

Division 30: Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, \$2 002 000 -

Mr Edwards, Chairman.

Mr McGinty, Attorney General.

Ms M.E. Rayner, Acting Commissioner for Equal Opportunity.

Mr E. West, Manager Corporate Services, Equal Opportunity Commission.

Mr D. Cloghan, Chief of Staff, Office of the Attorney General.

The CHAIRMAN: I will take questions as they are asked. If there are further questions to be asked, they will not be considered supplementary questions, but questions in their own right.

Ms QUIRK: I refer the Attorney General to the first dot point under significant issues and trends on page 534 of the *Budget Statements*. Will the minister outline what the proposed strategy is for community education following the Acts Amendment (Lesbian and Gay Law Reform) Bill?

Mr McGINTY: Although the acting commissioner has been on the job for only four weeks, I am happy for her to answer the question.

Ms RAYNER: I have convened a meeting of heads of government agencies to discuss how to ensure government agencies comply with the new legislative requirements through, for example, the use of forms, in documents and internal training and recruitment practices. The first meeting will be held on Friday. I have asked the head of my education and training unit to come up with a plan for the education of the community in the next few months in preparation for the proclamation of the amendments. I cannot give the member any more details than that. I have been on the job for four weeks and I trust that in the next two or three weeks I will be able to provide some more structured information on that matter.

Mr BARRON-SULLIVAN: I also refer to the first dot point, which touches on the education program. Part of the commissioner's job will be to advise employers of their responsibilities as a result of the new legislation. I wonder whether the minister can explain how the Government will deal with organisations that will need to be handled with a degree of sensitivity; I refer in particular to religious organisations. How will they be educated about their employment responsibilities under the legislation?

Ms RAYNER: I propose to invite religious organisations to a meeting in the near future to discuss the exemptions under the Act to which they are entitled as well as the overall scheme and underlying policy of the Act so that there are no misunderstandings about its scope and the exemptions.

Mr BARRON-SULLIVAN: Will the acting commissioner take a proactive role in telling the organisations about the exemptions provided for under the Act?

Ms RAYNER: That is right.

Ms SUE WALKER: I refer to the same dot point under significant issues and trends. Has a costing been done for the community education strategy, or is there a provision in the budget for this? If so, what is it? Is the Attorney General contemplating employing new staff for that purpose?

Ms RAYNER: There are no additional resources for the coordination of education services associated with the new ground. We have reallocated resources within the commission, which has meant reprioritising some of the work that has been done by officers. I am sure we will be able to meet our obligations to inform the public in this regard.

[9.10 am]

Mr McGINTY: Page 537 of the *Budget Statements* under output performance measures is a line item for the provision of reviews and advice. There was an increase of 1 000 pieces of advice tendered by the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity. That related overwhelmingly to the passage of the gay and lesbian law reform Bill, and to the correspondence and the entering into of those types of matters. This was carried out under the Equal Opportunity Commission's existing resources. It is intended that the matter to which the member for Nedlands referred, the community education issue, will also be carried out within the existing resources.

Mr O'GORMAN: I refer the minister to the key effectiveness indicators on page 536 of the *Budget Statements*. The target for the community awareness of the Act and its benefit was 81 per cent, and that has been achieved. How was this measured? Have any strategies been put in place to improve next year's figure?

Ms RAYNER: I will have to take that question on notice if the member wants a detailed answer. It is my understanding that this was carried out by way of a random questionnaire directed towards those who use the commission's services. If the member wishes, I can provide a copy of the questionnaire. It has been used as a standard measure for some years.

Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Jim McGinty; Mr Dan Barron-Sullivan; Ms Sue Walker; Mr Tony O'Gorman

Mr McGINTY: I agree to provide information detailing how community awareness of the Act and the belief that it is of benefit has been ascertained, by way of supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No B16]

Ms SUE WALKER: I again refer the minister to dot point one under significant issues and trends on page 534 of the *Budget Statements*. What matters have been deemed a low priority by the Equal Opportunity Commission as a result of the implementation of the community education strategy, bearing in mind that informing employers, employee service providers and individuals will take up a fair amount of the commission's time? Has there been an analysis of the timeframe in which the education strategy is to be fulfilled? What human resources will be required? What matters have been put down the list in order to accommodate the strategy?

Ms RAYNER: There has not been a re-allocation of priorities in the community education program. The community education program has been targeted significantly towards employers and employer groups, and covers all grounds of discrimination. It is not intended to change the way in which these services are provided. The program to inform the public about the new ground can take place side by side with the delivery of other training programs, because the two are not related. At the moment I cannot provide the member with a detailed program, but I hope to have one in the next three weeks. As I have already explained, this is a new ground. It is hoped that the information program will be fully rolled out within the next four to five months.

The appropriation was recommended.