

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Wednesday 24 June 2009 - Estimates Committee B (Singh) - Part 1

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Wednesday 24 June 2009

MEMBERS

Mr Dean
Mr Finch
Mr Gaffney
Mr Wing
Ms Rattray-Wagner (Chair)
Ms Ritchie

IN ATTENDANCE

Hon. L Singh MP, Minister for Corrections and Consumer Protection; Minister for Workplace Relations; Minister Assisting the Premier on Climate Change

Department of Corrections and Workplace Relations

Lisa Hutton, Secretary
Michael Stevens, Deputy Secretary
Robert Williams, Deputy Secretary
Chris Jacoora, Department Liaison Officer
Graeme Barber, Director, Tasmania Prison Service
Ginna Webster, Acting Director, Community Corrections
Roy Ormerod, General Manager, Workplace Standards Tasmania
Chris Batt, Director, Office of Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading
Stephen Morrison, Director, Finance

Ministerial Staff

Stuart Beswick, Head of Office
Geraldine Moorhead, Office Manager
Pat McConville, Adviser
Michelle Lowe, Adviser

The committee met at 9.33 a.m.

CHAIR (Mrs Rattray-Wagner) - I welcome you to day three of Estimates. We would like to welcome you, Minister, and also congratulate you because I believe it is your first time before Committee B at Estimates. I invite you to introduce your team at the table and then invite you to give a brief overview.

Ms SINGH - Thank you, Madam Chair. As you indicated, this is my first Estimates hearings as minister. I have sat on Estimates for a few years but not on this side of the table. I am looking forward to sharing with you everything that is going on in my portfolio budget-wise and also whatever else you are interested in.

Can I start by introducing Lisa Hutton, Secretary of the Department of Justice, and also my two deputy secretaries, Michael Stevens and Robert Williams. I have my chief of staff and my adviser for workplace relations, Stuart Beswick. I will introduce people as we go.

I was not sure whether Committee B wanted an overview but I think you have indicated that, so I am very pleased to be able to provide an overview to start with. Just to give a general thrust of some of our activities over my time as Minister for Workplace Relations and Minister for Corrections and Consumer Protection and what we have going on. I might start with Workplace Relations.

CHAIR - Is there any chance of starting the other way around? It is just that we will not get to Workplace Relations for some time. Or is that going to interrupt your overview?

Ms SINGH - Not at all. We will start with Corrections.

CHAIR - That is how we will run the output group - we will start with Corrections.

Ms SINGH - In my area of Corrections, obviously it is one of the largest parts of my portfolio both in terms of budget and also where a lot of my focus and energy has been since having this portfolio last November. Some of the ways in which I have wanted to address the area of Corrections have been to build on a lot of the work, changes and reforms that have already been implemented by previous ministers. Minister Llewellyn was in front of you last year outlining what had been achieved since the building of the new Risdon Prison and various other aspects. I wanted to come in and build upon that work and give with it my focus, which is very much in the area of education.

Since my time in the portfolio we have also had a new deputy secretary commence - Mr Robert Williams here - who also is the Director of the Corrective Services part of my portfolio. I have been working fairly closely with Mr Williams on ways in which we can implement more education and training within the prison system and also other programs that we know will reduce recidivism and reduce our numbers coming into the prison. We have done that through a range of programs and building on the programs that are already there. I would like to briefly run through some of them, and then add to where I want to take Corrections into the future.

At the Tasmania Prison Service we have an Integrated Offender Management unit that delivers a range of offence specific and general offending group programs. All of those programs are evidence based and delivered in accordance with the Australian offender program standards. Some of those programs include: Preparing for Change, which is a preparatory program looking

very much at cognitive behavioural therapy; Talking Up Change, based on Preparing for Change, has been adapted for more maximum security inmates; Making Choices, another intensive criminogenic program targeting both general and violent offending and runs for roughly about 100 hours over three or four months; Getting Smart, a condensed program designed to promote self-management of drug and alcohol issues because as you can imagine there are a number of drug and alcohol issues within our prison service. Pathways is another intensive treatment program looking at alcohol and other drug use problems, again running for about 120 hours over three to four months. New Directions is a program designed to protect the community by assisting sex offenders to take responsibility for their offences. I am happy to talk more about the sex offender program at any point today. Other programs available to an offender are affected by the length of their sentence. So depending on the length of their sentence will depend on what type of rehabilitation will be provided to them.

Program unit staff have recently provided training on the delivery of the Getting Smart program to a number of external service providers. I believe that not only is it the Government's responsibility to have input into rehabilitating offenders but also the NGO community sector have a strong role to play in doing that also and are doing it very effectively. The NGO sector deals with inmates pre release and post release. NGOs play a continuing role in that journey once inmates are released from prison. I am sure you are aware of some of the NGOs that do that, such as the Salvos, St Vincent de Paul, Red Cross and so on. Since becoming minister I have developed close relationships with them to ensure that their input is continuing. That is continuing through a range of programs that they are delivering in the area of rehabilitation and personal development.

I could read out a huge list of other programs but what I wanted to highlight today is something that has come to light for me that I think is fairly important as we go forward in the areas of Corrections - and that is I believe we need a strong and robust Corrections plan for Tasmania. When I talk about a plan, I mean a plan that will look at the next decade of where we want to see Corrections go in Tasmania. Today I am announcing the development of a new Corrections plan for the future of the Corrections system in Tasmania. I want it to be a strategic vision for Corrections. I want it to cover prisons and community corrections, which includes community service orders, and consider also the role of alternative sentencing options. Now that we have the new Risdon prison up and running, I want to look at the long-term view of where we want to see Corrections in the next 10 years.

As I said at the outset, I want to reduce the recidivism rate, improve on educational and employment opportunities available to inmates and make sure that we protect the rights of individuals while ensuring the ongoing safety of our broader community. In the past, our Corrections system has pretty much been defined by the prison walls. While prisons play a vital role in protecting the community and punishing offenders, a modern Corrections system must also focus on rehabilitation.

Over the past few years, the staff at the Tasmanian Prison Service have made significant improvements to the programs offered in our prisons, and I thank them very much for that. I have outlined some of those to you. But from that I want to build on the work done and on their enthusiasm and professionalism by providing them with a plan for the future to guide their efforts. With developing technologies that we have now, including the rollout of the National Broadband Network, there are greater opportunities for the delivery of programs into prisons as well as for development of alternative sentencing options which support the rehabilitation of offenders.

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I want to ensure that we are working to transform our Corrections system by looking at initiatives that benefit inmates and the broader community in terms of safety, security, reducing crime and of course saving taxpayers money. I acknowledge that there are those within the Corrections system who need to be in prison in order to protect the community. But for some, alternative rehabilitation options could be preferable and would produce better outcomes.

I have asked my department to develop terms of reference for this planning process. Those terms of reference will look at: infrastructure requirements to deal with the future demand; the operation of prison industries; the relationship between Corrections and other Government and non-government organisations; as well as current services such as the current rehabilitation and education programs that are run out of the IOM unit, therapeutic services and the like.

I also want the planning process to explore non-custodial options available to the justice system. I will be working with the Attorney-General, who has carriage of the Sentencing Act, on those alternative sentencing options. An external reference group will be established as part of this Corrections plan to ensure that a transparent and open process is undertaken. The planning process will include wide consultation across Government, industry and the broader community. It is very important that all sectors have input into this planning process.

This is a really exciting opportunity though for us to look forward to the next decade of where we want to see Corrections move to. It is about a fairly strong and robust reform agenda that already I have outlined throughout the last six months. In moving forward there are a number of challenges that present in the Corrections portfolio but there is also a lot of positives. It is about harnessing those positives and looking for more as we go forward in the ultimate hope that we can reduce our prison numbers, reduce recidivism and rehabilitate offenders so that we can have a safer and stronger broader community in Tasmania.

[9.45 a.m.]

CHAIR - Minister, it sounds like it will be an extremely good plan. What is your time frame around implementing the plan?

Ms SINGH - In the next month I want the terms of reference presented back to me and ratified by me. In that terms of reference I want a set timeline to be identified. I would hope that we can have something detailed back to me by the New Year. The time frame is imperative. It is about acting now and having something clear and robust to move forward with as soon as we can.

CHAIR - So you are expecting the financial crisis that is hitting us all to be over and done with by next year's budget so that you can implement a plan?

Ms SINGH - Absolutely not, Madam Chair. The financial crisis, as you know, is something that has happened off our shores many shores away that has extreme impacts right across the globe, and that does not wipe out Tasmania's State Government as part of that. The situation in our current State budget shows that very much so. It is because of that, as well as a number of other things I have just outlined, that we do need a plan to move forward so that we look at all of the service provision within Corrections, including our infrastructure and so on, to work out how we are going to be able to move forward within our current budget environment.

CHAIR - Because there is not any increase in the budget forward Estimates. So given that this is being announced today, is that something that you will have to renegotiate with the Treasurer in relation to funds?

Ms SINGH - No. I will be funding this out of my existing budget.

CHAIR - My next question would have to be: What other services does your department provide that will not be administered under a budgetary constraint?

Ms SINGH - We can move into how I am going to meet my budget across my area of Corrections when we get into the output groups. But I am still in overview, and in overview I still have two other parts of my portfolio that I need to canvass with you. Then we can talk more about how I am going to meet various parts of my budget.

CHAIR - I would anticipate that we will move into Corrections now.

Ms SINGH - Right, so you are not interested in any other parts of my portfolio?

CHAIR - Absolutely we are. But I was hoping that we might be able to move into Corrections now and then do a brief overview as we get into the next output groups.

Ms SINGH - All right. We can move into that. If I can just add a response to your question in relation to my Corrections plan that I have just outlined today. We need to distinguish between the cost of preparing a plan and then the cost of implementing whatever that plan comes out with. They are two distinctly different things. It is because of the situation we find ourselves in in Corrections, which is a challenging situation, that we need that plan. We need it for a number of reasons, one of them being budget but another one of them being where we want to see Corrections in Tasmania and where we want to be in 10 years' time. Do we want our prison numbers to continue to rise or do we want to see them fall? Do we want to see our prisoners come out rehabilitated or do we want to see them going back in again and a revolving door going around? It is about where we as a government want to take Corrections. I am very passionate and committed when it comes to my area of Corrections. That is why I have outlined today this Corrections plan in my portfolio.

CHAIR - I appreciate that. I can totally understand that you could fund a plan from your existing budget. But my question was: Do you expect that the economic recession will be over so that you can implement the plan? Because obviously the most expensive part of any plan is the implementation at the other end. That was my question. Thank you, minister. We will move on to Mr Wing who will kick off output group 6.1.

DIVISION 6

(Department of Justice)

Output group 6

Corrective Services

6.1 Prison Services -

Mr WING - And of course the question of cost depends on the outcome of the review entirely, and I appreciate that it is not possible to make any decisions as to that. But I must say, minister, I find it enlightening and refreshing that you are looking at all of these various options. The Hon. Dr Peter Patmore took the same approach and he was making good progress when he retired from politics. I think you are going to continue in the same vein, because in recent times

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there has been a bit of a lapse of looking at various options that are available. So I wish you well in that. I am wondering if you have had the opportunity to read the report of the Legislative Council Select Committee on Correctional Services and Sentencing in Tasmania?

Ms SINGH - This is the 1999 report chaired by you, Mr Wing?

Mr WING - Yes.

Ms SINGH - I am aware of that report. I have not had a chance to look at the recommendations from it. But I have been made very much aware of it and I would like to look at those recommendations, because of the sentencing component in that report. And also Corrections was part of it as well?

Mr WING - That is right.

Ms SINGH - In this Corrections plan I think we should have a look at that report and the recommendations from it as part of that process. I am the minister but I am certainly not the expert and I do not have all the ideas. I think we can learn from previous work that has been done by you as chair and those that were on that select committee at that time. It is very worthwhile to have a look at that report as part of this Corrections plan of looking at alternative sentencing options and so on.

Mr WING - It deals with a number of the alternative sentencing options such as home detention, periodic detention and pre-release measures. Mr Parkinson, the Leader of our House, and Mr Geoff Squibb were the other members of that committee. The recommendations were unanimous. Together we have been in more prisons than most people - and learnt a lot from that.

Mr GAFFNEY - A revolving door?

Ms SINGH - I have now had a few visits. Every time I visit, I always find something else that is going on that adds to the layers of information in understanding how our prison systems are working in Tasmania. You may also be aware, Mr Wing, of the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute's report on sentencing.

Mr WING - Under Professor Warner's chairmanship -

Ms SINGH - That is right, which I think was released last year. That also looked at home detention as a sentencing option. I also understand that Mr Patmore looked at home detention in the late 1990s as well. I have also been interested in home detention and therefore have asked my department to re-examine the viability of home detention as an alternative option in Tasmania.

Mr WING - Will they, and you if you wish, have the opportunity to see how it operates in another State? I think there was some publicity about a high-profile prisoner being released into home detention this week. I think it was South Australia, somebody who had committed fraud.

Ms SINGH - I understand that my department last year did visit New Zealand and looked at home detention there. Obviously, it is running in South Australia and Victoria. In Victoria, very interestingly, their prison numbers have come down considerably. Their system is similar to the way I want to take Corrections in looking at those alternative sentencing options - home detention being one - but also bolstering community corrections and looking at the way community

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corrections can play a stronger role in giving magistrates that faith in community corrections as an alternative sentencing option. That is why that part of the terms of reference of the Corrections plan is critical and crucial as we look at the next decade of Corrections in Tasmania.

Mr WING - As you said, there are people who need to have their liberty taken but who do not need to be behind brick walls or iron bars. They are not likely to escape. You do not need to build medium or high security prisons to house and accommodate everybody who needs to have their liberty taken. Your investigations will no doubt consider all those aspects. I am just wondering what your attitude would be for members of this committee, those who wish to do so, to visit Risdon prison and other corrective services facilities at a later date.

Ms SINGH - I would be more than happy to arrange that, Mr Wing. If any of the committee members would like to come to any of the prison facilities in Tasmania, I would be more than happy to organise a tour and a briefing for you.

Mr WING - Thank you.

CHAIR - Given the makeup of this committee, I know that most of us would like to visit one in the north of the State.

Mr WING - Yes, and we would like to have one developed, which was one of the recommendations of the select committee and one of the things that was ignored by administrations - a lesson for the new.

Ms SINGH - You know that there is actually a prison in the north of the State.

CHAIR - A remand prison?

Ms SINGH - The Tasmania Prison Service has undertaken a plan in relation to the future stages of PIRP, which is our Prison Infrastructure Redevelopment Program, and that included the concept of a northern prison facility. At the present time, of course, my budget is fairly constrained and we need to look at how we move forward with that. But we do have inmates housed in Launceston.

Mr WING - What is the capacity? It is very limited I know.

Ms SINGH - It is not large.

Mr WILLIAMS - About 30.

Mr WING - Thirty in the Launceston remand centre?

Ms SINGH - The capacity for 30.

Ms SINGH - The capacity is 28, and the current numbers are 19.

CHAIR - Male and female?

