

Chairman; Mr Martin Whitely; Dr Kim Hames; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Mr Frank Alban; Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Lisa Baker

Division 12: Indigenous Affairs, \$29 891 000 —

Mr P.B. Watson, Chairman.

Dr K.D. Hames, Minister for Indigenous Affairs.

Mr P.J. Walker, Director General.

Mr R. Thomas, Executive Director, Land and Heritage.

Ms N. Taylor, Acting Executive Director, Regional Outcomes.

Ms W.M. Dawson, Acting Executive Director, Policy and Coordination.

Mr G. Kessar, Acting Director, Business and Strategic Services.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Bassendean.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: On page 193, the first dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” states that the government is committed to a fundamental change in the way in which Indigenous issues and opportunities are addressed. Let us start with the discussions that the minister had with the Treasurer around the abolition of the Aboriginal Economic Development Unit. I presume there were some discussions.

Dr K.D. HAMES: May I get some advice on that, Mr Chairman, because I think the member is extrapolating beyond the bounds of normal practice of what is in the budget. If I may just explain, the member asked me a question and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition asked me a question previously in the Parliament —

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: Does the minister want me to reframe the question rather than tell us why he does not want to answer it?

Dr K.D. HAMES: The point I make is that this is not my portfolio. Ministers for Indigenous affairs need to have an interest in what happens in other portfolios, and I do. I have an interest in education, because there are many Aboriginal people in education, and the same applies to the police. It is the same but it is not my responsibility, nor is it in the budget. We are supposed to be discussing what is in the budget.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: It states —

The Government is committed to a fundamental change in the way in which Indigenous issues and opportunities are addressed ...

Dr K.D. HAMES: I am happy to talk about that.

The CHAIRMAN: If the minister will let the member explain, I will then rule whether it is okay.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: Part of that fundamental change is the abolition of the Aboriginal Economic Development Unit. I am asking the minister whether that function has been picked up by his agency, the Department of Indigenous Affairs?

Dr K.D. HAMES: No.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: Were there any conversations with other members of government about that decision?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I will provide an answer, but I want to re-emphasise the point that this is not in the budget papers, it is not my portfolio and the question should really be asked of the minister who has that responsibility.

The CHAIRMAN: The minister can refuse to answer the question.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Having said that, I was aware of discussions about the location of that unit; in fact, I was extremely keen to get it under my portfolio. I wanted that unit to come to me, because, like the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I share the member’s view on the great work that that unit has done in the past. It was established by Hendy Cowan, as the minister for economic development at the time, and it did a great job. The current minister is of the view that its time has passed and that it has been taken over by responsibilities in other areas. I did not investigate that or seek that responsibility.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: Rather than go on for a long time, has the minister received any extra funding to fulfil those functions?

Dr K.D. HAMES: No.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: Has it happened anywhere else in government?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I do not know.

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Mr R.H. COOK: Is the minister aware that the Premier in estimates this morning, backed up by the Director General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, asserted that the minister was in fact picking up these functions under the Department of Indigenous Affairs? Can the minister explain which line item it comes under?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I have already stated quite clearly that I am not picking up responsibilities for that unit. There is no line item in this budget that deals with that service.

Mr R.H. COOK: The minister would be familiar with section 13 of the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Act 1972, which suggests that the minister has an obligation, a responsibility or certainly a role to play in Aboriginal economic development. From that perspective, can the minister tell us what discussions he had with the Treasurer prior to the abolition of the AED unit and what part of the budget the minister was going to use in order to fulfil his obligations under the act?

Dr K.D. HAMES: There are two components of that. Firstly, I did not have discussions with the Treasurer about the abolition.

