

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 2

Friday 23 September 2005

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

The Committee met at 11.30 a.m.

MEMBERS

Reverend the Hon. Dr G. K. Moyes (Chair)

The Hon. A. Chesterfield-Evans
The Hon. C. E. Cusack
The Hon. D. T. Harwin

The Hon. E. M. Obeid
The Hon. P. T. Primrose
The Hon. H. S. Tsang

PRESENT

The Hon. M. Orkopolous, *Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship*

Department of Aboriginal Affairs

Ms J. Broun, *Director General*

Mr J. Wassell, *Executive Director, Executive and Business Strategy*

CHAIR: I declare this meeting open to the public. I welcome you to this public hearing of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2. First, I thank the Hon. Milton Orkopolous and departmental officers for attending today. At this meeting the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Aboriginal Affairs. Before questions commence, there are some procedural matters that need to be dealt with. I point out that in accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings only members of the Committee and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee you must take responsibility for what you publish or any interpretation you place on anything that is said before the Committee. There is no provision for members of the Committee to refer directly to their own staff. Members and their staff are advised that any messages should be delivered through the Chamber support officers or the Committee clerks. We have decided to break our time available for questions into 20 minutes, 20 minutes, 20 minutes. I declare the proposed expenditure open for examination. Minister, do you wish to make a brief statement?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Yes, if I could take the opportunity to make an opening statement. I am honoured to have been appointed as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on 10 August and I have very clear priorities in this important area. Visiting Aboriginal communities, strengthening the land council system and narrowing the gap of Aboriginal disadvantage are the keys to my work as Minister. As I indicated in the House last week, I believe that we all have a duty to work together to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal Australians, and I am absolutely determined to ensure that our policies will build on and reflect the many positives in Aboriginal communities. We will work with Aboriginal communities and their leaders to build on the programs that are addressing Aboriginal disadvantage.

I will also take the opportunity to mention the issue that has been the subject of a great deal of discussion and debate over the past week involving comments by my colleague the Minister for Planning, the Hon. Frank Sartor, MP. I have taken the opportunity to speak with the Minister on the matter and I am assured that his apology is sincere. As members of the Committee would be aware, the Premier also took the opportunity to express his view to the Minister on the matter. As I have indicated, the Government is committed to a positive dialogue with Aboriginal communities. Over the past month I have had 20 meetings with Aboriginal people representing numerous Aboriginal organisations across the State.

As I have already stated in the House, developing effective Aboriginal policy is a serious challenge. We realise that there are no easy fixes. Regardless of political persuasion, I believe it is incumbent on all of us to work together. No government in Australia believes it is improving things quickly enough, but we are determined to do our very best. It ought to be remembered that the issues around the Block have a history stretching back over two decades. They did not emerge this week, and they will certainly still be there next week. The issues are complex and substantial, and they will not be addressed unless everyone involved is committed to working together.

CHAIR: We will open now for questions.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Congratulations, Minister, on your elevation to the ministry. I take you first of all to one section of your opening statement where you dealt with, seemingly, your confidence in your colleague, the Hon. Frank Sartor. I am wondering, as Aboriginal elders right across New South Wales, including from my own area, are calling for Minister Sartor to be removed in terms of his authority over the Redfern Waterloo Authority, why do you not support those calls and why are you not supporting the view of the Aboriginal community?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: If I could answer that in two parts. Number one, when this blew up I did speak to the Minister. I questioned him closely and he expressed a very sincere apology to me. He has substantial responsibilities for the Block and the Redfern Waterloo Authority, and certainly the Premier has made very clear his and the Government's views on this issue. I have not been approached by any elders across New South Wales to think otherwise. I have heard in the media that some statements have come from a small number of people in the Aboriginal community, but I have not been directly approached and I am satisfied that the Minister's apology on a number of occasions made in the House and outside the House in statements is sufficient to address the issue. The point I want to make is that we have moved on from there. There are too many issues in Redfern

Waterloo for us to get bogged down on this one issue for which the Minister has apologised very soon after and made numerous apologies and statements of his regret in the House and outside the House.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: There are, and I will come to those in a minute. I refer to one aspect of that answer. I want it to be crystal clear to clarify what you are saying. You have not received any messages from elders, correspondence or telephone calls from members of the community expressing their view that the Minister Sartor should be removed as the Minister responsible for the Redfern Waterloo Authority?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I will take some advice on that. I am advised that my chief of staff took a call from Kay Bellear this week. I have not personally spoken to anyone who has sought the action that you have asked about.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: In that case I will ask a question specifically on the Redfern-Waterloo project. In view of the economic and social cost of the situation at Redfern, in the area of the Block how much money has been spent by the State Labor Government on engaging contractors and government agencies to support the development of the Pemulwuy project?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I am advised, quite rightly, that this question should be directed to Minister for Redfern Waterloo and does not draw on anything coming from the budget of my department.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Not one cent out of the department's budget has been spent on the various proposals that have been raised in terms of that Pemulwuy project?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I am advised that in the past financial year we contributed something like \$20,000—I am happy to take that question on notice and provide an accurate response—and there has been nothing contributed this financial year.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: In relation to the department's advocacy role—if I can loosely use that term—for indigenous people in the public sector, is the department able to access the information and provide me with details of what has been spent by the Government?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I am happy to take the question on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I note your comment that everyone now needs to work together on the Redfern-Waterloo project. How will that happen, given the announcement of the Aboriginal community that was reported in today's *Sydney Morning Herald* that it will not talk to Minister Sartor; they will talk to the Premier but they are not willing to engage in any more discussions with Minister Sartor? How will it proceed?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: My comment is absolutely right. The only way we can move forward is for each party to bury the hatchet and start working together. If they fail to do so then we will not get any progress on Redfern-Waterloo. Clearly Minister Sartor's original comment, now withdrawn and apologised for, is something that he has clearly regretted, given the reaction of the community. But I believe the community, by their representative Mr Mundine, accepts the apology. In front of the television Mr Mundine shook hands with Minister Sartor and accepted the apology and did not believe that it was a sacking offence, but the following day he changed his mind. That may mean that he could change his mind again. We need to have goodwill to ensure that the very large Redfern-Waterloo project goes ahead.

As I said earlier, the issues at Redfern-Waterloo and in Aboriginal communities across this State are very complex. I do not believe that we can move forward if we fall down at the first hurdle of what happened this week. We clearly need to look to ourselves to see what the benefit is to the Aboriginal community. I believe that the benefit for the entire Aboriginal community at Redfern-Water, especially at the Block, will be for everyone to sit down and be co-operative.

CHAIR: That would require the Minister Sartor to sit down and be co-operative.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: You will have to put that to the Minister. Minister Sartor has indicated to me and to the Parliament that he is more than willing to sit down with the relevant people to progress the Redfern-Waterloo issues.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Aboriginal community in Redfern says that it is not just that comment, it is part of an attitude. It has given examples of other aspects of the behaviour of Minister Sartor towards it. Do you say the community is wrong?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: We must recall that the issues around the Block have had a history stretching back over the past 20 or 30 years. They just did not emerge with Minister Sartor making one comment this week.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I understand the Labor Party's view is that we should move on, but it is clearly not the view of the Aboriginal community.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: What is the Liberal Party's view?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am asking you about the views of the Aboriginal community in your role as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Clearly you have a conflict between your political responsibilities to the Labor Party and your ministerial responsibilities to Aboriginal people. The message from the Aboriginal community at Redfern is very clear. Do you say the community is wrong?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: No, I am not saying it is wrong. I am just saying that it is important that all sides realise that we cannot progress and improve the 200 years of injustice by going into our foxholes over one comment. It is important that we all recognise that the complexities and sensitivities of these issues have not just flared up this week but have been going on for 20 or 30 years. The political exploitation of this comment, that was immediately apologised for and the apology accepted, has subsequently been turned into a political circus in this building. I am sure that ordinary people living on the Block would love to see some progress and movement in their housing and community so that they can get on with their lives and ensure that there is not another generation of children living in that situation.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: The Redfern branch of the ALP does not agree with you, does it Minister?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: The Redfern branch of the ALP has not communicated that to me and certainly I am not a member of the Redfern branch of the ALP. It is not a constituent branch of my electorate in faraway Swansea. You are not a member of the Redfern branch of the ALP, are you, Mr Harwin?