Ms SINGH - Only male.

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CHAIR - So there are no facilities for females in the north?

Ms SINGH - We only have the Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison in Tasmania and that is at Risdon.

CHAIR - Is that an issue that will be addressed in the redevelopment, having a remand centre for a longer time for females in the north of the State?

Ms SINGH - That is where this Corrections plan is so important, because as part of that there will be input from the community, industry, business, other Government agencies and so on into these various aspects and moneys required. That may or may not be an issue whether or not to accommodate for female inmates in the north of the State. We do need to remember when we talk about numbers of inmates in our prison system that the number of women is much smaller than the number of males. I think the current number of female inmates is about?

Mr WILLIAMS - Forty one.

Mr WING - And you need to have a critical mass of numbers before you can have a separate women's section - I appreciate that.

Ms SINGH - That is right. I have just been advised, Mr Wing, that we do remand women at the Launceston Reception Prison.

Mr DEAN - That has changed since I was there.

Ms SINGH - Is that right?

Mr WING - Could you please tell us the current number of prisoners at Risdon, at Hayes and you have given figures for the Launceston centre? And perhaps at a later date if you are not able to provide them now, the numbers over the last 10 years so that we can see the trends in prison numbers?

[10.00 a.m.]

Ms SINGH - Mr Wing, I might have to take that on notice as far as the numbers over the last 10 years, but it is always good to look at those comparisons between the last 10 years and now - and in the next 10 years hopefully they will be less.

Mr WING - Yes.

Ms SINGH - The current total number of inmates in the Risdon Prison complex is 259 for maximum and medium; the total in Ron Barwick minimum security prison is 122; the total in Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison is 38; the total number in Hayes Prison Farm is 47; the total number in Hobart Reception Prison 32; and Launceston Reception Prison, 19. I also have figures, if any committee member is interested, in the design capacity of each of those facilities.

Mr WING - Yes, that was to be my next question.

Ms SINGH - Hayes Prison Farm has 47 inmates but its design capacity is for 68; Hobart Reception Prison has 32 inmates, design capacity 36; Launceston Reception Prison inmates is 19 with a design capacity of 28; Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison has 38 inmates and design

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capacity of 46; Risdon Prison complex, which is medium and maximum, has 259 with a capacity of 297; and Ron Barwick has 122 inmates with a design capacity of 170. The total numbers in our prison service as of yesterday - I receive daily prison service reports which provide me with this data - is 517.

Mr WING - And the total capacity?

Ms SINGH - I beg your pardon, there is also another 10 in our Wilfred Lopes Centre.

Mr WING - Where is that?

Mr WILLIAMS - That is on the Risdon complex. It is the secure mental health facility that is run by the Department of Health.

Mr WING - How many there?

Ms SINGH - Ten.

Mr WING - So that is 527 in total?

Ms SINGH - So 527 is the total.

Mr WING - What is the total capacity?

Ms SINGH - It is 645.

Mr WING - The select committee report recommended that two new prisons be established, one in southern Tasmania and one in northern Tasmania principally so that northern prisoners were closer to their families which would be an important part of their rehabilitation. Unfortunately, that recommendation was ignored although it was unanimous. I would like to ask what your general thinking is as far as accommodating prisoners in the north. It was recognised there would be only one maximum security prison and that would be in the south and that medium and minimum should be shared between the south and north in the interests of the families who suffer when their relatives are in prison.

Ms SINGH - I understand that some of the reasoning behind the numbers of inmates we have in Launceston at the moment is to be closer to family. They are some of the challenges also with Hayes Prison Farm, which has a lot of positives but is in a fairly isolated part of the State and where there is no public transport available. So it is challenging for families to visit their family members who are in at Hayes. They are some of the challenges going forward, and I acknowledge those.

We need to look at this holistically and at a way that is within my budget, obviously not being in a position at present to build a northern facility. As part of the plan going forward we need to look at transport as something that may be a different way of looking at how families can connect up with family members that are in our justice system. I am just putting ideas out there right now and they need to be much more developed as part of a plan - it may be through providing transport in some fashion for families to come to Risdon or to Hayes. It may be easier and more affordable in the current economic situation to look at those kinds of transport ideas rather than building a prison in the north when it is not a cheap exercise building prisons.

Mr WING - I realise that. Unfortunately, the decision making in the last decade has meant we have missed the boat largely on that for the time being, and that is regrettable. When you are supplying the statistics that we have requested, could you also indicate in which general area of the State the prisoners are? I think the north was leading regrettably several years ago and I am not sure what the current situation is. It would be interesting to have those and also some indication of the age groups so that we can see what trend there is in relation to the age of prisoners.

Ms SINGH - Yes, Mr Wing, we could talk about that now if you want to talk about some of the demographics that make up our prison population.

Mr WING - Certainly.

Ms SINGH - But when we provide that other information in relation to the last 10 years and looking forward, we can do it on a geographical basis as well. I am not sure if I have the geographical information with me today but I do have the age of inmates information with me today.

Just on where those inmates have come from and the issues of family being able to visit, we do at this point fund the City Mission to run transport, which I think is a bus service from Launceston to Hobart. So that is there. Again, we can look more broadly at those and perhaps we can support that further. That should be part of the plan going forward.

In relation to the age of inmates, I will break it down into percentages which I think it makes it easier for you to see: Those under the age of 20 is 4.7 per cent; 20-24 years old is 18.3 per cent; 25-34 is the highest percentage at 33.8 per cent; and then 35-44 years is 24.4 per cent. So if you were to look at the 25-44 age group, that is where the bulk of our prison population is at 58 per cent. Then 45-54 is 10.6 per cent; 55-64 is 4.9 per cent; 65-74 2.8 per cent; and 75 or over is 0.4 per cent which equals two people.

Mr WING - Good, thank you. In the statistics my learned friend on the left has suggested that if we could have some comparison with other States to indicate we are faring, I think that would be desirable too.

Ms SINGH - As per percentage of our population, do you mean? Obviously our numbers are quite small in Tasmania.

Mr WING - In total statewide numbers.

Ms SINGH - As a percentage of our State's population.

Mr GAFFNEY - It is possibly one in 1 000 or 100 out of 100 000. I would be interested to see how that compares to other States.

Ms SINGH - We can get that information to you. Just to respond to your question, the Productivity Commission's report on Government services does list all of that information comparing us to other States.

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Mr DEAN - I have a question relating to access by northern people to prisoners serving at Risdon. I had a complaint recently of a lady where her daughter was imprisoned and the daughter has three young children. What ability do you have to provide reasonable access for those children to their mother at Risdon via telephone or video links? Are there any other ways that they can make contact with their mother in gaol without having to go to Hobart? What are the possibilities?

Ms SINGH - I might just talk about my views on that and then I might ask Mr Barber to provide some more detail in relation to your question. My views are that as much as possible where we can connect families up it has great beneficial outcomes - be that mother and baby or be that a father connecting with their children. We have a fantastic program in Risdon Prison where fathers read stories onto a CD, and that CD is then given out to the families at home so they can hear Dad's voice reading to them. As much as possible I believe we should try to connect families up.

Having said that, it is not always easy and there are sometimes some challenges. I do not want to talk about individual cases, but my views are that we should try as much as we can to have families connect up. I might ask Mr Barber to go into more specific operational matters when it comes to visits and mother and babies.

Mr BARBER - There is an option at the moment for telephone contact with families. Under the current contract with the provider of that service, the telephone contact to north and north-western Tasmania are at STD phone call rates, so it is certainly more expensive for northern inmates accommodated in the south to keep contact with their family by telephone.

Mr DEAN - That was one of my issues but I was going to go further and raise it now. It is not the fault of the children in this instance - they are aged six, seven and eight - or the parents. Why cannot we have a system where they can make contact with their loved ones at a reasonable rate and at a local call cost the same as it will cost a person down in the south of the State?

Mr BARBER - The system that we currently have is a tendered system. That tender is up for review and renewal in the next 12 months. Because we are a small organisation with small numbers, we do not seem to attract any more than one tenderer for that particular service. That service at the moment is delivered by a company called Comstra who developed the Arunta telephone recording system, and they use Telstra as their carrier. A couple of the other States have been able to get competitive tenders from NEC and some other organisations and other carriers. We are very hopeful that, when the tender goes out next time, we will be able to do that as well.

Mr DEAN - I would certainly urge you to, because I think you would concede that these northern people in this example are discriminated against because they live in the north of the State and their loved one is imprisoned in the south.

Mr BARBER - They are certainly disadvantaged.

Mr DEAN - Disadvantaged.

Mr BARBER - There is the opportunity also for inmates to get access to the video link system, but of course that depends on making suitable arrangements in the north for the family to go to one of those particular centres to have that contact. We also on a very regular basis do

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transfer of inmates back to Launceston for family visits. For example, for male inmates who may have had a partner giving birth, we take them back to the north to allow them to be present either at or shortly after the birth; and again, for any of the female inmates that make application to go back for visits in the north, we are able to facilitate that. So there are some options available.

[10.15 a.m.]

Mr DEAN - One other question on this same line: What is the cost of the bus service that we have referred to? Is there a payment made to the City Mission in relation to that bus service? How often does it run - is it a weekly service or done by approach to them? How does that operate?

Ms SINGH - Mr Dean, I will ask Mr Barber go into the operational matters of that bus service, but if I can just add to your last question in relation to the phone service and the issues you raise with cost and discrimination of our northern members and so on. I have official visitors that go into the prison, and they raise issues with me. That is one issue that they have raised with me. As Mr Barber outlined, as part of the next tender process for that phone service that we have - obviously we have to have the specialised Arunta phone service in the prison facility - we will look at that issue of cost for those living in the north of the State so that there is more fairness provided for them. I will ask Graeme to add some information in relation to the City Mission bus service.

Mr DEAN - Thank you.

Mr BARBER - The City Mission prepare an annual budget for a number of trips from Launceston to Hobart. They submit that amount to me annually and we cover the cost. That covers the hire, fuel and that sort of thing. I believe the driving is done on a volunteer basis by people associated with the City Mission and I think that it comes to Risdon three-weekly, every third week. If a family member from the north has an inmate family member at Hayes, there are arrangements made to pick those family members up at Bridgewater and transport them to Hayes, and bring them back as well.

Mr DEAN - What has been the cost of that service in the last 12 months?

Mr BARBER - I would have to get the proper details but around \$14 000 to \$15 000.

Mr DEAN - That is all.

CHAIR - Minister, I am interested to know what conditions apply around inmates being able to access phone and visitation rights. Are there good behaviour type conditions surrounding their access to family members?

Ms SINGH - As I said earlier, I think it is important that that bond between family on the outside and on the inside continues, because it does help in the psyche of rehabilitation for inmates to have loved ones there. The personal visits are to encourage inmates to develop and maintain that positive relationship, to lessen the negative impact of being incarcerated and also to help with their re-integration back into the community when that does occur at some point. Of course, there are professional visits and external visits by NGOs that inmates have as well. Inmates may nominate up to 20 adult personal visitors. Children are not included in that total of 20.

CHAIR - Is that 20 visits at one time?

Ms SINGH - As approved visitors that come to visit them. That does not include children. Those approved nominated visitors must submit an application for identification for security purposes. Non-contact visits may be facilitated for up to 21 days after inmates are received into custody to allow continued contact with their families and friends while their applications are processed. For those visits, the staff conduct a range of checks to ensure there are no security issues and that the Tasmania Prison Service does not inadvertently assist in the breach of a family violence or restraint order.

The nature, frequency and duration of personal visits varies across the State due to the different security categories of the facilities, the availability of visit areas and the operational considerations. There are limits on the number of visitors attending each visits session, which Mr Barber may wish to go into greater detail on. With the exception of the reception prisons, inmates' personal visit entitlements are linked to the contracts system, with additional visits available to inmates on the higher level contracts. So the number of visits that they may have is affected by the contract level that those inmates are on. For more detail on the contracts system and how that works -

CHAIR - So there are conditions surrounding what each inmate is allowed?

Ms SINGH - There are. That is a part of that contract system that they enter into when they come to Risdon, which Mr Barber might want to go into.

CHAIR - No, it is not necessary, thank you.

Mr GAFFNEY - You mentioned the lack of regular transport to the Hayes farm, and then Graeme Barber spoke about the City Mission going to there. Just yesterday we heard from the Social Inclusion Unit with the Premier talking about \$1.5 million worth of funding going to transport for groups that may be socially isolated. I was thinking there is a potential there for supporters of the farm who would be interested in the rehabilitation of inmates for them to access a vehicle, because he made it very clear that it would be for vehicles. So I was thinking down that line, and then you brought up about how the City Mission goes on a regular basis.

Ms SINGH - That is exactly right. I think maybe the Premier was talking about the community transport trust as part of that.

Mr GAFFNEY - Yes.

Ms SINGH - The Social Inclusion Unit has worked with the Tasmania Prison Service and has come to the prison also, because those that enter our Corrections system are some of the most disadvantaged people in our community. Therefore, it was very important that the Social Inclusion Unit included Corrections in their thinking when they were developing how they move forward in the area of addressing social inclusion.

You raise a very interesting point, Mr Gaffney, in relation to transport to prisons as part of the social inclusion. It is a very important concept and does need to be explored further. I hope that the Social Inclusion Unit is perhaps one of the agencies that may have input into my Corrections plan to ensure we can have transport and family and community connectiveness as part of Corrections, because it is about those in Corrections not just those in the community.

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Mr GAFFNEY - I am pleased you mentioned the plan because I want to put on the record that 10 years sounds like a long time but, as we know, it is not a long time for plans. As Mr Wing spoke about, it was 1999 when they did the review, which was 10 years ago. Hopefully a review of the plan will be within the plan so that it becomes a 15-, 20-, 25-year plan and so that we do not have to have a new plan every 10 years, it is more an evolution or a re-tweaking of the original.

Ms SINGH - That is a very good point, Mr Gaffney. There should be a review component as parts of the terms of reference in that plan. One of the important parts of this plan, as I mentioned, is the reference group, which will have external people on it, that can look at the area of Corrections in a very holistic way. It is sometimes easy to get bogged down when you are working in a portfolio area or in whatever job you are working in to only be looking at the day to day of how you are going. It is beneficial to have that external outside view coming in, because it is about linking the broader community to Corrections. Most of our inmates are not in there forever, and eventually they will re-integrate back into community. It is very important that when that happens there are the supports and opportunities there for them to get back onto their journey in a way that does not see them end up back in our Corrections system, because if that continues, then we are failing somewhere, are we not?

Mr GAFFNEY - There are obviously sections of the current plan that you would agree have had a very positive effect and need to be followed through.

Ms SINGH - Absolutely.

Mr GAFFNEY - So it is not just a whole new -

Ms SINGH - No, I do not want to reinvent the wheel here. That is about building on what we have and putting it into a framework. We have so much good stuff going on in Corrections, and I do not want that to be lost at all. I want it to be put into a framework where we can say, 'This is what we have got going on. This is where we want to be. This is how we want to move forward. This is our budget, and how we are going to implement doing it.'

