

CORRECTED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2003–04 budget estimates

Melbourne – 19 June 2003

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Mr G. Jennings, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs;

Mr T. Cahir, Executive Director, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria;

Mr T. Healy, Acting Secretary; and

Mr S. Mather, Corporate Finance, Department for Victorian Communities.

The CHAIR — I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings on the budget estimates for the portfolios of aboriginal affairs and aged care. I welcome the Honourable Gavin Jennings, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Minister for Aged Care; Mr Terry Healy, acting secretary, Department for Victorian Communities; Mr Tony Cahir, executive director, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria; and Mr Stephen Mather, corporate finance, Department for Victorian Communities; departmental officers, members of the public, Hansard; and the media.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript early next week. Before I call on the minister to give a brief presentation on the more complex financial and performance information that relates to the budget estimates for the Aboriginal affairs portfolio, I ask that all mobile telephones be turned off and pagers turned to silent.

Minister, after you have had the opportunity to do your presentation on Aboriginal affairs and the overheads, 35 minutes has been allocated for questions on the Aboriginal affairs portfolio. It is over to you, and we welcome you particularly as you have the great honour of being our very final minister for this inquiry! If you have any overheads, now would be a good time to distribute the hard copies of them.

Overheads shown.

Mr JENNINGS — I thank the committee for the opportunity to outline the important responsibilities that are undertaken within my area of government responsibility. I will provide the committee with a brief overview of the significant issues, particularly building from budget paper 3 and into the activities the department is undertaking. Certainly, from a commencing point, budget paper 3 indicates that I am responsible for a budget for Aboriginal Affairs Victoria of \$14.6 million under one output group, which is the indigenous community cultural development output within the Department for Victorian Communities. This replaces outputs that were in the previous budget for 2002–03 and those outputs were indigenous community building, reconciliation through partnerships with government and Aboriginal communities, and addressing dispossession of Aboriginal land and culture. All of the activities that were within those outputs have been included within the one new output group within budget paper 3.

For the benefit of the committee I would like to outline some of the issues that are confronting the indigenous population of Victoria and the community organisations that represent the interests of Aborigines within Victoria. We are talking about a population, according to the 2001 Census, of 25 078 people, which approximates to about 0.6 per cent of the Victorian population. Victorian Aborigines comprise about 6 per cent of the Australian indigenous population.

A significant issue in terms of not only the demographic profile of Aborigines in Victoria but a consequence of a very low life expectancy is that over half the Aborigines in Victoria are under the age of 25. This is a massive skewing of the age profile of the Aboriginal community which is consistent with a very low life expectancy. Indeed, only 3 per cent of Aborigines live to be over the age of 65 years, which is significantly less than the life expectancy that is enjoyed by other Victorians.

In terms of where members of the committee and the community are likely to come into contact with Aborigines across Victoria, most of them live in rural and regional Victoria. Over half of them live in country areas, compared with about a quarter of the Victorian population that lives outside the metropolitan area. That is clearly a difference from the overall demographic trend within Victoria. There are 40 regional Aboriginal community organisations that represent the interests of Aboriginal communities and provide services to their communities each and every day and provide active advocacy on their community's behalf and interact with government.

In terms of the snapshot of the Aboriginal Affairs Victoria budget, the graph on the overhead indicates that it was bouncing along from the period 1987 through to about 2001 in the ballpark of \$9 million and has seen a significant increase on that baseline figure in the last three years, which has seen the budget accumulate to \$14.6 million within the current budget forecast period. The major activities of the department that are the achievements in the year 2002–03, in terms of the outcomes of the previous financial year, were that under the stewardship of the previous Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Keith Hamilton, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria produced for the first time in Victoria something that is a cumulative effect of effort across the whole of government in terms of the Victorian government — that is, the indigenous affairs report, which provides a breadth of service delivery issues across the Victorian public sector and beyond and the success of programs that are the responsibility of the public sector in Victoria. I draw the committee's attention to that published report and the fact that there are significant investments

in most of the major portfolios right across the Victorian public sector which deliver in a timely way, hopefully, support to Aboriginal communities.

