

**Division 27: Indigenous Affairs, \$18 839 000 -**

Ms J.A. Radisich, Chairman.

Mr J.C. Kobelke, Minister for Indigenous Affairs.

Mr R.N. Curry, Director General.

Mr S.B. Stylianou, Assistant Director, Finance and Administration.

Mr T.E. Carleton, Acting Director, Policy and Coordination.

Ms C. Petroboni, Acting Principal Legal Officer.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: I refer the minister to the total under the appropriation and forward estimates on page 441. The department has closed down regional offices and cut back programs. I have looked at the work of some of the other departments and found that the Department of Health looks after Aboriginal health, the Department of Housing and Works looks after Aboriginal housing, the Department of Education and Training looks after Aboriginal education and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet looks after native title. I could keep going through those. There have been some major stuff-ups with the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee in the past year. What is the minister's department in existence for?

[Mr P.W. Andrews took the Chair.]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That is easy to answer. However, I must refute some quite misleading comments. The member referred to stuff-ups with the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee. That is the first I have heard of it. The member might like to ask me some specific questions, because I am not aware that that section has not been working well. There may be complaints from some people, but I am not aware of any complaints of substance. They certainly have not been drawn to my attention. The member also suggested that offices had been closed down. There certainly has been a reprioritisation and a shift of focus. However, in my view, there has been no diminution in the output of the excellent work that is being done by the Department of Indigenous Affairs.

The Department of Indigenous Affairs had refocussed prior to my becoming the minister less than 12 months ago. Those priorities go to its responsibilities for land. The Aboriginal Lands Trust is responsible for about 13 per cent of the area of Western Australia. Clearly, there are land issues for which the department has legal responsibility, as well as all the various programs and policies surrounding that. It also has responsibility for heritage and culture. Again, that is another key area of the department's work. Thirdly - this is perhaps slightly more nebulous - it has a responsibility to help coordinate matters relating to indigenous affairs. As the member alluded to in her question, mainstream agencies such as health and education have specific responsibilities for delivery of service to indigenous people. Housing and works is a key one. Our role is to look to coordination, particularly as the Government has made a major change in the way it is delivering services to indigenous people. It has sought to make sure that government is joined up, and people are not simply being passed from one department to another. That has been a whole-of-government approach in which the Department of Indigenous Affairs has been integrally involved.

I have outlined some of the key initiatives. I am very concerned at the negative connotation of the question. I would be quite keen for the member to ask a follow-up question specific to those matters so that we can refute what appear to be baseless allegations.

[12.30 pm]

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: The final dot point on page 441 refers to indigenous capacity building and governance as emerging strategic policy issues for Governments across Australia. It further states that responding to this trend requires all Governments - I presume that includes the minister's - to consider key policy considerations around the continued ideals of self-determination. Will the minister tell me in what specific way this Government will provide for greater self-determination among Aboriginal communities of this State?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The statement about commitment to a just and fair relationship with indigenous people is fundamental. I do not know whether the member's question is being driven by his understanding of self-determination, which can be a loaded term. For quite some time many indigenous communities have been given self-determination in the sense that they are responsible for the management of a whole range of matters relating to their communities. We are now looking at how best to get those communities to take care of their own needs and to function effectively. A whole range of communities might even be called dysfunctional. There is a belief that somehow or other they can manage themselves and a whole range of basic services that people in my electorate do not have to manage. Somehow it is believed that an Aboriginal community out in the middle of

nowhere can look after its own electricity, sewerage and roads - that is supposed to be self-management and self-determination. We are starting to see models that will set up those communities to fail. The whole issue of governance is crucial to the development of indigenous people. There is no single model. We are very conscious of the failure of governance in many areas. I have alluded to one area where these communities have been set up to manage a range of things that we would not ask people in the member's electorate or in my electorate to manage, and we wonder why it does not work. The structures that have been put in place are deficient in a range of ways. From time to time communities have not had their own organic leadership or people with the potential to make the calls and to run the community. There is an issue of what training we give people. It is a very complex matter, which can go to the economic sustainability of the community. A community cannot be expected to survive if the people do not have employment and a flow of funds etc, and it is often just a lawful approach that does not help develop that necessary self-reliance. It is a very complex issue, it is being dealt with by Governments right around Australia. Because many indigenous communities are in need of good governance, we should be a leading player in the development of that governance. However, it will not be done solely by the industrial relations department or the State Government; it will be done also by indigenous leadership and Governments in other parts of Australia. We are committed to getting improvements in this area. We have accepted that we have a shared responsibility with the Commonwealth. We will be working in partnership with the Commonwealth Government on these matters. We want to make sure that Governments are investing in these communities. That does not mean just investing in new housing and infrastructure; it also means investing in governance so that communities can make those decisions for themselves. As I alluded to earlier, in some areas we may have put too great an obligation on those communities. Perhaps we should be stepping back and saying that a government agency will look after the electricity and sewerage - that is not something those communities should have to look after, but many Aboriginal communities are expected to look after and manage those things themselves.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: The minister has just given a very good talk about why, in his view, self-determination has not worked in many respects, but the budget papers refer to key policy considerations around the continued ideals of self-determination. Will the minister give me a couple of specific examples of what this Government will do to enhance self-determination in any individual Aboriginal communities, or generally?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I will ask the director general to give some details.