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. I am mindful of the time and I am also mindful that it is a question and answer session. Mr Gaffney, any more questions?

Mr GAFFNEY - No.

Mr DEAN - I have a number. There has been a decrease in the budget of almost \$1 250 000 to the prison services area. How are you going to run this service with that sort of a decrease in the budget and maintain the current level of services? I want to know how you are going to make that saving. Will it impact on security? Will it impact on safety for the warders and gaol in total? Could I have an explanation of where we are going and how those savings will be made?

Ms SINGH - Thank you, Mr Dean. You have outlined some of the challenges that we have going forward but, as you know, the Tasmanian Government is faced with the challenge of responsible economic management during a time of a global economic crisis. As a result, the Department of Justice including the Tasmania Prison Service, is subject to a range of efficiency measures, as are all other agencies apart from those that have been quarantined from the efficiency measures. As you allude to, the corrective services appropriation has reduced from \$48.574 million to \$45.879 million, which is a decrease of \$2.69 million. After making some

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adjustments, the Tasmania Prison Service has an effective budget reduction of \$1.85 million. I can explain how that figure comes about -

Mr DEAN - I just wonder about some of the figures that you put up, because our budget papers are fairly clear on the decrease in the budget moving forward to the year 2009-10. The overall decrease shown in the budget papers is calculated at \$1.227 million - that is across both services, community corrective services and prison services.

Ms SINGH - Where are you referring to?

Mr DEAN - I am referring to table 7.2 on page 7.6, and I am referring to the amounts identified against 6.1 prison services and 6.2 community corrective services. I am looking from last year to this year the decrease in that budget and a further decrease the following year.

[10.30 a.m.]

Ms SINGH - That is correct. If you go to table 7.13 on page 7.19, you will see that it shows the same figures as expenses by output. They are the costs to run the prison. Then it has retained revenue which is reduced from that figure, because retained revenue is our prison industries, things like Hayes Prison Farm and the laundry we run at Risdon that provide us with a small amount of revenue. When we take that revenue off obviously that gives you that net cost output. Then at the bottom you have the appropriation, which is our budget, the amount that we have been given. Obviously that is less than last year.

Mr DEAN - That revenue might have been less, but some of that revenue would have been there last year?

Ms SINGH - It shows you there that our retained revenue last year was \$2.89 million and this year it is \$3.512 million. From our calculations we have an effective budget reduction of \$1.85 million. I can talk to you about how we are looking at those measures.

Mr DEAN - What I want to know is how you are going to make those savings in the prison and retain the same level of security and safety for our warders.

Ms SINGH - When you say 'warders', you are talking about our correctional officers?

Mr DEAN - Sorry, correctional officers, I was using the old terminology.

Ms SINGH - The Prison Service has already implemented a wide range of strategies to reduce costs including reviewing purchasing, minimising travel, vacancy control, a roster review - a committee to look at the rosters has been organised - and an absent management strategy. However, there is more that needs to be done to meet these budget requirements. Some of those things that I have just mentioned are budget measures that my secretary, Ms Hutton, has put across the whole agency. In order to reduce costs while minimising job losses the Tasmania Prison Service will be looking to introduce new strategies to meet its budget reduction. This will not be an easy task.

Mr DEAN - I think that is the question I am asking: What are the new strategies?

Ms SINGH - I am getting there, just a moment. The department obviously has to implement the strategies to meet its budget. But to look forward at these new strategies, I recently met with

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unions representing correctional officers to discuss the budget situation with them and those discussions were extremely positive. A number of options looking at how we can meet our budget were discussed, and that is what I share with you today. One of those options was annualisation of correctional officer salaries to include a component of prepaid overtime, flexible working conditions and structural reform such as roster changes. So moving from our current system of paid overtime for correctional officers, which in the last year has been quite a budget blow-out - is that correct, Mr Williams?

Mr DEAN - If we can get those figures as well, can we?

Mr WILLIAMS - It was \$3.1 million.

Mr DEAN - For overtime?

Ms SINGH - It was \$3.1 million in overtime, that is correct. You can see, looking at my budget situation and looking at the amount of overtime that has been spent in the current financial year, that a lot of our budget is going into overtime. One of the options that I canvassed with the unions was the annualisation of correctional officers salaries. Annualisation of correctional officers salaries has been used in other States. I understand that it works effectively in Western Australia. It is where there is a component of prepaid overtime within a correctional officer's salary. I think it is a good way of looking forward. It may not be the only way but it is one option that we need to seriously progress to enable us to meet our budget requirements.

I have asked my department to work very collaboratively with the unions as a matter of urgency to try to look at how we can implement a new annualised model for correctional officers. With the cooperation that we need from correctional officers and the unions, the implementation of this strategy will go a long way towards helping the Prison Service meet the required savings. Our correctional officers currently receive an additional 28 per cent over and above their base salary to cover shift work and working on weekends and public holidays.

Those discussions will continue with unions representing correctional officers to institute a prepaid annual allowance for a certain number of hours of overtime - and that is obviously to be negotiated with unions. As I said, Western Australia has used this strategy for some years and it has worked very successfully to reduce overtime and the overtime spend. I am also aware this strategy has been used successfully in other Tasmanian industries. We can look at it in other industries in Tasmania where it has also worked effectively. I that you will acknowledge, Mr Dean, that \$3.1 million in overtime is a fair amount spent. Mr Williams might want to go into the nitty-gritty of that because he is very much abreast of that.

Mr DEAN - What are the reasons for that amount of overtime? Is it because of short staff issues, sickness leave, stress leave and so on? If it cuts all of those issues I would appreciate the staff numbers as well. The other thing I would ask is about the 800 redundancies that are to be achieved across the Public Service. Will that impact on the jail? Will they have to make a contribution towards that as well? You would then have all of the other budget restraints that this Government has imposed on organisations this year, including transport and the other areas - I do not have the list with me here today.

Ms SINGH - I will ask Mr Williams to comment in a minute on the overtime and how that has come about. That is correct in relation to the cost measures that have been put on our agency, as they have on every agency. These include savings on transport, 30 per cent; vehicles, 10 per

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cent; mobile phones 20 per cent; advertising, 30 per cent; savings in middle management; senior executive positions and continued vacancy control. But in relation to redundancies, if we can avoid redundancies, we will. If we are talking about the Corrections part of my portfolio, we are providing a service. When you are talking about providing a service, you do not make people necessarily redundant in all the circumstances when you are providing a service because you need a critical mass of people to run a service.

Mr DEAN - I understand all that. I just want to know how you are going to do it. That is the question.

Ms SINGH - I have just outlined in relation to a model of annualising salaries how we are going to do it as one of the measures we are moving forward with, as there are a number of measures that are put forward across the agency. If we can avoid redundancies, we will. Only two months ago I welcomed six new recruits into the Tasmania Prison Service as new correctional officers, because we need a critical mass of correctional officers to run a prison which of course adds to us not needing to have those coming back on overtime. I would ask Mr Williams to break down that overtime picture for you so that you understand why we have that budget spend on overtime.

Mr WILLIAMS - Is there any particular aspect of it that you are interested in?

Mr DEAN - I just want to know where the majority of overtime occurs within the Prison Service. What is the reason for the majority of that overtime being worked?

Mr WILLIAMS - A very large majority of the overtime is recall to positions where people have been sick. That is about 42 per cent.

Mr DEAN - That brings me to the next question: Is it sickness through stress? What is the reason for the sickness within that service? Is it because of the pressures on the correctional service officers? What are the reasons behind the sickness? That is a high level of sickness if 45 per cent or something of overtime is taken up through recalling personnel through sickness.

Ms SINGH - I will ask Mr Williams to answer that.

Mr WILLIAMS - I think that is a reasonably high level of sick leave. There are a whole range of reasons why people apply for sick leave. There is a continuum from people who have colds and flus to really serious illnesses. We implemented an absence management strategy about two and a half months ago to try to deal with this issue. That strategy is one where we talk to the officers about the reasons for their absences to try to unpack the root cause.

We need to understand whether it is a workplace issue, as you say. Sometimes sick leave in an industrial sense can come from workplace pressures, whether it is bullying at work, management issues or the types of work. Corrective service officers work in a pretty difficult environment if you can imagine being inside the prison. There are pressures that can be brought to bear in terms of managing that. We want to make sure it is a balanced process, because if you are going to manage sick leave in an organisation you have to make sure you do not target people who genuinely are sick and should not be at work. Rule number one: If you are sick, you should not be there. That is the basic rule.

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We have started a strategy of monitoring sick leave, looking at people who have taken high levels of sick leave. If they are genuinely sick with chronic or acute illnesses then obviously we do not look any further. It is where there are patterns of behaviour. I would not like to target the majority of correctional officers as taking high levels of sick leave. Sick leave is an entitlement under their award and, if they are sick, they should not be at work. It is a matter that has to be handled with some sensitivity. That is what we have done in introducing a management strategy around sick leave.

Mr DEAN - How much of the overtime is attributed to staff shortages as opposed to sickness? In other words, not having the required number of correctional officers employed in the organisation.

Mr WILLIAMS - It is very hard to tell. If we had a lower level of sick leave it would not be a problem. We would be able to manage the organisation with a much lower overtime budget with the current complement of staff we have. The six staff that we brought in recently have had some impact on that. That is exactly why we did that.

Mr DEAN - So staff levels have been maintained at the maximum numbers identified for the Prison Service. Is that what you are saying?

Mr WILLIAMS - There are always some vacancies. You would always have more if you had the perfect world.

Ms SINGH - So you can see, Mr Dean, that it is not necessarily a saving, when talking about our correctional services, to make people redundant. It can actually end up making our own budget even larger, because it is about having that critical mass of staff within the Prison Service.

Mr DEAN - I am not the one who said there had to be 800 redundancies across the Public Service. You ought to talk to your other ministers and the Premier, I would have thought - but not me. I have a number of other questions in this area -

CHAIR - Staff numbers, did we actually get that figure? I do not believe we did.

Mr FINCH - And can we also get some indication as to how your overtime has been tracking in recent years? If we could get some indication such as from the past couple of years whether this has increased?

Mr WILLIAMS - I can actually give you that today. I can go through the budget allocation of the last three full financial years and then what we actually spent on overtime: In 2005-06 we budgeted \$1.2 million and we spent \$2.2 million on overtime in that year, which was an overspend of just over \$1 million; in 2006-07 the budgeted amount went up by about \$900 000 and was \$2.1 million, and the amount spent on overtime was \$3.3 million; and in 2007-08 the amount budgeted was \$2.2 million and \$3.8 million was spent, which is an overrun of \$1.5 million. Those figures are internal budget allocations, internal to the Prison Service, as opposed to allocations from Government. They are internal measures.

Ms SINGH - So you can see, Mr Dean, that my commitment to look at exploring a new model of annualisation is very important when you look forward at how we are going to meet our budget. That is something I met with unions about this week and canvassed with them. We are

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going to work with them to negotiate further an overtime component within an annualised structure for correctional officers as we go forward.

[10.45 a.m.]

Mr DEAN - I take it that penalty rates for working Sundays and all of that is already a part of the basic salary paid. I take it that has already been annualised - has it or not?

Mr WILLIAMS - There is a component added into the salary which covers not necessarily working overtime but the fact that people work at times when they would normally get a shift penalty. So they get paid a single rate on a Saturday instead of the overtime rates.

Mr FINCH - These figures that you have given us, it is not about the penalties for working weekends and shifts, this is purely overtime, is it?

Ms SINGH - Yes, which is double time.

Mr FINCH - I must say that I am gobsmacked at the figures here. I am curious, because you have to make people work longer, about what is occurring to their own work situation in respect of working beyond the normal agreed time of eight or nine hours or whatever the shift is. This money could be used to employ the extra staff to cover off on having to pay overtime and putting people's health under threat through working extra shifts.

Ms SINGH - Mr Finch, you raise a really important point, and that is the work life balance component of looking forward into an annualised model. The fact is that, if you do have people recalled for overtime, they are working much longer shifts. Wearing my Minister for Occupational Health and Safety hat, obviously there is a health and safety component that needs to be addressed as well. Not only does looking at annualised salaries allow us to look forward to meeting part of our budget, but also it looks at some of the changes that I think are important when we talk about a healthy work life balance within our correctional officer work force going forward. That is important.

This example highlights some of the challenges that we face within the corrections system. We have continued to recruit. We had a recruitment program that was completed in April. I was very pleased and privileged to be able to attend the graduation of those new recruits -

CHAIR - Of those six people. With due respect, minister, this is all information that the Committee has heard and we really need to move it along. Can we have the number of staff and the breakdown of those staff?

Ms SINGH - The number of staff full-time equivalents as at May this year in the Tasmania Prison Service was 351 and the number in community corrections was 50. If you want to know just the numbers for custodial staff in the Tasmania Prison Service, currently there are 252 full-time equivalents. The prisoner to custodial staff ratio is approximately 2.1 to one; that is, 2.1 prisoners per custodial staff member. Obviously the number of staff we have has to complement the number of inmates that we have, but of course that ratio does not take into consideration the allocation of staff to relevant shifts and excludes inmates accommodated as patients at the Wilfred Lopes Centre because that is part of Department of Health and Human Services portfolio. The progressive daily average prisoner population, which we have gone through before, was 520 as at the end of May and then we have to ratio that with the correct number of custodial officers.

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Mr WING - Could you please tell us the cost per day of keeping a prisoner in the correctional services division and, if it varies between the various facilities, if you could give us the variation.

Ms SINGH - The cost per day I draw firstly from the 2009 Productivity Commission report on government services which is publicly available. In that 2007-08 Tasmania recorded the second highest cost per prisoner day of all States and Territories because it always looks two years retrospectively. At \$248.50 Tasmania's costs were higher than the national average cost per prisoner per day of \$206.80. However, in real terms this is a slight decrease from the adjusted cost per prisoner per day of 2006-07 when it was \$250.90. When broken down into open and secure facilities, Tasmania's costs were \$203.50 and \$254.10 respectively.

The growth in the period from 2005 to 2007 reflects in part the costs of commissioning the new prison at Risdon but also increases in health costs and correctional officers salaries during that period and the introduction of prison-based initiatives designed to assist in prisoners' rehabilitation and re-integration. Some of these high costs for us are because of the small population of our prison numbers. It is a bit like running a house, it does not matter if you have a few people in there or one person, you still have to pay the mortgage, you still have to run the hydro, heating, water and so on. Similarly with the prison, we have a number of high fixed costs of running a prison system which we cannot avoid, no matter the numbers of inmates in there. It is reasonable to expect that Tasmania's costs per prisoner per day would be higher than other jurisdictions in that vein, and the cost per prisoner per day is expected to remain stable as we go forward in the coming years.

Mr WING - One factor in the increase in outcosts may be that other States that have privately run prisons as well as State run prisons are in a stronger negotiating position with unions dealing with remuneration and working conditions, because our working conditions and remuneration were certainly more generous 10 years ago. And the very establishment of our select committee I know gave leverage to corrective services management in dealing with unions to get a more favourable deal.

