

Division 3: Premier and Cabinet — Service 4, Aboriginal Affairs, \$36 405 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Ms E. Roper, Director General.

Ms F. Hunt, Deputy Director General, Aboriginal Engagement and Community Policy.

Mrs S. Black, Deputy Director General, Infrastructure, Economy and State Services.

Ms S. Meaghan, Assistant Director, Native Title Negotiation.

Ms T. Ninnette, Director, Aboriginal Engagement Directorate.

Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis, Chief Financial Officer; Manager, Finance and Payroll.

Mr S. Hayden, Senior Policy Officer, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

The member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 58 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. The Aboriginal cultural heritage bill has \$795 000 attached to it. Could the minister explain what the 2021–22 budget estimate of \$795 000 is for?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This relates to the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill that the minister is hoping to bring on later this year. It is a very significant transforming bill to come before the house. Obviously, a lot of work has been done on the bill in consultation with various groups including various Aboriginal groups. The consultation has involved a lot of work. The bill took in a lot of submissions, but that \$795 000 has been provided to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to support work from 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021, which includes \$620 000 allocated to support the bill's implementation team, comprising nine FTEs; \$100 000 allocated to continue stakeholder engagement, which is a critical component to ensure that stakeholders are prepared for the introduction of the legislation, and commence consultation on key supporting documentation; and \$75 000 to engage professional services to undertake ongoing funding modelling to ensure that a sustainable model is put in place to support the new legislative framework into the future.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Given that part of the \$795 000 is for stakeholder engagement, is the minister able to provide a list of the stakeholder engagement that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs or the department has carried out to ensure that consultation has occurred on the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said, there were three rounds of stakeholder consultation and over 380 submissions. More than 1 500 people have participated in around 175 workshops, stakeholder meetings or public information sessions held across the state, most recently in August this year. Once the new legislation is in place, extensive future consultation and engagement is planned to inform the development of key documents to inform the legislation, such as draft regulations, Aboriginal cultural heritage management code, time lines and activity categories. In regard to the specific names of who has been involved, I am sure that the member knows many of the people in his electorate who have been involved. If the member wants to put on notice a request for a list, he can. I am not sure that will be of any great value to the member but if he wants to put it on notice it is up to him.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We are playing this game of putting things on notice. These are the estimates hearings. Can the minister supply as supplementary information the stakeholder consultation engagement that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs has undertaken on a very important bill? In the interests of being open, transparent and

accountable, can the minister provide it as supplementary information, rather than asking me to put it on notice as a bit of a cop-out.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think it is a cop-out at all. Does the member want me to start reading out some of the list?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Go for it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Let us start reading out some of the list now. I will talk about where the consultation was held and then I will go into some of the organisations.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is important to know because a criticism of the bill is a lack of consultation.

[9.10 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am about to tell the member, and if the member wants to stop me at any time, please do. I will go back to 2018; over 100 workshops and information sessions were held across the state as part of the review of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 and the development of the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill. There were 28 workshop information sessions in the Kimberley and 18 in the Pilbara. In 2020, over 75 meetings with stakeholders were held as part of the development of the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill. Six meetings were held with Kimberley-based Aboriginal stakeholder organisations and 21 meetings were held with Pilbara-based Aboriginal stakeholder organisations. In August 2021, five native title rep bodies and 22 prescribed bodies corporate from across Western Australia attended the ACHB stakeholder information sessions in Perth. Three were Kimberley-based PBCs and nine were Pilbara-based PBCs.

The following workshops were held in 2019: 15 May at Warmun in the Kimberley; 16 May at Balgo in the Kimberley; 16 May at Karratha in the Pilbara; 16 May at Warburton in the goldfields–Esperance; 17 May at Kalgoorlie in the goldfields; 17 May at Kununurra in the Kimberley; 17 May at Roebourne in the Pilbara; 18 May in Karratha; 18 May in Kununurra; 21 May in Katanning; 21 May in Carnarvon; 22 May in Busselton; 22 May in Geraldton; 23 and 24 May in Bunbury; 24 May in Meekatharra; 30 May in Moora; and 18 March in Kalgoorlie.

