

# **GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2**

**Monday 12 August 2013**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area**

## **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. J. A. Gardiner  
The Hon. M. Faruqi

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

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### **PRESENT**

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

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## **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 this hearing of the inquiry into the budget estimates for 2013-14 open to the public. Before we commence I acknowledge the Gadigal clan of the Eora nation, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I also pay our respects to elders past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present. I welcome Minister Dominello and the officials accompanying him. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Citizenship and Communities and Aboriginal Affairs. Minister, the Committee has decided to allocate equal times to both of those portfolios. Because Government members have forgone their question time we will have 30 minutes of questioning comprising 15 minutes of questioning by Opposition members and 15 minutes by crossbench members for each portfolio.

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 photos. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee the media must take responsibility for what they publish or the interpretation they place on anything that is said before the Committee. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available on the table by the door. I note that today's hearing is open to the public and that it is being webcast live via the Parliament's website.

Before we commence I will make some comments about procedural matters. Any messages from advisers or the Minister's staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the committee clerks. Minister, I remind you that you and your officers are free to pass notes and to refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. 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 off their mobile phones or to have them in silent mode. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn in because you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. All other witnesses should state their full name, job title and agency and either swear an oath or make an affirmation.

**STEPAN KERKYASHARIAN**, Chairperson, Community Relations Commission,

**KEITH STEVENS**, Chief Financial Officer, Community Relations Commission, and

**DONNA RYGATE**, Chief Executive Officer, Office of Communities, sworn and examined:

**DEBRA BOCK**, Director Finance, Office of Communities, affirmed and examined:

**CHAIR:** I declare the proposed expenditure for Citizenship and Communities and Aboriginal Affairs open for examination. As there is no provision for the Minister to make an opening statement, I invite members of the Opposition to begin their questions.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, how many bills have you introduced in this portfolio area?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** In the Citizenship and Communities portfolio?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Yes.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** None.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Why have you failed to introduce any legislation?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Because I think the Community Relations Commission is doing an outstanding job, and I hope you support that. If you do not, and if you believe changes should be made, I am happy to receive any submission from you. I think the commission is doing an outstanding job in the community. It has a large role to play, particularly given the extraordinary breadth of the multicultural space in New South Wales. As you would appreciate, it is very different from what is happening in Victoria. Our multicultural community is much larger and much more diverse.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, as you would appreciate we have 15 minutes in which to ask questions about this portfolio area. I ask that you limit your answers.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** The short answer—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** In response to that—

**CHAIR:** Respect must be shown by all parties. If a question is asked, the Minister should be allowed to answer it without interruption.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, you said that the Community Relations Commission is doing a great job. I note that it now needs to undertake work to repair and maintain its assets. The commission's income has decreased from \$200,000 to \$86,000 and general revenue has decreased from \$60,000 to \$22,000. It seems that you have run down the Community Relations Commission.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** That is not true.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** The facts speak for themselves.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** That is not correct. This badgering line of questioning is not reflecting well on you. Be that as it may, the reality is that we have increased the grants programs budget. Under the Labor Government the programs were allocated only \$1.2 million and this Government has allocated \$1.4 million. That is one of the Community Relations Commission's major interfaces.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I quoted those figures from the budget papers. You said that the budget had been increased. Under the Education and Communities cluster, community support services have decreased by 7.6 per cent. There is a clear variation from \$11.4 million to \$10.5 million. Why is that?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Madam Chair, how should I address the honourable member?

**CHAIR:** You can call him "Shaoquett".

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I do not want to be disrespectful or discourteous. As you know, the Government has increased the overall funding from \$1.2 million to \$1.4 million. We have maintained that and it is clear. Mr Kerkyasharian will provide the detail.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** It is in the budget papers.

**CHAIR:** The Minister has referred the question to Mr Kerkyasharian.

**Mr KERKYASHARIAN:** What is the specific line in the budget papers?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** It is in the Education and Communities section.

**CHAIR:** What page is it on?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** It is on page 3-1. It indicates that the community support services budget has gone from \$11.4 million to \$10.5 million. That is a variation of 7.6 per cent.

**Mr STEVENS:** The decline of 7.6 per cent is based on two different columns. One refers to the revised budget for 2012-13 and it includes midyear supplementation approval by Treasury to carry forward funding from 2011-12. The 2013-14 budget is only the core budget and does not include any carry-forward funding at this stage.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Is that explained elsewhere in the budget papers?

**Mr STEVENS:** Treasury has a glossary of terms in Budget Paper No. 2 that should explain what a revised budget contains.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Under the Education and Communities cluster, Citizenship and Communities has had a 30.2 per cent funding cut from \$69.9 million in 2012-13 to \$58.1 million in 2013-14. What is the reason for that?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** As I said, the greatest interface for the Community Relations Commission is through the grants program, which has been increased by \$200,000. I will refer questions about the minutiae of the budget of this independent statutory commission to Mr Stevens. In terms of the broad picture, we have increased our interface with the public and I am particularly proud of that.