Mr CURRY: There are any number of examples, but I will pick a couple in particular. The minister has referred to the current situation at Balgo, where a significant problem has been in the making for many years; it is not just a recent development. The agreement we are striking with the indigenous community in Balgo is to look at how the provision of municipal services can be dealt with more adequately. That will require the involvement of the Shire of Halls Creek, which we have. It will require the local Aboriginal community to demonstrate that it has the capacity and the willingness to participate in a process of planning for the requirement of municipal services and, most importantly, it will require them to be able to provide plant and equipment that is currently within Aboriginal communities, which they claim they have some ownership of, in a regional pool. These are big decisions for these communities to make. The determination that is required is that we cannot force those communities to be part of that process. They have to determine for themselves how they will do that and on what terms they will enter into such an agreement. We are currently progressing with the Shire of Halls Creek, and will have completed within the next three months a model for how municipal services can work. During those three months there will be extensive negotiations and consultations with the community, and at the end those communities will have to make a decision about how they will participate. Clearly, one spin-off is that they will be required to employ Aboriginal people in that program of municipal works.

The other example is the community action groups that operate in the south west and in the wheatbelt of the State. Community action groups in Nyoongah country are designed to deal with some of the fractious relationships that exist between families and are always problematic in any government agency's dealings with Nyoongah communities. Over the past three years a model has been developed that will enable the families themselves to nominate a family representative who will participate in the so-called community action groups, or CAGs as we refer to them, and who will have an equal voting right. It removes the dominance of large families from that decision-making process and establishes a democratic process for families to discuss issues that are put before them and to come back predominantly to the local government sphere on issues. Those families themselves have to determine how they will construct those community groups, how they will participate and particularly how they will present views and decisions to government on which we can act.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: What sorts of issues are we talking about? Will the minister give me some specific examples?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I will ask the director general to respond in a moment, but I will refer to the key issue. The dot point referred to by the member concerns the continued ideals of self-determination. We are saying that

those communities, like most communities, need to have a say in basic governance issues. We do it in other areas, through community groups, associations and local government etc. These communities have a very special set of needs, and their powers of decision making will be different. We are very conscious that there have been failures in that governance. The issue then is how those communities are restructured so we get the benefits on the ground but always with the ideal that the local communities can govern their own affairs and look after themselves. We should support them to do that. When we see communities failing and facing major problems, the issue is not simply how to build governance; there may be a structural issue involved, in that we are asking them to do too much. What do we really mean by greater self-determination? It can be a coloured term on which people have their own views. The system is undergoing change as people look at what is happening in communities, what they need and, when there is a failure, what to provide. They need to be fully engaged and consulted. That may mean that some things they currently do are better done by other agencies, whether they be government or non-government. Ideally it will not be something that is imposed on them but one that allows them a clear role to determine what they do or do not do and ensures that the structures are available for managing the areas for which they are responsible. The arena is changing. It is a very exciting time.

[12.40 am]