The Hon. DON HARWIN: No, I am not.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: He would like to be.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: No, I would not.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I think that Mr Harwin would be more politically aligned to the Redfern branch of the ALP.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Nowhere near it.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: As Minister, you are not willing to represent views of the Aboriginal Housing Company on this matter?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: It is not my role to represent the views of individual housing companies. It is a private company, owning private land. I represent the policy-making arm of the Government in relation to Aboriginal Affairs and my job is to co-ordinate a whole range of services across a whole range of departments over which I do not have control to ensure that the disadvantage that has been experienced by Aboriginal people in their communities for a long, long

time—not just this week, and many times not reported in the media and certainly not questioned by Opposition members for a long time—is dealt with. The only way we can do that is to sit down and respect each other's positions and move on.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: *Mark Latham Diaries* published this week reveal what Mark Arbib told him over lunch at a restaurant in Sydney on 1 November last year.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: What has that got to do with the estimates?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do not interrupt the question.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: "Focus groups [conducted by the Labor Party] also show that it's popular to bash the blacks ... You need to find new issues, like attacking land rights, get stuck into all the politically correct Aboriginal stuff—the punters love it." Minister, were you shocked by this revelation?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I was certainly more shocked by the Senate inquiry that found that the Prime Minister had lied about the children overboard and that he had lied and used people coming here on boats as a political ploy to bash and win an election.

CHAIR: I take the point made by Mr Obeid that we ought to be dealing with budget estimates. I do not think that the children overboard inquiry has anything to do with the estimates.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: I would like to further note that this matter has been disputed by the General Secretary, and it could be subject to legal proceedings. It is not a matter for this Committee. It is basically an allegation that has been denied and could be subject to legal proceedings.

CHAIR: My understanding of the question was that it was not about Mr Latham's opinion; it was really about the Minister's attitude to the views expressed and whether they are true.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: The allegations made in the diaries have been denied and could be subject to legal proceedings.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I thank the honourable member for making that point. Minister, what investigation have you made as to the truthfulness of that allegation by Mr Latham?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I do not propose to comment on what are hearsay comments by the former Federal Leader of the Opposition, which were denied by the General Secretary. If I followed every statement made by former leaders and former politicians about what they claim other people have said, I would be investigating Wilson Tuckey for a long time.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: As Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs, you do not find this statement particularly remarkable or worrying?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I did not give it any credence, because it was hearsay.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So you have made no investigation into it?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Why would I investigate something that is hearsay and has been denied?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Point of order: In the past during these committees members have sought to ask questions about newspapers and other reports. It has been ruled consistently that if a member wishes to use such material, the member needs to affirm the veracity of the information.

CHAIR: It has to be tabled.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: If the Hon. Catherine Cusack wishes to affirm the truth of the statement, so be it, otherwise it is purely hearsay and inappropriate, and has been consistently

ruled so. The Minister's comment indicated that he cannot attest to the veracity. I strongly doubt that the Hon. Catherine Cusack was present and, therefore, she cannot attest to the veracity of that statement.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am asking questions about the veracity of that statement.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Are you prepared to attest to the veracity?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The issue is the veracity of the information, which, if true, has enormous implications in the sense of inciting racism in our community.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: If you cannot attest to the veracity, you cannot. They are not my standing orders.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I am simply seeking to ascertain whether the Minister, who is responsible for Aboriginal people, has bothered to recognise the significance of that statement and has investigated the matter.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Are you prepared to assert that the conversation took place? Do you attest to the veracity of the conversation?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I attest to the information being published in *Mark Latham's Diaries*.

CHAIR: I have ruled previously that we should concentrate on the budget estimates.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: You have no further comment on that matter?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I will repeat: I cannot comment on something that is just hearsay.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: An inquiry into the land council system is under way at present. Can you advise who is undertaking the inquiry, the process of the in-camera inquiry, and the cost to date paid to consultants or any others engaged in the inquiry?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: The Aboriginal land council system has delivered enormous benefits to Aboriginal people in its 20 years of operation. However, the system is clearly not working as well as it could, particularly with the regular appointment of investigators and administrators to New South Wales land councils. To ensure that the Aboriginal land rights council system is structured to meet future economic challenges and build sustainable benefits for Aboriginal people in New South Wales, in May 2004 the former Minister announced a review to overhaul the Aboriginal land rights council system and established a task force to make recommendations for the improvement of that system. Task force members are Stephen Wright, Registrar of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act as chairperson; Mr Murray Chapman, Administrator of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council; and Jodie Broun, Director General of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: That deals with the first element of the question. I ask you to go to the second and third elements. Can you enlighten the Committee on the process of the in-camera inquiry and the costs to date paid to consultants or any others engaged in the inquiry?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I can answer the second question and I will take the question as to costs on notice. The review has been conducted in a staged process outlined by addressing the most urgent and complex aspects of the land council system. The first relates to land dealings provisions—how land councils deal with and dispose of land under the Act, land council governance, structure, representation and benefits, including financial and management accountability and other issues, including our core functions of Aboriginal housing and planning. The land dealings paper has already been released and has been available on the web site since prior to August, but I will get back with a precise answer. I do not want to mislead the Committee.