Ms SINGH - I have the statistics here for all States and Territories in relation to the cost per prisoner per day. As I talked to you earlier about Western Australia who have implemented the annualisation, if it was just salaries that brought the cost per prisoner per day down, I would think that WA's costs would be a lot less than what it is, which is \$224.90. I do not think it is just about salaries of correctional officers. It is about a lot of those fixed costs when it comes to running a prison. But as part of the plan we can look at ways to see how we can reduce those fixed costs, such as the use of energy and how much our energy bills are. Maybe we can look at innovative ideas. I know a certain business developer in Hobart is looking at putting wind turbines on top of buildings. There are all kinds of ways that we can look at how we can bring some of those fixed costs down.

Mr WING - You spoke about equipping prisoners for their release. What measures are in place to deal with pre-release matters?

Ms SINGH - There are a number of pre-release programs run by a number of NGOs that come into the prison such as the Salvation Army's supporting prisoners pre and post release program and the Red Cross's Inside Help pre-release program. We also have our own Integrated Offender Management unit that runs various programs to prepare inmates pre release and provide them with the support that they need. The ones run by NGOs are very lengthy. There is Good

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Beginnings in Launceston that run the prisoners and their families program, helping them to re-integrate with their family stronger before they are released; drug and alcohol counselling by Holyoake; Anglicare run the debt and money matters program, a very important one for their financial situation coming out; break even gambling programs by Relationship Australia; life coaching by City Mission Hobart; Excel Prison was the Salvation Army one I showed you; and I have mentioned the Red Cross one. Centrelink very importantly go into the prison pre release to help inmates organise their relevant forms to be able to receive Centrelink benefits. That is all organised pre release.

Mr WING - How long do they have to wait for the first payment after release?

Ms SINGH - I will ask Mr Williams to comment on that because he comes from previous employment in Centrelink so he has quite a lot of knowledge related to that program.

Mr WILLIAMS - If all things go to plan, the payment is normally available the day they are released if they are getting the crisis payment. The Centrelink service goes into working with the other providers to make sure that things like accommodation are under way so that people have the best chance of coming out with money in their pockets to find accommodation, feed themselves and get set up. The first day is the best outcome.

Mr WING - That is good. What role in terms of pre release programs does working outside the prison have? Are prisoners allowed - as they are in South Australia - to go into the city and make job applications?

Ms SINGH - Yes, we can give you some information on the numbers of inmates we have working outside the prison who go out daily at the moment.

Mr WING - If you could give that information generally and also specifically as it applies in terms of a pre release condition.

Ms SINGH - In relation to the Excel program run by the Salvation Army it is going into shopping centres, crowded environments, areas where there is a general crowd to help them feel re-integrated and comfortable in those types of surroundings as they face those challenges of the new freedoms that they are going to have going forward.

CHAIR - What programs are available in the outlying areas? Not everyone comes from Launceston or Hobart and are released back into their community. Is there any support outside of the city areas?

Ms SINGH - You mean at Hayes?

CHAIR - No, once they are released.

Ms SINGH - You are talking about post release now?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms SINGH - You want to move to post release -

Mr WING - Can we deal with pre release first and then deal with post release?

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Ms SINGH - I might ask Mr Williams to add to any more on pre release.

Mr WILLIAMS - I think you have pretty much covered most of the pre release. There is a whole range of programs within the prison system designed to treat the offending behaviour. There is a lot of education programs -

Mr WING - I want to come to those but I wanted to deal with the pre release now. Is the Salvation Army paid for the work they do?

[11.00 a.m.]

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes.

Mr WING - Does the corrective services division do anything itself to condition prisoners for pre release?

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes.

Mr WING - Could you tell us about that?

Ms SINGH - Firstly, we run a program called Preparing for Change, which is a four-week intensive program dealing with communication, anger management and some of those other issues that may be particular to certain inmates. There is one called Talking up Change that is more for maximum security pre release which is a similar program but dealing with those anger and violent issues that may come about. There is Pathways and Getting Smart, two very strong drug and alcohol programs, one is six weeks very much pre release but the other one is three to four months. There is also New Directions which is specifically a sex offender program.

Mr WING - Perhaps then if you deal with the chair's question about the post release.

CHAIR - I think in the interests of time I will invite the committee to take a 10-minute break and then we will resume at the table because Mr Dean has a couple of questions.

Mr WING - I have other questions too. I have been patiently waiting.

CHAIR - I know. I will invite everyone at the table to attempt to keep their questions short and their answers short. We will take a 10-minute break.

The committee suspended 11.01 to 11.17 a.m.

CHAIR - I would welcome the opportunity, minister, for Mr Wing to ask another couple of specific questions.

Mr WING - Well, it will be more than a couple of specific questions.

Ms SINGH - I have responses, sorry, Mr Wing, to your last one, if you want it?

Mr WING - Yes, thank you.

Ms SINGH - There are currently two inmates engaged in paid external employment. A third inmate has been given principal approval to start paid employment and is in that process. The most inmates we have had on section 42, which is leave in paid external employment at the same time, is five.

Mr WING - I am pleased to hear that, because although the public do not understand the importance of that sometimes, it is really important in terms of rehabilitation. All the prisoners, just about all, will be released into the community anyway, so it is in the interests of the community. Now, could you please tell us about programs, work programs, educational programs, in the prison?

Ms SINGH - Yes, I have had quite an interest in and focus on educational programs. That has commenced with, firstly, I was very pleased only a couple of weeks ago to announce the expansion of Risdon LINC. Risdon LINC has been set up last year by Minister Llewellyn in the minimum security and comprises a library. So it was done in conjunction with the education department and State Library. There is a library and also online teaching of secondary and college courses. Now, that has only been offered thus far in minimum security, so, therefore, women missed out on that and all of those in the rest of Risdon. Only two weeks ago I announced the expansion of that program to go now throughout the entire Risdon complex, so that includes women and maximum and medium security.

The way that that Risdon LINC works is very much by connecting inmates up with tutors at the Hobart Polytechnic to enable them to do courses online in a very safe and secure way. They cannot go on to the World Wide Web as such; they are only linking up with their tutors and the course work that they require. Again, this is another example of invasion and the way that we can roll out the cables now using wireless technologies throughout the whole prison service. That has been actually at quite a small cost to my budget to explain Risdon LINC to the rest of the prison. Roughly around \$15,000 was spent. That is one very good educational example in the prison.

The report on Government services showed that 51 per cent of eligible prisoners in Tasmania were involved in education during 2007-08. That is the highest percentage of prisoners in education in any State and Territory in Australia. In December '08 the Solicitor-General advised that inmates could not enter into contracts as trainees or apprentices with the Department of Justice. So, as a result of that, no new apprentices or traineeships can be commenced at this time.

Mr WING - Why is that?

Ms SINGH - Mr Williams, do you want to go into why that happened?

Mr WILLIAMS - Previously the department had contracted the inmates as the trainees, and we then received legal advice from the Solicitor-General that, in fact, we could not do that. Therefore, the funding for the traineeships was not available to us as an employer as such in that relationship.

Ms SINGH - What I have asked Mr Williams and my department to do when I heard of that situation was to meet with Skills Tasmania to ensure how we can continue apprentices and traineeships. As I said, my commitment is very much at looking at ensuring we build on education and training and skills within our prison service. Only with that can we ensure that we

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have inmates post-release coming out into the wider community with those opportunities to gain employment or further their education, whichever.

In relation to Skills Tasmania, they have now agreed to allow inmates to complete any training program that they had already commenced, of course. Inmates who had planned to or particular plate from their current qualification to a higher-level qualification, we are looking at ways that they can now see how they can do that. At this point in time, we are unable to do that. But we are going to continue to work with Skills Tasmania as a matter of priority to improve that range of vocational education and training.

Mr WING - That is good. Now, it is not good to have prisoners idle. What numbers or percentages are involved either in education or working programs?

Ms SINGH - We have an average 250 inmates each month participating in education. An average of 100 inmates receive literacy training each month. Some 185 inmates enrolled in flexible learning with the polytechnic. An average of 40 per month participate in vocational education, and also a smaller number are undertaking tertiary courses. So that is some of the data in that. I understand there were some inmates - I do not have it in front of me - that actually received some kind of traineeship award or something as well post-release when. I had a brief on that earlier.

Mr WING - Due to the unfortunate time limits, I will just deal with two more matters. One, in the statistics that you are going to provide us, could you deal with the question of recidivists, the number of people who are in custody on a repeat basis?

Ms SINGH - Yes.

Mr WING - I would like to ask about the question of drugs and to what extent is that a problem in our corrective services division.

Ms SINGH - Yes, I have taken a fairly hard line on drugs in relation to our prison system. We can provide you on notice, if you like, Mr Wing with the recidivism figures. I do have them on me.

Mr WING - If you would like to make some comments on them and perhaps let us have that documentation.

Ms SINGH - Yes. That, again, is available publicly through the report on Government services, the Productivity Commission report. Again, it has looked over the period of 2005-06. We had a 36 per cent return to prison within two years of release statistic. The national average was 38.2 per cent.

Mr WING - Good.

Ms SINGH - Still, of course, we need to continue to improve on that. A further 6.5 per cent of prisoners released returned to corrective services under a community corrections order as well, giving a rate of return to corrective services of 42.5 per cent.

Mr WING - Thank you.

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Ms SINGH - We are always trying to combat recidivism and reduce those figures. In relation to drugs in prison, as I said, I have taken a fairly hard line on that. I was very pleased to announce that we have another drug detector dog that has now started. We have got two drug detector dogs that are now within our prison to combat the contraband coming into our prison. I think there is no point in being, as minister, coming and talking to you today about my corrections plan, about my commitment to ensure there is a robust education and training program running within our prison, that there are rehabilitative services and NGOs, with all their goodwill and all of that support from prison staff and the like if the drug and alcohol issues of inmates is not addressed. That may be that they come into the prison with drug and alcohol issues, or it may be issues of contraband or the like. So, I have been fairly firm on the way thanks we need to deal with that.

The dogs are one thing. Of course, Mr Barber runs periodic urine testing as well. But, on top of that, we are committed to building the perimeter fence to the cost of approximately \$800,000, we think. We have gone out to tender on the building of that perimeter fence. The idea with that fence is for it to act basically as a buffer between the existing prison wall fence so that anything that may fall into the prison, be it a tennis ball or any other kind of variety of object, gets trapped within that prison fence buffer. So that is another way that we can deal with contraband coming into the prison.

Mr WING - So that probably shows some inadequacy in the original design not having catered for that, because it was a well-known fact that in prisons tennis balls and things can be thrown over the wall. Was that an inadequacy in design?

Ms SINGH - I think contraband is something, as you say, Mr Wing, comes into prisons all across the country in various ways. I was not the minister when it came to the design of the prison at that time.

Mr WING - I am very well aware of that. But it was well-known at that time that things were often thrown over the prison walls. So that was not taken into account in the design?

Ms SINGH - Well Mr Barber might like to comment, because he was a part of that kind of design process. Whether it is a result of the design or whether it just is the nature of contraband trying to find its way into the prison system.

Mr BARBER - From operational experience now running the prison, it was a design problem.

Mr WING - Are there any other notable ones?

Mr BARBER - No, not to the extent of this one.

Mr WING - Well, at all?

Mr BARBER - Certainly in the early stages, the fabric of the new prison was tested to its extreme by inmates. There was a considerable amount of damage done to some of that fabric, which has now been repaired and replaced with better quality of product.

Mr WING - Thank you, Madam Chair. In the interests of time, I will finish.

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Mr DEAN - I have just three or four important ones. Just looking at table 7.14 from page 720, I just want to commend the director, minister - no prison escapes at all. A perimeter this year. That is progressing extremely well. So that is a wonderful situation. It costs a lot of money for this State to have to find and return prisoners. In the lower security areas, of course, open perimeter, as well, which is prisoners walking out of those, and you cannot do a lot about that, and we accept that. But it is great to see that.

Minister, what is the annual base salary after of a correctional officer.

Ms SINGH - I might ask Graeme Barber to answer that.

Mr BARBER - I will have to take that question on notice. With the 28 per cent loading for shift work, I think it is around about in the high \$50,000s.

Mr DEAN - Right, okay.

[11.30 a.m.]

Mr BARBER - But without that loading, I think it is back to about \$45,000 or \$48,000, something like that.

Mr DEAN - Coming back to the overtime thing, of course. The other question is current freeze that we have on the employment of State service staff, minister, does that impact on the need or the requirement to engage and employ more correctional services officers?

Ms SINGH - Well I think, Mr Dean, as we went through before, the number of correctional officers that are required for us to employ is based on the number of inmates that we have in our correctional system at any one time. It is that ratio that I think I went through before of 2.1 to 1 that determines what are numbers are going forward. So whether or not we will run another recruitment round, for example, in the second half of this year will very much depend on our numbers going forward. But if you are talking about the overtime -

Mr DEAN - So the wage freeze will not stop you from employing more correctional officers if they are needed, is that what you are saying?

Ms SINGH - No, I do not know what you mean by wage freeze.

Mr DEAN - Sorry, the employment freeze of employing new people within the Statistic service organisation. The Government has got a freeze on that, the employment of new people.

Ms SINGH - That does not stop me.

Mr DEAN - It does not stop you?

Ms SINGH - It does not stop me from employing correctional officers, no. We are running a service. When we are talking about our prison, we are talking about a service. It is a prison service. Of course, like any service, it needs a critical mass, a certain number of people to run the prison effectively. So, no, I will continue to employ correctional officers as need be. There is not actually a freeze, though, Mr Dean, as I understand it. What it is called is vacancy control, so where there may be people employed in the State service that leave the State service, and we may not fill those positions, but I do not understand there to be a freeze.

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Mr DEAN - I thought there was a freeze on employing additional people within the State service. So probably I have got that wrong obviously.

Ms SINGH - I might ask my Secretary, Ms Hutton, to comment on that.

Ms HUTTON - Yes, Mr Dean, since the beginning of this year, we have had an agency version of vacancy control in place. We have not changed that. That has continued in place during the year. It simply means that each vacancy that arises is reviewed. Very many of them are put on hold, if you like, for a period of six months. There are some positions in the agency that are recognised as crucial, so we proceed to fill them.

Mr DEAN - My question, minister, was specifically on employing additional people within the organisation. I understood that the Premier had a clear position on this: that there would be no additional positions created within the public service. I have obviously got that wrong.

Ms SINGH - It is not creating additional new positions; it is just whether we fill vacancies or not. That is really what we are talking about when we are talking about employing correctional officers. At the time that the Premier and the Treasurer have outlined the various Budget measures that agencies needed to put in place, we were recruiting six new correctional officers into the prison system because we needed those to fill those vacancies to ensure that we are running the prison with the correct number of staff.

Mr DEAN - Just one further question on overtime, the Department of Justice was obviously aware of the situation in relation to the overtime and the large amount of overtime that was being incurred within the prison system for a number of years, it would seem. Minister, it would seem no action has been taken until this year in talks with the union to try and resolve that or try and get a better position moving forward. Is that the case?

