

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2

Monday 18 August 2014

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

CITIZENSHIP AND COMMUNITIES, ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS, VETERANS AFFAIRS

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. M. J. Pavey (Chair)

Ms J. Barham
The Hon. D. Clarke
The Hon. G. J. Donnelly
Dr M. Faruqi

The Hon. J. A. Gardiner
The Hon. P. Green (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. S. Moselmane
The Hon. E. K. C. Wong

PRESENT

The Hon. Victor Dominello, *Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Veterans Affairs, and Assistant Minister for Education*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2014-15. Before I commence, I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I pay respects to the elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present. Welcome Minister Dominello and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure in the important portfolio of Citizenship and Communities, Aboriginal Affairs and Veterans Affairs.

Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. A transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography.

I remind media representatives also that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside of their evidence at the hearing. So I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after completing their evidence as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take an action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances witnesses are advised that they can take the question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or member's staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. I remind Minister Dominello and the officers accompanying him that they are free to pass notes and refer directly to the advisers seated at the table behind them. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning.

Finally, I ask everyone to turn off their phones for the duration of the hearing. All witnesses from the department, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn in prior to giving evidence. I remind the Minister that he does not need to be sworn in as he has sworn an oath to his office as a member of Parliament.

GREGOR MACFIE, Director, Policy, Commission for Children and Young People,

HAKAN HARMAN, Chief Executive Officer, Community Relations Commission,

HELEN ROGERS, Executive Director, Communities Policy and Programs, NSW Department of Education and Communities, and

PHILLIP PEACE, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Education and Communities, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: The Committee has resolved that, as per request, it will take questions regarding Citizenship and Communities between 2.00 p.m. and 3.00 p.m., Veterans Affairs between 3.00 p.m. and 3.20 p.m. and following afternoon tea Aboriginal Affairs between 3.35 p.m. and 4.15 p.m. At this point in time the Government will not be asking questions, but reserves its right to do so. In that event, the hearings times will be extended. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Citizenship and Communities, Aboriginal Affairs and Veterans Affairs open for examination. As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questions, we will commence with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, given the evidence received at ICAC that Hunter Liberal members of Parliament received cash from prohibited donors, can you guarantee that you did not receive an illegal donation at the last election?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: At no time have I received an illegal donation. At all times I have complied with my obligations under the electoral and funding laws of New South Wales.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Will you make under oath the same statement as the Premier?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Absolutely. At all times I have complied with my obligations under the electoral laws of New South Wales. I have made every disclosure I am required to make under my pecuniary interest obligations, which is there for all to see. Absolutely, I make that statement again.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: With regard to the announcement of Scott Morrison, Federal Minister for Immigration's to take in 4,400 refugees, what discussions have you had with the Minister?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I have not had any discussions in relation to that matter at all. Maybe Harkan has at an administrative level. Would you like to say a few words?

Mr HARMAN: We have not had any discussions as yet. The NSW Government Immigration and Settlement Planning Committee, which is the body that coordinates immigration and planning for New South Wales, has met twice this year. We have our next meeting on 26 August, I believe, and then there is a SOSOG meeting, which is the Senior Officers Settlement Outcomes Group, in October. I do not have the date. I think it is about 16 October. They are the forums for us to discuss those issues.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What plans does the CRC have regarding refugees?

Mr HARMAN: Refugees are a stakeholder group and an important part of what the commission does in its activities. We have a number of ways. We have identified the humanitarian entrance refugees and asylum seekers as an important group within our strategic plan looking forward for the next three years, and a whole range of activities that we undertake to advocate for improved services to them form part of our work. That is through the Government Immigration and Settlement Planning Committee and our engagements with other agencies across the sector. It is through advocating at the Commonwealth level for increased and improved data sharing to facilitate better decision making by our public-facing and service-providing agencies, and then through our grants program, of course, our advisory board members or commissioners. No doubt it is a really important area for us. So we have a number of priority areas that we identify and through our grants program we direct partnerships and also certain engagements to focus on key issues, and humanitarian entrances is one of those. One such example was a Refugee Council of Australia partnership where we developed a booklet last year that articulates the services provided to new entrants.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: By the Community Relations Commission [CRC].

Mr HARMAN: It was funded by the CRC—no, not by the CRC but just generally settlement services. As you know, settlement services are a Federal-funded activity.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes, but the CRC has a responsibility to refugees coming to New South Wales. It particularly has a humanitarian element.

Mr HARMAN: Absolutely. The CRC is there for all of the people of New South Wales. That is our remit at the moment. For an organisation of 70-odd people, which is not a public service providing agency, we are there to coordinate and advocate, and ensure that through all of our mechanisms, in particular, the strongest one in that space, the Multicultural Policies and Services Program, which has been the backbone of the success of multicultural policies in this State. It ensures that every single agency across the public sector provides services in accordance with their target group.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you.

Mr HARMAN: There is an important part in that. What we did as part of last year's reporting as part of the Multicultural Policies and Services Program, we requested all agencies to provide us with information on what services they provide for humanitarian entrants and that will also be a key item for reporting this year.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am interested in what the CRC does and what the Minister does. I will go to the Minister. In keeping to the response of Mr Harman, why is it, given that response, that your accounts committee has expressed deep disappointment—"very disappointment", as it says—that the humanitarian entrants are a particularly vulnerable group, and it is disappointing that the New South Wales Government has rejected all of the Auditor-General's recommendations?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The accounts committee? I will leave that for Mr Harman.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Are you not aware of those, Minister?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Mr Harman is going to respond.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But you are the Minister. I am asking you.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Which accounts committee are you referring to?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: This is your own Public Accounts Committee.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The Public Accounts Committee?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes. I will let Mr Harman answer.

Mr HARMAN: The Public Accounts Committee into humanitarian entrants deals with the Auditor-General's report on coordination of services to refugees and humanitarian entrants in New South Wales. I understand that prior to my commencement there was a number of hearings undertaken in terms of reviewing the position of the New South Wales public sector. I think it was in the second week of my tenure that I attended a Public Accounts Committee, together with the then Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet [DPC], Mr Chris Eccles. There is a strong collaboration, connection and engagement between DPC and us. We have progressed a lot of the recommendations of the Auditor-General's report. We have a scheduled time line to report back, I think in November, so all of our responses in progressing those recommendations will be provided to the Public Accounts Committee in November.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: My understanding is that the Government has rejected the recommendations already. It is not that—

Mr HARMAN: I think the premise of the response was that immigration planning and undertaking an assessment of the numbers allocated to each of the jurisdictions is the responsibility of the Federal Government. I think that was the premise of the response. That does not negate our responsibility—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Which is?

Mr HARMAN: —and our willingness to ensure, as an agency that advocates for all the people of New South Wales, in particular the needy, to ensure—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can I go back to the Minister? My question is not a broad question; it is a specific question. It is about the settlement of humanitarian refugees coming in and it is clear from the report of the Public Accounts Committee that it says that the New South Wales Government is responsible for providing new migrants equitable access to services such as health, education and housing. Where have you addressed those issues?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Do you want to respond, Mr Harman? I am happy to respond.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It is to you, Minister.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is what I thought. As Mr Harman said before, we are not a front-line service delivery agency. The reality is you have articulated in that question health, education, community services, et cetera. What we have in the engine room of the legislation that guides us is the Multicultural Policies and Services Program, and that effectively keeps other agencies—i.e. the major service providers—to account. In many ways it inspired the model that we have adopted in relation to Aboriginal Affairs for the Aboriginal ombudsman to hold the service deliverers to account. You asked what we are doing in relation to health. Obviously, that is not part of our budget. When you ask us what are we doing in relation to policing, again, that it is not part of the budget of the Community Relations Commission. At its core, the Community Relations Commission, as the Chief Executive Officer [CEO] has wonderfully articulated, is for all of the people in New South Wales. At our core, we are there to ensure that relations between all of the people in New South Wales are as harmonious as humanly possible. Service delivery is for the main-line agencies.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you, Minister. I will move on to another area. Minister, where is your CRC chair?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The CRC chair is not here.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Why is that?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The new chair has not been appointed yet. We have an acting chair at the moment.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What about the previous chair? What happened to the previous chair?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Vic Alhadeff resigned.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, can you answer this question: Do you regret and acknowledge your failure to take immediate action to limit the damage that was caused by the statements that were made by Vic Alhadeff at the time?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That was a very difficult situation at the time, I acknowledge that. I remember having a number of meetings, and the first of which was with the Arab Council Australia. We had a very long meeting where community leaders expressed their concerns. I was doing my best to ensure that we had an environment where, hopefully, the matter could resolve of its own volition. That would ideally have been the best outcome. Clearly, that did not take place. Vic Alhadeff, the chair at the time, found it appropriate to resign in the circumstances. I thought it would have been prejudicial to rush to an immediate decision because we wanted to give Vic every opportunity to continue to build those relationships. I did everything I could, including meeting with senior members of the community.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Do you not think that the handling of the situation with Vic Alhadeff has damaged the CRC for a long time?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Not at all. The CRC is far stronger than one human being. In many ways the Community Relations Commission is there to embody who we are in New South Wales: a diverse multicultural, multifaited society in which we all get on reasonably well. There are obviously occasions when there will be issues between various community groups, but that is where the Community Relations Commission can step in, show some leadership and bring people together.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What would you say to the former Anglican Bishop of Canberra? Bishop George Browning made the comment that the situation effectively diminishes the credibility of the Community Relations Commission?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I dispute that. As I said, the Community Relations Commission is far stronger than one person, far bigger than me, far bigger than the CEO, far bigger than the former chair, far bigger than anyone. It is far bigger than Stepan Kerkyasharian, who was there as chair and CEO for 25 years. In terms of the Premier's Harmony Dinner, we have named an award after him. I do not think that this incident takes away from the enormous great work that has been done by the commission over the past 25 years.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Given this experience, what plans have you put in place to ensure that this will never happen again?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Obviously, we will go through the usual processes to ensure that we continue to engage with community. That is what we will do; that is what we have done. I remember very specifically—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Are you saying that with the appointment of the new chair you will engage with the community?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: We will make an announcement in relation to the appointment of a new chair in the weeks ahead.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: So you will just tell the community, not engage with them?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As I said, we will make an announcement about the appointment of a new chair in the weeks ahead but we have very constructively engaged with the community. I just draw your attention to the facial identification laws—I know that you were particularly interested in those and you did a lot of great work behind the scenes—which caused a lot of angst in the community. I remember you as one of the people who were saying, "We have got to deal with this delicately." Thankfully, due to the hard work of the Community Relations Commission at that time, that law went through both Houses of Parliament without so much as a murmur. Just recently the Ombudsman prepared a report in relation to the facial identification laws and pretty much gave it a full tick in regard to how the police have implemented those laws. That only happened—I was there with the Attorney General at the time and Stepan Kerkyasharian, the commission chair—because we were working with the community. We had some meetings out in Auburn to explain to the community that this was what needed to be implemented and they came on board. The same applied to what some people call the Sydney riots, but I call the Sydney unrest. We called the community leaders together and that showed the strength of the commission at the time.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I now turn to some budgetary matters. The Community Relations Commission lost funding of 7.1 per cent in the 2014-15 budget. Will any services be cut back or scraped as a result of those funding cuts?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I dispute that. The reality is in relation to the grant program we have increased funding from \$1.2 million to \$1.4 million. I will let Mr Harman deal with the specifics of the figures but overall the money has increased, not decreased.

