

PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2008
FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

MONDAY 13 OCTOBER 2008

QUESTIONS
AND
ANSWERS

Questions from Mr Cohen

1. Will the Minister undertake to adopt for his own portfolio, and to coordinate for all relevant portfolios, a transparent, publicly accessible reporting regime for the funding and implementation of the Actions in the NSW Interagency Plan To Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities: 2006 – 2011, including a publicly available annual report covering at least:
 - (a) the amounts and sources of all resources for each of the Plan's Actions;
 - (b) the results to be achieved through these resources;
 - (c) whether the results have been achieved; and
 - (d) if the results have not been achieved:
 - (i) the reasons for the failure to achieve them; and
 - (ii) the action to be taken to ensure they will be achieved in future.

ANSWER:

The Annual Report will have information on key priorities and achievements against each of the Plan's four strategic directions: law enforcement, child protection, early intervention and prevention, and community leadership and support.

Although some actions include reference to funding amounts, the Annual report will be focused on outcomes, not inputs. As such, the amounts and sources of funding for each action will not be included.

2. Can the Minister confirm that the present Overarching Agreement on Aboriginal Affairs between New South Wales and the Commonwealth Government (2005-2010) (also known as the Bilateral Agreement) was

the one announced in April 2006 by the lemma and Howard Governments?

ANSWER:

The Overarching Agreement on Aboriginal Affairs between NSW and the Commonwealth (also known as, the Bilateral Agreement) remains in operation.

3. Can the Minister confirm it contained a commitment that it be “jointly reviewed after three years,” and that it is due to be reviewed in April next year?

ANSWER:

The Bilateral Agreement contains the commitment that it be “jointly reviewed after three years”.

4. Given the political events since this agreement was struck, particularly the departure of the Howard Government and Premier lemma, and the attitude of the new Commonwealth Labor Government, do you agree there is an urgent need for a new overarching agreement to be negotiated now which recognises more equitable funding for Aboriginal Affairs in NSW?
If so, what steps, if any, have been taken to begin that process?

ANSWER:

At a NSW/Commonwealth Officials meeting on 15 October 2008, it was agreed that the review of the Bilateral Agreement would begin immediately to ensure that it reflects the current reform agenda and priorities of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

It is expected that an initial draft will be provided for consideration by the First Ministers in the first half of 2009.

5. Does the Minister agree that Aboriginal peak representative bodies should be partners to any new overarching agreement between NSW and the Commonwealth, given the crucial importance of ensuring their active participation in any programmes to increase the health and well being of Aboriginal people in NSW?

ANSWER:

There are currently a range of structures already in place which ensure that Aboriginal communities are key partners in the State’s work with the Commonwealth in Aboriginal affairs.

At a State level, Aboriginal communities are represented on the *Two Ways Together* Coordinating Committee (TWTCC) through representation from the following Peak Bodies; the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat, the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council, the Aboriginal Housing Office; the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and the NSW Aboriginal Land

Council. The TWTCC is responsible for the overall management and coordination of *Two Ways Together*, the NSW Government's Aboriginal Affairs Plan.

At a regional level ten *Two Ways Together* Regional Engagement Groups are responsible for developing, coordinating, and monitoring *Two Ways Together* Regional Action Plans. These plans identify regional priorities and cross agency responses to meeting these. Regional Engagement Groups bring together representatives from the NSW and Australian Governments and Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal representation is through Peak Bodies.

6. Noting that ministerial responsibility for the Aboriginal Trust Fund Repayment Scheme (ATFRS) is not part of the Minister's portfolio, can the Minister to the best of his knowledge and inline with his Department's involvement, indicate:
 - (a) The total value of assessments made to direct and descendant claimants under the scheme as of 31 July 2008?
 - (b) How many descendant claims and direct claims are on the register?
 - (c) Does the Department have a budget to fund awareness raising and communication actions?
 - i. If yes, what is the expenditure and where does the funding come from?