Mr R.H. COOK: The Treasurer says that the minister did.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I do not mind. I am just telling the member. I can tell him only what I know. I have not had discussions. I was aware that despite my wishing to have this unit under my care, it was decided that would not happen and that it would go elsewhere to the management of the Treasurer. I cannot say any more than that. That is just what happened. The Department of Indigenous Affairs plays a very widespread role in managing economic development in the Aboriginal community. Remember first that we have limited funding. As the member will see, it is only \$20 million-odd. I do not need to tell the member this, but the DIA has two roles. One is coordinating Aboriginal heritage issues to do with managing section 18 applications and approvals, managing lands through the Aboriginal Lands Trust and managing a range of services like that. On the other side, we have now committed to the Indigenous Implementation Board and a significant role of the rest of the department is to support that implementation board. Board members are talking to Aboriginal communities about how we can better service and improve those Aboriginal communities, particularly in the areas of economic development, but also in the areas of housing, health and so on. People think that every time something happens to an Aboriginal person it becomes our responsibility. That is not the case. Individual ministers have responsibility. The Minister for Education has responsibility for the education of Aboriginal people, as for everybody else, and it is the same for police.

The CHAIRMAN: We were going to try to keep answers short so that we could get some more questions in.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: Which minister has responsibility for Aboriginal economic development?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I think the Treasurer currently has that role. He has responsibility in his role as Minister for Commerce, and that is to where the member should direct his question. That is where the decisions were made.

[7.10 pm]

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I refer to page 193 and to the second dot point. How is the re-establishment by the government of the Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council and the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee improving service delivery and accountability for investment in Aboriginal affairs?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I will ask the director general to comment to some extent on that, because he is the chair of that committee. A requirement under the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Act 1972 was that this body be created, which has as its chair the Director General of the Department of Indigenous Affairs and senior top-level directors general from other significant departments, such as health, police and the like. The director general will go through those. It was not a functioning group. Some suggestions have been made that it was canned under the previous government. The previous government said that it was not true and that it still had a committee there of sorts. However, the reality is that this committee has been refocused in its intensity under the directorship of the director general to much better coordinate the services being provided by the government. That will be the case particularly in remote Aboriginal communities. There has been a major problem in delivering state government, local government and commonwealth government services to remote Aboriginal communities. This committee will enable us to get across that problem and do it.

We have recently had some interesting meetings. All the directors general recently attended a meeting with the Aboriginal Implementation Committee, chaired by Lieutenant General John Sanderson, to discuss how the government can target Aboriginal communities across the state and play a key role in delivering those objectives in the future. That was an extremely good meeting. I was on some committees when we were in government, and I know they existed to some degree also in between times. What normally happens at these meetings is that the directors general think—we can see it on their faces—“been there, done that; same old over and over again”. By the time we had finished that meeting, we would see their change in attitude and enthusiasm. That was very

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interesting. I believe those groups have a strong desire to work together to achieve their objectives. I will ask the director general to follow up on that answer.

Mr P.J. Walker: As the minister has said, I chair a high-powered committee of directors general. That committee comprises the Under Treasurer, and the Directors General of Health, Child Protection, Education and Training, and Housing. We have also invited on to the committee the Director General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and the Commissioner of Police. The role of the committee is to coordinate government service provision across government and get agencies to work together in a better way. There is also an obvious opportunity that arises from the significant Council of Australian Governments funding across the national partnerships. To pick up on some of the comments that were made earlier, on 10 June I will be chairing a meeting of 16 government agencies that provide facilities and services to make sure that we are maximising those opportunities for Aboriginal economic development. Some of the Aboriginal economic development opportunities that are presenting themselves at the moment are the Browse Basin development on the Dampier Peninsula and the Ord stage 2 project, and also things such as the pastoral stations that are held by the Aboriginal Lands Trust.

Mr R.H. COOK: I refer to page 193, "Service Summary". I am interested in the budgets for the Indigenous Implementation Board, the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee and the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee, and the sitting fees for each of the members of those committee, and the chairpersons.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I will need to hand over to Mr Walker for the specific fees. The Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee has not met yet. We have gone through the advertising process, and I have been given a recommended list of applicants and have approved those. That is very close to being formally established. We do have sitting fees, obviously. Those sitting fees are determined largely by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Mr Walker will detail those fees.