In terms of the work that has been achieved within the funding structures of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, we were very happy to support a major capital investment that has seen the Koori Heritage Trust, a significant cultural institution within Victoria, establish a new facility in King Street, Melbourne, that is shortly due to be opened formally. Certainly it will be the pride of all Victorians in its collection, which gives due respect to the cultural heritage and artistic contribution and, more broadly, the contribution that Aborigines have made to the history of Victoria.

There have been significant achievements in terms of ensuring that that cultural heritage capacity has been enhanced across the Victorian community. The department has increased the skills and knowledge that will underpin the successful protection and understanding of cultural heritage issues. Indeed, AAV has been responsible for coordinating a number of training programs and bringing people right across Victoria to improve that capacity within Aboriginal communities.

We have seen a number of significant investments in terms of major projects that have been delivered through funding. Currently we are seeing some developments right across the state from Sale to Warrnambool. I draw the committee's attention to them. In terms of the ongoing priorities, the indigenous family violence strategy, which is a \$7.6 million commitment over four years to address the incidence of family violence within the Victorian Aboriginal community, is an ongoing program which we continue to support. Community capacity is looking at the intrinsic organisational skills and knowledge base within Aboriginal organisations and indeed individuals that we have provided support to to enhance skills and development across the Victorian Aboriginal community.

In response to the *Bringing Them Home* report, on Sorry Day, 26 May, we announced the creation of a new stolen generations organisation, which, on the recommendation of the stolen generations task force, intends to respond to the ongoing needs of the stolen generations. We have a significant community infrastructure program which will see the ongoing rollout of support in capital infrastructure to a number of Aboriginal communities. We want to make sure that we have appropriate heritage partnerships with communities right across Victoria and the ongoing capacity for them to administer and deliver their responsibilities under the cultural heritage legislation. We will be building on the strength of the report that I have indicated, the whole-of-government report, to actually have these as organising principles of the Department for Victorian Communities. Our obligation is to bring together adequate reporting on whole-of-government service delivery. We will play an ongoing role in ensuring that there is an appropriate awareness of indigenous culture and issues that relate to the Aboriginal community as part of our ongoing priorities.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Minister. By way of background for the secretariat and for our benefit, could you provide that whole-of-government policy and that report, whatever it was called? It was really good.

Mr JENNINGS — I have copies here. It is available.

The CHAIR — That is excellent.

I refer to budget paper 3, page 405, the indigenous community and culture development output. It makes reference to the promotion of Aboriginal community control of the protection and management of Aboriginal heritage and cultural properties. Could you outline how that would be done, with particular reference to how you are going to evaluate it and what performance measures you have in place?

Mr JENNINGS — As I have indicated in my presentation, AAV is working closely with Aboriginal communities to develop a strategic and coordinated process which enables land managers to deal with Aboriginal cultural heritage matters as an integral component of environmental and land-use planning. The reason this is important is not only to enable the ongoing protection of cultural heritage items, particularly what are commonly known as sacred sites or sites of significance, but also for the ongoing benefit of the community itself. It is also important to establish where and how development may take place in the adjacent area. It plays a cultural heritage protection role, but it also has the capacity to be used in the facilitation of ongoing development. Some in the community may be concerned that it is a locking-up of culture heritage, but that is not the only dimension of why it is important for the Department for Victorian Communities to engage in such a program.

As I have indicated briefly to the committee, we see that in this capacity within Aboriginal organisations right across the state it is essential for all members of the Victorian community to be able to have a degree of confidence

that that work will be undertaken from a sound knowledge base, being particularly mindful of the legislation, being particularly mindful of the formal obligations and in a way that is understandable both by the Aboriginal community and by the general population. That is why we have entered into programs that support that capacity across Victoria. About a quarter of AAV's budget is dedicated to this activity, as we recognise it is a significant investment on behalf of all members of the Victorian community. About \$3.5 million is expended to satisfy that capacity.