ANSWER:

The Aboriginal Trust Fund Repayment Scheme (ATFRS) is administered by the Department of Premier and Cabinet. I can however provide the following information:

- a. the total value of repayments made under the ATFRS to date is \$1.119m;
- b. the Scheme has registered 634 direct claimants and 2,587 people wishing to make descendant claims;
- c. the Department of Aboriginal Affairs does not provide any funding to the ATFRS for raising awareness or communication actions.

Signature:

Date:

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Questions from Mr Tsang

7. What is the NSW Government doing to address Aboriginal employment within the private sector?

ANSWER:

The NSW Government is showing its commitment to working with Aboriginal people to generate employment opportunities in the private sector as a key way of closing the disadvantage gap that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

The NSW Government is doing this through its Job Compacts Program and the Aboriginal Participation in Construction Guidelines. Job Compacts are being rolled out across the State as part of the New South Wales State Plan Priority F1, which aims to improve health, education and social outcomes for Aboriginal People.

Job Compacts are written agreements between the Government, Aboriginal groups, local businesses and decision-making bodies, such as chambers of commerce, to increase local Aboriginal employment. They target locations with large Aboriginal populations and strong labour markets and promote improved employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in the private sector.

By encouraging local businesses and industry groups, organisations and governments to come together, we are aiming to overcome some of the barriers restricting Aboriginal people from accessing employment opportunities.

Twelve Job Compacts have been developed across the State:

- Statewide Job Compact Memorandum of Understanding between the NSW Business Chamber, the Local Government Association of

NSW, the Shires Association of NSW, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, Unions NSW and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

- Dubbo
- Tamworth
- Eastern Sydney
- Western Sydney
- South Western Sydney
- Illawarra
- Tweed Heads
- Wagga Wagga
- Cobar, which has a mining focus
- Newcastle/Hunter and
- Redfern.

These Job Compacts have been developed in a flexible manner in order that they relate to location or industry specific circumstances. They are two-year agreements where signatories have made the commitment to undertake steps to develop and maintain Aboriginal cultural awareness within their organisation.

Many of the Job Compact locations have also developed local resources including guides for employers who are interested in attracting and retaining Aboriginal employees, guides for Aboriginal job seekers with some pointers on getting a job and retaining it, and local service directories detailing the services and programs available in these locations to support employers and Aboriginal job seekers.

During the 2007-08 financial year the Department of Aboriginal Affairs provided approximately \$200,000 to support Job Compact projects, which included a number of Job Compact Grants.

Under the Tamworth Job Compact a grant of \$70,000 was allocated for an industry-focused training program. The first iteration of this program focused on the health and aged care sector. Participants completed an industry-directed training program and completed four weeks work experience in the participating businesses. Six Aboriginal trainees recently completed this training program, which had a 100% completion rate. All Aboriginal graduates received job offers as a result of the program and some graduates have received more than one job offer.

An additional \$10,666 was allocated to the Tamworth Regional Development Corporation to train Aboriginal employment mentors in the Aged Care homes involved in the pilot program. Sixty-seven newly trained mentors will help to overcome barriers to employment by providing support and assistance to the new Aboriginal staff, and their employers.

Under the Western Sydney Job Compact a grant of \$10,836 was provided in June 2008 to support the Keeping Aboriginal Youth Safe

(KAYS) project, which focuses on young people gaining the knowledge and skills needed to obtain and keep driving licences.

The Dubbo Job Compact was launched on 22 May 2008, with 30 signatories on board. These signatories included a wide range of businesses, employment and training providers, government organisations and local organisations.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs coordinated the development and launch of the Dubbo Job Compact, including the establishment of the Dubbo Job Compact Steering Committee and attracting key stakeholders and signatories. The Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party (DACWP) and the Local Chamber of Commerce were also integral to the program in Dubbo. The DACWP is the representative body for the Aboriginal population in Dubbo and is strongly supported by my Department and other agencies.

As part of the Dubbo Job Compact, The Department of Aboriginal Affairs has provided a \$10,000 grant for Aboriginal cultural awareness training for Job Compact signatories as well as potential signatories. This training is being conducted through the Dubbo Chamber of Commerce, as a series of cultural events aimed at building better relationships between Aboriginal communities and local businesses.

