

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND
FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2014–15 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
THURSDAY, 12 JUNE 2014**

**SESSION TWO
DEPARTMENT OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Members

**Hon Ken Travers (Chair)
Hon Peter Katsambanis (Deputy Chair)
Hon Martin Aldridge
Hon Alanna Clohesy
Hon Rick Mazza**

Hearing commenced at 2.00 pm

Hon PETER COLLIER

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, examined:

Mr CLIFF WEEKS

Director General, examined:

Mr AARON RAYNER

Chief Heritage Officer, examined:

Mr JAMIE STRICKLAND

Chief Land Officer, examined:

Ms LUCY GUNN

Executive Director, Community Development, examined:

Mr GLEN KAR

Executive Director, Corporate Services, examined:

Mr VAUGHAN DAVIES

Acting Executive Director, Accountable Government, examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I would like to welcome you to today's hearing. Firstly, if I can ask the witnesses if they have read, understood and signed a document headed "Information for Witnesses"?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Witnesses need to be aware of the severe penalties that apply to persons providing false or misleading testimony to a parliamentary committee. It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private, either of its own motion or at a witness's request. If, for some reason, you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia. The committee values your assistance with this.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: I give the call to Hon Alanna Clohesy.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I refer to "Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators" on page 310. I note that the percentage of stakeholders satisfied with services relating to the management of Aboriginal heritage has fallen. It was 81 per cent in 2012-13, but was 65 per cent in the estimated actual for 2013-14. Can the minister provide detail about why it has dropped?

Mr Weeks: It has not actually dropped. Eighty-one per cent was the result of our annual survey last year, which was an increase. We have to give an estimated actual, which is based on a target. The agency is doing its annual survey at the moment as part of the annual reporting process.

Hon PETER COLLIER: And that will be reflected next year.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Still, 65 per cent seems quite low for a satisfaction goal.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is two-thirds. It is an extremely contentious area and, of course, there will always be some people who are dissatisfied no matter what. I appreciate that. We are making some changes to the Heritage of Western Australia Act at the moment, of which Hon Alanna Clohesy would be aware. It has been a long process, but it has been a deliberately long process.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Nevertheless, across the range of outcomes the indicator is set at 65 per cent. I acknowledge that perhaps the heritage one might be particularly contentious. I refer to outcome three, “Improving accountability for delivery of outcomes for Aboriginal people from government investments” and to outcome four, “Supporting the Western Australia Aboriginal community to independently determine and further their identified priorities”, both of which has a target of 65 per cent. It seems to me that 65 per cent is a low target compared with other departments and the work they do. How is the target set?

Mr Weeks: The target is set with the Office of the Auditor General. Two years ago we reviewed our outcome effectiveness indicators. We had to sit down with the deputy Auditor General at the time, who went through and approved the figures. On the face of it, we need to do better in land and accountable government, but we are quite happy with 83 per cent and 89 per cent in other areas.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Does the Auditor General set the targets?

Mr Weeks: Yes; in collaboration with the department.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Would I need to go to the Auditor General to get an understanding of how they are set?

Mr Weeks: We can provide supplementary information about the rationale we use to get to that.

The CHAIR: I acknowledge that students from Woodvale Secondary College, which is another great North Metropolitan school, have left the public gallery!

Are you saying that the 81 per cent and the 89 per cent were done on a different measure to what you are now measuring in the actual figures from 2012-13?

Mr Weeks: Those are the results from the last financial year. We do not do our annual survey until the end of the financial year. We are going through the process of getting the 2013-14 figures now, and as part of the annual reporting process we then give those as results.

The CHAIR: If the department was able to achieve 81 per cent and 89 per cent, why has it dropped its target back to 65 per cent? That the department was able to achieve that in the 2012-13 financial year defeats the argument that it is hard to achieve. If you do a good job, clearly it can be achieved because it has been achieved. Were they measured on the same basis on which you are currently measuring?

[2.10 pm]

Mr Weeks: It is, but in the previous year we were not achieving that score; so it is quite low. For us to be able to change that target, we have to do that with the Auditor General; we cannot change it by ourselves. But considering that we are reaching those targets, then it might be time to reassess those targets; so I take that point.

The CHAIR: It kind of makes out that you do not think that you are going to do as well this year as you did last year, and, hopefully, you have, and that is, hopefully, a sign that you are clearly doing a good job.

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is a good point. You do not want an artificially low target to say how good we are.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Because that is as good as you go.

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is the point, as I said. Certainly, collaboration with the Auditor General is something that we need to look at.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I will take it that that will be something you might work on in the next 12 months.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes, we are already coming back to you with regard to the rationale.