Mr HARMAN: The budget of \$19.4 million in the revised figures is up 7.3 per cent, by \$1.4 million, and that is attributable to recognition of expenditure that was carried forward. Between budget 2013-14 and budget 2014-15 we have a 2.56 per cent increase, which is just on half a million dollars.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: In the 2014-15 budget the grants and contributions have decreased from \$13.4 million to \$12.5 million. How can these services be provided across New South Wales with a decrease of \$900,000?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: It is my understanding that the funding for grants has increased from \$1.2 million to \$1.4 million under this Government. I do not know what figures you are citing. Mr Harman will respond to that.

Mr HARMAN: The figures you are referring to form part of our revenue line item on page 2-28.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: Yes.

Mr HARMAN: So "grants and contributions" do not refer to our grants and subsidies program. Our grants and subsidies program is clearly articulated in our fully audited financial statements in the annual report. I think you will find that somewhere around, as the Minister has said, \$1.455 million per annum was provided in grants to communities. The grants and contributions you are referring to is the revenue we received from Treasury appropriation. This is our grants and contributions. It is called "grants and contributions" because that is how it comes to us as part of our allocation appropriation.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: In light of that, can you confirm that services to communities across New South Wales will not be affected?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Absolutely. In fact, we have increased the grants available to communities under this Government. That is something of which we are particularly proud and it is really important. As Mr Harman has explained, the reference to different budget line items is not a reflection on how much money we are giving to communities. It has increased.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, I have some information that says that Community Relations Commissions grants and contributions have decreased from \$13.4 million to \$12.5 million—that is about \$900,000. The chief executive officer has said the complete opposite. Can you tell us what is happening?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I am not an accountant but I know Mr Harman is a forensic accountant.

Mr HARMAN: Used to be.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: And he used to be the chief financial officer [CFO] at the State Library. I will take his word in regard to the construction of the budgetary figures.

Mr HARMAN: I will take the word of my own CFO, Keith Stevens, and the fact that these figures are audited and comply with State Government reporting and generally accepted accounting principles. The reason why the budget of \$12.9 million differs to the revised position of \$13.4 million is as a result of the carry forward from the previous year. Each year with the introduction of carry forward provisions that then Treasurer Mike Baird introduced to ensure that we did not have this ramp-up of expenses at 30 June—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: There is no carry forward there; last year was less.

Mr HARMAN: It is embedded into the \$13.4 million that we have spent. We cannot spend more than what we are given but because we were given additional funds the previous year that were not spent, they are spent this year. A similar thing will happen with every agency across the sector where there will be an adjustment for amounts that are allowed to be carried forward at the end of the financial year.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: We will send you a question to clarify this.

Mr HARMAN: Sure.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, are you aware of the Immigrant Women's Speakout and the Muslim Women's Support Centre?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, I am.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: You would also be aware that they have both lost their funding to provide specialist services to women from multicultural backgrounds as a result of this Government's botched Going Home Staying Home program. As the Minister for Citizenship and Communities, what is your response to the potential and impending closure of these centres?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Thank you for your question. Given that this is a budget estimates hearing I am happy to answer any question you like concerning my budgetary portfolio but I will not provide a running commentary in relation to other Ministers and their portfolios because it would be inappropriate for me to do so.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Surely as someone who has responsibility for multicultural issues you would be deeply concerned by the closure of specialist multicultural services for some of the most vulnerable in society. These are really the only two services that provide care and support for women from a large diversity of cultural backgrounds. Have you spoken to or made representations to Minister Upton about these two organisations?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Dr Faruqi, as I have said, I am happy to answer any questions you like in relation to things that come within my budget—in this case it is in relation to the budget of the Community Relations Commission and I have been forensically examined by Mr Moselmane and Mr Wong—or in relation to any statutory obligation of my portfolio, but it is not appropriate for me to comment on the portfolio of another Minister. You will have many an opportunity to talk to Minister Upton, who I consider to be an outstanding Minister. She is doing great work in very difficult circumstances.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Given that the Muslim Women's Support Centre provides support to women from ethnic backgrounds, will you support the unanimous upper House call made last week to restore funding to this centre?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again, I will not comment on matters outside my budgetary purview. This is a budgetary estimates hearing in relation to my budget. I respectfully suggest that you ask Minister Upton or any other Minister questions about their respective portfolios.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: You are responsible for the multicultural portfolio and you have no opinion on those two multicultural services that are closing down?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I am the Minister responsible for the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act and everything underneath that and within the mechanisms of that piece of legislation. I am responsible for the budget that sits within that, the budget assigned to our agency, and all the things that we are doing to promote advocacy for women within my budget. That is what I am here to answer. I cannot, and I should not, talk about another Minister's portfolio because it would be inappropriate for me to do so. If you want to ask me a question in relation to what we are doing to assist women and women-related issues within my budget I will be more than happy to answer you. I am very proud of our record.

To this day, every day I wear a wristband for White Ribbon because I am passionate about reducing the incidence of violence against women, in particular, and this is germane to Dr Mehreen Faruqi's line of questioning, women in multicultural community. The Community Relations Commission and the Government have partnered with the White Ribbon organisation. We have given them \$80,000 so that they can work with us to make sure that we do send that message out to the community and linguistically diverse [CALD] group in our society. That is really important, and something I am particularly proud and passionate about.

At the launch at Parramatta were Dr Geoff Lee, Mr Tony Issa and Deputy Commissioner Nick Kaldas. We complimented the New South Wales Police Force. I put on record my appreciation for the work they do. They were one of the first New South Wales Government main agencies to have a workplace accredited program for White ribbon, which means that they take on best practice when it comes to making sure that we get the community engaged in preventing violence against women.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, just two weeks ago you announced the awarding of a New South Wales Human Rights Award to the Executive Officer of the United Muslim Women's Association, Maha

Krayem Abdo, OAM. The United Muslim Women's Association runs the Muslim Women's Support Centre, which will now run out of funding in December and will have to close. Minister, why will you not speak to Minister Upton about these issues, especially as this is one of only two support services for multicultural women?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Maha Abdo is a very worthy recipient of the New South Wales Human Rights Award. The award was adjudicated by three esteemed people in our community, including Mick Gooda, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. He is an outstanding community member not just in New South Wales but in this country. Other members of the judging panel were Ainslie van Onselen and Vic Alhadeff. They decided Maha Abdo should be the recipient of the second New South Wales Human Rights Award. The inaugural recipient was Andrew Penfold. He had done monumental work for the Indigenous community.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Maha and the other women of the Muslim Women's Support Centre run a very high-quality, outstanding service.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, could you commit to talking to Minister Upton about providing funding for this work to be ongoing?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again, I am happy to answer any question concerning my budget. But when it comes to the budget of other Ministers, I suggest you direct your questions to them.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I move on now to the Community Relations Commission grants program. Minister, I note that the rejection rate for Community Relations Commission grant applications continues to be very high, standing at approximately two-thirds in the last financial year. Is the issue a lack of funding to fund all of these grants or do the grants not meet the criteria?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As I have indicated before, we actually increased the amount available for grants to the community. It has actually increased by \$200,000 under our Government. There is no doubt that our Government has applied more rigour to the grant process. This is taxpayers' money. It is not my money and it is not your money, it is taxpayers' money. We want to make sure that when it goes to the community it is probably accounted for and acquitted. So there is no doubt that we have put more rigour into the process. We are making sure that the grants are going out to communities and that the \$1.4 million is being used. I am happy to let Mr Harman answer more fully.