Mr CURRY: I take it the question is about examples of how an obligation by Aboriginal communities is discharged through their participation in that process.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: Self-determination and greater self-governance is self-explanatory. I am trying to get examples of when the Aboriginal community should engage in a greater degree of self-determination. If there are specific examples in which Aboriginal communities can make decisions about matters that would usually be dealt with by local authorities or government agencies, I am interested to know what they are.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The member is not involved in this area in a major way, so I will explain that major changes are occurring in this area. The old catch-cry of self-governance and self-determination meant that communities were established with a very idealistic view that they could look after themselves in a range of ways that we now know, in retrospect, was asking them to do too much. We are not talking about providing greater levels of self-determination in an idealistic way. We are taking a far more pragmatic approach and saying that many of these communities have experienced a real lack of success in managing their own affairs and being self-determining. We will pull back on that in some areas. An extreme example is what happened recently in the Pitlands in South Australia. Two years ago, that community was established independently. However, because of the glue sniffing and health issues, the Government has taken control again and put Bob Collins in charge.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: You keep giving me examples of why it does not work, which makes me wonder why this policy is mentioned in the budget papers. Surely this policy should say that it is to consider key policy considerations around the new ideal of moving away from self-determination. All I am after is examples of areas in which the Government is heading down the path of self-determination.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That is exactly what I am trying to explain, and how to make sense of what the reference in the budget papers is trying to convey. The issue is the old ideal of self-determination was not carried through with the practical support and structures that enabled people to have an effective level of self-determination. The issue then is to look at totally new models of how we can work cooperatively with the Commonwealth and the local community. However, we must be absolutely clear that the ideal of self-determination must be embedded in that. As we look to enhancing these communities with new structures and programs to improve governance, we are seeking to make sure that, at some time in the future, these communities will be able far more effectively to govern a range of matters that relate to them. There is clear recognition in this that the way they are currently structured and inadequately supported does not give them effective self-governance.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: You were going to give me an example through the chief adviser of specific cases.

Mr CURRY: There is nothing we can do in the field of Aboriginal affairs that excludes participation by and determination of the wishes of Aboriginal people. If that is what we call self-determination, that is basically what this is about. The structures we are establishing - the thrust of this department - is to build partnerships with the indigenous community and key stakeholder agencies. We have moved right away from the notion of locally based services to deal with individual needs. They are picked up by mainstream agencies. The example I gave in the south west, which is closest to home for all of us here, is the relationships that exist between the many Aboriginal families in that area that are highly problematic. The communities often present a view that they cannot agree among themselves and that it causes problems. We must say to those communities that they themselves must determine how to resolve their problems. We cannot tell the families how to resolve them.

Many of the matters that lead to feuding and disagreements are historically based; they go back many generations. However, we can propose a structure and say that if we support a structure at a local level, such as community action groups, we will provide a means for those Aboriginal people to determine those matters themselves and we will participate fully with them as an equal partner in the partnership arrangements.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: Can you give me specific examples of the matters?

Mr CURRY: There are any number. Family support is one example. Aboriginal people are criticised for not looking after their own children as well as they should do. State and commonwealth departments provide services for those families. Unless there is engagement with the Aboriginal community about how they take responsibility and they themselves determine how they participate in supporting their own families and improving outcomes for kids and families, we will get nowhere. Housing is another example. Aboriginal people are criticised for not looking after public housing well. How do they decide how they will be a partner in addressing that problem? There are any number of examples in which Aboriginal people are criticised. The major criticism is that they themselves cannot resolve their own difficulties. We must allow them to be a partner and to bring their solutions and expertise to the table to make those resolutions. The practice of government agencies feeling as though they have the solution to these matters and can somehow determine the outcome has gone. The structures and operations of this department are established to build those partnerships and to determine the best way to resolve issues and the best way that the Aboriginal participants can take responsibility in that process.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The last point the director general made was that part of this picture places the emphasis back onto the responsibility of indigenous people. We need to give them the means by which they can make decisions. They must accept responsibility, and we will work in partnership with them.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: The first major achievement for 2003-04 on page 444 refers to facilitated partnerships between government agencies and indigenous stakeholders to implement the Government's response to the Gordon inquiry. It relates to the department's role. The Government has failed to meet many of its commitments in 2003-04 outlined in its response to the Gordon inquiry. The three remote police facilities have not been completed. Only a third of the money to expand and refurbish the child protection unit at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children has been spent. The expansion of the sexual assault services and relocation of the sexual assault referral centre will not be completed until May 2005. Only a fifth of the money has been spent on the expansion of the community-based programs and community supervision agreements to enhance the management of violent offenders. Only \$108 000 of the provision of an additional \$300 000 has been spent to extend victim support services to adults and children in Aboriginal communities. Only 12 of the promised 14 Aboriginal support workers have been employed. What is the department doing to ensure that the Government's recommendations and its commitments to the Gordon inquiry are implemented? Women and children are being let down.

