

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2

Wednesday 26 October 2011

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

CITIZENSHIP AND COMMUNITIES, ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

The Committee met at 3.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. M. A. Ficarra (Chair)

The Hon. J. Barham
The Hon. D. Clarke
The Hon. P. Green

The Hon. S. Mitchell
The Hon. S. Moselmane
The Hon. H. Westwood

PRESENT

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

Community Relations Commission

Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian, AO, *Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer*

Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales

Mr James Christian, *General Manager*

Office of Communities

Ms Carol Mills, *Chief Executive*

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 General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 inquiry into the budget estimates for 2011-12 open to the public. I welcome Minister Dominello and accompanying officials to the hearing. The Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Citizenship and Communities, and Aboriginal Affairs. In accordance with the Legislative Council 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 what 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.

Any messages from attendees in the public gallery should be delivered through the Chamber and support staff or the Committee clerks. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and to refer directly to your advisers while at the table. The Committee has agreed that the Citizenship and Communities portfolio will be examined between 3.00 p.m. and 3.45 p.m. and the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio between 3.45 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. The transcript of the 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. Mobile phones should be turned off or switched to silent and away from the microphones.

All witness from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn in prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath as a member of Parliament. All other witnesses should state their full name, job title and agency and either swear an oath or take an affirmation.

STEPAN KERKYASHARIAN, Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Community Relations Commission, and

JAMES ALEXANDER CHRISTIAN, General Manager, Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales, sworn and examined:

CAROL MILLS, Chief Executive Officer, Office of Communities, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Citizenship and Communities, and Aboriginal Affairs open for examination. We will start with questioning from the Opposition.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Thank you, Minister, and departmental officers for your attendance. What is the value of grants allocated by the Community Relations Division under the Community Development Grants Program and the Community Partnership Scheme in 2011-12?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: There are two main community grants programs, one of which is worth \$1 million, and the Premier's Awards which are basically worth \$500,000. I will ask the chair of the Community Relations Commission to provide the details.

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: The Community Development Grants Program is worth roughly \$1 million and it is run once a year. Applications are called for publicly and they are assessed by the commission and recommendations are made to the Minister. I will provide the details of the Community Partnership Scheme on notice.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How does that compare with the value of the grants allocated under the same programs in the 2010-11 budget?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: The amounts are the same, I think, but with a consumer price index increase [CPI] at the very least.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: So the allocations are the same amount as last year plus the CPI increase?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: Yes.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: For both?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: Yes.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: By how much do you expect them to increase in the years of the forward estimates?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: I anticipate that there will be an increase because the commission is considering an amount of money that is currently available. That is money which was specifically allocated for some other community program but which was not fully utilised. It is possible that the commission will recommend to the Government that part of it be utilised for community grants. So I anticipate an increase.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What program underutilised funds?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: It was the community awards program. The allocation was provided roughly two months before the change of government.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: What funding has been allocated for the Lebanese, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese and Indian subcontinent awards in 2011-12?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: As members know, the commission's grants program has developed into a large variety of programs and they are under review at the moment. We anticipate that the commission will make some recommendations to the Minister, probably in December. I think it would be inappropriate to pre-empt the outcome of that review. That includes all the grants programs that we are running—not the amount of money available, but the programs themselves.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Can you give the Committee a commitment that the awards will continue into the future, or is the whole concept being reviewed?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: I would not like to prejudge the outcome of a review.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, do you have anything to add?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No. I have received a report from the commission and I have asked it to review the grants program. I want to ensure that we are not duplicating programs and that our multicultural communities are properly recognised. The Premier's Awards have identified five multicultural communities in New South Wales. I think that the program started with the Chinese Community Service Awards, and they have been followed by awards for the Indian, Lebanese, Vietnamese and Filipino communities. However, many other multicultural communities make enormous contributions to our State, such as the Polish community and the Austrian community. I attended the Austrian national day celebrations the other day. As you know, New South Wales is the most multicultural State in Australia and arguably one of the most multicultural States in the world. When I saw that only five community groups were being acknowledged I requested a review to ensure that the program encompassed everyone in New South Wales. We want a grants program which encompasses every multicultural community and which is open to all. That is one thing I am looking at.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: When do you think that review will be completed and a report tabled in Parliament?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will ask the chair of the Community Relations Commission to answer that question because he is in the process of conducting that review.

