fine.

Dr Harmer—Sure.

Ms Beauchamp—There are a range of activities that the Commonwealth is involved in across a number of agencies together with the Victorian government. Some of those are done in partnership, as Dr Harmer mentioned, under the national disaster recovery and relief arrangements. So there is a plethora of announcements that have been made. What we could do is consolidate all those announcements from government and provide you with a list of what has been announced and initiatives that are taking place. We could provide at estimates an update on how we are going against each of those initiatives.

Senator FIFIELD—That would be useful.

Dr Harmer—I forgot to mention Emergency Management Australia, who are very heavily involved of course, and PM&C, the Attorney-General's Department and Immigration. Virtually every core department and agency is involved, and we are coordinating the IDC to make sure that core involvement dovetails and fits with the Victorian government effort.

Senator FIFIELD—On that point of dovetailing and coordinating with the Victorian government effort, one of the things that will be critical, obviously, is clear lines of accountability. In the material you prepare, would you be able to perhaps give us a diagrammatic representation of—

Dr Harmer—Who is responsible for which bits? Sure.

Senator FIFIELD—That is right, and of the key bodies. For instance, there is—and you will correct my terminology—the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority. Is that the name of the group?

Dr Harmer—Yes, it is. That is going to be headed by Christine Nixon.

Senator FIFIELD—Is Major General John Cantwell the interim head of that?

Dr Harmer—John Cantwell currently is the interim and will be, as I understand it, an ongoing senior member, with Christine Nixon running that.

Senator FIFIELD—That diagrammatic representation would be useful—

Dr Harmer—Sure.

Senator FIFIELD—as would, overlaid on that, what the decision-making bodies are. For instance—and I could be wrong on this—in relation to the Victorian bushfire reconstruction authority, I have heard that Major General Cantwell has at the moment, as Christine Nixon will have in the future, very limited decision-making capacity and that most things apparently need to be referred to and decisions taken by the Victorian cabinet.

Dr Harmer—I cannot comment on that. I do not know.

Senator FIFIELD—I appreciate that. But as Major General Cantwell is a Commonwealth military officer, I think it would be useful to have both the Commonwealth stream of responsibility and also, to the extent that we know it, the state stream of responsibility. Who actually has the authority to make decisions? That is going to be critical in terms of making sure that things happen and that we avoid blockages. That is extremely important to know.

Ms Beauchamp—There are some very specific guidelines under the national disaster relief and recovery arrangements where the decision-making elements of that are very clear between both the state and the Commonwealth. So there is already a well-tested arrangement to get things done in a hurry, and when you need things done in a crisis. We can certainly provide you with the governance arrangements around both the Commonwealth effort and the Victorian effort and who is making the decision in some of the initiatives that have been announced. Obviously, some of those are Commonwealth only, some of them are joint and some of them are—

Dr Harmer—at the state level.

Senator FIFIELD—For those areas that are state only, I assume that, even though it is not the Commonwealth department's responsibility, nevertheless, it is important for the

Commonwealth to know who takes the decisions at the state level. That would be information that would be able to be provided.

Dr Harmer—To some extent, yes. But there would be some elements of pure state responsibility that we would not have a great interest in, because we either do not fund it or it is not central to our decision making.

Senator FIFIELD—Further to that, you mentioned this morning that you were meeting with Mr Shorten at 10 am. Are you able to give the committee any more detail as to what Mr Shorten's role and responsibilities will be?

Ms Beauchamp—There was a division in the House at that stage so I did brief the Chief of Staff. But I have further clarification around the arrangements. Minister Macklin remains the Commonwealth representative as the key coordinator of the Commonwealth's efforts—

Dr Harmer—At ministerial level.

Ms Beauchamp—at the ministerial level. Mr Shorten is the parliamentary secretary assisting her in that role. I guess you would understand that over the past couple of weeks it has been hugely intense and intensive for Minister Macklin. As we start getting out of the recovery phase into the rebuilding phase, she is seeking additional support. That was what was announced yesterday.

Senator FIFIELD—In terms of how Mr Shorten will render that additional support, is it as directed or has he been given specific areas of responsibility?

Ms Beauchamp—It is, as I said, assisting the minister, who has the primary responsibility.

Senator FIFIELD—Yes.

Dr Harmer—So he and Minister Macklin will work out precisely what he will take on, as is normally the case for a parliamentary secretary supporting a senior minister. It is an arrangement that is developed between the senior minister and the parliamentary secretary.

Senator FIFIELD—I assume that, once that is further bedded down, it will be something that we will be advised of.

Dr Harmer—It could be. But, in my experience with senior ministers and parliamentary secretaries, while the broad areas of responsibility are determined and they are determined, as it was yesterday, in the statement from the Prime Minister, the specific elements can change according to how loaded the senior minister is and what the senior minister decides from time to time to give the parliamentary secretary.

Ms Beauchamp—Given the pace of effort, sometimes these things cannot be written down beforehand. It really is saying, 'Who's available to do what?' in amongst all the other competing priorities. It will be a real partnership arrangement, and we will be making sure—as is happening at the moment—that everybody is kept informed of what is going on.

Senator FIFIELD—As a Victorian senator, I am thinking about who to go to for what: Mr Shorten or Ms Macklin?

Ms Beauchamp—I am sure you would get the same answer, because we will be making sure they are both kept informed.

Senator FIFIELD—This question is in terms of community groups and individuals in the affected areas. If you are a community group and you are not sure what the range of Commonwealth services are and what is available, where should you go?

Ms Beauchamp—A community group or community organisation?

Senator FIFIELD—A community organisation. Where should you go? Your need is not necessarily something which Centrelink would service. There are a vast range of needs and a vast range of reasons why a community group may want to determine what is available from the Commonwealth. What is the one-stop shop?