We have engaged in a number of training activities, which I draw to the attention of the committee, that indicate performance measures, as referred to on page 405 of budget paper 3. Whilst the anticipated target for engaging in those training activities was 8, in fact we were very enthusiastic in the prosecution of those training activities and 18 such training opportunities were provided. That was well and truly over our target. In fact it was a due recognition of the importance of the role that was played to support the Aboriginal community organisations, and also of the enthusiasm with which the program was met. We have great confidence that it is a program that has exceeded our expectation in the outgoing year, and we would anticipate an ongoing commitment to that certain output.

Mr FORWOOD — I wonder if you could outline for the committee the purpose and function of the interim community advisory committee — how much funds does it take to operate? — and if you could outline for the committee the reason why the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Compensation and Cultural Heritage Council has withdrawn from participation in that committee.

Mr JENNINGS — The cultural heritage program is operated on the basis of five regional committees. For the last few years there have been cooperative arrangements as much as possible that the department has hoped to ensure will bring together all the various community organisations within those regions to have a combined group that provides advice to the Parliament and to me on how cultural heritage would be managed. Those regional cultural heritage bodies provide the auspice for a number of cultural heritage officers who are subsequently employed to go out and do the work I have been describing for the last few minutes.

As any observer of community politics would be aware, from time to time there are disputes or differences of opinion within the community organisations about the direction that cultural heritage programs, or for that matter any programs, may take. Indeed the circumstance that is embedded in your question is one of those instances where there have been some contestable views about the direction of the cultural heritage program that the Wurundjeri people are a part of, which is the Kulin nation program that has been under the auspices of the Kulin nation. A process has been undertaken for the best part of six months to try to bring all the various family groups, the traditional land-holder groups that are covered within the Kulin nation region together, to reach a consensus point of view about how that cultural heritage program should be managed into the future.

The recommendation that came to me from the majority of a community meeting has been perceived by the Wurundjeri people to be at their disadvantage in terms of their place within the Kulin nation regional cultural heritage group. They have chosen to withdraw from participation in the ongoing consideration of that community group. The majority view has been put to me within the last month, and I have been considering the recommendations that came from that majority group.

Also I have had conversations with the Wurundjeri people and one or two other people who feel as if their points of view were not countenanced very well in the majority view. I have said to them that no decision will be made about the ongoing nature of the management and operations of the Kulin nation cultural heritage regional group until we have had further conversations, and I have played some role in trying to bring them together.

Mr FORWOOD — And the funding side of it?

Mr JENNINGS — On the funding side of it, off the top of my head, I would suggest to you that that regional cultural heritage group employs about four people, and —

Mr FORWOOD — Each one employs four people?

Mr JENNINGS — Yes, each of the five does. So we are talking in terms of the resources in it, they are in the ballpark of about \$250 000.

Mr FORWOOD — Two hundred and fifty thousand for each?

Mr JENNINGS — Yes.

Mr FORWOOD — Right. And do the board members, the advice members get paid?

Mr JENNINGS — No — sitting fees.

Mr FORWOOD — Sitting fees?

Mr MERLINO - I refer you to page 391 of budget paper 3. It states that:

A key achievement for ... 2002–03 was the implementation of the *Indigenous Family Violence Strategy* ...

You outlined in your presentation that that has got a TEI of \$7.6 million. Can you advise the committee what initiatives have been introduced to reduce the disproportionately high levels of indigenous family violence?

Mr JENNINGS — Thanks for the opportunity to be able to talk through it. It was a significant undertaking that Keith Hamilton kicked off when he was minister. Last October we established a task force to advise the government in the ongoing way in which we could meet the most unfortunate instances of family violence within the aboriginal community. Sorry, they were charged with their duties in fact earlier than that, in March rather than in October. They were charged with making sure that when the government employed regional workers in each of the nine regions across the DHS structure to provide support to their local communities that there was a quality control and coordinating mechanism that ensured that best practice was encouraged; there was a coordinated approach to the way in which we would fund our responses at a community level to this most unfortunate practice. Subsequently a statewide coordinator has been employed to make sure that we pick up the best practice as it emerges across Victoria to respond to those issues.