Mr P.J. Walker: The annual budget for the Indigenous Implementation Board is \$427 600. The chairman of that committee, Lieutenant General John Sanderson, is engaged under a ministerial contract for \$100 000 per annum. There are eight members of that board, and they each receive \$12 000 per annum. In relation to the members of the Aboriginal Advisory Council, we have written to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet asking for its recommendations for consideration by the minister. I think it is fair to say that the remuneration of the members of that committee will be significantly less than for the members of the Indigenous Implementation Board. The Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee is made up of directors general. I do not have the details for the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Those fees were not set by us. The fees are whatever was set by the former government, and they have continued in place. They are pretty standard fees paid to all committee members on government boards.

Mr R.H. COOK: Is there any particular reason why the fees that will be paid to the members of the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee will be significantly less than the fees that are paid to the members of the Indigenous Implementation Board?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Yes, there is. I will explain that further in a moment. I do have the sitting fees for the ACMC, just to fit that in. It is \$425 a day for the members, and \$655 a day for the chair. They are pretty standard fees that I see for boards all the time. An issue that we have found since we came into government is that there is a huge variation in the fees that different groups are paid for doing different things. There is often no clear evidence as to why one group is paid a particular fee over and above another group. The \$12 000-a-year fee for the members of the Indigenous Implementation Board was established because that committee has on it some very high-profile members, such as Professor Fiona Stanley. That sitting fee of \$12 000 is similar to the fee that is paid on other committees that comprise high-profile members. There are committees that get more, and committees that get less. A fee of \$12 000 a year for 12 meetings is \$1 000 for each meeting.

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, we have four more questions left, and only 15 minutes.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Fine.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer to the second dot point on page 194—the COAG intergovernmental agreement. What are the respective contributions of the commonwealth government and the state government to the COAG intergovernmental agreement, and what will be delivered to the Aboriginal people as a result of that agreement?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Because of our limited time, I will try to condense this question as much as I can. We have already talked about the \$117 million for Indigenous health in the health budget. This talks about the other contributions that are being made in the area of Aboriginal services. The member for Pilbara was particularly interested in those figures and in some of the other funding for Aboriginal communities. From the commonwealth, there is \$49.85 million for Indigenous early childhood, \$122.62 million for Indigenous health,

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\$81.69 million for economic participation, which is another issue that the member for Pilbara raised, \$496.57 million for remote Indigenous housing—this is over four years, I might add—and \$21.47 million for remote service delivery. The state contribution is \$9 million for Indigenous early childhood, the \$117 million that I referred to earlier for health, \$12.1 million for remote service delivery, and \$26.3 million for Indigenous participation. With the contribution that the state is making, that is \$6 million a year for economic development in Aboriginal communities. I do not have time to go into all the details now, and I can provide those later, but at least we have a record of the total funding that is being provided to Aboriginal communities from the commonwealth and the state, and I think that is particularly important.

[7.20 pm]

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I refer to page 193, the first dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, which talks about the Indigenous Implementation Board, and also the COAG process. I understand that there is a linkage between the Indigenous Implementation Board and COAG in developing some federal projects regarding Indigenous participation in some of the alcohol restriction issues et cetera. The dot point concludes —

The Board will work towards developing a proposal for a regionally based reform agenda that can be considered by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) with a view to it being modelled federally.

What is the linkage between the Indigenous Implementation Board and the COAG process?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Lieutenant-General Sanderson put forward a proposal to the previous government to look at developing regional committees, and that was dismissed by the former Premier. Interestingly enough, a similar proposal was put forward back in the nineteenth century, when a department of the Kimberley was created, with its own minister. The proposal that was suggested by Lieutenant-General Sanderson related to not only an Aboriginal committee, but also a department responsible for the Kimberley. It would be a mixture of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, like a Homeswest agency, but a Kimberley agency, looking after that area. That is one of the things that that committee will be looking at. It is currently involved in what it calls conversations with Aboriginal people. There was recently a Kimberley conversation, when the implementation team went out there, and they want to do the same in the goldfields and in the Pilbara. They are discussing issues about what Aboriginal people want and need, and ways in which we can better engage as a state government, trying to link at the same time with the COAG processes to see how the available funds can be better used for improving services in Aboriginal communities in this state.