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: We anticipate completing a preliminary scoping paper in the next couple of weeks. We have already done some preliminary consultations. I sure that members will agree that such a review should involve community consultation. We have already circulated the draft terms of reference in confidence to various ethnic community councils for their feedback and once we have the scoping paper in the next few weeks we will be conducting further consultations. I would expect that the commission will provide a preliminary draft to the Minister at some time in December, but it might slip by a few weeks.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again, when I looked at the grants program, there was no award for the Italian community, which is a large community—as you would know, Madam Chair—or the Turkish community, which is another large community, the Armenian community or the Greek community. I think it is something that we need to look at seriously as a government and as a society to make sure that everybody is part of the process.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I support the idea of recognising all of the community groups that have contributed so much to our society. Can I take it that you are in favour of maintaining the community awards system and, from your comments, are going to expand it?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No, I am waiting for the outcome of the review because if, hypothetically, we have 200 various multicultural groups in New South Wales and we have an award for every separate group, arguably it would not be manageable. No doubt the review will provide us with information on that. Again, the general principle is that we want an award system and a grant system that is inclusive of everyone rather than isolating certain communities because each of those communities has made an enormous contribution. The fact that over the years only five of the communities have been recognised leads to questions as to why the Italians were not given an award and why the former administration did not have awards for the Greek community or the Turkish community, and those communities have every right to ask why they were not part of it. The short answer is I am going to wait for the outcome of the review.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: On my understanding, you are not cutting out awards to the Lebanese, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese and Indian communities; at minimum, you will be maintaining those communities.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No, I am saying that I am going to wait for the outcome of the review.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: So you may cut out some of the community awards?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will wait for the outcome of the review.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But it may be the case that you cut out one of those?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again, I will wait for the outcome of the review because the review may recommend an amalgam of different options. As you would appreciate, each of the awards for each of the various communities has different subcategories. The review will be exhaustive and no doubt there will be significant consultation with communities.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am conscious of the time, so I will turn to a very important issue for communities throughout New South Wales, which is burial grounds.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can you confirm if your Government will continue with the former Labor Government's policy to release 90 hectares of cultural burial grounds to allow families to observe their cultural and religious beliefs at Castlereagh, Appin, Rookwood, Kemps Creek and Mona Vale cemeteries?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: It is a sensitive issue, I know, and I have received a number of representations already in relation to that issue, but as you would appreciate it is not within my portfolio responsibilities.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I understand that.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I think it is better that you ask the Minister responsible, but I do recognise that it is an important issue and, as I have said, I have received a number of representations.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: This is one of the most pressing priorities for the communities that you are Minister for, who see the shortage of burial grounds as an issue.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: The Muslim community in particular now has to bury two bodies—and there is even talk of being three—in one grave because of the shortage. Can you assure these communities that burial grounds will be provided to address their concerns?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I acknowledge the concerns. This is one of the issues that we have been dealt as a government. It is not like the issues arose yesterday; they have been long in the pipeline and it is something that we, as a government, have to sit down and work through with the responsible Minister. I am not the responsible Minister, but I can assure you and the communities that I represent and advocate strongly for that I will continue my advocacy—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Will you take that on notice and provide an answer to this Committee?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, I will continue the advocacy on their behalf.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Has the O'Farrell Government set aside any funding to create an immigration museum in Sydney to promote multiculturalism?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That would be the responsibility—from a museum aspect—of the Minister for the Arts, the Hon. George Souris.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It also relates to communities so, even if it concerns the Minister for the Arts, it crosses into your portfolio.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: It would if it is proposed and agitated forward, and no doubt at that juncture I would be involved and consulted.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Will you come back to the Committee—

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, I am happy to do that.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, could you inform the Committee of the findings and recommendations of the New South Wales Centenary of Anzac Commemoration Committee and could you also inform the Committee of what funding has been allocated for the 2011-12 financial year to implement the committee's recommendations?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, the Centenary of Anzac commemorations are very important for everyone in New South Wales and we are still, as a Government, considering the committee's recommendations so that we can formulate a proper response. This will require detailed planning. It is going to be one of the most significant events on our landscape in the coming years and we want to make sure we get the structures right. Again, our Government is preparing a response to the committee's findings.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Can you tell the Committee how much funding has been allocated to the Community War Memorials Fund in 2011-12?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: My recollection is that it is \$250,000. I am happy to take that on notice and get back to you.

Ms MILLS: We can confirm that now.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes, it is. The Office of Communities was allocated \$2.7 million in the 2011-12 budget for Veterans Affairs' policy and programs. That \$2.7 million includes \$1.5 million to support the operations of the Anzac Memorial Building and \$250,000 for the Community War Memorials Fund. The Anzac Memorial Building has an establishment of 6.6 equivalent full-time positions and Veterans' Affairs has an establishment of four equivalent full-time positions.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: My question relates to the Vibe Alive festival held in Moree on 31 August and 1 September this year. As you may be aware, the festival attracted some 2,500 young people from across New South Wales to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, including the spirit of reconciliation, the importance of health, education, careers and the performing arts. I note that you also contributed \$10,000 to the Deadlys. Has the Government allocated any further funding towards the future of Vibe Alive festivals in New South Wales because of the success of this event?

CHAIR: I know that the question is in relation to the Indigenous portfolio. We are actually dealing with Citizenship and Communities now.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I will come back to that question and go on to another one. I refer to the Minister's announcement regarding funding for the creation of the Centre for Aboriginal Languages Coordination and Development [CALCD]. What is the centre's functions? You stated that it will be overseen by a council of experts in the field that are yet to be determined. Can you confirm who will be on the council?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again, that is an Aboriginal-related matter—

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Yes, I am sorry, I have grouped them together. I am quite happy to defer to my colleague.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I have a question about the funding allocated to the Commission for Children and Young People. The media release on 6 September referred to it being to fund the Keep Them Safe: A Shared Approach to Child Wellbeing Program. Can you provide us with further information on that and clarify if there is other funding that goes to the commission for its other functions?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The total indicative budget for the Commission for Children and Young People in 2011-12 is approximately \$16 million, including the capital budget allocation. Obviously within the budget is the Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing—which is the Working with Children Check. That absorbs a significant amount of the budget spend. The commission's indicative budget also includes recurrent funding of \$1.4 million and capital funding of \$1.2 million to implement changes to the Working with

Children Check. This is a much-needed reform to ensure that New South Wales comes on line with a number of jurisdictions, which I am sure you are aware of and very passionate about.

The commission's capital budget in 2011-12 is \$1.8 billion and includes \$500,000 to finalise the rebuild of the employment screening system—the core information technology system used to conduct statutory background checking. The commission has approximately 47 full-time equivalent positions. An amount of \$1.2 million has also been allocated to meet capital costs associated with the implementation of the new model of the Working with Children Check, and the remaining \$100,000 in capital funding is for minor work programs. That is pretty much the main budgetary breakdown of the commission.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Last year's expenditure was \$13.6 million. We are seeing an increase despite the transfer of some of those responsibilities to the Ombudsman. Is that correct?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The transfer has not occurred; it is in the process. But I will leave that for Ms Mills to answer.