Ms Beauchamp—There are a range of what you call one-stop shops in terms of relief and recovery centres being set up which accommodate both the mix of Commonwealth and state responsibilities. We are involved in that process, along with a lot of other agencies. But what is more important for victims and people who have been directly affected by the bushfires is that they can have someone there that they can go to who can then broker ways through the system—what is available, where to go to get what.

Senator FIFIELD—You have got case managers for individuals?

Ms Beauchamp—Case managers are being looked at and, yes, being funded to help with that process.

Senator FIFIELD—Who do case managers service? Are they there for families who have suffered loss or bereavement in particular?

Ms Beauchamp—They are there for all families who have been affected by the impact of the bushfires.

Senator FIFIELD—How many case managers are in place at the moment?

Ms Beauchamp—Ms Janz might have that information.

Ms Janz—Yes, I do, as it is changing daily.

Senator FIFIELD—I am sure.

Ms Janz—Today, there are 97 Centrelink officers on the ground, and 44 of those are social workers and 41 are case managers at the relief and recovery centres around Victoria. They change from day to day. Those case managers and social workers or psychologists move according to demand in the particular relief and recovery centres. In terms of your previous question about a one-stop shop, FaHCSIA has a website, which is disasterassist.gov.au.

Senator FIFIELD—Yes.

Ms Janz—That contains a summary of all the Commonwealth assistance that is available and links to other websites as well.

Senator FIFIELD—Is there a one-stop shop in terms of a phone number or a number of physical sites which people can go to? Given the range and sort of assistance that is available, a website can be not necessarily the most accessible and friendly thing for someone.

Ms Janz—There certainly are a range of phone numbers available for different services. There is one in particular for case management. When individuals phone that line, they are referred on to a case manager. The standard is to do that within 24 hours of that phone call.

Senator FIFIELD—If I am a community group and I do not know where to begin, where to start, where would I go?

Ms Janz—If you are living in the area, you would probably go to one of the relief or recovery centres in the area. Centrelink staff are at those centres, as well as staff from the Department of Human Services, Victoria. They would be able to direct people to the right areas.

Senator FIFIELD—Where are those relief and recovery centres? I drove past one in Yarra Glen the other day. I assume there would be one as well at Yea and Whittlesea.

Ms Janz—Yes. Currently, there are in fact 44 locations in areas across Victoria. I have a list. I do not have the individual addresses.

Senator FIFIELD—Forty-four?

Ms Janz—Forty-four relief and recovery centres across Victoria. A list of those centres is available on the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria's website, and also through the DHS website.

Senator FIFIELD—Commonwealth and state are combined?

Ms Janz—They are staffed by both Commonwealth and state, yes.

Senator FIFIELD—How long will those relief and recovery centres be in place?

Ms Janz—I do not think that is an easy question to answer.

Senator FIFIELD—But there is no end date that has been stipulated? They are operating until further notice?

Ms Janz—They vary according to demand in those particular areas. Some of them have been opening and closing, depending on the bushfire threat in the areas as well. People move through those according to what the demand is and whether it is safe to do so.

Senator FIFIELD—Have any of those been shut permanently?

Ms Janz—I know a number of them have stopped operating because there was no longer a demand in those areas, but they constantly review that and come back. I do not have a list of those that have closed, but I could get that information if you needed it.

Ms Beauchamp—We are looking at how we would go with the immediate emergency relief centre going to a much more transitional arrangement around the recovery centre and to get as many services—

Senator FIFIELD—That is right. These relief and recovery centres are, I guess, essentially focused on short-term immediate aids, getting money into people's pockets; they are very much focused on immediate assistance. So by their very nature they are temporary, they are transitory. What is envisaged for the medium term or slightly longer short term?

Ms Beauchamp—I am not too sure what your definitions might be of 'short term' and 'long term' but—

Senator FIFIELD—I said 'medium term' but that sounds a little far off.

Ms Beauchamp—These things are very fluid so, as long as demand is there, I think there is a commitment from both governments to continue to provide those services to people who have been affected by the bushfires. We will continue to work with the bushfire authority and the Victorian government to see what services are required in the medium to longer term. We know this is going to be a pretty intense effort for quite some time.

Senator FIFIELD—Will the Victorian bushfire reconstruction authority itself be the one-stop shop in the medium to long term? I might be the president of a local cricket club, I might be the president of a service organisation, I might be an individual who is concerned about a neighbour, and I just do not know where to go because bureaucracy can seem intimidating, foreboding, impenetrable. I am really trying to get a handle on where is the go-to place. At the moment it is the relief and recovery centres but—

Ms Beauchamp—Well, physically.

Senator FIFIELD—Yes.

Ms Beauchamp—There are also a number of hotlines that have been set up too, so people can be triaged into the right service. These things will develop as we go along, in terms of the need, but certainly from both a Commonwealth point of view and the state government point of view we would want to make it as easy as possible to get information—not just for the victims that have been affected but also for service delivery organisations. I know that, with many of the organisations that we fund, for example, we contacted them the very next day to see if they were all right, to see if they knew how they could help as well, so there is a huge network of assistance out there and it is up to us to make sure that it is coordinated.

Senator FIFIELD—Sure. What is the responsibility, the remit of the joint ministerial group, with state and federal ministers, that Ms Macklin is on and her Victorian counterparts? Sorry, firstly, what is the name of that group?

Ms Beauchamp—The ‘Victorian ministerial advisory group’, I think.

Ms Janz—The ministerial advisory group, yes. The bushfire—

Senator FIFIELD—Who do they advise?

Ms Beauchamp—Primarily Premier Brumby.

