

# CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into 2004–05 budget estimates

Melbourne – 16 June 2004

#### Members

Mr W. R. Baxter

Ms C. M. Campbell

Mr R. W. Clark

Mr L. A. Donnellan

Mr B. Forwood

Ms D. L. Green

Mr J. Merlino

Mr G. K. Rich-Phillips

Ms G. D. Romanes

Chair: Ms C. M. Campbell

Deputy Chair: Mr B. Forwood

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms M. Cornwell

#### Witnesses

Ms M. Delahunty, Minister for Women's Affairs;

Mr T. Healy, acting secretary;

Ms S. Quek, assistant director, Office of Women's Policy; and

Mr S. Gregory, chief finance officer, Department for Victorian Communities.

**The CHAIR** — I now welcome our new witnesses, Mr Terry Healy, acting secretary, Department for Victorian Communities, Ms Soo-Lin Quek, assistant director, Office of Women's Policy, and Mr Stephen Gregory, chief finance officer, Department for Victorian Communities. Minister, you now have the opportunity to give a 5-minute presentation on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the women affairs portfolio. I am sorry, but I am going to have to keep you to time on the 5-minutes yet again. Thank you, and thanks for being so obliging last time.

**Overheads shown.**

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — Thank you, Chair. I think it is important to point out that the Office of Women's Policy, as the name implies, is a policy unit — it is not a service provider — so we need to put that into context. Our budget is very small for that reason. We provide strategic policy advice to the Victorian government on issues of concern to women, and is that not everything? We are part of the Department for Victorian Communities, and our focus, as you can see, is strengthening communities, building social networks, promoting local leadership and encouraging local ownership and control. We provide a whole-of-government strategic approach. We have to, and we do, work collaboratively across government. We monitor specific initiatives. We lobby for money and then give it to other departments. We are quite a rare creature, really. We do the lobbying. Anyway, we get the money and we give it to others to spend, which is a very good thing to do. We listen, engage, inform and work with the women of Victoria.

As to our achievements in 2003-04, we have achieved our target of 40 per cent for new appointments and reappointments of women on government boards and committees — a significant achievement. We came into government with a very low figure for women on government boards and committees. We have launched our action agenda for work and family balance, and substantially boosted engagement. The highest number of women ever formally consulted in the history of mankind have been consulted.

Under further achievements, we have increased the funding pool for the Women's Community Leadership grants, and this is a terrific project. The Women's Safety Strategy is a very important part of our work. I am sure members of the committee would have heard of the horrific stories this morning in the media through VicHealth of the health effects of domestic violence, the great blight of our society. We are working that strategy through some very collaborative work with ministers right across government. Gaining ground, the women's report card — I might refer to that later if I have the opportunity — is an important part of our work. We have added another 22 inductees into the Victorian honour roll of women, which is a great initiative of this government.

Our priorities for 2004-05 include progressing the Women's Safety Strategy, supporting women's leadership through community grants, further appointments, and our community training forums. This is for those women who work in often voluntary community organisations who feel reluctant to go on boards and committees because they do not feel they have the expertise. They have exactly the expertise we require in government and we want to support them with training — and we are funding that. There is also the action agenda for work and families, which is an important part of our work in 2004-05. Also there is a focus on supporting indigenous women; there is the new forward plan for women in Victoria, 2004-07; and some very good work at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, now that the development around that centre is virtually complete, and it can, if you like, rise into a new era to support women of Victoria.

**The CHAIR** — The first question I wish to ask is in relation to the Office of Women's Policy's overarching responsibility of reflecting key issues of concern to women. After you have reflected on those views to various people in government, how do you then report back to the women of Victoria on the work that the office and the policy team have engaged in?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — That is an important part of our work because I referred to how we have substantially expanded the conversation with women right across the state. Of course one of the most highly visible forums for that is the Premier's Victorian Women's Summit, which the Premier chairs and leads every year. But we have a series of forums and consultations. I have actually added to the way we operate through our community cabinet process. As we go into various communities, both in metropolitan Melbourne and beyond and into regional Victoria, we have added to that process a women's round table for local women's groups and that is conducted and led by our Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Affairs, Mary Gillett. That has been immensely successful.

