

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO STATE PLAN REPORTING

At Sydney on Monday 27 October 2008

The Committee met at 1.30 p.m.

PRESENT

Mr P. E. McLeay (Chair)

Mr N. Khoshaba
Mr G. A McBride
Mr A. J. Roberts
Mr J. H. Turner

CHAIR: I welcome the representative of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Thank you for appearing today to provide evidence on the Public Accounts Committee inquiry into State Plan reporting. The Committee is close to finalising its report on this inquiry but before doing so wishes to follow-up with the department on questions that have arisen and hear about developments since our last hearing.

BENEDICT THOMAS KENEALLY, Executive Director, Premier's Delivery Unit, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Level 15, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney, NSW 2000, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Please state your occupation and in what capacity you are appearing before the Committee.

Mr KENEALLY: I am the Executive Director of the Premier's delivery unit, which is a division within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and I am representing the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

CHAIR: I draw your attention to the fact that your evidence is given under parliamentary privilege and you are protected from legal or administrative action that might otherwise result in relation to the information you provide. I should point out that any deliberate misleading of the Committee may constitute a contempt of the Parliament and an offence under the Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before we proceed to questions?

Mr KENEALLY: No, I am happy to proceed straight to questions.

CHAIR: Many submissions focused on the need for region-specific performance information. Some information is now being provided for most regions through regional delivery updates and performance dashboards. Can you please explain the notion of a dashboard and how delivery updates and performance dashboards are put together? In particular, what informs what information is included? For example, in contrast to others, the Central Coast dashboard, in which Mr McBride takes a keen interest, does not include information on healthy communities. Are there reasons for that?

Mr KENEALLY: I do not know if you have a full set of the regional updates that have been produced this year, so I will table them but I might just keep them here to refer to them until that point. In terms of putting them together, they are prepared in consultation with the various lead agencies that are responsible for delivering the priorities under the plan, so the information is sourced from them and then verified and checked by us before being released. It goes to Cabinet for final consideration. In terms of the decision as to what is included, the starting point was the "delivering locally" chapter 8 of the original State Plan. Based on the consultations that were held in those regions, we identified what appeared to be the priority concerns of those regions. That consultation, going back to 2006, included both local meetings as well as receiving submissions over the Internet.

That of course has to be a somewhat impressionistic task to identify what are the key concerns, but we have used that to provide those materials. Then what we have done in actually releasing those materials, not yet in all areas but in most regions, we have held further consultations with a mix of local government, non-government organisations and other local organisations or local representatives to reconfirm those priorities, to identify particular actions that might want to be taken against those priorities and so on. So there is a checking back against that list of priorities.

Partly the ability to report on local delivery is a function of data availability at that level of specificity. Not all priorities can be reported on at that level of detail. So that is one dimension. The second dimension, obviously, concerns the issues that were identified as relevant. With the Central Coast and the healthy communities reporting, you will recall that there was a decision to do an audit of reporting of triage performance in a couple of Central Coast hospitals and we felt therefore that it would be unreliable to publish that data at that point in time when we were releasing the data. Hence the decision not to produce the data at that level of specificity because it had been subject to complaints and concerns about whether it was reliable.

CHAIR: How many region-specific dashboards are there? How did you determine the regions?

Mr KENEALLY: I believe there is one for each Premier's department region, and there are nine or 10 regions. I will have to double check. It depends a little bit on western Sydney in that in western Sydney there are two Premier's department regions, one for south-west Sydney and one for western Sydney, but we reported for greater western Sydney as a whole while having consultations for each of those two regions. So again it is just a question about what level of specificity and what level of geographic isolation the data is available.

CHAIR: When we last checked there was no update on Western New South Wales.

Mr KENEALLY: Yes, that is still to be released. We are finalising some of the data points there and we are trying to time it with the ability to align it with the response to the rural and regional task force, which we have not been responsible for. We did not want to put out a document that was in conflict with it.

CHAIR: Is that the parliamentary one?

Mr KENEALLY: The parliamentary one, yes.

Mr JOHN TURNER: It was not entirely representative of the Parliament.

