

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2

Wednesday 10 October 2012

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

CORRECTED PROOF CITIZENSHIP AND COMMUNITIES, ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

The Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. M. A. Ficarra (Chair)

The Hon. J. Barham
The Hon. D. Clarke
The Hon. R. H. Colless

The Hon. P. Green (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. S. Moselmane
The Hon. H. Westwood

PRESENT

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

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

CHAIR: I declare open to the public the hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2012-13. I welcome Minister Victor Dominello and his accompanying officials to this hearing. This morning the Committee will examine proposed expenditures for the portfolios of Citizenship and Communities, and Aboriginal Affairs. The portfolio of Citizenship and Communities will be examined between 9.00 a.m. to 9.45 a.m. and the portfolio for Aboriginal Affairs from 9.45 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. Before we commence, I will make some comments about procedural matters.

In accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members 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 the Committee, you must take responsibility for what you publish or what interpretation you place on anything that is said before the Committee. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available at the table by the door.

Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff, or the Committee clerks. I remind Minister Dominello and the officers accompanying him that they are free to pass notes and may refer directly to the advisers seated at the table behind them. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning.

The House has resolved that answers to questions on notice must be provided within 21 days. I remind everyone to turn their mobile phones to silent mode if not off. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. I remind Minister Dominello that he does not need to be sworn, having already sworn an oath to his office as a member of Parliament. For all other witnesses, I ask that each in turn state their full name, job title and agency, and swear either an oath or an affirmation.

STEPAN KERKYASHARIAN, Chairperson, Community Relations Commission,

DONNA THERESE RYGATE, Chief Executive Officer, Office of Communities, and

SIMON PETER JULIAN GLASS, Acting Chief Financial Officer, Office of Communities, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: As there is no provision for a Minister to make an opening statement before the hearing commences, proceedings will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, can you tell me how many bills you have introduced?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: In relation to working with—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Communities and citizenship?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, the working with children check bill, and there was a bill in relation to the land rights Act, but that is in the other portfolio.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: So you have been a Minister for almost 20 months and you have introduced one bill in respect to Citizenship and Communities?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is correct.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What have you been doing, Minister?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I have been working very hard with the community, and that is an important function. We have a very important framework under the principles of the *Multiculturalism Act 2000* that provides a very good working framework to engage with the community. To be honest, working with the community involves not just being with them during festivals and functions, as you are well aware because you attend them as well; it also is about administration of grants and undertaking programs. We have announced a strategy in the Multicultural Advantage Action Plan where we set up the inaugural Premier's Harmony Dinner, the March Multicultural Media Awards and the Voices in Harmony choral concert. These are all new initiatives that do not require legislative reform.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Do you not think that you have really trivialised your portfolio by not tackling the legislative requirements of communities and citizenship from the beginning as the Minister?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Far from it. I think we have actually evolved in this portfolio by refocusing it on the economic opportunities that exist within the multicultural communities. Traditionally, in the past, governments, as you no doubt heard me say before, Shaoquett, tend to look at the multicultural spaces and say, "Here's some grant money for a song and a dance" and do not really work on the intrinsic economic value that our multiculturalism brings to this State. In our case, we have done that. That is why we have introduced the Multicultural Business Advisory Panel to draw links between the greatest asset in our State, our people, and the roaring tiger economies in Asia and the subcontinent. I believe that these are important initiatives that will have a real impact not only on multicultural communities but also on everyone in New South Wales.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: According to your colleague Kevin Connolly, the overall purpose of the ministerial consultative committees is to engage local multicultural community leaders. Is that not the purpose of the Community Relations Commission? Do you not have confidence in it to represent and be the voice of multicultural communities?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I have every confidence in the commission and it does an outstanding job.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Have you consulted the chairman of the Community Relations Commission?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I often refer to the chairman of the Community Relations Commission, who is sitting to my left, as the doyen of multiculturalism in our State, if not in this country. He is a world-renowned expert in this field.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Have you asked him to investigate the need—

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Indeed, the ministerial consultative committees have been so successful that your brothers in the federal jurisdiction have appointed their own ministerial consultative committees—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: They came up with it first.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: —because they realised that they work. Their role is different from that of the Community Relations Commission.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Did you consult with or ask the chairman of the Community Relations Commission to investigate the need for the ministerial consultative committees?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I came up with the ministerial consultative committee initiative, and I obviously discussed it with the chairman at the time. Indeed, the chair is well aware—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Have you allocated a budget for the committees?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: They act within existing resources because—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What are those resources? I am asking the questions.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Let him finish his answers.

CHAIR: Members asking questions should allow the Minister or his advisers to answer them without interruption.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: They operate within existing resources. Unlike the former administration, this Government does not want to spend beyond its means. As you have no doubt read in the newspaper today, we realise that if we follow the path taken by the former Government everybody in this State will be hurting. We must live within our means, and that includes the ministerial consultative committees. These committees do not need a bucketload of money to do things. The most important resource that we have in this State is its people. The people who participate in these committees do so voluntarily. They offer their energy, passion, commitment and ideas. We work with them effectively to implement change with existing resources.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can I put it to you—

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is a very different proposition—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I put it to you that your Community Relations Commission—

CHAIR: Allow the Minister to answer.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: We get only 15 minutes to ask questions.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: —from that pursued by the former Government, which was to throw money at organisations and then to turn a blind eye. This Government does not do that; it respects the intrinsic value of people to do things.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I understand that members of the Community Relations Commission feel they have been undermined by the ministerial consultative committees. What is your response to that?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again, the commissioners are doing a wonderful job.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am not questioning that. I asking you about—

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The role of the ministerial consultative committees is completely different from that undertaken by the commissioners. They are doing a wonderful job. I believe that these are important initiatives that will have a real impact not only on multicultural communities but also on everyone in New South Wales.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I understand that there are 15 ministerial consultative committees. However, there are more than 200 different cultural groups in New South Wales. Why have you chosen that 15 and relegated the rest?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The 15 represent the major cultural groups in New South Wales.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can you name them?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: This is not a memory test, but I can go through—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: You are supposed to have met with them and listened to them.

CHAIR: The member asked the Minister a question and he should allow him to answer.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: He is shaking his head. He clearly does not know.