[12.50 pm]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The Gordon inquiry and our response to it has created a sea change in our relationship with indigenous communities and the attitude of Government to child abuse. It has been swept under the carpet for too long. Following the Gordon inquiry, the Government committed a substantial amount of money and a huge effort to make sure government agencies work together. The role of DIA is not to be the accountable department for those programs. Its role is to work with the agencies to try to facilitate matters and to coordinate and in particular link to indigenous communities. We have been very much involved in putting together those area plans so that indigenous communities are engaged in the programs. On the whole I think they are going quite well. In some areas there has been slippage and things have not moved as quickly as they could. There is a mix of reasons for that. One would have to question particular agencies, such as the Police Service on how quickly it can get police stations up. However, the delay is not always a matter of agencies doing better; sometimes the delay is caused because if the whole approach is to work with the community to eliminate or see a huge reduction in child abuse, we must engage the community. We must find the right people to put into the jobs who can work with the community. It is not simply a matter of posting a cheque, although a lot of money is involved, but working with the community and engaging it so that it understands. I have spoken to only a small percentage of all the communities across Western Australia, but I have had very positive feedback from indigenous people who have said that they really appreciate the fact that the Government is willing to play an active role and to make sure that things change. We have that very positive response at the local level. We must make sure that local people become part of the process that is put in place. That sometimes takes longer than we would hope. However, if all that preliminary planning is done, it is much more certain that the process will work, rather than simply lobbying it on to people and telling them that they have extra money. Unfortunately, the State has a record of decades when that has been done and it has simply been a waste of effort. We are very much committed to making sure that we get positive results from the implementation of the Gordon report. To be totally frank, there are probably some areas and departments in which we could have pushed harder or others could have pushed

harder, but in other areas proper planning and consultation has meant that we could not commit the money until those preliminary stages were properly advanced.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Page 442 refers to reviewing the arrangement the Government has had in place for the delivery of services with the elected arm of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Given that Prime Minister Howard has now plagiarised Mr Mark Latham's policy on ATSIC and has adopted the Labor position of replacing that organisation with a better organisation, does the minister see any disturbance to the delivery of services to our indigenous brethren in Western Australia? I imagine that as Mr Mark Latham has been leading this policy, the minister would be prepared for it, but now that Mr Howard has come on board, does the minister see any disruption of services to our indigenous brethren in Western Australia?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The issue of disruption is very real and causes me great concern. I have a different view from that expressed in part of the question. I do not see the Howard Government following through on the recommendation of the leader of the federal Opposition. I believe there is a major difference.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: In what sense?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I am about to explain that. The issue is that the Commonwealth had instigated a review of ATSIC. Tensions obviously existed between the Government and ATSIC and a fair bit of public exposure of issues relating to the national leadership of ATSIC caused disquiet. It became a media target. That overlooked the fact that at the regional level ATSIC is doing very good work. Many dedicated people are working very hard delivering to local communities and working very cooperatively with State and Commonwealth Governments. Those partnership were being built and showed great promise at the regional level.

Mark Latham proposed scrapping ATSIC and putting in place an alternative representative body. The Howard Government has scrapped ATSIC and made no commitment to a representative indigenous body. Regional councils have been given 12 months life. We are uncertain what will happen after that. As a result of scrapping ATSIC \$270 million a year that currently comes to Western Australian services through ATSIC will, under the Howard Government proposal, go to mainstream departments. That goes to the concern that the member has raised and which I share. The community development program is a major support to communities through job creation programs. That now goes to the federal Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, which administers a whole range of other programs. I am fearful that the money will get lost in the bigger budget.