The following information sessions were held in 2019: on 22 March in Geraldton with the Yamatji Indigenous land use agreement traditional owner negotiation team; 1 April in Kununurra; 2 April in Fitzroy Crossing; 3 April in Broome; 16 April in Katanning; 17 April in Albany; 29 April in Geraldton; 30 April in Port Hedland; 30 April and 1 May in Moora; 1 May in Karratha; 1 May in Northam; 2 May in Meekatharra; 2 May in Roebourne; 2 May in Tom Price; 7 May in Busselton; 7 May in Derby; 7 May in Kalgoorlie; 7 May in Narrogin; 8 May in Bunbury; 8 May in Looma; 8 May in Warburton; 9 May in Fitzroy Crossing; 9 May in Leonora; 13 and 14 May in Broome; 14 May in Midland; 15 May in Bidyadanga; 15 May in Jigalong; 16 May in Ardyaloon; 16 May in Balgo; 16 May in Newman; 20 May in Carnarvon; 20 May in Esperance; 21 May in Halls Creek; 22 May in Kununurra; 22 May in Wiluna; and 23 May in Onslow.

The following relates to phase 3 consultation on the bill in 2020: 21 September in Albany; 22 September in Moora and Broome; 23 September, a closed meeting with Kimberley PBCs in Broome; 23 September in Bunbury; 24 September in Fitzroy Crossing and Midland; 25 September in Geraldton; 25 September in Kununurra; 29 September in Karratha; 29 September in Warburton; 30 September in Kalgoorlie; 30 September in Port Hedland; 1 October in Leonora and Newman; and 2 October in Esperance and Carnarvon.

The following phase 3 consultation–targeted stakeholder meetings were held in 2020: 4 September in Perth with the Western Australian Local Government Association. Does the member want to know the individual people who represented WALGA, or will WALGA do?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am more interested in which Aboriginal organisations were consulted.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member did not ask that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I asked for the consultation.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am about to tell the member now.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: If I were the minister, I would just put it as a —

Dr A.D. BUTI: On 7 September —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am happy for the minister to keep reading it out.

Dr A.D. BUTI: In 2020, a meeting was held on 7 September in South Hedland with the Kariyarra Aboriginal Corporation, and on 7 September with the Karlka Nyiyaparli Aboriginal Corporation. I am sorry about my pronunciations. A meeting was held on 8 September with the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, and on 9 September with the Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation. Does the member want only the Aboriginal corporations? What about others?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Aboriginal corporations.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The following meetings were held in 2020: 11 September, Wintawari Guruma Aboriginal Corporation; 11 September, native title tribunal; 14 September, Kimberley Land Council; 14 September, Nyamba Buru Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation; 15 September in the goldfields, Native Title Services; 15 September, Central Desert Native Title Services; 16 September, South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council; 16 and 17 September in Perth, Banjima Native Title Aboriginal Corporation; 18 September, Ngadju Native Title Aboriginal Corporation; 18 September, Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation; and 18 September, Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation.

Also in 2020, the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee was consulted on 22 September, the Aboriginal Legal Service was consulted on 5 February and the Aboriginal Lands Trust board was consulted on 6 February. Also consulted were the following: Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation on 6 February; Kimberley Land Council on 11 February; Nyamba Buru Yawuru on 11 February; the Shire of Broome on 11 February; the National Native Title Tribunal on 11 February; the Puutu Kuntj Kurrama and Pinikura Aboriginal Corporation on 13 February; the Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation on 13 February; Yamatji on 13 February; Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation on 17 February; Wintawari Guruma Aboriginal Corporation on 17 February; Yamatji again, on 20 February; Aboriginal Advisory Council of WA on 25 February; and the Aboriginal Legal Service on 27 February. Then we have South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council on 5 March; Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee on 9 March; Goldfields families on 23 and 24 March; Kariyarra Aboriginal Corporation on 17 August; Karlka Nyiyaparli Aboriginal Corporation on 17 August; PKKP Aboriginal Corporation on 18 August; Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation on 18 August; Yamatji on 20 August; Kimberley Land Council on 24 August; Yawuru on 24 August; and Banjima Native Title Aboriginal Corporation on 28 August.

There were two stakeholder information sessions in August 2021—on 18 August with 13 representative bodies and on 19 August with 14 rep bodies. I have some more from this year: on 13 September with the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee; on 20 September with Wajarri Yamatji; on 16 September with Palyku; on 16 September with Aboriginal heritage and native title, Lands and Main Roads; on 12 October with Robe River; and on 15 October with Yamatji. Five prescribed bodies corporate are still waiting to be heard.

[9.20 am]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the minister able to table the document?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. I think Hansard got that.