I had the benefit of attending a three-day conference in March of this year which discussed the range of issues that have been considered by the community and how it may respond, and at that time announced a number of grants to deal with those issues. Community organisations had been invited to make suggestions about how they could meet the ongoing needs of their community. At that time we announced grants in the order of \$639 000, I think, by adding up two numbers in front of me. There were 6 major projects in the order of \$100 000 each were spread across major organisations throughout the Aboriginal community, and there were a number of smaller grants, 9 smaller grants, so 15 in total.

It was very clear as part of this conference, and I would like to take this opportunity to say that it is clearly the viewpoint of the Aboriginal community that family violence was not a traditional way of life. This is not shifting blame onto the colonial history of the last couple of hundred years, but it is symptomatic of the stresses and strains of dispossession that have occurred within Aboriginal communities which has clearly led to higher incidences than we would like in terms of alcohol and other substance abuse, in terms of lack of job opportunities, in terms of income stresses and strains, and quite often these are acted out in terms of family violence. The Aboriginal community itself is saying, 'We do not accept this in any shape or form. We want to make sure that we dig deep into our resolve to overcome these difficulties'. I think this project over four years is an extremely laudable one, and one which the Aboriginal community has taken up with vigour to overcome this sorry situation.

Mr CLARK — My question follows Mr Merlino's in relation to the indigenous family violence strategy. In your response you did not give a great deal of detail about what actual strategies and tactics and measures were being implemented in the six projects you referred to. I note that in the indigenous affairs report that you referred to earlier there does not seem to be a great deal of data or detail on the strategy. What baseline data has your portfolio established to measure the extent to which the strategy is being successful? What approach is being adopted within that strategy, and why are there not measures within the budget estimates, say at page 406, of the effectiveness of the program? The only measure there is the proportion of indigenous family violence community initiatives fund grants that are endorsed by the indigenous family violence task force, and that has a figure of 90. One could ask why it should not be 100. Even given that, it does not seem to be an adequate way of measuring the success or otherwise of the program.

Finally, I refer you to the speech made by Professor Mick Dodson at the National Press Club last week. I do not know if you are familiar with it, but if you can you comment on whether the Victorian government shares Professor Dodson's assessment of the issues underlying Aboriginal violence?

Mr JENNINGS — There are quite a few questions there. Generally, based on the tenor of Professor Dodson's speech, without seeing the entire speech and relying on the way it was reported in the press, we would be very supportive of the underlying argument and concern. Indeed, when I saw the press cuttings I attached a note to my copy of the press cuttings that said, 'Let's get him in next time he is in Melbourne to have a conversation with

him about addressing these issues'. It is consistent with my answer to Mr Merlino's question in the sense there is a rigour and resolve within the Aboriginal community to say that this behaviour is clearly unexceptional, we will not tolerate it into the future and we should not pander to the easy option of not standing up and saying these actions are wrong; so starting from that point of view.

In terms of the performance measures, it is a reasonable question to ask what is the benchmarking and the way we will monitor that program in the future. I did not indicate to the committee that part of the work being done by the indigenous family violence task force is to provide — and I am not quite sure how deeply it will be going into the establishment of a database as a numerical benchmark — a report to government later this year describing the situation and providing us with advice about, from the community's perspective, the best way we could monitor the ongoing success of those programs, and indeed, over time effectively measure the effectiveness of the program. I note the kernel of a very reasonable question within the one you have put to me. I would expect that the community itself will be making suggestions to us about the way in which we may monitor the effectiveness of the program in the future.

The CHAIR — By way of supplementary question — and I know police is not your responsibility and given I pull everybody else up on this topic — when Chief Commissioner Nixon was here she commented on the family violence strategy that was being embarked on through justice and police. To paraphrase her comments, she said that it may be seen as a positive performance measure if the reporting of family violence actually increased. Has there been any discussion between Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and the police on linking, particularly to performance measures, your strategy and theirs?