In the Redfern Job Compact the Redfern Waterloo Authority (RWA) is leading the initiative with a focus on jobs in the construction industry. As part of this work the RWA has entered into a Job Compact agreement with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and implements a Job Ready Program, jointly funded by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and RWA, which supports Aboriginal people into pre-employment training and job placements in local construction projects. Central to the model is the use of mentoring which supports Aboriginal people through both pre-employment training and once their employment commences. Case managers also support employers. Close consultation with Aboriginal organisations and communities is also a critical element.

The RWA has used the NSW Government *Aboriginal Participation in Construction Guidelines* to leverage Aboriginal job places on a number of local government funded construction and urban renewal projects. The construction industry is very important to future employment prospects of Aboriginal people because it has an annual value of \$7 billion and, in some areas, employs one in six Aboriginal men who have a job, and an increasing number of women.

As at March 2008, more than 100 jobs for Aboriginal people have been created through this project with an additional 120 jobs for Aboriginal people expected during the 2008-09 financial year. The RWA also

reports that the mentoring and support provided under the Job Ready Program resulted in a major improvement in job retention, which is now over 70 per cent.

Job Compacts is a new program which will continue to develop and improve. The NSW Government is currently seeking to link Job Compacts to relevant Federal initiatives under COAG. The newly announced Australian Employment Covenant in particular offers an opportunity to ensure that all levels of government are actively working together to increase the employment of Aboriginal people in the private sector.

The *Aboriginal Participation in Construction Guidelines* were developed to expand Aboriginal people's participation in NSW Government funded construction and related activities. They also support the role of the construction industry to enhance Aboriginal employment as many of the Government funded contracts are by subcontractors in the private sector.

Under the State Plan priority F1, the Guidelines are being used to target 15 construction projects over the next year which will include mandatory Aboriginal employment outcomes as a tender requirement. Already over 15 projects have already been identified and work has started, including the construction of the Nowra Correctional facility and refurbishment of Bowraville school.

Long term outcomes can only be achieved through the support of private sector employers and Aboriginal communities. The NSW Government has devoted the necessary time and effort to build these relationships, working closely in partnership with Aboriginal communities.

8. The Government funded a Water and Sewerage Maintenance and Monitoring Program in over 60 discrete Aboriginal communities at the beginning of 2008. What has happened in these communities to date?

ANSWER:

The Water and Sewerage Maintenance and Monitoring Program, which commenced in June 2008, is to maintain and monitor the water and sewerage infrastructure in over 60 discrete Aboriginal communities. The program is a partnership between the NSW State Government and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC). Both parties have committed to funding the program for at least 25 years. NSWALC is contributing 50% of the service delivery costs.

The program is being managed by the Department of Water and Energy (DWE) with the active involvement of Department of Aboriginal Affairs, NSW Health, the Aboriginal Housing Office and NSWALC.

The program is currently being piloted in eight communities across NSW. These are Toomelah, Bellbrook, Baryugil, Malabugilmah, Bowraville, Namoi, Gingie and La Prouse.

To the end of September 2008, meetings with the local community and the local utility provider have been undertaken in Toomelah, Bellbrook, Bowraville, Baryugil, and Malabugilmah. Infrastructure in each of these areas has also been assessed.

The importance of this partnership with NSWALC cannot be overstated. Programs and policies designed with Aboriginal communities are much more likely to be successful.

I look forward to outlining the progress of this program as it continues.

Signature:

Date:

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Question from Ms Robertson

9. Can the Minister provide an update on progress from the Aboriginal Communities Development Program?

ANSWER:

The NSW Government is committed to improving housing and environment health outcomes for Aboriginal people. One way it has been achieving this is through the Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDP).

The ACDP is a \$240 million program designed to address environmental health issues. The program targets the high level of identified need in housing, water and sewerage and general community strengthening and development.