**Mr STEVENS:** I think that figure that you quoted also includes the Citizenship and Communities portfolio in general. The Community Relations Commission grant allocation from the Department of Education and Communities was around \$12.8 million year on year. That is the amount of grant funding that I received to administer the operations.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, you just said that you have increased the grant program. My information is that you have offered only 150 out of the 400 grant applications in 2012-13, approving only 33 per cent of those grant applications. Why has such a small amount of applicants been approved when under Labor in 2010-11 85 per cent were approved out of the 710 applications?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** As I said, not only did we increase the amount of money that we have allocated to the grants, we have restructured the grants program so that there are now three components: the partnership grants, the sponsorship grants and the inclusion grants. One of the main components of the restructure was to make sure that we communicate to the community how important it is to have that inter-faith, inter-community engagement. The most important thing that we can do—I really believe this—in relation to the ongoing strength of our diversity is to make sure there is some social adhesive in that. In order to achieve that we had to re-tailor the grants program to make sure that communities are working together with one another rather than in simple isolation. In terms of how many grants and applications are approved, as you would know, this is an independent statutory body. There are 12 commissioners who make recommendations on which grants should be approved and which should not.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, do you go out to the community and inform people as to how they should apply for these grant applications? A significant 73 per cent have been rejected.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Stepan will answer in detail because he is in control of how they go out to the community and making sure that there is an education program in relation to the new grants.

**Mr KERKYASHARIAN:** As the Minister said, we changed the process by which we call for applications and assess them. A couple of years ago we had a two-stage process where we called for expressions of interest. They were not actually applications; they were just expressions of interest on one sheet of paper which said, "This is the idea. This is what we want the money for and this is how much we want." The commission looked at them, culled them and then called for applications on the basis of those expressions of interest. That process was changed. But if we look at the absolute numbers we find that in 2008-09 124 grants were given out. In 2009-10 164 were given out. In 2010-11 163 were given out and in 2011-12 178 were given out. So you will see that the number of organisations receiving grants actually increased. We also use our extensive regional advisory council networks and our own networks to publicise the grants.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Thank you, Mr Kerkyasharian. I will move to the next area of my questions.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Is the question withdrawn?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, why have you shrouded the ministerial consultative committee in so much secrecy. Why do you not declare who the members are? Why do you not declare their names? What are you hiding, Minister?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Shaoquett, I am more than happy to tell you who the chairs of the committees are. For example, the chairs of the Chinese committee the chairs are Charles Casuscelli and Mark Coure. Do you want to make a notation?

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I am not asking who the chairs are. Why are you not making public the 300 members that exist on the 15 secretive ministerial consultative committees? Why are you hiding that, Minister?

**CHAIR:** Point of order: I will not allow members to make derogatory, insinuating remarks. Members will ask questions respectfully and they will get respectful answers.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Respectfully, why are you hiding it, Minister?

**CHAIR:** I will now ask the Minister to answer your question.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Thank you, Madam Chair. These are committees that were formed when we came into Government. They are so successful that our Federal counterparts in Canberra have adopted their own ministerial consultative committees. I do not know how they are going. I am happy to disclose to you who the chairs of these committees are.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** No—

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** You have asked the question, now hear me out. I am happy to disclose who the chairs are. It is then a matter for the chairs to ask the various members of the committee whether they want their names to be disclosed.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** They are your consultative committee, Minister; the members are yours. Let me ask: You have got yourself and 30 other parliamentary members involved in these committees and yet none of the Opposition and none of the public know who those 300 members are. I am not casting a shadow on those members but you are by keeping them secret.

**The Hon. JENNIFER GARDINER:** Point of order: We are here to ask questions not make statements. No question is being asked in that statement.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Point of order: There was a question.

**CHAIR:** There was also a statement.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** We have 15 minutes to ask questions; give us a go.

**CHAIR:** Clearly ask a succinct question and you will have an effective session.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** We are asking it. You do not ask our questions; we ask our questions. You are biased enough.

**CHAIR:** Ask the question.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Will you undertake to provide us with a list of names of the 300 members?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I will give you a list of names of the chairs; you can then write to the chairs and ask them whether their members wish to have their details disclosed to you.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** You have 15 committees—

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** They are individuals; I respect their privacy. If they want to disclose their name to you, they can. If they do not, I respect that privacy.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** You have 15 committees, secretive ministerial consultative committees—

**CHAIR:** Order! I have already warned the member not to make derogatory remarks.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** There is nothing derogatory in that.

**CHAIR:** Yes, there is. You are being disrespectful to all those members of the public who serve voluntarily on those committees, and I will not accept that.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I would like to know their names, Minister.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I endorse that. This is not the Labor Party.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Why are you secretive about it? Minister, may I ask you another question?

**CHAIR:** Ask a question and allow the Minister to answer.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I am asking another question. Minister, you have nominated the Lebanese consultative committee. Why are you discriminating against the other Arabic communities? They are not the only Arabic speakers: there are Iraqis, Palestinians and Syrians. Why not have an Arabic consultative committee rather than just a Lebanese consultative committee? Why are you discriminating?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I am not discriminating. Again, you load the questions in a very inflammatory way, which is not only disrespectful to the communities that are—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I am asking you to get them involved.