Senator FIFIELD—And the Prime Minister. Primarily Premier Brumby.

Ms Beauchamp—That is correct.

Senator FIFIELD—This group will be a long-term group? Is this group just for the short-term response and recovery or will this group be an ongoing one for the reconstruction as well?

Ms Beauchamp—This was set up by the Victorian government and it will be up to the Victorian government to decide the ongoing nature of that group, but it is certainly a good way to connect our Commonwealth minister to what is happening in Victoria and then come back to us in the Commonwealth and say, ‘Well, these are the gaps that might be emerging’ or, ‘We can do more here or less there.’

Senator FIFIELD—And the Victorian reconstruction authority, that will be purely a state body?

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Ms Janz—Yes, under the state legislation.

Senator FIFIELD—Will that have any Commonwealth officers seconded to it for—

Ms Beauchamp—I guess there is an opportunity to advertise for jobs and seek secondments, but they would not be in their role as a Commonwealth employee. They would have to transfer over formally to the authority.

Senator FIFIELD—So you are not envisaging that there will be a great need for liaison between that authority and Commonwealth agencies and departments in the reconstruction phase?

Ms Beauchamp—There is also attached to the governance arrangement in Victoria an interagency task force which has a number of Victorian government departments represented on that as well as Centrelink, the AFP, the ADF, our portfolio. So we have a number of people also sitting on that group. Another group that also gets together are secretaries of departments too, in Victoria. Dr Harmer has been going to the secretary groups as well, so there are lots of connections being made at lots of levels.

Senator FIFIELD—I am sure you can see why I think it would be helpful to have a diagrammatic representation of—

Ms Beauchamp—We can provide you with a diagram of the governance arrangements, yes.

Senator FIFIELD—That would be extremely helpful. You may have seen or read a copy of the member for McEwen's speech in the House earlier in the week where she gave an update, from her point of view as a local member, of the situation on the ground. I just want to check if the department had had the opportunity—I realise it has not been long between her speech and today—to consider, or at least undertake to look at some of the suggestions that she raised in her speech, some of which no doubt would be state responsibilities.

But her first request was that General Cantwell be made available by the Commonwealth to be in charge of the Victorian bushfire reconstruction authority for 12 months. I understand Ms Nixon is due to finish her term as police commissioner fairly soon and it was no doubt the Victorian government's intention that she take over General Cantwell's role at that time. But has the Commonwealth made the offer to Victoria that General Cantwell is available for 12 months, as Ms Bailey suggested, and has the Commonwealth actually put that to Victoria as, firstly, a possibility because the Commonwealth is prepared to make him available and, secondly, that it might be advisable in terms of continuity in that sort of initial 12-month phase?

Ms Beauchamp—I would have to take that on notice. Obviously when Christine Nixon comes in to take over the role of Major General Cantwell next week, the ongoing arrangements will be something that will be agreed between the Victorian government and the Commonwealth government. I should say that so far the Commonwealth government has made available all the resources it possibly can to help with the effort, so I am sure that they would not be backward in making that offer. But I will provide formal advice on that.

Senator FIFIELD—Thank you, and if the Commonwealth has indeed indicated to Victoria that it would be prepared to make General Cantwell available for that 12 months.

Ms Beauchamp—Sure.

Senator FIFIELD—Thank you. Ms Bailey also raised the issue that the community of Marysville has a preference to move back to Marysville as a whole, as a community, rather than on a piecemeal basis. This might be something which is more within the province of the Victorian government than the Commonwealth, but is that a suggestion which has at least been registered and acknowledged by the Commonwealth insofar as it is able to assist in that task?

Ms Beauchamp—The housing issue, both transitional and longer term, is a key priority of both governments. The Victorian government has primary responsibility for the provision of housing, as you would understand. There are huge logistical issues associated with getting people back into their communities, whether that be cleaning up sites, putting power, water, sewerage back on; making sure there are facilities and services available in the local area. So whilst the intent is good—and I think everyone knows, around the community healing process, if you get the community back together as soon as possible, you will help that healing process—there are huge logistical issues to manage between both the Commonwealth and the Victorian government in getting communities back into the areas. There are other issues around making sure it is a safe and healthy environment as well.

Senator FIFIELD—Sure. The department is certainly aware of that desire on the part of—

Ms Beauchamp—I should say that we are getting a range of suggestions from a number of people and we are making sure we do collect all the suggestions, particularly from MPs and individuals, and certainly putting those to our internal people for review or to the Victorian government, or to the relief appeal.

Ms Beauchamp—I should say that we are getting a range of suggestions from a number of people and we are making sure we do collect all the suggestions, particularly from MPs and individuals, and certainly putting those to our internal people for review or to the Victorian government, or to the relief appeal. Any suggestions that we are getting—and we are getting quite a few—we make sure that we are referring them to the areas that can help the most.

Senator FIFIELD—Another suggestion which Ms Bailey had, which she directed to Dr Emerson, the small business minister, was that his department might be able to provide assistance to small business in setting up online trading, utilising their IT capacity. I appreciate that Dr Emerson's portfolio is not this portfolio, but I am assuming for the purposes of the Victorian bushfire that FaHCSIA is happy in an estimates sense to act as a one-stop shop to relay advice and information.

Ms Beauchamp—A number of announcements have been made by government already around helping small business and primary producers, particularly with clean-up and getting those people back into business. If there are gaps emerging, the Victorian government, and we, will look at it, based on information and advice from others.

Senator FIFIELD—Can I take it that, as with the request in relation to General Cantwell and the Marysville move, this suggestion in relation to small business portfolio assistance for small business is one that you can take on notice and provide advice on?