Mr JENNINGS — There has been dialogue and there will continue to be dialogue. Advice comes to us from the task force, and in fact from the perspective of the police force, which plays a key role in partnership with the AAV and the community in addressing this issue. In fact I was discussing with the AAV team this morning the fact that the sheer commitment to exploring the depth of the issues and some programs that start intervening to assess and redress certain situations may increase the degree of incidence. I understand that point. We will be mindful that we may document a more distressing case than we are currently aware of before we see the success of the programs.

The CHAIR — By way of putting you on notice, it would be of great interest to the committee to have some indication of your performance measures in indigenous family violence and also generally.

Mr FORWOOD — If you follow up last year's stuff about performance measures, the committee has always had a go at Tony about getting them right.

Ms ROMANES — Minister, you referred in your presentation to the release of the report from the stolen generations task force and the announcement that the government would establish a stolen generations organisation. Could you please tell us more about the task force report and its recommendation, and what funding will be provided for that work?

Mr JENNINGS — To answer that question first, a \$2.1 million funding commitment over three years will underpin the establishment of the stolen generations organisation. I had a false start before by indicating the wrong committee. This is the committee that actually started in October last year. After six months of consideration and consultation around the nation the stolen generations task force provided government with a report at the end of April. We responded with a public announcement on 26 May that we would support the establishment of such an organisation.

The task force established that practices of child removal evident around the nation, including Victoria — not necessarily the explicit policy direction of any Victorian government in the past but clearly an outcome of action — means that there are many thousands of Aborigines across Australia, many who moved from Victoria, who suffer the heartache of having been removed from their families.

There have been a number of programs both at the state and commonwealth level over the last five years since the *Bringing Them Home* report was tabled in federal Parliament to try to do something about the ongoing counselling needs, family connections, providing advice, public education, analysis of a breadth of issues, but that work is not well coordinated and not linked up. Members of the community are not aware of the gateways to those programs. They do not find them very accessible, and they have had a limited success.

The task force has recommended that by creating one organisation that has prime carriage for coordinating the activity — bringing it together, providing a range of support ranging from advocacy through to individual

counselling, family reunions, public education campaigns, and bringing those together with the authority of a board that is made up of members of the stolen generations themselves — may start delivering results that both the commonwealth and state jurisdictions hope to achieve in providing ongoing support for members of the stolen generations.

I draw to the committee's attention that in fact the task force had a great deal of compassion for all those people who have been involved, right from families where the children have been removed to the children themselves and the receiving families. Often they were receiving families in the broader community who in many instances had fostered or adopted Aboriginal children with the best of intentions, but quite often they did not know or have the wherewithal or the capacity to deal with the grief, longing and loneliness that Aboriginal child experienced. In fact, there is much pain in those receiving families. It is the recommendation of the task force that all players within that removal process warrant some degree of ongoing concern and consideration. That is a very symbolic and meaningful way in which the task force has provided a lesson to all of us about what reconciliation may mean in the future.

Ms ROMANES — Is that what Jim Berg was referring to in his comments in the media in the middle of May in relation to work that needs to be done to heal the pain and suffering of the separation of families by both the indigenous and non-indigenous communities, or was it something more than that?

Mr JENNINGS — Jim Berg, who was the head of the stolen generations task force, did great work on behalf of all the people of Victoria in steering the work of the organisation. I think he was somewhat disappointed that in fact there was some media commentary about his report indicating that the stolen generations did not exist, practices of child removal did not take place in Victoria and there was no ongoing suffering in Victoria — which most avid readers of the *Herald Sun* may have actually gleaned from an article by Andrew Bolt on the subject. Mr Berg did reply to that article, to say 'Let's not be too preoccupied with blame. Let's not be too preoccupied with guilt. Let's not be preoccupied with drilling down to actually convincing people that some members of the community are right and others are wrong, some are racist, some are not. Let's step over those issues and let's work collaboratively to recognise that there is a degree of ongoing hurt that is experienced within the Aboriginal community and beyond, and let's do something about it to meet that hurt'.