**CHAIR:** Let the Minister answer.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** It is not only disrespectful to the communities that are embodied in the question; it also does not show you in a good light, Shaoquett. It is not discriminatory at all. I have said before, and I will say it again, if there are communities out there that would wish to form a consultative committee I am very much open to it. In fact, recently the Thai community approached me and said, "We would like to form a committee to engage with the Minister." I am more than happy with that and I am trying to process it. Recently

even the Ukrainian community—because I addressed them on their national day recently; I even tried to speak a few words of Ukrainian, I think unsuccessfully—approached me and said they are also interested. So, Shaoquett, I repeat what I said last year: If there is any community that is interested in forming a committee my doors are always open.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, will you undertake to provide us with the aims and objectives of the ministerial consultative committees?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I have done that in the past and I am happy to do so again. Already the consultative committees are proving successful. I cite just one example: the Russian ministerial consultative committee. The Russian community has been trying to get the Russian language as part of the Higher School Certificate syllabus. It has been knocking on doors, particularly under the previous administration, for over a decade, asking former Ministers for education, "Can we get this on the syllabus?" They got nowhere. As a result of the hard work of the chair, Bruce Notley-Smith, and as a result of the hard work of the committee members they managed to get it on. They said that alone has been an initiative that they have driven—that they have owned—that has had a real outcome and has made a real difference.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Minister, I have one minute and I will ask you a couple of questions, if I may. There are other areas that I would like to ask you about.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** You have asked me about the objectives and I am telling you what they are.

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I have 20 seconds, I am told. With regard to the Voices in Harmony Concert, in reply to the shadow Minister, Guy Zangari, you advised that due to a conflict between proposed dates and the Easter celebration you cancelled the event. Why not reschedule it?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** In relation to the detail of that, the reality is that we were only notified at the last moment. I am proud to say that the calendar in relation to multicultural events in New South Wales is quite full. We have the Harmony Dinner, we have the media awards, we have all of these—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** Yes, but why was this concert not rescheduled? That is my question.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** We do not do things like you do things, Shaoquett, with poor planning—

**The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE:** I do it with poor planning? Is that what you are saying?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** With great respect, if you are suggesting—

**CHAIR:** The Opposition's time for questions has expired. I will ask Dr Mehreen Faruqi to commence questioning for The Greens.

**Dr MEHREEN FARUQI:** Minister, a group of prominent academics wrote to you earlier this year about the Local Schools, Local Decisions program and the impact it would have on English as a second language as well as migrant communities. As Minister for Citizenship and Communities, what effect do you think having a system that is servicing more than 130,000 students today will have on the ability of migrant communities, as well as refugees and multicultural communities, to learn English and engage with others in our society?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Thank you, Dr Faruqi, and congratulations again on your elevation to this important office. Local Schools, Local Decisions, as you would appreciate, is an initiative of the Minister for Education, and I will let you ask him about the detail of that. But in relation to the impact in relation to the multicultural communities, we have in New South Wales a very ingenious mechanism to make sure that the various service provision agencies are held to account in relation to making sure that they adhere to the principles of multiculturalism, and that is through the Multicultural Policies and Services Program [MPSP]. The commission, chaired by Stepan Kerkyasharian, will make sure that whether it is Education, whether it is Health, whether it is Police—whatever the major service provision agents are—they are doing their role in accordance with the principles of multiculturalism as enshrined in the Act. So whether it is Local Schools, Local Decisions



or whether it is Connected Communities—whatever is being conducted by Education—there will be a prism through which it will be seen, and that is through the MPSP. That is how it is dealt with in terms of multiculturalism.

**Dr MEHREEN FARUQI:** Minister, you will know that in Victoria programs similar to Local Schools, Local Decisions have an impact at the end of the day on English as a second language and on how the migrant communities were taught. So will you be putting in more budget and other resources in the other programs of the commission to overcome that?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Again, I am not the Minister for Education and, as you would appreciate—

**Dr MEHREEN FARUQI:** I am asking you specifically with respect to migrant communities.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** And I have answered the question. I have said that in terms of my portfolio—you have asked about my portfolio—it is dealt through that prism of the MPSP, which I think is very good; it does hold agencies to account and I think it does so very well. Stepan, as chair of the commission, would you like to add further to that?

**Mr KERKYASHARIAN:** It is a matter that the commission has been dealing with. We have had correspondence with the Department of Education and even as recently as last Friday, when we had our monthly commission meeting, we discussed the issues confronting Education, among other things, and we are dialoguing with the department. But at the end of the day I guess the commission's view is that it is the outcomes that are important and not necessarily the organisational structure; it is what is delivered.

**Dr MEHREEN FARUQI:** The outcomes, though, will need resources and budgets. Minister, I noted that in the budget estimates the employee-related expenses of the Community Relations Commission of New South Wales will decrease from a revised forecast of just over \$6 million to \$5.4 million in 2013-14. Is the Government going to introduce redundancies to the commission?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** The commission is an independent body. In relation to the detail of its day-to-day operations, I will pass that through to Stepan and to Keith. The reality is that this is a government that is, first, strong on the rhetoric around multiculturalism; and, secondly, strong on the reality. We have already implemented a number of initiatives in the multicultural space—for example, the Harmony Dinner. That has never been done before in New South Wales, notwithstanding the fact that it is the largest multicultural State in our country and one of the most diverse in the world. We initiated the media awards and the National Multicultural Marketing Awards that have been around for a long time. As Shaoquett has been painful in his prosecution, we have already identified that the ministerial consultative committees are already achieving many things.

We have done a lot of things in the multicultural space. Let me just say this. The public has quickly realised that just because you throw more money at something does not mean that you get better outcomes. The reality is that responsible governments do not simply throw money at things. They use the money they have wisely and efficiently, and that is what we, as Coalition governments, do. We do not throw money around and say, "We'll change the world just because there's more money in the system." We live within our means. That is critical, because if you do not live within your means there are plenty of examples around the world of what happens once you hit that slippery slope. We live within our means and we use the money we have wisely.