Ms Beauchamp—I can say that we will consider it internally to our IDC, which involves most agencies, yes.

Senator FIFIELD—Ms Bailey suggested that people are keen to have temporary accommodation placed near their community rather than some distance away. Is that also something that has been looked at?

Ms Beauchamp—That is something that has been looked at.

Senator FIFIELD—I guess it is tempting to think of this as a longer term issue but it is probably not: the need for safe shelters in communities. In 1998 the Victorian government had a plan to build 72 of these sorts of facilities in communities. Again, that might be something that is within the province of the Victorian government.

Ms Beauchamp—Correct.

Senator FIFIELD—But, again, that is something that you are happy to feed through into the process as Ms Bailey has—

Ms Beauchamp—Feed into Victoria? Yes, we can do that.

Senator FIFIELD—Ms Bailey also raised the idea that state government fuel reduction programs be tied to state and local government road funding. I think she might have been suggesting that that be tied to Commonwealth funding of roads in Victoria; that that money would only be forthcoming if an appropriate fuel reduction program is undertaken. I know roads and fuel reduction are not the core business of FaHCSIA, funding of—

Ms Beauchamp—I think in that case it is not necessarily the bailiwick of the Commonwealth either. It is more a Victorian government issue.

Senator FIFIELD—I am not sure, but I think Ms Bailey might have been talking about Commonwealth funding of roads in Victoria being tied to fuel reduction. But, again, as the lead Commonwealth department—

Ms Beauchamp—I can pass those suggestions on, if they have not already been included in the list of the suggestions that have come forward through our website.

Senator FIFIELD—I am just hoping that FaHCSIA would—and I am sure you would—take on board seriously what the federal member for McEwen raised in the House, and see it as part of your job as the lead agency to ensure that that is fed through to the appropriate place, whether it be the Victorian government—

Ms Beauchamp—Sure. I can give you that assurance. In times of crisis, we are looking at every idea possible, with the Victorian government, to pursue.

Senator FIFIELD—Thank you for that. Ms Bailey also suggested the need to provide assistance for industry to re-establish and also look at a range of ways to provide employment in the local area in the interim. One example that she cited was the trout industry. I think 85 per cent of Australia's trout comes from within her electorate. She suggested low-interest loans might help those businesses set up their infrastructure.

Ms Beauchamp—They have already been announced.

Senator FIFIELD—They have been?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes, indeed. I think there are loans available up to \$200,000 at 3.2 per cent interest.

Senator FIFIELD—Up to \$200,000, yes. She cited this particular instance where, to restock say 20 ponds, she thought the figure might be about \$500,000 that would be required. I appreciate that you have announced that scheme for \$200,000, and I know you have to draw a line somewhere with the quantum. But, again, if I can just know that that has been registered and taken on board. Also, of course, there has been quite a discussion about improved infrastructure to allow early warning; again, if that could be taken on board.

If you could take all of those on notice and provide the committee with advice as to what action has been taken: a particular item that may have been referred to the Victorian government; if so, which particular part of government; whether it was referred to the Victorian reconstruction authority; whether it was something that was referred to the Victorian ministerial advisory group; whether it was something that was, say, referred to Minister Macklin or Mr Shorten. That would be useful in keeping track of accountability, so that we are not raising with you things which you have already passed on to the appropriate authority. I thought it would be appropriate to go through each of those things that Ms Bailey raised in her speech in the House, so that we can continue to follow those up.

I do appreciate that you and Dr Harmer have undertaken to provide us with diagrammatic representation of the various responsibilities and also to overlay that with who the key decision makers are, and I also appreciate that you have undertaken to provide, at the start of consideration of output 4.3 at each estimates, a written update on where things are at in terms of the reconstruction. That is greatly appreciated. Thank you, Chair.

Senator BOYCE—Following on from Senator Fifield's questions about relief centres in Victoria, how many centres with Commonwealth government involvement in them are there in North Queensland at the present time?

Ms Janz—I might have to take that on notice.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, that is fine. If you are taking it on notice, if you could give me something of a snapshot of the number of people who are using them, the number of staff they have, and the sorts of issues that they are dealing with, that would be good.

Senator FIFIELD—If I could add: although I was referring to the electorate of McEwen, I am certainly well aware that there are other electorates, including McMillan, which are affected, and there are other electorates where there has not been a loss of life but which have, nevertheless, experienced property damage. While probably 95 per cent of those who lost their lives are within Ms Bailey's electorate, obviously my questions refer to all of the areas covered by the reconstruction effort in Victoria.

CHAIR—Thank you. That completes output. 4.3. Thank you very much.

Senator Chris Evans—Madam Chair, it might be useful that I put on the record—certainly from my point of view—the appreciation of the government, and probably all parliamentarians, for the effort of federal public servants who responded to this crisis.

Senator BOYCE—Indeed.

Senator Chris Evans—Defence tends to get all the recognition because they are so obvious in their uniforms, but I know FaHCSIA, Centrelink and a whole range of people have—

Senator BOYCE—Hard hats, Senator Evans. Everyone should have one!

Senator Chris Evans—Although the focus was on some inadequacy in some Centrelink payment system, I think people will recognise that that was a small blip in what was otherwise a magnificent effort. So I think we ought to record our appreciation to FaHCSIA and also to Centrelink and all the others who clearly have been working very hard.

Senator FIFIELD—And the opposition certainly would want to associate itself with your comments, Minister.

[7.19 pm]

CHAIR—Thank you. We now move to the final item on the program, which is output 2.5, Support for women. I apologise for you being in the last lot, but it is much earlier than you often have been, so that is a positive thing. We have questions from Senator Brown and Senator Boyce. Senator Boyce, do you want to kick off?