[Supplementary Information No B1.]

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Minister, I think it was in last year's budget papers that we flagged that a review of the Aboriginal Heritage Act was going to be undertaken. I take the minister to page 309 of the budget papers, under "Outcomes, Services and Key Performance Information". The government goals and desired outcomes are there. The first desired outcome is —

Achieving the right balance between development and protection to ensure economic opportunities are leveraged to the benefit of the whole community.

In view of the fact that there was to be a review process, could the minister update me in regard to achieving that desired outcome, if that review has been happening? What has been going on with it?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes, it has been a long process, I have to say, and, yes, the review has continued. In fact, I released the final exposure draft act yesterday, and that is for a further eight-week consultation. After that—it has to go through cabinet, of course—I would like to bring that bill to the Parliament for the spring session. As I said, it has been a very, very long process of review. This last eight weeks is not the only opportunity for the community to contribute to the heritage act. The heritage act is over 40 years old. It is dated and it needs refinement. But at the same time, we have got to be careful that we do not get to a point where people feel or have this notion that we are undermining Aboriginal heritage or that somehow we are usurping our commitment to maintaining Aboriginal heritage. That is simply not the case.

We got Dr John Avery to do a consultation period, which started in mid-2011. There was an enormous amount of consultation right across the state with respective industry groups and opportunities for the community to contribute. We are at the position now where I feel that we are probably ready to take the draft bill to cabinet, but I spoke with Cliff about this and, because of the sensitivities around this issue with regard to Aboriginal heritage, we collectively decided that it was probably best to allow one final period for public submission or public comment. That is why we now have another eight weeks. After that is completed, I will take the draft to cabinet for print. As I said, at least, I will introduce it and I would like to think that we can get the support of the Parliament to pass that bill by the end of the year. I do not know if you want to add anything, Cliff.

Mr Weeks: Only that there are some fact sheets on our website and we are conducting a whole range of forums at the moment and meeting with key stakeholders who utilise the Aboriginal Heritage Act, so I can go through some of those details if you like or rather you can access those in your own time.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: I have another area.

The CHAIR: Was there any follow-up information, or will you get that from the website?

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: No, that is okay.

I do not know whether this will come under you, but it is an area that I have, through my chairing of the public administration committee, been finding out quite a bit about in the pastoral lease inquiry that we did, and there is an inquiry that we have on foot at the moment with regard to recreational hunting—that is, Indigenous land use agreements. On page 310 you have the online land approvals system and you have got that moneys are allocated there towards the development of online land approvals system and the e-lodgement program with A-HELP and things like that. Is that designed

so that ILUAs can be processed through this way also? I really do not know about this area, but it is something that I am learning about rapidly.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is, and it is very, very good in terms of helping to streamline the process and making the public more accessible to the process. It has been very well received. Considering the fact that the man to my right is actually pretty much directly responsible for its implementation, I will get Cliff to make some comments.

Mr Weeks: It would have been three years ago now that the state government committed \$3.7 million to the agency to develop an Aboriginal heritage electronic lodgement program. It is really to track statutory approvals. It gives high visibility to proponents who lodge an application but it also gives high visibility to the minister and our office. We have now scanned 30 000 site files, so information is now available to Aboriginal people to be able to log online and access their cultural heritage information. What we are now doing is using that technology and applying it to our land function. The Aboriginal Lands Trust has 27 million hectares of land and we are using that same technology now to apply that to land so that we will be able to track mining approvals and the use of the estate. The chief land officer may have more information on that system if you would like it.

Mr Strickland: Some of the functions that that will track will be, as Cliff suggested, mining entry permits and transit permits for people entering onto part III reserves. Our land transfer program will be within that system. The technology is certainly overdue. We are just in the early, or earlier, stages of using the lessons we have learnt from the heritage system and applying that to the land process.

Hon PETER COLLIER: It gives more public accessibility, community accessibility, to the actual process. As I said, it is quite a seismic step forward in terms of streamlining the process, the actual process, from go to whoa.

Hon LIZ BEHJAT: Anything that streamlines it will be very well received by the community out there, because it is quite a complicated process at the moment, as I am finding out rapidly.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I refer to page 310 of budget paper No 2, where it talks about the PALS program, “Partnership, Acceptance, Learning and Sharing Program”. There is an increase in funding of \$100 000 in the forthcoming financial year. I want to clarify: will there be an additional 133 schools in addition to the 229 schools that are currently receiving that funding or is it just that 133 schools will share the whole \$335 000 pool?