Mr HARMAN: I think the response to that question would be that in the first scan those applications most likely do not meet the eligibility criteria. That would be the most direct response. This approach was adopted some years ago. As we develop performance indicators going into the future I do not know if we would adopt similar approaches—that is, having expressions of interest. There is probably a much higher percentage of acceptance and funding when we look at actual physical grant applications, not expressions of interest. I think it would be fair to say with any program that we would be oversubscribed with applications if we were to go out and say, "We have a grants round opening and it is for this specific purpose."

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, I do appreciate that you have expanded the program from that of the previous Government but marginally exceeding Labor is hardly an aspirational goal, I think. Will the Minister commit to a large expansion of the Multicultural Advantage Grants Program, especially with special funding targeted for emerging communities?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will be making an announcement in relation to the Community Relations Commission in the days ahead, and that will touch upon some of the issues that you have raised. It is something I am particularly passionate about. Not only am I the "Minister for multiculturalism" but, like you, I am a product and a beneficiary of multiculturalism. So this is something that I am extremely passionate about. I will be making some announcements in relation to future funding in the days ahead.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I have been hearing from many multicultural communities of the frustration they feel about the time, expense and effort that community groups put into grant applications, especially now, as Mr Harman has said, that many of these grant applications do not meet eligibility criteria.

What is the Government going to do to provide more support to the community so that grant applications can be successful?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will let Mr Harman answer this, but let me just give you a prelude. As I said, in the days ahead I will be making announcements in relation to future processes. I understand what you are saying and I will address that in the days ahead. Mr Harman might like to say a few words here. Emerging communities are very important to the work of the Community Relations Commission. That is something I acknowledge. It is something that will be part of my announcements in the days ahead.

Mr HARMAN: Without going into too much detail about the announcements, I have spent the past six months reviewing the operations and activities of the commission. We have heard directly from our stakeholders about the efficiency and in some cases how we can improve our processes—for example, by providing better "in language" service; more training on grant applications, as appropriate; and also by simplifying some of our processes. We have listened to all of that and incorporated it into things which we will articulate in the not-too-distant future.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Good afternoon, Minister. In June the Festival of Dangerous Ideas had scheduled an event called "honour killings are morally justified". At the time you said on 2SM, "I think our community is sort of coming to a tipping point where we are saying enough is enough. We see so much violence towards women generally pervasively in society that we are just saying enough is enough and we are not going to tolerate this." I note your public condemnation of this event. This event raised a great deal of concern in the community, as you would be aware. What efforts is the Government making to alleviate public concern about events such as this? Are you working with the Minister for Tourism and Major Events to ensure that such events do not receive Government endorsement and/or funding?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As with the line of questioning from Dr Mehreen Faruqi, issues relating to the Opera House and the Festival of Dangerous Ideas should be appropriately dealt with by Minister Grant. He is on top of that issue. In relation to my comments, I absolutely stand by them. As I said before, here is living proof, I wear my black wristband and I never take it off. Violence against women in all of its forms is something that concerns me deeply.

As I said recently at the presentation of the NSW Human Rights Award, hopefully the Community Relations Commission will focus on two things. Firstly, there is violence against women. Why am I so passionate about this issue? Because it impacts 50 per cent of the world's population. Violence against women is targeted at a group which makes up 50 per cent of our community. Secondly, the other major thing I am super concerned about is racism. I cannot think of anything else throughout human history that has caused more grief, pain or suffering—whether it is slavery or whether it is wars—that has been based on racial intolerance. Political machinations will use other vehicles, but at its core they will use the race card to cause huge human suffering throughout our history. They are the two things that I particularly asked the commission to look at.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: In regard to that line of questioning, as you would know, two weeks ago a bus load of children from the Jewish school in Bondi were attacked while on their way home from school. They were verbally abused and threatened with violence by five alleged teenagers who had boarded the bus. I know you made media comments condemning this unacceptable racial attack too. Minister, what initiatives or specific actions is the Government taking to stamp out this type of behaviour and stop it from happening again?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Hakan will go into some detail but can I say in relation to the second arm, which is the racism point, we need all of us around this table to stand up to it; it is not just me. Even if I spoke 24 hours a day, seven days a week, I would not be enough to counter this. This has to be above politics; whether it is your party, The Greens or the Labor Party, and that is why so often when these issues come to the fore, leaders stand up and politicians step down. That is why I am very proud of all of us in Parliament for doing that.

To use an example, when we had Harmony Day this year, the race discrimination commissioner, Tim Soutphommasane ran a campaign, Racism. It Stops With Me. We had photos with Ministers and members of Parliament, not just on my side of politics but all sides of politics. There were Labor members of Parliament there, and I think The Greens turned up as well; every side of politics came up. We had a photo with the commissioner so that photo could then appear in the local newsletter of each member of Parliament to show that racism is not tolerated and racism is not a party political thing. It is something that states men and women should stand up and address.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: We note that sometime ago there was a racial attack on a Ukrainian Catholic church in Lidcombe. Do you know if the Government offered to assist that church in its repairs?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: At the time I was very vocal about that, as I am vocal about any racist attack. As I said, it is one of the great scourges of humanity. At the time we publicly condemned it but I will have to take that on notice as to whether the Government offered any assistance.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Does the Government give anything to help councils resource the removal of such attacks?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will have to take that on notice. Obviously what councils do is the purview of their—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What specific steps is the Government taking to improve cohesion so as to avoid repeat behaviour in the future?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is a very good question. Part of the reason for our success in New South Wales in having a multicultural society is twofold: we do understand and celebrate each other's diversity and we have done that very well. The other part of the equation is that we must continue to work on things that unite us as Australians, whether it is Australia Day, whether it is volunteering, whether it is Anzac Day and the Centenary of Anzac commemorations is a great point. We need to do both in equal measure. In terms of celebrating our society, obviously we introduced the Premier's harmony dinner. In the first year we had about 500 people, the next year we had 750 and then this year past we had about a thousand people turn up. That is getting bigger and bigger. That is a visual, practical demonstration of everyone in the community coming together.

We have the Multicultural Media Awards as well, again celebrating the great work, the outstanding work the multicultural media have done and the role they have played in our society. At those awards I remember giving a speech in relation to violence against women and I challenged the multicultural media at that speech to make sure they take this up as an issue, not bury it or sweep it underneath the carpet. To their credit, most of them ran a major article about what we can do to stop or prevent violence against women in the multicultural world. I am sure Hakan is champing at the bit to provide more details in relation to issues that we have undertaken.

Mr HARMAN: Only if the Deputy Chair would like me to do so. On 20 August, which is this Wednesday, we have our annual symposium, which is a significant part of our community engagement strategy. This year our topic is overseas conflict or, more correctly, the impact on communities in New South Wales of conflicts in other parts of the world. We are looking through different lenses at how we maintain social cohesion and community harmony in one of the most multicultural states in the world. We have been over-subscribed for this initiative. We have over 300 leaders from all different sectors coming to participate in this discourse.

I think it is about education. I think it is about directing our programs and partnerships, and utilising the skills of our advisory board and commissioners to direct our resources and our engagements with our strategic partners to achieve the best outcomes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, one of the things you just said about the commemoration of Anzac relates to my next question. Obviously next year the 100th Gallipoli anniversary will be held. How many representatives from different parts of the community will be sponsored to attend the memorial in Gallipoli and which community groups will be represented and, of course, what budget has been allocated to ensure that these representatives can attend?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: In relation to the school tour, we have just announced as a Government that we will be funding \$1 million for a hundred students plus 28 supervising teachers to partake in the Gallipoli dawn service next year. I think they will be there for approximately seven days and they will be doing other activities relating to Anzac. To answer the second part of your question, they are going to be selected through a ballot process. Application is now open for schools or groups of schools to put their name forward to be part of the ballot. Then, if they are drawn out of the ballot, that school or groups of schools will have four students going along. Basically there will be 25 schools or groups of schools drawn out of the ballot.

To make sure that there is an equitable spread across our great State, the ballot process will ensure that there are both metropolitan schools and non-metropolitan schools represented. We will also make sure that there are government and non-government schools represented. It is an important opportunity for all schools.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Last year \$200,000 was dedicated to the restoring and repairing of community war memorials. Have the planned repairs been completed? If not, what is the project line?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is ongoing funding.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: That will be another \$200,000 this year?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes. They have been allocated the money. I do not know the specifics of whether each and every one has been repaired but each year there is a similar grants program to make sure that the war memorials are in proper repair.

Ms ROGERS: It is actually \$250,000.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: Minister, I have heard Mr Harman's interpretation of the funding cuts in a different perspective, which I find a bit difficult to comprehend. But I can only rely on the figures where they show that there are cuts of 7.1 per cent of expenses on community support services and a 0.9 per cent cut on the language services. In regard to the cutting of the language services funding and also of employees, has any specific study been conducted before the decision to cut the expenses? Do you think that would be fully supporting the service we are providing in light of the fact that there are a lot more immigrants coming in who need to have interpretations or translations of their documentation?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again Mr Wong, I do not accept the premise of your question given the explanation provided by the chief executive officer in relation to the financial position of the commission and what I have already said before, that there has been no cut. In fact, there has been an increase but I will let Mr Harman speak to that.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: But the figure is showing the cutting of expenses.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again, I am not a qualified accountant, I do not know whether you are, but the man sitting next to me is. I will let him explain the figures.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It is pathetic.

Mr HARMAN: The language services line item at page 2-27 shows \$8.9 million for 2013-14 and \$8.9 million, the exact same figure for the following year, 2014-15. Part of our review includes a complete look at the way all of the resources are allocated within the organisation. These budget figures do not reflect that review as such.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Where do those budget figures come from? It clearly says a variation of 7.1 and 0.9 for languages. It is clearly in the budget papers. Are there any documents that you can give us?