CHAIR: It could be a fairly lengthy answer.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is correct. If the member wants me to go through them, I can. There is obviously the Indian Ministerial Consultative Committee, the Korean Ministerial Consultative Committee, the Lebanese Ministerial Consultative Committee—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Have they met?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: You asked me to name them.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Has the Lebanese Ministerial Consultative Committee met?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, it has. With great respect—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: How many members—

CHAIR: The member will allow the Minister to answer.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am asking the questions.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: You have not allowed me to answer the first question.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: There are 200 cultural groups. We agreed that there are 15 ministerial consultative committees. What about the rest of those communities that have no ministerial consultative committee? Are they not important to you as the Minister for Citizenship and Communities?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will be respectful to you and answer the first question you asked. I will name the 15 ministerial consultative committees.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: You did not answer the previous question.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will answer it.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am following up on that. Are the other 185 cultural groups not important to you?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will continue with the answer to the first question you asked and then you can follow up on that. You asked me to list the 15 ministerial consultative committees and I will continue to do so. As I said, there is the Indian Ministerial Consultative Committee, the Korean Ministerial Consultative Committee, the Italian Ministerial Consultative Committee—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Is there a Maltese Ministerial Consultative Committee?

CHAIR: The member is now making other members of the Committee angry. If the member wants to ask a question he should show respect and allow the Minister to answer—otherwise, do not ask it.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I asked a question with the specific goal of getting an answer. I want to know—

CHAIR: Then be respectful and allow the Minister to answer.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am being respectful.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As a lawyer you should know that before you ask a question you should be prepared for the answer.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: You asked me to name the 15 ministerial consultative committees and I will do so. Do not blame me if you asked a poor question. The reality is—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: The question was—

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No, let me answer the question.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It was about the 185 community groups that do not have a ministerial consultative committee.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No, you can check *Hansard*.

CHAIR: You have asked multiple questions but you have not allowed the Minister to answer any of them.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: You asked me to list the 15 ministerial consultative committees and I will have another go at doing that. I will get there eventually. Next time—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I would like to move to the next question.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No, I want to answer the question.

CHAIR: It is the Minister's prerogative to answer the question that the member asked.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I want to answer the question.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am asking the questions and I want to move to the next one.

CHAIR: It is the Minister's prerogative to answer the question.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I am trying to answer the question. As I said, there is the Lebanese Ministerial Consultative Committee, the Italian Ministerial Consultative Committee, the Korean Ministerial Consultative Committee, the Egyptian Ministerial Consultative Committee, the Chinese Ministerial Consultative Committee and the Pacific Islander Ministerial Consultative Committee. Brian Doyle is the chair of that

committee and he is doing a fantastic job. Members of the Pacific Islander community have given a performance at Parliament House. It is an amazing group that is making an enormous contribution to life in Liverpool in particular. I am trying to remember the other committees.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you support multiculturalism?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Absolutely.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you see it as your role to defend multiculturalism when it is attacked?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Not only do I support multiculturalism, I am also a beneficiary of it. My parents came to this great country of ours when they were seven and my grandparents came out before the war. You probably read an article published in the *Daily Telegraph* sometime ago that mentioned my grandfather, who was interned as a prisoner of war when he came here in 1936.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, can I refer you to your colleague the Hon. Peter Phelps who stated on 19 September:

Just stop funding official multiculturalism because it is a waste. If they just mean cute bits of exotica why are we funding it? It is either a waste of money or a very bad use of money.

What was Mr Phelps on about?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Mr Phelps is a member of the Upper House and this Government—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you agree with this statement?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: This Government absolutely endorses multiculturalism. As I said we have done things that are completely different to what the previous administration has done in relation to—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What have you done to contradict Mr Phelps' statement? Surely that is a real concern to multicultural communities and groups out there to suggest that multiculturalism is a waste of money. What have you said to reassure those communities that Mr Phelps is, indeed, wrong and I suggest bordering on racist?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I am the Minister for multiculturalism and when I go out to the communities I tell them exactly what I think of multiculturalism—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What did you tell Mr Phelps?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: —that is, it is an asset of our State. The reality is, one of the things I am particularly proud of, is the way we administered the grants program—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Are you proud of Mr Phelps?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: —which is fundamentally different to the way your Government administered it.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Are you proud of Mr Phelps? As a colleague of the Liberal Party are you proud of him?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: We have undertaken a review of the grants program—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Why are you avoiding the question?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: —so that we are now focussing—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: This bloke is your Pauline Hanson, isn't he?

CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Aren't you ashamed?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: —more on inter-culturalism. That is something that your Government did not pay attention to. If you look at the 2000 Act that I think Stepan Kerkyasharian pretty much drafted and I congratulate him for it because it is—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Did you consult Mr Kerkyasharian after that outrageous statement that Mr Phelps made?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: —a shining piece of legislation and that is why he is regarded as a world renowned expert. As a result of that if you look at the principles, the absolute genius of multiculturalism is the fact that it is something that should be shared amongst cultures. It is no good if communities stay within their own community. The best thing about multiculturalism is if you share it. That is what the grants program is about.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Was any action taken against Mr Phelps?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: And when I go out to the—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I will take that as a "no".

CHAIR: Time is up for the Opposition.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Silence. Silence is complicit.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Minister, could you explain about the multicultural advantage action plan and whether or not that will be engaging with not only multicultural groups but also local government as a means to have harmony days or celebrations or engagement?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The action plan is multifaceted but one of the things we are looking at is the scoping of multicultural hubs. There is a nascent form of a multicultural hub right under my nose in Ryde. I went and opened that the other day. It is a fantastic concept that is operating from Ryde Council. It is a good idea, a good initiative and a grass roots initiative which is something we can work closer with councils about. Ryde is a multicultural community. The premise is that the hub shares common facilities—you share the hall and you share the kitchen—but then they come together and more importantly they share ideas with one another.

I have a lot of people with Indian, Korean and Chinese backgrounds in my area and they come together and share each other's cultures. At the opening of the hub we had somebody demonstrating an Indian dance which was followed by a Chinese singer. Beyond that they go and branch out and do things together. I was trying to explain to Helen and Shaoquett that that is the true genius of multiculturalism—when we start joining things together. It is something we are definitely looking at.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Are you providing funding through the action plan to those local groups? I could not find a budget allocation for that.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: What we have done is undertaken a scoping in relation to what we need to do and how we can go beyond that. The action plan at the moment is a source of existing funding. As I explained to Shaoquett, some of the flagship items in the plan, some of the bigger ticket items that involve a bit of money, such as the Premier's Harmony Dinner and the like, I have established community groups to help raise sponsorship for those and hopefully they will be self-funded.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Are the funds available for local communities to do the harmony days or multicultural days?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Very much. The grants that we announced this year have increased from \$1.2 million to \$1.4 million. I think this is more specific and I apologise if I did not answer it before. The grants have changed in the sense that the commission has consulted with the community and we have realised that we have now got three headings for the grants: One is the sponsorship grants which is \$70,000 and you can

apply for up to \$2,000 and that is for local communities and local festivals and the like. There are the community inclusion grants and they are typically for interfaith type events or intercommunity events—something I am particularly passionate about.