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is the 133 in addition to the 229. That is a sensational program—partnership acceptance, learning and sharing. What it does, I am not sure if you know—I will not go too much into it—but suffice to say that when we have them up here when we have the awards, it is terrific. It actually engages not only non-Aboriginal students, but also Aboriginal students, to enhance their understanding of their own culture, plus non-Aboriginal students get an awareness of Aboriginal culture; why it is so rich, why it is so dynamic and why it is so essential that, as Australians, we have an understanding of Aboriginal culture. I am totally committed to this program. In fact, at the moment we are looking at transferring the management of the program into Education, where it would appear to be more appropriately placed. The DAA will always contribute to the program, but in terms of the management, if we could get into almost 400 schools, that would be terrific. The more schools we get into, the better in terms of trying to—not trying to—as a government say that we are committed to the development of an understanding of Aboriginal culture. To watch these kids when they come to Parliament House and to see how embraced and engaged they are with their various projects is very heartening. They do some terrific things. They do some wonderful and innovative things in the development of their understanding of Aboriginal culture. So that is an additional appropriation and an additional number of schools. But, as I said, ideally I see PALS probably more appropriately aligned in the Department of Education.

[2.20 pm]

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I agree that it is a great program, which is why I wanted to clarify that it is going into more schools this year, which will be a good thing. Obviously I do not expect the minister to have this at his fingertips, but are we able to get a list of the schools that are benefitting from this program, perhaps as supplementary information?

Hon PETER COLLIER: We will provide that as supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No B2.]

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: The minister flagged an intention to incorporate the program somewhere in the Department of Education.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Is there any time frame on that?

Hon PETER COLLIER: We are working through it at the moment. It should be imminent, I would imagine, unless there is some hold-up that I have not been informed of.

Mr Weeks: We are just doing due diligence. There is an appetite to do it. We just need to make sure, obviously, that we can explain how the program is managed. It is something we are quite proud of, so we just want to make sure that if we hand it over to another agency it will get the same care and attention.

The CHAIR: Does the Minister for Education have the same support for it, though?

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Yes! Go ask him!

What involvement will DAA continue to have in the development and the structure of the program once it is incorporated into the Department of Education? Will there be some form of memorandum of understanding to enable DAA input? How will it work?

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is yet to be established; suffice to say the connection between DAA and DOE is dynamic. That is no accident. These guys were up in one of the Corn Flake boxes in St Georges Terrace, and they basically had no public access at all there as far as the department was concerned. It was little rabbit warrens. It was a horrible little place. I felt that particularly with regard to the fact that one of the pivotal areas that we need to focus on is early intervention in education, the links with DAA are quite profound. So DAA now sits right next to the Department of Education in East Perth, and they have got a wonderful open facility there which is very accessible for the public, and the relationship between DAA and DOE was enhanced overnight, to such a degree that I felt that the Aboriginal education unit within DOE was not as dynamic as it should have been—it really was not. If anything, it was quite pedestrian. No disrespect to those involved, but I felt it was a little pedestrian and they needed to have some stimulus. So I asked Cliff if he would mind if we seconded Duncan Ord, who was deputy director general at the time, to come over and head that Aboriginal education unit, which he did, and did extremely successfully. So we have now got the frameworks for a much more enhanced Aboriginal education program. PALS is part of that transition, and that communication with DOE, even though Duncan is not there anymore, will continue in earnest. We then take it to the next step with the Aboriginal affairs cabinet subcommittee. One of the areas of the subcommittee is education, and what we are looking at at the moment is early intervention; and we have to have the support, the encouragement and the expertise of DAA if that is going to be successful.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I understand that, because that is really the role of DAA going forward, and the director general has outlined that in previous estimates hearings, where DAA has that input at a high level, and where the majority of the programs are run out of other line agencies. Because you raised that, minister, in relation to that position in the Aboriginal education unit, when

Mr Ord moved on to bigger and better things, did DAA have any input into who succeeded Mr Ord in that position?

Hon PETER COLLIER: There were informal discussions between respective directors general, and I am very happy with Ms McGowan-Jones in that role.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Minister, can we start on page 314 with “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, and the item “stolen wages”. In 2013–14, the estimated actual was \$100 000. What was that spent on?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Mr Weeks.

Mr Weeks: Is that the \$2.5 million?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The estimated actual in 2013–14 was \$100 000. What was that spent on?

Mr Weeks: All of the funding that was allocated from the state government was actually spent on the payments. The department did not take any administration or anything out of the full \$2.5 million. We retained \$100 000 when the process was closed, because we were doing an appeals process. So we retained \$100 000 just in case any of those appeals was successful.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I see. So where are they up to now?