**Dr MEHREEN FARUQI:** I have limited time. May I interrupt you and maybe ask Mr Kerkyasharian to answer that question? I understand you do not have to throw money but you still need appropriate resources to fund services.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** And I believe there are. As I said, I have outlined a number of initiatives that we have already adopted within the existing envelope.

**Dr MEHREEN FARUQI:** Can Mr Kerkyasharian respond to that question of whether the bringing down of the budget will have an impact on employees, and will you be reducing the staff at the commission?

**Mr KERKYASHARIAN:** I understand that the figure that has been quoted also includes some amounts which have been brought forward from last year if need be. Mr Stevens can give the details of that.

However, the commission has not been singled out for any specific cuts. It is the general efficiency dividends that apply across government. As chief executive I am fairly confident that we can meet those efficiency targets by prioritising our activities. Of course, the issue of the Multicultural Policies and Services Program, monitoring of government agencies and community harmony are top of our priority list. The third major function we have, which is interpreting services, actually generates a lot of revenue. So I am confident that we can meet those targets without affecting our service delivery.

**Dr MEHREEN FARUQI:** Are you saying that you are privatising some of the implementation that the Government was doing previously or that the commission was doing?

**Mr KERKYASHARIAN:** I am sure I did not use the word "privatising". In fact, we have been, I think for the past 23 years, providing user-pays services for interpreting and translating. That does generate revenue. However, that still runs at a deficit because we provide a fairly significant community service to the courts, which is, I think, in the order of \$3 million to \$4 million a year. I would never use the word "privatisation".

**Dr MEHREEN FARUQI:** Moving to the grants, I know you have already had a discussion with the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane on that. The target of the expressions of interest was reduced from 750 retrospectively to 450 in 2013-14. Can you explain why the target of expressions of interest being received was reduced? This is on page 320 of the budget papers, where the forecast was 750 and then revised down to 450.

**Mr KERKYASHARIAN:** The process that we used to follow was that we basically said to community organisations, "If you have an idea, just put the idea forward and tell us roughly how much that idea will cost if you implement it." So a lot of community organisations gave a lot of thought as to what idea they would put forward but they did not necessarily sit down and work out the logistics of it—the outcomes that would be achieved, et cetera. Therefore, when we changed the process we went straight into an application process. In other words, we said to community organisations, "Here is an application form. Please apply for a grant but give us all these details: What is the project? How you will achieve it? What is your time line? How much money do you need? Where will the money be spent? How will you measure your outcomes?"

**Dr MEHREEN FARUQI:** Was support provided to those community organisations to prepare grant applications or expressions of interest?

**Mr KERKYASHARIAN:** If community organisations approach us, we provide support. As I mentioned earlier, we do publicise it extensively. We have a very effective email link system which reaches out, and it has been proved to be successful. Also, our commissioners who chair our regional advisory councils always give out information to community organisations. [*Time expired.*]

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** I want to clarify some of the Hon. Shaoquett Moselmane's concerns. The word "secrecy" always makes me a little nervous. Can you clarify that the Opposition can write to you for the names of the ministerial consultative committees' members?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Yes, by all means. If the Opposition wishes to ask me the names of the chairs of the committees, by all means, I am happy to disclose that.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** The members. My point is: Can the Opposition write to you?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Yes.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** And has it written to you?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I think it has written to me on notice.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Have you answered it? What is the answer?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Sorry, I did not know it was your turn for questioning.

**CHAIR:** One member at a time is asking questions. The time now is with the Hon. Paul Green, with no interference from other members.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** As I said, I am happy to disclose the names of the chairs, but it is up to the chairs to then—

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** That was not the question. The question is: Has the Opposition written to you?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I think it has asked and I have said that I am happy to disclose the names of the chairs.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Thank you. That is all I want to know. I commend the Government on recently announcing \$200,000 to restore and repair community war memorials. I note that 24 grants were issued to repair or restore war memorials. How many applications were received in total for that last round of applications?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I do not know the detail—

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** That is fine.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** —but maybe Ms Rygate can answer that.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** While you are looking for that answer, what rationale was used to reject funding for the grant applications? What disqualified them?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** With regard to the minutiae, I will ask Ms Rygate to answer that.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** If you do not have an answer, I might move on to my next question.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Put it on notice maybe. We might come back to you on that.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** How much did the repairs to the Martin Place cenotaph cost after being vandalised earlier this year?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I do not know.

**CHAIR:** Take it on notice.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Yes, I will take it on notice. I can add that if you were happy with that initiative you would also be happy with the initiative that we entered into in partnership with the RSL and the Anzac Corps of Guards. Were you aware of that?