CHAIR: Will there be reporting of performance against all State Plan targets for each region in more detail or just what is on the dashboards for the regions?

Mr KENEALLY: We would intend to go to greater levels of detail. As I said, there are some priorities that simply cannot be reported at that level of detail. Off the top of my head, I could give you some examples. But the intention would be to provide it in as much detail as we possibly can. For example, some of them are difficult to determine at a regional level. To take road safety, you can report underlying data, like the number of casualties or fatalities, at a regional level but you cannot report it at the rate per million vehicle kilometres travelled because you do not have the breakdown of vehicle kilometres travelled at a regional level. So the highest level information is only available at the State level. Similarly the victimisation rates, because they are based on an Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] survey and because of the size of that data collection, it is reliable at State level but once you get down to statistical areas the level of reliability of the data is not there because of the sample size—smaller and smaller geographic population grouping.

As a consequence, we use the proxy of crime rate as reported by Police and the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. Using the example of road casualties, we could probably report casualties by region but we would not have it in that measure of vehicle kilometres travelled. Our focus to date has been on reporting against those issues that were identified as highest priorities regionally, but as we have developed the reporting systems and can do it in a way that is not onerous in terms of departmental resources to report to us—and again that is often dependent on the nature of their core systems and on the systems that can extract data from them—the intention will be to provide that data at a regional level.

CHAIR: How would you report that data, if it is not going to be on the dashboard?

Mr KENEALLY: As you see with, for example, the Central Coast, it is a combination of a four-page summary and the dashboard. So in the written summary we might say something about the number of casualties that have risen or fallen in the Central Coast region over this period. But we would not actually report that on the dashboard because it might not be a particularly important number. It may be; that is just an example.

Mr JOHN TURNER: Earlier you referred to the Central Coast and the problems with triage reporting, so you did not do a report. Is that not the very essence of the State Plan—if there is a problem, identify it and report it?

Mr KENEALLY: I do not recall the full details. I just remember that there was a period when the integrity of the reporting of emergency room waiting times in Gosford and Wyong hospitals was questioned and a full audit was requested to look back at the reliability of that data over the last couple of years. On that basis we were not willing to say that emergency room waiting times have improved, got worse or whatever in that region because of the reliability of that data having been called into question.

Mr JOHN TURNER: I understood that you said there was no report on health at all for the Central Coast because of the problem with triage reporting. There is a lot more to health than triage. It is important in emergencies, but I understood you to say that you did not bother to report at all on health.

Mr KENEALLY: No, again in the report there are reports on health but in terms of the dashboards, the data selected for presentation, we did not report that data because we had reason to believe that data might not be reliable.

Mr JOHN TURNER: You said a moment ago you reported on the highest priorities regionally. Who determines what the highest priority in a region is?

Mr KENEALLY: When we conducted the original consultation on the State Plan in 2006, at about 30 different locations we held meetings regionally and we also reviewed submissions by location and tagged them for the region they came from. Looking across that, in the State Plan in chapter 8, Delivering Locally, we then wrote up what we understood those priorities were by region, as they were expressed to us. Then, as we have gone back there, we have reviewed that prioritisation. It has been one of the particular activities conducted at those regional forums we have held. We have gone back out there with these regional updates and dashboards.

Mr JOHN TURNER: You have gone back to the original regional forums?

Mr KENEALLY: We have gone back to a regional forum that has been a combination of local governments and selected non-government organisations based on the advice of the Premier's regional coordination manager. It was a selected group. It included obviously elected representatives through the local government, but also some selected representatives.

Mr JOHN TURNER: Was there any form of advertising for the general public to come along in this return bout?

Mr KENEALLY: I do not believe so, no. It was mostly through local government.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: It seems from your comments that between the different departments and structures within government there is no harmonising of reporting of data. That being the case, when you draw out information from the different departments, how can you validate what you are comparing with the actual benchmarks or targets you have set? It has been an issue for me for a long time that, for whatever reason, the departments do not have the same system. One department gets certain information, yet the same process in another department does not exist. Is it a priority for your organisation, given the fact that this is the State Plan and covers all aspects of government?