Mr Weeks: All of the appeals are completed now, and I think there were a few successful appeals. Lucy Gunn will be able to give us those details, I think.

Ms Gunn: Yes, certainly. There were review requests that were considered. That was completed by August 2013, and 38 were assessed as eligible, mainly due to additional information being provided by applicants.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How much has been paid to claimants?

Hon PETER COLLIER: It is \$2.532 million.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Has a line been ruled under that now? Can people still make claims?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No. It is finished.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So there is no more to be done on that issue?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have a couple of quick questions, and I then want to go to one more substantive issue. There is an Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee, which I understand Mr Weeks chairs, and which has 12 directors general on that committee. What is the budget associated with the workings of that group?

Mr Weeks: There is a shared budget, and each agency contributes to the costs of the chief operating officers. We have two chief operating officers, and I can give you that exact amount, but it is essentially their salaries and overheads.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So their full-time job is servicing that committee?

Mr Weeks: That is right. They are tasked by those directors general.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What are the terms of reference that that group is working under?

Mr Weeks: I guess in terms of reference it is everything Aboriginal in government. So it is quite broad. We do have some priority action areas that the cabinet subcommittee that the minister chairs has identified.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Can I just add to that. To be perfectly honest, I would be surprised if there were any. When I took over, after 12 months it was quite evident to me that they really did not do an enormous amount, to be perfectly honest. I felt that there is a genuine intent on the part of government and government departments, but, with no disrespect to the respective directors

general, when it comes down to it, Health were doing what they liked, Education were doing what they liked, Mental Health were doing what they liked and Child Protection were doing the same. The respective government departments were there, and theoretically, yes, the all-of-government approach would have been nice, but it simply was not occurring. I was very frustrated for the first two years that I was Aboriginal affairs minister that Cliff would go to these meetings and quite basically they would just nod and say yes, and that was it. That is why we established a cabinet subcommittee. It was to give Cliff some more authority with regard to decision making on behalf of government so that AACC is actually now answerable to the cabinet subcommittee. So Cliff has got that authority, and that has provided it with more teeth, dare I say, than it has ever had before. Even though we would like to think it was an umbrella committee, it was very much a silo approach. That is with no disrespect intended at all, as I said, to the directors general. They all felt that they were doing their little bit. But I was just not convinced that collectively we were achieving the best outcomes. That is why we did what we did.

[2.30 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is the idea to work towards some sort of lead agency model, a model where the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is the lead agency on some of those priority areas set by the cabinet subcommittee?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you tell us what those priority areas are?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes, we have five. I will get Cliff to talk about it specifically in a moment. We have five specific areas that we work towards. We have had a review of funding at the moment. It has been really proactive and very positive in terms of looking towards positive outcomes. We had to work out what we were dealing with, what funding we have at the moment and what programs exist before we could work out whether or not —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Essentially, you are dealing with other ministers' money, are you not?

Hon PETER COLLIER: We are, but they are part of the process. We would never usurp their authority.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am sorry to interrupt you, minister, but are those 12 ministers on your cabinet subcommittee?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No; they are not, but if they are involved; if a particular policy framework is involved, they will be invited to the subcommittee. It has to go through cabinet still. Any policy determination has to go through cabinet. We make the determination and then the cabinet subcommittee has minutes and that has to be approved by cabinet. I will get Cliff to talk about the other areas in a moment. As I said, in terms of education—I mentioned this in the education hearing—one of the biggest areas of disconnect we have at the moment is with regard to early intervention. That crosses a number of portfolio areas, specifically with Education, but we have been able to establish a framework and a way forward with regard to early intervention, in particular with regard to three-year-old kindergartens. We still have a way to go with that and make sure it is an all-embracing, well-rounded policy framework that does not include just the child but the parents as well. That requires that cross-departmental interaction that I referred to. From that perspective, having this cabinet subcommittee is such an advantage as opposed to saying we would like to do it in Education but we do not have the support of this or Child Protection is doing this and they do not want to give up that particular aspect of their policy framework. It is working really well. I will keep quiet and ask Cliff to go through the other areas to identify the specific areas cabinet has authority over.

Mr Weeks: There are five priority action areas. I guess the thing that is slightly different around the lead agency is that it is not actually the Department of Aboriginal Affairs that is the lead agency, it is that responsible director general and agency. One of the priority action areas is education.