Senator BOYCE—Thank you. The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children has been granted an extension for the development of their national action plan. What is the new time frame for the national action plan?

Ms McKenzie—The national council are now expected to report to the minister in early March.

Senator BOYCE—That is about a two-month extension.

Ms McKenzie—They were initially expected to report in December, but when the council were trying to put together the huge amount of information that they had, including talking with over 2,000 people, they had so much information that they really needed an extra extension. They had initially hoped to provide the report to the minister by the end of January, and that advice went up on the OFW website. Then they asked the minister for a further extension until March so that they could be sure to represent the views of all the people they have talked to.

Senator BOYCE—That was going to be my next question. The reason for the delay was simply the enthusiastic response, was it?

Ms McKenzie—It was certainly the enthusiastic response. They visited remote areas and talked to people in those areas; they had expert panels; they had over 370 written submissions; they had face-to-face interviews; they had online interviews; they did community panels. So they got an awful lot of information in. Also, when the council came to consider the problem, they believed that only a long-term response was going to be useful. Therefore, the plan that they are developing and want to put forward is a 10-year plan.

One thing they discovered was that, for probably the first time, they were trying to align the responses to domestic violence and sexual abuse, which are not normally taken together, so that made it very difficult. When they did that, they realised the levers that needed to be

taken into account in order to develop a response were quite broad, and then they had to work through those levers. They also wanted to take into account where the state and territory governments were in responding, to ensure that they could build on what was already there rather than starting a sort of greenfield site.

Senator BOYCE—What do you mean by ‘levers’, Ms McKenzie?

Ms McKenzie—In terms of thinking about domestic and family violence, I suppose you can start to think of it as a relatively small problem, where you think of it more in relation to the services that are available for the victims and, in that kind of space, where—

Senator BOYCE—Sorry. I am smiling at the concept that it could be a small problem.

Ms McKenzie—No, I was not suggesting it was a small problem as in having a small impact. I was suggesting, rather, that you can consider it as a narrow issue, and therefore you look at the services that relate very much to the victims. But in this case the council have looked much more broadly and they have been concerned not only about the victims but also about what is happening with the perpetrators and whether there are other programs that are needed. They have also been very interested in the legal responses and how those can be improved. They have also been very interested in getting a much broader response from the community and having the community stand up and say that it is unacceptable and how that could be done through respectful relationship programs in schools and also broader kinds of things. I think the issue is that when you start looking at responses in that kind of breadth, putting together a plan over 10 years that is bringing together Indigenous family violence, domestic violence and sexual assault, you are starting to talk about a very big picture. As well as that, they had a lot of input.

Senator BOYCE—I want to confirm something. When you say early March, is that when it will be presented to the minister—

Ms McKenzie—That is right.

Senator BOYCE—or when it will be made public?

Ms McKenzie—When it will be presented to the minister and made public.

Senator BOYCE—That sounds great, but this could be a problem in the current economic environment, could it not? Does the plan outline funding that should be put to programs within the plan, or is it much broader than that?

Ms McKenzie—The national council, which is 12 independent experts, is producing the plan. It is not being produced by the Office for Women—

Senator BOYCE—I realise that, yes.

Ms McKenzie—though we are providing some secretariat support. When they present that plan to government, it will then be for government to look at what are the costs of some of the measures that are being produced and to really have time to think about the strategy that the council has put together.

Senator BOYCE—One hopes that, if it cannot all be funded, that will not mean that none of it is funded. What involvement so far has COAG or the state governments had? How has the council interacted with them?

Ms McKenzie—The council has sought to interact with all state governments, and one of the pieces of work that they have been producing is an ‘as is’ document which outlines the current situation in each of the state and territory governments in terms of their current programs, their current responses and their current priorities. That document will be available with the plan when the plan is launched.

Senator BOYCE—So the document itself will be new to the state governments when it is published?

Ms McKenzie—That document has been discussed with the state governments.

Senator BOYCE—Not the ‘as is’. I mean the whole plan.

Ms McKenzie—The whole plan. The way the council has developed the plan has been a fairly iterative process. When they developed some understandings and they went out to another meeting, they would take those understandings and say: ‘This is what we think might be a helpful way ahead. Do you think that these are really the main ways that we should be thinking about the problem? Are these the kinds of responses?’ They have had a couple of meetings with officials from the state women’s departments and talked about those kinds of things.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you. This is a 10-year plan. What else is happening? What initiatives do we have currently about reducing violence?

Ms McKenzie—There are a range of initiatives that the Office for Women have been working on. Two million dollars was announced by the Prime Minister at the White Ribbon dinner to benchmark community attitudes to violence.

Senator BOYCE—Where is that program at?

Ms McKenzie—I think letters have gone out to about 40,000 households seeking their involvement in the survey, and interviews have started.

Senator BOYCE—And they would be focus group type—

Ms Stodulka—There are a number of interviews being conducted by telephone but also, in order to test the attitudes of Indigenous people and people from a range of different cultural backgrounds, those interviews will be discussed face to face through small focus groups. So there will be a range of approaches to the testing of the attitudes, tailored in a way that will capture a broad cross-section of the community.

Senator BOYCE—When would you expect the survey results to be available?

Ms Stodulka—We are working in partnership with VicHealth and the Social Research Centre. We are expecting to have the first cut of the report by about the end of June, and a report published, I would say, by early August.

Senator BOYCE—In the *Women’s Budget Statement 2008-09* from the Australian government, there is a statement that the government will toughen and harmonise state and territory domestic violence and sexual assault laws. What has happened there?

