

VERIFIED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2012–13

Melbourne — 15 May 2012

Members

Mr N. Angus

Mr P. Davis

Ms J. Hennessy

Mr D. Morris

Mr D. O'Brien

Mr M. Pakula

Mr R. Scott

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Witnesses

Mr H. Delahunty, Minister for Veterans' Affairs,

Mr A. Tongue, Secretary,

Mr G. Forck, Chief Finance Officer,

Dr P. Hertan, Deputy Secretary, Sport and Recreation and Veterans' Affairs, and

Mr D. Roberts, Manager, Veterans Unit, Department of Planning and Community Development.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee**

The CHAIR — I now welcome from the Department of Planning and Community Development Mr David Roberts, manager of the veterans unit. I now call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the budget estimates for the veterans' affairs portfolio.

Overheads shown.

Mr DELAHUNTY — Thank you, Chair, and members of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. The Victorian veterans have made a significant contribution to our community over the last century through their services in conflicts around the world. We are indebted to them for their service and the sacrifices they have made for our nation, which continues to this present day. We are committed to commemorating Victorian service and sacrifice and supporting their health and wellbeing and passing on the stories of their experiences to future generations. We are committed to respecting and honouring their services and sacrifice. Given the diminishing numbers of World War II and Korean War veterans, this is more important than ever.

Our key achievements in 2011–12 include the Premier's Spirit of Anzac prize. Ten students have recently returned from the eighth study tour, which this year visited Turkey, Singapore and Malaysia. The competition and associated overseas study tour are important in keeping the memory of veterans service and sacrifice alive across the generations. Since 2004 the competition has attracted more than 1300 entries. For the first time ever, this year, in addition to the 10 students travelling overseas, 17 regional finalists received a study tour to Canberra to visit the Australian War Memorial and other national significant sites. This initiative provides more students with the opportunity to learn about Australia's war history. The Premier and I, along with the opposition leader, had the honour of meeting all of these students at this year's Premier's Anzac Day luncheon. Our government is committed to ensuring the continuing success of this important program, which has received bipartisan support. That is why we have allocated \$100 000 per year over four years to better promote the Premier's Spirit of Anzac prize competition in last year's budget.

In 2011–12, 43 projects, with a grant value of more than \$240 000, were funded through the Restoring Community War Memorials Grants program. This investment has supported a range of initiatives across the state, including restoration works on the oarsmen's cenotaph by the Yarra River and the bronze memorial plaques for the Ballarat Avenue of Honour. Some of those sites are marked on the board there. Consistent with previous years, a significant portion of these projects have been undertaken in rural and regional Victoria. In the 2011–12 budget the government was pleased to commit more than \$1 million over the next four years to continue this program.

The 2011–12 financial year has also seen significant progress on initiatives to preserve our war-related history and pass the baton of remembrance to future generations. This year we have recorded over 40 stories from our veteran community through our In Our Words digital storytelling project in partnership with ACMI and the Shrine of Remembrance. We have also completed the Victorian Veterans Virtual Museum. This provides Victorians with access to a range of information about our state's war history.

We have also run veterans heritage workshops in Sale and Mildura and in Melbourne at the Victorian Archives Centre. These workshops have provided community organisations with hands-on skills to preserve their war-related memorabilia. Through the Veterans Fund grants we have allocated over \$260 000 to 23 community projects to commemorate veterans' service and sacrifice. These include funding a major event for the 50th anniversary of Vietnam Veterans Day on 18 August.

We have continued to support the Shrine of Remembrance as it delivers its important work in commemoration and education. In the 2011–12 budget we made \$50 000 available to support the redevelopment of the shrine's website and strengthen the shrine's marketing program, public programs and online education activities. We have supported numerous commemoration events within Victoria over the past year. In February I was privileged to accompany two Victorian veterans to the 70th anniversary of the commemoration of the bombing of Darwin.

We have also committed \$1.2 million towards the construction of the Seymour Vietnam veterans walk. The Victorian Veterans Council has distributed, from the Anzac Day proceeds funds, grants worth more than \$415 000 to 37 projects in support of our veterans' welfare. These include funding for an outreach program for younger invalided veterans. We have also celebrated the third Veteran Community Award, which was

presented to Joan Gillespie during Seniors Week for her support to Vietnam veterans. The Victorian government continues to provide veterans and war widows with free travel on Anzac Day. In partnership with the Victorian Veterans Council, we have also run information forums for the veterans community in Bendigo, Frankston and Ararat, which will provide up-to-date information about the commonwealth, state and local initiatives and entitlements for members of the veterans community.