Sharyn O'Neill chairs that subcommittee. There is a health and mental health priority action area and that committee is chaired by Professor Bryant Stokes and Tim Marney. They share that role. There is an economic development and governance subcommittee chaired by Paul Rosair, the director general of Regional Development. There is a regional and remote community subcommittee which is putting forward a policy position on the future of our Aboriginal remote community town-based reserves. That is chaired by Grahame Searle, the director general of Housing. Then there is a youth and families subcommittee chaired by Emma White, the acting director general of the Department for Child Protection.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Having those five subcommittees, dare I say it, of a committee, it is not becoming unwieldy or burdensome. We have a framework that we can work towards, not a multitude of departments all doing their individual policy development. We have a framework we work within.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Thank you, minister. You have given us a concrete outcome of the education subcommittee. The workings of that would be the education subcommittee makes its recommendations to the AACC, which then makes recommendations to the cabinet subcommittee?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No. They come to the subcommittee.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Who goes to the subcommittee? Sorry; let us take a step backwards. We need a whiteboard here. We have the cabinet and the cabinet subcommittee. We have the AACC and five subcommittees of the AACC.

Hon PETER COLLIER: No, five subcommittees are from the cabinet subcommittee. Sorry; it is the AACC. That is right.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I was right?

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Tell me what happens when the subcommittees of the AACC make a recommendation; where does it go then?

Mr Weeks: It is shared by the directors general. If we get it in time, it goes to the next meeting otherwise it is shared out of session. The directors general get to see that information and then the responsible director general attends the cabinet subcommittee. One of the important components of that cabinet subcommittee is that I get to attend it. The director general of Premier and Cabinet, Peter Conran, and myself attend with the five cabinet ministers, and we are able to give our comments on those particular policy positions.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The five cabinet ministers on the subcommittee are education —

Hon PETER COLLIER: Health, mental health and regional development. That is four. Sorry, there is Police. Liza came on recently.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Thank you, minister. You have given us a concrete outcome of the education process. What are you expecting to see from the other four areas?

Hon PETER COLLIER: We have worked through a number of areas with regard to review strategies on spending in terms of mental health and regional development. I could cover all areas of Aboriginal affairs and say that we want positive outcomes in each of those areas. Regional and remote areas of the state are something of a priority at the moment in making sure we have a sustainable future in some of those communities, which does not exist. Helen is looking specifically at mental health with regard to suicide and resilience; it fits neatly in with health as well in terms of overcoming deficiencies in health for Aboriginal people. It is broad based.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay. You have clearly named some key areas of concern there but you have not mentioned housing or juvenile justice, which are probably the things that are most

frequently raised with me. Even if we are having a discussion about youth suicide in the Kimberley they almost automatically talk about housing and juvenile justice.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Spot on. That is why, as I said, we invite Bill Marmion, for example, to the cabinet subcommittee when we refer specifically to housing or the housing policy, which will again come through the ARCC recommendations, and he will attend that meeting or meetings as appropriate.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: In 12 months' time when we are in estimates next year, you will want to report positive outcomes from those other four.

Hon PETER COLLIER: As I said, I get asked this all the time as Aboriginal Affairs minister: What are you going to do? In some misguided notion people have the idea that because I am Aboriginal Affairs minister I somehow drew the short straw, but I did not.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have never subscribed to that.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I know you would not, but some of our colleagues, as you know, think, "What can we actually do?" We can keep on going along the same pedestrian path whereby we continue to inject funds into the same programs, some with minimal, if any, positive outcomes at all; others with some significant positive outcomes. Or we can change the way in which we direct our funds and our policy development as a government. That is what we have chosen to do. This committee has been going now for not quite 12 months, or probably just on 12 months. It is so good when you can go in there—not just for education—and I can say to Sharyn, "Look, mate, I'm really keen about this; I want to make sure we do something with early intervention." She would go to the AACC and that is when you hit this wall again, this disconnect, and say, "Well, it just doesn't work." That is why we have made this transition. Yes, ideally, I say to you, honourable member, I would like to think that in 12 months' time we can say, "Yes we have created this framework which will lead to positive outcomes in those four key areas." I know for a fact that we are so close in terms of education with what we are intending at this stage. I know from the meetings we have had—we meet regularly—that we are putting in place those frameworks. Ideally, yes.

[2.40 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is great, you can take that as notice of my questions for next year, minister, because all we want to see is change.

The CHAIR: If you would like to supply them to the committee in writing, we can put them on notice before the hearing!