The CHAIR: Hansard has got its work cut out for it, I think!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is not very fair on Hansard.

The CHAIR: There is no capacity to table in this setting.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We will give a copy of the list to Hansard.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Prior to the 2021 election, when the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs was Hon Ben Wyatt, draft legislation was released for consultation. After the 2021 election, there has been no draft legislation so there has been no visibility. Will people have an opportunity to look at the draft Aboriginal cultural heritage bill before it becomes a fait accompli and is rammed through both houses of this Parliament?

The CHAIR: That is enough of a question for the minister to answer.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is the same draft.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So the government is working on the same draft. When are we likely to see the bill? The minister stated that hopefully it will be this year.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can I just correct myself, member? It is the same draft bill but, as a result of consultation, amendments have been drafted and are being worked on at the moment. When they are available, they will be released.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I suppose that was the point that I was getting at. There are amendments to the draft legislation of the previous government. There is a lot of concern about what the draft amendments will look like. When will the stakeholders get an opportunity to look at the draft amendments? Will it be when the government introduces the bill into Parliament or will the government allow the community, given all the consultation already undertaken, to review the amendments before the bill is introduced into Parliament?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The amendments that came about in response to the consultation have been discussed at those consultations. The amendments will not be a surprise to the various groups because they have been involved in the consultation that led to the amendments and the discussions about those amendments.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I do not know whether the minister is able to answer this next question given that he is not the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Does the minister feel confident that enough stakeholder engagement has occurred given that many Aboriginal organisations have commented that they fear the amendments being one-sided?

The CHAIR: Member, I need to stop you there. I think you prefaced the question with the fact that this minister is not the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and we are dealing with solid facts rather than feelings.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Fair call, Madam Chair; I take that on board.

Will there be an opportunity to look at the amendments prior to the bill being introduced into Parliament?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member would realise, there has been much discussion about this bill by various —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There have been many protests as well.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Which would tell the member that people are well aware of what is in the bill.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The answer is no; the bill will be introduced without any further consultation once those amendments have been written up.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Consultation and discussions are continuing as we speak, member. Consultation is consultation. Just because there is consultation, that does not mean that a bill will always agree with the concerns of any particular group.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is the concern.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is with any bill.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: A further question, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR: You are pushing it. I will give you two more.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: When will the bill be introduced into Parliament, and will it be introduced in the Legislative Assembly or the Legislative Council?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As far as timing, it is still planned for this year. I assume it will have to be in the lower house because it involves financial issues.

The CHAIR: A further and last question on this, member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Going back to the original question about the \$795 000 that is in the 2021–22 budget for the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill, is the minister able to map out the next 12 months of the rollout of the bill? The minister mentioned—I am trying to think of the changes —

Dr A.D. BUTI: The draft amendments?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, not the amendments. It will come to me. What other amendments will arise after the legislation is passed by Parliament? What is the pathway of the next 12 months?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Member, with all due respect, I am not Nostradamus; I do not know how the bill is going to go in the debate in Parliament. We do not know what will happen so it is hard to say what amendments will come in. We will have to leave that —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, but the minister is not stupid either. He knows that the government has an absolute majority in both houses so it is going to get through.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Let us see how the bill goes through Parliament.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am not sure whether this falls under this section, but I am interested in this matter. I refer to page 58, budget paper No 2, volume 1. The third paragraph states that the government continues to prioritise negotiated settlements. I have been told by the local government in Geraldton that Oakajee land has been transferred to the combined group of five prescribed bodies corporate—that it was part of the settlement. Has the title of the Oakajee estate been transferred to the prescribed bodies corporate as part of that settlement or is that claim by the local council not true?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Oakajee is not part of the south west native title settlement.

Dr D.J. HONEY: So just to be clear, it has not been transferred. I was dubious, but I was told that by the shire of Geraldton.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think that has to be deferred to the division on the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage.