There are a number of important new initiatives in the veterans affairs portfolio. These were announced in the recent budget. I am pleased to advise this committee that our government is allocating \$22.5 million towards the development of the shrine's new Galleries of Remembrance. These new facilities will help the shrine to meet growing public interest in our war history and will enhance its capacity to commemorate the service of our veterans for the centenary of World War I, known as the Anzac centenary.

The government is committed to honouring Victorian veterans and to ensuring that their legacy is passed on to future generations. The Anzac centenary, which commences in two years, will be an important time for the community to commemorate the centenary of service. We are committed to consulting the veteran and wider Victorian communities to appropriately commemorate this historic anniversary. I am delighted to announce that the government is allocating \$8.9 million to continue the state's preparation for this centenary. Now that the commonwealth government's position on the centenary is clearer, we are also moving to establish a Victorian Anzac Day centenary committee. This will include appropriate representation from organisations like the RSL, the shrine and the Victorian Veterans Council. The government will make further announcements on this important committee over the coming months.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. The remaining time is available for questions on the veterans affairs portfolio.

Given the key growth and efficiency initiatives announced in the budget, can you please outline for the committee the likely impact of the budget on enhancing service delivery, promoting productivity and achieving efficiency gains within your portfolio? In your response could you also indicate how you intend to monitor the portfolio's effectiveness in maximising improvements in these areas and, in the interests of time, could you also coincidentally inform the committee on the likely impact on the community stakeholders in the portfolio of the initiatives?

Mr DELAHUNTY — The budget includes two important initiatives in the veterans affairs portfolio: firstly, the Galleries of Remembrance redevelopment at the shrine; and secondly, the Anzac centenary strategy. Each of these initiatives will enhance service delivery and promote productivity. For example, the Galleries of Remembrance redevelopment at the shrine will increase its capacity to cater for larger visitor numbers during the Anzac centenary as well as groups of school students. Funding has also been provided for regular, routine repairs and maintenance at the shrine to ensure that this important state asset is maintained at an appropriate standard. The Anzac centenary funding will enable a greater level of engagement with and delivery to veterans and the wider Victorian community around this great state of Victoria.

Mr PAKULA — Minister, I want to ask you about the Western Port maritime memorial project. You would probably be aware that the Western Port maritime memorial project has made a number of applications for funding to establish a museum alongside the donated submarine, HMAS *Otama*. I do not see any specific line item in the budget in BP 3, page 47, for that, but I am wondering whether there is, within the DPCD base funding, any possibility of that memorial project alongside the HMAS *Otama* being funded in the 2012–13 year?

Mr DELAHUNTY — I am not aware of this particular application — whether it has been received in my office or not. What happens with these programs is that they come into the veterans council or through my office. We have, as I said earlier in my presentation, a grants program for restoration of memorials. That is up to a maximum of \$10 000, if my memory is right; I am pretty sure that is the right amount. Other applications go through other processes. But the Victorian Veterans Council, which was established under the Veterans Act, responds to these types of requests, and I am aware that through the last year over \$260 000 was allocated to 230 community projects. These include a major event for the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam veterans, and I said that earlier in my presentation, and also I know there is funding for a bronze statue of Ted Kenna, the last surviving VC, which will be established in Hamilton, and also a range of education programs for school children. I am also aware that the Victorian Veterans Council has distributed grants worth more than \$450 000

from the Anzac Day Proceeds Fund to 37 projects to support veterans welfare — but this is not in relation to welfare.

I do not have specific details of this one. If you want any further details, I am pleased to take that on notice.

Mr PAKULA — Just to follow on, the group behind the HMAS *Otama* project have a website, and on the website I think the member for Hastings, Mr Burgess, is listed as a strong supporter of the project. I had assumed he might have approached you about it, but if that is not the case — —

Mr DELAHUNTY — I have a lot of people approach me on various matters, Mr Pakula, and I know that Mr Burgess is a very passionate member for his electorate and does some great work down there. Normally across Australia a lot of these major programs are funded by the federal government. We in Victoria, to the credit of the previous government, set up the veterans unit, and it provides small grants under the Restoring Community War Memorial grants program, but it sounds like this project is a larger one. Mr Burgess is also probably dealing with the federal government to try to get their support. They have allocated some money for the centenary of Anzac, whether or not that will get up in that process. They might also have applied through that funding program. But no doubt Mr Burgess, who is a very passionate supporter of his community, will be working on it to try to get funding for that very important project.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, you just mentioned the centenary of Anzac, and I note that the budget provides some 8.9 million over four years to plan and conduct the commemoration activities for the centenary of Anzac and of course the centenary of the Gallipoli campaign. Can you indicate to the committee what initiatives will be funded?