Ms SINGH - Obviously I can talk for myself as being minister in this portfolio. I think perhaps Mr Barber might like to talk about past negotiations with unions. I do not think that I am necessarily coming up with something completely new here. However, I am very committed to moving this forward and moving it forward in a fairly timely way, because, as you have raised, it is a \$3.1 million spend. That is a fair amount of my budget. I now have to find budget savings that I have outlined today as well. To meet those savings, one of the ways I am doing that is looking at the annualisation, and I am committed to looking at that. But I might ask Mr Barber to comment about past negotiations with unions. I am sure he is much more familiar with them than I am.

Mr BARBER - We commenced negotiations in 2005 on overtime.

CHAIR - With no success. So why, minister, do you believe that you will be able to achieve that success?

Ms SINGH - I am determined to move forward to work collaborately with unions to do this.

Mr DEAN - I would have thought the previous ministers would have been, but maybe they were not.

UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Mr WING - Can I just ask: was it any advantage to negotiate with the unions at the time of the appointment of our select committee, because we were told at the time that the very fact of the appointment - one of the terms of reference being to consider a privatisation of part of the corrective services division - was of assistance in the negotiations.

Mr BARBER - In the early part of the 2000s that was of some assistance. In recent years we have not had any success with those deliberations.

Mr WING - Once the threat of privatisation ceased to exist by the Government policy, I suggest, Government policy at the time, which was philosophically based and inappropriate.

Ms SINGH - Well, I can rule out today that I do not have a Government policy for privatisation.

Mr WING - Do you have one against it?

Ms SINGH - Yes.

Mr WING - I see. Well, that is the problem, you see.

Ms SINGH - At this point in time, I am not looking at privatisation. It is not on my agenda.

Mr WING - No, I do not think it is appropriate now. It was then, and that was helpful in relation to this aspect of -

Ms SINGH - Right, I see, with past deliberations relating annualisation, thank you, Mr Wing.

Mr DEAN - Minister, I just wanted to briefly touch on the prison farm at Hayes. There has been a lot of publicity around this, and I guess you would be well and truly prepared for this question: what is the planned future for the Hayes jail farm? That is keeping the question nice and succinct and to the point.

Ms SINGH - I was pleased to visit Hayes not that long ago, because I wanted to go out there and see for myself the substantial infrastructure upgrades that will be required at Hayes. I think Hayes has a very important component within my corrections plan, because from what I saw and discussed with correctional officers out there - fantastic correctional officers we have working there - we have some challenges with Hayes. But we also have a lot of positives. It is a completely different environment, I am sure you will agree. I am happy to take you up there at some point as well. It is obviously not a fenced environment. It is a farm. It is an operating farm. There is a dairy and also the food processing plant. Inmates have a fairly structured day where they work in that plant or on the dairy and then in the afternoon they are doing what have you. I think it is unique and it does have a lot of positives. I think we need to ensure that that Hayes prison farm is part of the corrections plan as we go forward.

Mr DEAN - So it is and will be there, and there are no plans to shed the department of Hayes in any way and move it?

Ms SINGH - My personal view, Mr Dean, is that I am not keen to sell Hayes, but I think it needs to be part of the plan as we go forward to see how Hayes fits in to the rest of all the other aspects that we have covered today when it comes to the corrections system.

Mr DEAN - So when you say you are not keen to sell it, has there been discussions within the cabinet and within Government as to the future of the -

Ms SINGH - Firstly, I do not talk about discussions that go on in cabinet.

Mr DEAN - Discussions that go outside of cabinet? Have there been discussions in relation to the sale of Hayes?

Ms SINGH - Well, I am having one with you right now.

Mr DEAN - Minister -

Ms SINGH - I think I have been fairly open and frank with you, Mr Dean. I have just put to you that I am not keen to sell Hayes. However, we need to put Hayes in the context of the rest of the corrections system. I have been out there; I think there are a lot of positives with Hayes. I cannot be anymore clear with you than that.

Mr DEAN - Are there others keen to sell Hayes?

Ms SINGH - Not that I am aware of. Not that I am aware of, no.

CHAIR - Thank you. Minister, I will now move on to community and corrective services.

6.2 Community Corrective Services -

CHAIR - I know that we have touched on that already, but I am interested, given that there has been recent legislation passed in both houses of Parliament accepting the exchange of members of other communities into the exchange program, can you tell us about that?

Ms SINGH - The parolee?

CHAIR - Yes. So I am interested to know how, if we get an influx of people into Tasmania, how are we going to cope with that both in staffing and resourcing with funds? Also, minister, with the community work orders, has there been any improvement on the amount of volunteers or supervised persons that have made available in communities to actually supervise community work orders?

Ms SINGH - Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased you have raised Community Corrections, because I think very much we need to strengthen Community Corrections as part of our corrections plan going forward. I think not enough good attention or any attention, really, is given to the community corrections side when we are talking about corrective services, because, again, if we are going to look at alternative sentencing, we need to very much focus on Community Corrections. It is actually out of all of those that are sentenced, more are sentenced under the Community Corrections side of things than they are in incarceration. I think some more focus does need to be given on community corrections.

In relation to the bill you talk about that went through Parliament, that, of course, was for the transfer of parolees. With transfer of parolees, it has to work both ways: there has to be the other State that has passed legislation as ours for us to do that transfer. In relation to inmates wanting to

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come into Tasmania, that information is given to me and it is my decision whether or not I allow that transfer to occur. Now, that happens often based on family reason. So, if an inmate was convict in one State but all their family is in Tasmania, it may be more beneficial for the rehabilitation of that inmate for them to serve out their sentence in Tasmania and vice versa. So they are some of the reasons why we have the transfer go on.

Having said that, we certainly have not been overloaded with offenders belting down our doors wanting to come in. So, it is certainly not something that is a high -

CHAIR - There is no issue of resourcing?

Ms SINGH - No, not an issue with resourcing at all.

CHAIR - And community work orders?

Ms SINGH - Community service orders, I will just welcome Ginna Webster to the table, who is the direct offer of Community Corrections in Tasmania, but I will just talk briefly about Community Corrections. We have just completed a review of Community Corrections in Tasmania. That started with a commissioning of KPMG to do a report on the structure and operation of Community Corrections. What that report or that review included was consideration of the community service orders scheme, such as the types of projects available to offenders, procedures for administering the scheme, resourcing of the scheme. I am really pleased that that has occurred when I have come in as minister, because, as I said to you, that is very much a focus that I want to see bolstered. Not only when we talk about community service orders should we just be thinking about time mowing lawns or doing some of those work-order type things, but we should also be looking at addressing what it was that brought that particular person into our justice system in the first place, whether they had drug and alcohol issues, whether they had issues with literacy or education training and so on. When I talk about bolstering Community Corrections, they are some of the ways that I want to also see the causes of those offenders being addressed. I might just ask Ginna to answer your question in relation to the supervisors and the like.

CHAIR - I am looking for numbers; I am looking for specific numbers of supervisors, how many community work orders and the quantum of those.

Ms WEBSTER - Currently in Tasmania we have 1122 offenders on community orders. That was in the 2007-08 year.

CHAIR - What is the quantum of their hours?

[11.45 a.m.]

Ms WEBSTER - I would have to take that on notice, sorry, Madam Chair.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms WEBSTER - I can certainly do that. That includes probation orders, parole orders and community service orders. In 2008-09 there were 573 on community service orders, 113 on parole orders and 670 on probation orders. In 2008-09, that is 1179, that is our average daily offender population so far for this year.

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CHAIR - Have the numbers reduced at all?

Ms WEBSTER - No, the numbers have actually increased.

CHAIR - Due to not having any adequate staffing, supervision -

Ms WEBSTER - No, that would not be the reason. The numbers for community orders around Australia have increased for the same period. In fact, ours are slightly lower than the Australian average. So we are certainly looking at the way we supervise those. As the minister indicated, one of the things we would like to do in the future in light of this review from KPMG is to balance the number of hours of work given to the community with addressing the particular offender's rehabilitation needs and offending behaviour. That is certainly an aim of this review that we have just recently implemented.

CHAIR - So, minister, have I the understanding, then, that anyone who attends a two-hour session for rehabilitation for drug and alcohol will get that reduced off their community service work orders? Is that the plan?

Ms SINGH - Yes, that is the plan. That is, again, where I want to work with the Attorney-General and with magistrates in looking forward as part of this plan into looking at ways we can bolster community correction being more of an option for magistrates than short-term sentences.

CHAIR - Would you accept that that could well be considered by some in the community as a soft option, to let them go to a two-hour session and not actually do some hard yakka on the ground?

Ms SINGH - I think if the community were aware that it cost \$250 per inmate per day of their taxpayers' money to keep someone incarcerated for a short-term sentence compared to \$10.50 per day of their taxpayers' money going into someone being rehabilitated and doing time on the outside, in think they will see it as a clear cost benefit.

CHAIR - No, I was talking about actually instead of having to do work, as in you may do some council work, some gardening or some mowing or something, they would see that that part of their community work orders, being able to go to a two-hour session was not comparable. That was my question. Not about keeping them incarcerated.

Ms SINGH - Well, the two-hour session for rehabilitation may also be accompanied with work for -

CHAIR - That was the question asked. Do you get that off your work order if you do two hours of a drug and alcohol session? That was the question.

Ms SINGH - Yes, you do, but you still have a number of other hours that you will still have to complete as part of your work order. I mean, the thing, Madam Chair, about sentencing is that sentencing is about addressing rehabilitation as well pure punishment. Otherwise, we are just going to keep going around the circles.

CHAIR - I understand that. I am just asking the question about the process. Mr Finch?

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Mr FINCH - No, I am okay.

CHAIR - Any other questions in this particular area?

Mr DEAN - I just have a couple. Did you mention - I might have missed it - the number of probation officers we currently have in the State? Was that mentioned?

CHAIR - I do not recall that.

Mr DEAN - No, it was not. So I ask that question. Do we have enough to be able to perform the functions that they are required to perform? We were told there are 1 122 people on orders out there. So do we have enough people in those areas to service those orders, to carry out the contact that is necessary and deliver the reports to the courts that are necessary?

Ms SINGH - I understand we have 57 in total in the State at the moment. But I think what you refer to, Mr Dean, is exactly what I am talking about when I want to look at a plan going forward, because it may be that we need to structure the Budget differently. We may need to look more at the Community Corrections side when we talk about our budget than we are talking about the prison service.

Mr DEAN - With respect, minister, I understand that. What I am asking, though, is how many do we have on the ground now.

Ms SINGH - Well, that is 57.

Mr DEAN - The numbers we have on the ground now, are they able to perform the tasks that are necessary of them in carrying out their functions to these 1 122-odd people who are currently on these orders? That is what I am saying.

Ms SINGH - I have meant with those staff both in Launceston and in Hobart - very dedicated staff - and they certainly have not raised with me that they are not able to carry out their functions, in fact, the contrary. They are very dedicated and very much committed to doing that and are doing it.

Mr DEAN - It was often said, Minister, that the courts - I do not know whether they are saying it now - were sometimes hampered in their processes because of the time frame of getting the reports back from these officers because of the work load they had. That is now not a problem, I take it?

Ms SINGH - Well, I might ask how Ginna how that report system is working right now.

Ms WEBSTER - Thank you, minister. I recently met with a number of magistrates in the south and north and the northwest to address this issue, because it certainly was an issue that was raised through the KPMG review. We are actually addressing that, and we have a couple of processes in place where we are going to hopefully address that issue of the time that it takes to wait for the reports. By and large, the courts are very satisfied with the quality of the reports and the content, but they have raised some issues about the time frames. As Community Corrections as an organisation, we are currently addressing that issue.

Mr DEAN - I might ask the minister how you are addressing it?

Ms WEBSTER - If the minister is happy for me to answer this -

Ms SINGH - Yes.

Ms WEBSTER - As I said, I have recently met with a couple of magistrates and we have a process in place where we are prioritising some of those reports. We are also asking magistrates to tell us a little bit more what they want in those reports rather than us giving them what we think they want. They have invited myself and a number of my key staff to their magistrates conference in October and we are going to come up with a process and workshop the report issues that suit them and also allows us to deliver what we have to deliver. It is in process at the moment.

CHAIR - Your very last question.

Mr DEAN - Well, I do have more, but I will ask this: you have talked, minister, in your briefing about the non-custodial options. You are looking at that, and I understand that, and I accept that. However, Mr Williams would know more about this than what I would, we have been talking about non-custodial options now for many years that I am aware of. When I was in the police service, we were talking about non-custodial options being furthered et cetera, et cetera, and nothing much has happened in that regard. Magistrates are calling for further options for them as well. So are we assured now that we will really address this issue moving forward with some further options?

Ms SINGH - Well, Mr Dean, I cannot be any more sincere than I have been with you this morning to say that I am very committed to moving forward with corrections to ensure that we address non-custodial options, reducing recidivism, addressing rehabilitation, bringing our prison numbers down and all of that, as I have announced this morning to you, I want to be part of a plan that goes forward, that has an external reference group, that gives us clear, independent advice, recommendations on that. I am very strongly committed to this. Of course, there has been some recent movement on home detention, for example, under the previous minister, Minister Llewellyn. Last year he received that Tasmanian Law Institute report on sentencing. I know the Attorney-General is as keen as I am at looking at alternative sentencing. Obviously she has the Sentencing Act. So there has also been other initiatives like a mental health list and a drug court. They are recent initiatives aimed at keeping people out of prisons. So there is some movement already going on.

Mr WING - Receiving a report is not much movement. Unless there is action taken, it is nothing.

Ms SINGH - They are in place, those two initiatives. The mental health list -

Mr WING - No, no, you said that the former minister, Minister Llewellyn received the report.

Ms SINGH - Yes.

Mr WING - There was no action taken on that?

Ms SINGH - No, but, Mr Wing, I am now taking action.

Mr WING - That is right.

Ms SINGH - I have inherited the portfolio from him. I have picked up from him, and I am now taking it forward and taking further action on this.

Mr WING - I am delighted to here that.

Mr DEAN - So will I be seeing new legislation coming in, if there is legislation necessary, in the near future?

Ms SINGH - I am not going to pre-empt the corrections plan. Mr Dean, this has got to be -

Mr DEAN - No, I am not talking about the plan; we are talking about the -

Ms SINGH - Alternative sentencing has to be part of the corrections plan. Obviously, if we are going to introduce alternative sentencing options, I need to look at my budget and how I am going to fund those things.

Mr DEAN - I look forward to this session this time next year.

CHAIR - I think we are back to where we started from when I asked how we were going to fund a plan. With your indulgence, minister, we will move on to capital investment programs, while you still have your advisers at the table. Because my reading of it is that it all relates to prison infrastructure. Mr Finch.

Capital Investment Program

Mr FINCH - Just on page 7.6, capital investment program, a big factor here is the completion of the holding cells at the Supreme Court. Surely more capital works are going to be needed over the next four years. Is there no work at all being planned? The budget for this year is \$739,000 and then zip, zip, zip, zip, or am I reading it wrong? Is there another explanation?

