

Division 64: Local Government and Communities — Service 6, Promotion and Support of Multiculturalism in Western Australia, \$4 523 000 —

Mr P. Abetz, Chairman.

Dr M.D. Nahan, Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests.

Ms M. Dawkins, Acting Executive Director, Office of Multicultural Interests.

Mrs N. Cheung, Policy Adviser, Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Girrawheen has the call.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the fifth point on page 778. How many full-time equivalents are currently in the Office of Multicultural Interests, and will the minister give an undertaking that there will not be any redundancies and that that is a static number? Will the minister quarantine that number?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: We have 19 direct and seven corporate services in OMI. We will undertake a strategic plan for OMI and look to undertake a change in focus, and leave it at that.

[7.40 pm]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What is that change of focus?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: We are working on that now. OMI will increasingly focus on grants and building the capacity of ethnic communities. That focus may or may not change; that has not been resolved. There have been no changes in this budget to OMI in terms of FTEs and other issues, but we reserve the right to respond to the change in the strategic plan that is underway now. The current strategic plan comes due at the end of this year and that is being looked at now.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister says that he will increasingly focus on grants and capacity building. Implicit in that statement is that the office will move away from other areas. What are the areas the office is moving away from?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: The office will work through that in the strategic plan and it will be a public process. The office will talk with the affected communities, and it has just begun that process. I do not want to prevent that by saying which existing areas we will exit from and which areas we will not. My view is that even though OMI has a vibrant grants program and a number of major grants, the amount of funds and resources of the grant section are subject to vetting, identifying, and promoting grants, and that is a very small part of the operation of OMI's office. That will be expanded. Part of that expansion will focus on capacity building of ethnic communities and part of it will communicate better with the various ethnic communities on how to get grants and how to build capacity. They are the areas the office will generally focus on.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Given the abolition of the substantive equality unit in the Attorney General's portfolio, does the minister anticipate that OMI will need to take up the slack, certainly in areas of discriminatory practices and racism as it applies to the delivery of services?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: That has been brought to my attention, and it will be considered in the strategic planning process. I add that it is an important issue.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Prior to the decision to abolish the substantive equality unit, did the minister have discussions with the Attorney General and was he aware that was going to happen?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: No, I did not.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: My question also refers to page 788, specifically the fourth dot point. The diversity statistics on OMI's website do not mention Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander numbers. This was brought to the minister's attention in June in questions without notice, but has still not changed. Will the minister give an update on that?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: The member for Kimberley brought that to my attention and we addressed that—we are in the process of addressing it. I will pass over to the executive director to respond to that.

Ms M. Dawkins: We have committed to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data in future OMI publications as far as it contributes to the multicultural nature of this state, and are making the particular commentary that they will be recognised as the first peoples of Australia in publications, rather than as a group which forms part of our cultural and linguistically diverse community. The office is advised that that is how most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want to be viewed—that is, as the first peoples of Australia, rather

than being part of our culturally and linguistically diverse community. Taking that on advice, the office will and has included that to ensure the recognition of Aboriginal languages in that publication. It will be coming out shortly.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I note that the website version says that it is going to be amended, but that has not occurred yet; is that correct?

Ms M. Dawkins: The office is discussing with the minister whether he is comfortable with the amendments it has made and it is awaiting the final sign-off, and it will be put up then.

Mr M.H. TAYLOR: Will the minister explain what difference the community grants program makes to culturally and linguistically diverse communities in WA?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: It is a very important series of grants, has been around a long time and given to a diverse number of groups. As members know, Western Australia's population is ethnically diverse. Over the past 15 years WA has experienced a dramatic increase in not only the number of migrants coming to Western Australia but also the composition of migrants from different countries. There is also a different skill base among those new migrants. Since the 1990s, many of the migrants to Western Australia have been skilled as opposed to the past when many migrants were refugees. WA also has a large number of refugees facing different issues, including language and trauma, and some from new countries. There is a great deal of diversity. The office tries to give grants for a variety of reasons; one of them was the funding of MADEC Australia, a not-for-profit organisation to deliver employment and training services to migrants to work in rural areas.

The office also gives grants to groups who struggle, because of the lack of capacity in their communities, to put together programs to help them build peak bodies or representative bodies from where they can find work. It is a new issue, particularly for some of the newer African communities, in which there are many people who are struggling at times to build up groups to represent them and also accommodate new migrants from their communities.

The office also gives grants to groups to help celebrate various festivals like the Diwali Festival in the Indian community. It is used to develop capacity building, assist groups acclimatise to Australia, and to become active in the community. It is also used to bring in new migrants and make the culture of new migrants accessible to Australians. There are a whole variety of purposes for the grants. I also add that most of the grants are quite small.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Will the minister explain why there has been a significant cut in community grants from \$1.4 million estimated actual in 2012–13 to \$784 000 in 2013–14?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: When I first looked at that, I was also surprised. The reason is a very large grant for Celebrate WA has been transferred from OMI to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. In previous years the funding for Celebrate WA was in the OMI budget; it is now in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's budget.

Ms M. Dawkins: That is because the minister is the minister responsible for citizenship as well as the minister responsible for multicultural interests, so Celebrate WA is part of the citizenship portfolio.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Which minister is minister for citizenship?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I am.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Why can the minister not do Celebrate WA?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: If I can, I will, but the funding is in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. There has been no change to the amount of funding for Celebrate WA or any other grants.