Ms L.L. BAKER: I refer to services in key efficiency indicators on page 194, under the heading “Support to Partnerships, Partnering Initiatives”. My question is related to the line item for the average cost per coordination partnership. I was concerned to hear from the Minister for Communities that the Indigenous Women’s Congress is under review. I am sure that the Department of Indigenous Affairs would be aware of how valuable the Indigenous Women’s Congress has been in helping the government to implement policies in communities. Some very well thought-of and well respected elders are involved in the congress. I do not know what will happen as a result of that review, and I am sure that the minister does not either. I would be very concerned if the minister did not have some sort of contingency plan, under the department’s commitment to Indigenous women, if that council is scrapped.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I am struggling to find the spot on the page to which the member is referring. Under the heading “Support to Partnerships, Partnering Initiatives” I see “Total cost of services” and “Provision of support to partnerships”, and the details of those, and then “Average cost per land partnership”, “Average cost per heritage and cultural partnership” —

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, we are running short of time. Can you just give us an answer please?

Ms L.L. BAKER: I refer to page 194.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I cannot find how the question that the member raised relates to what is on the page in front of us. Perhaps the member can give me a direction as to where she thinks it might be.

Ms L.L. BAKER: It is a coordination role, but if the minister is having trouble finding something under the efficiency indicators that are listed there, I suppose the first dot point under the heading “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 193 might apply. It begins —

The Government is committed to a fundamental change in the way in which Indigenous issues and opportunities are addressed in Western Australia and the way in which Indigenous people are engaged and empowered in policy development and decision making which impacts upon them.

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That is the lead statement about a significant trend that the minister is watching, and my question can be related to that as much as to coordination.

Dr K.D. HAMES: The difficulty that I am having is that that question relates not to what is in the budget papers but to another minister's portfolio. Hence the reason it was raised during discussions with the other minister. This specifically relates to areas outside of my portfolio. I am not aware of the reduction in funding the member is talking about to an Indigenous women's partnership. It is not in my portfolio.

Mr R.H. COOK: My question relates to the details of controlled grants and subsidies on page 197. I draw the minister's attention, merely by way of example, to the Aboriginal community patrols, for which \$1.9 million has been budgeted in 2009-10 and \$2.054 million in 2010-11. In recent times, these services, although supported by the state, are essentially bankrolled by the commonwealth through the community development employment program. I am aware, for instance, that the people who participate in the Nyoongah patrol do so as part of the CDEP. In the event that the CDEP is wound back and not utilised for projects such as these and, I suspect, for a whole range of activities that the Department of Indigenous Affairs is involved in, what will be the budget implications for the department and its capacity to effectively support these programs?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I thank the member for the question, and I would like to give an answer for it, but unfortunately I do not have one, and it is not because I am not concerned about it. We fund those community patrols and indeed I think we may have actually established them in the time of the previous coalition government. We funded a lot more of them when we came to government, because I have a lot of time for the work those groups do, particularly the Nyoongah patrol. The issue of the CDEP being canned was brought up by the previous federal Liberal government, and I have always been uncomfortable with it. I have say, however, that I have spoken since then to Hon Jenny Macklin and she supports doing the same. Her argument is that Aboriginal people deserve a proper wage, not CDEP tapping. Having said that, I want to make sure that these patrols go on, but I am not sure where else I will get the funding. We have been having discussions with Jenny Macklin, saying that there are areas in which we desperately need that funding to continue. We do not want these people to stop what they are doing. If funding is available somewhere else to pay them a normal wage for doing that job, that is very good and we would love to see it. Otherwise, we are cutting off our nose to spite our face, because there are some genuine needs for CDEP in this state. I think she is sympathetic. Certainly, in some of the regions where there are no other jobs available she has agreed that CDEP is appropriate. My concern is that in areas like the Perth metropolitan area, where there may be other jobs that those people can do for a full-time wage, this is the type of activity they want to do, and it is enormously beneficial to the state.

Mr R.H. COOK: It was not about the worthiness or otherwise of CDEP; I just think that collectively we have a problem there, and to the extent that we can assist, please ask.

The appropriation was recommended.

[7.30 pm]