Mr HARMAN: I am sorry; can you point that out? I am happy to answer you, if you could just point out what line item you are referring to.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: It is page 2-1.

CHAIR: What page are you on?

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: It is 2-1 where it states "Service Group" and "Language Services". In 2014-15 it shows \$8.9 million and there is a 0.9 per cent variation. Is that it cut, or do you think it is an increase?

Mr HARMAN: What that is looking at is, I think, the revised 2013-14. These figures come from page 2-27. If you look at total expenses for the 2013-14 budget, it is \$8,899,000. The revised budget is \$8,984,000, so that has been rounded up to \$9 million in the revised figures for 2013-14, and rightly so. Our budget for 2013-14—or our forecast—is \$8,899,000, which is exactly the same figure. There is no cut in language services.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: Is there any loss of employees as well? I think one of the tables shows that there are two employees being lost. Is that the case?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Can you direct us to the table or the document? It is very difficult otherwise.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: While Ernest is looking at the tables—

Mr HARMAN: I can report to it, if you like. It is page 2-27 again. I think what you are referring to, Mr Wong, is employees for 2013-14, which is 114, and our forecast is 112. This is a full-time equivalent factor of the recruitment process from time to time of casual employees. At any one time we can have over 600 to 650 casual employees, and there is a full-time equivalent of that; and that is what that is. It does not actually indicate that we are putting staff off in terms of casual employees.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: Thank you.

Mr HARMAN: That is okay.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, I note what you said earlier about your position in relation to racism and I commend that, as all members of this Parliament oppose racism and vilification. But why did you or your Government refuse to immediately oppose the Federal Government's watering down of section 18C?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Thank you for reminding me. That is exactly what we did: We put in a submission in the proper form and we did it in a very powerful way. We got our Victorian counterparts in line as well. In my view, that was an even more powerful way to get the message across.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It was not immediate. That is my point.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: When you are in government things take a little bit more time than they do when you are an individual or in opposition.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But when you see black is black, you can clearly state that.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: You make a good point. My response is equally strong: When we joined forces with Victoria, we had a joint submission. As you would appreciate, that would take a little bit of time, but the power of that joint submission was far, far better than any individual State just saying its own thing because we could then say, with Victoria and New South Wales combined, we had a majority of the population and, without doubt, a majority of the multicultural communities in our great country of Australia. That was a very powerful submission. I think it was taken into account, ultimately.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can I say, Minister, that people look at government for leadership and I think the Government failed in leadership instantly.

CHAIR: Is that a question or a statement?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can I just ask the question and give an outline? I now you are strong in terms of discrimination and vilification. What is your initiative, if any, in relation to religious vilification? I ask that because the Islamic community, in particular, has been subject to significant vilification in recent times. The Anti-Discrimination Act does not cover religious vilification, nor does the Federal Racial Discrimination Act [RDA]. What action would you take to address the concerns of those communities?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Can I just answer the previous statement? I think our Government showed exceptionally strong leadership on section 18C.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But I am asking about religious vilification.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I know, but you have made a statement and I am going to respond to it. Our Government showed exceptionally strong leadership. It would have been very easy to score a quick political point but the fact is we waited until we could get that partnership with Victoria to make it an almost unstoppable submission, and that has proved to be the case. I think we showed in the light of day very strong leadership on that issue and it is something that I am very proud of. In answer to your question, there was an issue raised in relation to section 20D of the Anti-Discrimination Act in New South Wales. That issue went to the justice committee. That is a committee I think you may have sat on.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes, I am on that committee.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: It is the committee where there are The Greens, Labor and Liberal members. That committee was asked to examine section 20D, its effectiveness and how we could improve it. The recommendations from that committee I think were almost unanimous. The Government is shortly going to respond to them.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But there was a dissenting statement. You would have seen that.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is your dissenting statement?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, I saw that. But in relation to the committee we will have a response to the committee's recommendations—not the dissenting statement but the committee's recommendations—in the near future. Clearly, that is a matter for the Attorney General.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I have a couple of questions regarding the membership of the ministerial multicultural committees. Based on your advice at last year's estimates, which was to write to the chairs and ask them whether their members wish to have their details disclosed to me, I did just that. I wrote to 29 chairs and co-chairs of the committees. Of the 29, I received responses from only three and all of them declined to provide any details of membership. Minister, my question to you is: How can the community have any confidence in the Government's ability to meaningfully engage with communities until there is transparency around who you are getting advice from?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Thank you. Dr Faruqi, those committees no longer exist. The Community Relations Commission [CRC], as part of its new strategy, is improving its community engagement strategies so that effectively the functions of those committees will roll into the new community engagement strategy that the commission will undertake. Basically there are going to be metropolitan consultative forums of the Community Relations Commission. They will conduct those in November. They will be undertaken in Strathfield, Liverpool and Hornsby. I will let Mr Harman say more about that. But if I could just say in relation to the publication of those who may or may not have participated in the ministerial multicultural committees [MCCs], when they were established in 2011 we sought advice from the CRC about community leaders who should be invited to participate in the consultative bodies. The advice formed the basis of a schedule of possible participants, which were compiled for each MCC in consultation with the MP chairs. The chairs used these schedules to invite community leaders to participate in the initial MCC meetings.

The chairs of the MCCs were then responsible for calling subsequent meetings and for inviting participants to attend the meetings. The schedule was updated as new MCCs were formed and I used that schedule then to write to participants on two separate occasions, once on 28 April advising them of the CRC developing a community engagement strategy, to which I have just referred, and my wish to include the successful MCC structure—because it was successful in that they achieved some outcomes, and I will talk to you about that in a moment—as part of a broader engagement mechanism as well as making the names of the MCC participants publicly available. At the end of the day, they were volunteers; they were community people. They did not get paid; they were simply volunteers—ad hoc people on the committees.

I wrote to them for a second time on 1 August advising them of this change in inviting them to participate in the Community Relations Commission metropolitan consultative forums, which I said will take place in November this year. In 2012-13 in relation to our publication there was a question on notice about the full list of those who may or may not have participated. I responded by naming the committees. As you have indicated correctly, I suggested that you approach the chairs—and thank you for doing that. I understand that

there has now been a Standing Order 52 direction. I will comply fully with Standing Order 52. I wanted to make sure because they were voluntary people in the community that if there were any privacy concerns I had at least articulated that in the correspondence and that has been done. So Standing Order 52 will no doubt be answered and it provides an appropriate mechanism to overcome any privacy concerns that may have existed previously.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Minister, I am particularly concerned because the Sri Lankan community has raised some concerns with me about this secret membership, especially given the diverse nature of communities. You know there are allegations of war crimes that have been raised, committed against the Tamil people. I think it is important to make sure that the make-up of those committees is representative of the broader community and I hope, with the new model, that you will take that into account.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Thank you, Dr Faruqi. As I said, we will comply with Standing Order 52 and the metropolitan consultative forums will be open to community leaders of all persuasions. I welcome anyone's attendance at those forums.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: I am happy with that. I have another question about the financing of the committees because I asked that question of the chairs and Mark Coure, MP, was one of the few chairs who responded. He said that it is incorrect to claim the membership of the Multicultural Committee [MCC] is supported by taxpayer funds. Is that correct Minister, and is there any money or in-kind support provided to the committee by the Government?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As I said, the committees no longer exist.

Dr MEHREEN FARUQI: Was in-kind or monetary support provided to the committees?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Support was obviously provided by the ministry in the sense that we coordinated the symposiums where we brought people together, where people like General Cosgrove spoke about the Centenary of Anzac and how it is important for multicultural communities to get involved. It is a good point because it is what the Hon. Paul Green asked: What are you doing in relation to the multicultural communities and the Centenary of Anzac? I specifically said that, as part of the budget, \$50,000 would go to multicultural communities to assist them to participate in the Centenary of Anzac commemoration. So of course it was in-kind support provided by our ministry, but that is the extent of it.

(The witnesses withdrew)

CHAIR: We now turn to the budget expenditure for the Office for Veterans' Affairs.

DARREN MITCHELL, General Manager, Office for Veterans' Affairs, Department of Premier and Cabinet, sworn and examined:

PHILLIP PEACE, Chief Financial Officer, Office for Veterans' Affairs, Department of Premier and Cabinet, on former affirmation:

CHAIR: We now move to Opposition questions.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, in the 2013-14 budget, \$33.694 million was forecast for the Veterans' Affairs community grants. The revised costing for the period was decreased to \$2.247 million. Can you explain that?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The Veteran' Affairs community grants? If you could show me the document, that would help us out.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: This is a question I have here.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I know but you are obviously sourcing the information from a document. Could you tell us what the source of that information is?

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: I think Mr Mitchell would probably have read the file of 8 January that goes to the Veterans' Affairs community grants, so probably you will be able to give us a bit of background on it in regard to the revised costing. Do you think that has increased or decreased? I am pretty sure you will have those figures, right?

Mr MITCHELL: I will just seek clearance of the Minister to answer your question.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I am sorry, what was your question, Mr Wong?

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: We are talking about the Veterans' Affairs community grants. The Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane is looking into the papers but there is a reduction of the grant. But probably Mr Mitchell would be able to verify whether or not that is the case and where the figures would be.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will ask Ms Rogers, because I think we have sourced the document you are referring to. It is on page 2-15 of the budget papers. There is an explanation in relation to youth opportunities but we will get back to you on that.

Ms ROGERS: I think you are referring to the service measures on page 2-15 in Budget Paper No. 3?

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: Unfortunately, I do not have it.