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** My next question is about the RSL and Anzac. With regard to the Martin Place cenotaph, given that this is a very public war memorial, as everyone knows, what steps is the Government taking to prevent future vandalism from occurring at this particular site?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** We set up an initiative with the Anzac Corps of Guards. Most of the people who have gone through the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park would have seen our equivalent of the beefeaters guarding the memorial. They are great volunteers doing an outstanding job. We have partnered with them to ensure that in the future people who engage in terrible acts of vandalism, whether it is desecration of war memorials and the like, have an education process around it. For example, when those people appear before a local magistrate—normally they are young people who frankly just have a brain snap—they can then go and spend some quality time with the Corps of Guards at the Anzac Memorial so that they can learn about the history of the Anzac tradition and assist the guards with their duties. They will be provided with a coat or a jacket that says "Assistant", so they will not be a guard per se, but it is an educative process that we can impart on the offenders to ensure that they do not do these things again.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** I will put my previous questions on notice because I would like an answer to my next question. Can you outline the Government's plans for the centenary of Anzac to be held in 2015? What is the budget allocated to this event and what events are planned throughout New South Wales to celebrate this most special occasion?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** We are lucky in New South Wales. We have an outstanding leader in General Peter Cosgrove, who has agreed to take on the chair of the New South Wales Centenary of Anzac Advisory Council. On that council there is something in the order of 32 ambassadors, including Harry Allie, Michele Bruniges, Doug Dean. There are a number of ambassadors who are providing advice to government in relation to the programs that need to be implemented for the centenary of Anzac.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** What is the specific budget for celebrating this most important event?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** They have provided a suite of recommendations in relation to what should be done for the centenary of Anzac. The Government is in the process of currently considering those recommendations.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Does that include resourcing RSLs to help them organise and plan for that event?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Yes. For example, the Kangaroo and Cooee marches and the digitisation of the State Library's collection. They have recommended a suite of suggestions to the Government. As General Cosgrove has said time and time again, Paul, one school desk or one hospital bed should not be sacrificed for the purpose of the centenary of Anzac commemorations. This is about a grassroots community event. This is not about throwing a whole lot of money at it. It is quite the opposite; it is about the community coming together. The Government provides the organisational structure to make sure that we can work with the community to deliver the outcomes.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** With all due respect, money and resources help these events get off the ground and local grassroots organisations need that little bit of financial support from the Government.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I agree, Paul, but a lot of it can be done from within existing resources. We will take on board the recommendations by the advisory council and decide accordingly.

**CHAIR:** We will now deal with the portfolio of Aboriginal Affairs.

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

**CHAIR:** We will now deal with the portfolio of Aboriginal Affairs. The Opposition will begin questions for 15 minutes.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, how many Aboriginal people do you currently have working in a policy capacity in your ministerial office?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** We do not have any, but from time to time we have departmental liaison officers. In the past there have been some departmental liaison officers that are Aboriginal but currently there are none.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Do you think it is odd that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs does not have an Aboriginal person to advise him?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I have plenty of Aboriginal leaders advising me. Our record speaks for itself. We have engaged more comprehensive—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Is there not one Aboriginal person in New South Wales that has the skill—

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Madam Chair, can we have some order from the Hon. Helen Westwood?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** With the greatest respect, you have asked the question, let me answer it.

**CHAIR:** Members will ask a question, then let the —

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Madam Chair, we have 15 minutes to ask questions on this significant area of public policy in New South Wales.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** And I am answering.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Given it is our 15 minutes, I think I am entitled to ask questions and get through them as quickly as I want.

**CHAIR:** If you keep interrupting—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** If the Minister wants to make a statement, the Government members could have asked questions but have chosen not to.

**CHAIR:** If you keep interrupting you will get an interrupted answer.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** The Government chose to not use its time.

**The Hon. DAVID CLARKE:** Point of order: The Hon. Helen Westwood interrupted the Hon. Paul Green when he was asking questions. She should practise what she preaches.

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I am happy to say, yes, currently there are none. There have been some from time to time, but there is much more than having somebody in the office. As a government we have comprehensively engaged with the Aboriginal community probably more than any other government. We have had and continue to have Aboriginal leaders on the ministerial task force with whom we continue to engage. We continually speak to the peaks. I have plenty of people giving me advice from Aboriginal leaders right throughout the community and it is something I am particularly proud of.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** How much money does the Government spend on Aboriginal people in New South Wales?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** In relation to the Aboriginal—specific expenditure, it is something in the order of \$300 million per annum.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Something in the order of \$300 million. Is that the total?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Yes.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Why did the Government withdraw funding to the Custody Notification Service [CNS] 24-hour legal advice phone line which, by law, New South Wales Police must use every time they take an Aboriginal man or child into police custody.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** As you would know, Helen, I am not the Attorney General. That is something within his portfolio that I am not aware of.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Were you consulted on it?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I will take it on notice. I will ask the Attorney General about it.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** So you were not consulted. Did you know that funding had been withdrawn?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Again, it is not part of my portfolio, Helen.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** So you did not know that this important service, required by law, had its funding withdrawn?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I ask you to focus your questions to the Minister responsible for the application of that program? I am not—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** So you do not have a coordinating role?

**CHAIR:** The Minister has answered the question. I advise the Hon. Helen Westwood to move on to the next question if she wants to maximise her time.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** That is right, if you want to maximise your time ask the Attorney General. Ask me about the initiatives that we have implemented in Aboriginal Affairs. Ask me about the land rights Act, that is part of my purview. Ask me about OCHRE [Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment], that is part of the initiatives. But if you want to ask the Attorney General questions, ask him.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, are you concerned about proposals in the child protection discussion paper in relation to adoption of Aboriginal children? Are you aware of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Again, Helen, I think you are misunderstanding the purpose of my ministry. Have a look at the administrative orders. I am responsible for administering the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. I also have a responsibility in relation to OCHRE; that is another initiative the Government has had. In relation to your question, you should ask the Minister for Family and Community Services.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** You are the voice of Aboriginal people in Cabinet. They do not have another voice there. There is no-one else at the table. Where is your voice on these decisions by your Cabinet and Government that have a detrimental effect on Aboriginal people? Where is your voice? Are you standing up for them?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I have a very strong voice.