Ms MILLS: That is correct in terms of the costs of the former Child Death Review Team, partially offset by the Ombudsman and partially offset by the Commission for Children and Young People with a further supplementation from the budget, which the Department of Premier and Cabinet could clarify. However, you are correct in that there are a number of additional items in this year's Commission for Children and Young People budget principally concerning the Working with Children initiatives and the upgrade of our information technology system.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I now have a question about the volunteering strategy. Is it all on track? I note the media release says we should have it by the end of the year and that you have been undertaking consultation. Are you in a position to indicate what the budget will be for its implementation? I am sure lots of great ideas will be coming through on how the Government can increase the \$2 billion contribution that volunteers make.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: There about two million volunteers—1.6 million to 2 million—in New South Wales. Volunteers make an enormous contribution, and if one were to analyse the economic value of the contribution made by our volunteers it is closer to \$2.5 billion. Beyond the economic value, volunteers add social capital to our society. I call them the glue or the soul of our society in many ways. It is something in the order of 235 million hours that they give to our society each year. I have been conducting this strategy, through the department, for some months now. In August I hosted a roundtable discussion with representatives from the sector, including sports organisations, ethnic communities, emergency services, environment and heritage, community development and welfare organisations, the Volunteer Referral Centre network, academics and volunteers. A very useful dialogue took place at that meeting, which continued from the morning to well into the afternoon.

Altogether more than 400 people from across New South Wales, representing almost as many organisations, participated in the consultation process. Despite the diversity of the sector, some common themes emerged. The need to increase participation and ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to volunteer was one theme. Returning to the figures we were citing before, if we could increase volunteering in New South Wales by just 2 per cent that would effectively result in a bottom-line contribution of something in the order of \$250 million. In addition to the critical social capital provided by volunteering, it also helps the volunteers themselves. Plenty of studies show that those who volunteer have a better outlook on life and a better sense of social wellbeing.

Other themes included the demand for greater information; support for both volunteers and volunteer managers; a higher profile for achievements in the sector, particularly in developing new forms of volunteering; more inclusive opportunities to volunteer, particularly the enormous opportunities offered by the utilisation of our new social medium; recognition of the contribution made by volunteers and ensuring that appropriate incentives and rewards are in place; and support and encouragement for volunteer organisations to capitalise on the opportunities offered by digital media and technology. I am hopeful that the strategy will respond to these concerns, and I anticipate it will be ready for release in December 2011. That is in line with the Government's State Plan commitments—New South Wales 2021—to increase the amount of volunteering in New South Wales.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Is there a specific budget item for the implementation costs? Is the cost of implementation separate to the development strategy costs? I thought I heard you talk about training—everyone is talking about the need for training and mentoring—and support for people to be able to do their volunteering tasks. Is that a separate item?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: We are still in the process of finalising the strategy and recommendations will obviously come out of that. Some will have different cost imperatives that will need to go through the centred budgetary line. But for this year I can inform you that the budget has ensured that the resources are there and that more than \$1.3 million has been set aside to backup our commitment. The budget will support the initial implementation of the volunteering strategy. It will ensure that work can begin immediately on the key initiatives once the strategy is released. Other things could come out of the strategy that will require ongoing commitment, but that is something to be announced hopefully in the weeks, if not months, ahead.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Three times lucky—a different festival and the right portfolio hopefully—I now refer to the Youth Harmony Festival, which is organised by the Community Relations Commission of New South Wales. The festival usually draws thousands of people from a wide range of races and ethnic backgrounds to spend a day together enjoying food, song and dance while exchanging information and explanations about their cultures. Are you aware if the Youth Harmony Festival will continue next year? Will the Government be allocating some funding towards that event, and how much? Are you aware of any other similar events in New South Wales, particularly in rural New South Wales?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: My understanding is that that program was funded by the Commonwealth Government. I will ask Mr Kerkyasharian to provide further details. Generally, youth harmony is absolutely critical. It is one of the strong themes I am hearing as I go about the community, particularly amongst the younger people. We do live in a multicultural State. When we have these festivals it is important for many different communities to come together under the one banner—it is healthier for all of us. For example, I went to a red lantern festival held at Cherrybrook on the weekend. That festival was initially organised by the Chinese community about 20 years ago.

Some 20 years ago it probably would have been just a Chinese Australian type festival but now Indian Australians, Vietnamese Australians, Celtic Australians and Italian Australians proudly get up there. I think that harmonisation is the strength of our multiculturalism. If we do more of that and focus more of our attention on that harmonisation we will have a stronger and healthier society. In relation to the specifics of your request, I will ask Mr Kerkyasharian to answer.

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: That particular festival was a consequence of the Federal Government's national action plan in the wake of 9/11, Bali and other international events that resulted in violence. The bulk of the funding came from the Commonwealth and the specific objective of that festival was to create an opportunity for young people of different faiths to mix in an environment of friendliness and enjoyment of cultural expression. The commission has a number of other initiatives that are continuing. For example, our annual Youth Leaders Day, which was held a few weeks ago, was highly successful. We had students from a cross-section of high schools and some undergraduates; by cross-section I mean both geographical and socioeconomic as well as private and public sector schools. We have set up a multicultural youth network that has been functioning quite well, and they have get-togethers which create the same type of environment. We also have a youth support network for one of our other community harmony programs. So we are concentrating on multicultural youth activities but not necessarily through a festival at Darling Harbour.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I understand there was State funding for Harmony Day. Is 21 March Harmony Day?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: State funding to support local communities—

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: It goes through local government.

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: My understanding is that Harmony Day, which has been running for about 12 or 14 years—I am not sure of the exact date—was an initiative of the Commonwealth Government. All the

funding, as far as I know, comes from the Commonwealth Government through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Perhaps I could ask you to consider whether you might find some budget allocation next year for that.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I think that is my point.

CHAIR: The Minister will take that on board.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will.