There are the formal consultative processes and there are the informal consultative processes. There is a very clear indication of what we said we would deliver for Victorian women. We do that in several ways. We are quite proud of our achievements against the first three-year forward plan. Three update reports have been completed and distributed valuing Victoria's women: wrapping up the year, celebrating women's achievements in 2002, and *Gaining Ground for Victoria's Women 2002–03*, which is being distributed on the Web in great detail.

But we have also done something else. This year we have provided what I am calling a report card, and I would like to share it with the committee today. This is, if you like, a very user-friendly document. I will pass copies of that around to committee members. You will see that the report card is looking at the priority areas for the government's policy area on women — for example, representation and equity. It says:

Women asked for:

- opportunities for leadership;
- participation in decision making;
- access to information.

And then it lists what the government has done in response to that. I will not read all that out, but it has increased the number of women in the judiciary, for example.

The second priority is health, wellbeing and community strengthening. Women asked for a special health and wellbeing strategy. The government has immediately responded. So you can see the way we are trying to relate to issues that Victorian women have told us are important to them, right across portfolios, and to report to the various stakeholders through the formal mechanisms, but also to provide something that is, as you would understand, quite user friendly, very accessible, but has quite an amount of detail. We are pretty pleased with that. It will be printed and available soon, but I thought as a gesture to the committee you might be interested to see that.

**Mr CLARK** — Could I just clarify the follow-up reports you referred to on the Valuing Victoria's Women policy statement 2002–03. You indicated there was a first update report for 2001. Did I hear you correctly that the second update report on the strategy was actually *Wrapping Up the Year 2002* and the third was a document called *Gaining Ground for Victoria's Women*? Were they intended to be the annual reports referred to in the original three-year strategy document? I thought you said *Gaining Ground for Victoria's Women* was on the web site; I cannot find it on the web site at the moment.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — It is actually not on the web site yet, but it will be.

**Mr CLARK** — Are those intended to be the three annual reports that were referred to in the original strategy statement?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — Yes, and we are trying to do it differently, Robert, if you like, in a more accessible form as we progress. We are quite frankly getting better at it.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Minister, the last of your priorities for 2004–05 in the slides was the Queen Victoria's Women's Centre. You will recollect that last year you said for the second year in a row, 'Oh God! This is a saga'. This matter has now been before this committee since 2000. My first question is: is it doing a bit better as the subsidy is still running at around \$200 000 a year or thereabouts? Has the strategy that you were going to make available the year before last yet been finalised, and if so can the committee have a copy of it?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — All good things are worth waiting for, Bill. They said this about the Opera House, that it took a little while — and it was marginally controversial. To be fair, though, it has been in a difficult position with the wonderful Grollo development going on around it, but they have been trying to operate in the middle of a building site. In fact I understand that the Grollo company, of course, is still in the building. But we have, as you know, a new board led by Helen Hewett and a terrific board of women. They have a very strong business plan or business statement. We have approved money through the CSF for, if you like, an interactive IT hub where you will find, once it is up and running, a complete list of services that are available to women. So it will certainly be worth waiting for. So far as the \$200 000 is concerned, the amount of money you have referred to, I might refer that to the chief operating officer.

**Mr GREGORY** — There is no ongoing subsidy at the moment. They are working through the rent program now the building has been completed and will get a business plan soon. As to the need for ongoing funding, at this stage we are not expecting one, but they are going through a rent strategy at the moment.

**Mr FORWOOD** — When did the ongoing funding stop?

**Mr GREGORY** — I will have to take it on notice because I am new to the department. There is none this year and there is none next year, so I will have to take it on board. I know one-off funding has been provided for things but not ongoing funding.

**Mr FORWOOD** — If you could get back to us on that. The strategy I guess is not far away.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — That is what I am told.

**Mr FORWOOD** — I will see you again next year!

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — I am sure you have seen this, Bill, which is 'QV's New Reign', which is quite an extensive analysis of how the place is going to look and some of the ongoing birth pains of both enterprises.