If the Korean and Indian communities come together—which I think we need to do more of—they can apply for a grant of up to \$20,000 and the total of that grant pool is \$840,000. The partnership grants are longer term grant projects where the Community Relations Commission can work with not-for-profit organisations and that grant program is worth \$490,000 and you can apply for up to \$80,000 for those grants. There are various grants that exist. We have increased the funding by an extra \$200,000. If communities want to take part in that I encourage them to apply.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What efforts are made to inform the communities that those moneys are available? With a change of Government websites and portfolios people have come to me saying, "Where do I find the information now with a change in the one-stop-shop?" It does not seem to be working as effectively as promised: that you could go to one place and find out what grants are available as they are not all listed and it is a little bit of a maze.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I have done the media release and I go out to communities and I talk about it, which is one form of communication, and the website. Given that the grants are administered by the commission I will ask Stepan to indicate what he does.

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: The grants are advertised on our web site but we also place advertisements in the ethnic media and one of the main stream English language newspapers. As far as the migrant communities are concerned I would suggest that the communication effort we undertake is fairly extensive. We also have an electronic database and we use that for a mail-out which means that some thousands of notifications go out about the availability of these grants and their purpose and the way in which people can apply.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Do you write to local government to allow local government to advertise in the regions? I have an interest in the regions and whether they are getting the information as effectively. My other point is—

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: May I answer that?

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Yes.

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: We also have 10 regional advisory councils which operate outside the metropolitan Sydney area. Those councils have composite membership of local government, local senior public servants and community representatives. They are informed and engaged in the information dissemination arrangement as well. We are confident that we also reach regional areas and local government.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Will there be any moves to engage with local government in a way that requires them to have a multicultural or harmony policy or plan in place? Some councils do it and some do not: are you and your colleague, Mr Page, able to encourage councils to look at citizenship issues and multiculturalism?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Obviously most of the councils have a large multicultural component, for example, Ryde, Parramatta and Blacktown councils. They already have active programs to engage their multicultural communities.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Councils that do not have such large, distinct communities have people that are quite marginalised and are not being recognised or catered for.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The Hon. Jan Barham has made a good point about emerging communities such as those in Griffith where Turkish and Indian communities have now been established. We know about Griffith's well established Italian community but newer communities are also establishing there. The Chair of the Community Relations Commission indicated that we have the regional Community Relations Commissioners who liaise with us to see where we can help. For example, through the Commission we have already provided funding to some local communities to assist in their establishment.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What is the Government doing to protect volunteers against insurance claims when building community infrastructure, especially when local government is not able to protect them? For example, if a community builds a cycleway in a village that is not done by a local government contract but has been taken on by the community, however, insurance is needed if anything goes wrong on the job or if someone is hurt for any claims. Who will cover the insurance in those circumstances? What is the Government doing to provide a surety to volunteers that if they build community infrastructure they will be covered by insurance either for their own mishap or for others?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is obviously a legal question. Given that two million people in New South Wales are volunteers who contribute in the order 240 million hours and \$5 billion to our economy each year, one would have thought a strategy would have been in place many years ago to help them and to increase the pool of volunteers. I am proud to say that our Government is the first government in New South Wales to have a volunteer strategy which I announced in May 2012 during Volunteer Week and which was universally supported, including by the Centre of Volunteering which is taking an active role in it. The strategy has a number of platforms, including recognising the rights of volunteering.

A few months ago I attended a forum held in the Jubilee Room of Parliament House. I know that the Centre for Volunteering is now undertaking consultations with the sector on how we can improve the rights of volunteering as that needs to be properly explored. During the consultation phase we have to make sure that whilst we protect the rights of volunteers on one side of the ledger we do not want to make volunteering burdened with red tape on the other side of the ledger. We want to get a delicate balance. Through the strategy we want to incentivise people to volunteer in greater numbers. To answer your question in relation to the insurance issue, that matter will no doubt be considered as part of the consultation that is taking place.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Will the Minister tell us about some of the features of the new Working with Children check?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, as I said to the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane the Working With Children Check is now state-of-the-art and is an important initiative that I introduced in June 2012 in Parliament. As we all know, one of the benefits of federation is that we have various States that can learn off each other. This State was the first to introduce a form of Working With Children Check and other States have followed and it looks as though it is our turn again to lead the charge, and we are. We have learnt from the errors of other jurisdictions. The new Working With Children Check will remove the different checking and declaration regimes for employees, contractors, self-employed people, students and volunteers. It will also remove the need to get additional checks every time a person changes jobs.

All successful applicants will get a five-year Working With Children Check clearance which they can use for any child-related employment, paid or unpaid. The system will be online and will involve far less paperwork than the current check so most clearances will be able to be obtained within one day. The new Working With Children Check will involve continuous checking of records, which is a significant improvement from what existed in the past, by the NSW Police Force that will ensure that if a person is cleared to work with children, and subsequently commits an offence against a child, the clearance can be revoked. In the past, if a person was cleared and then committed an offence it may not have been picked up on the radar but now we effectively have a live check; it is a living, breathing check. This a virtual check that lasts for five years, which is a benefit of our system that I do not think exists in any other jurisdiction.

A person can say to an employer that they have a clearance. The employer will go online and type in the number—the person has a virtual card effectively—and will quickly find out whether that person is cleared or barred. In the past, the employer would sometimes have the onerous obligation of making some difficult calls but that is no more. We now have a team of experts in the Commission for Children and Young People who will make a determination whether a person is cleared or barred to work with children. The beauty of this is that if people change jobs they do not need to get another check as it is already on line and continues for them for five years. I am proud of this initiative which will commence in February 2013.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: In light of the recent central business district riots in Sydney what will be your response in terms of initiatives and programs to increase community cohesiveness and unity?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As I said to the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane and the Hon. Helen Westwood and as I have articulated to Hon. Jan Barham one of the most important aspects of the new grants program is inter-culturalism where communities start talking to one another. Community members to whom I

have spoken universally have said that it is a great idea. Recently I attended the United India Australia Fair and the organisers, having heard my speech, were proud to say that they had a Korean table and an Italian table at the fair. They could show their wonderful Indian culture to the Korean and Italian communities who will then return to their communities and talk about what the Indians are doing.