CHAIR: He takes everything on board. He is that kind of Minister.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: I have one or two questions arising out of a question asked by the Hon. Helen Westwood regarding the awards given to five communities, I think. I am not sure of the exact date but I think it was a few weeks before the last election, just to put it in a time context. Is this the first time that awards in that particular format have been handed out, as far as you are aware?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will leave the details to Mr Kerkyasharian but yes, I was surprised when I saw the amounts of grants that came out pretty much in the last two months before the election.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: I am talking about the awards and the occasion when the Premier handed out certificates to several communities—

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: It was very popular.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: —down at Government House. I am talking about those awards. Is that the first time that has ever been done?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: If the broad reference is to an ethno-specific community award, there was a Chinese community award that had been running for some years, but the five ethno-specific awards that were given out around February this year were a new initiative.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: A new initiative?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: Yes, and I think to some extent they were different to the Chinese awards, which had been running for some years.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: When was the decision made to bring those awards on? Do you have any information on that?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Obviously that occurred before we formed Government.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: That is what I am referring to, yes.

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: It is off the top of my head but I think the instructions for the commission to run those awards came in around November-December 2010.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Was there a process involved in deciding which communities or were you basically told, "These are the communities. Go ahead and organise it."?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: The commission was informed that there should be community awards for specific communities. This decision was made by government and the commission just facilitated the process.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: To get it clear, you were informed, "We want to give a series of awards to those particular communities. Organise the details". Was there a time frame put on this? Did you have to do them by any particular date?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: I think—again, I am speaking from memory—they all had to be done by the end of February.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: By the end of February?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: Yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: What is the New South Wales Government doing to determine the economic contribution of cultural diversity in New South Wales?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: New South Wales continues to be the preferred destination for almost all categories of permanent and temporary arrivals. For example, over a third of long-stay business migrants, over a quarter of skilled migrants and nearly half of all international students make a contribution of something in the order of \$6 billion to our economy. Nearly 40 per cent of family reunion entrants, more than a third of humanitarian or refugees entrants, and more than 40 per cent of international tourists come to New South Wales and a large proportion of that want to have or had an Aboriginal experience and that is something I will hopefully address later.

These people come with language skills and knowledge of the domestic markets of their home countries, representing a significant asset. Accordingly, we need to explore new ways of leveraging from this cultural diversity to build our State's economic prosperity. The New South Wales Government is serious about making New South Wales number one again. In pursuit of that, we have set the specific target within NSW 2021, the Government's 10-year-plan of growing the value of cultural diversity to the New South Wales economy. We have charged the newly established Multicultural Business Advisory Panel [MBAP] to help us identify and capitalise on cultural connection language skills and market opportunities to enhance two-way international trade.

The MBAP is jointly funded by the Community Relations Commission and the Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services [DTIRIS], with the department providing the necessary secretariat support. I have asked the Community Relations Commission to develop two key concurrent events to spark a discussion about how to achieve our economic goals through making the best use of the people and skills already present in New South Wales. To inform this discussion, I have also asked them to commission academic research documenting what we already know about the economic contribution of cultural diversity. This research also provides a baseline on which to measure our efforts.

On 5 October I co-hosted, with the Deputy Premier, and Minister for Trade and Investment, the Hon. Andrew Stoner, a breakfast with the consuls general of 20 countries, representing some of our State's top trading partners and largest ethnic communities. Also in attendance were senior representatives from the Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Austrade. This was an opportunity to declare to international markets that New South Wales is open for business and to encourage the consular cause to engage with the New South Wales Government to achieve mutually beneficial trade goals. At the conclusion of the breakfast many of the consuls remained for a summit, which was co-hosted by me, Mr Paul Toole, MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier and for Asia-Pacific Trade. There we had an opportunity to network with some of the brightest business minds in Australia—academics, cultural diversity advocates, innovators, entrepreneurs and government officials from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Chaired by Nihal Gupta, who has recently been appointed as chair of the Multicultural Business Advisory Panel, the summit was structured around two panel sessions that looked at how we can capitalise on the human assets of New South Wales and how we can use our strong governance to attract, retain and effectively utilise those human assets for economic growth. The first panel covered the themes of productive diversity and marketing and communication, and included Miss Anna McPhee, chair of Diversity Council Australia; Mr Michael Gatt, Executive General Manager, People, Strategy and Corporate Services, TransGrid; and Dr Hass Dellal, Executive Director of the Australian Multicultural Foundation. The second panel covered the themes of enterprise in New South Wales and positioning New South Wales as a global destination. It included Professor Jock Collins, Professor of Social Economics at the University of Technology, Sydney; Mr Walter Da Gama, Director and Principal Consultant, Luxor Finance; and Scientia Professor Veena Sahajwalla, Director for Sustainable Materials, Research and Technology.

Participants workshopped a series of questions that were also explored by the panel members. The collated ideas generated at the summit will inform the strategic direction of the recently appointed Multicultural

Business Advisory Panel when it meets for the first time in the near future. Can I also add that I think we need to change the rhetoric in relation to multiculturalism in this great State. One-quarter of the people in the great State of New South Wales were born overseas. Forty per cent of people have at least one parent born overseas, and I am in that subcategory. About a third of the people in New South Wales speak a language other than English at home. So we have extraordinary multicultural diversity in New South Wales and I do not think we have properly utilised or recognised this in the past.

I say to Committee members that grants are important, particularly in creating social harmony and the like and social awareness of the various beautiful cultures that we have in this great State. But I think we have underestimated, particularly in the past, the economic asset that multiculturalism is. As the Premier has said on numerous occasions, the greatest asset is not that sitting underneath our feet—that is, minerals and resources—but the people of this State. They are our greatest asset. When you consider that many people in our State have a multicultural background, we should leverage it because who do we trade with? We trade with international markets, and these people with a multicultural background who are residents and citizens of New South Wales provide that bridge to those international markets. The National Multicultural Marketing Awards, an excellent initiative of the Community Relations Commission, provides ample examples of how we can leverage that multiculturalism. I think it is a dynamic and a new rhetoric that this Government is proud to have—that we will leverage off the asset that is multiculturalism in New South Wales.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: I have a follow-up question. Given what you have said, Minister, about the cultural diversity in our community, can you tell the Committee what the Government is doing to build that social cohesion you are talking about so we can reap the benefits of that diversity into the future?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again, it is a function of two streams, as it were. There is the community function, where we are providing the necessary grants. That is why I have asked the commission to report back to me after it has investigated all the grants, to make sure that the grants are penetrating into the communities and hitting the grassroots where it is needed, so there is some strong social cohesion. I was making reference a moment ago to the multicultural nature of some of the events. For example, I know that as for our Victorian counterparts, their Government provides incentive so that if a number of communities get together to celebrate openly they provide them with additional resources as part of the grants structure. That is something we may explore here. We can have an Indian festival, but if we can combine that with an Italian Australian festival and a Greek Italian festival and bring everyone together as the community that we are then we can incentivise that through a grants program. That is why I think it is important that we await the outcome of the review because it may provide us with a new horizon in which to further engage in a better, more efficient and more harmonised way.