I just want to pursue a couple of issues following on from there. You mentioned that the police commissioner is on there. I accept, minister, that it is not your job to fix every problem, but one of the things I raised in the police estimates last year—and when we have them in again, I intend to pursue it—is: how do we actually ensure that there are more Aboriginal people employed as police officers? Part of that, in my view is trying to break down some of the barriers or provide alternative pathways to get into policing for Aboriginal people who may not meet the education criteria or something else, but would still be very good police officers. Is that something that these committees are working on? Again, what that requires is working with the department of training and the state training providers. You and I both represent the North Metropolitan Region, and West Coast Institute of Training sits there right next door to the police academy and you have got the education department and a range of other agencies. Is that something that is part of that work you are looking at—trying to coordinate how we get all of these agencies to lift it? I think, from the figures we got last year, something like 1.5 per cent of police officers identify as being Aboriginal and now that is well below what the COAG targets are expected to be for now and climbing to the future. Is that part of the work; and, if it is not, can you put it on the list of to-do things? Because I think it is one that strikes me requires that central coordination of your different agencies to make it a focus and I think that would assist in a whole range of issues.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes, specific to the police, it is a point well taken. I will say that the police minister has only been a member of the committee for one meeting.

The CHAIR: We have an immediate job for her then!

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes, absolutely. We have the same issue in education, I have to say. We have parlous few Aboriginal teachers at the moment and it is probably the same with police and a number of other areas. Employment in a generic sense is, yes, very much a focal point of this committee, particularly in areas in the public sector. As you suggest, with police it is vital, particularly given the high incarceration rate of Aboriginal people, and particularly Aboriginal juveniles. To have that cultural understanding within the force would seem not just to be logical, but essential. It is the same in education. As I said, in education we have so few Aboriginal teachers. Mind you, I went to a program and gave them a Lotterywest cheque yesterday. It is a terrific program they have operating with mentoring of Aboriginal tertiary students up in Halls Creek. There are a number of programs that exist like that, but they are pretty much ad hoc. There is no general policy framework that tries to enhance opportunities for Aboriginal students then to move into education or necessarily to move into police.

The CHAIR: I know they have talked about trying to do a cert IV at West Coast. I am not sure where that is up to, but those sorts of programs across government that are actually providing direct pathways into the police academy, if you are successful in that course—police being involved in choosing the people for that course—even going to being in the police academy. It is that level of joining up that strikes me as what we need to actually get to. It struck me that it is something that would be a very important role for your committee to play. That is my bid and I will continue to ask the other agencies as well about these issues, whether we get West Coast later in the year or the police themselves. I think that cultural awareness and understanding comes from having people who identify as Aboriginal within the police force will actually make a huge difference in terms of some of the issues we face and maybe help solve some of the other issues as well along the pathway. That is my little speech for today.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Minister, the ancestral remains repatriation program, I am sorry, I cannot give you a page reference other than page 310 under the priority heritage protection program, which I assume that program sits under.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Yes, it does. Yes it is, it is with us. We will just get something for you.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So it is one of those programs?

Mr Weeks: Yes, it is.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can you tell us how it works?

Mr Weeks: Essentially, we are working with the Museum as a key partner and other entities that may have some of those ancestral remains. We will then work with the appropriate Aboriginal people, be it the traditional owners and others to work out the appropriate process to take those remains back. We have increased our involvement in that space and we allocated \$50 000 this financial year that we are currently in, and we returned 65 sets of Aboriginal ancestral remains across several locations from Mt Barker to Dongara, Northampton, Bremer Bay, Lake Saide and a couple of others. It is something we have really got proactive about. There are still a lot of remains that we need to do more work on and make sure that they are returned home. It is obviously a significant thing for Aboriginal people to have their families back home on country and to do the right processes around making sure they are buried, essentially.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Am I understanding you correctly that total funding for that program in 2013–14, which is not quite finished, was \$50 000?

Mr Weeks: That is right, yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What is it going to be in 2014–15?

Mr Weeks: It will remain that investment.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It will be \$50 000—okay. Is it for things other than remains? Would it, for example, cover artefacts or artworks that needed repatriating?

Mr Weeks: It does. I might actually refer this to the chief heritage officer because he was in Laverton last week to return some artefacts.

Mr Rayner: That is right, I was in Laverton on Friday repatriating 17 sacred objects used in ceremony. We acquired those objects about three years ago and have been working with TOs in the northern goldfields to work out who they should be repatriated to. The \$50 000 budget was originally set to repatriate human remains and that is ring-fenced, but the department uses other resources as and when to repatriate other objects.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am sorry, this is probably a terribly crass way of putting it, but I am getting the impression that you are sort of going through the Museum archives working out what needs to go back to country; is that correct or is it coming from other places?