[9.30 am]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 128 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the provision for the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is not in this section.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is Aboriginal affairs.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member will need to leave that until we discuss the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, which comes up later.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I will turn to this question then: I refer to page 58 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under “Aboriginal Affairs Reform (including Native Title Negotiations and Closing the Gap)”. Can the minister provide a summary of the progress of the Closing the Gap national agreement and how Western Australians are performing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In other words, the government’s performance with regard to Closing the Gap? Closing the Gap is obviously a very important program of reform in the Aboriginal affairs portfolio. The government prepared an initial implementation plan for Closing the Gap that demonstrates our commitment to work more closely in partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders. The first iteration of the implementation plan for Closing the Gap was submitted to the joint council on 6 August 2021. The plan comprises two parts. The first summarises the government’s high-level approach to the reform and targets and explains how this is aligned to the Aboriginal empowerment strategy. The second part is effectively a stocktake of strategies, programs and initiatives that contribute to the reforms and targets. The plan will provide a critical point of transparency and accountability, as well as the starting point for future planning. It creates a baseline from which the WA government’s current approach can be assessed as a whole and further reforms can be developed. The government has committed \$3.4 million for grants to support the strengthening of the Aboriginal community–controlled sector in WA. A further \$1.4 million will support the establishment of a consortium of Aboriginal community–controlled organisations.

Mr Y. MUBARAKAI: What resources is the Department of the Premier and Cabinet providing, and what work is it doing, to protect remote Aboriginal communities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As we know, the issue of protecting remote communities from COVID-19 is a critical part of the work of the government and the community. The complex task team was created early in the pandemic by the State Emergency Coordinator and was transferred to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in mid-2020. The team, now called the remote Aboriginal communities mobilisation unit, works to minimise the specific risk presented by the pandemic to remote Aboriginal communities. The unit coordinates between communities, government and other stakeholders to ensure communities can find solutions to problems that arise through the pandemic. It supports the State Emergency Coordinator in administering the emergency remote Aboriginal communities directions that limit access to remote Aboriginal communities, and administers the remote Aboriginal COVID-19 emergency relief fund. There is a \$3.1 million royalties for regions funding call to address emergency needs in remote communities during the pandemic. I should also say that a number of agencies have been involved to protect remote Aboriginal communities, besides the Department of the Premier and Cabinet—the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, the Office of the Auditor General, Western Australia Police Force, the Department of Justice, the Department of Transport and the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. Over the period of the pandemic, 31 staff members from 11 agencies have served in the unit or its predecessor, the complex task team for remote Aboriginal communities. The unit has no operational budget but administers the \$3.1 million remote Aboriginal communities COVID-19 emergency relief fund.

Last week, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and I had the pleasure of travelling to the Tjuntjuntjara community, one of the most remote communities probably in the world. It is only 200 kilometres from the South Australian border. Vaccination rates for first injections are quite impressive there. But the biggest concern—we were witness to this, and I have heard it from other communities—is the disgraceful misinformation being peddled by certain evangelical churches. It is appalling that they are putting Aboriginal lives in danger by peddling mistruth and absolutely appalling misinformation. I ask anyone who has influence in those organisations to please request that they stop peddling that misinformation.

The CHAIR: I remind members to quote a page number before they ask a question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister would be aware that I have a large number of Aboriginal communities in my electorate, and also towns that have a high Aboriginal population; for example, Meekatharra, Carnarvon and Wiluna. We often hear about Aboriginal communities but do not hear about towns that probably have a higher Indigenous population than many of those communities. My evidence is that it is not an evangelical group that is preventing people from getting vaccinated, but the inability, or hesitancy, of people to walk into a hospital, or not knowing when they can get a vaccine. That is the issue.

The CHAIR: Is there a question here, member?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Which is the budget item?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am following the member for Jandakot’s question after the minister’s response. Has the department considered having a mobile vaccination clinic travelling around towns and communities, and not just for an hour or two? I will use Meekatharra as an example of a place that has one of the worst vaccination rates in this country. Could the mobile clinic staff stay there for a week and actually knock on doors and get people to be vaccinated? Has the department advocated for something like that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member asks a very important question because it relates to not just remote communities, but also the towns. When I mentioned the evangelical churches, I meant that they are not preventing immunisation, but they are discouraging it. Obviously, they are not physically preventing it—as far as I am aware. With regard to the member’s question, that really does come down to the Department of Health. We now have a Vaccine Commander, Mr Dawson, the Commissioner of Police. They are matters he will work through. I know he is trying to address issues everywhere. One of the main reasons Western Australia’s rates may not be as high as New South Wales is obvious: at the moment, we are COVID-19-free and people are complacent. However, the member raises an important question. I know that more vaccination supplies will come on stream. Members must remember that for a long period we just did not have the supply, so even if we did have the mobile booths, there was no supply. I am sure the matters the member raises are being considered by the Department of Health and, more importantly, by the Vaccine Commander. Minister Dawson did meet with police commissioner Dawson this week.

