

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Thursday 15 June 2023

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Paul Hamer

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Ellen Sandell

WITNESSES

Ms Ros Spence MP, Minister for Community Sport,

Mr Tim Ada, Secretary,

Mr Peter Betson, Deputy Secretary, Sport, Tourism and Events, and

Ms Georgina McCann, Executive Director, Community Sport and Recreation, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2023–24 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

As Chair I do expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream today and other committee members.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome the Minister for Community Sport the Honourable Ros Spence as well as department officials from the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions. Minister, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Ros SPENCE: Thank you, Chair. I would like to thank you and the committee for this opportunity to report on the status of the Victorian community sport and active recreation sector. Before I begin, can I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we are meeting on today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

I have had the honour of serving as the Minister for Community Sport for the last three years, and it continues to be a really inspiring role – to see the dedication, collaboration and shared purpose our clubs, associations, leagues and peak bodies bring, supporting Victorians to get active.

The community sport and active recreation sector is a major contributor to Victoria's social, cultural and economic wellbeing. Eighty-one per cent of Victorians are active at least once a week and almost two-thirds get active three times a week. These levels of activity have remained fairly stable over the past few years. Even when COVID-19 limited sports, Victorians found other ways to get active – whether walking, running or riding. The wider sport and recreation sector supports an estimated 71,500 full-time jobs and more than 800,000 volunteers. I want to take this moment to thank the staff and volunteers who work hard to keep our sector going week in and week out. The facilities that our clubs call home are often the central point for whole communities, particularly in our regional and rural areas. Across the state there are around 10,000 facilities, and these facilities generate an estimated \$7 billion worth of direct and indirect economic benefits to Victoria annually.

The Victorian government has provided significant support over the past year to the sector to ensure our clubs, leagues and associations can continue to provide participation opportunities for all Victorians. We have continued to deliver the Get Active Kids voucher program, which provides payments of up to \$200 to help Victorian families get their children involved in their favourite sport and recreation activities. I am pleased that

more than 115,000 vouchers have been issued through the program to date. Pleasingly, around 50 per cent of recipients would not have been able to participate without the assistance provided. Through the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation we have continued to deliver programs to create opportunities within the sports sector for women and girls to participate on and off the field. To increase Victoria's capacity to meet current and future demand for sporting facilities we have approved funding of nearly \$96 million to support 191 local sports infrastructure programs to date, in 2022–23. We have also provided \$2.2 million in support through the sporting club grants and Aboriginal sport participation grant programs.

When the October 2022 flood events hit, many local clubs were faced with significant damage and disruptions to their work. As a result the government launched the community sport emergency flood assistance program in October last year. It provided one-off grants of \$5000 to assist in the replacement of items that had been lost, damaged or destroyed by flood. The community sport and recreation organisations were also able to apply through the business and community sport flood recovery grants program that provided grants of up to \$50,000 in total to cover expenses resulting from direct damage to property, assets, stock or equipment.

The 2023–24 budget reflects the Victorian government's continued commitment to supporting the community sport and recreation sector. \$201.2 million is being invested to deliver community sport and active recreation election commitments and grant programs for new and upgraded community sport and active recreation infrastructure, along with the continuation of the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund and country football and netball program. We are also continuing to invest in the participation programs that support Victorians to get in the game, with an investment of \$12 million, from the VICSWIM program to Together More Active. We are also continuing with the Get Active Kids voucher program, the emergency sporting equipment grants program and the Get Active Travel program, encouraging more Victorians to get and stay active. As minister for sport I am optimistic about the sport and rec sector over the next 12 months and beyond, and I know the investments this government is making in improved infrastructure for women and girls and in key programs will continue to yield benefits in terms of increasing the number of Victorians taking up sport, along with keeping Victorians in community sport as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first eight minutes go to Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair, and good morning again, Minister and team. Minister, can I ask, on budget paper 3, page 70, is the line item 'Investment into community sport and active recreation infrastructure', which is the two programs you just mentioned, local sporting infrastructure and country football and netball. What is the breakdown for those? What do they each get over four years?

Ros SPENCE: Yes, \$193.65 million is for the election commitments, the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund is \$5 million and country football netball is \$2.5 million.