**Ms GREEN** — Minister, I refer you to page 244 of budget paper 3 and to the important issue of work and family which we heard a little bit about from the industrial relations minister this morning. I understand it is a joint responsibility with your area as well. Could you update the committee on the progress of this important issue?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — All the work we do in the Office of Women's Policy is critical. One of the biggest stresses in modern life is trying to balance work and family responsibilities. You just have to look around the table to see how successful we all are.

**Mr FORWOOD** — That is what Rob Hulls said this morning.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — Did he?

**The CHAIR** — I am glad two people have got it right.

**Ms GREEN** — I think he said it was a work in progress for himself.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — I want to make the point at the beginning that this is a cultural challenge, and I do not mean cultural in the arts sense. It is a question for our community, and government can be part of the solution, but it does not pretend to be the whole solution. In our forward plan we detailed a range of strategies to try to ensure that women in paid work in particular can try to achieve some sort of balance. It is part of Growing Victoria Together and is identified as one of the government's priority actions to encourage employees, workers and families to better balance these responsibilities and their ability to communicate in community life. So the action agenda for work and family balance has been developed as a whole-of-government strategy. It was launched in November 2003 by the Premier at the women's summit in Bendigo. It sets out work and family initiatives and a plan for leadership and action over the next two years. You are quite right, it is a partnership between IRV and the Office of Women's Policy.

Some of the main features of the agenda, which the committee may be familiar with, include the payroll tax deductions to employers providing paid maternity and adoption leave. That has already been achieved through the support of the Treasurer. Return to work grants are going exceptionally well; I think you would have to say that they are oversubscribed. They are managed through the Department of Education and Training. The government has allocated \$11 million over four years to provide return-to-work grants and that provides assistance to around 10 000 parents, predominantly women, who have been out of the work force continuously caring for children. We had already allocated 2475 grants after only six months of the program, so you can see the huge demand. We have funds for the industry-based pilot projects and targeted research. Again, this is an area where we do not have any firm answers; we certainly have some clear advice, but we want to have the best research.

As you know, the Premier has set up the Premier's children's advisory committee, which is looking at an integrated system of child care and preschools. We have advocated long and loud for improved provision of federally funded child care and outside school hours programs, and also for a national paid maternity leave scheme. We took a bit of a leadership role there and certainly the payroll tax deductions showed a very early form of national leadership

from Victoria. We have provided an additional \$10 million over four years for outside school hours programs offered to the federal government, and will continue to lobby it on this issue. These initiatives offer a multifaceted approach to a broad problem and, as stated on page 244 of budget paper 3, the Office of Women's Policy will produce a report card with Industrial Relations Victoria in the third quarter.

**Mr CLARK** — I refer you to page 244 of budget paper 3 which is the service delivery component for the Office of Women's Policy output group and which shows the target output cost for 2003–04 as \$2.3 million, the expected outcome of \$2.4 million and the target for 2004–05 of \$2.6 million. I understand that there have not been any specific new allocations for this output group for initiatives so I assume that the figures there are cost variations. In respect of the \$2.4 million when would that revised estimate have been given to Treasury? Is it still the best estimate for the expected outcome for 2003–04, and what are the reasons for the increase in 2003–04 and 2004–05?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — The Office of Women's Policy budget allocation for 2004–05 is \$2.6 million compared with an expected outcome of \$2.4 million for 2003–04. The increase of \$200 000 is due to corporate overhead adjustment and wage outcomes. I refer any further comments to the chief operating officer.

**Mr GREGORY** — So basically it is the wage indexation for the next year. That is the higher corporate cost that has been allocated to the output.

**Mr CLARK** — For 2003–04?

**Mr GREGORY** — For 2004–05 and it is basically for wage costs.

**Mr CLARK** — For 2003–04 is that still the accurate and expected outcome?

**Mr GREGORY** — Yes.

**Ms ROMANES** — Under the Office of Women's Policy output on page 244 of budget paper 3 and in your presentation there is reference to the Office of Women's Policy providing whole-of-government advice. Would you tell the committee what steps have been put in place to ensure women are not only considered for appointment to boards and committees across government, but also how government is providing support to develop the capacity of Victorian women to serve on such boards.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — This is an important part of our work. We want women's voices to be heard — and dominant actually — in the great decisions of our time. The number of women on Victorian government boards has continued to rise. When we came into government it was 29.7 per cent — pretty low. It had risen to 38.3 per cent in 2003 and we have now reached our target of 40 per cent for all new appointments and reappointments in 2003, fulfilling our commitment and positioning us well for the next goal of 50 per cent. The female chairs of government boards have increased to about 25 per cent and could go still further, but that is a big jump. We have achieved this in several ways. We have returned the women's register back into the Office of Women's Policy and we have greatly improved the service to government through that — and it has not cost us any more; in fact I think it has cost us less.

