

---

## **We'll pay \$1m for ATSI 'witch-hunt'**

Misha Schubert & Michael McKinnon

*Australian*

15 September 2003

Taxpayers will outlay more than \$1 million for a review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Contract details obtained by The Australian reveal that taxpayers have already been committed to pay up to \$400,000 for the salaries of three review consultants.

Documents from the Government's purchasing gazette show former NSW Liberal attorney-general John Hannaford will be paid up to \$154,000 for 10 months' part-time work, former federal Labor minister Bob Collins up to \$123,200, and indigenous academic Jackie Huggins up to \$126,500.

But Mr Collins said yesterday the figures were estimates and he had been paid only \$57,400 for his work so far, with one more invoice to come.

A spokesman for Indigenous Affairs Minister Philip Ruddock said the cost of the review was "run of the mill". In its final submission to the review, the ATSI board has asked for tough investigative and audit powers such as those held by the Auditor-General, and for a seat at the table at all Council of Australian Governments meetings.

Mr Ruddock's spokesman said: "We are heading for a figure a bit over \$1million, including support costs, which ATSI is meeting. About a million dollars for a thorough review is reasonable."

But suspended ATSI chairman Geoff Clark said it was hard to justify spending such a large amount of money merely on a review.

"If it's a witch-hunt, it's a pretty expensive witch-hunt," he said.

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to focus some of those resources in communities that are suffering?"