Ms ROGERS: And the 2013-14 forecast was \$3.694 million and the revised figure for 2013-14 was \$2.247 million?

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: Correct.

Ms ROGERS: So the revised figure is the amount of funds that have gone out the door in 2013-14, as at 30 April. So that figure would be higher than that once the 30 June budget actuals are finalised. But this is not just grant funding for veterans. In fact, the grant funding for veterans is about \$350,000 worth of that figure. This is about grant funding for youth and veterans programs.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: So it includes youth opportunities moneys as well.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: You have indicated that there is a higher figure. What figure is that, Ms Rogers?

Ms ROGERS: I would not be able to say but I think it would be closer to \$3 million. If you note that footnote A on that page explains there is an underspend. The third round of youth opportunities grants did not go ahead in 2013-14 because the funding was reallocated to young people commemorating the Centenary of

Anzac. So that is funding that was put aside for the Gallipoli Study Tour 2015 that Mr Green asked a question about earlier.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: We put \$1 million into it, so \$750,000 would have come out of youth opportunities and \$250,000 as part of the standard Premier's allocation for these scholarships.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It is not related to the Veterans' Affairs community grants?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Not the whole figure, no. The youth opportunities, Mr Moselmane, is a grant that is worth \$3.1 million per annum. I can understand the line of questioning.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: In the 2014-15 budget there is also a forecast of \$3.694 million and again it says, "Veterans' Affairs community grants".

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: But if you read the line it says, "the value of youth and veterans", so they have amalgamated the two. The youth component is that \$3.1 million youth opportunities aspect and then there is the veterans component as well. That is where I think there is some confusion.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Has there been an increase? Is that what you are saying?

Ms ROGERS: No, it is the same. It is just that in 2013-14 a certain amount was set aside to cover the cost of the Gallipoli study tour.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: But when you look at the figures for 2013-14 you find there is a decrease in that funding. Will you expect this to be the same this year, as compared to figures for the last financial year?

Ms ROGERS: No, we expect full expenditure, so we would expect that the final expenditure for 2014-15 would be about \$3.69 million.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: Are you able to clarify again in regard to the reduction last year to give a clear picture of exactly where it fell short in last year's revised expenses?

Ms ROGERS: The \$2.24 million is the actual expenditure against the youth grant funding and the Veterans' Affairs grant funding as at 30 April. Since then a number of grants have been paid so the final figure for the 2013-14 year will be higher than that. Mr Peace, did you know when the final figures will be available?

Mr PEACE: Once the audit is completed.

Ms ROGERS: So once the audit is completed the final figures will be available. The reason there is an underspend—there is a conscious reason why there is an underspend—is that the funding needed to be confirmed to cover the cost of the Gallipoli Study Tour 2015 which we believe will cost around \$1 million. About \$750,000 or \$800,000 will need to come from the Youth Opportunities grants program in order to cover that cost. That is why there is an underspend. We have kept aside that money to be able to pay for the Gallipoli study tour, but we do not expect to have to do anything like that next year so that the youth programs funding allocation is expected to be fully spent in 2014-15.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Mr Mitchell, is it true that the Office for Veterans' Affairs is in the back corner of the office with limited resources?

Mr MITCHELL: If I could just refer to statements of fact: The Office for Veterans' Affairs has been housed in a building in 323 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, co-located with the Office of Communities throughout the past year and a bit more, as is in keeping with the allocation at the time through 2013-14 of the portfolio responsibilities within the Education and Communities portfolio. So we were co-located with the Office of Communities and I continue to be in that space, even though in recent times there has been a reallocation of the portfolio responsibilities across to the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: When you say "co-located", does that mean it is given significant space and is not in the back corner of the office?

Mr MITCHELL: We have adequate space, thank you, for carrying out our duties within the Office of Communities and Environment, of which Helen Rogers is in charge.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: What grants do you expect to put in for next year? Are there any new programs?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Obviously, the biggest thing for Veterans' Affairs is the \$38 million that we are allocating to upgrade the Anzac memorial. This is a true legacy spend for the whole community and is something we are particularly proud of. That is to make sure that we have the education centre go underneath and, obviously, the effects that will have on all students coming forward will be immense. That is a big spend we will have. We are hoping to have that completed by 2017, so before the conclusion of the centenary commemoration.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Just quickly.

CHAIR: Your time has expired.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Take it on notice?

CHAIR: I am being very generous.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Thank you. Have any Veterans' Affairs staff resigned?

Mr MITCHELL: Yes. There has been a resignation during 2013-14 of one of our officers.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: How many employees do you have at the moment?

Mr MITCHELL: Within the Office for Veterans' Affairs, it also includes the Anzac memorial staffing, of which there is a seven equivalent full-time staffing component. That remains intact currently. Within the Office for Veterans' Affairs, which is sort of like a separate entity, there are 4.6 positions. As of today there are four people in place. So 0.6 has resigned.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I refer to plans to redevelop the 10 terminal site, a site of significant heritage for Vietnam veterans, into a 86-bed aged care home with dementia day clinic. While I understand that the proposal for the 10 terminal will be subject to a full Federal and environmental impact assessment before it can proceed, will the State Government support moves to preserve this site and allocate future funding to turn this site into an historical museum? Will you commit to a collaborative effort with your Federal Government counterparts to ensure this end?

CHAIR: For further clarification, where is that site, Middle Head?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Would you like to see the articles?

Mr MITCHELL: Yes, it could be useful. I would love to, yes.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I will ask another question while you peruse that and come back with an answer. Minister, given that in November last year Kiama councillors unanimously endorsed its sub-branch's vision to have a Centenary of Anzac logo painted on the Kiama lighthouse from 2014 to 2018, given that those plans are in disarray because correspondence was received from NSW Crown Lands Division that a full heritage assessment was needed to be supplied before a decision was made, and given that became known just one working day before centenary commemorations took place, but which had been known for at least a year, what steps are being taken to ensure that our Diggers are honoured in ways local communities through New South Wales expect?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I can answer the last part of the question and will do so in a moment, but in relation to the first part, obviously that is Crown Land.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I thought you would play that card.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: It is not a question of playing the cards; it is a question of being honest. That is the reality. No doubt, Mr Humphries will answer that, and I am sure you will ask him that question. In relation to the second part of the question, we are doing a lot of grassroots work to make sure that we commemorate the Centenary of Anzac properly. It is never lost upon me what then General Cosgrove said to us when he was Chair of the NSW Centenary of Anzac Advisory Council. He said, "This is not a celebration. This is a commemoration. We're not going to spend a lot of money on fireworks and the like." Nor are we going to waste one hospital bed or one school desk in relation to the commemorations. These are genuine grassroots activities. That is something the Government is doing. For example, we have a number of initiatives and I will walk you through some.

The re-enactment marches coming from regional New South Wales into the city, the Waratah and Kangaroo marches et cetera will be a very big activity. Already I know that communities are marshalling their troops to paint a picture in relation to those marches. We have the digitisation of the Diggers' diaries. The State Library has put those on record. They are amazing. I encourage everyone to look at them. Obviously, we have the landmark infrastructure spend around the upgrade of the memorial, and where we will have the education centre—\$38.3 million to be precise. Then we have initiatives that are genuine grassroots initiatives, such as United We Stand. What that means is getting sporting clubs involved in the commemoration process. That is around what I call the three Rs. It is about research, respect and remembrance.

We did one down at the Kiama Cricket Club. I think we announced it there. Basically what they do is get a club that has been around for a while, or even if it is new, and they are required to do the research to find out if any of their members were part of the campaign in the Great War. If that is the case, once they have done the research—you cannot truly remember or respect unless you know what you are remembering or respecting—they play a game closest to Remembrance Day and dedicate that game in honour of the Diggers who participated. Then they ask permission of the sub-branch to see if they can lay a wreath on Anzac Day. There are a whole lot of grassroots initiatives on which I am more than happy to give you more information.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I will say that plan is probably taken from the Shoalies rugby club, where Keith Payne, VC, just as recently as two Saturdays ago took time.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: They did something similar, did they?

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am sure they are in discussions with the State or Federal Government to move that through other sporting codes. It sounds pretty good.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The good thing is that we have a website—another thing to try to coordinate everybody so that everyone can see what we are doing. Hopefully they will be part of that website.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: There is a good blueprint down there at Shoalies rugby club of which I declare that I am a patron.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I expect to see you in the paper there.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I commend also the Government for helping to fund a DVD titled *Camden Anzacs "Our Story"*, which was self-funded by Camden community connections, helped along by grants from Camden Council and the New South Wales Department of Veterans' Affairs. Is the Government involved in any other praiseworthy ventures? If so, how much has been allocated to such important purposes as preserving our cultural heritage?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: We have a number of Anzac community grants that we are administering. Darren Mitchell has been outstanding in his work to date in implementing them. Do you want to go through some of them?