The second way is through setting up panels, like the Multicultural Business Advisory Panel. We have extraordinary talent in New South Wales, particularly as our residents often provide that bridge to overseas destinations. Indeed, forgetting about trade for one moment—which is critical—I have already mentioned the international students who come here and contribute \$6 billion to our economy. But let us also think about other forms of tourism—come to Sydney, visit the world. People come to Sydney. They can have the iconic experience of going to Bondi, to the harbour bridge—it is the greatest harbour in the world in my view—and the Opera House, and getting on a ferry to Manly. That is an iconic Sydney experience, but there is so much more. They probably stay here for two days and then go to various other States. We should try to capture that market and get them to spend another day or two here.

CHAIR: Down in Cronulla.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: In Sydney and New South Wales. I know that Minister Souris, through Destination NSW—another Government initiative—is very focused on promoting this. Our multiculturalism is an asset: go to Cabramatta and experience Vietnamese cuisine, go to Leichhardt and experience Italian cuisine. That is a real drawcard for international tourists. Indeed, I think it is a drawcard for international students—the fact they can come to our State and sample a portion of each part of the world. This is a way that I think we can promote the benefits of our great diversity in this State.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Mr Kerkyasharian, getting back to that issue I raised before, which was raised originally by the Hon. Helen Westwood, I want to get it very clear with regard to these awards. You were directed by the previous Government to organise awards for certain specified communities—no input was sought from your department as to how those communities would be chosen. You were then asked to put everything together so that the awards could be handed out by the end of February. Is that basically correct?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: Yes, that is right.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Basically correct. That was not a very long period from beginning to end, was it—the end of the year to the handing out of awards and an awards ceremony at the end of February? That seems to be a very short period to put together such a big task. Would that be a fair comment?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: That is a matter of judgement I think. Obviously it was a major task and it was not something that was planned by the commission so I had to divert staff from other tasks.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: To allow that awards ceremony by the Premier to take place by the end of February?

Mr KERKYASHARIAN: Yes.

CHAIR: We will now move on to the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio.

(Mr Kerkyasharian withdrew)

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, can you tell me how many members of your ministerial staff are Aboriginal?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: There are no members who are Aboriginal.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: There are no policy officers or ministerial officers?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: No.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Would you not agree that it would be best to understand the community through themselves, such as having an Aboriginal as a policy staff member, to advise you directly on Aboriginal matters?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I agree that engagement with the community is paramount, and that is why, in the first weeks of my Ministry, I spent an exhaustive amount of time engaging with, and more importantly listening to, the Aboriginal community. I spent many a day going to Wilcannia, to Walgett, to Dubbo. I think I went to 15 separate locations.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I understand that, Minister.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: There is no substitute for hearing from the Aboriginal people themselves.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: But my question relates to advisers in your ministerial office.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Would you consider employing an adviser in your office, such as a policy officer or a ministerial officer, with an Aboriginal background?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Of course I would, yes.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: When would you be doing that?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: All positions are taken up at the moment, but of course, like any other position, I would award the position on merit.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: So you will give us a commitment that you will employ somebody with an Aboriginal background in your office?

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am asking that question.

CHAIR: A point of order has been taken.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: The question is entirely hypothetical.

CHAIR: It is hypothetical.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I am asking the Minister if he will commit.

CHAIR: The Minister has indicated that he would do it on merit.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Can I hear it from the Minister? Minister?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: The most important thing I can do is have a strong relationship of respect with the Aboriginal community.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: So I take it you will not employ an Aboriginal person in your office.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Point of order—

CHAIR: A point of order has been taken. That is misleading.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is not the case.

CHAIR: You are putting words into the Minister's mouth.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I have had departmental liaison officers [DLOs] work in our office who are of Aboriginal background. The reality is I have worked very closely with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, which has a number of Aboriginal people from whom I seek advice constantly. I listen to that advice very carefully.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, recently you granted \$1.277 million to the New South Wales Australian Education Consultative Group [AECG] for the Centre for Aboriginal Language Coordination and Development. As I understand it, the Aboriginal community in New South Wales and many Elders are gravely concerned and have written to you on this issue, particularly Dr Beryl Carmichael who is a life member of the New South Wales Australian Education Consultative Group, about the lack of consultation. You have talked about consultation and you have talked about respect. As I understand it, there is grave concern among Elders about the lack of consultation in drawing up language boundaries and particularly that there has been no consultation with Elders and custodians of language throughout New South Wales. Can you please give the Committee some indication of how you will resolve this issue of grave concern to Elders in the Aboriginal community?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Let me just correct the record. You said the Australian Education Consultant Group. It is actually the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Yes, I am sorry, I beg your pardon.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: That is okay. The reason we have given them \$1.277 million over three years to develop the Centre for Aboriginal Language Coordination and Development is that we believe that as a key stakeholder and as a key non-government organisation [NGO], they have the expertise to properly deal with this issue of culture and language, which is so critical. It is so critical. Universally wherever I go in the Aboriginal community, despite the horrendous disadvantage that they face and the difficulties they face on a day-to-day basis, almost universally they say to me, "Minister, the most important thing to us is the education of culture and language." That is why very early on in my Ministry I asked my department to allocate that funding so that it can go to a non-government organisation that, mind you, I respect very much—the AECG.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Minister, why do you think that a life member of that group has such grave concerns and in fact believes there has been a complete lack of respect and consultation with custodians of language?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I will ask Mr Christian to answer that particular concern because obviously he is aware of it.