Mr Weeks: Multiple input sources, but mainly the Museum, yes.

The CHAIR: Is UWA doing their own thing separate to you, then?

Mr Weeks: I am not quite sure.

Hon PETER COLLIER: They are doing something, but it is not to do with the department.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is there somewhere that a person could go to look at the parameters? Are people able to apply for funding from the ARRF? Is there somewhere people can go to see the guidelines and then make an application for funding under that program?

Mr Weeks: If you are talking about the ACCRF program, that is more for emergencies.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: No, I was talking about the ancestral remains repatriation program.

Mr Weeks: I will have to refer that to the chief heritage officer. I guess we have had some longstanding objects and remains that were sort of at the top of the list and we have started working our way down, but I do not think we actually advertise it as a process for people to come in and, I guess, apply for a grant.

Mr Rayner: There is in fact a published document with details of how people can go about applying for moneys to repatriate human remains. There is an application process and it is a published strategy, so individuals or prescribed bodies corporate can apply to the department for assistance in repatriating human remains.

[2.50 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: From what you are saying, I am gathering that there would not be funding available to, for instance, protect remains or sacred objects on a site where they are not safe.

Mr Rayner: In fact, in the budget papers for next year \$250 000 has been made available as a heritage protection program. The parameters of that program have been worked through and there will be an application process from 1 July.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Through your website?

Mr Rayner: Indeed.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is \$250 000 under what program?

Mr Rayner: The “Protecting our Aboriginal Sites” program. It is a new program within this budget.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Could you tell me whether the cost of salaries or wages could be covered either from the ancestral remains repatriation program or the program the officer is talking about?

Mr Rayner: The parameters of the program are still being worked through, but it is intended that it will promote some economic development opportunities for Aboriginal organisations.

The CHAIR: Member, do you have many more questions, because I am just noting the time?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: No; I am happy to hand over now to Hon Alanna Clohesy.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: How is the asbestos management plan progressing?

Mr Weeks: We are working with a number of agencies at the moment. I will go through the notes and then refer to the chief land officer. We are working with the Departments of Housing, Health, Local Government, Communities, Environment Regulation and the WA Planning Commission; part of our role has been bringing these government agencies together. The Department of Housing is now undertaking an audit of housing in those communities to assess asbestos. Our role really comes in on behalf of the Aboriginal Lands Trust to audit the other buildings, which there is not necessarily a funding stream for. We first have to, obviously, identify the risk. The thing with asbestos is that there is asbestos in some of those buildings, but it depends on the condition of that actual building as to whether fibres are actually released and it becomes dangerous. We have to assess each case on its own individual merits, but at this stage it is trying to find a funding source to be able to undertake some of those works. We have previously used the Aboriginal community emergency fund, which is now administered by the Department of Regional Development. We will continue to apply for funds out of that process, but we are also working with the Department of Mines and Petroleum because they collect rent from royalties for mining activities on the Aboriginal Lands Trust. At the moment the Aboriginal Lands Trust only gets about 30 per cent of that, so we are working with the Department of Mines and Petroleum at the moment to get a higher percentage. I think we get about \$300 000 at this stage, and potentially it could go up to \$1 million a year. It is a dual process of making sure that government agencies that are responsible are doing their work, but also making sure that the Lands Trust gets access to some dollars to be able to undertake some of their own responsibilities.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: The second part of that plan—the Lands Trust part—is it at a stage where buildings at risk have been identified in communities?

Mr Weeks: Look, there is a whole range of communities, so I think the first thing we are trying to do—I will pass to the chief land officer—is trying to prioritise which communities we go to first. Obviously, from a commonsense point of view, we would like to link up with Housing, so it may actually start with the communities where the Department of Housing manages those housing assets, and then we will try to piggyback that process.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: But there are other buildings—public buildings that are not Housing buildings—that are in desperate need of attention right now. Is there a list of those?

Mr Weeks: We are doing an audit of those buildings, but historically there have not been a lot of, I guess, planning approvals for the infrastructure that is on some of those remote communities. It may sound a little strange, but we actually do not know the full picture of what the infrastructure is. You can have a mining company that donates a building, and all of a sudden it turns up on a community and they have to accept all liability and risk associated with that without the proper rigour. Mr Strickland, can you give any detail?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So there is still no commencement of or definitive list yet of buildings that require action?

Mr Strickland: No.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So if someone on community identified a building that was at really high risk—there were big holes and fibres and it was really at risk—what action would they take to have that building addressed?