Danny O'BRIEN: Over the four years.

Ros SPENCE: Well, if you want a breakdown over four years –

Danny O'BRIEN: I do not, no. That is the total over four years? Right.

Ros SPENCE: Well, local sports infrastructure is \$5 million over one, country football netball is \$2.5 million over one, and the remainder, the \$47.5 million, is over the outgoing three.

Danny O'BRIEN: Sorry, say that last bit again?

Ros SPENCE: The \$47.5 million over the outgoing three, as you can see on budget paper –

Danny O'BRIEN: On page 70? Yes.

Ros SPENCE: Yes. And the –

Danny O'BRIEN: So that is all election commitments.

Ros SPENCE: Correct. That is \$51.15 million in 2023–24.

Peter BETSON: And so, hence, \$58.65 million is the total for 2023–24 that is in the papers.

Danny O'BRIEN: Right. So just to clarify that, of the \$201.2 million there, \$193.65 million is for election commitments. Is that what you said?

Peter BETSON: It is for the projects related to community sport and active recreation election commitments, yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Right. So literally for the next four years we have got \$7.5 million available for community sport in this budget, for those programs.

Ros SPENCE: In this budget – we have another budget next year.

Danny O'BRIEN: So literally \$193 million in election commitments?

Ros SPENCE: That is what the election commitments were, and they are all funded in this year's budget, and we will have another budget next year.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, I am just confirming it.

Ros SPENCE: We have had \$1.9 billion in infrastructure since 2014, and we will continue to build on that.

Danny O'BRIEN: Could I get a list of those election commitments, including the value ascribed to each one?

Ros SPENCE: Of course.

Danny O'BRIEN: That would be great, thank you. You mentioned in your presentation \$96 million on community sports infrastructure projects so far in 2022–23. How much is there scheduled for 2023–24? What is the target, is what I am asking.

Peter BETSON: So the target for community facility grants, number approved for 2023–24, is 130.

Danny O'BRIEN: The dollars is what I am after, sorry, Mr Betson.

Peter BETSON: So, Mr O'Brien, that is related then to –

Ros SPENCE: That would be getting out the 51.

Peter BETSON: So that is related to a proportion of the election commitments, as well as country football netball, as well as local sports infrastructure.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. So that will be the \$58.7 million, basically.

Ros SPENCE: Yes, the target we would be getting out –

Peter BETSON: So we estimate, Mr O'Brien –

Danny O'BRIEN: I guess my question is: that is what is budgeted, what are you actually expecting to have available?

Ros SPENCE: I would expect to get that out the door.

Peter BETSON: So I can give you a breakdown, Mr O'Brien, if that assists, of what we are expecting the 130 to contribute to.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, that would be great.

Peter BETSON: So 70 projects we expect to sign up through the election commitment projects, 10 country football and netball programs and then approximately 50 from LSIF.

Danny O'BRIEN: Sorry, what was that?

Peter BETSON: Fifty from LSIF.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is projects?

Peter BETSON: Those numbers are estimates. The community facility grants number approved is the actual number approved, so they are based upon our best estimates of what will be achieved in 2023–24.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Beautiful. Get Active Kids vouchers, Minister, you mentioned there. You said there are 115,000 that have been delivered. Was that last year?

Ros SPENCE: Over six rounds.

Danny O'BRIEN: So since when?

Ros SPENCE: Since 2021, when it commenced. Six rounds.

Danny O'BRIEN: 2021. They are \$200 a voucher?

Ros SPENCE: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: So that is part of the \$12 million also on page 70. How much is available for that program in 2023–24?

Ros SPENCE: Four million dollars.

Danny O'BRIEN: Four million dollars?

Ros SPENCE: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Four million dollars. Okay. Can I ask, Minister, on the grants website for sport and rec there are 23 programs, I can see a couple that I do not believe are yours: do you know how many of the grants programs are actually in this portfolio?

Ros SPENCE: I do not have the website in front of me, so I do not actually know.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, I had to go to the website, but I would hope that you might actually know what the programs are and which ones are yours and which ones are not.