**CHAIR:** I indicate again that the Hon. Helen Westwood will not make a statement but ask a question that is in order pertaining to the Minister's portfolio or I will rule the question out of order. The Hon. Helen Westwood will move on to the next question.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** If you do not want to answer it I will move on.

**CHAIR:** It is not the Minister's portfolio.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Let me answer it. The Hon. Helen Westwood has made a statement that fundamentally shows how little her understanding is of the process. Everyone around the Cabinet table, whether it is the Minister for Health, the Minister for Education, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, has responsibilities in relation to Aboriginal Affairs. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services administers the IPROWD program that is directly focused on Aboriginal Affairs. The Minister for Education administers Connected Communities which is specifically focused on people in the Aboriginal community. I administer the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and OCHRE and make sure there are accountability mechanisms. We speak but we also act and our track record as a government is second to none because of our partnership with Aboriginal people, and that is something I am particularly proud of.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Why have grants and subsidies been cut from \$3.8 million in the 2012-13 budget to \$1.3 million in the 2013-14 budget? Mr Kevin Humphries as the shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs stated on 18 June 2010 that the Coalition will provide a breakdown of costings for expenditure on Aboriginal Affairs. It has been almost 3½ years. When can we expect that commitment to be honoured?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I will defer to Mr Ardler in relation to the fine details.

**Mr ARDLER:** I will have to take the question on notice. If we are talking about the grants program the Office of Aboriginal Affairs administers, it has been the same \$787,000 for the past number of years. So I am not clear on the—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Will you take the question on notice?

**Mr ARDLER:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Minister, the Independent Commission Against Corruption Commissioner has made three corruption prevention recommendations to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Government generally in regards to the Wagonga Local Aboriginal Land Council. Has any of those Independent Commission Against Corruption recommendations been instituted, particularly recommendation 3?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** We have taken those on board. We are in the process of going through an exhaustive consultation with the land rights network as we speak. They will be taken on board together with the other feedback we get from consultations with the network and hopefully we will get a landing towards the end of the year.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Would you be able to provide a list of the current executive members of each of the local Aboriginal land councils and how long they have held any executive positions since 1983?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** There are 130 Aboriginal land councils. Do you want me to run through the list of 130 executive members?

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** If you take it on notice would you be able to provide that?

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

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** When you first became Minister for Aboriginal Affairs you said that you would change outcomes for Aboriginal people in this State. Can you tell us how you have done that?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Yes.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Have you done that? You said you have done that. Can you tell us how? Have you changed outcomes?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Do you want me to answer the question?

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Yes, please.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** You do not change outcomes that are so entrenched and so difficult overnight. That is the subject of spin and any politician that says they are going to change the world tomorrow, quite frankly, is not worth a pinch of salt. What I said is that we are going to change the way that we deal with Aboriginal people, which in turn will in the long term change outcomes. We have done that in the way that we introduced Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment [OCHRE]. Opportunity In many ways OCHRE is the Government's response but it is pretty much an endorsement of what the community wanted. We have already engaged in genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities so that we are now delivering to them what they have asked for.

That is just on the OCHRE strategies and the various things that will come out of OCHRE, and if you want me to go into more detail about that I am happy to. In the same way that we have engaged in genuine partnership with Aboriginal people in relation to OCHRE and the broader strategy, we have engaged in the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. There is a statutory review of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act every five years. Traditionally under the Labor administration they would have the registrar of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act there, they would have Aboriginal Affairs there of course and they would have the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council there.

We have actually broadened that to make sure that it is more inclusive. We had Stacey Meredith from Griffith and Sean Gordon from Darkinjung but, more important, we had the director general from Primary Industries, basically Crown Lands, there. That genuine partnership and genuine attempt to make a difference is already bearing fruit. The registrar told me the other day that we inherited 25,000 land claims as a result of there now being genuine dialogue through that working group. They have already devised a mechanism where they believe they can at least deal with 10 per cent of them administratively far more efficiently. We are making a difference but the big thing is that the changes we are trying to drive are sustainable and they will be long term. They will not be quick, shoddy announcements that are designed to make us all feel good over a one—year period.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Could you be more precise about what has actually changed? You talked about outcomes. We talk about the gap in areas like health and education. Can you tell us where the outcomes have been in those key areas?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** In relation to the OCHRE strategy there were three things that we focused on. One was education outcomes, two was employment outcomes and three was service delivery. What underpins all of that is an accountability structure to make sure that those things are being implemented along the way. In relation to education, I have already made reference to the connected communities. But another initiative that the community has asked for and we are in the process of implementing is in relation to culture and language. There are going to be five of those and these are real, concrete things. In fact, they are already starting in some areas. They were identified in partnership with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. The five street-based language groups are Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi, Gumbaynggirr, Darkinjung and Bundjalung. They are the five language groups. Do not ask me to spell them all. They are the five language groups that have been identified. That is in education.

Another thing is in relation to employment. We have already initiated with the Minerals Council an industry-based agreement. A few days ago I had a forum with other industry peak organisations to see if we could initiate other industry-based agreements to make sure that we have a supply of quality jobs for the very young Aboriginal population that exists out there.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** So are we seeing lower unemployment rates in those communities as a result of that? Could you point me to that?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** If you think for one moment if you make a policy today in this very complicated social policy setting that you are going to get an outcome tomorrow, then quite frankly you have a very poor understanding of how social policy works.