Mr KENEALLY: We need to distinguish between two elements. The first one is the geographical boundaries for the coding and reporting of data, and the second one is the actual systems for the recording and extracting and the sorts of information that are actually recorded in administrative data sets. On the first one, most agencies manage their data records in their service delivery boundaries. As you know, service delivery boundaries are not consistent and they are often not consistent for good reasons—the degree of physical and geographical size and space you need is different for a local area command than it is for a hospital area administration. However, in terms of being able to then provide useful whole-of-government views on performance, the fact that it is not necessarily recorded on a consistent geographic basis can make it hard to say, "This is how the Central Coast as a region is performing", or "These are the issues on the Central Coast we have to look at compared to other regions." One thing we found in working with agencies was that, for some of them, because they have got it down to a cadastral kind of level, it is actually very easy for them to link it by local government areas and put it against some concordance, which we provide, of which local government areas are in which region and just press a button and flick out a report. For other agencies it is quite difficult. They have to do a special run of reports, go down to each particular service point, be it a school or a hospital, and code it against one of the Premier Department's regions and then run a report that way.

What the ABS would tell you is that the future in terms of government statistics is the successful combination of census and survey level data with administrative data sets. When you combine those two bits of information, covered by privacy guidelines and that sort of stuff, you can get really powerful information about how well programs are working and how well populations and groups are performing in geographic or other locations. I think that would be ideal if we were able to get consistent boundaries for the reporting performance as opposed to necessarily the delivery of service. Delivery of service boundaries may well still be quite different.

The second issue is what data do people record about service events, populations or people that they serve? On that score across clusters—like human services and justice on the one hand and economic development and environmental and planning type groups on the other hand—to work towards some more consistency about what is recorded in data sets would be good. The difficulty is that sometimes some changes can be massively expensive in terms of what it means, you know, legacy systems and the core computing systems that people have. It is actually quite expensive to be able to change something like Police, Community

Services or whatever core systems. You need to be able to have a business case to justify that sort of change. To do it as systems migrate, as people upgrade systems and move them over to new systems, I think we should be aiming to do things on a consistent basis where we can collect, always able to know, sort of the cadastral level information or something like that so that we can do it geographically as well as some of those informations about the recipients.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: My experience on the Central Coast is that we are foot printed from everywhere else. For example, public works come from Blacktown, Housing comes from Maitland, originally Education came from North Sydney and Police came from Newcastle. Our statistics then get churned through the departmental regional statistics and often we are told that we cannot get the information for our Central Coast zone, notwithstanding that according to the Premier's department the Central Coast is a zone, but within the individual departments it is not. This has put up a barrier to getting the information we need to get the leverage to get equity in services.

Mr KENEALLY: It is a very similar point. If you let the service delivery boundaries define your performance reporting then you are always going to be at the mercy of that sort of situation. If, instead, we were saying we want to not only have standard boundaries for performance reporting but we would actually like those to line up with the statistical districts of the ABS and then you would be able to get some very powerful information at a regional level. We could say Central Coast as defined by ABS covers the two council areas and that is it. And we can actually then combine the statistical insight of the ABS with the administrative data sets that we get out of State Government service delivery and really start to understand how well or otherwise we are being served on a variety of dimensions.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: What is your title? You introduced yourself as Executive Director General of the Premier's Delivery Unit. On this witness sheet your title is Deputy Director-General.

Mr KENEALLY: The title is actually Executive Director of the Premier's Delivery Unit, and that is my role.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: What are we doing about the failure to collect this information, particularly with triage? From your point of view it must be frustrating and almost unacceptable that you are trying to present this information as part of a State Plan and reporting process. What have you put in place to come up with those correct figures? Will we see those figures?

Mr KENEALLY: I can take it on notice or I could refer you to Health for the specifics of how that audit process is timed and what its reporting deadlines are et cetera. I cannot provide that at the moment. In terms of our quality assurance of data, the approach we have taken is to divide all the various key performance indicators [KPIs] that we have set ourselves, or that we have set the government, and distinguish between those that have independence in their collection and reporting, and those that have independent verification and those that are purely administratively generated. So there is a large number of these that are ABS collected, or ABS set—I have no problem with those. I assume that the ABS is a reliable institution and we are happy to publish those directly. Then there is another set where there is some independence in the checking or in the ascertainment of those data sets. For example, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research [BOCSAR] may generate a data set. It is independent of the agency on which they are reporting and again I am happy to report those.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Will you take that on notice? Do you have the power to name and shame organisations that are not supplying correct information to you?