We are now in the process of developing some further consultation papers. When those consultation papers are completed we will be in a position to take a package to the wider Aboriginal community. We have a series of 10 community meetings around the State in November where the decisions that the Government is going to make, arising from the discussion papers, will be put to the local communities and consultation will take place at that time.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: In view of the financial and social costs to the Aboriginal community of not getting the land council system right, can you explain why the land council review is not being undertaken publicly?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: As the Director General correctly advises me, the consultation will be extensive and public. The review has generated an enormous amount of discussion within the department and with the State Land Council. Submissions were called for and received at the beginning of the process. The content of those submissions is reflected in the land council dealings paper. Certainly the issues of governance, accountability, structure and various ideas about how we should restructure the land council system have been canvassed in those submissions.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, will you concede that the inquiry set up by your predecessor has led to a wide degree of dissatisfaction amongst Aboriginal people because it is not an open inquiry? Will you, as the new Minister, do something positive and change the structure of the review prior to the consultation phase to guarantee openness and transparency?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I will answer this way: We are almost at the end of the review. The papers are ready to come to me and the department for analysis. We want to put a series of propositions to the communities and get their feedback. During the short time that I have been Minister I have visited communities and spoken to a large number of people. They are concerned that they will have enough time for consultation. They have not asked for any higher level of consultation. They have their own fixed views and they want to see whether the review of the land rights Act is consistent with the submissions that have been made to the review task force and that they will be reflected in the structure that we propose to put to those communities. The one thing that the communities have said to me is that they want to ensure that there is consultation—that is No. 1—and that at the end of the consultation period we make sure that elections are held and everything is democratic and open.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What amount of money will be available for community building in Baryulgil, particularly for families suffering the effects of asbestos-related illnesses?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I will have to take that question on notice.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is the department's assessment of how much money is needed to rehabilitate completely the site of the asbestos mine near Baryulgil?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: We have not done an assessment and I do not believe it would be within the purview of our responsibilities to do so. It may be the responsibility of the Department of Environment and Conservation to undertake that assessment.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Are you not developing Aboriginal communities? Is it not your job to develop Aboriginal communities?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: My job is to co-ordinate services according to the Government's policy and to ensure that those services are delivered to communities by service providers that extend across a whole heap of other departments for which I have no responsibility.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But you advocate to get those services for your communities, is that correct?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Some 22 communities are currently approved as priority communities under the Aboriginal Communities Development Program. The community to which you referred is not on that list.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So it is tough luck for it.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: No, it is not tough luck. We have 22 completed communities under Housing for Health. We have seven current projects, of which Baryulgil is one, and we have 15 future projects that will be undertaken. It is a priority system. Baryulgil is one of the current projects.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Apparently there was an all-party parliamentary investigation of the asbestos problem at Baryulgil in 1981 but they are still having problems—the lung bus is up there. What is your department doing about this?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: My response is that the problem with asbestos-related diseases in communities where asbestos was mined is much larger than the programs that I can provide and are available to me. The Department of Environment and Conservation would need to undertake a health survey. A whole host of other departments would need to be involved in the clean-up to look after the health of the children and adults who suffered under those conditions. As I said, there are current projects, one of which is Baryulgil. We are building housing for that community.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Presumably you are watching other departments that are responsible for cleaning up the asbestos in the soil and conducting medical tests on residents. Can you tell us what is going on in that community? What is your department doing to monitor the services that other departments provide to that community?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Under the Government's Two Ways Together Program, the regional co-ordinators from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs are co-ordinating, with other services providers from other departments, programs across government for specific communities. Clearly, in view of the health and other outcomes required at Baryulgil, the regional co-ordination of other service providers would be paramount. That is what we are doing. You mentioned the 1981 investigation: the Two Ways Together Program is a 10-year program that has just begun. Consultations by regional co-ordinators of that program have just started so we will soon see the benefits of a whole-of-government approach to problem communities such as this. Baryulgil has had this problem for a long time.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is someone beavering away in your department watching the rehabilitation of the land and watching the healthy people and their lungs?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I do not believe that it is our responsibility to oversight other government departments. It is our responsibility to co-ordinate other government departments to ensure that they develop proper plans for the community that address its needs. If you ask me this question, say, next year or the year after or after we have done this work—the Two Ways Together program was only announced recently, and we need to allow it to work. It is a 10-year program. We are at the beginning of it. We are recognising all the failures of past administrations, both Labor and Liberal-National, for more than 200 years. In order to address disadvantage and problems you need to have a cross-agency approach. The best model that we have come up with is the Two Ways Together program. Regional officers from the DAA are starting to co-ordinate and develop plans of the regional managers from other government departments, and those specific plans will be there. It is not their job to monitor other government departments. They have no role or authority to do so.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You are playing with words. One minute you are telling me that you have a co-ordinating and oversight role and you have a joint peer group; the next minute you are telling me that it is not your job and you do not know. This thing has been going for 24 years since an all-parliamentary inquiry. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs has been going for a very long time. Are you saying that nothing happened until a year ago, when this other new project started but has not got off the ground yet?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: My response is that I have only been Minister for six weeks. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs has only been going for 10 years. The Two Ways Together Program has only been going for a short time. I have outlined the structure which I believe addresses the systemic failures of the past to get a whole-of-agency approach. The Department of

Aboriginal Affairs has decentralised its offices, and it is the responsibility of the managers in those decentralised offices to co-ordinate and develop plans from other regional heads of government departments to develop plans to address the specific issues of that particular community.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Can I confidently expect that if I ask you next year you will have a list of all the Aboriginal communities, all their problems and the approaches of other departments to them and how well they are doing?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I can certainly give you a list of the communities, but if you want further details as to the specific works in those communities and the roles played by other government departments and all of that, I will have to take it on notice because that is a level of detail.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is that not the role of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs? Is that not what you are doing—looking to the welfare of the people? If you have a role you would at least be looking at what other departments are doing that impinges on your people?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: If I ruled the world, what a better place the world would be. Everybody would be happy if I ruled the world.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: There is no point in just going along with ridiculous rhetoric. I am talking about auditing what is happening to your people. I am not asking you to fix it; I am asking you to audit what is going on.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I have clearly and patiently explained to the Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans, who has been here much longer than I have, and perhaps a little too long, that the Two Ways Together policy recognises 200 years of failure of service delivery to communities.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Ten years of which were under the current government.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Some 200 years of failure in service delivery. Ten years of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs has come up with the Two Ways Together Program. We have the structure in place that is developing specific plans for a specific community's needs. I believe that with that we will be able to better address the issues that have doggedly failed us in the past, and that is policy co-ordination and service delivery co-ordination.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We have a very recent plan and an even more recent Minister. Is that the answer?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: And we have people who have been there for a long time, yes, and the problems that have been there for a long time.

CHAIR: In the light of your statement that you have not been Minister for very long, I remind you that you may ask your staff to answer questions on your behalf on detailed matters.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Thank you, I am grateful to you.

CHAIR: I am thinking about building a sense of authenticity and acceptance by the people you serve. I preface my question by saying that in the mid-1990s I led a group of 50 businesspeople every Saturday down to The Block, and every Saturday for a year we shovelled garbage and removed the remains of burnt-out housing. That won a great deal of acceptance and understanding. Would you consider inviting Frank Sartor to come with you to do some highly visible volunteer work among the people of The Block?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: That is a good question.

CHAIR: I have done it. I am asking you whether you would consider doing it.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I think that would be—

CHAIR: I will join you.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: You will join me? I would be happy to join hands with you and Frank to do that.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: This Saturday?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: This Saturday I have constituents and functions.

CHAIR: I will be happy to work with your diary and to arrange some volunteers.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Thank you. I would be more than pleased to.

CHAIR: I think that might be a very visible sign of your commitment to the people which we want the people to understand and know.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: And to have these honoured people here join us in shovelling garbage would be wonderful too—to see the Hon. Don Harwin and the Hon. Catherine Cusack shovelling garbage.

CHAIR: I remind you that it was the unions responsible for the city of Sydney garbage disposal that refused to collect garbage over that period of time and therefore we did it in their place. In relation to the Aboriginal Communities Development Program [ACDP], you mentioned 22 Aboriginal communities that were selected to receive assistance through the Aboriginal Communities Development Program. What are the needs of Aboriginal communities which have been identified and which are not currently receiving assistance? I would be happy for the director general to reply.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: My advice is that the ACDP was developed from a needs analysis developed in the 1990s. We do not have a statewide needs analysis at the moment. The 22 communities that I suggested for housing and the other communities, including Baryulgil, and the 15 future projects have been prioritised from that original needs analysis. We do not have a more contemporary one, but if there is anything further—

CHAIR: Can I ask you to take that question on notice?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I was about to suggest that we take it on notice.

CHAIR: In relation to funding for Aboriginal housing, why is the \$18 million that the department is funding for the Aboriginal Communities Development Program being redirected to the Aboriginal Housing Office under the Department of Housing? Why is this money not being provided directly to the Aboriginal Housing Office?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I will ask Mr Wassell to answer that.

Mr WASSELL: The \$18 million that was directed through the Aboriginal Housing Office or the Aboriginal Housing Fund comes through from Treasury, through the Aboriginal Housing Office, and comes to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The reason for that mechanism is that funds directed through the Aboriginal Housing Fund can attract the protection of the Aboriginal Housing Act and therefore the houses acquired through that fund have the State's interest registered in them. So it is a funding mechanism. The money comes to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and is spent on building or buying new housing under the program. Then the housing that is acquired under the program attracts the protection of the Aboriginal Housing Act and the State's interest in those assets is registered.

CHAIR: Do you have full-time staff in the department overseeing the movement of money from one department to the other, from Treasury to yourselves to the Department of Housing?

Mr WASSELL: We most certainly do. The mechanism for that involves, as you quite rightly state, New South Wales Treasury officials, officials of the Department of Housing—

CHAIR: One of my concerns is money that should go to Housing is being provided for the salaries of white public servants. How many staff would you have in that area?