**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** When could we expect an outcome? When will we see the results?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I will tell you this, I am not going to do what other politicians have done and say, "There will be no child living in poverty in X years" because all you are doing is setting up expectations for the community to fail. What we will do is find out what the community wants—and we have done that through genuine dialogue—and then we will make sure that we have an implementation program that we can oversight throughout the course of its life and that is what we will implement as well.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** You do not have a date? You tell us that you have set up these programs. Do you have a date when you expect to see results?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Yes.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Could you share that with the Committee?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Yes. I am talking and we are liaising with the community—and that was part of the OCHRE initiatives—in terms of what their expectations are. What governments failed to do in the past is they impose expectations on the community and sometimes these expectations are ridiculous and sets the community up to fail. We will engage with the community, find out what their expectations are and then work with the community to try to achieve those.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** As a Minister who came to this portfolio saying that you would change outcomes for Aboriginal people in this State, what are your expectations?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** These are generational reforms that we are working on. These are not quick fixes.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** So we cannot expect to see anything soon.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** These are not spin or media grabs that will make me or you feel good for a day. These are generational reforms that I am very proud of. I am very proud that my agency has worked so hard to deliver it and more importantly I am proud that these are reforms that the community owns. You have no idea—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** Thank you. I do not have very much time left, so I would really like to get another question in before you do that. Do you agree with Mr Mundine, who wants to get rid of land councils?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I am not aware that Warren has expressed that view.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** He actually has. We can refer you to it.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** No. I believe that land councils are an important—

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** So Mr Mundine is wrong?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** You can raise that with Mr Mundine.

**CHAIR:** Minister, you do not have to answer misleading questions like that.

**The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD:** I think he is talking to you a lot more often these days.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Jealousy is a curse. [*Time expired.*]

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** Minister, I would like to ask about the local decision-making model, where it is up to, how it is being rolled out and what funds are allocated to developing that program in communities?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I will let Mr Ardler go into the detail, but expressions of interest have already been put out. Do you know when that is due to come back?

**Mr ARDLER:** It is 25 September.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** So we have gone out there to communities and said, "Here it is. This is the local decision-making. Who would like to put their hand up?" Again, like everything and also with the OCHRE initiatives we are going to apply a strength-based lens to this. Hopefully there will be lots of submissions and applicants. We will choose applicants that have the best chance of success because I really believe in this space that success will breed success and these are things that have to grow organically.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** Are you able to provide information about how many of those programs will be running? Is it three models?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Yes, we are having three local decision-making models.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** What sort of funding will be made available to each of those communities to develop?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I do have the detail, but Mr Ardler might know off the top of his head.

**Mr ARDLER:** We have not gone into the detail of saying how much per community. That will be dependent largely on which communities and where they are starting from. What we do have a commitment to is meeting those communities where they are at, so we will do an assessment of their needs and work with them to build on those.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** A lot of that will be around building governance structures within communities to build those things or having money set aside for programs or implementation of outcomes from that process.

**Mr ARDLER:** Both are the intent. The intent is that we will go through the expressions of interest process and identify the communities that have agreed they want to be part of it. We will negotiate in the first instance what we are calling an "accord"—for want of a better name—which will be the basis of deciding the first pieces of work that will occur in those communities. I expect it will be a mix of identifying capacity needs that we will work with them on and looking at the services that are already there and how we might streamline and coordinate those, but it will depend on the communities.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** If they identify education and training outcomes is there additional funding available in that space to supplement what is already being done?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** The whole idea behind the local decision-making model is to ensure that agencies pool resources to deliver services that the community wants. We have been to so many communities where there are so many services being provided that there is no real impact on the ground and Aboriginal communities say to me time and again that they have bureaucrats crawling all over the place but are not achieving any outcomes. The whole idea behind the local decision-making model is to identify what the Aboriginal community wants and to make sure that the resources are pooled to get what they want and need. It is not necessarily throwing more money towards it because we have thrown money at it in the past and that does not drive outcomes. We must become more efficient with the money we spend to ensure a match between what the community wants and what we can deliver.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** If they identify a project there are funds available to support that process?

**Mr ARDLER:** There is \$600,000 identified this year which is intended to support that program in those communities.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** In total?

**Mr ARDLER:** In total for this year. As the Minister said, we will be mapping the services that are already there. Communities have told us very clearly that there are a lot of services going in and out of those

places that they do not know about, are not accessing and are better directed elsewhere. A lot of it will be about creating better efficiencies, and not having gaps and duplication.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** Will there be a decision concerning which communities by the end of the year?

**Mr ARDLER:** I would expect a decision by the end of October.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** The other issue is about the land rights review. We have seen some amendments. Can we expect another bill to deal with the more contentious issues?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I am excited about the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983. I used to be a lawyer in my past life and the first time I read the Aboriginal Land Rights Act I thought this is a powerful Act in terms of impacting on social change. It is the thirtieth anniversary of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983. I think it is generational in its timing. We are having broad consultations with the network as we speak and I am hoping to have a bill before Parliament next year.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** Next year?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Yes. They are hopefully going to be comprehensive.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** There are a lot of recommendations and there is broad support for most of them.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** We have been working collaboratively with the network.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** I congratulate you on establishing the task force and the way you have been working.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Thank you.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** I am interested in the language program.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** As am I.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** Can you report on the outcomes of the funding arrangements, the application, which communities will benefit and by how much?