Mr CHRISTIAN: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, the Hon. Helen Westwood, for the question. Can I go back a couple of steps and just make it clear that what was the precursor to Aboriginal Affairs recommending to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to outsource the management of Aboriginal languages in New South Wales was a detailed report undertaken by Professor Bob Morgan. Professor Morgan spoke to a number of people during the course of his independent review. He made recommendations to Government through Aboriginal Affairs on the future of Aboriginal languages. The Aboriginal Education Consultative Group—can I also make this point—participated in a tendering process, which they were successful in winning. They are a group of largely or predominantly Aboriginal people, both in terms of who they employ and certainly in terms of the very expansive network of local Aboriginal education consultative groups across the State who have a key interest in Aboriginal languages—the teaching of, the reclamation and the promotion of.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: The people who won the tender are the people who are making the decisions about the boundaries for language?

Mr CHRISTIAN: There is one other point I should make about your concern about consultation. Last year my office engaged the AECG to conduct a number of regional forums on Aboriginal languages, and they were well attended. The proceedings from those forums were written up and are publicly available. That was another precursor for informing the new direction, which is basically there is a recognition that, given the position of Aboriginal languages in New South Wales—the very critical position—Government has a role in supporting the Aboriginal community to reclaim, to teach and to promote the speaking of Aboriginal languages in the community. However, the ownership of that needs to rest in the Aboriginal community, and the AECG is an Aboriginal-community controlled organisation.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Why is it, would you think, that a life member of that group has such grave concern?

Mr CHRISTIAN: It is an aspect of Aboriginal languages that we take seriously. Everyone has some very strong views about what should be done.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: How will you take those on board?

Mr CHRISTIAN: We have received representations from the Elder that you have mentioned.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Yes.

Mr CHRISTIAN: We will be responding and making sure that the concerns that she has raised get a response and are factored into the considerations that we have asked the AECG to take on, on behalf of the Government—that is, to manage Aboriginal languages.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Minister, you have spoken about the importance of cultural heritage. What are you, as the Minister, going to do about the terrible destruction of a significant Aboriginal artefact—a carving of an Aboriginal footprint at 17 Orlando Avenue, Cremorne—that the Office of Environment and Heritage has been dragging its heels over and is meant to protect?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Obviously the specifics of that rest with the Office of Environment and Heritage, which is Minister Parker, but again let me emphasise that, as the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I can safely say that culture and heritage are critical. In fact they are very important to the Government. That is why we have already announced that we are undertaking a review to make sure that cultural and heritage sit outside the current statutory framework of flora and fauna. That is notwithstanding the fact that they sat there for 16 years. Within seven months we have already recognised that this requires a different, stand-alone statutory regime. That is again a matter for the Minister for Heritage to address because it is primarily her responsibility.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: I would think it is central to you as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Are you and your Government prepared to prosecute those who caused this damage? Will you prevent further destruction and desecration of Aboriginal heritage?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Again, Aboriginal culture and heritage are important and I have been promoting them over and over again within my portfolio. The community has been crying out for action, and they have not seen much over the past 16 years. I need to take your question on notice, because it sits within another Minister's portfolio, and I will get back to you.

The Hon. SHAOQUETT MOSELMANE: Have you had any discussions with the Minister for Heritage about this issue, given its significance?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: There are lots of issues relating to various Aboriginal sites and cultural locations, all of which primarily sit within the portfolio of the Minister for Heritage. I am happy to take your question on notice and get back to you.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: A process has been agreed upon for the appointment of special advisers to the Ministerial Task Force for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Is that right?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: It has only one special adviser per se and that is Noel Pearson. The Ombudsman's most recent report made reference to some of the programs that Mr Pearson has been actioning at Aurukun in Queensland. It is important that we get the best advice possible. Mr Pearson is not a member of the task force but he will provide advice if and when the task force determines necessary. I am sure if the task force needs advice from any other person in a specific area it will have the freedom to seek it.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Have you considered any special advisers from New South Wales who can also provide advice to the task force?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Beyond advice, we have the best people on the task force. From the Aboriginal community is Danny Lester, Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy. He will help us, in accordance with the terms of reference, to improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in New South Wales. As a member of the task force he will provide his wisdom constantly. Professor Shane Houston, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University, will impart his wisdom to the task force about health and educational outcomes, which is part of the terms of reference. There is a representative of the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations within which are senior Aboriginal peak organisations.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: I acknowledge the great work of Mr Pearson in far north Queensland. Was there any assessment of whether the issues in far north Queensland relate to those in Aboriginal communities throughout New South Wales before that appointment was made?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: When the Ombudsman published his recent report he made reference to the work of Noel Pearson. It will be left to the task force to determine if and when it requires specific advice from Mr Pearson.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: Do you agree with the Ombudsman that there is a question over the ongoing role of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs? Do you have some view about the future of the office?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I think the office has an important ongoing role. In fact, it is pivotal to the task force. Not only does it provide secretariat support but it is critical to a lot of the work that is going to be undertaken by the task force.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: How will the \$1.277 million be spent on the Centre for Aboriginal Languages, Coordination and Development and will there be performance reviews? How often? Will the findings be made public?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: In relation to the \$1.277 million, the Centre for Aboriginal Languages, Coordination and Development involves a three-year project to facilitate community-based Aboriginal language projects and to coordinate Aboriginal language resources. The aims of the project are to locate the centre in an Aboriginal organisation that is accessible and appropriate to Aboriginal community members. It will attract wider investment by the public and private sectors in New South Wales to Aboriginal language activities. It is to

increase the number of Aboriginal language revival activities across New South Wales and to increase Aboriginal ownership and control of the revival. Mr Christian made reference to that a short time ago.