Ms Stodulka—What has happened is that we have worked through the Australian Government Solicitor and done an audit of all domestic violence and sexual assault laws, and had AGS do that audit from the perspective of the victim of violence, looking for where,

within the laws and practices, there are opportunities to strengthen the victim's safety and where there might be increased risks. That research, in two volumes, has been made available to the council and they have used that extensively, and we do anticipate making that research public. However, it will be slightly delayed—being made public with the release of the plan—and that is just because in the sexual assault area of research some work was not done because we were able to access it from other sources, and we did not want to repeat that work. We need to put that into the second volume so that we produce something that is complete to somebody accessing those resources and that it does not look like council perhaps only three-quarters understood the sexual assault—

Senator BOYCE—Sorry, I do not quite understand. Where was the sexual assault stuff before?

Ms Stodulka—Sorry. The AGS has undertaken an audit of the state and territory sexual assault and domestic violence laws.

Senator BOYCE—So the section that you took from elsewhere is—

Ms Stodulka—When I say 'an audit', there were a number of components which council assisted with, giving direction on where, particularly, they felt that they needed advice to inform their plan and to use that research to inform their plan. They have a complete picture done by the AGS in terms of domestic violence. They did not need AGS to give such a complete picture in terms of sexual assault because some of that information was already in existence from other sources. However, they feel, in terms of us publishing the two volumes of research, that we should insert the areas of sexual assault law that do not currently exist in volume 2 so that it is a complete package that we put out. I am sorry if I had not explained that.

Senator BOYCE—I think I understand. That would come out at the same time as the plan?

Ms Stodulka—No, it will not, because we just have not attended to that—

Senator BOYCE—Shortly after the plan?

Ms Stodulka—We would hope by April or May, yes. It will be a terrific resource.

Senator BOYCE—That is the tool for how you go about harmonising state and territory law, is it not?

Ms Stodulka—It is an important first step in understanding where best practice sits, and part of that election commitment was to share best practice. I believe that the council will be making recommendations with regard to its views about sexual assault and domestic and family violence laws.

Senator BOYCE—Police interviews? When you say 'interviews', you mean that kind of interview?

Ms Stodulka—They will be looking across the justice system, as Ms McKenzie was discussing. They have reached very broadly and have really touched across the justice system, not just the police.

Senator BOYCE—And what about toughening the state and territory laws?

Ms Stodulka—The issue of toughening laws and what are tougher laws has been a subject of considerable debate in the council because research often shows that, whilst you might toughen laws in the sense of a harsher sentence or penalty or increasing fines, often it is the woman who will be victimised as a result of that seeming toughness.

Senator BOYCE—Yes. Taking the breadwinner away does not exactly help, often.

Ms Stodulka—Certainly there should be toughness around accountability and responsibility. In terms of specifics around sentencing as such, I am not sure.

Senator BOYCE—That is the issue, Ms Stodulka. We are not sure what the specifics were that the government had in mind about toughening and harmonising the laws either. It does not look as if we have gone very far down the road in terms of actual action there.

Ms Stodulka—I think it has been in terms of the research and then the debate around the issue, and what it means differentially for different people in the population, and then we expect advice from council.

Senator BOYCE—We have got \$200,000 allocated in the last budget for new research into international best practice models for working with perpetrators of violence. Is that in work the council is doing, or separate?

Ms Stodulka—It really has been progressed at a first stage with the council. They have held two expert roundtables, one focused on working with perpetrators of violence and one focused on Indigenous perpetrators and healing models. From that advice, and again picking up on a point that Ms McKenzie made before—it was interesting—council brought those working with perpetrators of sexual violence and perpetrators of domestic violence together for the first time, and we do expect that council will be making specific recommendations around where they believe that research effort should be targeted in regard to perpetrators.

Senator BOYCE—It sounds quite fascinating. There was \$200,000 allocated for that in the budget. How much of that has been expended?

Ms Stodulka—About \$40,000 on the two expert roundtables.

Senator BOYCE—And how will the rest of it be expended?

Ms Stodulka—We are waiting on that guidance from the council.

Senator BOYCE—The research of this will be part of the plan? Where will this information get published?

Ms Stodulka—The council has been providing feedback to the community via the Office for Women website about its consultation efforts. As well as its plan, it is producing a background paper that pulls together all the research that it has done over the past seven months, as well as the jurisdictional analysis that Ms McKenzie referred to earlier.

Senator BOYCE—That is what you referred to as the ‘as is’?

Ms Stodulka—Yes. And it is supported by a substantial research paper around domestic violence and sexual assault.

Senator BOYCE—When would that research analysis or review be out?

Ms Stodulka—That will be released at the same time as the national plan.

Senator BOYCE—Just one clarification here: the same Australian government *Women's Budget Statement* that I was referring to says—and it would probably be nice if it were true—that there is \$500,000 million allocated in the budget to the Australian Institute of Criminology to inform future interventions for women and children—

Senator Chris Evans—It says \$500,000 million, does it?

Senator BOYCE—That is what it says. That is why I am asking the question.

Senator Chris Evans—No wonder we're broke!

Senator BOYCE—I am sure we have prevented an awful lot of homicides involving women and children for that money, but I am just wondering how many. I presume it is meant to be \$500,000.

Ms Stodulka—It was \$500,000 in the last financial year. I apologise, Senator Boyce.

Senator Chris Evans—It should have ended domestic violence, child abuse, world poverty and everything with that much.

Senator BOYCE—Let's hope. I have a few questions on the National Rural Women's Summit. In last year's summit the Minister for the Status of Women gave the opening address.

Ms Stodulka—That is right.

Senator BOYCE—What other role did she play in the summit?