[9.40 am]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is extremely important because we hear about vaccination targets of 80 per cent or 85 per cent, and generally that is for the whole of Western Australia’s population. My argument is that it should be 80 or 85 per cent—whatever target is set by the Department of Health—for every city and town in Western Australia because the regions are very vulnerable, given the high Aboriginal population, and the number of people who are travelling around and the resource industry. It would be a tinderbox waiting to explode if there was a COVID case in the regions.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Commissioner of Police is the Vaccine Commander; I believe the Minister for Health met him this week, not last week. I do not disagree with what the member is saying. Breakdowns have been done for different regions, so we are aware of them. The Minister for Health did a tour of certain parts of the north a few weeks ago and he said that there are some Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal sections of towns where there are high vaccination rates, and others where the rates are very low. I know the commander and the Department of Health are working on a multipronged attack to try to ensure we can improve vaccination rates for the community as a whole, particularly Aboriginal and vulnerable groups.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the “Service Summary” table on page 60 and the fourth line item, “Government Policy Management Aboriginal Affairs”. Why does the allocation for Aboriginal affairs double between 2020–21 and 2021–22?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The amount for 2019–20 is \$11 million, and then the amount for 2020–21 is nearly double that—is the member asking why it has doubled between 2019–20 and 2020–21?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask the chief financial officer to answer that.

Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis: The amount has increased from 2020–21 to 2021–22 by just under \$12.5 million. The significant increases are predominantly with regard to reclassification of grants that were previously underserved and had been reallocated to the service for Aboriginal affairs. They include significant grant allocations such as to the Browse regional body corporate; land and equity Indigenous land use agreements; the remote communities economic transformation project; the Yamatji Nation ILUA; the Dampier Peninsula project, which is royalties for regions—funded; the resolution of native title in the south west of WA; the Yawuru strategic development, also royalties for regions—funded; Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council, also royalties for regions—funded; the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve compensation settlement package; Plan for Our Parks, which is royalties for regions—funded; exploration incentive grants ILUA; and the south west settlement Noongar Boodja Trust and recurrent carryover for the south west settlement.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is a significant drop-off in the 2022–23 estimates, continuing in 2023–24. What is the reason for that drop-off?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will refer again to the chief financial officer.

Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis: The reduction in expenditure for the out years is predominantly because of reduced expenditure tapering off with regard to the remote communities economic transformation project for Bidjandanga; the remote Aboriginal communities COVID-19 emergency relief, which is royalties for regions—funded and also has a reduction in expenditure in the out years; Closing the Gap, the Aboriginal community—controlled organisation consortium; the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council; and some other minor adjustments that taper off in the out years

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 62 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the first dot point under “Government Policy Management—Whole-of-Government”, which states —

leadership and coordination of cross-agency solutions to complex issues;

That obviously goes into Aboriginal affairs. Is there any aggregation of the total expenditure specifically related to Aboriginal groups and organisations? The reason I ask is that I believe outcomes for Aboriginal people are probably now no better or worse than they were when I was a child. I am not aiming this at the government; I think this applies to both sides of politics. Problems have been identified, new spending initiatives have been identified, and expenditure has been applied. I have not added it up through the budget as an exercise, but a vast sum of money is being allocated. However, like the minister, when I go out and see communities, both close to and distant from large regional centres, I see a level of social disadvantage that is confronting and does not meet anyone's standards. It seems the solution is always to apply more funding. I wonder if there might be a point of reflection, especially given the function of this agency, to step back and look at that aggregate. Obviously, it would have to intimately involve the Aboriginal communities, but is that money being expended well? It seems to me that, at both a state and federal level, we are applying more and more money and are not getting the outcomes we would expect.

The CHAIR: Member, I had a bit of trouble discerning whether that was a question or a rhetorical statement. What would you like the minister to respond to?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is there an intention on the part of the government to step back and look at this holistically, rather than at individual programs, and to do a review of the total expenditure?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member mentioned in his reference, the department provides leadership and coordination of cross-agency solutions to complex issues—very complex issues, as the member would well realise. This is a whole-of-government approach. One of the benefits of having Aboriginal affairs elevated to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is that this department provides leadership and oversight across government. Obviously, part of it is also to try to empower Indigenous groups, and that is a complex and difficult issue. We always try to see that the money is going to be used in a way that will close the gap. One part of the member's question was: are we going to step back? I can assure the member that governments, federal or state, are always reflecting on and looking at ways in which they can do things better, but part of the solution has to be the empowerment and involvement of Aboriginal communities, otherwise it will not succeed in the long run. I am not going to stand here and say that it is an easy issue or that there has been great progress made. There have been wins. The member for North West Central has a lot of involvement with various Aboriginal communities and I am sure he has seen some positives, but there are also a lot of issues as well. All I can really say there, member, is that, yes, at times we have to step back and reflect, and I think that is done constantly, but there really needs to be a whole-of-government approach, which is why it is good that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is leading the approach. The empowerment of Aboriginal groups has to be paramount.