CHAIR: You referred to two million volunteers in New South Wales who did 240 million hours of volunteering every year, which is phenomenal, which contributes \$5 billion to our economy. What is the Government doing to support the Volunteer Strategy in this State?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As I indicated, I am very proud that this is the first Government to implement a strategy to cater for two million volunteers, and apart from the \$5 billion economic input, who provide the heart and soul of our community. If you took the volunteers out of our society I think you would sap our society of its collective soul. Research has shown that volunteering has a positive impact on the health, well-being and social connections of people who volunteer, which is why I can assure the people of New South Wales that this Government is committed to growing and supporting volunteering.

As I indicated before, in May this year I was delighted to join the Premier in announcing the release of the first NSW Volunteering Strategy. The New South Wales Government has committed resources valued at more than \$4.5 million over the four years to 2016 to support the implementation of the initiatives in the State's first volunteering strategy. The NSW Volunteering Strategy supports the NSW 2021 goal of increasing volunteering in New South Wales beyond the national average.

The New South Wales Volunteering Strategy has five priorities: firstly, to make it easier to volunteer; secondly, to support organisations that work with volunteers; thirdly, recognising and celebrating volunteering; fourthly, improving support for corporate volunteering; and, fifthly, pathways from volunteering to employment. During National Volunteer Week in May this year I launched the newly upgraded NSW Volunteering website, which provides a centrepoint for information about volunteering in New South Wales.

The website is tailored to meet the needs of individual volunteers, those looking to volunteer and businesses and corporate organisations seeking to establish or strengthen a volunteer program. It also is designed to support organisations which manage volunteers across New South Wales. The website is updated regularly with information on how the rollout of New South Wales initiatives is progressing. Its social media capacity provides government with an additional vehicle for distributing information and updating the community on what is happening within the sector. I am impressed by the current statistics, which indicate the website has approximately 2,000 unique visitors per month and that 69 per cent of those are new visitors to the site.

Another initiative that has made it easier to volunteer is the reduction in the price of national criminal history record checks from \$52 to \$15 for New South Wales volunteers working in aged care facilities under Federal legislative requirements. That has been very well received. We are also supporting organisations that work with volunteers. For instance, we are working in partnership with the Volunteer Centre Network NSW, so that training will be provided for volunteer organisations for the development of governance and leadership as well as sound volunteer management practices. I have asked the Volunteer Centre Network NSW to continue the dialogue within the community by leading a public consultation process on the recognition of volunteer rights, with recommendations to be provided for my consideration by the end of the year.

An exciting initiative coming out of the NSW Volunteering Strategy is the trial of timebanking in the Hunter and Central Coast region. In July 2012 I was pleased to publicly endorse a joint proposal by the Hunter Volunteer Centre and Volunteering Central Coast to trial timebanking in the Hunter and Central Coast regions through a \$300,000 grant. Timebanking, as I explained to the communities, is essentially a bartering system for volunteers.

For example, you might get a retired lady who cooks meals for the homeless. It may take her three hours a day to prepare those meals for the homeless. Ordinarily, she would do that without recompense. That is fine; volunteers do this because they have good hearts and generous souls. But, under timebanking, after doing three hours they will put those three hours into a time bank. Then a grandmother might say, "I need somebody to help me out; I need somebody to clean my gutters." Another volunteer in the community will say, "I have a spare hour or two; I can help out. I will put my hour in." So the grandmother can use part of her three hours to get somebody to clean her gutter; that person can then spend two hours cleaning the gutter and put those two hours into his time bank. So, as I said, it is like a barter system.

The beauty of this is that not only does it bring communities closer together, which is part of my responsibility, but it actually helps local communities and local businesses. Think about it. We have two million volunteers spread throughout all communities, whether in the Ryde Council or in the Hunter Valley. Communities can really work on the volunteer collective, and they can go to local businesses and say, "We have a timebanking initiative here; we have on our database 100,000 volunteers. That is, you now have a potential client list of 100,000.

If you say to the volunteers, "If you take part in this timebanking we will give you a 10 per cent movie discount" that is great for the local community and great for the volunteers. It is just a win, win, win. I am proud to say that this timebanking initiative is the first of its kind in Australia. It trialled in the Hunter Valley and on the Central Coast, where there are very active volunteer organisations. But when I talk about this, particularly in the multicultural space, communities say to me, "Minister, when are we going to get ours? We want one." They are all lining up to have one. I look forward to the success of the trial, which is being reviewed by the University of Newcastle. From there, we will no doubt roll it out.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Minister, I would like to ask you a question on cultural diversity. Unlike the Labor members of this Committee, I am actually going to let you answer it without interruption or badgering, or verbal harassment, or interrupting you mid-sentence. What is the Government doing to maximise the benefits of cultural diversity in this State?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I would like to thank you for your very courteous question and the precursor to it.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: And I know you will give a courteous response.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will. The Premier and I launched the New South Wales Government's Multicultural Advantage Action Plan 2012-2015 at the Premier's Harmony Dinner on 28 March 2012. As you know, the 2011 census has confirmed that Sydney is Australia's most diverse capital, where 40 per cent of the community was born overseas—including my parents and grandparents. Our regions too are daily becoming more culturally diverse. The New South Wales Government recognises that only by careful strategic planning can we hope to best use this diversity as an asset, while continuing to ensure everyone is afforded their right to equitable access to services.

The Multicultural Advantage Action Plan is evidence of the New South Wales Government's commitment to multiculturalism and sets out some of the ways in which we will harness its many benefits for the advantage of all our State's citizens. It outlines how the O'Farrell Government will endeavour to further grow the social, cultural and economic asset of our State's diversity. The Multicultural Advantage Action Plan rests on three pillars: value, unity and respect. In addressing policy issues, strengthening community harmony, celebrating multicultural success, and genuinely engaging multicultural communities, these principles underpin each of the actions in the plan. We are building on the invaluable contribution that migrants to Australia have made and continue to make and further develop our workplaces in innovative ways. Our Government is determined through its actions to ensure that our State's great diversity pays further dividends for all the people of New South Wales.

The principle of respect is central to the Multicultural Advantage Action Plan and its initiatives. This is not empty rhetoric. The O'Farrell Government is committed to improving social wellbeing by engaging in meaningful relationships with our diverse population. The Community Relations Commission is hard at work implementing a number of the plan's actions. We have already established the Multicultural Business Advisory Panel, which is exploring how we can best use the expertise, cultural, linguistic and otherwise, of how our tens of thousands of New South Wales residents from diverse backgrounds can help grow our economy. The Ministerial Consultative Committees—which I know Shaoquett Moselmane is a fan of—in many ethnic communities are also seeking to expand the opportunities for people's participation in all areas of the life of the State. The Government is also working on the development of a multicultural tourism initiative in an attempt to get our overseas visitors to stay longer in New South Wales and sample our cultural diversity.