Mr KENEALLY: As I was going to say, the last step is that we have engaged the Auditor-General to review the other data sets. In the annual report, which is due out probably within the next few weeks, the Auditor-General's office will have reviewed those data sets that are administratively generated. In some sense it is not for me to do that, it is for somebody whose institutional role is actually independent and can actually make that ascertainment of the data sets.

CHAIR: From the collection of data and acknowledging that there are some anomalies in that process, you are confident that in most cases they can get to it eventually. South Australia is going through a process of regionalising its strategic plan so it is not just collecting data and reporting it regionally but actually adjusting the targets that it sets regionally. Are you thinking of doing such a process with this State Plan? For example,

take smoking rates across the State – whilst they are falling generally, in a region of the Central Coast, for instance, they may not be falling but the targets are not different. It is still the one target.

Mr KENEALLY: I think this question also applies to population groups as well. People might say regions, women, indigenous people et cetera. There are two observations: South Australia is now well into its second iteration of its State Plan, and the first few years was very much about establishing it as a way to manage government which for them was a significant change, and it also represents a significant change for us. So its initial focus was just using it as a whole-of-government tool. South Australia is three or four years further down the track in a process like this and so for them to move to that as an extension of it, I think, is understandable.

I think the pros and cons of tighter and tighter levels of targets for both population groups or for regions can be summarised as this: the pros are that it does help call out specifically disadvantaged groups or regions, and identify the particular efforts required there. In particular, if you are talking about 5 per cent of the population that are not reaching literacy levels, that is actually hard to focus on, but if you know that they are particularly in remote rural areas, and particularly that they are Aboriginal children, or something like that, then that may well help agencies focus their effort. So it may help bring a real priority to the most disadvantaged, and I think those arguments are solid.

The arguments against doing it at that sort of level are a bit about the degree to which that disempowers agencies from the task of delivery. I think one of the criticisms of the sort of Blair agenda in the United Kingdom was that it went from setting these national targets at quite a high level to promulgating literally thousands of targets at the level of each local government area, basically. It was seen as being too controlling, removing the sort of initiative from local government and taking it all back to the centre, in particular, once you move from outcomes, like reducing the smoking rate, to a series of input type measures as well. I think in a nutshell it is something you can get to as you understand more and more what it is going to take to deliver those targets. But I would be hesitant about doing it to fine grain levels, only because it will start to actually put the centre in control so if you were to balance it with some sort of a more engaged regional prioritisation process, something that did draw in a far stronger degree of local consultation in determining what our local priorities really are, you would need something like that to offset otherwise you would have a very controlling kind of centre.

CHAIR: Does the State Plan have a facility for providing incentives to regions that are doing better than average in the State Plan, or is it simply about targeting areas that are falling behind?

Mr KENEALLY: There is no incentive structure built into it. I think it probably provides more of a spur to underperformers. That is the nature of public service: you get your targets and if you are lucky you get a pat on the back. If you do not—

CHAIR: Just more on regions before we move on to other areas. You said that there was a second round of consultation with non-government organisations and local government associations. Do you think that was a successful way to go, and do you have any plans to have further regional consultation in the short term?

Mr KENEALLY: On the first question: I do not think it was wildly successful, nor do I think it was wildly unsuccessful, but I think given more time it could have been a lot better. In terms of further consultation, the Premier, on 26 September, sent a message to the Council of Social Service of New South Wales [NCOSS] at a conference on the State Plan and in it he announced that beginning in early 2009 we will commence a review of the priorities and targets in the New South Wales State Plan, and that will be achieved through a comprehensive consultation process with communities and stakeholders right across New South Wales. Given that we have got several months to prepare for that, to get out a good discussion document, I would think that that is something that we definitely aim to do.