I would like to draw the committee's attention to Andrew Bolt's article, which has kicked off this debate and which perhaps some people have read.

The CHAIR — You do not have to go there. If you want to, you can.

Mr JENNINGS — I will just outline it. The article was headed 'Money for myths'. It was a bit gratuitous at the start. I will not be indulgent and defend myself. Let me conclude by saying that — —

The CHAIR — You presume we have read it.

Mr JENNINGS — These are the best words of Mr Bolt's article:

But let me be clear. I do not deny that some Aboriginal children were removed from their families without good reason. More importantly, the collapse of so many Aboriginal families, for whatever reasons, has been a great tragedy — and still is — that has damaged generations of children.

He concludes by saying:

We must do what we can to heal this deep wound.

I congratulate him on those sentiments.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask you about the line halfway down page 405 of budget paper 3, 'Heritage projects jointly developed with Aboriginal communities'. Can you explain, please, how those projects are developed? Is it a case of AAV receiving applications from Aboriginal communities seeking AAV's involvement in those projects or are the projects initiated by AAV? Is there a joint funding mechanism? Why has the target for the number of projects this year been cut from 10, which was both the target and the achieved level, to 5 for the coming year? When you are ready.

Mr JENNINGS — Thanks very much. The target has been reduced because within the overall output we have determined that with the success of the broad program we referred to earlier, which is the overachievement of our training activities and addressing community capacity in that regard — that is one reason. The target was also reduced because a shift of emphasis in terms of broader capacity building across Aboriginal organisations and

using those discretionary funds within the output group to add to the capacity building funds that people were able to apply for. The question that I did seek some counsel on was in relation to whether they are ongoing programs which are advertised, which people submit for and which we respond to. That is the answer: they are advertised and people apply.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Are they joint funding arrangements?

Mr CAHIR — In the last year and this year, as a result of the communiqué signed between the state government and ATSIC, ATSIC has funded \$50 000 in each of those years to match state funding of \$50 000 to fund the programs.

Mr DONNELLAN — Minister, in your presentation you mentioned that there are 40 Aboriginal organisations around Victoria, most of which are in rural and regional Victoria. Firstly, as the minister have you been able to meet with most of those organisations, and secondly, have there been common interests which have arisen in those discussions?

The CHAIR — Work on around about a 4-minute answer. If you ask the question, that is your answer.

Mr FORWOOD — The answer is, yes and yes — can we have the next question?

Mr JENNINGS — The answer is that I can assure the committee that I have been very keen to get out into Victoria, right across the breadth of the Victorian community, making sure that I meet as many organisations as I possibly can. It would be possible to list a great number of organisations that I have met. I indicate to the committee — —

The CHAIR — Tempting as it is.

Mr JENNINGS — Tempting as it is, I will not go there, but I have been there, with the exception of Mildura, Swan Hill, Robinvale and a couple of organisations in the Loddon-Mallee region. I have not quite got there, but I will be getting there within the next month. Those are in the diary. That is as far north as I am going to get for winter. It will be my great pleasure to be able to report that I have met with most or nearly all those 40 organisations by that time.

Yes, there are a number of similarities in the stories they tell. Let me actually start by saying I was absolutely pleasantly amazed in any number of those visits with the capacity of individuals who work within organisations and the work they are doing. In fact I am sure that the vast majority of Victorians do not understand the creative energy, the drive and the passion that is within most of these organisations — and the great degree of knowledge and skills.

Organisational strengths vary across the state. There are some that have some administrative failings, for want of a better or more accurate word. They need assistance and guidance and ongoing support to make sure that they can provide the service delivery that they promise to their communities, because some of them have difficulty with some administrative practices. Some of them are challenged because, whilst there is a very small core funding component that is provided through a range of state and commonwealth funding programs, most of the service delivery issues are on a continual annual cycle. There is no consistency and continuity of effort. As anybody who has worked in any community organisation knows, whilst accountability is important, to continually be applying for funds one year after the other for exactly the same program and having a great degree of administrative overlay sometimes gets in the way of service delivery on the ground. I think that is a story that we hear time and time again.