I have announced the new Multicultural Advantage Grants Program, which I have shared with the Hon. Jan Barham previously, administered by the Community Relations Commission, offering \$1.4 million in funding to support multicultural organisations, services and activities, and promote community harmony—an increase of \$200,000 on previous grant funding. This kind of investment in the diversity of New South Wales

plays multiple dividends. It is an investment in our people and the enormous contribution they make through unpaid service to the community. The Multicultural Advantage Action Plan draws together the work of all agencies across government, coordinated by the Community Relations Commission, to maximise the benefits we all deserve from cultural diversity. It is founded on the legal bedrock of the Principles of Multiculturalism, the policy of the State, and realises these through specific, targeted activities.

Every citizen in New South Wales has the right to equitable access to the Government's services and to maximise their opportunity to participate in public life. The Multicultural Advantage Action Plan contributes to making this real for people. The month for March, for example, will showcase a whole range of multicultural activities and in 2013 will feature a huge open air choral concert: *Voices in Harmony*, drawing on and bringing together the huge talent and traditions of the States ethnic communities. Several competitions seeking designs from our State school students and songs from musicians at all stages of their career have been held by the Community Relations Commission to support this concert. I am looking forward to seeing and hearing the winning entries.

As I have already said, the Government has a strong focus on exploring the economic value of diversity. The people of New South Wales, with their language and cultural skills and their intimate understanding of other markets, are an asset that should be capitalised on in doing business with the world. I have no doubt that what the Government is doing in relation to this, whether through the grants program or looking at multiculturalism through the new lens of the economic asset that it brings, will reap many dividends in the future.

CHAIR: We will now move to the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio. Committee members will get 15 minutes each for questions. Mr Ardler will now come to the table.

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

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, under the State Plan you are accountable for goal 26, which is supporting Aboriginal culture, country and identity, including increasing the number of culturally significant objects and places protected. How many new culturally significant objects and places have been protected since you have been Minister?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: As the Hon. Helen Westwood is aware, Aboriginal culture and heritage primarily rests with the Hon. Robyn Parker, Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage. As the Hon. Helen Westwood is also aware, that Aboriginal heritage is, in my view, repugantly contained within the flora and fauna legislation—the national parks legislation, which everyone in this room thinks is a disgrace. It is just insane that in 2012 important things of cultural heritage for Aboriginal people is contained in flora and fauna legislation.

We have a working group because we as a government realise the repugnant nature of this and we have made a commitment. In honouring our commitment we have established a working group so that we will have a standalone piece of legislation. We will consider the recommendations of the working group at the end of the year and, hopefully, some further determinations in March next year. In relation to the member's specific question, as I have said, that question should be more appropriately directed to the Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage. I will pass the question on to Jason Ardler who may have some more detail for you.

Mr ARDLER: I do not have the specific numbers in terms of places protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. However, I would inform those who may not be already aware that this year there were three very significant former children's homes protected under the New South Wales Heritage Act and recognised as being of State significance. While that is not the National Parks and Wildlife Act, it is the protection of three very significant places of Aboriginal cultural and heritage significance that have been protected this year.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Perhaps that question can be taken on notice, thank you. Minister, I am sure that you are aware that Mr Clayton Barr, member for Cessnock, wrote to you about the distress caused to Aboriginal groups at West Wallsend by plans for a development within 20 metres of the butterfly caves in that area. I am sure the Minister also knows that that West Wallsend site is an Aboriginal women's site. What is

the Minister doing to support Aboriginal groups who are fighting to protect these culturally significant butterfly caves?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again that question is primarily in relation to cultural heritage and that is really the responsibility of the Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage. I will defer to Jason Ardler who may be able to provide more information.

Mr ARDLER: No, I do not have any further information on that.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: As the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs are you not aware of this issue?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: If the member has a look at the administrative orders that were set out in March last year, which are pretty instructive to all of us in the room, the legislation that I am charged with administering is the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Issues relating to Aboriginal heritage fall under the responsibility of Minister Parker. So the member may want to save—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: But does not the Minister have a role as an advocate for the Aboriginal community in the Government? Is the Minister not the voice of the Aboriginal community in the Government?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: —that question for Minister Parker. I am happy to take the question on notice and ask Minister Parker for the member if she wishes.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: The destruction of Aboriginal culture and heritage in the greater Hunter as a result of mining is also of concern to its Aboriginal community. When will an audit be undertaken on the destruction of Aboriginal culture and heritage under care and control permits issued by the current Government?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I again invite the Hon. Helen Westwood to look at the administrative orders that were issued on 3 April 2011, after we formed government. The member will realise under those administrative orders that different Ministers have different responsibilities—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, the Aboriginal community looks to you as its voice in the New South Wales Government. The Aboriginal community sees you as its advocate. I think the Minister's silence would be of grave concern to them.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: We have advocated very strongly for the Aboriginal community and as a result we have established the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs. This is a Taskforce, as the Hon. Helen Westwood knows, that has come about as a result of the appalling record or the legacy that was given to us by the former administration

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Is it not reinforcing those silos that the Minister spoke about in opposition? The Minister was critical of silos when in opposition but what has the Minister done to break those silos down?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: This is not me saying it; the Auditor-General said it in his scathing commentary on the "Two Ways Together" report.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Let us move to the Auditor-General's report titled "Improving the Literacy of Aboriginal Students in New South Wales Public Schools". In that report it was suggested that the efforts in education by the New South Wales Government will not lead to closing the gap and meeting the Council of Australian Governments targets. How will the cuts that the New South Wales Government is making to education impact on its ability to meet the Closing the Gap target and what assurances will the Minister give to ensure that the Government is able to close that gap?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I again invite the Hon. Helen Westwood to look at the administrative orders. This question should be directed to the Minister for Education because it involves education. In relation to the Aboriginal community I can say that as part of the Taskforce, of which I am the Chair and which I can answer, we did consider an excellent initiative by the Minister for Education called "Connected Communities,

which involves 15 New South Wales communities—I do not know if the member wants me to name them—including Walgett, Boggabilla, Bourke, Tamworth et cetera.