[7.50 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Why did they move the funding?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Governments work in mysterious ways. I do not know. If the member checks the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, it is there.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the fifth dot point on page 778 and to the language services policy; in particular, the recommendations made in a review of that policy that OMI was to identify resources, create induction processes and increase the number of people who were accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters in new and emerging communities and also for Indigenous languages. What allocation of funds has been given to that role?

Ms M. Dawkins: Did the member mean funding for NAATI for language services?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: No, funding for OMI to carry out these various roles that were identified under the language services policy review.

Ms M. Dawkins: The parts of the language services policy we have reviewed are going to cabinet for decision shortly. I was not aware there were any funding implications. It is probably a question we would need to give the member supplementary information on.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The review that is on the website, which I just looked at, talks about OMI needing to identify resources, conduct induction processes for the public sector and to act so that there is an increase in NAATI accreditation for certain groups. Those three tasks are quite large, and I wonder how OMI will cope with them or whether it will require additional resources.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: There have been some issues with the NAATI accreditation process. I am not sure of the date, but the commonwealth government intended to take over responsibility for that and to fund it. Before that, it was jointly state and commonwealth funded. In a recent budget change, the commonwealth has decided it will not take over the funding. We retained our share of funding for it, but we are yet to get a response from the commonwealth as to whether it will meet its previous share. The commonwealth has told us, contrary to its previous commitment, that it will not take over responsibility for the whole funding. We are waiting to hear from the commonwealth whether it will meet its former share of funding. We have yet to hear from it on this issue. Once we do, depending upon the response, we might have to react and consider a range of issues, including taking over responsibility holus-bolus; that is, if the commonwealth decides to pull out altogether.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: With all due respect, this issue has been around for many years and a recent decision by the commonwealth has less impact than a report on OMI's website that identifies a role for OMI. I am trying to decide how that will be undertaken.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: We are working through it. OMI's budget is the same. There has been no change to funding or FTEs; we have some issues with funding and regulatory arrangements for translators, which we are working through. The commonwealth decided it would change the policy and then walked away from it, and we are trying to find out the commonwealth's position now. We cannot give the member an answer to what the funding impact will be until we know what the commonwealth's position is. Access to translators and accreditation of translators are big issues—the member is right that that is not new—but its dimensions are changing with the growth in demand for certain languages and the decline in demand for others. OMI has been dealing with that for years and will continue to do so.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: As supplementary information, is the minister able to advise how many of the 12 recommendations in the report on the review of the language services policy that was released in November 2011 have been actioned or partially actioned?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I cannot give the member an answer on that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is by way of supplementary information.

The CHAIRMAN: Could the minister state what he understands the question to be?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: If the member repeats it, I will see if it is correct.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The language services review that came out in November 2011 has 12 recommendations. I ask how many of those recommendations have been actioned either in whole or in part.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Yes; for both the state and the commonwealth.

[Supplementary Information No B46.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer the minister to page 4 of budget paper No 3, which is the broader economic and fiscal outlook. The first dot point refers to the payment of school fees for children of 457 visa holders. Does this create any particular issues from a multicultural perspective as far as the minister is concerned, and did the minister have input into the creation of that policy?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I am a member of cabinet, so I did. It was a very tough decision to make, and I know personally that it has been a major issue in my own electorate. Again, I do not want to handball this, but the commonwealth has let a large number of people down on this issue. The commonwealth should be responsible for 457 visa holders, who are temporary workers in Australia. It is a pathway to permanent migration and many people take that up. I cannot remember the exact growth in the number of these visas, but there were far fewer than 1 000 children of people on 457 visas five years ago in schools, and it is now estimated that there are 8 500. They often come with requirements for special education, particularly language, and it brings no additional funding with them. Many schools have been struggling to provide adequate educational services to those kids, and it is a substantial impost on the state. It is equivalent to somewhere in the vicinity of 15 primary schools, so it is a great cost.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: All I can say is that they must be very small primary schools! The Premier said 20 primary schools.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Did the Premier say 20 primary schools for 457 kids?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: If I divide 8 500 by 10, it is 850, and I can divide the number even further. Most primary schools have only 300 to 400 kids.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister is kidding!

Dr M.D. NAHAN: The largest primary school in my electorate has 750 students, but we have one with 350 students. It has a large impact and has grown very rapidly over the last five years and has imposed a very large cost. Many of the 457 visa holders—they are all skilled, by definition—are not low-income earners and some of them are moderate-income families with a number of children. It will impact on some of the 457 visa families and we hope the employers help them address this issue.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So this is a way of cost shifting to employers who the government feels has the means to pay?

Dr M.D. NAHAN: No; it is addressing a serious issue of cost impact on the educational system and on schools. It is also an issue in that there has been very rapid growth in numbers in the school system, and is a cost driver to have people who temporarily work here sharing the burden to provide high quality education to their children.

[8.00 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: My question relates to the second last dot point on page 778. I was surprised to see —

The CHAIRMAN: Will it be very quick? I have just noticed the time.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am just wondering why the pay gap is referred to in the report. What initiatives is the department undertaking in relation to the gender pay gap?

Ms M. Dawkins: That relates to Minister Harvey's portfolio.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Okay, so that is the reason it is there—because it relates to another part of the Department for Local Government and Communities?

Ms M. Dawkins: The Department for Local Government and Communities formed only on 1 July.

Ms S.F. McGURK: In relation to a gender pay gap.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: Minister Harvey is also the Minister for Women's Interests, and the Department for Local Government and Communities services many ministers, but the funding for it is located there.

The appropriation was recommended.