We have listened to members of numerous Aboriginal communities. I was very pleased to redirect funds from the bureaucracy to a community-based Aboriginal organisation to focus on language revitalisation, reclamation and maintenance. The Aboriginal Education Consultative Group will be pivotal in making sure that the advancement of Aboriginal language and culture, particular in the next three years, will be promoted. As Minister, I think that is one of the most important things that we can do to impact generational change. If we really want to make a change to a lot of the Closing the Gap initiatives, we have to put a lot more energy towards education, culture and language.

The Two Ways Together program, administered by the previous administration and so scathingly criticised by the Auditor-General, had some good ideas. One was the promotion of education, culture and language. Regrettably the program failed because, as the Auditor-General said, of lack of political leadership. This Government is determined that that is not repeated. This Government has strong leadership. The Government has heard that the Aboriginal community is desperate for this and we are determined to deliver it for them.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I agree. I think language is very important. I find that a lot of local communities are struggling to find the money to be able to put together the language so it can be distributed, and to find ways to expand the knowledge of language. How much of that money will get to the grassroots and to local communities where there are diverse languages across the State? I do not know how many Aboriginal languages there are. It seems, in contrast to the principles of recognising those grassroots, diverse groups, to have a consolidated amount of money. How much of the \$1.277 million will get to individual Aboriginal groups to do their own work?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I acknowledge those concerns. One of the great advantages of the Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group is that it has officers out in the communities who can funnel information to various locations throughout the State. That is no doubt one of the reasons it was selected.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I am not clear about what information they would need to give people about their own language and how to educate their local communities about retaining and supporting languages. I do not understand the top-down approach and using that huge amount of money rather than giving it to local communities to expand and document their own—

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I am happy for Mr Christian to provide a response.

Mr CHRISTIAN: For a number of years we have administered a community grants program for locally based Aboriginal language projects. Those arrangements will continue, but the decisions about them will be made by the new advisory board for the Centre for Aboriginal Languages and Cultural Development. Those grants programs will continue, but we have asked the board to do two key things. First, we have asked it to facilitate the development of community-based Aboriginal language projects and to put a framework around them. Secondly, and importantly, we have asked it to seek other sources of funding on top of the amount that will be granted under the contract we have with it. A question was asked earlier about performance and how it will be measured. Arrangements were written into the funding agreement for milestones that must be met, and funding will be released only when they are met. That is one way in which we will continue to monitor the funding arrangements.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: How much money is available through that grants program?

Mr CHRISTIAN: It is roughly \$200,000 per annum. In previous years when additional money could be found we have tended to allocate it into the community languages projects area.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: So the budget is \$1.277 million for the oversight and administration of languages and \$200,000 is allocated statewide to support local communities. Is that right?

Mr CHRISTIAN: We are awaiting advice from the new board on how to structure the community grants projects. I would not want to pre-empt that advice on the exact amount and how the funding for community projects will be run.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It does appear disproportionate. It is such a large amount but a very small amount is being spent statewide.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: You talked about funding and key milestones. How fragile are those milestones? Can they be easily manipulated to provide the required information to obtain further funding or will there be real, substantial and measurable goals that will result in better outcomes?

Mr CHRISTIAN: We wrote the original tender—which the Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group won—quite carefully. The funding agreement is specific and robust enough to manage the funding relationship, but it is a funding relationship. We will continue to negotiate as equal partners with the Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group on arrangements, including adjustment of milestones if it experiences difficulties in meeting them. However, I have not received any request so far to adjust any of the milestones that have been set.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I refer to the recent successful Vibe Alive Festival held at Moree, which attracted about 2,500 young people from across New South Wales to celebrate their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, the spirit of reconciliation and the importance of health, education, careers and performing arts. Has the Government allocated any funding to ensure the future of this event? Would the Government consider contributing to the advertising, promotion and sponsorship costs of the event given that it contributes \$10,000 to the Deadly Awards?

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: You can answer that yourself.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am looking for a commitment.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD: It is a Dorothy Dixier.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I want the money for next year. If it was a Dorothy Dixier, so be it. Show me the colour of your money.

Mr CHRISTIAN: Can the honourable member repeat the question so I know what I am answering.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: The bottom line is that the festival was very successful and it is tremendously important to Moree and the surrounding area, and to New South Wales. Will the Government build on this initiative by providing funding? If so, how much will be provided? Will the Government's contribution be the same as last year or can we do better and provide more resources to this great initiative? Funding could be used for advertising, promotion, sponsorship and so on.

Mr CHRISTIAN: I am aware of Vibe Alive, which is a national organisation that holds events in New South Wales. Aboriginal Affairs receives many requests for community support every year but we have a finite budget. We try to ensure that the decisions made about funding are linked to the significance of the activity in New South Wales. For example, we support the annual Premier's Excellence Awards for Leadership in Aboriginal Communities, which have been linked to a key result area in the State Plan. Of course, we cannot provide funding to everyone who requests money. We consider every request and we will continue to consider any request we might receive from Vibe Alive and other groups.

The Deadly Awards are a very significant event in the Aboriginal national calendar. They are held in Sydney at the Opera House and we have over the past couple of years provided \$10,000 in sponsorship. The Aboriginal community in New South Wales look forward to that event and we think our contribution is money well spent because it has its roots in this State. We will consider a request if we receive one from Vibe Alive, but, again, that is on the basis that we have finite resources.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Minister, can you clarify on what date the Department of Aboriginal Affairs became the Office of Aboriginal Affairs? Does the office have a director general? If not, who is the senior officer with primary responsibility?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I understand that the change was made in July 2009.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Who is the most senior officer?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: James Christian.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Is he a member of the New South Wales Government chief executive officer group?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: Yes.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: It is confusing to find where all of this sits.