Mr WASSELL: They are part of the general corporate services staff, so there is a senior officer, finance, for the transfer of funds, and in terms of expenditure of those funds and ensuring that those funds have been expended for the purpose for which they were granted there is the ACDP staff in regions and centrally.

CHAIR: It seems to me that it would not require many full-time staff many hours to see a cheque go from his pocket over to his pocket.

Mr WASSELL: Yes, quite so. That is absolutely the case.

CHAIR: Can you tell me how much money gets dropped while the passing of cheques goes on?

Mr WASSELL: For the transfer of funds, the \$18 million through the Aboriginal Housing Office, none at all. There is \$18 million transferred and the budget papers reflect this in another Minister's responsibility. But what that reflects is that there is \$18 million that comes from organisation two, from New South Wales Treasury to the Aboriginal Housing Office, and then there is \$18 million expenditure from the Aboriginal Housing Office that comes to DAA. No dollars are dropped in the transfer.

CHAIR: Excuse my misunderstanding here, but you seem to be digging a deeper hole. If it is passed through like that and no money is deducted, why do we need full-time staff to do that, which seems to me to be a relatively simple accounting mechanism?

Mr WASSELL: I apologise. I did not understand your question fully when you asked how many staff. I had understood your question to be around how many staff are monitoring expenditure within our agency, and there are a number of people part of whose job is around monitoring expenditure. With respect to the transfer, I can assure you—

CHAIR: Can I press on a little? If the money is passed through the department like this and even the oversight of that requires some staff, why is money not deducted from the \$18 million?

Mr WASSELL: The mechanism that passes money to the Aboriginal Housing Fund for the reasons that I outlined, to protect the State's interest and the assets acquired, is just one small part of a Treasury official who will have a whole range of functions and one small part of an Aboriginal Housing Office staff member who will have a whole range of functions with respect to the management of finances. In terms of the total amount of time spent by those people arranging better transfer, that is something that would be the responsibility of other agencies, and we would take that on notice. But I agree with your assessment, the amount of time to do that would be very minimal, and I certainly would not expect it would give rise to the need for additional staff or additional resources in those other agencies, which is why the transfer can occur with no deduction of funds, and the purpose of the transfer results in the State's interests being registered in those assets so that the assets can be protected in the future.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Following on from an area I was asking about earlier, how much is the salary of the Government-appointed administrator of the New South Wales Land Council? What are his qualifications? What is the total amount that has been paid by the New South Wales Land Council to the administrator?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: The administrator's salary is not a line item of this budget. The total salary is paid by the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council. As to Mr Chapman's qualifications, I will have to take that on notice because I do not have that information to hand.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Are you saying you take no interest at all as to how money is being converted from the land councils or tasks such as employing its bureaucrats?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: No, I am not saying that. I cannot understand how you could deduce from my answer that I could be saying that. You asked me a question about how much of his salary and I am saying how would I know what his salary is when it does not come from my budget, it comes from an organisation way outside this Parliament, beyond this Parliament, and it is paid for by the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But the issue is he said that one of your prime objectives is to narrow the gap—disadvantage—for Aboriginal people.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: True.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: And this is an organisation whose work is crucial to doing that. Therefore it would seem logical for you to have an interest in the matters that my colleague is questioning you about. It goes to the heart of the efficiency of the organisation in doing that.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I will take that question on notice from Mr Harwin and Ms Cusack to the total remuneration package for the administrator of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council—even though it is not an item from my budget—and provide them with an answer.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Earlier you made some comments about your hopes at the end of the inquiry process in terms of democratic elections and democratically elected leaderships for land councils. How do you justify deferring the State Land Council elections for at least five years by introduction of the regulatory amendment allowing administrators to be appointed for that period?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: We are confusing two things. Dr Refshauge, the previous Minister, introduced a regulation that increased the amount of time an administrator could be appointed to a land council from two to five years. I am aware that a disallowance motion relating to this five-year regulation may come before the Legislative Council in October. It is my view that the five-year regulation is appropriate. It may be the case that a larger land council with extensive asset holdings is beset by systemic maladministration. An extended period of administrative stability may be required to turn such an organisation around. You may like to note that the Local Government Act allows a council to be placed in administration for an indefinite period. In this context we believe that five years is appropriate for Aboriginal land councils. Having said that, we have had preliminary discussions with Mr Cohen, and Mr Hazzard from the Opposition around variations to the five-year regulation, and I am confident that the balance can be struck between my imperatives—a level of flexibility to ensure stability in the land council—and the concerns of Mr Cohen and the Opposition.

As to my desire for elections, of course I believe that democratic elections for land councils are paramount. But I am not going to allow a land council that has clearly demonstrated shortfalls in their governance and in their decision-making arrangements to have further elections until I am satisfied, via the administrator or any investigation that may be recommended, that the land council is ready to make the decisions. One of the mistakes we have recognised and the review has clearly picked up, and many other smaller land councils have told me, is that they do not have the expertise to do the things that we ask of them. That is why they have these problems. The average term of administrator for land councils is six to 12 months. The New South Wales State Land Council, which administers a far larger amount of assets and clearly has much more serious responsibilities under the Act, needs a period of stability. My view, in extending the period of Mr Chapman's tenure until November 2006, was to ensure that, under the new legislation that I hope to introduce early in the spring session next year, he has time to put those mechanisms and procedures in place for the State Land Council consistent with the new legislation.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Another question that goes to the Government's credibility in the eyes of the Aboriginal people is how many Aboriginal people have received funds under the recommendations for moneys that were taken from Aboriginal people in homes? Aborigines report that almost nobody has received funds owed to them despite the Government's promise to pay them. When will the Government give back the stolen wages?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: If I can have your indulgence, I want to talk to the current scheme. The scheme will be evidence based and will give due weight to oral evidence. The Government has determined that payments of entitlements will reflect the debt owed to present-day

valuations. For example, \$100 in 1969 is now approximately \$3,300. The structure of the Aboriginal Trust Fund Repayment [ATFR] scheme is established within the Premier's Department with reporting through the Special Minister of State. The scheme is envisaged to require \$22 million over five years. It will operate for five years, with a review and a report back to government after three years. The scheme will prioritise living claimants and those suffering medical or financial hardship before descendant claims. Practical support in submitting claims, counselling and assistance to claimants will be provided.

As the Department of Aboriginal Affairs [DAA] is the custodian of the Aboriginal Welfare Board and the Aboriginal Protection Board, the ATFR scheme will access records of trust moneys, payments and related information through those two older bodies. These records are physically located in State archives at State Records. The DAA will support the scheme and Aboriginal claimants by providing research of Aboriginal Welfare Board and Aboriginal Protection Board archives. The DAA and State Records have been allocated one research archivist position for each agency. The DAA has also been allocated four indexing positions to complete an index of these records. The total funding allocation to the DAA from the ATFR scheme is \$1,687,432.

CHAIR: Without trying to judge the motivation behind the question, I can tell you I received that answer back in about 2002 when I asked a question in the upper House. Virtually nothing has happened since.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That is my question. Having in mind the 2001 Cabinet submission by the Hon. Faye Lo Po', how much has actually been paid out to Aboriginal people? Has anybody been repaid their stolen wages since 2001?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I am advised the department's commitment to the ATFR scheme that I outlined to the Committee indicates our support of the program and our resourcing of the program. The program is being managed out of the Premier's Department; it is not being managed by my department. As such, the question should be directed to the Premier. I would be happy to take it on notice to the Premier.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Based on information you have given us, it sounds like the target date is 2008. Is that correct, three years from now?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: To operate the whole scheme is expected to take five years, with a review and report back to the Government after three years.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So it is 2010?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Yes, that is right, 2010. I surmise from that it will be 2010.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That sounds amazing. Many of these people are older and they want their money now, while they are alive.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: There is provision for prioritising living claimants and those suffering medical or financial hardship before descendant claims.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: In other words, the trustees of their estates, maybe?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I did indicate that the DAA is the custodian of all records. We are working with Premier's, who administers this program. I have indicated that I will take the question on notice. I also indicate that this is the only Government, the first Government, to be doing something about this, a problem that has been around for a very long time.