Ros SPENCE: Okay. I have Aboriginal sports participation grants, Access for All Abilities, Athlete Pathway Travel Grants, Change Our Game professional development scholarships program, Change Our Game community activation grants program, Change Our Game women in sports broadcasting program, Change Our Game research grants program, community motorsport program, emergency sporting equipment grants, Get Active vouchers program, Get Active Kids voucher program, Preventing Violence Through Sport grants program, sporting club grants, Together More Active, youth aquatic accreditation program, ReLink ActiVIC, Ride2School program and VICSWIM Summer Kidz program. I think that may be all of them.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Righto. I might come back to that if I get a second, but can I just go to the total output for sport and recreation, which is on pages 254 and 256. The expected outcome for this year is \$590 million, but the target for the coming year is \$297 million, and it says this is in relation to Commonwealth Games funding, so I assume that is not your portfolio.

Ros SPENCE: It is the whole of sport funding.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes. So the Commonwealth Games element of that obviously is not your portfolio.

Ros SPENCE: Well, there is more of that that is not my portfolio, because the \$590 million is sport in total, isn't it?

Peter BETSON: It is tourism, sport and major events as well as Commonwealth Games.

Danny O'BRIEN: No. It is literally sport and recreation.

Ros SPENCE: Yes, that is right.

Peter BETSON: So the sport component of tourism, sport and major events is in there as well as community sport, as well as Commonwealth Games.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. So things like the Significant Sporting Events program is in there. Is that all the Commonwealth Games funding?

Tim ADA: The rest of the Commonwealth Games funding, as I said earlier in the week, Mr O'Brien, is held in central contingency and will be released based on further market engagement and other milestones for release.

Danny O'BRIEN: So the note here says that the target is a lot lower because of funding released for the Commonwealth Games. I do not quite follow. It was released last year. Is it not being –

Tim ADA: So a portion has already been released for the 2023–24 financial year, but there are also significant other funds in the financial year held for the Commonwealth Games that have not yet been released from central contingency.

Danny O'BRIEN: Right.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. Your time has expired. We will go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Minister, officials. I represent the sports-mad people of Yan Yean. It is a sports-mad electorate. Hopefully they never learn that I cannot catch. And I see on page 77 we have got set out the infrastructure investments the government is making. Minister, why does the government feel that sports infrastructure investment is important? Why does it matter for communities like mine?

Ros SPENCE: Thank you, Member for Yan Yean, for your question. I know how passionate you are, having been out in your electorate with you at many of your sporting facilities. As the Minister for Community Sport I really am committed to seeing participation in community sport and recreation increasing. That is why the Victorian budget is providing more than \$213 million to deliver and improve community sports infrastructure and to support initiatives that boost participation and inclusion in local sports clubs and organisations. Since 2014 the Andrews Labor government has invested more than \$1.9 billion in community sports infrastructure, which will again help to lift participation.

Our government is committed to ensuring that kids from all corners of the state have access to the best opportunities to participate in community sport by creating some of the best facilities in the country. As minister I know that kids between 13 and 16, especially females, are at greatest risk of leaving community sport and not returning, and it is our job as government to invest in facilities that will give this cohort the greatest chance of continuing in community sport. Through this budget we will invest in female-friendly facilities for sports that traditionally are male only. We will invest in netball courts to keep young girls competing in the sport that they love. We will invest in aquatic centres to ensure that young people have access to facilities to learn to swim and to learn about safety in and around water – and I know that this is of particular interest to you, Member for Yan Yean, with this budget investing up to \$20 million towards the delivery of the regional aquatic and sports centre project in Mernda. Having been out to that site with you and knowing that that is kind of the last empty space out there and the last piece in the puzzle in what is a really growing area, it will mean that the residents in that growing suburb of Mernda and surrounds are going to have a new aquatic and sports facility, and that is absolutely wonderful news for that community.

This is a really terrific project, and it is one of the headlines of our government's investment in community sports infrastructure through the budget. In fact this budget, as we mentioned earlier, delivers on every single one of the commitments we took to the Victorian people at last year's election. There are more than 100 projects in all in those commitments, and they are all important commitments, because as I said, we want to increase participation. If you are going to do that, then you need appropriate community sports facilities to actually facilitate that participation. That is why these investments are important, and that is why community sports facilities are important right across the state.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister. You spoke a bit there about female participation in sport dropping off in those teen years. I can see there is funding here for female-friendly facilities. Can you speak a bit to how that supports participation?