Ms MILLS: Perhaps I can explain the background. As you would be aware, under the former Labor Government, in 2009 the number of government agencies was significantly reduced to 13. At that point, something like 160 different agencies were brought together into a group of 13 under 13 directors general. At that time, what was the Department of Aboriginal Affairs became part of the Department of Human Services. The director general of that department was Jennifer Mason and the former heads of agencies that had been departments, which included Aboriginal Affairs, Housing, Ageing Disability and Home Care, et cetera, then reported to the new director general. Following the election this year, there was a further consolidation of government agencies by the new Government from 13 to nine government agencies. The Aboriginal Affairs area was moved from the human services area to the Office of Communities, which forms part of the Department of Education and Communities. In that sense, the director general is now Dr Michele Bruniges, as head of department, and I head the Office of Communities in which Aboriginal Affairs and other former departments now sit.

CHAIR: You talked about the Auditor-General's report on the previous Government's program, Two Ways Together. Could you tell us, because the Auditor-General was far from complimentary about the outcomes, what this Government is doing to respond to the Auditor-General's feedback on poor performance?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: In May this year the Auditor-General tabled a report, which concluded that the Two Ways Together program did not deliver the improvements for Aboriginal people that were intended. Indeed, the Aboriginal community has time and again tragically referred to the Two Ways Together program as Two Ways Apart. The report described the growing distance between the Government and Aboriginal communities, the failure to coordinate between government agencies and the failure to measure Government performance. It recommended the need for greater accountability and leadership, a strong evidence-based and a whole-of-government approach. You can see by some of my answers and the answers of Mr Christian and Ms Mills today that this is clearly a new direction that the Government is taking the portfolio. In response to the report the Premier stated:

My Government will talk openly and honestly with Aboriginal people about the challenges that we jointly face and how to ensure that the mistakes of the previous Government are not repeated.

If the Government wants different results, we need to take a different approach, and a different approach together with Aboriginal people. That is why the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government has created a ministerial taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs that represents that very difference. That is why the task force is different in its membership and different in its priorities. Firstly, it is about the power of partnership, not bureaucracy. There have been numerous committees in the past on Aboriginal policy. The difference with our task force is that senior Ministers and senior Aboriginal leaders will be making decisions together. It will bring the voice of Aboriginal people to the core of Government. We understand that the best outcome is achieved when Aboriginal communities identify the problems, drive the solutions and own the outcomes.

The task force is also different as it reflects a whole-of-government approach. It includes me as the Chair, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Education, the Treasurer, the Attorney General, the Minister for Family and Community Services and the Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Healthy Lifestyles, and Minister for Western New South Wales. More importantly, a representative from the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations will be a task force member providing the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, Aboriginal Legal Services, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council and the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat with a voice at the table. In addition, there will be independent Aboriginal advisers on education and employment, including Danny Lester, Chief Executive of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, and Professor Shane Houston, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney. Again, these are task force members.

That means that we have seven Ministers—almost a third of the Cabinet—listening and working side-by-side with Aboriginal leaders and academics. The task force also includes the directors general of the

Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Education and Communities, and the head of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs. I was humbled to be joined on the day of the task force launch by these Aboriginal leaders, who shared the following sentiments. Danny Lester, the Chief Executive of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, said:

I am very proud and honoured as an Aboriginal man in New South Wales to be part of an historic task force that includes Aboriginal people as part of the decision-making process.

Mr Stephen Ryan, chairman of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, applauded the Minister and the O'Farrell Government for quick action on a report. He also said the Aboriginal community of New South Wales being in the room with a third of the Cabinet was something they had not tried, and that he was grateful to the Minister and his Cabinet compatriots. While we still have a long, challenging road ahead, to begin the journey with this support from Aboriginal leaders provides a very robust platform for change. Secondly, the task force is different in its priorities and believes that opportunity and aspiration for young people at school and through employment defeats despair and disadvantage.

Therefore, we will focus on identifying opportunities to improve educational outcomes and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in New South Wales. They deserve no less. The task force membership will strive to decrease the gaps in juvenile incarceration, life expectancy and child abuse and neglect. However, we must recognise that these are the symptoms of disadvantage and that effective reform in education and employment will reduce these symptoms. To address these issues, reform will be carried out through the framework of education. You will only get generational change through education.

The task force will aim to conclude in late 2012 with a strategy including concrete reforms around the terms of reference, which include, as I have previously mentioned, improved service delivery and accountability in Aboriginal Affairs, improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal people in New South Wales and improved employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in New South Wales. The process will incorporate genuine and structured consultation where all organisations and individuals will have the opportunity to contribute through a written submission process as well as through a series of public forums. The task force will actively be seeking the views of all Aboriginal leaders and communities, corporate and non-government organisations, and I look forward to this significant opportunity to work side-by-side with Aboriginal communities and leaders to make recommendations together to the Premier in 2012.

The Hon. RICK COLLESS: Can you tell us briefly, given our time constraints, what the New South Wales Government is doing to improve the employment and economic development opportunities for Aboriginal people across New South Wales?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: We are committed to a number of strategies in relation to employment programs. Those that have already commenced include Aboriginal Jobs Together, and there are a number of other programs that have been undertaken, but consistent with what the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman have said, that is, we need programs that are producing results and that are evidence-based. There is no use in continuing programs if they are going to deliver the same outcomes. Let us be honest about it: In the past, some Aboriginal unemployment rates, for example, have increased from 15 per cent in 2003 to about 20 per cent now. Obviously, the programs in the past have not been working.

I have asked to look at the programs that exist. I want to see what is working and I want to see what the evidence base around them is. The results of that will feed into the task force. The thing that will drive the task force—I can guarantee this—is that we want results. We want to know what is working. The Aboriginal community is entitled to have programs that work and that produce real outcomes. One of the criticisms—a very justified criticism—made by the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General was that a lot of programs in the past did not have any measurables or accountables. A lot of the accountables were caught up in the narrative, that is, "The program is doing very well." Tell us more. Tell us how the program is doing well. I want to know how many people are being employed and how much the program is costing, because only once we get this type of information will we make real inroads into the horrendous statistics of Aboriginal unemployment in New South Wales.

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.