Although the federal Government is guaranteeing that money will flow through to indigenous people, it may be through a far less responsive apparatus. The inflexibility and rigidity of how the money will flow could mean real problems for indigenous people, particularly in remote communities. Therefore, I have real concerns that the structure that the federal Government is putting in place does not have a long-term horizon. It will last for only one more year. The federal Government must then think of something on the run. The transition from 1 July, which will result in that funding going through mainstream agencies, will be open to a whole range of problems. They will not simply be administrative and planning problems; they will mean that indigenous people in a number of communities will simply go without and suffer the consequences. Many of the communities are quite marginal because of the support they receive and their ability to survive and function. If that money is held up as a result of the new bureaucratic structure, those people could be left without electricity and water. There could be major catastrophes if it is not handled well.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: The sun might not rise tomorrow. I think the minister is overplaying it a little.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I am not. I have visited some of the communities.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: We all have.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Some of them are currently on the brink.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: ATSIC should be absolutely condemned for the lack of work it put in place.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That is a political target, but the fact is that ATSIC at the regional level has been very productive. It has been engaged in trying to make sure that we do the right thing, that indigenous people are heard and that we have programs that will work. The Commonwealth Government said that would have only a 12-month life. We must work through what will replace ATSIC. In principle I do not have a problem with mainstreaming. However, this seems to have been done without detailed work being carried out for what is to be put in place to make sure that the transition flows smoothly. Although I do not wish to sound alarmist, there is a basis for being generally concerned. If there is inflexibility of support through mainstreaming, disasters could crop up. That is a real worry.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The minister mentioned the Department of Education and Training.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: No, I mentioned the federal Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Is there any strict quarantining of the moneys? Has any legislation been introduced to that effect?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The Commonwealth Government has given us a guarantee although it is not a legislative guarantee. I do not call it into question and I accept that there is no withdrawal of the total funds from indigenous programs. I have touched on the fact that when a major change is made things can go wrong. Because a number of these communities are on the edge, if things go wrong the consequences could be quite dire. The second potential real negative is that we have been involved with the Commonwealth and the ATSIC structure through regional councils in putting in place a whole new way of doing business. That really offers prospects of better outcomes for indigenous people. That is now put on the shelf because there is no guarantee of what the future organisation will be to represent indigenous people. The one thing that is certain is that if the Commonwealth and the State dictate how these programs will work for indigenous people, they will fail. One of the key links is the involvement of indigenous people. Although ATSIC clearly had major problems, it provided a structure through which we could work, and in a number of areas work very effectively. However, that has been done away with, and we now trying to cobble together what will be the replacement organisation. We had hoped that the Commonwealth would have entered into discussions about what the alternative structure would be with a much longer lead time so that we could get that in place before the existing structure was done away with.

[1.00 pm]

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: I refer to page 445 and the sixth dot point under major initiatives for 2004-05, which states -

Negotiate service agreements for Aboriginal Patrols to improve accountability and governance requirements and the effectiveness of services provided by patrols to Indigenous people.

I refer also to page 447 and the fifth dot point under major achievements for 2004-04, which states -

Reviewed the operations of all 21 Aboriginal Patrols with the aim of moving to contractual service agreements and improved funding levels to assist Indigenous people to address law and order issues.

Can the minister give an indication of the problems that have been experienced in this area, and is the minister prepared to provide a copy of the review document?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: We are happy to provide a copy of the review. I do know whether that should be provided as supplementary information. I give the member an undertaking that we will provide him with a copy of the review.

The CHAIRMAN: Will that be as supplementary information?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I do not think that would be appropriate, because it would then be incorporated. I am not sure how bulky it is. I give a personal undertaking to provide the member with a copy of the review.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: I am happy with that. Can the minister give an indication now of the problems that were experienced with the patrols?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: On the whole, the Aboriginal patrols have been very effective organisations. In some areas from time to time they have not performed, so there is an ongoing issue of monitoring them and assisting them, and there may be times when we withdraw support to a particular patrol because it is not working. However, the concept as a whole has worked well. An additional \$100 000 has been allocated in the budget to assist with the reorganisation of the Aboriginal patrols, so in no way are we withdrawing funds. Another issue is that because it is a grant, each individual patrol sets its own rules and is given a grant to do in a general sense what is required. We are seeking to give the patrols more support so that they can do a better job and better integrate with the range of other services that are available, rather than leave them to be independent and run their own race in the way in which they handle the complexity of matters with which they are dealing. We want to give them more resources so that the members of the patrols can upgrade their skills and better integrate with what the police and the Department for Community Development are doing. That is the thrust of what we are seeking to do. The director general may wish to give more specific details.

Mr CURRY: I think that covers it in a nutshell. One of the things that needs to be highlighted is that the report indicates that the patrols need more administrative support to assist them. Members need to understand that these are just ordinary folk off the street. They do not receive training. They volunteer their time. They are paid under the community development employment program. There is no payment other than that, so they are basically doing it just for the dole. Some of them do it voluntarily, without any payment whatsoever. The program is highly effective in providing an intervention point between people who, in the main, have committed offences against good order and the police. It is at minimal cost. It is a program to which Aboriginal people will respond, because they are dealing with Aboriginal people and not police officers. The key issues are the need for

improved training, the provision of administrative support, and, as the minister said, the need to integrate the patrols with other services.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: I refer to page 444 and the fifth dot point, which states -

Coordinated risk management strategies for the Swan Valley Nyungah Community in Perth and the Balgo Community in the East Kimberley.