The program is intended to:

- ensure community consultation, involvement and self-determination through the establishment of Community Working Parties (CWP);
- provide sustainable solutions that are appropriate and affordable for community well being;
- target a number of selected communities, rather than a wide scale program across the state;
- provide opportunities for progressive community development;
- focus on skill's development in property management, land management and the management of building and maintenance works;
- include a training and employment strategy within communities to enhance sustainability and self governance.

It has done this through a range of sub-programs – including the Housing for Health program and the Water and Sewerage Program.

ACDP achievements to the end of the 2007-2008 financial year (refer to Table 1) includes completion of 321 emergency repairs, 688 house refurbishments, 162 new houses, 61 new replacement houses and 91 house purchases.

The Housing for Health program has been delivered in 51 communities and has involved over 6,772 occupants. Around 36,000 items have been fixed by various trades in more than 1,577 houses bringing them to a safe and healthy living standard.

Some of the communities where this has occurred include: Leeton, Narrandera, Walgett, Moree; Kempsey; Bellbrook; Brewarrina; Armidale; Condobolin; Boggabilla; Toomelah; Mungindi; Walcha (Summervale); Box Ridge (Coraki); Macksville; Cumeragunja; Coomaditchie (Port Kembla); Orient Point (Nowra) Lightning Ridge; Collarenebri; Broken Hill; Weilmoringle and Menindee.

The Housing for Health component of the Aboriginal Communities Development Program has demonstrated significant improvements to Aboriginal housing, such as:

- nearly nine-fold increase in electrically safe houses (reducing injury and protecting assets);
- over four-fold increase in fire safety in houses (reducing injury and protecting assets);
- around two-and-a-half-fold increase in ability to wash people, particularly children (reducing infections and disease transmission) and to wash clothes and bedding in homes;
- over two-fold increase in removing waste safely in homes; and
- over three-and-a-half-fold improvement in ability to store, prepare and cook food.

The Water & Sewerage Program has delivered better quality water supplies to many Aboriginal communities across NSW by replacing existing poor quality water tanks and piping systems. Sewerage systems or upgraded by the ACDP offer better health outcomes by providing safer and more efficient waste disposal than the systems previously used.

A total of 79 projects to repair or upgrade existing services, including the repair of damaged pipes, repairs to existing treatment works and other urgent works have been completed in 44 communities.

A crucial component of the program is the employment and training of up to 222 Aboriginal apprentices.

Thirteen Aboriginal building companies were established or assisted since the inception of the ACDP, which has been of benefit to the Aboriginal communities where they are located and a positive effect on the general community as well.

The Aboriginal Communities Development Program is due for completion in June 2010.

Total Program expenditure to June 2008 has been \$210M.

Table 1: ACDP Achievements 2007/08

	Program Achievement to Date
ARMIDALE	83 House Refurbs/Emergency 8 Spot Purchase, 17 New /Replacement houses
BOGGABILLA/TOOMELAH	19 House Refurbs/Emergency 3 Spot Purchase ,20 New /Replacement houses,
BOURKE	24 House Refurbs/Emergency 0 Spot Purchase 14 New /Replacement houses,
BREWARRINA	65 House Refurbs/Emergency 6 Spot Purchase 43 New/Replacement Houses
CABBAGE TREE ISLAND	46 House Refurbs/Emergency 8 Spot Purchase 12 New/Replacement Houses
COLLARENEBRI	69 House Refurbs/Emergency 2 Spot Purchase 2 New/Replacement Houses
CONDOBOLIN	18 House Refurbs/Emergency 0 Spot Purchase 0 New/Replacement Houses
COONAMBLE	51 House Refurbs/Emergency 6 Spot Purchase 18 New/Replacement Houses
DARETON	37 House Refurbs/Emergency 1 Spot Purchase 9 New/Replacement Houses
ENNGONIA	26 House Refurbs/Emergency 0 Spot Purchase 0 New/Replacement Houses
GOODOOGA	29 House Refurbs/Emergency 2 Spot Purchase 0 New/Replacement Houses
GULARGAMBONE	42 House Refurbs/Emergency 4 Spot Purchase 8 New/Replacement Houses
KEMPSEY	239 House Refurbs/Emergency 28 Spot Purchase 11 New/Replacement Houses
LIGHTNING RIDGE	75 House Refurbs/Emergency 0 Spot Purchase 4 New/Replacement Houses
MENINDEE	0 House Refurbs/Emergency 0 Spot Purchase 0 New/Replacement Houses
MOREE	42 House Refurbs/Emergency 11 Spot Purchase 16 New/Replacement Houses
MULI MULI	26 House Refurbs/Emergency 0 Spot Purchase 2 New/Replacement Houses
MURRIN BRIDGE	37 House Refurbs/Emergency 0 Spot Purchase 9 New/Replacement Houses
TABULAM	20 House Refurbs/Emergency 0 Spot Purchase 4 New/Replacement Houses
WALGETT	41 House Refurbs/Emergency 10 Spot Purchase 2 New/Replacement Houses
WEILMORINGLE	10 House Refurbs/Emergency 0 Spot Purchase 5 New/Replacement Houses
WILCANNIA	10 House Refurbs/Emergency 1 Spot Purchase 27 New/Replacement Houses
TOTAL	1009 House Refurbs/Emergency 91 Spot Purchase 223 New/Replacement Houses