Ms SINGH - Firstly, you talked about the court, was it, Mr Finch?

Mr FINCH - Yes.

Ms SINGH - That is not my portfolio; that is the Attorney-General's portfolio.

Mr FINCH - Capital investment program, point 9, on table 7.20.

Ms SINGH - Yes.

Mr FINCH - So point 9 is the decrease in the capital investment program that takes the completion of the upgrade toff the holding cells at the Hobart Supreme Court.

Ms SINGH - Yes.

Mr FINCH - Are you saying that is in the Attorney-General's area?

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CHAIR - That is not your department? It was listed on our advice, minister.

Mr WILLIAMS - It is in the Attorney-General's portfolio.

CHAIR - It should not have been listed?

Mr WILLIAMS - This is the justice portfolio -

Ms SINGH - I share the justice portfolio, obviously, with the Attorney-General. So my output group -

CHAIR - It is clearly identified in the Budget Papers under your watch, minister.

Ms SINGH - I might refer to my other deputy secretary, Michael Stevens to answer that.

Mr STEVENS - The component in that figure is the interest payment for the last stage of the prison that was completed last year.

CHAIR - So it does come under this?

Mr STEVENS - It does come under this, yes.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr STEVENS - I am not quite sure how that note ended up there in the sense. There was a combining of the capital amounts for the Supreme Court and the interest payments for the prison.

Ms SINGH - I apologise, Mr Finch, it does include my portfolio.

Mr FINCH - But there is also, minister, this development for block D -

Ms SINGH - Stage D.

Mr FINCH - Stage D?

Ms SINGH - Yes.

Mr FINCH - Just give me some indications there as to whether that project has been affected by the Budget constraints, whether that will proceed on time?

Ms SINGH - That project, Mr Finch, is actually in the forward estimates. If you go to the capital investment program, on page 7.30, there is a table there 7.26. That shows clearly that the prison infrastructure redevelopment program has a budget in the forward estimates, so that is for 2010-11 onwards. There is no allocation in the current Budget.

Mr FINCH - Okay. But that is still proceeding as per the plan and the schedule?

Ms SINGH - There will be planning that will be done in the forward estimates on the prison infrastructure redevelopment at that time. But there will be no planning done in the current year we are coming to.

Mr FINCH - Thanks very much.

CHAIR - Minister, if we can go now to output group 8.

**Output group 8
Consumer services**

8.1 Fair, safe and equitable marketplace -

[12.00 p.m.]

Ms SINGH - I will start with a brief overview. Madam Chair, if I may?

CHAIR - If brief is five minutes maximum.

Ms SINGH - I will call to the table Chris Batt, who is Director, Office of Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading, and also my adviser, Pat McConville. I am sure members of the Legislative Council are aware that I recently launched a Rental Deposit Authority, which we refer to as MyBond. You may have seen the ads running on television at the moment. That is, of course, a major project that consumer affairs and fair trading - which I will refer to as CAFT - have been working on for some time. I have provided committee members today with kits of the RDA.

CHAIR - I might add that the tourism minister provided us with CDs, so this is not really coming up to scratch, minister.

Mr DEAN - I think we were given one of these very recently.

Ms SINGH - I hope you were. I did ask them to be circulated. Of course, -

Mr DEAN - I was, and I was not happy with it.

Ms SINGH - That is one area that has taken up a lot of CAFT's work and time, but it is now up and running. Of course, it is simply something that is in place in every other State in Australia - that is a Rental Deposit Authority where bonds are kept with that authority to, hopefully, resolve disputes in a more efficient manner.

We have also had our inquiry hotline continuing with a large number of callers each year. We have had CAFT assisting approximately 12,000 callers each year on our inquiry hotline. Most inquiries are simple matters where sufficient advice is given over the phone to consumers to resolve their problems. Of course, that service operates during business hours and provides advice on a range of matters, including building, travel, rental issues and the like. Private rental issues comprise 20 per cent of those calls.

Also we have had recently a ministerial council held here in Hobart, which I chaired in the Long Room. Along with my other portfolio responsibilities, there was significant reform designed to deliver on the promise of the Federal Government's seamless national economy. Many of those reforms are in my portfolio of consumer affairs. The Office of Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading here in Tasmania has specific responsibility for issues under that COAG agenda, such as the transfer of consumer credit, mortgage broking, business names and trade measurement. That will also go to the Commonwealth.

CHAIR - Thanks, minister, that is about three minutes.

Ms SINGH - All right, so what would you like to know?

CHAIR - Is there anything you would like to add?

Ms SINGH - Anything else? Sorry, I thought that was time. The office has responsibility to progress other COAG reforms, such as the harmonisation of security agent licensing, and the adoption of the Australian consumer law. Unfair contract terms are part of that national law, which will be in place by the end of the year. The remaining provisions will be in place by the end of 2010. Operating together under a national single law will allow Tasmania to work together with other jurisdictions to make sure unfair trading and product safety can be addressed before they become an issue here.

Consumer credit, of course, the COAG agreed that regulatory responsibility for consumer credit, including fringe market and payday lender, will be transferred to the Commonwealth. My predecessor, Mr Llewellyn brought to the House legislation to restrict the capacity of high-margin lenders to advertise. However, in October COAG agreed to bring forward their commencement of consumer credit, so, on that basis, to allow consultation and time and things, the National Consumer Credit Protection Bill 2009 will be introduced to the Commonwealth Parliament in June this year and proclaimed in September.

We also have obviously a number of audits that go on throughout the year: liquor measurement audits, toy safety audits and scanning audits across the State and also vendor disclosure. It is my intention to introduce vendor disclosure legislation for residential houses to allow part 10 of the Property Agents and Land Transactions Act 2005 to be proclaimed. Again, vendor disclosure is something other States have that we have not had here in Tasmania.

CHAIR - I am sure you have a lot of your staff put up their hand for the audit job when you are talking about the liquor and the toys.

Ms SINGH - I am sure the staff at consumer affairs and fair trading, those that go out and do those audits, enjoy it.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. Mr Finch.

Mr FINCH - With this national uniformity in a number of policy areas, credit regulations, are they one of them?

Ms SINGH - Basically, yes, that is consumer credit.

Mr FINCH - Yes.

Ms SINGH - When we talk about consumer credit, we are talking about registration and licensing requirements that will be introduced. They will be administered, actually by ASIC, so ASIC will actually be set up down here in Tasmania, and they will comprehensively address problems in the fringe credit market in Tasmania. Mr Batt may wish to comment about the role ASIC will play and how that will move forward.

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Mr BATT - It is probably useful to say that the consumer credit law is already uniform, but there are a couple of areas like interest rate caps and licensing that are outside of that uniformity arrangement. What COAG decided in order to achieve true uniformity is to move it from the States and Territories to ASIC under Commonwealth law so that will be a completely and totally uniform scheme.

Mr FINCH - Have we been behind other States in Tasmania in respect to these regulations?

Mr BATT - No, certainly not behind. We have been different, in the sense that we do not, egg, regulate interest rate caps and we do not currently have a licensing regime, but the large body of consumer law is part of a template scheme, which is enacted through the Queensland Parliament, and we have participated fully in that. The law in Tasmania is exactly the same as the law in all other jurisdictions.

Mr FINCH - Are we going to see more of a reliance, minister, on Federal consumer protection services? From what you say with these developments with ASIC coming here, do we need to concern ourselves at a State level?

Ms SINGH - This is a COAG initiative, the national seamless economy, and we play a very important role in that. I would say that there is a lot of work. Even when you are handing over parts of services to the Federal Government, there is a lot of work that goes into that handing over process as well.

Mr FINCH - Yes.

Ms SINGH - But, I think it has a lot of merit in the way that we do live in one country, and having some of these different regulations and laws when it comes to business names and product safety and fringe market lending and the like, there should be more uniformity, I believe, in that. Consumer affairs and fair trading still have a very large role to play in that.

Mr FINCH - Thank you. One role of output group 8 is to enforce product safety standards. Could I get some idea of how effective this is in Tasmania? What has been the level of product recalls here and have there been any prosecutions?

Ms SINGH - As I said to you earlier, Mr Finch, we have our audits, and one of those audits, for example, is in the area of toy safety. That audit, for example, leading up to Christmas, we had 1400 toys inspected, mostly from small toy retailers. You can imagine with toys, a lot of them come from China and other places and are made in different ways and with different rules to our own country. Large retailers and department stores generally do carry the same product lines nationwide, and they are tested by other jurisdictions. But CAFT works with other consumer affairs officers to ensure that product safety is nationally consistent and all toys that were inspected were all compliant. So that is just with toys, as an example.

Mr FINCH - On that subject, though, minister, it is interesting that they are not actually monitored coming into the country, or is that not possible?

Ms SINGH - I might ask Mr Batt to respond to that.

Mr BATT - Not all toys that are imported are tested, but, certainly, there is a close association between the ACCC, the Federal counterpart, and our jurisdiction with customs.

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Certainly customs have cooperated on a number of occasions in stopping toys where there is clearly a safety issue. But, clearly, the task of scrutinising every single product that comes into the country is not possible.

Mr FINCH - Was there something else, minister?

Ms SINGH - Yes. Mr Finch, prosecution, obviously, is an option when it comes to that. Obviously, it is seen as very much a last resort. We try as much as possible for issues to be resolved for consumers through advice and conciliation. Obviously, the cost when you go to prosecution is a lot higher as well. Advice and conciliation is the way that CAFT try to ensure disputes are resolved.

Mr FINCH - So during the last 12 months, no prosecutions?

Ms SINGH - No.

Mr FINCH - Thanks. Fair, safe and equitable marketplace, this phrase has a nice ring about it, but the reality is that some people do not view it as fair and equitable in respect of the supermarket place. Is there an understanding, or do you think that Tasmanian consumers are getting a fair deal in respect of the structure of our supermarket operations?

Ms SINGH - That is a fairly broad question. Obviously we have only got two major players in Tasmania when it comes to supermarket operations. We also have some smaller supermarket providers. I have not received any complaint or anything about supermarkets. Are you referring mainly to price, Mr Finch, or service?

Mr FINCH - Just a fair marketplace. You know, maybe there is seen to be a duopoly in this State and in other places. In Tasmania, particularly, we have strong domination here by Coles and Woolworths. IGA is a smaller player. So you are getting a sense that there is not consumer concern coming through the office?

[12.15 p.m.]

Ms SINGH - Not in the office. However, I would always like to see more competition when it comes to supermarkets in Tasmania. You are right; there is fairly much a duopoly in the marketplace in Tasmania. I would like to see more competition come in. I know, for example, that Aldi have been setting up in various parts all over the country, but we have not been able to have Aldi come here. Now, I was interested to meet with Aldi, but I had discussions with the Federal minister for consumer protection at the time, which was Chris Bowen. Unfortunately, Aldi does not seem to be interested at this point in time in setting up in Tasmania. Now, I think that is something that consumers would welcome, so perhaps something still needs to be progressed and pursued there as to how we can encourage and hope that those other players do come to Tasmania, like Aldi, because it is only through having competition that we can break down that duopoly that we do have.

Obviously, we have now got the unit pricing, though, within our supermarkets. You would have noticed that unit pricing expresses prices for a product as a cost per unit of a standard measurement, for example, 100 grams or per litre. I believe that unit pricing gives shoppers a quicker and clearer picture of value for money, especially when it comes to groceries. Unit pricing, obviously, has come in in the last year or so. No, it will start later this year, although I have seen it already in some of the supermarkets. It is effectively starting later this year, but I

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think it is already in place. I welcome the announcement by Chris Bowen in January this year that the Australian Government will establish that unit pricing. Obviously that is under the Trade Practices Act. I think more competition in the marketplace when it comes to groceries is only a good thing for Tasmania.

Mr FINCH - This is probably more of concern to Tasmanians, and that is the price of petrol from one place to another. I am just wondering if you could update us on the monitoring that might take place by your office or other agencies like the RACT to keep an eye on petrol prices and to inform the community what is actually occurring.

Ms SINGH - It will be very interesting to see the results of the monitoring of petrol pricing. However, that is being undertaken by Treasury. CAFT does not have carriage of the monitoring of petrol prices. That is something that Treasury are monitoring. It has been an initiative announced by the Treasurer. While I still have very much an interest in it being the minister for consumer protection, I will need to be provided with that information from The Treasurer in relation to the outcome of the monitoring.

Mr FINCH - So that probably brings me to another point about if there is somebody in the community concerned about consumer affairs, do you have a hotline? Do you have a direct contact? How do people come to consumer affairs and say, 'I have got an issue here. I am worried about petrol prices. I'm worried about supermarket prices. What's your take on this? How do I complain to you? Am I being registered as a complaint now?'

Ms SINGH - We do, Mr Finch. We do have a hotline, a consumer affairs and fair trading telephone advisory service. As I said earlier, it assists approximately 12,000 callers a year.

Mr FINCH - Did I miss that?

Ms SINGH - Yes. That is quite a lot of callers that are seeking assistance from that advisory line that is set up. The advisory line sponsors an average of 63 consumer calls a day. The office responds to more than 20,000 calls a year, including inquiries about business names and incorporated association. It is very important for consumers to be able to pick up the phone and talk to someone about their problem. That is clearly what our advisory hotline is doing. It is a really good initiative that CAFT runs. In many cases, though, it is really quite simple advice that is enough. But the advice can give great comfort, particularly to people in the community who are vulnerable and have no-one else to turn to, for example. I can tell you about the calls taken by advisory staff each year: 30 per cent relate to purchase, condition or warranty on general household goods such as washing machines, refrigerators and other appliances; 13 per cent relate to repairs, maintenance and performance of goods and services; 20 per cent relate to tenancy and real estate matters; 5 per cent to motor vehicles and; and 4 per cent relate to building matters. So the remaining 28 per cent relates to scams, communication issues, food and clothing, travel and other matters. I think that scams component is interesting. I think we really need to make all consumers out there aware of the scams, especially email scams. We all receive them. They go on all over the place. We have got a really good scams booklet. I am always out there talking about people to beware of scams.

Mr FINCH - Yes, there is a really tricky one that I have alert the taxation office to that came through in respect of very official looking statement about the fact that you are going to receive \$271.10 in a refund on your latest tax application, contact this number. It was so believable. We are used to the banks and we delete those, but this taxation office one was really quite

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professionally done and very skilled. I would imagine a lot of people would fall into the trap of that.

Ms SINGH - Well, I always ask people who come into contact with things like that to contact CAFT, to contact our consumer advisory number, so that we can do any follow-up that is required with some of those scams, because they really are just a really shocking cancer in our community the way they just get out, especially these days through email and so on. Some of those cases, though, that people ring up do require further follow-up, either by personal interview or a visit. So some of them do require further investigation just to determine whether or not there has been a breach of the legislation administered by CAFT. So some of them do require further work as well.

Mr FINCH - I must say, I contacted the taxation office, and they had issued a release on the mainland but not the Tasmania. So I noticed there was a press release this week alerting people to the fact that this scam is on.

