

VERIFIED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2013–14

Melbourne — 21 May 2013

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Witnesses

Mr H. Delahunty, Minister for Veterans' Affairs;
Mr A. Tongue, Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet; and
Mr P. Hertan, Deputy Secretary,
Mr D. Roberts, Manager, Veterans Unit, and
Mr G. Forck, Chief Finance Officer, Department of Planning and Community Development.

The CHAIR — We will now commence the hearing on the portfolio of veterans' affairs. I welcome Mr Andrew Tongue, the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and Mr David Roberts, Manager of the Veterans Unit of DPCD. Welcome back, Mr Forck, Mr Herten and Minister. Minister, a 5-minute presentation on this portfolio if you would, please.

Overheads shown.

Mr DELAHUNTY — Victorian veterans have made an exceptional contribution to our community over the last century through their service in conflicts around the world. We are indebted to them for their service and the sacrifices they have made for our nation, which continue to this present day. We are committed to commemorating veterans' service and educating young Victorians about the sacrifices that have been made. We are committed to respecting and honouring their service and sacrifice, not just on Anzac Day and Remembrance Day but on every day of the year. With the centenary of Anzac looming in 2015, we intend to help bring an even greater focus to Victoria on what our men and women in the services have done for us.

The completion of stage 2 of the \$1.2 million Seymour Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Walk has been one of our key achievements in commemoration. The opening of the walk in March this year was the culmination of a two-year journey by the Mitchell Shire Council and the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia to commemorate the more than 60 000 Australians who served in Vietnam, of whom 521 did not come home alive and 3000 returned wounded.

We are also commemorating our Kokoda veterans at the Kokoda Memorial Terrace and walk in the Dandenong Ranges National Park. I was also proud to be involved with the unveiling of the Ted Kenna, VC, statue in the city of Hamilton in April, for which the Victorian Veterans Council provided \$20 000. Our government has also supported numerous commemorative events within Victoria over the past year, including Remembrance Day, Vietnam Veterans Day and of course Anzac Day.

The veterans council has also provided grants worth \$265 000 through the Victorian Veterans Fund to 27 other community projects to commemorate service. These include the Gallipoli Oaks project of the Victorian branch of the National Trust of Australia to distribute seedlings for planting at 2000 Victorian primary schools. The government is also providing \$100 000 for the Anzac commemorative naming project, a statewide program to name roads, suburbs and other geographic features in honour of local World War I veterans.

The Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize competition and overseas study tour are important in keeping the memories of veterans' service and sacrifice alive across the generations. Ten students have recently returned from the ninth Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize study tour, which this year visited Gallipoli, the Western Front and the Netherlands. I was fortunate enough to spend three days with them on the last three days of the trip. They are fantastic ambassadors for their schools, their families and the state of Victoria. Since 2004 the competition has attracted more than 1600 entries. Retired Major General Jim Barry has done a terrific job in chairing the state selection panel from the very start and over the last eight years has selected a total of 89 students from across Victoria to travel overseas to where our veterans have served. In June, 16 regional finalists from around the state will also be travelling to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra to learn more about veterans' service.

In 2012–13 the competition received the record number of 320 entries from schools around the state, and my department is working in collaboration with the History Teachers Association of Victoria to look at new ways to encourage students in years 9 and 10 in the understanding of Australia's history of involvement in war. This year I have made a decision to expand the prize to enable 12 students to participate in next year's overseas study tour.

Some of our key achievements include the role of volunteers in preserving our war heritage, which cannot be underestimated. That is why we have run veterans' heritage workshops for volunteers to improve their skills in how to look after fragile objects, to catalogue, to store and to display them. Since 2011 we have held a total of eight workshops attended by 350 people. In March I was pleased to launch a series of 15 fact sheets on how to care for war heritage and memorabilia.

In 2012–13, 39 projects with a grant value of \$240 000 have been 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 St James Park war memorial in the city of Boroondara, the Violet Town and district

Anzac avenue of honour plaques and the McKinnon war memorial in the city of Glen Eira. Since the start of this program in 2004, 438 projects have been funded to the value of \$2.1 million.

The Victorian Veterans Council has distributed \$447 000 in grants to 23 organisations to improve the wellbeing of Victorian veterans and their dependents. Examples include funding assistance for war widows in East Gippsland to help meet their annual energy costs, and supporting the ex-services organisation Carry On for direct welfare to their veterans. We have also run veterans information forums to the veteran community in Wangaratta, Glen Waverley, Pascoe Vale and Hamilton. These provide up-to-date information about government initiatives, both federal and state, and entitlements for members of the Victorian community.