Mr DELAHUNTY — I thank Mr Morris. The Anzac centenary is a unique opportunity for the entire Australian community to be involved in the activities honouring those who served during World War I. The Victorian government is committed to ensuring that this historic anniversary is commemorated in a very fitting manner. To that end, the 2012–13 budget includes over the next four years \$22.5 million for the Galleries of Remembrance project at the shrine and, importantly, \$8.9 million for the Anzac centenary strategy, which includes \$1.4 million this year.

The shrine's Galleries of Remembrance project involves developing a space beneath the shrine to create a new gallery, education and exhibition space mirroring the existing development on the northern side. The centrepiece will be a lifeboat from the ship the *Devanha*, which was rowed ashore at Gallipoli in 1915. The southern extension of the shrine will also be constructed to provide educational, organisational and auditorium facilities. The redevelopment will cater for increased visitor numbers from Victoria and interstate and many from overseas during the centenary, as well as for the growing number of schoolchildren who participate in the shrine's education programs. This initiative will consolidate the shrine as a focal point for the commemoration and remembrance of all men and women who have served this great nation of Australia. Importantly, it will leave a long-term legacy of the centenary for all Victorians for decades to come.

Also in relation to the Anzac centenary strategy, we have allocated \$8.9 million, as I said, over the next four years. This will support Victoria's preparation for the centenary. This funding will support a range of initiatives, including a state-wide veterans heritage trail; a living memorials program to record veterans' stories; the veterans heritage workshops, which I spoke about earlier and which continue; a local communities commemoration program; and funding for repairs and maintenance of the Shrine of Remembrance.

Further details of initiatives from this funding will be announced following discussion with key stakeholders, including the RSL, the shrine and the Victorian Veterans Council. The funding builds on the \$2.1 million over four years announced in the 2011–12 budget to prepare for the centenary of Anzac. That investment included more than \$1 million over four years for the restoration of Victoria's community war memorials and also additional funding to support the annual Anzac Day commemorations here at the shrine.

We are also focusing on finalising the Victorian committee for the commemoration of the Anzac centenary. At the national level the Victorian government is also represented on the national working groups and national networks established by the Anzac Centenary Advisory Board. Major-General Peter Haddad is on the community representatives network, Major-General David McLachlan is on the ceremonial and commemorative working group and Dr Peter Herten, sitting beside me here, is also on the state, territory and local government working group.

Last year, Mr Morris, I also met with Air Chief Marshal Houston to discuss the work of the advisory board and Victoria's preparedness to work with the commonwealth in a coordinated way to commemorate the Anzac centenary. The government will continue to meet with the commonwealth representatives to discuss matters related to the Anzac centenary, including the commonwealth's recent budget announcement of \$83.5 million over seven years for the Anzac centenary.

The centenary provides an opportunity to commemorate the service and sacrifice of those who served our nation in World War I. It also provides an important reminder of all men and women who have served in World War II and other subsequent conflicts. We will continue as a government to work closely with the Victorian Veterans Council, ex-service organisations and the wider community and commonwealth to determine priorities for the Victorian centenary activities, which I really think will be a major event over the next four years, starting in 2014.

Mr SCOTT — From the centenary of Anzac, I would like to turn to veterans of an ongoing conflict, the Afghanistan war veterans. I looked at budget paper 3, page 47, and I could not find any output initiatives that related to any assistance or programs related to Afghanistan war veterans. I just wonder if you could outline whether there has been any funding for these newest of veterans.

Mr DELAHUNTY — I spoke about the various welfare programs that are funded. With those, I am not specifically aware of any specific to Afghanistan veterans, but through advice from the veterans council and others, we are supporting various funding programs that support our newest veterans. I call them that because the Afghanistan veterans are probably the newer veterans. No doubt they need a lot of support.

In relation to that, the Minister for Community Services is the person responsible for matters relating to concessions. They are also given support, but as a government we are also keen to work with the RSL and other ex-service organisations to ensure that the veterans community, including the Afghanistan veterans, are appropriately looked after in Australia. Obviously a majority of that work, Mr Scott, comes under the federal government programs that Minister Warren Snowdon is responsible for. I do speak to Mr Snowdon on a fairly regular basis; we catch up occasionally. You would no doubt be aware that the majority of the programs funding health and welfare — I would say just about all of them — are funded through the commonwealth programs funded under Minister Warren Snowdon.