**Mr ARDLER:** I can tell you that there has been a call for project proposals from communities. There have so far been eight proposals approved by the board of the NSW Centre for Aboriginal Languages Coordination and Development [CALCD] totalling about \$65,000 with another six projects currently being considered by the board.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** Have they been announced yet?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Is this in relation to CALCD or in relation to languages as part of the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment [OCHRE] project?

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** CALCD.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** That was a contract entered into before our term of government. I will refer the question to Mr Ardler.

**Mr ARDLER:** I do not know that it has been announced. I think conversations are happening between CALCD and the recipients.

**Ms RYGATE:** They are at the point of sorting out funding agreements but they have not been decided yet.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** I will place that question as to time frame on notice. In the overview budget where it refers to \$4.7 million to establish an independent council and better support for Aboriginal children, can you elaborate on that or direct me to where that information is defined in the budget papers? I am interested specifically in the better support for Aboriginal children and recognition of the Ombudsman's report.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Aboriginal children?

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** It refers to Aboriginal Affairs.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** The independent council, I understand.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** It says, "...and better support Aboriginal children".

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Let me answer the first part concerning the independent council. We are in the process of getting finer detail on that and hopefully I will report back to you and the Parliament in the near future. That is, to my way of thinking, the most important initiative out of the Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment project. You can have language nests, the opportunity hubs and every other initiative we have talked about, including the local decision-making model, but if you do not have an accountability structure then quite frankly the sins of the past will be repeated and in another 10 years there will be another Ombudsman and Auditor-General saying that you failed. That accountability mechanism, which we have almost finalised, I will report back on shortly, and if we can get that right we have a good chance of achieving successful outcomes with the other initiatives.

**The Hon. JAN BARHAM:** You will report back on that document?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** That is the Ombudsman's 390-page report that contains 93 recommendations in relation to the previous Government's interagency plan in relation to child sexual assault. As you can see from the depth of the report, they are very complex issues. That will be responded to by the Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Women as it is now within her purview. That requires some serious thought. Governments keep making the same mistakes time and time again in relation to that complex area.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Minister, in relation to communication and literacy what specific steps are you taking in New South Wales to collaborate with the Minister for Education to improve English communication and literacy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in New South Wales?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** Some of the initiatives we have embarked upon through the OCHRE project include connecting and engaging communities in the 15 schools in the 10 communities. The other thing I am passionate about is the five language nests. From my perspective, if we can make sure that traditional language is taught more widely within the Aboriginal community then education becomes relevant to them and, once education becomes more relevant, they have a higher chance of learning English and everything else. The community has asked for these language nests. They have an organic base. If we can get more pride around languages and culture then I truly believe that you will get better educational outcomes, whether in English, maths or other subjects.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** What processes do you have in place to evaluate whether the programs are working and successful?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** That is a very good question. As you would know, in the past governments have announced initiatives and then gone about their business without any real oversight. Then five or 10 years later there will be a train-smash report, such as we have just seen from the Ombudsman, saying it has failed. The Auditor-General produced a similar report with regard to the Two Ways Together plan—that was another initiative of the previous administration. I am sure that they had the best intentions in the world and I do not criticise them for that. I really believe that everyone is trying to do their best in this space but it is in the implementation of the plan that it falls over. What follows after 10 years is a train-smash report.

Leaving aside the lost money and time, the critical point is that you have lost an opportunity during that 10-year period. We are building an accountability mechanism to ensure that we are independently monitoring these initiatives along the way. Not every initiative will be problem free and it would be ridiculous to expect that. Some initiatives will have speed bumps and we might need to do some finetuning. That is fine as long as

we are upfront with the community, say that something did not work and make adjustments. We should make adjustments along the way rather than wait for the train smash report.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** Do you have an example of that?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** We are implementing that accountability mechanism at the moment. As I said to Ms Barham, I hope I will be able to announce that model in the very near future.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** I look forward to that. National statistics indicate that nearly one-third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults experience high levels of psychological distress, including depression and anxiety. What specific programs are you supporting to treat depression and other psychological distress among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in New South Wales? Obviously that would be done in concert with other departments.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** That is a good question. I will let Minister Humphries talk about that because he is responsible for the Mental Health Commission, which is an initiative proudly implemented by this Government. The "h" in OCHRE stands for "healing", which is the first thing mentioned in the Government's policy document. We understand it is a critical component of practical reconciliation. We were recently talking to the boys at Kinchela and we are trying to ensure that their stories are told not only to those present but also to future generations. Telling one's story is part of the healing process. A number of mental health initiatives have been implemented, but I will leave it to Minister Humphries to address the specifics.

**The Hon. PAUL GREEN:** I will probably ask him about that. How is the Government addressing discrimination and improving public attitudes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders?

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** We can do that by shifting the rhetoric. Too often in the past, governments have placed a welfare or disadvantage lens over this area of social policy. This Government is deliberately focusing on the advantages and positives. If we shift the rhetoric, action will follow. I am already seeing positive and aspirational ripple effects throughout the community as a result of the Government's celebration of culture and language. I was recently at West Ryde Public School, which has only one Aboriginal student. Despite that, students are learning about Aboriginal languages. On Australia Day this year the Premier raised not only the national flag on the Sydney Harbour Bridge but also, for the first time, the Aboriginal flag. That was a very powerful symbol. These are practical but powerful symbols that break down warped perceptions. If we keep talking about the positives and focusing on them with our initiatives and efforts we will reap rewards in the long term.

**CHAIR:** I thank the Minister and his team for attending this morning and answering questions.

**Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO:** I thank the members who asked questions.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**

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