The Anzac centenary, which commences in 2015, will be an important time for the community to commemorate the centenaries of service. Last year we announced government funding to begin the state's preparation for the centenary. This will deliver a range of statewide projects that will leave a lasting legacy for future generations and support communities throughout Victoria to develop commemorative projects that are relevant to them. To do this we have established a Victorian Anzac centenary committee to be chaired by the former Premier and member for Hawthorn, Ted Baillieu, and it includes the member for Ballarat West, Sharon Knight. We are also working to deliver a statewide heritage trail to encourage Victorians and visitors to our state to stop, see and reflect on the memorials, the avenues of honour and the ways in which communities have remembered fallen.

We are committed to working with the commonwealth to coordinate plans to secure funding for the Galleries of Remembrance project at the shrine to which our government has already committed to \$22.5 million.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. You will probably be familiar with the first question that I am going to ask. In the context of the 2013–14 budget, can you outline to the committee examples of capital infrastructure projects in the veterans' affairs portfolio, which will be either commenced or completed in the next financial year?

Mr DELAHUNTY — Thanks, Chair. I am pleased to let you and the committee know that the construction of the Galleries of Remembrance at the shrine is well advanced and on track for Anzac Day 2015. As you well know, the government committed \$22.5 million to this project in last year's budget, and in April, along with Minister for Major Projects, David Hodgett, I announced that excavation had begun on the task of removing 10 000 cubic metres of soil to create two new courtyard areas on the southern side of site. With the Anzac centenary fast approaching there are increased expectations on the shrine to be a place for the Victorian community to commemorate and learn about the sacrifice and service of our veterans.

As you would all know, the shrine was established after World War I, and over the 80 years since its dedication in 1934 the education role of the shrine has expanded. It has an important role in telling the story of not only past wars, but also about the importance of maintaining peace and upholding democracy. The Galleries of Remembrance will help to support the shrine in this task — to reach out to a new generation of Victorians. The new galleries will see the undercroft, or the basement space, transformed into a modern exhibition and education area. The centrepiece will be a lifeboat from the ship *Devana*, which was ashore at Gallipoli in 1915. This lifeboat was used to bring troops ashore on 25 April 1915, and may have carried Private John Simpson Kilpatrick, who is famous as Simpson and his donkey. It will be on public display through an agreement with the Australian War Memorial, and we thank them for that.

The expansion will be similar in style to the existing education centre and will be built in a way that does not have an impact on the shrine's heritage-listed features, as it will utilise underused space under the shrine that is currently inaccessible to the public. This is an important initiative, which will enhance a place which is already sacred in the hearts of not only generations of Victorians but of Australians generally. The redevelopment will cater for increased visitor numbers from Victoria, interstate and overseas, particularly in the centenary period. It will also cater for the growing number of schoolchildren who participate in the shrine's educational programs. This initiative will consolidate the shrine as a focal point for the commemoration and remembrance of all men and women who have served our nation. Importantly it will leave a long-term legacy from the centenary for all Victorians for decades to come.

I go to the shrine fairly regularly and when I am going along St Kilda Road and around that area, the number of people I see daily is outstanding. I know from looking at the figures that there are a lot of international visitors

who go to the shrine as part of their visitation. It is a very important resource. We are still hoping the federal government might come to the party in relation to support the project, but as a government we are committed to seeing this development. I am working closely with the Minister for Major Projects, David Hodgett, on the development.

Mr PAKULA — The veterans' affairs outputs on page 218 of budget paper 3 talk about 'Restoring community war memorial grants — projects approved'. In last year's budget it showed that the 10–11 actual was 50; the 11–12 actual was 43; the 12–13 expected outcome is 41. I suppose what I am wondering is with the centenary of Anzac coming up, it seems to be an unusual output to be continually trending down. I wonder if you can explain why that would be the case? Why is it trending down with the centenary of Anzac coming up?

Mr DELAHUNTY — I am not sure it is trending down.

Mr PAKULA — Well, 50, 43, 41.

Mr DELAHUNTY — In the 2011–12 budget the government provided funding for the successful Restoring Community War Memorials Grants program for a further four years. This funding provides up to \$10 000 to assist ex-service organisations, local councils, schools and community groups to preserve, restore and enhance local war memorials and honour rolls. There are more than 1100 war memorials in Victoria's towns and suburbs, many dating back to World War I. They are often the focus of commemorative events honouring the service and sacrifice of Victorian servicemen and women, and the government is committed to ensuring they are kept in a first-rate condition. Under this program, funding of around 240 000 for 39 individual projects to repair and restore local war memorials, memorial plaques and honour rolls has been approved this year. In one local government area alone, the city of Glen Eira, five projects were funded. Other projects included the honour board at Ballarat High School and the Arch of Triumph at White Hills Botanic Gardens in Bendigo.