CHAIR: We will move on to other areas. Mr Khoshaba?

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA: If we move on to the Auditor-General's review of the State Plan data and measures. The department previously indicated that it was intended that the State Plan annual report would be produced at a similar time to annual reports, which are generally due at the end of this month. When do you expect the annual report to be made available and do you think that the report will be tabled in Parliament?

Mr KENEALLY: In answer to the first question, it will be available in that sort of time frame, as originally indicated. It does rely upon a lot of the data which is produced through the annual report process, so it

requires that sort of data and input. The checking processes and the auditing processes that support the publication of the annual reports also support the verification of the data that is reported in the State Plan annual report. So, my expectations would be within the next few weeks. On the second part of the question about the report being tabled in Parliament, I do not know what the institutional arrangements are for that, but it certainly could be. I will have to take that on notice.

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA: Is the audit of the annual report occurring as a result of a request from the Premier under section 27 (3) (c) of the Public Finance and Audit Act? If so, would you be able to provide a copy of that request to this Committee?

Mr KENEALLY: I will take that on notice. I know there was a formal request, but I do not know which section it occurred under.

CHAIR: That is just a section that says that their annual reports will be tabled in the Parliament. The Auditor-General said in the report that he was not able to do his audit from the information made available, but he was concerned that not all the information was at hand due to the nature of lags in reporting. Has there been any additional information provided to the Auditor-General since the first review?

Mr KENEALLY: He has been supplied with all the requirements that he would have to verify the materials that we have asked him to verify—all the data that we have asked him to verify. His findings will form part of the annual report. So it is in those that if there are any reservations or concerns that that would be apparent. It is not finalised yet so I cannot comment any further than that, but certainly his findings will be made public.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: With respect to the Government's initial consultation process quite a few community representatives highlighted flaws in the processes or made some suggestions as to how that could be improved, and I refer you to the South Australian model, which, when it comes to consultation, is very effective. It just seems to be that in South Australia there is sort of a higher level of excitement in the community and I think it is based on that consultation: they feel that they are part of it, more so than we have here in New South Wales. Two questions: Has there been any formal evaluation of the consultation processes used for the State Plan to date and, if so, can you provide us with some details of the outcome of that evaluation? Secondly, can you tell us what lessons the Government probably learned from its initial consultation process and how we are going to do it differently this time?

Mr KENEALLY: The answer to the first question is no, there has been no formal review of that consultation process. Therefore, part two of that question I cannot say anything further on.

In terms of the lessons learned, I think I would summarise the lessons learned in three parts. The first part is that it would be better if we could be more iterative. We heard some things, we took them away, but we really only get that process once, and the ability to go back and confirm findings or test them again I think would be quite beneficial. That is the first thing.

The second element was when we went out to the local regions, to each of the 30 locations, we did three separate meetings: we did a meeting with local government; a meeting that essentially invited community representatives from non-government agencies, clergy, employers, environmental groups—a range of people representing different views in the community; thirdly, with a group of randomly selected people—typically, 20 to 40 or so people—responding to an invitation to come along. I would do more of that last type of thing. The ability to get beyond the gatekeepers of what local opinion is was really powerful, and "ordinary people" actually have a better understanding of the notion of a budget constraint and that you cannot do everything than a lot of people who were there to push particular barrows. So you got some very good conversations going on around discussion group tables about what really is our priority locally? It is not to do everything.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Hockey mums.

Mr KENEALLY: Are hockey mothers well informed or not? Caribou barbies. I think we do more of that, and it goes by all sorts of fancy names in the literature but it is getting to grassroots people rather than talking to the sort of self-appointed opinion keepers.

CHAIR: As members of Parliament we are very much in favour of—

Mr KENEALLY: You have got to do that as well: you have got to talk to local government and you have got to talk to people who represent different interest groups and so on, but that phase of gauging and testing opinions with people who actually live there can be really insightful.