Mr Strickland: They would be best placed advising their local Department of Aboriginal Affairs office to come through to the ALT, and then we could work out an appropriate action plan from there. Again, it is recognising historical factors—how the building got there, who may have an interest in there—and the working out again of who we need to bring in as a stakeholder to then address it.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: In the meantime, how do you stop kids running in and out of that building and coming into contact with asbestos and things?

Mr Strickland: We will work with the local community to identify a number of options. We have a couple of cases where we have worked with the local shire as well; we engage them in the process and have them determine the best course of action to take. But, effectively, there could be a range of options, from boarding places up, to putting up signs, and talking to community council, who then talk to the community to make them aware there is an issue here and we are trying to address it, but basically to keep out.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Are there dollars attached to doing that audit and addressing the asbestos issues once that audit is completed, or at least starting to address those?

Mr Strickland: We would need to find the dollars to do that. One of the things with asbestos remediation—even surveying to identify where asbestos is—is that it is quite an expensive process. It is certainly nothing that we are budgeted for at the minute. It presents a further issue for us in being able to identify a funding stream, and then when remediation actions are worked out where that other funding stream comes from as well.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So there is no money at the moment attached to doing the audit and implementing the plan?

Mr Strickland: No.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Nowhere in government?

Mr Weeks: We do have access to that Aboriginal community emergency fund that the Department of Regional Development administers. It is what we actually did in Beagle Bay; when the community identified some asbestos in those buildings, we acted straightaway, which is what that fund is for. It is for us to be able to go in and undertake the works. We partitioned that area off and made sure the kids were not actually accessing that building, and then we actually planned those works to occur in the school holidays. I think, from recollection, it was close to the school. So even though there is not a dedicated budgeted in our budget, we can access those dollars. If communities become aware that they do have an asbestos issue, like Mr Strickland said, if they contact our local office or our head office, we will do the appropriate investigation straightaway and make sure whether we need to remediate something.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: But there is no money to do a systematic audit of ALT?

Hon PETER COLLIER: I think what the honourable member is saying is that we need to be proactive, as opposed to reactive?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: That is exactly right.

Hon PETER COLLIER: That is a valid point. We are not being precious about this; yes, I think it is valid. You have asked a couple questions and I have had some others to cause me some discomfort. As I said, we do not have to wait for something to occur before we actually do something about it, and it is an area that I will speak with Cliff about.

The CHAIR: In terms of the proposed rail line through Perth Airport, is the department involved in resolving any of the heritage issues associated with that?

Mr Weeks: Not off the top of my head; I am not sure if the chief heritage officer is aware.

Mr Rayner: From recollection, I do not think there has been any section 18 application made by Perth Airport.

The CHAIR: It would not be by Perth Airport, it would be by the government. It is the government's proposed rail line.

Mr Rayner: From memory, I do not have any —

The CHAIR: When would you normally expect to be involved in heritage issues or trying to manage or deal with heritage issues on project like that?

Mr Weeks: It depends on the proponent. They may want —

The CHAIR: Assuming it is the PTA in this case.

Mr Weeks: It may depend how they are lining up the rest of their statutory approvals. They may want to try to line them up all together or they may want to deal with some others and then come and speak to the department about the heritage. But we are certainly open to the PTA; if they come to us at any point we will provide advice, but from my recollection we have not been approached up to this point.

The CHAIR: My understanding is that they are talking to other agencies, and that is why I cannot work out, when one of the issues is the heritage issue, why they would not actually be talking to yourselves about trying to resolve this.

Hon PETER COLLIER: You might like to ask them—have you got them next?

The CHAIR: We have; that is why I am asking it now, minister. I will follow up shortly as to why they are not talking to you about those heritage issues.

Hon PETER COLLIER: No, well, from information I have received, no they have not.

[3.00 pm]

Hon RICK MAZZA: I refer to page 310 of budget paper No 2 and the second bullet point under the subheading "Priority Heritage Protection Program". The last part of that bullet point refers to —

... the creation of economic development opportunities for Aboriginal organisations to manage and protect their own heritage.

I wonder whether the department would consider the introduction of recreational hunting to control feral animals, and if that would provide benefits and opportunity for that program.

Mr Weeks: Yes, I think we have received advice that feral camels and other feral animals are impacting on some sites. I think we would consider that. If it needs to be part of protecting a site or an object, then absolutely we would consider it.

The CHAIR: Noting the time, I will advise that the committee will forward any additional questions it has to you via the minister in writing in the next couple of days together with the transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice. Responses to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit these to the committee clerk at the close of this hearing. On behalf of the committee, I thank you, very much for your attendance today.

Hearing concluded at 3.01 pm