We have a database of over 1800 women from a broad range of professional business and community backgrounds. We are now one of the top two performing states and territories in this area. We have conducted information sessions — and I referred to that in my presentation — to train community-based women in particular. We are funding a top-level executive search facility for those supposedly hard to fill senior vacancies. Certainly Kathleen Townsend of Executive Solutions has an enormous database of highly experienced, competent, wonderful women available to be appointed to both government and private boards. So basically that is what we have done. We have worked out the top level to ensure that we have an adequate number of suitable candidates to be recommended to government, to ministers and to departments so that cabinet has a wide range of choice. Also, I personally hand out certificates of improvement in this area to my colleagues, which is a source of joy.

**The CHAIR** — On the topic of joy, Mr Baxter.

**Mr BAXTER** — On the topic of strategic whole-of-government policy advice, I turn to the aspect of what now appears to be called relationship violence instead of domestic violence, which we discussed with the Attorney-General this morning and in relation to which we will all have noted the article about it in today's press. It

is quite alarming. In terms of providing strategic advice, does your department see its role to be carrying out investigations into why, for example, so many women victims appear to return to abusive relationships time and time again and why so many proceedings are withdrawn at the court door, or is that work done by the justice department? I am trying to get a feel for what your input is into this very serious problem.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — Yes. It is a huge problem, and I think all of us understand how big it is. What is the role of the Office of Women’s Policy? It is to work in an integrated way as much as possible with the service providers who intersect with both the victims and the perpetrators. So yes, it is the role of the Department of Justice, it is the role of the Department of Human Services, it is the role of centres against sexual assault outside of government, and it is the role of police. We have worked very, very closely with the Chief Commissioner of Police on this, and you may well be aware that under the chief commissioner there has been an extensive — she may not use this term — retraining project so that police who are often the first on the scene do not treat domestic assault as ‘just a domestic’. It is a criminal assault, and it should be treated as such.

Your point about victims returning to the perpetrator is a good one, because the fact of the matter is that at the moment we still see the women and often the children who witness the violence being the ones forced to flee the family home. I think we have got it back to front; the perpetrator should be asked to leave. Through government and through the process I have just outlined we have been piloting an integrated domestic violence response to try to stem the trend of women who have been bashed, assaulted and, worse, constantly re-entering the system for treatment and for help. What we are trialling is the removal of the perpetrator from the family home. He is removed. He goes home to his family if he has one, but he is removed. Often there is counselling, anger management, an intervention order, or all three, and assistance is provided to the woman and her children to stay in the home and to try to maintain some semblance of normality, surrounded by their support, whether it be family, friends or indeed school.

**The CHAIR** — This committee is really interested in performance indicators, and given the conversation we have had not only today but with the chief commissioner, who you explained has rightly taken an active interest in this, perhaps one of the KPIs for the success of this whole-of-government project could be the very point that Mr Baxter made. Perhaps that could be taken on board, and it could be the subject of one of our recommendations, too.

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — The new performance measure in the 2004–05 budget papers does, of course, outline our public accountability measures, which include accountability and monitoring through — I referred to this in my original remarks — the annual meeting of relevant ministers, and there are about seven of us, to note the progression of the Women’s Safety Strategy. A senior executive group with representatives from all the relevant departments is also involved in the monitoring and implementation of the strategy, and I think there will be a report outlining the achievements and key learnings to be launched later this year. We are committed to a final-year public report at the end of the five-year Women’s Safety Strategy that we launched last year.