Ros SPENCE: Thank you for your supplementary question. As mentioned, we are continuing to invest in female-friendly facilities through this budget as part of our objective to facilitate and encourage the involvement of women and girls in community sport. These investments can help keep young females in community sport, but they also give opportunities for young girls to compete in sports that traditionally have not been an option for them. We have been committed to lifting the participation rates of females in community sports since we came to office in 2014. We established the Australian-first Office for Women in Sport and Recreation, and we have continually held a female-friendly facilities stream within the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund.

Let me provide some examples of that, and I am sure that the committee will appreciate hearing about some of these. Hazel Glen Netball Club is a wonderful netball club in Doreen, and the Member for Yan Yean knows it well and she has advocated very strongly for this club as well. This budget provides up to \$800,000 towards the redevelopment of the netball club's facilities, delivering new sporting spaces that the whole of the community of Doreen can be really proud of. This investment will support female participation at the club, and it will no doubt encourage more girls to take up the sport of netball. Elsewhere, at the Laverton Football Club, the budget provides up to \$1.3 million to upgrade facilities in line with female-friendly standards – something that will bring a smile to the face of the Member for Point Cook. I know he will be happy about that. And it is not just in metropolitan Melbourne that we are investing in facilities. In Western Victoria –

Danny O'BRIEN: Come on.

Ros SPENCE: at Princes Park in Maryborough –

Danny O'BRIEN: I am playing bingo here.

Ros SPENCE: the club will have the opportunity for a female-friendly change rooms extension with an investment of up to \$500,000, which is committed in this budget. There is also up to \$2 million to build female-friendly facilities at North Shore sports club in Norlane. At Teesdale recreation reserve in Teesdale –

Danny O'BRIEN: Come on, you are running out of time for Gippsland. Come on.

Bev McARTHUR: This is female sports for females only, Minister, is it?

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur.

Ros SPENCE: the facility will receive \$1.5 million towards the construction of female-friendly facilities, and the local Member for Eureka has been a driving force behind this project.

Elsewhere in Western Victoria there is also \$1.25 million towards upgrades at Portland Gymnastics Club, \$200,000 to install pump tracks at Murtoa, \$150,000 for facilities upgrades at Warrnambool Field & Game and up to \$100,000 for equipment upgrades at Stawell Gymnastics Club. These projects will make a real difference to local communities –

Danny O'BRIEN: You had better not be finished.

Ros SPENCE: which will encourage more women and girls to participate in sport –

Bev McARTHUR: It is most important you keep going in Western Victoria, Minister. Keep going.

Ros SPENCE: and it will create local jobs. So why are these upgrades important?

Danny O'BRIEN: Oh, come on. There has got to be something in my patch.

Ros SPENCE: Why are these facilities really important? Well, in my time as community sports minister, I have been to many of these facilities upgrades both before and after. And the unfortunate reality is that many club facilities were built as spaces for men. That is absolutely what they were. They are entirely inappropriate for females to participate in sport at these spaces. Clubs and the players will speak to you when you visit these spaces about how girls were either not participating in sport at these clubs or they were getting changed in cars because they could not get changed in the pavilions, in the change rooms that were provided, because they were completely inappropriate.

So these changes that we are making, with the female-friendly facilities, create environments that say to girls and women, 'You are welcome. We want you to participate. We want you to come and play.' And in doing that, not only does it let women and girls know that they are welcome and provide places that they can come to participate in sport, but it signals to other women and girls that they should come and play as well. What we have seen in places where there have been these facilities upgrades is membership growth. That is what happens. Straightaway the membership of these clubs increases, and we see a flow-on effect. What have been these community hubs of clubs in communities just continue to grow, so there is, on and on, great effects. So I applaud these female-friendly facilities upgrades and encourage more and more of them.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister. And of the infrastructure projects included in the budget, how many are to be delivered in regional Victoria?

Ros SPENCE: Thank you, again, for that supplementary question. We know that there are really important upgrade needs right across Victoria, and that is exactly what we are doing. We know that in many regional and rural towns community sport is the lifeblood of those towns, and it is a great opportunity for young people to get active and healthy.