Can the minister elaborate on the coordinated risk management strategies for those communities? Given that the Swan Valley Nyungah camp has now been closed, how are these strategies being implemented? Is there follow-up for the women and children from that camp? What is being done about the other indigenous communities around the State in which similar problems exist?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Again, I will call on the director general to expand, but I will make some preliminary comments. As indicated in the question, the key issues at the Swan Valley Nyungah Community have been dealt with. The feedback that I have received is that the outcomes for the women and children have been very positive. That is being handled by other agencies. We are not involved in that. We have a coordination role but other agencies, such as the Department of Housing and Works and Department for Community Development, are providing that support. The issue for us is the future planning of that area and turning it into an environmental heritage park.

The Balgo community has a complex set of problems that have led to major issues with young people, such as glue sniffing and suicide. The Government has made a huge response to those issues by providing additional resources and officers. The Department of Indigenous Affairs is not a service provider in those areas but it is playing a key role in coordination. It is also part of the Tjurabalan area, which is a Council of Australian Governments trial with the Commonwealth Government, so the Commonwealth Government is also taking a special interest in the area. In Balgo the Commonwealth has paid for the paving of all the roads. I had not been to Balgo before the paving was put in, but I am told that has had a major effect in improving the general amenity of the area and reducing the level of dust. That is an area in which the Commonwealth and the State are committed to working together very closely. However, there are also particular problems and some quite adverse health issues that need to be dealt with. Perhaps the director general can be more specific about the risk management strategies.

[1.10 pm]

Mr CURRY: As the member would be aware, the risk management strategy is a formalised process that government agencies are now being encouraged to pursue to ensure that the overall picture of risk for government is identified. We have used the Swan Valley Nyungah Community and Balgo as the two primary communities in which we have adopted a risk management strategy. We have found, certainly with Balgo, that that approach has been very much welcomed by the community, because it has been able to participate in the process of identifying the major concerns and ensuring that those concerns are registered with government. In the Swan Valley Nyungah Community the risk management strategy was conducted after the closure of the site. It was primarily about the risk of having a vacant site at that location. It has enabled us to look at particularly the cost of security. The security risk at the Swan Valley Nyungah Community was very high following the closure of the camp, and on the recommendation of the police a security firm was employed to provide 24-hour-a-day coverage of the site. The risk management strategy has enabled us to now reduce the level of security, because we believe the risk has considerably diminished, and there have been significant cost savings as a result of doing that.

There are approximately 280 other Aboriginal communities around the State. About 20 of those communities have populations of over a couple of hundred people. About 60 of them have somewhere between 100 and 200 people. The other 200 communities have fewer than 100 people. The problem that we have always had with the provision of government services in those communities is how far we can spread services. One of the things that we are doing is trying to determine to what extent services need to be maintained. It is not possible for us to maintain what we might call town-based services to every Aboriginal community that has been established around the State. Many of those communities were established under the out-station movement, which was supported by the federal Government via ATSIC. To a large extent, there is a question about the viability of those communities in the long term. Risk management in how we support communities is absolutely critical. Whether they are large or small, there are women, children and old people in those communities and we must ensure that we discharge our responsibilities to them.

There are four communities in and around the Perth area - Gngangara, Cullacabardee, Saunders Street and the Swan Valley site. The Government has, in cooperation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, taken the view that although it has closed the Swan Valley community for reasons primarily relating to the protection of the women and children at that site, the other communities are functioning, but a lot