If I can conclude with this. We need to be careful because it is very easy to always look at the negatives, and there are some dire issues, but there are also some positives. I think one of the keys is obviously to try to improve the educational attainment and retention of Aboriginal students. I think that would go a long way.

[9.50 am]

Dr D.J. HONEY: I recognise that, minister. I think the work that, for example, the Leedal do in Fitzroy River is exemplary and a great example of a very successful partnership of prescribed bodies corporate. In relation to seeing how we are going, I note there were broader Closing the Gap metrics that I did not notice in this section—I am happy to stand corrected—but are we tracking any metrics in outcomes so that the government is measured and held to account for the outcomes resulting from these programs?

The CHAIR: Minister—insofar as it relates to this division and service.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes; it is not really related to this section of the budget as such, but it is an important question. A Closing the Gap matrix is used by the commonwealth and the state to measure, but it is not a particular budget item.

Dr D.J. HONEY: To be clear, the metrics the state government is using are the commonwealth Closing the Gap metrics?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask Fiona Hunt to elaborate; Fiona is the deputy director general, Aboriginal engagement and community policy.

Ms F. Hunt: There are 17 socio-economic targets that form part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap that WA has signed up to with all the other states and territories. There is national reporting against those targets that form part of the implementation plan and annual reporting and tracking through, I believe, the Productivity Commission at the commonwealth level, but the state is contributing, through the national agreement, on government structures. The 17 socio-economic targets cover the full range of metrics that are being measured that WA state agencies have agreed to track.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the first paragraph under “Expenses” on page 66 under the financial statements. There is an allocation of \$7 million for various Aboriginal engagements and initiatives. What are those initiatives?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Does the member want to know about the \$7 million for engagement initiatives?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask the chief financial officer.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I can take it as supplementary.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No; we have the answer. I will throw to the director general.

Ms E. Roper: It is \$7 million for Aboriginal engagement initiatives. They are the spending changes that are reflected on page 58 of the budget paper.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The original question was: what are those initiatives? As I said, I am happy to take it as a supplementary.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No; why waste time, member. We might as well give you the answer now. We are here to please. The director general will provide it.

Ms E. Roper: It is funding for the implementation of the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill for this financial year; Closing the Gap Aboriginal community-controlled organisation consortium; financial support for the inaugural Yajilarra dialogues; Mirning part B area Indigenous land use agreement; the National Agreement on Closing the Gap implementation resourcing; Aboriginal cultural centre planning project; the south west native title settlement; coordination of special projects and implementation costs; and the Tjiwarl native title compensation resourcing.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Did the director general mention planning for the Aboriginal cultural centre as one of the initiatives?

Ms E. Roper: Yes.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to grants and subsidies on page 66, where it refers to the Aboriginal cultural centre for which \$2 million is allocated. What is the time line, and is that \$2 million on top of the \$7 million?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is within the \$7 million and the time frame is 2028–29.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” under the income statement on page 67; paragraph (c) says —

Refer to the Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies table below for further information.

I refer then to the line item “Aboriginal Engagement Unit Grants”. What is the reason behind doubling the funds in 2021–22?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Fiona Hunt to answer this question.

Ms F. Hunt: The increase in funds for the 2021–22 budget estimate primarily refers to the Mirning part B Indigenous land use agreement, which is where the \$1.2 million is being held currently, and the 2021–22 funding for the remote Aboriginal communities emergency relief fund. Some funding is for the Yajilarra dialogue. These are some of the things the member will have seen as spending changes held in this account.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The grants are not in the traditional sense of grants that an Aboriginal community or organisation can apply for. It is money already allocated to projects rather than grants for those applying for grants. Is that correct?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Ms Hunt might want to add to what I am going to say, but they go to communities, so it is a grant for communities.

The CHAIR: Any further questions?

The appropriation was recommended.

[10.00 am]