Netball in regional Victoria is such a major part of those communities, and that is why this budget is investing up to \$3 million to the Wangaratta Netball Association to upgrade their courts. This is a great investment for those who play netball in Wangaratta, and it will give those young girls great facilities to do what they love. The budget also provides up to \$8.4 million investment at Marty Busch Reserve in Sebastopol to develop new sporting facilities for that community. In Benalla the budget provides a whopping \$15 million investment for a new stadium that will include female-friendly change rooms. In Seville there will be up to \$5 million for new facilities at the recreation reserve, where football, cricket and netball are played in great numbers. The budget also provides \$800,000 to undertake key planning work required for a new indoor sporting facility at Lakes Entrance –

Bev McARTHUR: Hallelujah! He has got one.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is still not Gippsland South. You never give me anything.

Ros SPENCE: along with \$400,000 for netball in Buchan.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Minister. I see that that list is very extensive. For the last 3 minutes we will go to Ms Sandell.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you, Chair. I also want to ask about the active kids vouchers. Page 70 of the budget paper – I assume of that \$6 million for this year \$4 million is for the vouchers.

Ros SPENCE: Yes.

Ellen SANDELL: And so does that mean the vouchers will not continue into the future – in future years there is no money for them?

Ros SPENCE: In future budgets I will continue to advocate for the program to continue.

Ellen SANDELL: But it is just a one-year commitment for now?

Ros SPENCE: This is one year in this budget, and there will be another budget next year. This has been a really successful program –

Ellen SANDELL: So you expect it to continue?

Ros SPENCE: I would absolutely hope it continues.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay.

Ros SPENCE: We have seen great uptake – 115,000 vouchers so far.

Ellen SANDELL: Is it possible to get those broken down by postcode so we know who has accessed them?

Ros SPENCE: No, I cannot give it to you by postcode, but I can give it to you by LGA.

Ellen SANDELL: LGA would be great. Thank you.

Ros SPENCE: Yes, I can give it to you by LGA. Absolutely.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. And also a breakdown of how many of those were in the special consideration category versus the other categories?

Ros SPENCE: Yes, absolutely.

Ellen SANDELL: That would be wonderful. Thank you.

Ros SPENCE: I can give you a gender breakdown as well and also let you know which sports had the highest uptake –

Ellen SANDELL: That would be wonderful.

Ros SPENCE: because that was also a key take-out. But there are just two stats that I will point out to you that have been really key. In the latest round 23 per cent of voucher recipients identified that they had not previously been involved in a sport. That number has tracked down over the six rounds, which is telling us that people are coming back. They have got faith in the system, and they are coming back and getting a voucher in subsequent rounds. But we are still holding steady at 50 per cent of participants saying that they would not be able to participate without the program. That has held steady over six rounds, so we know that it is getting to the people that need it most. So that has remained a really critical, important stat for us.

Danny O'BRIEN: Just on the data you are going to provide, Minister, can you give it by year as well? I assume it will be broken down.

Ros SPENCE: By round.

Danny O'BRIEN: By round – that will do. Thank you. Sorry, Ellen.

Ellen SANDELL: That is all right. In terms of swimming, I understand it was a real struggle to get teachers back after COVID. Do you collect any data on whether kids are actually able to access swimming? I know there is quite a backlog.

Ros SPENCE: Swimming has been one of the highest sports through the Get Active Kids voucher program in each round.

Ellen SANDELL: And do you have any data on whether you are actually getting swim teachers back? I know there are a lot of kids that are still unable to access swim lessons because of lack of teachers.

Ros SPENCE: I can very quickly in the short amount of time that we have got let you know that we are still both supporting swimming through VICSWIM and supporting training of teachers, and that has been incredibly popular through the youth aquatic accreditation program. There has been really good uptake of that, and we are continuing that program.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Sandell. Well, Minister and department officials, sadly the time for questions has come to an end. We just want to thank you very much for appearing before the committee –

Danny O'BRIEN: And bringing muffins.

The CHAIR: this morning – and, yes, for your delicious muffins.

Bev McARTHUR: And looking after female-only sporting projects.

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur! The committee is going to follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee is now going to take a short break to eat those yummy muffins before returning to consider the portfolio of child protection and family services at 11:05 am.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.