Beyond the restoration of war memorials, the government has also funded commemorative and education projects through the veterans fund. I mentioned the Gallipoli Oaks project earlier in my presentation. The oaks project is one of 27 projects funded in 2012–13 to a total value of \$265 000.

The funds support projects in towns, cities and suburbs across Victoria and reflect the desire of local communities to honour their veterans and to commemorate their service and sacrifice. For instance, the Rotary Club of Monash received funding to support its conduct of the annual Anzac ceremony for schools in the city of Monash, while the Wallan commemorative committee received a grant of \$2000 to purchase a portable PA system to use at the Anzac Day and Remembrance Day services. These projects all support local commemoration and create opportunities for partnerships between local RSLs, councils, schools, historical societies and community organisations like Rotary.

But funding for this program has not been reduced; I have to emphasise that. The number of projects depends on the size of the projects and also the grant for each of these projects. The government has also provided additional funding for the centenary of Anzac, which can be used for projects which could include memorials. The program I announced in the 2011–12 budget provides grants of up to \$10 000. Again, I emphasise that there is more money going to this program as we go towards the centenary, as it should. I think that it is a very worthy question from the member, if I could, Mr Pakula.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. Is there a supplementary?

Mr PAKULA — Yes, just a quick supp. So, Minister, I have got two press releases of yours here — one from 19 April 2012 where you talk about communities and RSL clubs sharing in \$240 000 of coalition government Restoring Community War Memorials grants, and that was to help their local communities repair, protect, restore and enhance their war memorials.

Mr DELAHUNTY — Yes.

Mr PAKULA — That was 240, in April 2012 for the year ahead. And then you have got another press release from just a couple of weeks ago, or four weeks ago, again to 'help local communities repair, protect, restore and enhance war memorials and honour boards'. It is the same funding, and that is \$170 000. So 240 000 last year and 170 000 this year. To the layperson that would look like a \$70 000 reduction for the coming year as against last year, but you say it has not been cut.

Mr DELAHUNTY — I can assure Mr Pakula and members of the committee that funding has not been cut. There are two components of it. As I say, there was 170 000 — I think you have quoted from a media release there; would that be right?

Mr PAKULA — Yes.

Mr DELAHUNTY — But there is also another round of funding programs which we will be announcing. There is more work to be done on those projects that are coming through.

Mr PAKULA — Right. So ‘more to come’ is what you are saying?

Mr DELAHUNTY — There is more to come. That was my understanding. That was when I did the Gallipoli Oaks project, it was probably announced in that one there, because I know I did it with the group there and I announced those ones there. I do know there is more to come before the end of this financial year.

Mr PAKULA — I am looking forward to it.

Mr ANGUS — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 218, where it notes that the government is preparing to commemorate the Anzac centenary. I note that you also touched on that in your earlier answer to the chairman and also in your presentation. Minister, can you please advise the committee what else is being planned?

Mr DELAHUNTY — Sorry? You are talking about the Anzac centenary?

Mr ANGUS — Yes.

Mr DELAHUNTY — The centenary of the First World War, as we know, will run from 2014 to 2018, and it will be a significant international commemorative event. For us in Australia the landing of Australian troops at Anzac Cove in 1915 was one of the most defining moments of our history. The centenary of Anzac presents a unique opportunity for the entire Australian community to be involved in activities honouring those who served during World War I. The Victorian government is committed to ensuring the Anzac centenary is commemorated in a fitting manner, inclusive of all Victorians.

Our planning to support Victoria’s preparations for the centenary has included the establishment of the Victorian Anzac centenary committee. I am delighted, as I said before, that we have got the former Premier leading that, and the member for Ballarat West is also a member. Also on that committee we have got the state president of the RSL, Major-General David McLachlan; the chair of the shrine trustees, Air Vice-Marshal Chris Spence; and the chair of the veterans council, Major-General Peter Haddad. We will be adding a young person — a young person who has been a recipient of a Premier’s Spirit of Anzac prize — to that committee.

In addition to the Galleries of Remembrance, a number of statewide projects to commemorate the Anzac centenary have already been announced, and more will be following. Projects announced to date include the Anzac Commemorative Naming Project, in partnership with the office of geographic place names. This project was piloted by five Victorian councils and has seen 39 new roads named after Victorian veterans and civilians who served during wartime, including the new suburb in Ballarat named Lucas. Grants are available for councils to research and collate databases of commemorative names to support official recognition and gazettal by the registrar of geographic names.

A travelling exhibition about World War I in partnership with the Shrine will also occur during this period. This exhibition is in development and will commemorate the sacrifice of Victorian servicemen and women to educate the community, particularly our young people, about the history of Victoria’s involvement in war and its impact on individuals, families and communities.