of work needs to be done on their future. That is not to say that they will close, but work needs to be done on how better support can be provided to those communities in the long term. All the families who were at the Swan Valley community have been closely monitored by the Department for Community Development. I am sure it will provide details on them. As recently as last week I had discussions with the director general, who indicated to me that the outcomes for the families who are receiving support from DCD were positive. A couple of families - primarily the core Bropho family - have chosen not to receive support. They have proved some difficulty for us in relation to their whereabouts. Although they are being monitored, and DCD is aware of them from time to time, they come in and out of the Saunders Street site and we are unsure of their exact wishes for the future. The essential component is that those families who were on the site are being monitored. So far the outcomes have been very positive. We are looking at the long-term needs of the four metropolitan communities, as well as at our risks as a Government in supporting in an appropriate manner the broader range of communities across the State.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: The director general often referred to the risk to government as part of the coordinated risk management strategies. We are not really talking about the risk to government; we are talking about the risk to the women and children in the other communities in which it will not be possible to provide town-based services. That is recognised. However, I am very conscious of the fact that there are women and children - the director general also mentioned elderly people - in those communities who are at risk. What will the department do to ensure that, if town-based services cannot be provided, the risk to those families is minimised?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That is clearly what we are seeking to do. We are facing up to those needs in a more realistic way. We are not the only Government in Australia that is doing that. I am not saying that it is a claim to fame for us, but there is a new realisation that we must move on and that new ways must be found. Risk management is just another tool to assess what is happening. I note that, in answering an earlier question, we did not respond to the query about how we will measure services if we go to new models of delivering services. There is now agreement with the Commonwealth and across Australia that we will look to benchmarking the outcomes in these communities. That whole program is starting to roll out. At the last ministerial council, a telephone address was given by Dr Fiona Stanley on the work she is doing that contributes to part of that program. It is really looking at a new approach. It is difficult to go into all the detail in the time we have here. Risk management, which we have just spoken about, is one of the tools involved in that new approach. The risk is not a financial risk to the Government; it is total risk management to ensure that we get better outcomes for people and realise where the real risks are so that, when we prioritise our response, we respond in the areas that we need to respond in.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: I refer to the capital works contribution table at the bottom of page 449. I note that the amount for funding included in output appropriations is \$550 000 for both 2004-05 and 2005-06. A little further up the page, under new works, is an amount of \$550 000 for the Aboriginal Lands Trust infrastructure repairs and maintenance program in 2004-05. Can the minister explain why that amount does not carry through into the forward estimates? Essentially, what is it for?

Mr STYLIANOU: The \$550 000 for the ALT infrastructure repairs and maintenance program is part of a capital works program that the department was successful in obtaining about two and a half years ago. An amount of \$1.1 million has been allocated over two years for 2004-05 and 2005-06. The nature of the capital works is non-recurrent, and that is why it does not carry over into the forward estimates. That program will be evaluated at the end of 2004-05. There will be perhaps another submission to the Government to consider the funding we would need to continue that program. Again, that would also be a capital works component.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: What are some of the major items that have been or are being funded under that program?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: As I indicated in response to an earlier question, the Aboriginal Lands Trust is responsible for about 13 per cent of the State. Clearly, in being responsible for that land, a range of matters incur costs. The level of capital input has been fairly minimal, so this additional money will go towards the prioritised needs. There may be a need for fencing in some areas. The money may be needed for the management of the property or it may simply be to meet a responsibility for the land to be fenced. There may be structures or housing on some ALT properties, and therefore there may be a need for renovations or repairs. There are myriad costs and the demand is huge. Recently we looked at some figures for weed eradication. For example, if there were a weed eradication program in a farming or pastoral area and we were part of that program and the private landowners were required to be a part of it, as the public landowner we would have to be engaged in it as well. All those sorts of costs must be met.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: Can the minister provide by way of supplementary information a breakdown of what has been spent under that program?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: This is for the coming year.



Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: I thought the allocation was made two and a half years ago.

Mr STYLIANOU: The allocation was made two and a half years ago for the 2004-05 and 2005-06 years.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: It is only just starting now.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It will start from 1 July.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: I refer to the output performance measures on page 444, and in particular the measures under the heading "Quantity". Obviously a large number of projects were put in place last year and the year before. There is a large discrepancy between the 2003-04 budget and the 2003-04 estimate. Can the minister elaborate on the reasons for that and the changes for the forthcoming year?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Again, this matter relates to the structural change to the way in which the department is working, and not to a reduction in effort. That is noted next to the entry. We have absorbed a number of initiatives into partnerships, resulting in fewer but larger outputs. If we go to a regional basis, instead of dealing with 10 communities we would deal with 10 communities, but through one organisation. The actual number of projects will drop, but the same resources will still go into them. I do not know whether the director general would like to clarify that.

[1.20 pm]

Mr CURRY: Following the machinery of government review in 2001, the department negotiated with the Auditor General on how we would present our outputs. In fairness to and in good faith with the Auditor General, we determined to keep the same outputs. Because the department was to undergo a significant transition from a locally based service to a regional model of service delivery and to become a more strategic organisation influencing the business of government, the outputs, to have any meaning, needed to tell a story about what had happened over that time. That story is exactly as the minister has just stated. In the previous years we had very high-level counts of activity. For example, in a partnership with a range of agencies involved in an activity, the previous arrangement would have been to count all of the engagements with all of the agencies. We now count only the single activity; in other words, the partnership and the outcome to which it is being directed. Those figures actually present the trend.