**Mr MERLINO** — Just on the Women’s Safety Strategy, which is referred to at page 244 of budget paper 3, what progress has been made on the implementation of that strategy?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — It is multifaceted, so I will take a minute or two to answer that. Let me just say that it is a landmark Women’s Safety Strategy. It is the first in 16 years, I am afraid to say. Over 50 initiatives are under way under this strategy. It is being driven by three separate steering committees in the areas of family violence, sexual assault and workplace violence. We have formed critical partnerships between the non-government and government agencies, as I alluded to. As part of the \$5.6 million devoted to the Women’s Safety Strategy progress so far, \$1.8 million has been allocated to increase the housing options for women and children. If we cannot keep them at home, which is our ideal, we certainly want them to have as many options as possible close to where they need to be, and that is why we have funded a private rental brokerage scheme, which is an innovation. The program is being offered in six locations across Victoria, and it is assisting 340 women per year. There is a long, long way to go, but it is being seen as an important tool. Some \$1.6 million has been allocated — I am sure the Attorney-General mentioned this — to an innovative pilot program under which men on family violence orders can be directed by a magistrate to undertake a behavioural change program. I call it anger management counselling, but it is more complex than that. And \$1.5 million has been allocated to support what we call the family violence networkers in the communities. Alongside the police, these wonderful, wonderful people are usually first on the scene when an assault has occurred or after, so that is where that extra money has gone.

I also want to refer to the indigenous family violence task force, which has done an enormous amount of work. The Office of Women's Policy has worked closely with Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, and there is money in the budget to specifically implement that initiative through the other portfolio. The Victoria Police violence against women strategy is proceeding apace, and the three statewide steering committees have been funded for both research and other work. I could go through a lot more detail than you probably need on that, but I hope it gives you a flavour of the extent of the work in the Women's Safety Strategy and how it is being delivered right across government, including things like a resource package to address bullying and violence in Victorian schools. What we are seeing is intergenerational family violence, and the work we are doing is to try to punctuate that cycle to stop that cycle. It means that we work on the men, because they are the perpetrators, and we also have to try to help the children who are witness to some pretty horrific stuff.

**Mr FORWOOD** — Minister, in your opening you said, 'We get the money and we give it to others to spend'. You can take this on notice: could you inform the committee in relation to 2003–04 and the forthcoming 2004–05 how much money you get, for what purpose and whom you give it to? I do not need the answer now, but could you provide that?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — I think I have given you a flavour of the sorts of departments we work with, but we are happy to provide that.

**The CHAIR** — The final question on the women's affairs portfolio is from Mr Donnellan.

**Mr DONNELLAN** — I refer you to page 244 of budget paper 3 and ask: what steps have been put in place to ensure that women are encouraged to take up leadership opportunities in the community, and I make specific reference to the announcement by yourself and the Minister for Local Government, which looked at the participation of women in local government?

**Ms DELAHUNTY** — That is a good one. That is an important area of work. We find that the numbers of women who put their hand up for office in local government varies year by year, so we have analysed that and tried to provide both financial and mentoring support in that regard. The Victorian Local Governance Association and the Municipal Association of Victoria, on behalf of what we call the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition, were funded to undertake a research project to find out why we had this variation in the numbers over the years. They provided that research, and we have certainly taken a keen interest in the results, which have been distributed to all councillors. Some of the reasons were around time management — the balancing of work and family. We looked at the changing demographic in our society. We have an increasing number of single parents, women looking after children alone, and some women who are ideally suited for local government in particular and would love to do it just feel they have not got the ability.

Secondly, sometimes women undervalue their own talents, skills and expertise. Certainly through the Our Community project and funding contract, we have tried to provide some support and training so that people understand what their responsibilities would be both on boards and in local government. Thirdly, our general leadership grants have fed into a sense of increasing self-esteem and strength in women, particularly in regional Victoria, who feel that we are supporting their leadership role in their community group, and therefore they can take that next step and move into local government. It might be a small thing, but we also wrote to all the new women mayors who were elected not so long ago to show, if you like, state government support for them. I understand that in your own electorate, Luke, the Narre Warren Community Learning Centre has received some funds through the community leadership grant, and I think you have probably visited it and probably understand just how much that \$5000 grant has meant to women in the local community. I think we will see more women moving from their local communities now into local government. But it does vary.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much to the minister for her explanation on the women's portfolio and to the departmental officers for their attendance.

**Witnesses withdrew.**