The third thing I would say is that what was good was that we actually published something substantial beforehand for people to react to—it was not just an open-ended talkfest. If we were going to go out there and say what needs to change, how should it evolve, what is the next step for the State Plan, I think it would be ideal to do that with a good discussion document beforehand, with even more time for people to process that than we were able to give last time around. So, putting out a draft for consultation and really having something to respond to I think is a valuable way to work.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Just to follow on, when you have a look at the Canadian experience, particularly with respect to drawing people in from across the country, I think it was randomly; it was almost like a lottery. Would we ever go that far?

Mr KENEALLY: I think that is actually a question for decision makers, not for me.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: What is your opinion?

Mr KENEALLY: I think when it is well resourced by good information input rather than opinion polling, in a sense—if it is just opinion polling then it is putting on the public purse a process that the representative politicians are meant to do, that is divine public will, but where it is an engagement process to test different bits of information and competing views, to see how people respond to a process rather than reacting with their gut feel on things, then it can be incredibly valuable and an experience that helps the process of dialogue between the elected and the electors, and that is to the good of the democratic process, I would argue, rather than the negative.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: I endorse those comments, having been to four of the forums. The best session in the forum was the session you are referring to. There were the usual suspects, like elected leaders—and you know what their agenda is, whoever they may be—and community groups where you get the same sort of thing, but it was very interesting to see how opinions at tables would change because of genuine dialogue. Someone comes in with what they think is the most important issue, but they will be persuaded by other people around the table because they do not represent any specific group, they are representing themselves. I thought that was the best part of it. If you are going to do it again—and I think you should do it again—that is where I would be focusing, and you do need a document for discussion.

Mr KENEALLY: Yes.

CHAIR: How do you ensure you get random sampling for the process?

Mr KENEALLY: When we decided to do it our original assumption was that we would use the electoral roll as a way of generating a random sample. We discovered that that in fact would be in breach of the Commonwealth Electoral Act. It cannot be used for any purpose other than the purpose for which it is intended. We were able to obtain mailing lists from firms that provide those sorts of services to marketing companies—

CHAIR: Which use the electoral rolls.

Mr KENEALLY: I am not sure. I would imagine a share of those addresses— We probably had a strike rate in terms of people coming back and saying, "Yes, I would like to attend", which varied between one in three at best, up to about one in six.

CHAIR: For various reasons or demographics?

Mr KENEALLY: By location, but it probably depended a little on the time of day, the day of the week. Our response rates were much better for older people. I think finding some way that we could get the demographic from young people to parents with kids, things like that, would be another challenge to look at because they typically selected out against what we were doing.

CHAIR: What types of incentives did you provide, just that their views would be considered?

Mr KENEALLY: Their views would be considered, and refreshments—a cup of tea.

CHAIR: Do you think that is enough where it was one in six?

Mr KENEALLY: Because the process was not that well known, I think it was really a matter of whether people responded to the letter in front of them. If there was more public awareness—and it goes to your point about South Australia where the level of awareness has been supported by a quite significant public education process—you might get a different response rate because people feel that they have a chance to—

CHAIR: "They really do listen"?

Mr KENEALLY: Yes.

CHAIR: Or do you think it will be lower? Do you think it will be higher or lower?

Mr KENEALLY: I suspect it would be higher.

CHAIR: So you think that is the level, that as you go to the review in 2009 as the Plan says, there will be a much stronger level of community engagement using the methodology of random sampling?

Mr KENEALLY: Yes, I think the jargon is "deliberative democracy". My advice would be that I think it is a very useful tool, but it is not my decision.

CHAIR: Whose is it?

Mr KENEALLY: It is a decision for Premier and Cabinet really to make.

CHAIR: Is the unit gearing so that it could go to that?

Mr KENEALLY: As public servants, we do what we are told.

CHAIR: What can you do in the meantime? Is there community apathy or any impediment to the public getting involved in the process?

Mr KENEALLY: You mean to help spring-load this? In some respects it is a bit of an arcane idea that Government will work more effectively overall if you set some long-range targets. I think people intuitively believe it and intuitively think it is a good thing to do, but to turn that into something exciting when it is not about saying, "Hey, we're going to build a new this for you, or we're going to employ some new them in your local area", it is actually about standing back from that and saying, "Executive government is setting these targets for the public sector, for them to stay focused on even in the hurly-burly of the day-to-day of responding to particular issues, responding to particular complaints, responding to MPs, et cetera. We want you over the long term to stay focused on achieving these targets."