CHAIR: Excuse me interrupting: not doing something.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Since 2001?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I am further advised that the hold-up is that the taxation treatment of compensation is with the Federal Government and to date we have not been able to

resolve it. If you believe we should implement a scheme where the small amount of wages—no matter how small or how large—is going to be taxed and not treated as compensation without the agreement of the Commonwealth Government, then you believe we should dud them even further. We have been pressing the Commonwealth Government to come to some sort of finalisation of an agreement here, and until that agreement is completed these people will be taxed at the top marginal rate. I am sure you do not believe that people on their deathbed, as you said to me, should be taxed as disproportionately as that.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Did you raise this with the Commonwealth Government in 2001?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I will have to take that on notice. I am sure it has been taken up each time, but I will have to take that on notice because I was not the Minister in 2001.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can we have the date that it was raised with the Commonwealth?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Certainly, I will take it on notice. I am more than happy to do that, and I welcome the honourable member's assistance in persuading the Federal Government to come to an agreement.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: If you could give us a copy of that correspondence?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I will take that on notice and would be happy to provide you with the answer.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Has your department done any work on the effect the closure of the Sydney University Settlement would have had and the outcome of the dispute about the management of the university settlement?

CHAIR: The director general can answer, if you like.

Ms BROUN: No, we have not.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is Redfern one of your priority communities?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Clearly the answer is that the future of Redfern is caught up in the Redfern-Waterloo Authority and discussions have to be held with the community—and not only the indigenous community but the wider community living in Waterloo and Redfern—about the plans for the redevelopment of that area. As such, they are issues that my colleague the Minister for Redfern Waterloo is responsible for.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: No, Minister, the Sydney University Settlement was an independent non-government organisation [NGO] looking after the Aboriginal kids in that community. It is not directly under the Minister for Redfern Waterloo. If you have an interest in that community, what interest do you have in that particular NGO project, which was looking after the kids in that community?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: When?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: A bill about this went through Parliament some months ago.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I am advised this has nothing to do with my department.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So an NGO facility at the end of the Block has nothing to do with your department. Is that your position, Minister?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: My advice is that this NGO has not approached the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for anything.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Does the department not approach NGOs that are providing services to people in the communities?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Mr Chairman, we do not fund services through NGOs. Services are funded through government departments and allocations to other government departments for service delivery.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is it not the case that this Government has run endless seminars about private-public partnerships that involve the community sector? Has your department been totally untouched by any of that?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: The DAA is not involved in public-private partnerships.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is it involved in co-operation with the NGO sector in the delivery of service to its people?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: We co-ordinate State Government service delivery and some NGOs that are funded, like the Aboriginal Housing Company [AHC] which is an NGO, to provide specific services to communities.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Pemulwuy project, which is the Aboriginal Housing group redevelopment of the Block, is in dispute with Minister Sartor about the nature of that development. What is your department doing to resolve the situation?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Mr Chairman, I understand that you, I and our colleagues around the table are going to clean up and bring peace and co-operation to those people so that we can get them talking. This is the responsibility, Mr Chairman, not of the DAA or me: It is the responsibility of Minister Sartor. He has the responsibility to deal with the projects for the Block.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: He is at loggerheads, it would seem, with Mick Mundine and the Aboriginal Housing Company in not only the design but the whole concept of what should be done at the Block. Is your answer that we are going to do a garbage shovelling thing a facetious answer, or is that a real answer?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: No, it is a real answer. I was responding to the Chairman's a very generous offer. Certainly the history of 20 years ago, of getting groups of businessmen to go there and—I was responding to the Chairman's offer. I think it is a very good offer to show that the only way we can move forward is to work together for the community.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So are you saying that you have no part in any negotiations or in brokering any agreement for conciliation between the Aboriginal Housing Company and Minister Sartor about the concepts and designs for as significant an icon as the Block in Redfern. Is that your position?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: That is correct.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is your position. I was going to ask what you thought of the Morgan Disney report on human services.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Mr Chairman, I am advised that the director general has done some work with Minister Sartor in some of the earlier proceedings.

Ms BROUN: I was involved, as required, in earlier negotiations between Minister Sartor and the AHC, but it has not been recently.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you acknowledge that the Aboriginal Housing Company and Minister Sartor would appear to be at loggerheads in terms of their vision for the redevelopment of the Block?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Mr Chairman, I ought not answer that because it is not my role to speculate as to the issues raised by the honourable member.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: This is a major issue of the community, surely. What I am saying is certainly no secret. Do you not have a view on that?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Whatever my views are, Mr Chairman, I am here to answer questions on the budget and my responsibilities within that budgetary context. I cannot offer an opinion.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Minister, on your performance, I have no idea of what the department does.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Point of order: The Minister is debating the question that is being asked by the Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: He has answered that a number of times but the Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans just does not seem to accept the answer.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The director general has indicated that the department was involved in negotiations between Mr Sartor and the Aboriginal Housing Company, therefore the question is quite in order. Rather than debate the question, the Minister should answer the question.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Further to the point of order: The standing orders relating to questions do not apply here, therefore it is out of order. The Minister is perfectly entitled to answer the question as he sees fit, particularly as I believe it would be totally inappropriate for him to be making comments on matters that are outside his portfolio responsibilities.

CHAIR: The Minister is entitled to say it is none of his business and refuse to answer the question. He is entitled to say that. That in fact is the answer. Minister, I do not want to put the words into your mouth. I will let you answer that.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Stop badgering him, Arthur.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Mr Chairman, I am not responsible for every issue affecting every Aboriginal person in this State—not every issue.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: What is the biggest issue at the moment?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: If there is a new issue, do you take at least a watching brief?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: There are a large number of issues, and that is why the Aboriginal Communities Development Program is so significant. We have a large number of Aboriginal communities west of the Great Dividing Range, if you can get yourself out of Sydney, where a lot of Aboriginal communities live. They are benefiting from our program and a \$240 million program to provide sewerage and better housing and facilities for them. They are the issues that I am involved in.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You have a very limited bailiwick for the Aboriginal people. You do not know very much about Baryulgal and the health issues there, and you do not know much about Redfern, but you have a sewerage development program for west of the Great Dividing Range. Is that what you are saying? Is that what you argue?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I am not going to dignify that question with a response, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: On another subject, was the department involved with the Mii Mi Mothers out of Nambucca Heads in the last month of the signing of the heads of agreement between the State and the Commonwealth concerning a one-stop shop? That work was led by Karen Ella Bird.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Mr Chairman, I am advised that that is a shared responsibility agreement [SRA] between the Commonwealth and the local community, but we have not been involved in that.

CHAIR: If it is a shared responsibility, including NGOs—one of which I acknowledge is very close to me, and Karen Ella Bird is a member of my staff—why was the DAA not involved in such a program?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: At the moment the shared responsibility agreement is a Commonwealth policy. We have entered into a bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth and we are ready to sign that agreement which, for our side, requests that the Commonwealth advise us, give us notice, of its entering into a community. At the moment it can go to any community, and indeed any individual, and develop a shared responsibility agreement with them, bypassing New South Wales. We have asked the Commonwealth to notify us and include us. To date, we have not been involved in that.

CHAIR: Would you initiate something under your Aboriginal Communities Development Program? It seems to me that under the Aboriginal Communities Development Program, if the Commonwealth is willing to work with Aboriginal people and with NGOs in the interests of indigenous people, surely the DAA should be right up the front.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: More than happy, Mr Chairman, especially where we are welcome to participate.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Does the director general wish to say something?