10. What is the Government doing to reduce disadvantage and improve the well-being of Aboriginal people?

ANSWER:

The NSW Government is working to reduce disadvantage and improve the well being of Aboriginal people in NSW through a range of initiatives, including:

- NSW State Plan;
- *Two Ways Together* Aboriginal Affairs Plan;
- Interagency Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities; and
- COAG Indigenous Reform agenda.

NSW State Plan

The State Plan includes the Aboriginal specific priority Priority F1 – to improve health, education and social outcomes for Aboriginal people. Under this priority five key objectives have been established for reducing the gap in well-being between the Aboriginal and the total population of NSW:

1. Ensure Aboriginal families are supported to live free from violence and harm
2. Increase the readiness to learn of Aboriginal children prior to school entry
3. Ensure that all Aboriginal communities have equitable access to environmental health systems
4. Increase Aboriginal employment
5. Build community resilience.

Delivery of specific strategies under each of these areas is undertaken on a whole of government basis involving a number of agencies. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs is responsible for overseeing and monitoring the progress of projects under this priority.

Thirteen other State Plan Priorities are also of significance in addressing disadvantage and improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal people:

- R1 Reduced rates of crime, particularly violent crime;
- R2 Reducing re-offending;
- R3 Reduced levels of antisocial behaviour;
- R4 Increased participation and integration in community activities;

- S3 Improved health through reduced obesity, smoking, illicit drug use and risk drinking;
- S4 Increasing levels of attainment for all students;
- S5 More students complete Year 12 or recognised vocational training;
- F3 Improved outcomes in mental health;
- F4 Embedding the principle of prevention and early intervention into Government Service delivery in NSW;
- F6 Increased proportion of children learning with skills for life and learning at school entry;
- F7 Reduced rates of child abuse and neglect;
- E4 Better environmental outcomes for native vegetation, biodiversity, land, rivers and coastal waterways;
- E8 More people using parks, sporting and recreational facilities and participating in the arts and cultural activity;

Respective lead agencies have been asked to incorporate targets and strategies for achieving outcomes for Aboriginal people. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs reports on progress in setting Aboriginal specific targets and measures to the Chief Executives Committee.

Two Ways Together

Two Ways Together is the NSW Government's ten year whole government Aboriginal Affairs plan. Through *Two Ways Together* Aboriginal communities and NSW Government agencies are focusing on improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in seven priority areas of health, education, economic development, justice, families and young people, culture and heritage, and housing and infrastructure. These priority areas align with those of the NSW State Plan.

Two Ways Together requires government agencies to work together in partnership with Aboriginal people to ensure that services required by Aboriginal people are accessible, culturally appropriate and deliver results.