That is what it is really all about at its heart. You do not want to interfere with it too much, you do not want to make it a day-to-day job, you want to make it something that really drives the way that we are organised and what we deliver as public servants. To excite the community about that I think is in some ways a bit of a challenge because it is in the realm of what is a good way to manage the public sector, what is a good way to shape the relationship between Cabinet, Government and the public sector, but when you have a chance to say, "We're really thinking about what our priorities are and how to measure whether or not we are succeeding at them", the best people to ask about that is the community, but there is a challenge in getting them to come along for the conversation.

CHAIR: What about the notion of citizens' juries? Are you familiar with that concept where you get a smaller sample, but you spend a lot of time in an educative process, have experts come in, and then you have to trust them to come up with an outcome which you have to endorse?

Mr KENEALLY: I think the whole spectrum of deliberative democracy, wherever it sits along the range from somewhere like that to things that provide advice, advisory but not determinative, the engagement of the public in real dialogue, not in "What's your bias on these things", but "Here we have a viewpoint from there and a viewpoint from here. How do you interpret that? Is it best that we shift our discretionary dollar towards

preventative health care or acute health care and, if we do that, what does it mean? What is our priority?" They are good questions to engage people on and it is good to not have everyone assume that preventative is better because it sounds good; it is good to hear the arguments about why you would do that or not.

Mr NINOS KHOSHABA: You have said that moving forward you would ideally like to provide more time when it comes to consultation and engagement with the community, and I think that will provide better results in the future, but do you think those who have participated in the community process in the past will participate in the future? What was the feeling you got from those who have already been through this process?

Mr KENEALLY: The feedback we got was that people have really appreciated the degree of engagement of senior executives and Ministers, so when they sat down in a room where there were 20 to 40 people, a couple of Ministers and a couple of directors general, they realised: This is important. The feedback was always, "It is great that someone is listening, to be heard on this stuff and to be taken seriously. We can explain why it is hard." There is a self-selection issue; the people who want to say something are the ones who come along.

When we have gone out to do these regional consultations in greater western Sydney or other locations, again the feedback is that the fact that we are bringing along decision-makers—Ministers and chief executive officers—is a real positive. The feedback from most of the regions was that they wanted to keep doing this and that it should be locked in as a formal process. It goes beyond what is the priority to what we have delivered against that in the past 12 months. One of the important short-term issues that emerged from the discussions in western Sydney was community car parking. It was one of the top three issues. You would like to think that in 12 months we can go back and say, "This is the progress we have made with community car parking. These new parking areas have been approved and these ones have been funded as a consequence of our discussions."

Finding ways to make that dialogue between local government, the community and State Government a bit more effective and targeted is a good idea. The frustration for local government—as individual units or as part of regional organisations—is that they do not get a lot of contact with decision-makers. This process of bringing them together across all of the State Government's key priorities areas and engaging with them about the priorities is a very effective way for them to have really good engagement with the decision-makers about the community's priorities at a regional organisation or council level—or even at the level of a few large councils.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: The points you have made are very good. The only thing you need is a facilitator and to have all the different departmental and other senior government officers in the room and being part of the process. At the gathering I attended, each of them sat at a table and participated. Often they were the note-taker at the table. It was a good learning experience for them and helped them to understand the community's views and sometimes the anger or joy about different policies. Everything they get now goes through a process and it is dead when they read it on a piece of paper. It is different when they have to face the person concerned. I remember one case of a lady whose husband was a quadriplegic and was being looked after at home. All of a sudden, it is very real when a very senior officer talks to the wife and mother who has kids at home. It is very important for them to be there. I have unlimited faith in the public's ability to make good decisions. They do not need to be guided by some expert.

CHAIR: The committee will finish its report soon. It is looking at recommendations for a review of the State Plan. Hopefully, those recommendations will assist in your task next year. We will certainly have the report finished before the end of this year.

Mr KENEALLY: It will be very timely.

(The witness withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 2.24 p.m.)