Ms BROUN: The details of that particular SRA I am not aware of, but the office that we have opened at Coffs Harbour would have details about it, so we are not actually getting involved in SRAs at the moment. But that does not mean we are not involved more generally in that community or with the Mii Mi Mothers.

CHAIR: Are you aware of what the indigenous people are doing in that community, where unemployment is so high?

Ms BROUN: I am aware of a number of things that they have been doing up there, but I would have to get advice from my office there. That is actually why we have opened up those offices—so that we are closer to the ground and more involved with those communities. Karen Ella Bird has been to see me previously so I was aware of what they were doing up there, yes.

CHAIR: Would you undertake to establish good relations with those who are doing those things under shared community programs to involve the New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs?

Ms BROUN: That is very much why we have those regional offices being set up, so that they can work with the community and be involved in partnership—

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: And the Federal Government.

Ms BROUN: —with the Federal Government and with the community. In all those places there will be priority communities that we will need to work much more closely with, and much more closely with the Commonwealth Government.

CHAIR: I will just make one final comment. It seems to me that when the Prime Minister gives awards to indigenous people for the development programs in communities—and that is

supported by all of the local politicians and other representatives, both State and Commonwealth—he DAA is not there. That is a problem.

Ms BROUN: As I said, I am not sure of the details of the SRA. Because we are not signatories that does not mean we do not know what is going on in the community.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: Can you update the Committee on the review of the land rights Act?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Certainly. The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 provides for the establishment of community-controlled land councils throughout New South Wales. New South Wales was among the first States to introduce land rights legislation, and the benefits to Aboriginal people over the last 22 years have been substantial. New South Wales has the best land rights system in Australia. The Act has changed the lives and the destinies of thousands of Aboriginal people in New South Wales. In 22 years of operation more than 100 local Aboriginal land councils have been established. These land councils provide a voice for local Aboriginal communities and significant benefits such as housing, community development programs and social services. The intangible benefits are also significant: a real pride in having title to land and the sense of empowerment that goes with it. Under the current Act the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council has responsibility for the oversight of the operation of the land councils.

The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council is also a significant asset holder in its own right, the most significant asset being the statutory funds established in 1983 for the purpose of acquiring appropriate plans for land council ownership. As the Committee is aware, the former Minister placed the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council into administration in November 2003. The events leading to the appointment of the administrator have been well documented and I have commented on them here and I do not propose to go through them now. However, it was clear that the elected council was not providing appropriate leadership and that the systems in place within the organisation needed fundamental repair. There had also been a running down of the statutory funds at the time. Indeed, reserves had fallen below the minimum amount required by the legislation.

I am pleased to advise the Committee that the administrator is making good progress toward putting the organisation on a sustainable footing. A new, highly experienced management team has been put in place and the operations of the council have been progressively re-engineered, and the statutory fund is recovering. Over the last 12 months it has grown by almost 12 per cent. I am advised that the strong growth is projected to continue. These are encouraging results, but I have determined that there remains significant work to be undertaken by the administrator before we can move to the return of an elected council.

As I said earlier to the Hon. Don Harwin, I will not have elections in places where the administrator believes there is more work to be done. For this reason I recently announced in the House that the administrator's term was to be extended for a further 12 months, allowing appropriate time for the overhaul of the organisation to be properly bedded down. This extension will expire in November 2006. When I am satisfied that the organisation has been returned to a position of sustainability I will ask the administrator to take the necessary steps to prepare the organisation for the return of an elected council, and develop the electoral rolls.

I want to make it clear that I will not be allowing the return of an elected council until I am satisfied that the organisation is in good administrative shape. I make no apologies for this and I intend to apply the same approach to any other land councils in similar situations. I am simply not going to allow a situation to emerge in which councils can slide backwards, undoing good work of the administrator and executive team. Land council members are entitled to a professional and diligent approach to the commercial affairs of the land councils, and we will work with them to ensure that this occurs. Over the last month I have had 20 meetings with Aboriginal people representing numerous Aboriginal organisations across the State. Among other things, I am being told that the review will need to provide, first, better governance arrangements. The existing arrangements were crafted more than 20 years ago.

The sophistication and scale of commercial decisionmaking required by land councils has increased significantly during this period, and the new Act will need to take this into account. Second,

there must be more participation by Aboriginal people at local level. I am advised that whilst there are more than 130,000 Aboriginal people across New South Wales, only a minority are voting members of land councils. We need to improve this level of participation to maximise the legitimacy of the decision making process. Third, we need more equity. It is clear that the value of land council asset bases varies considerably across the State because of property prices and the scale of landholdings. We want to consult as broadly as possible to ensure that we are developing a model that delivers benefits in an equitable manner. Fifth, there should be a direct link between assets and benefits. We need to improve the ways asset bases are converted to benefits for all Aboriginal people.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Minister, Could you please update the Committee on the progress of the Aboriginal Community Development Program?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: The Aboriginal Community Development Program is a long-term plan that delivers training and employment for Aboriginal people so they can improve the delivery of health and housing services in Aboriginal communities. Since its inception, more than 220 apprenticeships for Aboriginal people have been created. I am sure the honourable member would agree that that is wonderful. These jobs are providing real training opportunities. For example, in Lightning Ridge a five-week building course has been developed by Barriekneal Community and Housing Ltd and Moree TAFE. Eleven students have completed the course and are employed in building, painting, tiling and electrical trades. We know that employment reduces alcohol and drug abuse, family violence and other problems impacting on all communities, especially Aboriginal communities. Through this program we are making a real investment in Aboriginal communities, with real results.

The program is a \$240 million investment over nine years. It is providing better housing, waste disposal schemes, and running water and sewerage schemes. The program is delivering on-the-ground benefits for Aboriginal communities. In housing this means improved plumbing and electricity, fixing damage to any unsafe areas, and the replacement of switches, taps and plugs. Twenty-two major projects have been successfully completed in communities such as the Bellbrook, Brewarrina, Armidale, Kempsey, Willow Bend, Walcha, Mungindi, and Toomelah. Work has also commence in another seven communities—Baryulgil, Tumut, Forster, Coffs Harbour, Malabulgimah, Purfleet and Cowra. These are where large disadvantaged Aboriginal communities live, outside central business districts.

In total, more than 750 houses around the State have been repaired or improved. In the provision of water and sewerage services, more than 2,700 Aboriginal people in 38 communities now have running water and proper sewerage systems that they did not have before—a far greater result in the last 12 months than in the last 200 years. A further 29 projects are under way, including at Tingha, where the project has recently been announced as one of the winners in the Case Earth Awards, which are presented annually for civil construction projects.

The program also has a substantial positive impact on the economy in remote communities. In some remote towns the project is injecting up to \$16 million into local communities; it is the lifeline for some towns. By investing heavily in the program and working closely with Aboriginal people we have helped bring about significant improvements in the lives of young people and their families, providing jobs, traineeships and apprenticeships, and safe and functional homes. It is a long-term plan to deliver long-term results and I am pleased to report that it is well and truly on track.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Mr Chairman, may I ask a brief follow-up question?

CHAIR: Certainly.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, thank you for that answer, it was very much appreciated. I am delighted to hear that the program is going so well. However, of the 22 locations—and I appreciate that you may need to take this on notice—could you detail the outcomes by location, rather than globally?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I am more than happy to. That is a reasonable request. Certainly you have flagged it for next year as well. We will make sure you have the information.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can you advise what is occurring under the program in Wilcannia?

Ms BROUN: We are constructing 27 new homes and renovating three homes, and there is a swap purchase of one home, and major landscaping, water, drainage, road repairs, and sewerage work for 30 houses.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: When did that project start?

Ms BROUN: Initial community consultation was from September to November 2001.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: When was the tender awarded?

Ms BROUN: April 2003.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Has the builder gone broke?