What these connected communities have that is so different to the current regime is we are going to have executive principals appointed to these connected communities because we realise that the best way to change the lives of some of these communities is through the school. We want to make sure that these connected communities, which are communities that are in desperate need of help, have the best principals that the State has got to offer and we have worked with the Teachers Federation—

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: In your State Plan under goal 26 you do have responsibility for that.

CHAIR: Order! You asked the Minister a question on education and he is just coming to the conclusion of his answer.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: We have got very limited time so I think it is reasonable to ask a question—

CHAIR: You have asked a question. Allow the Minister to answer. Can the Minister finish his answer?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will round it up. Another critical component, apart from getting the executive principals in place, is that we also have a Aboriginal leader or elder working in partnership with the executive principal, and that dynamic I believe will have profound welcoming results in the future for Aboriginal communities.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: If I could move to the issue of food supply in Wilcannia? That was a real issue following Minister Roberts' visit and intervention there—much-publicised. We understand that the State Government has put funding into a market garden in Wilcannia. Could you tell the Committee how much money was put into this project?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will defer that question to Jason Ardler.

Mr ARDLER: As I understand it, it was funding that was provided by Fair Trading and it is my understanding that \$45,000 was provided to Centacare to do a feasibility study on the establishment of a co-op in Wilcannia.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you know that the market garden is dead? How has that happened? They are not even going to get a carrot out of it this year it seems. Funding of \$45,000 and it is not going to produce as much as a carrot.

Mr ARDLER: We might be speaking about different things. My understanding is that \$45,000 has been provided for a feasibility study into a co-op.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What has happened to the market garden that was funded?

Mr ARDLER: That I do not know.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Could you take that on notice? There is also the issue of the community project officer for Wilcannia. I understand that that position has not been filled for some time.

Mr ARDLER: We are in the process of recruiting that position now.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How long has it been vacant?

Mr ARDLER: I would have to take that on notice as well. It is some months.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: In a community like Wilcannia with such well-known and profound need surely it was a priority to have that position filled?

Mr ARDLER: It is not that the community has not been serviced; we just have not had somebody based in Broken Hill to do that directly. But we have an office in Bourke.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Broken Hill is an awful long from Wilcannia—so is Bourke. If I could move on to the Land Rights Act? We are now 30 years on from that Act, which was to provide for the acquisition of land and for economic development. Many Aboriginal groups have expressed the view that the standard five-year reviews of the Act are all well and good but given the number of changes we are looking at in terms of Aboriginal culture and heritage and the work of the Aboriginal taskforce what is really needed is a far more comprehensive inquiry into that Act and a review of that Act. I think one of the things that people are calling for is a parliamentary inquiry into that Act. Would you agree?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I think the working group is doing an extraordinary job. As you know, it is a statutory review that is required; it is embedded in the Act and it is undertaking its course, as it must. I think to presuppose or to pre-empt what the working group is going to do is premature. I think we need to wait and see what the working group ultimately comes to in terms of where it lands on some of their recommendations in relation to the Act and then we will consider it accordingly. Can I just say in relation to the working group as well, our Government has taken a very different approach to this. In the past, and you may be aware, the Local Aboriginal Land Councils—the LALCs—were not necessarily involved in the working groups when there was a review being undertaken. We, for the first time, have done that.

We have got Stacey Meredith from Griffith Local Aboriginal Land Council and we have got Sean Gordon, who is the CEO of the Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council. They are on the working group. But, more importantly, because it may come to an issue that is close to your heart in relation to land claims, that is, in many ways, an important overall consideration of the workings of the Land Rights Act. For the first time we have got the Director General of the Department of the Primary Industries, who pretty much is responsible for Crown lands, to be on the working group. This is a genuine show of good faith by this Government that we are trying our very best to overcome the 26,000 claims backlog that we inherited. I really believe that we need to let the working group continue, complete its findings, present them to us and then consider it and we will take it from there.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It appears that you are cutting the Aboriginal Affairs budget by \$5 million. Why are you doing that?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is not my understanding at all. My understanding is that this year there have been savings of \$8 million and of that about \$2 million has come out of my collective portfolios of Aboriginal Affairs and Citizenship and Communities. But we have got to put this in the global context. The reality is we are living in difficult economic times, as you know. I know that you are an avid reader of newspapers and I know that you would have read the report today by the International Monetary Fund that has again put a big warning out there for countries saying that if we do not live within our means, there are countries that are going to go the fiscal cliff face and they will fall off. We have got to make sure that we live within our means. In relation to Aboriginal Affairs, as I said—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Everyone is aware that Aboriginal Affairs is in desperate need—

CHAIR: Order! Let the Minister finish his answer.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: In relation to your specific question regarding the funding, I thought I answered it but I will ask Ms Rygate to give you the specifics.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I have the budget papers here and it says \$25 million last year was revised to \$20 million for 2012-13. So it is clearly \$5 million short from last year's budget

Ms RYGATE: If I could perhaps help with that question? The budget papers reflect an actual expenditure, as you have pointed out, which is additional to budget expenditure in the Aboriginal Community Development Program that occurred last year at the end phase of that program. The budget papers also reflect a number of programs that were coming to an end and ended at the end of 2011-12, so the budget allocations for this year are necessarily lower because we are not getting money for various of those programs.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Was there any particular program that was cut?

Ms RYGATE: Mr Ardler can probably go into the detail of all of those specific programs. But, as the Minister said, the savings strategies that we are applying this year in Aboriginal Affairs are a part of our commitment to meeting the need to achieve savings across the board. The Aboriginal Affairs savings are around \$750,000 rather than the sort of figure that you are quoting.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: What programs were cut?

Ms RYGATE: I am just about to go into that. What we are doing to achieve those savings is reducing our rental accommodation costs by reconfiguring our accommodation; we are looking at operating costs and trying to reduce things like travel costs; we are holding two non-front-line positions vacant for half a year and as other non-front-line positions become vacant we are reviewing them carefully to determine whether we actually need to fill them. I wonder if Mr Ardler would like to talk about any of the various Commonwealth, et cetera, programs that came to an end in 2011-12 to assist you to work out the numbers?