Ms SINGH - That particular tax one. Yes, there has been a Commonwealth Bank one that I have received, saying your user name and ID has changed or something, use this now.

Mr FINCH - Yes. Just a point I would like to raise is an issue I dealt with Mr McConville over in respect of people who live on caravan park sites.

Ms SINGH - Right.

Mr FINCH - They have a situation where they do not have many rights as caravan park dwellers. I believe their circumstance is being dealt with by consumer affairs, and I am just wondering whether we are progressing towards legislation or maybe some changes there.

Ms SINGH - Thank you, Mr Finch. There has been a range of issues relating the operation of caravan parks that has arisen out of changes in this market in recent years. In 2007 CAFT, in consultation with the Caravan Industry Association of Tasmania, developed a voluntary code of practice for park operators. CIAT represents the majority of caravan and cabin park operators within Tasmania. Operators within the industry generally support that code of practice. So, CAFT has monitored compliance with that code of practice. Since its development, there have been only a few complaints. So the code of practice represents the accepted standards for members of CIAT in their dealings with park occupants. The code increases certainty for tenants and licensees and provides some level of protection for caravan park residents that you refer to. But Mr Batt could give you further advice in relation to CAFT's role in that.

Mr BATT - The situations are difficult, because often people have short-term licenses of only a year. That has been renewed for a long period of time, and you often find that people have very elaborate structures on land over which they have a very tenuous legal claim. What usually happens is the caravan park is sold and the new owner wants to build all sorts of new innovative things, and the first thing they want to do is to get rid of the long-term occupants. It is very difficult without creating law with retrospective affect to do anything about establishing rights. The role of the office has been to develop this code of conduct, but also to go in and actively negotiate on behalf of the parties. We have negotiated successful outcomes for about six or so people so far, and that is probably about as much as we can do. That has been successful.

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If we were to introduce, for example, legislation, unless it had retrospective effect, it would probably need to clean out the caravan parks in order to do that. It is a little bit of a balancing act at the moment. We are confident that we are doing the best we can on behalf of the consumer.

Mr FINCH - Can I just ask minister - this might also come back to Mr Batt - just in respect to how we compare legislatively in protecting the rights of people who live in caravan parks to other States?

Ms SINGH - I may ask Chris to respond to that.

Mr BATT - It is interesting, because we are often told through the media that we should get legislation equivalent to other jurisdictions, but our research indicates that there are no other jurisdictions that have greater protections for these circumstances than what we do. We have actually looked with interest to see what is happening, so I think that we have comparable protections for people within caravan parks as other jurisdictions.

Mr FINCH - So this code of practice, voluntary code of practice, is that likely to be reviewed or updated, or will there be a revisit to this code of practice to just see if circumstances are changing? We are living in a climate of people looking for different types of lifestyles. Certainly caravan parks offer that. People, once they go there and are ensconced there, they think they would like to have more certainty about this type of lifestyle.

Ms SINGH - Well, Mr Finch, I think if there is ongoing change in the market, which there has been, which has led to us developing the code of practice and so on, there could be potential for need to review in time. I think that the monitoring plays a role there in determining at what stage we do do any kind of change or review, because if we are only having a few complaints, perhaps it is still going okay. If that changes and if time has moved on, and the market has changed again, if any of those factors come to the fore, there could be a need to review. I think Mr Batt raised an important part, though, about when you raised about legislation. There is a risk of all the tenants being basically cleaned out is a worry. It is a concern, because these are people's homes. We do need to tread carefully when we deal with this issue.

Mr FINCH - My advice to people who have these concerns is to contact consumer affairs -

Ms SINGH - Absolutely.

Mr FINCH - About the voluntary code of practice in respect of this.

Ms SINGH - That is right.

Mr FINCH - It is available to them.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mr Finch. Mr Dean, you have a couple of quick questions.

Mr DEAN - Just a quick question: in relation to the bond moneys, there has been a little bit of flack in the press of late by mainly the owners of properties and the bond moneys and the fact that the bond moneys now have to be paid to the State. I ask the question first of all: where does the interest go that will be earned on those bond moneys that are paid into Service Tasmania?

Ms SINGH - Firstly, it has not started yet, Mr Dean. It starts on 1 July.

Mr DEAN - So where will the interest go?

Ms SINGH - Firstly, the cost of running a new system like this certainly means that there is a cost imperative that goes into running such a system. So, as far as any interest that comes about, when it comes about, - interest rates are pretty low at the moment, are they not - that interest will go back into the operation and the running of the Rental Deposit Authority. I do not envisage seeing any kind of interest of any kind of largesse for some time yet.

Mr DEAN - Putting this into place, I but suspected you must have had some idea of what might come in by way of bonds?

Ms SINGH - Firstly, I will ask Mr Batt to fill in in a minute, but, firstly, when we are talking about the new rental deposit bond, MyBond, we are talking about new leases.

Mr DEAN - Yes.

Ms SINGH - So new leases as on 1 July. So there is a lot of existing leases, obviously, that do not fall into that category. If leases are simply renewed, they will not fall into that category either. So it is only when a lease -

Mr DEAN - That was my next question. So you have answered that. If they are renewed, people have got them now and they are continually renewed, okay.

Ms SINGH - That is right. We are talking about new leases in the rental market. Mr Batt, do you want to add to that?

Mr BATT - In terms of the cost of running the Rental Deposit Authority, we are required to establish a special trust fund where all the money will be deposited. The Residential Tenancy Act clearly specifies that all of the interest earned must be used for the purpose of administer the Rental Deposit Authority.

Mr DEAN - The interest must be used -

Mr BATT - For the purposes of administering the Rental Deposit Authority.

Mr DEAN - I have a question on that. How can that be so? If the interest you are getting in is too much for that, how can you use it for administering the program if you have too much coming in?

Mr BATT - We do not envisage that that is going to occur for a while. To offset the cost of setting up the RDA, we do not expect to break even for at least five years. The current interest rate provided by Treasury for special deposit fund is about 3.25 per cent. The biggest concern for us as it might go lower, which would actually threaten the financial viability of the RDA.

The services provided by the RDA obviously include staff to actually run the system, establish a computer system to manage a significant amount of data, and it also includes the resolution of disputes, which is a fairly labour-intensive and costly process. It also includes, for example, the production of the rental booklets that we provide to the community, tenants and property owners rely on that significantly for advice on residential tenancy matters. Also, it

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covers the ongoing public awareness to inform the community about their rights and obligations under that act. So, on that basis, the problem that you allude to might, in fact, arise, and we will be very grateful when that problem does arise.

Mr DEAN - What will happen if it does?

Mr BATT - Presumably -

Ms SINGH - We would value add to tenant services. Very hypothetically we are talking, Mr Dean. If we had this plethora of interest come in and the global market changed and interest rates went up again, we would value add to tenant services.

Mr DEAN - They will go up.

Mr BATT - That is an issue that we might deal with in the future.

CHAIR - So is it a fee-for-service, minister. Any other specific questions. I am mindful we have not got to work place standards yet.

Ms SINGH - It allows us to hedge against future dips later on. As we know, we live in a volatile global marketplace.

Mr WING - Is there any concern about the condition of some rental properties and should any action be taken to ensure certain minimum standards, particularly at a time when there is a shortage of rental accommodation and some owners, I think, are exploiting that situation?

[12.30 p.m.]

Ms SINGH - As I understand it, substandard housing is actually regulated, Mr Wing, under health. It is not specifically within my portfolio. It is not actually under the Residential Tenancy Act.

Mr WING - Even if they comply with health but are below par, in the interests of consumer protection, is it not seen as some function of the department?

Ms SINGH - I am willing to look at improving access to maintenance and some of those issues you have raised. I might have more discussions with my department, with CAFT, on some of those issues you have raised.

Mr WING - Good, thank you. I think international students, in particular, or students generally, would be appreciative of that as well other consumers. One other point: is there any type of regular monitoring of prices charged at supermarkets trading in mainland States and Tasmania to see what difference there is in the price of some articles not accounted for by freight?

Ms SINGH - I understand nationwide obviously Choice does that, and I think also there is GroceryWatch. I have had a little bit of interest in this myself, Mr Wing, and, therefore, I have had discussions with Mr Batt about this. Coming out of those discussions, we now have our own survey going on in relation to this issue. So perhaps at the completion of that we can provide you with the details and the outcomes of that survey. It is of interest. Obviously being an island State and have the issues of freight put upon us -

Mr WING - It is exaggerated.

Ms SINGH - As I understand it, there is some national pricing that does go on, regardless of freight. Correct me if I am wrong, but I think companies like Big W, who put out a national catalogue, that is the same price across the board. But I understand that is not the case when it comes to groceries.

Mr WING - Your survey will reveal that.

Ms SINGH - That is where the discussion came from. We will provide the committee with that information.

Mr WING - Thank you. If it does reveal an unfair disparity as far as our consumers in Tasmania are concerned, I hope that might be an ongoing course of action.

Ms SINGH - Audit, yes.

**Output group 9
Industrial Relations Services**

9.1 Services of the Tasmanian Industrial Commission -

Ms SINGH - I will ask Mr Beswick to come to the table. We are talking about industrial relation, and I have got Mr Michael Stevens here with us.

CHAIR - I am mindful of the time, minister. We do need to finish by 1. I do believe it is important to have at least some questions on Workplace Standards.

Mr FINCH - If I could, minister, services of the Tasmanian Industrial Commission, I notice in the forward Estimates there is just that slight increase in the Estimates each year. Can you just tell me what the pressures here are to reflect that slight increase each year?

Ms SINGH - In the forward Estimates?

Mr FINCH - Yes.

Ms SINGH - Because the current Budget going into next year is reflecting the budget decrease, as are all agencies.

Mr FINCH - Yes.

Ms SINGH - In the forward estimates, I might ask Mr Stevens to explain.

Mr STEVENS - It is the effect of salary indexation and various other components that they put in to forward estimates. I have to say, the forward estimates obviously are an educated guess at this particular point in time, and they will be firmed up as we get to each particular year. There is probably not a lot to be seen from looking at the forward estimates.

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Mr FINCH - So what about in this area here in respect of some contribution to the 800 job loss situation? Are you able to provide some numbers from here from this output area to that situation? You have employees here?

Ms SINGH - We do have employees. Obviously we have commissioners and employees in the Tasmanian Industrial Commission. But in relation to the 800 across government, obviously, as outlined earlier, Mr Finch, there are a range of measures by which we can try to meet that. I think Ms Hutton might be able to talk across the agency as far as this agency goes, which, of course, is shared by Minister Llewellyn and Minister Giddings as well.

Ms HUTTON - Mr Finch, at this point, as far as the whole agency goes, as the minister said, the only calculations we have done are on the SES and senior to middle management levels. The agency will be required to lose one SES position over the period. This is information that the Attorney-General gave yesterday to another committee. It will also lose 12 at the middle management level. So far as the impact of the Budget management strategy on other positions, we are not in a position to know that yet. As the minister said, we will be looking at redundancies as a last resort.

Mr FINCH - So will it directly impact on the industrial commission?

Ms SINGH - I can inform you, Mr Finch, that obviously the commission is mindful of the Government's Budget strategy to restrict expenditure. Therefore, the Registrar has not sought to fill vacant positions in the Industrial Registry or replace hours of staff moving to part-time work since the commission's workload began to decrease in 2005-06. The commission's full-time equivalent level is now at 10.6, made up of four commissioners, 3.6 associates and one industrial registrar and two support staff.

Mr FINCH - Thanks, Minister. The Federal industrial laws, how do they impact on the Tasmanian Industrial Commission's services, if at all? Is there any reflection back to the commission?

Ms SINGH - Obviously you would be aware, Mr Finch, that with the Federal Government being in place, they have got rid of WorkChoices, which changed the face of the industrial system landscape across Australia by bringing forward at the last election their commitment to go forward with fairness policy implement nation plan. Part of that, of course, includes us being asked by the Federal Government to hand over the rest of the private sector employees to be under the Federal Government's jurisdiction. Obviously those private sector employees already covered under corporations were already in the Federal system because of WorkChoices, but there were still those in trusts and sole traders that were still in the Tasmanian industrial system and, therefore, the Tasmanian Industrial Commission heard such disputes and cases and the like.

Just recently, on 11 June, I attended the work place relations ministerial council meeting where response was sought from all States as to their intention to refer powers to the Commonwealth for the remainder of the private sector. The remainder of the private sector, as I said, includes those partnerships and trusts and sole traders. So I announced at that meeting that Tasmania has agreed in principle to refer those powers to the Federal Government in order to create one, single national industrial relations system for the private sector. This means, obviously, that the referral powers will include local government as well, which currently is covered by Federal awards anyway.

What that means is, as a result of that timing, the Budget for the Tasmanian Industrial Commission does not reflect any changes in service. However, there will be changes in service once that referral is completed. It is not completed yet, because we have given in-principle support now, but a bilateral agreement has to be developed. So some negotiations need to continue between us and the Commonwealth on that agreement. I have been obviously consulting both employer and employee groups on those. But it does mean that the Tasmanian Industrial Commission will be left with roughly the 30,000 public sector employees under its jurisdiction. That operative date for the referral is 1 January 2010. In terms of the effect on the Tasmanian Industrial Commission, there have not been any discussions had yet with the commission on the overall referral of the private sector and the bilateral agreement that has to be developed.

If, following the referral, there is a way to reconfigure the services of the Tasmanian Industrial Commission to reflect the changes in workload, then we will consider those at that time. But at this point in time, we have only given the in-principle support. We have to go through those bilateral negotiations. Of course, in having the new Fair Work Act there, there is obviously Fair Work Australia, which is the only Australian Industrial Commission, and that will need to have a role and a place here in Tasmania. A lot of those discussions need to go on in that bilateral agreement, how Fair Work Australia will have its commissions and presence here. There is still a lot of work to be done.

CHAIR - Thank you, minister. No more questions. We are going to head out of that area, minister, because I am mindful that workplace services is an important area, and we do not want to miss it.

Mr WING - Are we not doing workers rehabilitation?

CHAIR - I was mindful that we are not going to have enough time.

Mr WING - I have a significant question.

CHAIR - One significant question with a very short answer.

Ms SINGH - I will talk quickly.

9.2 Workers' Rehabilitation and Compensation Tribunal -

Mr WING - I understand that the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act is being reviewed.

Ms SINGH - You are talking about the Clayton report?

Mr WING - I am speaking about that. I want to instance a case known to several of us about a Tasmanian who suffered very severe injuries in a motor vehicle collision in the course of his employment. He lost his right arm and had other severe injuries. He has had a prosthesis in lieu of the right arm, which needs to be replaced every three years at a cost of \$93 000. Under the present legislation, after 10 years, he will be entitled to no further assistance. Could that situation and others of an extreme nature such as that be taken into account in framing the amendments to the workers compensation legislation?