The objectives of *Two Ways Together* are to:

- develop sustainable partnerships between Aboriginal people and government to improve the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal people in NSW; and
- enhance the skills and ability of government agencies to work with Aboriginal people and support the development of skills and capacity of Aboriginal people to work with governments.

Success in implementing State Plan priorities is underpinned by the same elements that underpin *Two Ways Together*. It requires a coordinated approach to service delivery and effective partnerships with Aboriginal communities.

At a State level, the *Two Ways Together* Coordinating Committee oversees the implementation of both the headline strategies identified in the State Plan and the ongoing implementation of activities under *Two Ways Together*.

Regional Engagement Groups (REGs)

To ensure participation of Aboriginal people at the State, regional and community level, the NSW Government has established the *Two Ways Together* Regional Engagement Groups (REGs). The REGs plan and monitor improvements to government service provision within each region and are made up of community representatives from peak Aboriginal bodies, as well as the NSW and Australian governments.

In early 2007, *Two Ways Together* Regional Action Plans were developed by the REGs in collaboration with other stakeholders to identify priority actions over a two year period, with a particular focus on cross-agency actions.

Two Ways Together Report on Indicators

Two *Two Ways Together Reports on Indicators* have been released. The first *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators* was released in June 2005. It presented, for the first time, a consolidated data report on the status of Aboriginal people in NSW. It included indicators against which progress can be measured in each of the *Two Ways Together* priority areas.

The second *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators*, released in April 2008, provides population indicators to measure the disadvantage gaps between the Aboriginal population and the general NSW population, and where possible, trend information to show whether these gaps are changing over time. The report also provides performance or service indicators which indicate the extent and quality of service delivery to Aboriginal people in areas which may assist in closing the disadvantage gap.

Interagency Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities

In January 2007, the Interagency Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities was released. This was the Government's response to the recommendations of the Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, which the NSW Government had established to identify solutions to this problem.

The 88 measures in the Government's five year Interagency Plan will be delivered to communities at a cost of more than \$30 million over the next four years.

On top of this, the 2008-09 budget includes additional funding of \$22.9 million over four years to enhance local responses and services for Aboriginal child sexual assault in the west of the State.

NSW Government progress in implementing these actions includes:

- A new Schools in Partnership Program has been introduced in 30 schools, aimed at closing the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. (*Action 59*)
- Department of Education and NSW Police are implementing Truancy Reduction Strategies as part of schools' Attendance Action Plans. (*Action 61*)
- The number of Aboriginal teacher scholarships has doubled in 2007/08 to 60 scholarships. (*Action 70*)
- The Rural New Street Program – a community based treatment program to treat children and adolescents who display sexually abusive behaviours has been established in the north-west of the state. (*Action 56*)
- More than 100 children participated in services or received support from one of DoCS Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Services during the year. (*Action 75*)
- Aboriginal police numbers have been gradually increasing from 180 (approx) 4 years ago to 221 now. (*Action 75*)
- A new child sexual assault training package for Department of Juvenile Justice staff has been implemented to improve training for 'screening, detecting, responding and referring clients who are victims of sexual assault. (*Action 54*)
- Legislation has been enacted to make sexual procurement or grooming of children a crime, and legislative reforms have been enacted for AVOs. (*Actions 22 and 45*)
- A new model for monitoring sex offenders on release, which includes Corrective Services staff being on call during evenings and weekends and a specialist compliance group is conducting unannounced visits and other supervision of surveillance actions with high risk offenders (*Action 24*)
- Sixty two per cent of courts in priority locations now have the technology for remote witness facilities (*Action 16*)
- A Ministerial Advisory Panel has been established, to advise the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on the implementation of the Interagency Plan. Membership of the Advisory Panel has been drawn from the Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, Aboriginal communities and public servants with relevant expertise. They are all people with high levels of expertise, commitment and community confidence. (*Action 76*)

- Enhanced protection of victims through awareness raising for legal professionals about the availability and use of bail conditions. (*Actions and 47*).

The NSW Government is committed to addressing Aboriginal disadvantage and is providing substantial support to meet its commitments under the NSW State Plan and the *Two Ways Together* Aboriginal Affairs Plan.