Mr MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr Green. The Anzac Community Grants is a \$100,000 program and is incorporated in some of the questions that were previously asked by members. In the past little while, some grants have gone out to some very worthy causes. It is a combination of youth grants and multicultural grants. Some are directed towards school communities or other youth work within local communities. Other grants are directed towards multicultural associations or those who might be working in rather diverse areas. For example, some of the things that were recently supported include the Kangaroo Valley Anzac Committee which is receiving \$2,000 from the Kiama area for a commemoration service and family day in March, so a community

day to involve more than just those who might routinely attend Anzac Day services. Similarly, in Holroyd City Council we intend to support them with the collection of stories, artefacts and engaging their local communities with stories around those artefacts. That was a \$5,000 grant. In particular, some recent things that you may be familiar with include the Sydney University Graduate Choir which was involved in a performance of a unique Australian war requiem on 10 August at Sydney Town Hall. We contributed some funds—I think the total amount was \$5,000—to ensure that that requiem is available in other languages. In like nature, we have also supported the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway in Concord with a grant to ensure that its original composition, which will be premiered just before Anzac Day next year, also will be available to young people in multicultural communities.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Is the Minister in favour of moving the memorial from Martin Place to Hyde Park?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I am in favour of working closely with the RSL to ensure that we get a place that is appropriate. I am like you. We have to ensure that we do it in partnership. I know an increasing number of crowds are attending the dawn service. I have attended for the past four or five years and the numbers have been extraordinary. From memory, it was raining this year—it definitely was last year—and still the crowds flock. Given the amount of people who will be attending next year, we need to think outside the box. I will work closely with Don Rowe and the RSL to ensure that we have an appropriate service that pays due respect and dignity to the diggers.

CHAIR: Thank you. We will now have a 15 minute break for afternoon tea.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

JASON ARDLER, General Manager, Aboriginal Affairs, Office of Communities, Department of Education and Communities, affirmed and examined:

PHILLIP PEACE, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Education and Communities, on former affirmation:

CHAIR: I declare the estimates hearing into the portfolio of Aboriginal Affairs open.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, in the programs you have presided over in Indigenous affairs—programs that your Government may have initiated or programs you may have inherited from the previous Government—are there two or three in your judgement that are working quite successfully and producing pretty good results?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Thank you for the question. I think all the initiatives under the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment [OCHRE] strategy I am most pleased with and that is because they were initiatives that were designed and requested by Aboriginal community. We have a long-term strategy in relation to those initiatives such as local decision-making, language nests and opportunity hubs and each was designed in partnership with the Aboriginal community. The one I am most passionate about, if I had a favourite, is probably language given my own particular circumstance; I know how important that is to the Aboriginal community.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Essentially what you are saying is, without picking favourites, in your judgement the OCHRE initiatives have been quite successful and are worthy of ongoing support?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: They are definitely worthy of ongoing support; success will play out over time. That is why we have a deputy Aboriginal ombudsman in relation to OCHRE, which is absolutely critical to all of this. Obviously these are in their initial phase of implementation and establishment. Some will progress much faster than others but if you measure success by asking "Was there partnership with community?" then there was absolutely success.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I appreciate your identification of that specifically. I now turn to Budget Paper No.3, page 2-1. Do you have a copy in front of you?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No, but I will look over Mr Ardler's shoulder.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Are you looking at Budget Paper No.3, page 2-1?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I have 2-14.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: At the top of the page is the heading "Education and Communities Cluster". You probably do not have a copy of last year's budget paper with that same heading in front of you—I have that advantage over you because I do. In the budget paper for 2013-14 and what was then called "Promoting social and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people"—which is Aboriginal Affairs—the budget was \$20.9 million and the budget for 2014-15 is \$18.4 million. Do you follow that?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Obviously there is a difference between those two figures. Looking at the figure in the previous budget and the figure in this budget we have a difference of a negative \$2.5 million. Back in 2011-12—you will also have to take this figure as a given from me because I have the details in front of me—with respect to Aboriginal Affairs the figure was \$23 million. Last year you crafted a budget with a figure of \$20.9 million and this year you have crafted a budget with a figure of \$18.4 million. So we have this decrease in a social policy portfolio that has a range, which you perhaps know better than most, of serious problems and difficulties. So we have the situation of an underspend from last year's budget, and that is obvious, and we now have a figure that has been crafted for this year. We have this negative, backward affect. It really flies counter to a number of things the Minister has actually said about progress. In fact it is regressive; it is a diminution with respect to a very important portfolio area.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I understand the question. Some \$3.2 million we received from the expenditure review committee was not put in there, so that is not reflected in the budget papers.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In which budget paper?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: In these figures here.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In which figures? Are you talking about the \$18.4 million?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: This is the difficulty of referring to cross documents. I am talking in relation to the 2014-15 figures. You were saying there was a diminution—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That is not true. You budgeted last year, for the 2013-14 period, for \$20.9 million—and there is no question about that. In this year's budget we have a budgeted figure of \$18.4 million. So that gives minus \$2.5 million. This is a very significant portfolio area where there is a huge amount of disadvantage and citizens of this State face great difficulties. On a whole range of indices—whether we are talking about education, health or other issues—we are going backwards. What is your explanation for that?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: There was a Council of Australian Governments [COAG] component of that as well.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: A COAG component of what?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will let Jason Ardler, who is General Manager of Aboriginal Affairs, walk you through the minutiae of the budget.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: With the greatest of respect, Minister, you are here as the Minister. This is not minutiae; this is a clear line item on page 2-1 of Budget Paper No. 3. I would have thought, in all fairness, that you would have some grasp of what is the credible explanation of why we have gone backwards in such a significant way.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Mr Donnelly, you asked me questions in relation to the initiatives and I gave you an outline. If you ask me about the funding in relation to each of those initiatives, I can tell you more about that. If you want an accounting explanation in relation to the variance in the figures, between one revised and one budget, I will hand the answer over to the person who has—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That is not what I am saying. You know they are both budget figures. I have already explained that. These are not revised and budget figures; it is the budget figure for last year and the budget figure for this year.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Mr Donnelly, if you want an explanation then you will get it.

Mr ARDLER: The major variations in the Aboriginal Affairs budget come down to three things really. The \$20.8 million from 2013-14 was in fact adjusted down by 0.9 million.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Where does the \$20.8 million figure come from? I cannot see a figure for \$20.8 million?

Mr ARDLER: The 2013-14 budget, the original budget. It was in fact adjusted down by 0.9 million, which was simply a budgeting error. That 0.9 was for Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment [OCHRE] funding, which should have been for the Department of Education and Communities [DEC].

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: So there was an error of 0.9 million?

Mr ARDLER: It is because it is within the cluster. That money was just adjusted back to the cluster for the OCHRE initiatives.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Was it publicly explained that an error of that magnitude had taken place?

Mr ARDLER: That I do not know.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Did you make that clarification?

Mr ARDLER: No.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Did you make that clarification to the Minister?

Mr ARDLER: I cannot recall.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, did you receive clarification about how \$0.9 million just sort of disappeared?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: This is not an insignificant amount of money in what is not a large portfolio budget, is it? We are talking about \$0.9 million.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will take it on notice.

Mr ARDLER: The other major adjustment was the cessation of the Community Partnerships Program and the COAG national partnership agreement initiatives, which expired on June 30. They totalled \$4.5 million. As the Minister has said, they were offset by an additional \$3.2 million into the Aboriginal Affairs budget this year. So the material difference is the cessation of the COAG programs.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Mr Donnelly, this is a space where, quite frankly, more money does not necessarily mean better outcomes. Let us be honest about that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am not arguing that; I am trying to get the figures right.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Okay, well the explanation has been provided. When I go around to communities, and everyone knows how much I have been out in the community, they all say the same thing—they want programs that are effective, that are working and that are independently evaluated.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I turn now to page 2-14 of Budget Paper No. 3. Under the heading "Service measures" it lists the number of partnership communities with recognised governance bodies. The figure for 2011-12 was 34. The revised figure for 2013-14 is reduced to 23. Do we have a list somewhere of those that have not been funded and did not receive financial support?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The money in relation to the working parties has essentially been utilised now for local decision-making, which is in accordance with the wishes of the Aboriginal community when we formed the OCHRE strategy.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: So you are saying that the Indigenous community of New South Wales agreed to the reduction from 34 to 23? Is that what you are saying?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I am saying that when we went out to the community we had an exhaustive consultation process. We had about 2,000 submissions or people attending, which is equivalent on a pro rata basis in New South Wales to about 100,000 people turning up. They articulated to us what their priority areas are. Local decision-making was one of those areas. I do not resile from the fact that that is an important requirement as part of the OCHRE initiatives.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: So that is what your explanation is. I turn to the number of employees, which has moved from 107 in 2011-12 to 88 in 2013-14. Are those the correct figures?

Mr ARDLER: I believe so, yes.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Do we know what areas these particular people were employed in? It is quite a significant reduction in full-time equivalent [FTE] over this period of time. Do we have any tabulation of where these people were employed or any sort of list of the areas they were employed in?

Mr ARDLER: I would have to take that question on notice.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Thank you, if you could then that would be helpful.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: In regards to this loss of more than 21 per cent of staff, do you think that is one of the factors that contributes to the fact that you have only negotiated three local decision-making accords, as indicated on page 2-14?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: You are referring to local decision-making accords?

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: Yes, you have only three. Is that due to the loss of staff?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Not at all. One of the things that this Government is particularly focused on is making sure that we do things right. We need to get the model right and then start rolling it out effectively. What has happened in the past is that traditionally governments have said, "We are going to give every electorate a prize; everyone is a winner", irrespective of whether or not that community or electorate has capacity. We agreed that there will be three local decision-making initiatives rolled out across the State, and that is because at that point that is where we could identify capacity. Mr Ardler can talk more about that and the potential for some more accords as more capacity is rolled out. That is why we have only five language nests.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: How long did it take to get those three accords?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That occurred over the past six or eight months. Mr Ardler might have the details in relation to the specific dates. Otherwise I can go from memory.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Just take it on notice. We are talking about the loss of 19 employees—that is a 21 per cent cut to staff numbers.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Just in response to the last question, because it relates to the assertion that there was a reduction in staff and that is why we had fewer accords, that could not be further from the truth—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Hang on, there has been a reduction in staff—unequivocally.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: You are drawing a correlation between that and providing local decision-making.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I did not make any inference at all.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I did not suggest that you did.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: You just did.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I said that Mr Wong did—that was the basis for his last question.

The Hon. ERNEST WONG: I am sure that would be one of the factors contributing to it. Of course, there would be a lot of other factors.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I know. I just want to say in relation to the local decision-making, just because you sign an accord it does not mean that is the end of the process. The design of the model is such that once capacity is demonstrated and built, then more and more authority in terms of making decisions, allocation of money, et cetera, is provided. This is not a gift that you wrap and you give once the accord is signed; this is a long-term initiative that may take many, many years to evolve into its full potential.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I note that we have four minutes, Minister, and I want to ask you a question about the Aboriginal Heritage Act. You promised that you will enact the Aboriginal Heritage Act. There is no bill before Parliament. When will you deliver on this promise?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I am the co-Minister; obviously the lead Minister on that is Minister Stokes. Yes, that is something I am particularly passionate about, there is no doubt about that, and Minister Stokes and I are working very hard to bring a bill to Parliament as soon as possible.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Given your passion about it, Minister, when do you think you will have it?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As soon as possible. Obviously there are only a number of sitting weeks left but we are constantly trying to get something out. This is something that we are very passionate about; there is no doubt about it.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: As to the Government review of Crown lands and Aboriginal land rights, have you met with representatives of the mining, gas or property industries?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: In relation to the Crown lands review?

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Yes.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No, not to my knowledge.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: In relation to the Crown Lands Act, has there been a strategy to shut down Aboriginal lands claims?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Any question in relation to the Crown Lands Act you need to ask the Minister responsible for Crown lands, but I am happy to talk about the review in relation to the Land Rights Act.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What about in relation to the Aboriginal part of it? Has there been any discussion with the relevant Minister?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again, in relation to the Crown Lands Act, by all means ask the relevant Minister the question. In relation to the Land Rights Act, I am more than happy to talk for the next two hours about the reforms that we are bringing about in the Land Rights Act because that is clearly under my control.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, I return to my opening theme about this reduction in expenditure which you are systematically overseeing in the department with respect to matters associated with Indigenous affairs. There is a decline that is taking place and we have the reality of serious difficulties inside the Indigenous population in New South Wales across a range of indices. If, as you have identified with the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment [OCHRE] program with respect to early signs, and these are your words, of some promising outcomes, why would you not be looking to give that a bit of a charge up to press it ahead, to give it a bit of a boost, as opposed to what is a diminution in expenditure in this portfolio?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: All of the initiatives under OCHRE have been fully funded and they will roll out accordingly.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That is not the question I asked. You are presiding over a cut, another year's worth of cuts. This decrease is occurring year after year after year. We have a budgeted figure and a revised figure, a budgeted figure and a revised figure, a budgeted figure and a revised figure, and if you follow the trend, it is one way: downwards.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Mr Ardler explained that to you and in relation to the OCHRE initiatives, there has been no cut. The OCHRE initiatives have been fully funded.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I do not think the explanation has been completely clear. You are saying no cuts; I submit there have been cuts. These are the budget figures; they are in the budget papers. This is what we have to work with.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I understand that, Mr Donnelly.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I acknowledge the \$0.9 million that you referred to earlier on. I did not know that and I suspect most people around this table did not know that before this hearing. We can only go with the figures that we have been given. But we have this decline in expenditure and I cannot see the justification for that when we know, one, there is such need and, two, if there are programs, either existing or those under trial which are starting to show some potential, why would we not be getting behind them and boosting them to try to improve the situation of Indigenous people in this State?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: You are absolutely right in relation to the overarching statements. Once we show that they are working and the like, then we would put some more money behind them to roll them out further.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: But in the meantime—without cutting you off—you are prepared to cut year after year after year?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As I said, I do not accept the premise of that statement.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Could you give me an explanation about where I am wrong in these figures: the budget figures for last year, the budget figures for this year showing a negative \$2.5 million?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As Mr Ardler explained, there was a reduction in relation to the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] partnership moneys coming to a conclusion. There were additional funds provided—I think it was \$3.23 million ERC—to make sure that the moneys were funded for the initiatives as part of the OCHRE strategy. We will take on notice that \$0.9 million figure.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Minister, I follow on with the OCHRE budgetary allocation. I note that there is \$2.4 million: \$739,000 going to the deputy ombudsman, which is very much a positive thing. As to the balance, the \$1.66 million, what specific projects or programs are allocated to that funding?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Obviously in relation to the OCHRE strategy we got the local decision-making, the opportunity hubs and the cultural languages. Again from the top of my head, I think it is about \$4.4 million of the estimates in relation to the five language nests, being the Wiradjuri, Barkindjii, Bundjalung, Gamilaraa and Gumbaynggirr language nests. I will have to get the precise details in relation to the breakup of the local decision-making and the opportunity hubs. Do you have that in front of you, Mr Ardler, in terms of those precise figures?

Mr ARDLER: We will have to take that on notice.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I can get back to you on that.

Ms JAN BARHAM: It is just a clarification of that \$2.4 million and then there is the \$4.6 million from last year, which has been reduced to \$4.4 million this year in terms of the total allocation. Could we have more clarification?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will take that on notice but I can assure you that in relation to the OCHRE initiatives—and this I can assure the Committee because it is a fair point raised—they are fully funded. With the greatest respect to everyone here, the most important part of these initiatives that has been funded is that of the deputy ombudsman because basically he or she is going to be there to make sure that these initiatives are evidence based, are running on time, are meeting the key milestones that we require. We can put a whole lot more money into Indigenous affairs and get "worst outcomes". We have seen that in governments of all political persuasions in the past, just throwing money at a problem rather than thinking about an issue and seeing what we can do to fix it up.

The deputy Aboriginal ombudsman, in my view, is probably one of the most important pieces of legislation we will have for Aboriginal people in this State, if not in the country, because no other State or

Territory has it. The reason it is so important is because it provides accountability in relation to these programs. Mr Donnelly rightfully asked the questions, "What are you doing? How are you going to beef it up?" When the ombudsman reports back to us and says "It is on track, things are going well" or "You need to tweak this here or there", then we can say, "Alright, we can go to the next evolution". I can go to the ERC and say "We need some more money so we can roll it out a little bit further". They will only roll it out once they are at a level of success that we know that we are not delivering failure on the community.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I agree, and I think it is important. We have all relied on the Office of the Ombudsman to provide valuable reporting and accountability back to Parliament. That is why I have been asking for about 15 months now when are we going to get a response to the Ombudsman's report on child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities. I think I have been bounced around a bit. No-one seems to be claiming responsibility for delivering a Government response to that. I have been to you, I have been to Minister Goward, I have been to Minister Upton. I put something in Parliament the other day and got refused on formal business. This issue is unresolved; 15 months, no report. When are we going to get a response from Government to a very important report, I think with 93 recommendations to Government about protecting Aboriginal children? Are you are going to follow up for me?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will follow that up.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Thank you. I am a fan of the language nests.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As am I.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Yes, I know you are, and that is fantastic. I am wondering where the next rollout will be for the language nest areas? Where are they designed?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I know there is a lot of interest but, to be honest, Mr Ardler might know the details on the ground. I am very mindful that I do not want to roll another one out, or even another five out, until we get the model right for this one. It is so critical. Languages are probably the most difficult area of policy that we have because they are endangered. If we do not do something now, they are pretty much going to become extinct. We have got to really throw every resource—not necessarily money—that we can to make sure that the model works and then we can roll it out. Mr Ardler might know whether other communities have expressed an interest. I can tell you that when I go from community to community, lots of them are expressing an interest; but whether there is the requisite level of capacity that is another thing. I do not want to visit failure on a community.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I will raise the other issue that was in the papers then about the teaching of Aboriginal languages in schools and in TAFEs. I have not seen that rolling out. Do you have a say in any of that or in regard to consultation with the Minister?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Obviously, everything within the Education budget is through Minister Piccoli.

Ms JAN BARHAM: It did not seem to appear. I think it appeared in last year's papers or there was reference last year about a program that I thought sat alongside.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: We are definitely, Ms Barham, working in partnership with TAFEs in relation to the language nests. With the five language nests, we have asked them to identify their local TAFEs so that we can provide the requisite pathway. When students—and not just students but teachers—want to upgrade their skills they can go to TAFE. We are definitely working in partnership but in regard to funding for Aboriginal languages through that, that would be the Minister for Education.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Okay. I will follow that up. I want to ask you about the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Can you advise whether there is a strategy to deal with the 25,800 claims awaiting determination?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes. Part of the review of the land rights Act—and it was a comprehensive review; it is, in my view, the generational review—is how we would start making some serious erosion in relation to the 25,000-odd land claims. One of the mechanisms—and this will be coming into Parliament shortly when we present the bill—

Ms JAN BARHAM: In this session?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Hopefully, in this session. I cannot control the vagaries of Parliament, but hopefully in this session. One of the mechanisms is a voluntary Aboriginal land agreement. Technically within the Act, you could probably do that right now but there would be a dispute—and maybe it would be taken on appeal—if you had an agreement in relation to land council and a multiplicity of claims. If we can consolidate that and clarify it in the legislation it would enable the registrar of Crown lands and whichever other agency is relevant to sit down with the local land council to say, "Look, can we just do this en masse in relation to a chunk of, say, 2,000 claims", and have a negotiated settlement that way, obviously with all parties at the table in consent. That is one of the mechanisms to try to deal with the backlog.