The member would obviously have noted in the figures that the unit cost for the organisation is higher. Although our unit costing is an average, it reflects that we have a range of partnerships. Some are low cost - it might be only \$5 000 to \$10 000 for overheads and staff time - and others are major activities. Perhaps a good example is the Council of Australian Governments trial in the east Kimberley, which may cost us up to \$300 000. That is the explanation of the outputs, reflecting the change in the nature of the activity. We will be negotiating with the Auditor General, and have done, for a change in our output measures to now reflect the change in the business of the organisation.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: I refer to the third dot point of major achievements on page 447, which is a note about the provision of advice on housing and infrastructure development. I suppose my question is in two parts. First, what specifically is the department doing about policy matters to do with the provision of housing for indigenous people? My other question is: generally speaking, on what other areas does the department provide information about the activities of other portfolios? For example, does the Department of Education and Training have much of a say on education policy in the State?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: This relates to our coordination role. The Department of Indigenous Affairs coordinates interagency safe and healthy community forums, addressing systematic policy issues and improving across-government coordination. These include the Aboriginal community's essential services steering committee, which the department chairs; the environmental health needs coordinating committee, for which the department provides the secretariat; the intergovernmental working group on environmental health, which the department chairs and has the secretariat; and the state emergency mitigation strategy for Aboriginal communities. There are various structures, and we have a key role in providing assistance. We are not involved in the specific provision of housing. There is a range of committees and programs that bring government together, and we are a player in that. That is the point that is picked up in that dot point.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: The minister's department provides policy advice in this area.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It is more of a coordination role. There may be some policy advice. If housing is to go into an area, for instance, planning must be involved. We do not want the planning people going out to consult, next week the housing people going out to consult and the next week the people from community development going out to consult, all about the same issue. DIA might organise for them all to go there at the same time, or put together a consultation structure to work with that community. The department has a coordinating role to make sure that the agencies do not go backwards and forwards to that community over and again, talking about the same issues from the perspective of the different agencies.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: I refer the minister again to the number of full-time equivalents under the output performance measures on page 444. The number of FTEs is six below the number budgeted and five below the actual for 2002-03. What are the reasons for that? Can the minister give me a breakdown of the FTEs? How many indigenous public servants are there within that number of FTEs, how many indigenous people are above level 6, and what is the gender balance?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The reduction in the number of FTEs is a consequence of the restructuring. Whereas before we had offices with one staff member within a range of communities trying to deliver services, as the director general mentioned earlier, we have gone to a much more strategic approach and coordination. That has been going on for three years, roughly. Although an office might have been closed down, and it might have been decided that there would be a reduction in the number of places, a person might not have been redeployed. It takes some time to flow through. That is why there is a reduction this year.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: Has the department given up its FTEs or is it still maintaining the positions of the FTEs and just keeping them vacant?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The director general will answer that.

Mr CURRY: The approach with this organisation now is that we are far less interested in maintaining what might be called a government structure on paper. Because of the nature of our business and our operations at a local level, we are now determining what is the business we are involved in. We will then make a determination of how we will construct ourselves as an organisation to respond to that. For example, when we have been clear on the business, we have been quite prepared to make available to local government either dollars from the salary budget or outpost officers to work at a local level to deal with these matters. To answer the question, we would prefer to say that our salary budget is a fluid budget.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: The department is keeping its FTEs and using them in whatever way it sees fit.

Mr CURRY: No. We have had a reduction in FTEs of 15 over that time. We are down from 140 to about 125 or 126.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: Your FTE allocation is 126.

Mr CURRY: The establishment of the organisation is 127 FTEs.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: How many indigenous public servants are there, what is the gender balance, and how many indigenous people are in positions above level 6?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: If we are clear about the questions the member is asking, we can certainly provide that information.

Mrs C.L. EDWARDES: Will the minister provide, by way of supplementary information, the number of FTEs who are indigenous people, the number of indigenous people who are on level 6 and above, and the gender balance?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That can be provided by way of supplementary information.

*[Supplementary Information No B41.]*

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: Mr Chairman, this is a very unusual question, so give me a lot of leeway. I forgot to ask a very brief follow-up question about the consumer affairs portfolio. The minister gave some fuel pricing figures. I do not want those figures to be provided as supplementary information, but will the minister provide those figures informally at some stage?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I will do that.

The CHAIRMAN: That will have to be done outside the committee.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Committee adjourned at 1.29 pm*