Ms Stodulka—She also hosted a business function the evening before, inviting women from rural and remote areas who are running small businesses to come and display their businesses and take the opportunity to start building some networks. Some amazing networks were built from that night. I recall an Indigenous woman who was trying to put her three children through boarding school and had a fourth child and she sold a painting for \$12,000 that night. So that enabled her to send her fourth child to boarding school. There were women who had yabbies, jewellery and all sorts of things. We keep hearing really positive stories.

Senator BOYCE—I was going to ask you about any fabulous networks that have been formed. You are still getting feedback, are you?

Ms Stodulka—Yes. It's just unbelievable. Again, an Indigenous woman from Darwin, who is running the Larrakia radio station up in Darwin, is now running a television station as well and she broadcast part of the summit. We had a woman from Defence come in for about six weeks to help make sure the summit went well and we were well organised for it. I occasionally hear from her and she said she is still getting emails from the women saying how fantastic it has been.

Senator BOYCE—Did the minister go to any of the workshops?

Ms Stodulka—No, she did not. She was at the event the evening before, she did the opening in the morning and stayed for some of the early presentations. But her advisor certainly was there. Senator Moore was there, as well as a couple of other senators.

Senator BOYCE—A very good rapporteur, I am sure. There were a number of recommendations that came out of that summit. What has happened to those?

Ms McKenzie—We are currently putting together a government response to those recommendations.

Senator BOYCE—Yes, and then what? Can we have a time frame on that?

Ms McKenzie—We are hoping that will be available shortly.

Senator BOYCE—Is the Office for Women doing it or the minister will do it?

Ms McKenzie—The Office for Women has coordinated a government response across a number of departments. That is with ministers now.

Senator BOYCE—So the ministers will be the ones releasing this or will you release it?

Ms McKenzie—No, the minister would release it.

Senator BOYCE—So we still have to wait to get those recommendations. I would like to move on to something that is in FaHCSIA's annual report for last year and quote this little bit from under the section for women:

Interrupted work patterns due to caring responsibilities, coupled with lower rates of pay, result in many women not achieving financial independence in retirement. Women's superannuation balances are lower than men's at most ages, and the gap begins to widen significantly around the age of 35.

I do not think anyone here would query that. However, we do have the situation where it appeared that there was going to be paid maternity leave. It now appears that there may not be a government based paid maternity leave scheme. What involvement initially has the Office for Women had in consultation and developing ideas around the need for paid maternity leave?

Ms McKenzie—The Office for Women has participated as part of the broader department in discussing paid maternity leave. In addition, the Office for Women has provided funding to one of our secretariats, Security4Women, to consult with the women's sector and to provide input to the Productivity Commission.

Senator BOYCE—Were you involved in the Productivity Commission report that came out? You submitted to that?

Ms McKenzie—We engaged with the rest of the department around the parental leave but, in addition to that, we funded one of the women's alliances to work with the other women's groups to be able to put in some submissions to the Productivity Commission.

Ms Beauchamp—Could I clarify that, too. The Productivity Commission is an independent report.

Senator BOYCE—Absolutely.

Ms Beauchamp—It is independent of government. We were asked to provide factual information, so factual information was provided from the department, and we had no influence in terms of the recommendations that were made in the report.

Senator BOYCE—You did not have any opinions in the information provided by either of the groups?

Ms Beauchamp—We would not express any opinions.

Ms Stodulka—Also, in June last year—and again Senator Moore was there at the face-to-face meeting of the National Women’s Secretariat in Broken Hill. The productivity commissioner came and ran a workshop and consulted with approximately 70 women from those secretariats.

Senator BOYCE—The Office for Women was involved in facilitating that?

Ms Stodulka—Yes, we hosted that meeting. It was a meeting between the Office for Women and the National Women’s Secretariat, but it was an area of keen interest for them to get some engagement, and so we facilitated that happening.

Senator BOYCE—What was the general view on paid maternity leave at that meeting?

Ms Stodulka—There was very strong support.

Senator BOYCE—Very strong support for it?

Ms Stodulka—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—Does the Office for Women offer women employees paid maternity leave?

Ms Beauchamp—The Office for Women, being part of the department and part of the Australian Public Service—

Senator BOYCE—Okay. I did not know if you had separate—

Ms Beauchamp—No.

Senator BOYCE—Does the department give paid maternity leave to women employees?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes.

Senator BOYCE—Can you tell me what the conditions for that are?

Ms Beauchamp—From memory—and someone might be able to correct me—it is 12 weeks.

Senator BOYCE—Twelve weeks paid leave?

Ms Beauchamp—Twelve weeks paid leave and 12 months unpaid time off. Then there are new employment standards which the government is bringing into place.

Senator BOYCE—I do not want to go into what is going to happen, but what does happen.

Ms Stodulka—You can take that paid maternity leave on half rate. Also, the department has a policy around supporting transition back to work, so it looks very favourably on requests for part time.

Senator BOYCE—So you could come back part time or whatever.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes, indeed.

Senator BOYCE—We have covered maternity leave. Paternity leave?

Ms Beauchamp—I think we have got two weeks.

Senator BOYCE—Does the department have any condition?

Ms Beauchamp—Yes, we do, but I will have to take on notice the number of weeks.

Senator Chris Evans—There is 12 months unpaid leave.

Senator BOYCE—Is there any paid leave for fathers?

Senator Chris Evans—I think there is a little bit.

Ms Beauchamp—I am following that up.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you. Those are my questions.

Senator CAROL BROWN—I wanted to follow up from the signing of the optional protocol, what has happened since then, or what is the process that we—

Ms Moyle—The Australian government took all the formal steps to accede to the optional protocol in December 2008. It takes effect three months after that accession. That should come into effect from the first week of March. From then on, Australian women can make complaints to the CEDAW committee in Geneva if they feel that their rights under CEDAW have been breached, insofar as Australia has undertaken to comply with CEDAW.