In terms of the overall commitment to their communities, time and time again people actually right throughout Victoria are saying, ‘We want to have a sense of optimism and hope for kids in the future that we haven’t seen’ — full stop. It is not a matter of how long since they saw it; they have never seen it. They actually want to make sure they have the capacity to look after people in their old age, and in the Aboriginal communities people get old from about 40 onwards. The life expectancy of Aboriginals is about 30 to 40 years less than the rest. That is just totally unacceptable. None of us, as members of Parliament, should sit here and find that acceptable, and we have to do what we can to turn that cycle around. That is what those organisations are committed to, and that is what they want for their community. From within the role that we can play I think that is what we should focus our attention on.

The CHAIR — Thank for you such a succinct answer about what you found in 40 organisations.

Mr BAXTER — Following the bushfires in the high country earlier this year farmers were not able to replace their boundary fences until an archaeological survey had been conducted. Why was it considered necessary

bearing in mind they were replacing fencing that had been there for 100 years? How much is costing? Is that coming out of your \$14 million budget or the Department of Sustainability and Environment budget?

Mr JENNINGS — In the first instance I am not aware of any specific fence that had been delayed in its reconstruction because of an archaeological survey. As you and other members of the upper house would be aware, I spoke of this matter in question time on a couple of instances, that in the devastation that was meted out across Victoria in terms of damage to environmental values, to farming communities and to farming properties, within that overall despair there was a flip side in terms of potentially uncovering archaeological sites which may otherwise have remained invisible from the public domain or public scrutiny because of the denseness of forest cover. It was deemed important to ensure that there was appropriate archaeological exploratory work to go in and see what the level of damage was and to see what may be uncovered during the course of the fires that would not otherwise have been uncovered.

In terms of the question, I am certainly aware of the stress that was caused for many farmers and particularly those that abut public land. Whilst all in the community should have a degree of concern for what is perceived to be administrative overload before they can actually restore their productive land I have not been made aware of any specific circumstances where archaeological surveys may have prevented that from occurring. If Mr Baxter or any member of the community is aware of that, and is different from my vantage point, I would be keen to expedite that reconstruction. In terms of the costing for it, I believe there is a small allocation in the Department of Sustainability and Environment for bushfire recovery, which includes heritage surveys if they are required.

Mr BAXTER — By way of supplementary question, I do not think I was alleging delay, and I have had it clarified that it is coming out of the DSE budget. Was anything found on the fence line inspections? I know some things may have been located in the burnt forest areas but was anything located on the fence lines which were surveyed?

Mr CAHIR — The reasons the surveys were instituted is that most of the fence lines could be as old as 50, 60 or even more years. The legislation that requires surveys that establishes a register of Aboriginal sites was not in existence at that time. Identifying sites is opportunistic — we do not just survey every square inch of Victoria but as developments occur or as change in land use occurs it is an opportunity not only to look at where the fence lines were, which may have impacted on some sites. But because there is a 10 metre or something buffer zone on each side the survey was more than a specific fence line.

As the minister said, the funding for that for Aboriginal people and archaeologists to supervise such work came out of the general bushfire recovery funding. We are aware of various community members working with farmers on their fence lines and seeking to identify sites. As to any identified either on the fence line or in the buffer zone, we are not aware of the numbers but we would expect a report when the whole process is finished.

Mr FORWOOD — I refer to the total amount spent on the surveys — could you get that from the DSE?

Mr JENNINGS — We will have to check on that.

Mr FORWOOD — On a point of order, Chair, I note that we have gone 9 minutes over the allocated time. I think there is not sufficient time for questions to the minister on this portfolio. We on this side of the table have had one question each, and I think one from each member at the other end of the table. Next year we need more time on this particular portfolio area. I flag with the minister that among the questions we will be asking is about the Sorry badges — and thank you for the Sorry badges. The question we will be asking you in writing is, ‘Why were they made in Sydney?’.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. I thank witnesses from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.

Witnesses withdrew.