Ms BROUN: I do not have that information with me. I will take that on notice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Have any houses been finished in Wilcannia?

Ms BROUN: Yes.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: How many of the 27 have been finished?

Ms BROUN: I will have to take that on notice. I understand it is about 11 at this point.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can you give the date when people living in that part of Wilcannia were relocated into caravans and out of town? Can you indicate as well how many people still have no permanent accommodation in Wilcannia?

Ms BROUN: Not at this point. I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, have either you or the director-general visited Wilcannia to observe the work in progress and the outcomes?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I have not as yet been to Wilcannia, but the director-general has.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: When did you visit Wilcannia?

Ms BROUN: I would have to check my diary.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Was it in the past 12 months?

Ms BROUN: Again, I would have to check my diary.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Minister has just told the Committee that the works are on target and going very well. Was that your impression when you were in Wilcannia?

Ms BROUN: No issue was raised with me at that point.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: So you did not have any concerns about the program at that time?

Ms BROUN: No.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: You will take that question on notice and check your diary?

Ms BROUN: Yes.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Yes, of course

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Aboriginal apprenticeship scheme involves builders. Does the department monitor whether builders building for the Government actually comply with the guidelines for Aboriginal building apprentices?

Ms BROUN: We actually have our program delivered through the Department of Commerce, so we would comply with all requirements.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Was it not the case that the Department of Housing was approving many builders who either did not know or did not comply with the suggested guidelines for use of Aboriginal apprentices?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Surely that would be a question for the Department of Housing, not us.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Department of Women, who advocated for the interests of women, had very good data on how many women were employed by government departments and their promotion rates and so on. They made sure that guidelines for women were not simply ignored. Do you not do things like that for Aboriginal targets and programs?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I am advised that the department does not monitor other government departments' compliance with their own policies. Through the Two Ways Together Program we do get reports at the regional level but not perhaps at the level that you seek. Therefore we are unable to answer that question.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Were these not whole-of-government projects agreed to by other departments in co-operation with your department?

.....
Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Yes, and it is a responsibility of the Department of Commerce to make sure that the Department of Commerce complies with the Department of Commerce and government policies. So I cannot answer for the Department of Commerce.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The Department of Commerce is monitoring the Department of Housing to look after Aborigines in terms of their compliance with the apprenticeship scheme? Is that the situation?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I am advised that the Department of Commerce program managed the work of builders for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. As project manager it is their responsibility to ensure that they comply with all government policies.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It is my understanding that the tender for builders for the Department of Housing did not have this as a requirement?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Mr Chair, seeing that the honourable member knows something that I clearly do not know, and has specific information about that—

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I asked a question about it in the House some time ago.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Unfortunately, I am not in your House, but I should be. It is such a powerhouse.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I recommend *Hansard* to you.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: From this day forward I will assiduously follow the honourable member's questions in the upper House, as has been recommended to me.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Why is the provision of sewerage and water for Aboriginal people a community development project and not the responsibility of local councils? Is it because they live in settlements rather than towns?

Ms BROUN: It is often to do with the tenure of the land; they are often outside of that, or on local Aboriginal land council land.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is why I asked the question, as to settlements versus towns. If a bunch of white people get together they are said to live in a town, but if a bunch of Aboriginal people get together they are said to live in a settlement. Effectively, white people get facilities and traditionally black people do not. Is this not a matter that should be corrected by local councils?

CHAIR: You can tell by where the sealed road stops.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: The Chair is validating your comment.

Ms BROUN: It is an issue of tenure, as I said, which is the ownership of the land. If it is on the Local Aboriginal Land Council [LALC] land, that is privately owned land. It is the same as other circumstances.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Local councils do not provide sewerage to privately owned land?

CHAIR: Nor water, nor sealed roads.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is that the case for all privately owned land? It does not depend on how far it is from the city centre?

Ms BROUN: It might be that they take it to the boundary, but if you are talking about a block, a lot of LALC land might have 30 houses on it within quite a large area of land.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The local council only brings it to the boundary and these programs take it from the boundary to the houses on the land?

Ms BROUN: They are being jointly funded, with local government contributing an amount as well. In respect of a number of other projects we have an agreement for them to take on the maintenance of those programs once they are built. The other point is that a lot of the small local government authorities do not have the capacity, necessarily, to put in a large sewerage or water scheme, either.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I refer again to Redfern. The Morgan-Disney report made a lot of recommendations with regard to human resource development. What input to that has the department had?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: To the audit?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The consequences of the audit. In other words, they have made some changes. They had a publicly available report, and my understanding is they had a confidential report, which said, presumably, that some service deliverers are doing a good job and some are not and should be cut back. That is going to result in a major reorganisation of human services in the Redfern area, I understand. Has the department had any input to that and, if so, what?

Ms BROUN: We would have provided some initial comment and contributions to that report, but we are not actually funding it. We are not a human services agency and we are not funding the services you are talking about. I am on a CEO group of human services for Redfern-Waterloo. There is a group I am involved in there as well.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Has that group had input into which non-government organisations will be funded in the Redfern-Waterloo area?

Ms BROUN: Not that I am aware of, no.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is the group you are on doing in relation to this? Nothing?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: You are answering your own question.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: No, I am giving you a possibility. You can say "yes" or "no".

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: You are answering your own question, Arthur.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: You have made a statement.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I think I am reaffirming what the director-general said.

Ms BROUN: I head a group that is currently working on a human services plan. It does not go into the details you are talking about, but I cannot go into detail of it.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do you mean you cannot, in this forum, because of—

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Cabinet in confidence.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What is the relationship between your department and the new Redfern Aboriginal Authority, which I gather started recently?

Ms BROUN: There is not a relationship.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You do not fund it in any way?

Ms BROUN: No.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How is it funded?

Ms BROUN: I do not know.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I thought, as the department, you might know. That is all.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Earlier you said you had been involved in some negotiations between Mr Sartor and the Aboriginal Housing Co. Will you tell us when those negotiations were undertaken and what the objective of those negotiations was?

Ms BROUN: I am not sure I would call them "negotiations".

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: That was the word you used, and that is why I used it. You used that word.

Ms BROUN: I am not exactly sure of the timing of those. It was a few months ago.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: What was the issue?

Ms BROUN: It was generally when Minister Sartor was initiating discussion with them about the Block.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Were you assisting Minister Sartor in initiating the discussions?

Ms BROUN: I was providing some advice.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: To Minister Sartor or to the Aboriginal Housing Co?

Ms BROUN: To Minister Sartor.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Why did that role finish, in terms of providing him with advice?

Ms BROUN: There is a Redfern-Waterloo Authority established, which we would see as the principal adviser to Minister Sartor.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: It is the lead agency.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: You were giving him the advice up until that point and then other people took over? Is that what you are saying?

Ms BROUN: No. I am saying that the Redfern-Waterloo Authority was established.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: And took over.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: And took over the negotiations with the Aboriginal Housing Co. What arrangements are in place to remove syringes from the streets around the Block at Redfern?

CHAIR: We have just organised that.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: The question has been asked and there ought to be a response from the Minister.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: It is not a facetious question; it is a serious question.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I beg your pardon, Mr Chairman, would the honourable member ask the question again.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: What arrangements are in place to remove syringes from the streets around the Block at Redfern?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: It is a Department of Health issue, I would suggest.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Are you aware of an Aboriginal gentleman who walks around Redfern every day with an esky, picking up syringes?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: No, but I hope to invite him when the chairman and the rest of this Committee come to clean up the streets.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Minister, this is not a joke; I am asking about syringes lying around the streets of Redfern, and what funding and arrangements are in place to collect them.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I appreciate the question, but it clearly has nothing to do with my portfolio.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Have you checked to see whether there is a drug and alcohol worker working with residents of the Block?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: No, I have not, because it is not within the purview of my responsibility.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Redfern-Waterloo inquiry heard, at the time it was conducting hearings, that the director-general had not been down to visit the Block.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Which director-general?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: The Director-General of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I do not know.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Can you tell the Committee how many times the director-general and you, Minister, have been down to the Block in the last 12 months?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I have been once, upon my unanimous endorsement by my caucus colleagues and prior to being sworn in.