Ms SINGH - Mr Wing, firstly, I just want to say that I am very keen to improve the benefits for injured workers. I think that Government, though, also has with that the obligation to ensure that the cost of the scheme in Tasmania remains affordable for Tasmanian employers and businesses and does not place them at a competitive disadvantage with other counterparts. I think the aspect that you raise is one of many that have been looked at and addressed in the Clayton report as far as various recommendations that he has put forward in how we could amend our Workers Compensation and Rehabilitation Act to make it address fairness in the workplace, basically, in relation to injuries that happen at work. Not to waste too much of the committee's time, I am committed to working further on a package that will reform workers compensation in Tasmania. I have been spending a lot of time talking to experts, seeking advice from my department and the WorkCover Board and talking to employer groups and unions and so on to ensure that when the time comes for me to bring forward that package, it will be a balanced package and it will be fair.

[12.34 p.m.]

Mr WING - When do you expect you may be bringing that forward?

Ms SINGH - I feel that it will be fairly imminent.

Mr WING - Fairly imminent.

Mr DEAN - Included in that package, is there some special position for police?

Ms SINGH - Mr Dean, I am not going to go into the package now because it is still being developed and worked on.

Mr DEAN - I have other questions, but I will keep them.

CHAIR - Thank you, there are no other questions in this output group.

Mr DEAN - Well, there are, but you are not allowing them.

CHAIR - I was going to say I am not allowing them.

**Output group 11
Workplace Services**

11.1 Workplace Standards -

Mr DEAN - How many are employed in this area?

Ms SINGH - Mr Ormerod has come to the table, and he is General Manager, Workplace Standards Tasmania, so I will let him answer that.

Mr ORMEROD - The current financial year, 130 FTEs.

Mr DEAN - Yes. Is it right, minister, that we have had over the past two or three months two senior managers within workplace standards finish, not replaced?

Ms SINGH - Mr Ormerod?

Mr ORMEROD - Because we were aware that we were facing some need to make savings, we did it in a way which we felt was going to impact least of all on our operational output capacity. We have taken a level of management out of our organisational structure, which helps us to achieve our targets for the next financial year while, at the same time, being able to continue to achieve a presence and providing the services that people expect from us.

Ms SINGH - The numbers have increased, though in Workplace Standards on the previous year.

Mr DEAN - I am going to get around to that. But those positions, I take it, that have not been filled, were they vacancies or were the members made redundant?

Mr ORMEROD - The two positions, in particular, I can mention them exactly - the southern regional management position - that person retired, and the northern regional management position, that person was transferred to a newly created position to assist us with major infrastructure plans. That position was then rolled in so we have one person operating regional management for northern Tasmania. There used to be a north-west regional manager, and that person has taken over both now.

Ms SINGH - There have been no redundancies.

Mr DEAN - You refer to the increase in staff. I am going to turn that around to the State redundancies that we have referred to right through the last three days. What sort of an impact will that have on this area? Will it have any? What other cuts will be required of Workplace Standards Australia?

Ms SINGH - Again, this comes back to the general discussion we have been having about ways in which my agency is trying to achieve its Budget savings across the board. That is obviously vacancy control - that means not filling vacancies. It is a range of options, vacancy control being one of them, but also, of course, advertising, mobile phones, vehicles, travel, all of those budget measures have been equally shared across all my portfolio areas, that includes Workplace Standards Tasmania.

Mr DEAN - My question from that comes: is the work load increasing within workplace standards, or has it levelled off or decreasing? Where are we in the current work load, minister, and the personnel?

Ms SINGH - I would say it is changing in the way the priorities are coming about for workplace standards. Obviously, one of the priorities of mine as minister has been, for example, in mine safety. I have had a fairly strong focus on mine safety, because we know that we have had the Beaconsfield inquest, we have also had the Renison Bell mine inquest, as well as the Legislative Council report recently handed down. That contained various recommendations. Since Beaconsfield and the like, the mines inspector within Workplace Standards has employed a full complement of mines inspectors. That is obviously an employment issue. We have also had the dangerous substances area. There has been a strong focus on looking at areas of dangerous substances. We had the amnesty on those coming forward with dangerous substances. That was a lot of work for my staff at Workplace Standards Tasmania because we had quite a lot of people out there in Tasmania that took up the opportunity to bring forward their various explosives at that time. We had quite an intake of that.

There has been some change of focus in certain areas in Workplace Standards, but it is certainly working robustly and hard and continues to be out there in the field. Inspectors are working hard in the area of workplace safety, so we have got a fairly strong agenda and a good team of people working there.

Mr DEAN - My next question: where is the area of most concern right at this present time? Mining, forestry? Where are you concentrating on, minister, in relation to workplace safety?

Ms SINGH - Firstly, my view with workplace safety is it has to be across every industry and Government.

Mr DEAN - Of course.

Ms SINGH - It has to be a change of culture when we talk about workplace safety. It is something that people always need to be vigilant about. But, in relation to industry-specific areas that you asked, Mr Dean, I will ask Mr Ormerod to comment on that.

Mr ORMEROD - It is interesting: mine safety is not what we call a black spot area. It is not an area that attracts high injury. It is something that seems to attract the interest of people. But the national black spot areas are things like health workers and rural workers, the forestry and farming areas. They are black spot areas. We participate in national campaigns to raise awareness and to help educate people in those areas to try and reduce injury levels.

Mr DEAN - Minister, Workplace Safety Tasmania is very similar to police, in that at a time of economic difficulties and problems, where people are cost cutting, redundancies are occurring right across organisations, the work in this area is likely to increase. Has that been considered? Do you believe that that will happen within the State service, if we have 700-odd employees made redundant, there could be some workplace safety issues arise across the organisation? Have we looked at that? Has there been a strategy put in place to determine whether that is likely to occur?

Ms SINGH - I think there always has to be strong measures in place in any workplace. It does not matter whether it is a workplace of five or a workplace of 500. Those measures must ensure that there are really robust and good policies for workplace safety in that workplace. I have had the opportunity since being minister to go to a number of variously different workplaces to see just how they are addressing their workplaces. Of course, each year the WorkCover Board runs the workplace safety awards. Of course, that is where we highlight good or best practice when it comes to workplace safety. It is by positive initiatives like that that we can ensure that people are always going to try to do the right thing to have their business or their industry or organisation as a showpiece. There is nothing more rewarding for those businesses to be able to get up there on stage or up in lights in magazines to see that they are doing the right thing. I am very much dedicated to ensuring we continue through Workplace Standards Tasmania to have our inspectors out there on the field to be inspecting those workplaces and so forth. As I said to you, Mr Dean, it is about a cultural change. There has been, unfortunately, some industries, some areas, that have just not valued workplace safety. It is about us continuing to try and get that message out there about how important it is. Of course, with my workers compensation rehabilitation hat on, it is important so that premiums come down so we have fewer accidents in the workplace.

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Mr DEAN - That is my next question: we have had the two senior people made redundant, the regional managers -

Ms SINGH - Not made redundant, no. They retired.

Mr DEAN - Not filled. The positions were not filled. So I ask the question now: what supervision will occur within those areas where those positions have not been filled? I ask the question because I was recently speaking to a member, who was to remain nameless, quite obviously, who has said that they do not have the time to perform the functions that they should now do, that they are overworked and they are struggling to keep up - that is people working in this area. Do you wish to comment on that?

Ms SINGH - There have been no issues like that raised with me. Mr Dean, I encourage you to always correspond with me if -

Mr DEAN - I cannot help it when somebody bails me up.

Ms SINGH - Yes, but to pass that to me so that -

Mr DEAN - I am doing it now.

Ms SINGH - Yes, but to always do that, because it is only then that we can try and address what issues may be out there and find out about those. I understand that Workplace Standards Tasmania is working very effectively and within its means. I do not want to talk about individual cases.

Mr DEAN - I am certainly not raising the fact that they are not doing their job or that they are not doing it to high standard. I am not suggesting that at all. They are doing it to a high standard. I am saying that they do not have enough employed in their area and do not have the time to be able to carry out their financials in the way they would like to do it.

CHAIR - I am mindful of the time, Mr Ormerod, and I do not want to put too much pressure on you.

Mr ORMEROD - Any operator who has workplace health and safety at heart would always want to have more time to do their jobs. I am not aware of any specific issues from staff about that.

Mr DEAN - Are we on target currently this year? I think the target was set for 13.2 injuries in the workplace. I do not where the 0.2 comes in. So where are we with workplace injuries so far this year?

Ms SINGH - I do not think that those statistics for this year would exist yet, would they? No, we do not have statistics for this year.

Mr DEAN - But you do not know where you are going?

Ms SINGH - I can say in Tasmania that there were 11.2 claims per one million hours worked for 2006-07 reported. Serious claims include all facilities, all permanent incapacity injuries,

temporary claims that involve more than one week lost time from work. Average in Australia is 8.8 claims per one million hours worked.

Mr DEAN - So we do not know how we are proceeding this year, whether we are making improvements?

Ms SINGH - We would not have those statistics yet, Mr Dean.

Mr DEAN - I thought you might have them.

CHAIR - Follow-up question and final question.

Mr DEAN - One final question: I have raised this previously and that is that there is currently a plan for a memorial garden for fallen workers at Launceston.

Ms SINGH - Yes, I am aware of that.

Mr DEAN - Minister, what is the position of Workplace Standards Tasmania? Will they make a contribution? Will they become involved in this or are they involved in it in progressing this memorial park for fallen workers?

Ms SINGH - I am actually coming up to Launceston in a couple of weeks, I think, to have a look at the plans and so forth of the memorial park. I am quite aware of the progress that is being made there. I look forward to being able to make further announcements.

Mr DEAN - That sounds good, minister. I can make the announcement for you now.

CHAIR - I think you can probably pre-empt that one, Mr Dean.

11.2 Employer and employee services -

Mr GAFFNEY - Minister, I think the importance of workplace services is reflected in the \$4 million extra being budgeted for next year for both the standards and the services, according to the notes. Mr Dean has touched on a number of the areas I was going to question you on. However, the \$2 063 000 allocated for employer and employee services is quite substantial and has a projected increase for future years. The Government's note suggests that the increase primarily reflects a more accurate estimate of activities undertaken by WorkCover Tasmania. Looking at the many roles and responsibilities of WorkCover Tasmania, I gather this increase is to cover current activities and responsibilities?

Ms SINGH - Yes. I might ask Mr Stevens to respond to that, Mr Gaffney.

Mr STEVENS - Basically, it is more to do with the operation of the trust account that attaches to this area. Treasury, if you like, do not review the trust account every year; they review it about every three years. So you will see, if you look back on past estimates, about every three years trust accounts are adjusted, if you like. It is money in and money out, so to speak. Increases in money due to premiums has now, if you like, come out the other side in terms of marketing campaigns and other WorkCover activities that take place. It tends to be more an accounting-type approach rather than actual, if you like, specific money. There is always money going through, and it increases as the years went past, but Treasury did not actually adjust the

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trust accounts. They only do that on a periodic basis. That trust account, I guess, better reflects the actuality than the last couple of years.

[1.00 p.m.]

Ms SINGH - It is a bit like having your house revalued.

Mr GAFFNEY - So it is not actually funding going into the organisation.

Mr STEVENS - It will be extra money, if you like, coming in and going out, but if you actually reconcile with the last two years, you will find that that figure there for the last year, in fact, was well under what it should have been. So it is not a substantial increase in 12 months; it has been a gradual increase until you actually get the trust account revalued, so to speak.

Mr GAFFNEY - I appreciate that. We will skip on to the KPIs for WorkCover Tasmania. I am interested to note the safety of the workers, the expectation approvals, facilitation of public assistance and enforcement. I am just wondering about the record of the number of injuries in the 2007-08. Is that an increase or a decrease in the year before?

Ms SINGH - I just read out those injuries, did I not?

Mr GAFFNEY - You did the injuries, but not the severe injuries, which I think is 12 weeks loss of work. I am just wondering whether there has been an improvement on the 12 months before to see whether the changes have been advantages.

Ms SINGH - Just one moment. There were 11.2 claims per 1 million hours worked for 2006-07. The actual number of serious injuries from 2006-07 declined to 3 390 from the 2005-06 figure of 3 430. So the 2006-07 figure was 3 390.

Mr GAFFNEY - Has that been through work from Workplace Standards Tasmania and Workplace Services pushing for those improvements, and how has the response been from the business sector?

Ms SINGH - I was actually up in the north-west of the State at the beginning of this year where we ran an Expect the Inspector program, which was basically periodic inspectors randomly going into workplaces. We ran a bit of a campaign on that in the northwest because, from my memory, the northwest had a slightly higher rate of injury than other areas. Perhaps it was related to some of the industries up there. But that Expect the Inspector program had 455 businesses which received a site visit by an inspector, and feedback from industry was very positive. So it was not an enforcer going in; it was more for providing advice and information. There was very positive feedback, including that the workplace visits had been useful and that businesses had a better understanding of their obligations as a result of those visits. Site visits were not comprehensive safety audits, so it was not like an enforcer going in, but it was more designed to give each business a clean bill of health. They were designed to simply raise the profile of safety. I think the Expect the Inspector program did help very much with continuing to fight the battle of trying to reduce severe injuries in the workplace. Mr Gaffney, I will note that Tasmania's 2006-07 performance for severe injuries was 2.2 claims per million hours worked. The average in Australia was 2 claims per million hours worked. So we are actually above the national average.

Mr GAFFNEY - You mentioned the WorkCover safety awards and how positive they were. The Safe Work Tasmania week, do you do an evaluation of the effectiveness of that awareness

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campaign? Is there any monitoring of whether it is getting to the right places and what response have you received from businesses and community alike.

Ms SINGH - Mr Ormerod, do you want to comment on that, because I was not the minister last year when that occurred.

Mr ORMEROD - Safe Work Tasmania is run every year. They always do interviews when they run the various forums and seminars, and people are asked to comment on what they have learnt from that. The majority of responses are very good. They are always looking every year for new ideas for the way they can actually provide information to the community which best suits their immediate interests. We are now calling for interest this year on any topics that people would like us to cover next October to run forums on.

Mr GAFFNEY - One last one: are there any questions that I should have asked that I have missed?

CHAIR - No.

Ms SINGH - Well, I was just going to -

CHAIR - Minister, no, there is not. We do not do that. Minister, just before we finish up for today - we appreciate your time - I just want to give you some notice that the nominal insurer was an area that, after some confusion, finally arrived with this committee. Unfortunately we have not got to scrutinise it, because it has not been scrutinised in 2006, 2007 or 2008. We believe it does belong with you, and we will make some attempt to discuss this particular issue at a later time. It was confusing in the Budget Papers and we received it as late advice.

Ms HUTTON - That was the error I was thinking of in fact, about errors in the Budget Papers. Not our error.

CHAIR - I just want to give you that notice that if we are fortunate to have you in front of this committee next year, we will start with the nominal insurer, albeit that it is almost gone, I believe. There are aspects of it that are a bit confusing. I am disappointed that we did not get to it, but I just wanted to put it on notice.

Minister, I would like to thank you for your time today and all the work that obviously goes into preparing for Estimates Committee. I hope you enjoyed the process, and I thank other members.

Ms SINGH - Thank you.

The committee suspended at 1.07 p.m.