A book about Victoria’s involvement in World War I in partnership with the State Library of Victoria will be produced. The drafting of the book has begun, and it will look at all aspects of Victoria’s war effort from our military units, our casualties and the impact on rural communities, to the role of our schools and the formation of the 14th battalion, the Aboriginal soldiers and nurses from Victoria, our role at battles such as Villers-Bretonneux and Fromelles, our awful losses at Krithia and the repatriation of our troops back to Victoria. It will be a resource for us all for years to come, and I am very much looking forward to its publication in time for the centenary.

This builds on our continuing work around restoring community war memorials and honour boards, and support for a range of statewide commemoration and education initiatives, including additional support for the Anzac Day march.

At the national level the commonwealth has established an Anzac Centenary Advisory Board, chaired by a former chief of the defence force, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, to guide the preparations for the centenary. The commonwealth has made budget allocations for the centenary for a wide range of nationwide projects, including the redevelopment of the World War I galleries at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and a grants program that is to be delivered through the federal members of Parliament.

Senior Victorian representatives sit on the Anzac Centenary State, Territories and Local Government Working Group and the Community Representatives Network. The state, territories and local government working group meets on a regular basis and shares information to maximise the coordination of states' and territories' efforts. I am in regular contact with Warren Snowdon, MP, the commonwealth Minister for Veterans' Affairs, on matters concerning the centenary commemorations. Discussions not only with him but also with others within the state of Victoria, particularly our ex-service organisations and local councils, are progressing very well.

Mr SCOTT — Minister, I ask you to turn to page 218 of budget paper 3. There is a performance measure there 'Event attendance: Student participation in Shrine of Remembrance programs'. There is a decline from the actual of 2011-12 to the expected outcome for 2012-13 of over 7000 students. There was a program in the 2009-10 budget, which was referenced in budget paper 3 on page 338 and then again on 342, which was funding for the Shrine of Remembrance, 'especially in respect to schools programs'. That funding was due to lapse in 2012-13, so I am trying to seek information as to whether that has been refunded for the current budget year.

Mr DELAHUNTY — Now in its 79th year, the Shrine of Remembrance is Victoria's largest and most visited war memorial, and you know that as well as anyone. The shrine is a focal point for events and commemorates the sacrifice of our veterans. Our government is committed to ensuring that it continues to play an important role to educate the community, especially young Victorians, about our service history.

In regard to operational funding, that is why our Victorian government provides the shrine with a total annual funding of over \$2.3 million. This includes approximately \$1.5 million from the Department of Premier and Cabinet and over \$800 000 from the Department of Environment and Primary Industries. In the 2012-13 budget this includes \$400 000 for commemoration, \$700 000 for public education and \$400 000 for stewardship of the shrine, including repairs, maintenance of this heritage-listed building and \$800 000 for the management of the shrine reserve. The shrine also receives an annual grant of around \$150 000 from the Melbourne City Council.

I have also had discussions with Chris Spence, the chair of the shrine, about fundraising to look at managing future costs associated with the Galleries of Remembrance. As you know, we spoke about the centenary of Anzac coming up. The shrine has experienced a period of growth, which continues as we approach the Anzac centenary. In recognition of this we are proud to have committed, as I said earlier, \$22.5 million in last year's budget for the Galleries of Remembrance project. This project will consolidate the shrine as a focal point for commemoration and remembrance for all men and women who have served this nation. Importantly, it will also leave a long-term legacy of the centenary for all Victorians for decades to come.

The number of visitors to the shrine vary from each year. They continue to be above 40 000 — I think that is shown in the figures there. That is why we are rebuilding the shrine to get more space for the children to attend. Again, they are estimated numbers, but it is a continuous level. The reality is that the shrine as it is at this stage has limited capacity to take a lot more students there — the days are booked out — so the expansion of the shrine will allow for greater numbers to go through, but that will not be open until 2015.

Mr SCOTT — I am still seeking information. I understand there was some general information presented regarding funding for the shrine, and I am grateful for that, but in terms of the specific program that was funded in 2010-11 and whether that funding for the specific purpose that was outlined in that budget is actually continuing, could you provide clarity on that matter, Minister?

Mr DELAHUNTY — As I said in my answer there before to Mr Scott, we provide \$700 000 for public education.

Mr SCOTT — Including the students?

Mr DELAHUNTY — No, it is not. It is mostly students, I have to say, but predominantly that is where it goes. I am sure the money there is covered for in the question you were asking.

The CHAIR — That concludes the hearings on the veterans' affairs portfolio. I thank you, Minister, for your attendance this afternoon and also the officers of the department. Where questions were taken on notice — and there was a question taken on notice for the sport and rec portfolio — the committee will write to you and we do seek a response within 21 days, if that is at all possible, in order to allow a timely report to the Parliament. I thank you for your attendance this afternoon.

Witnesses withdrew.