The Hon. EDDIE OBEID: He was carried on our shoulders!

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: That is right. I went down with Minister Refshauge, visited houses and spoke to a number of people, and walked around the Block.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Did you hold a press conference while you were down there?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: No, I did not do it as a media stunt.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: I ask the Hon. Catherine Cusack to tell me whether she has been to the Block?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Yes. I live in northern New South Wales—

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: Did you hold a press conference?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: No. With respect, I am asking these questions of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I have answered that question.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I have been to Wilcannia, Karuah, Bowraville, Brewarrina, Bourke and Broken Hill.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG: Did you hold press conferences at all of those locations?

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: No, I have never held a press conference in those circumstances.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I have answered the question. The director-general has indicated that she has been there several times, but she would have to check her diary to determine precisely when she went there and how many times.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I ask the director-general to take on notice the dates and purposes of those visits.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Certainly.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: Minister, you have the standalone portfolio of Aboriginal Affairs. Obviously there is some hope, in relation to the plight of indigenous people, that that will bring a renewed focus on their concerns and the concerns of the wider community. I have some misgivings about the answers you gave to a series of questions not just from the Hon. Catherine Cusack

but also from the Hon. Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans and Reverend the Hon. Dr Gordon Moyes. To say that you do not have knowledge of them, up to a point, is understandable, given the fact that you have been Minister for only five weeks. However, we do not appear to have any capacity to get answers from the director-general either.

I am concerned, therefore, in relation to this new portfolio that you have been given, to know who is accountable? Do you have the capacity to satisfy yourself that other government agencies, and other Ministers, are delivering on your Government's priorities in relation to the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio? Do you have the capacity to ask questions about the expenditure of funds, the achievement of benchmarks and whether we will get an outcome for indigenous people based on the fact that we now have this standalone ministerial portfolio?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: That is an interesting question. The Hon. Don Harwin would be straying from reality if he thought I would answer questions that Opposition members should have asked of other Ministers responsible for programs that they are funding and administering. I was asked how much the administrator of the land council earns. I took that question on notice because I do not know; it does not come from my budget. I have been asked questions about programs that are run by NSW Health. I will certainly find out; I do not know the details. Those programs are administered by NSW Health. My role is to co-ordinate policy and to co-ordinate other government departments.

Notwithstanding the incredulity in the voice of the Hon. Don Harwin about the inadequacy of my department and the fact that the director-general and I do not have answers to questions about government departments, we certainly have a lot of answers and a lot of detail about the things that are happening in our department. For the benefit of the Committee I will refer to the role and functions of the department. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs is the New South Wales State Government's agency with a primary focus on leading, influencing and monitoring New South Wales agencies on the delivery of services to Aboriginal people through the New South Wales Government's 10-year Aboriginal affairs plan.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: That is exactly my point, Minister. You do not seem to be able to give any answers at all about monitoring other agencies.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Part of its role is to co-ordinate the Aboriginal community's engagement in government agencies in New South Wales; to identify and support strategies that overcome disadvantage; and to deliver an innovative Aboriginal development communities program that delivers sustainable, environmental health and community development outcomes in a number of communities across the State. It also has as part of its role to administer the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983, which delivers sustained, cultural and economic benefits to Aboriginal people across New South Wales. The question I am being asked is: Who is picking up syringes in Redfern? That has nothing to do with my department.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: But it does have something to do with the plight that is facing the people of Redfern, Minister, many of whom are indigenous. That is why it is being asked.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Clearly Opposition members have been in Opposition for so long they do not understand how Government responsibilities work.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Clearly.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: With great respect to my colleague and friend the Government Whip, I sat through hearings of the multicultural and ethnic affairs portfolio under the former Government and Labor members asked those same questions. I think those questions are totally validly put to this Minister in his standalone portfolio.

CHAIR: I think the Minister has given his answer. Minister, I wish to ask about the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC]. In the void left by the abolition of ATSIC, what options is your department considering for the creation of a new peak indigenous body? How will the Government ensure that the voice of indigenous people continues to be heard?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: The abolition of ATSIC has presented us with some problems, in that the organisation and structure created by ATSIC was a useful vehicle on which to graft the State Government's service delivery arrangements. Now that they will be delivered through shared responsibility agreements we have worked hard to develop a bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth to provide a structure for the delivery of those agreements and to give us a role in that Commonwealth policy. The New South Wales Land Council is the one of the peak representative bodies for Aboriginal people in New South Wales.

CHAIR: But there are other issues, Minister, that concern indigenous people that go beyond land councils.

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Absolutely. That is why we have the Aboriginal health and medical research group, the Aboriginal educational consultative group, community justice groups and family violence groups. We have a range of programs on the ground, in the courts and in other places.

CHAIR: I understand the programs; I was really asking which peak body will take responsibility?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I do not think there is one peak body.

CHAIR: Can you explain why the department no longer has a discretionary or major grants program to support the initiatives of Aboriginal people?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: I might get the director-general to answer that question.

Ms BROUN: We still have an allocation called the Aborigines Assistance Fund—the old grants program. Previously, submissions were advertised and called for. We are moving away from that, so the funds will still be there but they will be used in a more strategic manner.

CHAIR: On whose initiative?

Ms BROUN: Currently we are putting together some guidelines, but the strategic areas will be capacity building, leadership and community governance. Those are the areas in the demise of ATSIC that will leave a gap in the community. Because we also have regional offices, those regional offices will provide recommendations on where we can support community, government structures and those sorts of things. I add that there is not an overall peak body but the department has been involved in a number of forums working with members of the Aboriginal community on what they might see post-ATSIC, including a 300-people summit in Sydney last year and a range of consultations across the whole State. At this stage the support is mostly at the local level.

CHAIR: Unless there is another pressing question I will wrap up this hearing. Before I do so I would like it recorded in *Hansard* that earlier in this hearing I extended an invitation to the Minister and I received a written reply, signed by the Minister, which must be a world record for written replies.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: It certainly is under this Government.

CHAIR: I would like to read that reply on the *Hansard* and to congratulate the Minister on his one-hour turnaround. The letter states:

Dear Reverend Moyes,

Thank you for your question regarding volunteer work in the Redfern Waterloo area in today's Budget Estimates Committee.

As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs I am committed to improving the social wellbeing of Aboriginal people, families and communities in NSW.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite you, your cross bench colleagues and all Opposition members to join with me in a program of volunteer work in the Redfern Waterloo area, in particular the area commonly known as "The Block".

I am proposing that one Saturday per quarter we visit "The Block" and assist one of the many exceptional community organisations which provide support to Aboriginal people. If you wish to join me, please contact ... to organise a suitable time and date.

I look forward to participating, with you, in this valuable volunteer work.

Yours sincerely

Milton Orkopoulos MP

I replied to you, Minister. I wrote:

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your prompt reply to my invitation this day to you and Mr Frank Sartor to join with me in spending some Saturdays working with volunteer organisations in the Block area of Redfern.

I will invite members of both Houses to join with us, as well as public servants in your department. I suggest allowing MPs to view the Sydney Swans [tomorrow], then we commence work on Saturday October 1st at 9 a.m. Thank you for agreeing to join in this valuable volunteer work.

Gordon Moyes

Minister, I will notify you, members of your department, the director-general, and members of the Government to join with us in this wonderful volunteer work.

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: I would like to place on record that I am happy to volunteer for this worthwhile project.

CHAIR: Minister, do you understand that the Committee has recommended that any questions taken on notice be replied to within 21 days?

Mr MILTON ORKOPOULOS: Yes.

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