Mr ARDLER: There were two programs primarily that were due to finish at the end of June. One was the Economic Development Officer Program, which was in fact a two-year Commonwealth funded program. The Commonwealth changed their program guidelines and the way they wanted to approach that work and so they decided not to continue funding that program and they are now providing the services that were provided under that program in a different way. The other program that was due to finish up was the Safe Families Program. The last one was a one-off project looking at data gaps that was funded through some of the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] national partnerships, so that was a one-off.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Are you able to provide an update on the taskforce, particularly around the development of the new strategy and whether or not a draft will be made available for consultation?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, I will give a bit of an update on it, but it comes on the back of the Auditor-General's report and the Ombudsman's report, as you know. In summary, we recently released a progress report and went out to the community. That report is available, so you can have a look at that. We went through the second phase of consultations on that progress report and I can go into more detail about that if you wish. We are now in the final stages of deliberation of that second round. That will then go to Cabinet and hopefully a decision will be made by the end of the year.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: For a final document or a draft?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No, the Taskforce final recommendations will be delivered to Government or Cabinet for consideration by the end of the year.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It is a little confusing because in December last year you advised via media release that there would be open community consultation for the development of a new Aboriginal Affairs strategy?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It is that strategy that I am particularly concerned about, whether or not there is a document being developed or something—

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, if I may explain it, there have been two rounds of consultation. The first round happened at the beginning of the year, so we went out and said, "Tell us your views; tell us your concerns", and it was an exhaustive process. About 1,700 people turned up. There were over 4,000 individual submissions or ideas and 200 written submissions. When we went through that, we collated all of those ideas and deliberated over them, and we prepared an interim or progress report. Then we went out with that progress report and said to the community, "Based on what you have told us, these are the three, four or five ideas that we think you would like to see happen as part of the strategy", for example, an opportunity hub, culture and languages—how we do that—and local decision making, for example, a new accountability framework and those types of things. All of that is published in a progress report that is online and you can access that pretty readily.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It is a bit difficult to find online, but yes, it is there.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: It is accessible. We then got the progress report and went out for a second round of consultations that we have just recently concluded. We then had workshops around that and said, "This is what we understand you would like, so tell us how each of these initiatives or strategies could or should work in your respective communities. How would you like to see, for example, the development of culture and language? Should it be at a school, should it be outside of school, should it be in the community? How would you like to see an Opportunity Hub? Should it be done at local council level, should it be done in the library, or where should it be done?"

We now have that feedback. We had surveys, and I stand to be corrected but I think about 700 people participated in the second round of community consultation, and there were more than 420 surveys completed saying, "Yes, we would like this, but we do not like that; we think this would work, but that would not." We are now deliberating on those. Those final deliberations of the taskforce are taking place and those recommendations will then go to Government or Cabinet by the end of the year. I hope that explains it.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Yes. Last year there was the issue, which you have just referred to, about Safe Families funding and the Interagency Program that was finalised in December.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: What fills that gap and can you provide any information about whether specific action has been taken by you in relation to Toomelah and whether there is funding or programs available to address Aboriginal child sexual assault?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I thank you for the question. It is obviously one of those issues that is very difficult because you do not want to stigmatise any particular community with it, but it is an issue that just needs to be dealt with. As you know, the Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce recommended the Interagency Plan in 2006, which came out of the Breaking the Silence report, and they had about 88 recommendations, as you know. I have been advised that it was hastily cobbled together, but one of the recommendations was the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Panel or group that is currently being chaired by Bev Banton and Cindy Berwick is on it, and people like Shani Gallagher from Link Up, who actively participated in the Taskforce.

They regularly reported on a six-monthly basis on the implementation of that Interagency Plan in relation to child sexual assault. That plan expired at the end of last year. The Ombudsman is going to report on that in the coming months and no doubt the Ombudsman will say that the plan worked or it did not work and these are the improvements, this is how we can better protect children in Aboriginal communities in relation to child sexual assault. Safe Families is in a similar vein. I think what we need to do is wait for the Ombudsman, which is only a matter of weeks away, to find out his report and his recommendations to see how the plan went and how we can improve before we go beyond that.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: That means we have had a gap of a year from the end of the plan until when we might get a report from the Ombudsman, and then some progress and implementation. Is that right?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The plan was scheduled to finish at the end of last year, which happened, but the Ministerial Advisory Panel [MAP]—they issued six-monthly reports and in the reports they said they were not convinced that the Interagency Plan that was established in 2006—

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: That is my point, it has already been identified that it is ineffective.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Correct, by the Ministerial Advisory Panel. I then provided those concerns to the Director General, Michele Bruniges, and I said, "You need to take these concerns on board when dealing with this issue", but the reality is, whether it is this issue or any other issue, any quick kneejerk response is not going to work and that is why I think we honestly need to wait for the Ombudsman to come out with his recommendation.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: So nothing has happened?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: What we have done is give the concerns of the Ministerial Advisory Panel to the Director General so that she can take steps to address any concerns. The reality is that Safe Families

is continuing into next year, but we will no doubt be very wisely instructed by the Ombudsman in his report, which will be handed down in a matter of weeks.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Are you aware of any pilot programs in the Kempsey area relating to the establishment of the cooperative initiative, which will encourage education, jobs, Aboriginal culture, farm stays and training. If so, can you update the Committee on this and what support the Government is giving to this potential pilot project or, if not, can you take it on notice?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Thank you, there are a lot of programs out there and, to be honest—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: It is left-field.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, but I am happy to take it on notice. I may have come across it, but I see so many of them—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: In New South Wales the life expectancy of Indigenous men is nearly nine years less than non-Indigenous men and 7½ years shorter for Indigenous women. What initiatives are in place or are being planned to deal with these concerning statistics?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Paul, you are absolutely right. In the health area, the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is, quite frankly, appalling. Whatever health statistics you look at—smoking, obesity and diabetes—ultimately the final form of the health check is the one you identified, and that is the life expectancy. Unless we bring that closer to parity, I do not think we as a society are doing our job. The same applies to educational outcomes, as you know. There is a huge disparity. The same applies to unemployment rates. We are talking 4.8 per cent in New South Wales for non-Aboriginal people and about 18.1 per cent for Aboriginal people. The disparity is just disgraceful. The same with incarceration rates: if we go through those statistics, we should all hang our heads in shame.

But these things require a long-term plan. Last year the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General said, when they were scaring in their condemnation of the previous administration's conduct with Two Ways Together—that 10-year plan that they had, which did not make any inroads; in fact, in some of the cases some of the statistics broadened—"Effectively, to deal with this, you need that long-term plan. You need to have a partnership with Aboriginal communities. You need to have evidence-based programs." All of those three things were missing from the previous administration. As soon as we got those reports, we announced Taskforce. Guess what this Taskforce does? It has genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities. Whatever we do with this Taskforce, we can say, "We did it in partnership with Aboriginal people." It is not Government directing the Aboriginal community, "This is what you're going to have whether you like it or not."

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Hear, hear!