Ms JAN BARHAM: That means that you have legislative changes that hopefully will provide more negotiating opportunities or a strategy that will address how you need the legislation changed before you can actually progress.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Technically, you can do that now, but I have received advice that that is not 100 per cent clarified in the legislation. It is ambiguous. We are going to make that clear in the legislation that we bring before Parliament. Some of the other initiatives that we are bringing forward—for example, and again this is all subject to the bill being passed and the like—is to provide advisers. In the past the registrar would have the ability—the pretty draconian ability, really—just to appoint an administrator or not or recommend the appointment of an administrator or not. What we are trying to do is put an adviser in place so that they can assist land councils rather than seeing them being pushed to the edge. Another thing is some reform around the shape and the paths, which is the housing element of the reform. If we can provide some clarity and streamline that, it will provide land councils with more ability and free up more of their time to focus on things such as economic capacity building, and the like.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I want to ask about the economic program for which you called submissions in relation to the economic development framework. I think the submissions closed last month. Do you know how many submissions you received?

Mr ARDLER: I would have to take that on notice, but quite a few.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Is there any indication as to what areas you are looking at supporting? Will you be supporting economic development or working across a whole-of-government approach to try to get more funding for Aboriginal economic development programs?

Mr ARDLER: We had very positive feedback from the consultations. The plan is that we will work more closely with industry in particular to create both direct employment opportunities but also to support enterprise development in Aboriginal communities. We are looking at innovative funding opportunities. There is a significant opportunity, we think, in the social impact investment area that we have not tapped into previously. We are also looking at the way we can leverage existing government procurement as well. The intent is that it is a mixed range of funding opportunities.

Ms JAN BARHAM: It is something that will not require legislation. It will just be a policy and funding opportunity for government to work with.

Mr ARDLER: That is right. The intent is to respond to the review that was undertaken by Allen Consulting back in 2011. The key recommendation was for an overarching policy framework that links various activities already happening across government but then also looking at new opportunities to work with industry. That is its intent.

Ms JAN BARHAM: I am interested to follow up with Arts and Tourism to see how they are tracking in their programs. Minister, I think you know that I was successful in having my motion passed, calling for a lowering of the seniors card age for Aboriginal people.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Have you been able to have any input into that, or are you aware of whether there has been any move to progress that? Costing done by the Council of Social Service of New South Wales [NCOSS] puts it at only \$2 million a year to provide additional access.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will take that on notice and ask Minister Ajaka in relation to that.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Good. I am looking for an advocate. Is it right that there were three local decision-making areas last year?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

Ms JAN BARHAM: So are you doing three more this year?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Subject to capacity. Again, I will let Mr Ardler answer that.

Ms JAN BARHAM: That is the Illawarra, Coffs Harbour and Bourke.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Correct.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Are there locations identified for this year?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As I said, we have not said anything in relation to the additional three that are showing capacity, but we have got one, for example, in relation to far western New South Wales, which you call Bourke but it is the Murdi Paaki area. We have got one for the South Coast and one for the north. I think it is the Manning River, from memory. I know there are three more groups' localities.

Ms JAN BARHAM: It has been allocated for them, but they have not identified them. Is that it?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I do not want to speak out of turn because I do not want to give communities false hope, but there are obviously three other communities out there that have seen what we have done in relation to the three that we have already run, which you have rightfully mentioned and have got accords in place, that are very keen to say, "We want one as well." But again I am absolutely committed to making sure that we would not do it unless there is capacity there because we do not want to set a community up for failure.

Ms JAN BARHAM: Are the programs that you are implementing integral to changes that will be happening with the land rights Act? Are we going to see this as preparation and capacity-building for a change in legislation? One of the recommendations that came through was calling for more self-determination, economic opportunities, housing and jobs. Are these processes meant to facilitate that future?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Local decision-making, without a doubt, is about that, but it is a staged process. What has happened in the past with the working parties is I think one of the challenges with working parties—there was no end point as to where they would go. They would meet and they would talk, but then what would you do? What we have done in the design model of the local decision-making—and again, this is the Aboriginal community telling us what they wanted—was to have a tiered approach and there was incentive in that model. So initially we defined the area and then we would say to them, "Come together and express the needs that you have. You are at the coalface; tell us what your concerns are" and the Government tries to address those concerns.

Ms JAN BARHAM: But so often it has been not having that capacity at a community level.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Correct, so the first stage is to build that capacity—for example, Murdi Paaki has capacity and that is why they have local decision-making. Once they have demonstrated ongoing capacity—whether it is governance, meetings, et cetera—they then get to the next level and then they say to government, "We need these services". Rather than recommending, they pretty much direct us as to where those services need to go. Then the third evolution would be government saying, "You have demonstrated so much capacity over these years—governance, decision-making, the whole lot—instead of us spending money, we will give you the money to control your own destiny in relation to this fund that we would otherwise spend".

Ms JAN BARHAM: Within your portfolio area, do you have any funding allocation towards justice reinvestment or does that fall to the Attorney General?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No, that would be the Attorney General. It is something that I am aware of.

Ms JAN BARHAM: What are the impacts of the reduction in the Federal Government's Indigenous affairs program? What effect is that going to have on New South Wales? Have you been in discussions or given any consideration to the \$534 million lost from the Commonwealth budget? There has to be a couple of million dollars of that relating to New South Wales.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Obviously, where that would apply in relation to direct service provision—whether it is health, education and the like—those Ministers can address that. In terms of my portfolio area, we do have a defined budget and things are on track in relation to the budget.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It is a shrinking budget.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Can I just answer Mr Donnelly's point in relation to the \$3.5 million? That was due to—

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Not an accounting error?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No, it was an underspend due to a number of positions being held vacant, subject to the realignment. That realignment of the agency is now taking place and it will be completed in September-October this year.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It is not my question but—

Ms JAN BARHAM: It isn't actually.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am running out of time.

CHAIR: Order! The Hon. Paul Green's will now ask questions.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I said that I would take it on notice.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: If you could take it on notice that would be great. I want to come back to something the Hon. Greg Donnelly was talking about, the \$0.9 million. Mr Peace, given that you are the Chief Financial Officer, can you add any comment to that?

Mr PEACE: I would have to take that on notice. I am not across the particular detail of the issue that has been raised. I will take it on notice.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Minister, about 25 years ago the Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern issued a strong statement regarding mental health services for Aboriginal people in New South Wales. In the service's Aboriginal Mental Health Report tabled in the New South Wales Parliament in 1989 it said:

There is little information and only limited understanding of the scope and nature of mental health problems within the Aboriginal community, no effective services for Aboriginal people in the mental health and illness service system, and no culturally specific education programs for workers in the area.

Given that New South Wales has the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of about 208,500 people, what steps has the Government taken to improve mental health issues within the Aboriginal community in New South Wales and what initiatives are being taken by you in conjunction with the Minister for Mental Health?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As part of the OCHRE strategy, the letter "H" in the acronym stands for Healing. In many ways that deals with mental health from the perspective of the OCHRE strategy because the Aboriginal community identified that healing—whether individual or cultural—was important to them. Indeed, the first time that I met the Mental Health Commissioner, to his credit he identified that as a real area of interest for him, and I know that he is working closely with the Aboriginal community in relation to that aspect.

I imagine his remit would be a one-to-one type healing, whereas my remit would be more of a structural approach. In that sense, we had our first forum in relation to healing that took place at the University of New South Wales on 23 July. I was overwhelmed by the number of people who attended and the

compliments that were given in relation to the fact that this is the first time the Government has acknowledged this as an area that needs to be addressed.

I personally think that healing at the cultural level needs to take place when we see initiatives such as culture and language. Because if one thinks about healing, it is importing that something is broken or has been scarred. In many ways at a cultural level one of the things that has suffered shock would be Aboriginal language and culture. That is why I am particularly passionate about trying to remedy the wrongs of the past. If we can restore language and culture to their rightful place, then I think at the cultural level, at the bigger picture level, that would go a long way towards healing.

We have also undertaken initiatives in relation to giving funding to the Kinchela Boys so they can undertake some documentaries of their stories, because, again, telling the story of what they went through is part of the healing process. Sure, it is healing at the individual level, but I guess if it is told by many people across a wider audience again that imparts on the healing at the cultural level as well. So there are a number of things we are taking on board in relation to healing. If you look at OCHRE, I think it could be the first chapter that we talk about healing because that is what the Aboriginal community sees as a priority. Mr Ardler may want to say something further.

Mr ARDLER: I think the Minister has covered it well. Every time we go out and talk to Aboriginal communities these issues come up. People point to the importance of identity, self-esteem, sense of purpose and the very strong connection between those things and a strong sense of culture, a strong connection to country and the need to heal the wounds of the past, to build respectful relationships and those sorts of things. The reason why OCHRE does not include a specific healing initiative, other than the forum, is because we understand that we need to hear from people who have experience of trauma and who are implementing healing programs on the ground. That is what we got out of the forum. The feedback has been fabulous. We have a strong working partnership now with the Indigenous Healing Foundation in Canberra. The next step will be to take a good look at the outcomes of the forum and to start to think about how we can respond.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The Mental Health Commissioner was present at the forum. He put his words into action and is taking a strong interest in this.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Minister, did you authorise those positions to be held vacant? Was that something that you did?

CHAIR: We have agreed to take those questions on notice, Mr Donnelly. We have now concluded the time for questions.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: It was just a clarification I was seeking, that is all.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will take it on notice, Mr Donnelly.

CHAIR: I thank the Minister and officials for your attendance today. The secretariat will be in contact with you in relation to the questions on notice and clarifications required and you will have a three-week period to respond.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Thank you, Madam Chair, Deputy Chair and Committee members.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