Senator CAROL BROWN—When is the session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women occurring?

Ms Moyle—Monday.

Senator CAROL BROWN—And what is the theme?

Ms Moyle—The theme is caregiving between men and women, in the context particularly of HIV and AIDS.

Senator CAROL BROWN—Are there any other events?

Ms Moyle—Any other themes?

Senator CAROL BROWN—Yes.

Ms Moyle—Yes, there is a review theme as well, that relates to decision making shared between men and women. I cannot remember the exact words for that theme, but it relates to decision making.

Senator CAROL BROWN—Is the Commission on the Status of Women showcasing any other side events?

Ms Moyle—We are planning to share a side event, in partnership with the Australian Human Rights Commission. It will be showcasing some work from two women from the communities in Fitzroy Crossing who have worked with their community to deal with the problems of alcohol.

Senator CAROL BROWN—My next question is about the structure of the Office for Women. I understand it is an enhanced structure.

Ms McKenzie—Yes. Given the priority of dealing with violence and safety issues, we have created two separate branches. The women's branch, which Ms Moyle heads up, deals with international policy, research, economic outcomes, whole of government and women's leadership. We have also set up a safety task force, headed up by Ms Stodulka, and that brings together not only the women's safety programs that were done in the Office for Women but

the work in supporting the council to develop the national plan. It will be the one that will bring together the government's response to the national plan, but we have also moved into that, from elsewhere in the department, the Indigenous Family Violence Program. We have brought a series of programs together so that they can benefit from the synergies and ensure that there is a strategic alignment in the approach to violence.

Senator CAROL BROWN—Have you filled all the positions that would have inevitably been—

Ms McKenzie—We have. Currently there are 66. Sixty-six work across both of the areas. Fifty-five work on what were formerly Office for Women functions, which is higher than it has been in previous years.

Senator CAROL BROWN—So you have filled all the positions?

Ms McKenzie—We have filled the positions but, as you would know, in the bureaucracy there is a fair amount of turnover, which means that people leave and new people come in, but at the moment we are fully staffed.

Senator CAROL BROWN—You have got a pretty heavy work plan?

Ms McKenzie—We have a very heavy work plan, not only supporting the national council but doing all the safety initiatives. Ms Stodulka raised a few before, but there is a whole series of other initiatives that need to be done under safety. In addition, we have had a very strong international agenda—Ms Moyle has given some indication—particularly the 6th-7th CEDAW report that we did last year, and we are also funding YWCA to do a shadow report with non-government organisations. In addition to that, one of our major initiatives has been around the movement of what were formerly the women's secretariats to become alliances. In that we have been trying to encourage them to improve their policy input to government and part of that was the funding to the Security4Women to input to the Productivity Commission and to get the groups to—

Senator CAROL BROWN—The National Foundation for Australian Women, I think, joined with Security4Women.

Ms McKenzie—Yes. In addition, we have funded WomenSpeak to enhance the capacity of the women's groups to provide input into the Henry review, focusing very much on their policy input. In addition, we have been working with the alliances to try and broaden their representation and also the views and the ideas that they have been bringing forward. They are some of the main features of the agenda. There is more.

Senator CAROL BROWN—Is it possible to provide publicly your work plan on notice?

Ms McKenzie—Yes.

Senator CAROL BROWN—It is very interesting. The initiative where you supported Security4Women and the National Foundation for Australian Women to have input into the Productivity Commission's parental leave report: you gave them financial support as well?

Ms McKenzie—That is right.

Senator CAROL BROWN—That is a very good initiative, and I was wondering if that sort of initiative will continue, considering you want the women's alliances to have more input into other reports that the government will inevitably release.

Ms McKenzie—We had a roundtable meeting with the alliances earlier in the week, because we are trying to further refine the model of the alliances and how they can best be managed. One of the issues there was how we could better ensure that the women's groups could provide input into policy and the idea of them getting separate amounts of funding to do that was put on the table and is something that we are considering.

Senator CAROL BROWN—It worked well, I think you would agree.

Ms McKenzie—It did.

Senator CAROL BROWN—Thank you.

CHAIR—Ms Beauchamp, have you got some data for Senator Fifield?

Ms Beauchamp—I am just tabling it.

CHAIR—Hot off the press.

Ms Beauchamp—A question was raised around the contents of the primary school resource kit for young carers and we have just got a little statement.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. That concludes the Senate estimates inquiry into FaHCSIA. Thank you very much, Ms Beauchamp, to you and your officers, for coming. There is one more piece of information? I should never try and finish!

Ms Beauchamp—Because we have just gone through a new certified agreement process on paid parental leave, the paid maternity leave did go from 12 weeks to 14 weeks.

CHAIR—I thought so, yes.

Ms Beauchamp—Parental leave for the non-primary caregiver was up to four weeks. People can take that 14 weeks leave on half-pay as well.

Senator BOYCE—Or they can take any combination thereof.

Ms Beauchamp—Yes. We do provide adoptive leave in line with maternity leave and we have got very generous return-to-work arrangements.

Senator BOYCE—That the departmental leave.

Ms Beauchamp—The non-primary caregiver can take two weeks personal leave and two weeks parental leave. That is for fathers, primarily.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Minister, and thank you again to the officers for your flexibility. I can assure the Office for Women you will not be the last at the next estimates! I remind the officers that those who will be attending with respect to the Indigenous services program will start at eight o'clock tomorrow morning in the Main Committee room. Thank you, Hansard and, most particularly, thank you to the secretariat again. Good evening. We now stand adjourned until tomorrow morning at 8 am.

Committee adjourned at 7.55 pm