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: This is genuine partnership. For the first time to my knowledge in our Australian political history, we have seen a Taskforce that covers many Ministerial portfolios. There are seven Ministers on this. It is a sizeable chunk of Cabinet. It includes Aboriginal leaders, such as Stephen Ryan, who is the Chair of the New South Wales Aboriginal Lands Council and the Chair of the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations [CAPO] within which you have Link-Up and the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat NSW [AbSec], and a whole lot. You have other Aboriginal leaders making decisions in the Taskforce, as I referred to when I was talking to Jan, side by side with Ministers. So it is genuine partnership.

The second thing is that this taskforce is looking for that plan and is developing a strategy for a way forward. I can tell you this: From what I have heard from the Aboriginal community to date, it has to start with education. Education is the great enabler for generational reform. That is what we are working on very carefully with the Aboriginal community through that taskforce.

CHAIR: I call the Hon. Rick Colless. I know this is an area of interest to him.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, could you expand a little on that. I know the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs was created, or announced, in August 2011. Following on your comments in relation to the question by the Hon. Paul Green, could you expand on that and advise the Committee of what progress has been made since it was announced last year?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Thank you. The Premier established the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs following the New South Wales Auditor-General's performance audit reported in "Two Ways Together", the former New South Wales Government's 10-year Aboriginal Affairs plan. The report found that the plan did not deliver the intended improvements for Aboriginal people. The Auditor-General stated:

To date the Two Ways Together Plan (the Plan) has not delivered the improvement in overall outcomes for Aboriginal people that was intended.

This was reported in the NSW Ombudsman's report, "Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage: the need to do things differently", which was released shortly thereafter. It highlighted many ongoing problems, including a disconnection between government and Aboriginal communities, a failure to coordinate between government agencies, and a failure to measure—and that is a critical component of this—government performance. The Ombudsman stated:

Through our work we have repeatedly stressed that, on its own, the injection of additional resources will not guarantee improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families in these communities.

The NSW Ombudsman also reported key service coordination and delivery failures in his earlier reports into Bourke and Brewarrina, as you are no doubt aware. He identified education and employment as priorities in addressing disadvantage. The development of a new Aboriginal Affairs strategy is part of our long-term focus to work with Aboriginal people to strengthen Aboriginal communities. The Taskforce's Terms of Reference will deliver concrete reforms to improve educational and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in New South Wales and improve service delivery and accountability in Aboriginal Affairs across New South Wales.

The Taskforce does not intend to address every issue raised during consultations or discussed in submissions, nor does it propose quick fixes. That is a refreshing change. The focus is on bringing about generational change and sustainable improvement. For the first time a ministerial taskforce with seven Government Ministers sits side by side with Aboriginal leaders. For the first time the Aboriginal community people are sitting at a Government decision-making table. Geoff Scott from the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council [NSWALC], who is represented on the taskforce, said:

This is really a unique opportunity that hasn't been tried before to actually be at the table with senior Ministers and make decisions on the things that matter for Aboriginal people.

The Taskforce Ministerial membership reflects the recognition that government-wide commitment is needed to bring about sustained improvements in the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. The Taskforce's Aboriginal representation includes the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations and three independent Aboriginal members with relevant experience and knowledge to deliver on our commitment to respect for partnerships with Aboriginal people, and they include Daniel Lester from the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, who brings employment expertise to the table, and Professor Shane Huston, who is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney, who brings educational expertise to the table.

In terms of progress to date, on 6 August the Taskforce released a Progress Report, to which I referred in my discussion with Jan, outlining its proposed directions. The Taskforce carefully considered the feedback of Aboriginal communities and other key stakeholders in formulating these proposals. This involved information gathered from over 200 written submissions and 14 community forums that involved 1,700 participants. Think about the level of participation by Aboriginal communities. There are approximately 200,000 Aboriginal people in New South Wales and 1,700 of those participated in these consultations. That is equivalent to approximately 70,000 people participating in New South Wales consultation, which is an extraordinary level of engagement. I really think that in many ways this means the Aboriginal community is hopeful about the concept of partnership rather than Government again saying, "This is what is going to happen." They can see that they are going to own some of these outcomes because they are driving it. I think that is why they came out in droves and made enormous contributions to the taskforce to date.

Aboriginal language and culture have been identified as critical, and they are absolutely critical to Aboriginal people's identity and wellbeing. The reforms focus on strengthening support for language and culture. The proposals also focus on strengthening the connection between education, training and employment to inspire young Aboriginal people to stay at school and to get real and meaningful jobs. We have got to get them off that merry-go-round and get them into sustainable long-term employment to make that generational change. The Taskforce heard time and time again that training has been occurring for training's sake and is not leading to real jobs. It is examining how to get better coordination and connection of education and training with real opportunities and how to strengthen connections with the private sector. Another focus of the proposals is to

get greater involvement of Aboriginal communities in decision-making and service delivery. We know that top-down centralised decision-making does not take into account Aboriginal and community knowledge and aspirations, and ultimately does not work.

These proposals are outlined in the Taskforce's Progress Report and have been subject to further community consultations, to which I alluded earlier, to test whether they are on the right track and to bring about sustainable change and improvement. I will give you some statistics on the second round of consultations. It has involved 900 people participating in nine community consultation forums and four stakeholder workshops. Four hundred and twenty-seven people also completed surveys that provided specific feedback on the taskforce proposals. The feedback is critical in determining whether our proposals are on the right track and how they might be further developed or implemented.

The New South Wales Government is extremely grateful for the extent of engagement and input by the Aboriginal people into its deliberations. Through this consultation process the Taskforce has developed a stronger understanding of the issues facing Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. Common themes have emerged, including the need to work in partnership with communities to ensure those on the ground are able to lead on issues in their communities. The Taskforce is very mindful of the need to have continuing dialogue with Aboriginal people and communities. The feedback from the second round of consultations will inform the taskforce's final recommendations that will be presented to government by the end of the year.

I add in conclusion that one of the most compelling things I heard—and I attended most of these Taskforce consultations—was when Chairman Stephen Ryan addressed those in attendance. He said, "Listen, this is an extraordinary opportunity to have a meaningful dialogue, engagement and ownership of the way we are going in the future." He kept saying "We do not have more Wallang"—which is Wiradjuri for money—"but we do need to make sure that we have a plan in place to look after our burai"—which is our children—"for the next generation." He says it more powerfully than I could ever say it. When people like Chairman Ryan provide Aboriginal leadership on this, I think we are in a very good space for making a real change to the lives of Aboriginal people in our State.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