Mr SCOTT — In the interests of time, I will allow others to ask questions.

Mr ANGUS — Minister, I would like to follow up on Mr Morris's previous question and a matter that you touched on in your presentation and indeed is in budget paper 3, page 50, and that is the Galleries of Remembrance project that the government is supporting at the Shrine of Remembrance. Minister, can you provide advice to the committee in relation to the benefits of this project?

Mr DELAHUNTY — Thanks, Mr Angus, for this important question. This topic has been talked about by the Victorian community for many, many years, so I was pleased to announce that the government is allocating in this year's budget \$22.5 million to the Shrine of Remembrance Galleries of Remembrance redevelopment. Work will start immediately, and the aim is for the galleries project to be completed by the Anzac centenary on 25 April 2015.

The Shrine of Remembrance has occupied a very special place in the commemoration of the sacrifice of Australians from World War I and all subsequent conflicts since its dedication back in 1934. The shrine was established with a groundswell of support after World War I. Over recent years the education role of the shrine has expanded. This project will assist the shrine to better fulfil its important role of telling the story, not only of the past wars but the importance of maintaining peace and upholding democracy. With the completion of the visitor's centre back in 2003 and later the education centre in 2005, the shrine has increased the number of visitors and support to schools through education programs. Many of those are also outreach programs coming out from the shrine.

With the Anzac centenary fast approaching, there will be increased expectations for the shrine to be a place for the Victorian community to commemorate and learn about the sacrifice and service of our veterans. At my direction, my department developed a business case in partnership with Major Projects Victoria and the shrine to fully investigate the merits of the galleries project and associated costs to build and operate such a facility. The new galleries of remembrance will see an undercroft or basement space transformed into a modern exhibits

and education area. The centrepiece will be a lifeboat from the ship *Devanha*. I spoke about that earlier. This is the only existing lifeboat used to bring troops ashore on 25 April 1915, and the story is that it may have carried Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick. We all know him as ‘Simpson’ with his devoted donkey. This boat will be on public display through an agreement with the Australian War Memorial. The expansion will be similar in style to the existing education centre, and I have no doubt, Mr Angus, that you and other members have been down to the shrine to have a look at it. It will be built in a way that does not impact on the Shrine of Remembrance’s external heritage profile, and will utilise the unused space underneath the shrine. The aim is to complete the work in time, as I said, for the centenary of Anzac and other important World War I events.

I have to say, Mr Angus, this is an important initiative which will enhance a place which is already sacred in the hearts of not only generations of Victorians but also Australians generally. I have talked to a lot of people across Australia, and I recognise that the shrine is one of the most significant war memorials in Australia. I am sure this project will have bipartisan support. The redevelopment will cater for increased visitor numbers from Victoria, interstate and overseas. It will also cater for the growing number of school tours, as I spoke about, and this initiative will consolidate the shrine as a focal point for the commemoration and remembrance of all men and women who have served our great nation. Importantly, as I said before, it will leave a long-term legacy of the centenary for all Victorians for decades to come.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. One very brief question from Ms Hennessy.

Ms HENNESSY — Thank you, Chair. Minister, just at budget paper 5, page 105, the Victorian Property Fund expenditure has been reduced to replenish the working capital of the fund. I understand that the management of the fund does not sit under your portfolio responsibilities, but I was interested in your election commitment to provide 2 million over four years for housing for vets and their families. I was wondering whether funding for that election commitment had been affected in any way by the cuts to the Victorian Property Fund expenditure.

Mr DELAHUNTY — Thanks, Ms Hennessy, for this question. It was an election commitment for us, and my information is that the appropriate parties are working through this, which also involves the Melbourne City Council in relation to this. Our government is committed to the wellbeing of veterans who have served in past, recent and current conflicts. To this end, and you have pointed this out, we have committed \$2 million from the Victorian Property Fund to make specialist accommodation available to low-income or disadvantaged veterans. The veterans council is presently working with ex-service organisations to develop a proposal for consideration of the Victorian Property Fund to potentially make a number of units available in the proposed commercial development in Southbank known as Project Cairo. I look forward to receiving further advice from the veterans council on this matter, but I do know that it is proceeding, maybe slowly, because I know there are a lot of things to be talked about with the various ex-service organisations, but it is proceeding in the right direction.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. This concludes the budget estimates for the portfolios of sport and recreation and veterans’ affairs. I thank the minister and all of the departmental officers for their attendance. I note that there were two matters taken on notice. I would be grateful if when the committee writes to you, Minister, you would respond within 21 days. This concludes the hearing.

Witnesses withdrew.