COAG Indigenous Reform agenda

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia. The role of COAG is to initiate, develop and monitor the implementation of policy reforms that are of national significance and which require cooperative action by Australian governments.

COAG established a Working Group on Indigenous Reform (WGIR) to support its reform agenda in five areas; improving participation and welfare reform, improving the evidence base, governance and service delivery and reducing substance abuse. These reform areas are the basis of national partnerships with State Governments and the first nationally agreed partnership, finalised in October 2008, covers Early Childhood and Development.

COAG has developed key targets to reduce the gap in well-being between Aboriginal people and the wider population. The government works in collaboration with COAG in meeting these key targets. These targets are:

- Close the life expectancy gap within a generation;
- Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
- Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade;
- Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade; and
- Ensure that all four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years.

At its meeting on 20 December 2007, COAG established a Working Group on Indigenous Reform to lead the reform necessary to achieve these goals.

Five Sub Groups have been established under the Working Group on Indigenous Reform. These Sub Groups are:

- Building the evidence base
- Economic Participation and Welfare Reform
- Building Blocks and Governance

- Reducing Alcohol and Substance Abuse
- Optimal service delivery

The NSW Government is committed to working with the Commonwealth and other Australian Governments to close the gap and improve Aboriginal wellbeing.

Signature:

Date:

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QUESTIONS

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ANSWERS

Questions from Mr Veitch

11. What role is the NSW Government's languages policy playing in building better educational outcomes in Aboriginal communities?

ANSWER:

The NSW Government's Language Policy aims to coordinate language work in Aboriginal communities, in schools, in correction and detention centres and in the broader community.

In the last financial year, the NSW Aboriginal Language Research and Resource Centre allocated \$200,000 to 12 Aboriginal Community Language Assistance Projects to assist language revival efforts within Aboriginal communities. The grants are funding the production of linguistic materials, multimedia dictionaries and teaching resources, and will provide training in language teaching and language speaking across a number of NSW Aboriginal languages.

The Centre has also delivered on the Government's commitment that every school in New South Wales would have access to materials on NSW Aboriginal languages, including dictionaries. The Centre, in collaboration with the NSW Board of Studies, Department of Education and Training, Aboriginal communities and language experts developed the CD-ROM, *An Introduction to NSW Aboriginal Languages*. It has been distributed to all NSW schools, Aboriginal pre-schools, juvenile detention centres and to community organisations. The CD-ROM has proven to be a useful and popular resource for students, teachers and communities interested in language revival.

Aboriginal language education in schools, according to some early research, has proven to be a catalyst for increased attendance rates

amongst Aboriginal students and has also increased the students' performance, including their levels of literacy.

12. A key theme of *Two Ways Together*, the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003-2012, is that Aboriginal people are best placed to speak to their views and aspirations, that they themselves know best the needs of their communities.
13. What is the NSW Government doing to give Aboriginal people a voice in planning for better services in the communities?

ANSWER:

The *Two Ways Together* Coordinating Committee is the state level body with responsibility for overseeing and monitoring progress under *Two Ways Together*, the NSW Government's Aboriginal Affairs Plan. Aboriginal Peak Bodies are members of this committee and ensure that there is a clear Aboriginal voice.

This is reflected at a regional level through Peak Body membership on *Two Ways Together* Regional Engagement Groups. These groups have been established to identify regional priorities and develop regional actions plans in response.

At a local level, the NSW Government is implementing the *Two Ways Together* Partnership Community Program. The program consists of two main elements:

- a framework to underpin governance arrangements in the 40 Partnership Communities which encompass more than 40% of Aboriginal population in NSW; and
- guidelines for government agencies to support planning with Aboriginal communities which provides evidence based practical service delivery responses and initiatives that meet local needs and build community.

Partnership Community Project Officers will work in each of the Partnership Community. They will first support the community to develop a local governance structure which meets agreed governance framework. They will then work with the governance structure and agencies to develop local community action plans which address local priorities.

Signature:

Date: