

Responses to Questions on Notice or further information agreed to be supplied at the hearings

Witness	Secretary Jeremi Moule
Committee member	Nick McGowan
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Question:

Nick McGOWAN: Just so I am clear, as we sit here today you are saying to me that the Commonwealth government – Prime Minister Albanese – has said, ‘I will give you \$2.2 billion’? [Suburban Rail Loop]

Jeremi MOULE: That is correct, and that is a fairly regular process for the Commonwealth to commit to funding and then for the detail of that funding – whether it is an infrastructure project like SRL or other things – then to be worked out between officials and then agreed between the two governments.

Nick McGOWAN: As far as you are aware, in the forward estimates of the Commonwealth government budget have they identified when that money will be dispersed to you – in their documentation?

Jeremi MOULE: I think it is sitting in a contingency. We might need to take that question on notice.

Answer:

The Commonwealth Government committed \$2.2 billion to Suburban Rail Loop East in the October 2022–23 Commonwealth Budget (Budget Paper 2, page 160 and Budget Paper 3, page 58).

The Commonwealth Government’s schedule to the Federation Funding Agreement Schedule on Land Transport Infrastructure Projects (2024–2029) available from [federalfinancialrelations.gov.au](https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au) forecasts providing \$400 million in 2025–26, \$1,000 million in 2026–27 and \$800 million in 2027–28 for Suburban Rail Loop East.

Witness **Secretary Jeremi Moule**

Committee member **Nick McGowan**

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Question:

Nick McGOWAN: Let us assume the packages cannot go without each other. What is the total cost [of the North East Link project]?

Jeremi MOULE: I did not bring a copy of last year's midyear budget update with me. We can take that on notice, or you can ask DTP when you see them.

Nick McGOWAN: I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Jason LOOS: I think it is \$26 billion.

Nick McGOWAN: I think it is close to \$26 billion, but I am just wanting to make sure we are still talking about the same figure for a 10-kilometre stretch of road.

Bev McARTHUR: Anyway, are you taking it on notice?

Nick McGOWAN: Yes, are you happy to take that on notice? The figure as it stands today...

Answer:

The 2024–25 State Budget includes the cost of each package of the North East Link project, which reflects the project cost changes disclosed in the 2023–24 Budget Update.

Budget Paper No. 4, page 81

North East Link (State and Freeway Packages)	Total Estimated Investment (TEI)
Eastern Freeway Upgrade (Springvale to Hoddle)	\$5,709 million
M80 Ring Road Upgrade (Greensborough)	\$3,824 million
North East Link Connections (Bulleen/Watsonia)	\$2,642 million

Budget Paper No. 4, page 182

North East Link – Primary Package (Tunnels) and State Tolling Corporation (Greensborough)	\$14,034 million
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Question:

Nick McGOWAN: Secretary, has DPC engaged the legal firm Ashurst for any work, specifically in respect to the Suburban Rail Loop?

Jeremi MOULE: Not that I am aware of. The name does not ring a bell.

Nick McGOWAN: Do you mind just checking for us and taking that on notice?

Answer:

DPC did not engage Ashurst for legal services on the Suburban Rail Loop Project in 2023–24.

Witness **Secretary Jeremi Moule**

Committee member **Nick McGowan**

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Question:

Nick McGOWAN: And in terms of the training they are both required to undertake, have all ministers and parliamentary secretaries complied with the required training in the time specified? No-one has been tardy or late as far as you are aware? Because there is always someone that is late, right?

Joshua PULS: I could not comment on the timeliness, but certainly I know everyone has done it.

Jeremi MOULE: We might have had some last-minute rescheduling given the ministerial diaries, but everyone has completed what was required of them in a timely way.

Nick McGOWAN: A timely way. Can I have the department come back to us – if any of you do not have this at hand, which I do not expect you to necessarily, but certainly we all have been in a position where we are asked to something by a certain date and time, whether it be training – about which ministers were able to fulfill their obligations and which ministers were not, and parliamentary secretaries the same.

Answer:

DPC provided, with the Premier's Private Office, training in relation to their obligations under the updated Ministerial Code of Conduct:

- on 24 November 2023 for parliamentary secretaries;
- on 27 November 2023 for Ministers (including the Premier); and
- on 11 December 2023 for one parliamentary secretary.

Witness **Deputy Secretary Jeroen Weimar**

Committee member **Danny O'Brien**

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Question:

Danny O'BRIEN: Just a clarification, if I could, Mr Weimar, you talked about the Big Housing Build, and you may have mentioned also those Commonwealth Games billion dollars for regional Victoria. What is the actual net increase though in public and social housing? There are figures for what is being built, but the reality is in places like my electorate we have actually gone backwards in actual number of social houses.

Jeroen WEIMAR: I do not have the exact numbers at hand, Mr O'Brien, but certainly –

Danny O'BRIEN: Are you happy to take it on notice?

Jeroen WEIMAR: I am happy to take it on notice, but certainly the indications we are seeing is around an additional 4000 net homes in the last few years that have been created.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is statewide?

Jeroen WEIMAR: Statewide social homes. Of course part of the work around the Big Housing Build is to ensure that we expand the number of quality social and public homes across Victoria. As I said, 9500 or so completed, another 2500 or so to go, the Regional Housing Fund has kicked in and a number of other programs are on their way.

Danny O'BRIEN: If you can provide that regional data on notice, on the net gain, that would be appreciated.

Answer:

Homes Victoria is accountable for social housing in Victoria and has advised that there were 28,289 social homes in regional Victoria as at 30 June 2024 — a net increase of 248 since 30 June 2023.

The State Government is investing in more social housing in regional Victoria through the \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund that will deliver 1,300 social and affordable homes. The Big Housing Build is also investing \$1.25 billion in housing across regional Victoria.

Witness **Deputy Secretary Terry Garwood**

Committee member **Bev McArthur**

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Question:

Bev McARTHUR: How many lawyers have been utilised to prepare for treaty negotiations?

Terry GARWOOD: Well, I cannot provide you with that specific level of information. The treaty –

Bev McARTHUR: Would you be able to find it?

.....

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, VPS lawyers but lawyers from external firms as well. Could you provide that detail?

Jeremi MOULE: I think in the questionnaire we list out our engagement of legal services, but we can provide those. The greatest reliance for legal advice in relation to preparation for treaty has been done through the VGSO. In relation to treaty matters, on behalf of the state, they have the eminent legal opinion, so in addition to any legal staff who might be employed by DPC in preparation for treaty, they are working in conjunction with the VGSO.

Bev McARTHUR: Anyway, if we could have the detail of that costing and outside law firms, and also the total cost of this legal advice.

Jeremi MOULE: Yes, and again that would be publicly reported, but we can provide it for you.

Answer:

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) funds three positions (2.8 FTE) to coordinate and support whole of Victorian Government Treaty legal advice provided by a Solicitor-General led legal team. In the 2023–24 financial year, \$120,467 was expended on these positions, with no funding spent on external legal support or services. The State will continue to work closely with the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO) and the Solicitor-General as Treaty negotiations commence.

Witness **Deputy Secretary Terry Garwood**

Committee member **Bev McArthur**

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Question:

Bev McARTHUR: Could you give us information on the number of lawyers and the cost of the legal advice that has been required to prepare the evidence for the Yoorrook Justice Commission?

Jeremi MOULE: Yes, and again aspects of that are reflected in the questionnaire.

Answer:

In 2023–24, DPC, on behalf of the State of Victoria, engaged two law firms, including the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO), at a total cost of \$6,238,275 (excl GST).

These costs include approximately 75 lawyers to support the State's response to the Yoorrook Justice Commission in 2023–24.

The legal costs included reviewing and advising on:

- documents and background papers;
- responses to the Commission's Requests for Information;
- witness statements; and
- advising and representing State witnesses to appear before the Commission.

In addition to DPC's engagement of external lawyers, DPC's in-house lawyers, and legal teams across all Victorian Government departments, Victoria Police, and the Solicitor-General have supported the State, in responding to the Commission.

Under the State's insurance arrangements with the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, DPC recovers costs, including legal expenditure, of preparing for and responding to a Royal Commission.

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Committee member	Bev McArthur
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Question:

Bev McARTHUR: So \$59.6 million for the cost of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

Jeremi MOULE: There is the cost of the commission to operate itself and then there are some costs related to DPC and government participation in that. I should say that for all commissions of inquiry, whether they be Yoorrook, royal commissions or the like, the VMIA, through our insurance arrangements, cover the costs directly incurred by the department to participate in such inquiries.

Danny O'BRIEN: Do they cover the costs of ministers and the Premier as well?

Jeremi MOULE: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Can you provide those costs on notice to us?

Jeremi MOULE: We can for the Premier and our portfolio ministers. We probably do not have details for other ministers. The VMIA would.

Answer:

In 2023–24, DPC incurred legal costs of approximately \$285,543 (excl GST) associated with preparing the former Premier, the Premier and Minister Hutchins to appear before the Commission, noting the former Premier did not ultimately appear.

Under the State's insurance arrangements with the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, DPC recovers costs, including legal expenditure, of preparing for and responding to a Royal Commission.

Witness **Deputy Secretary Terry Garwood**

Committee member **Danny O’Brien**

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Question:

Danny O’Brien: You touched on the interim community benefits formula. How is that formed and agreed? What was the process for that?

Terry GARWOOD: Well, we just used the material provided from the Timber Creek decision, knowing that were some matters that were a little bit more complex – things to do with solatium, as in, impact of cultural loss. That is a very complex matter. We have sort of put that aside and parked that for discussions with the First Peoples’ Assembly, but the actual guidance that was given enables us to make, as we call it, an ‘interim community benefit formula’, which we are using. We are now actively negotiating with those traditional owner corporations in relation to what that means for them, and that is a very positive outcome. It gives certainty and enables us to move through on matters that have been sort of held up because of that. So we are actively negotiating.

Danny O’Brien: I am going to run out of time, Mr Garwood. Would you be able to provide on notice a bit more of an explanation of how that interim formula was established?

Answer:

The Interim Community Benefits Formulae was a jointly agreed recommendation of the First Principles Review of the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*. It was developed and agreed between the State and Traditional Owner parties to the First Principles Review. The Formulae is derived from the principles of the High Court’s 2019 Timber Creek decision, which set a benchmark and method for court-determined native title compensation payments.

Witness	Deputy Secretary Terry Garwood
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Question:

Danny O’Brien: That would be great. Very quickly, the questionnaire refers to two additional traditional owner corporations commencing negotiations. Who are they? Again, maybe you could take that on notice as well.

Terry GARWOOD: Yes, I can. I will take it on notice.

Answer:

In 2023–24, the State commenced negotiations for new or revised agreements with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation.

Witness **Deputy Secretary Brigid Sunderland**

Committee member **Aiv Puglielli**

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Question:

Aiv PUGLIELLI: In terms of the complaints system processes, how can they be improved so that we ensure that there is accountability for poor translation services where they are occurring?

Brigid SUNDERLAND: A couple of key aspects to that: I suspect, depending on the arrangements that we have got in place with LanguageLoop, providing a vehicle through LanguageLoop back to the relevant departments – DGS and other departments who use those services – so that we have a visibility of those, any issues that are arising. But as I said, they are well connected in with various different parts of government. For example, Court Services use LanguageLoop. They would have their own internal mechanisms for complaints or concerns being raised.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: In terms of the existing professional standards for this space, can you speak a bit about what those are currently?

Brigid SUNDERLAND: I would have to take that on notice in terms of the detail of those specific training standards.

Answer:

In Australia, the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) is responsible for the accreditation and quality of language services professionals. The Victorian Government's language services policy states that the public sector is required to engage NAATI credentialed interpreters and translators.

Interpreters and translators are required, as a condition of their ongoing certification, to act in accordance with the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) Code of Ethics. Auslan interpreters are required to abide by the Australian Sign Language Interpreters' and Translations' Association (ASLITA) Code of Ethics.

If a service provided does not meet performance expectations or a language service professional fails to comply with the principles outlined in their relevant code of ethics, the Victorian Government guideline *How to work with interpreters and translators* advises to lodge a complaint with the language service provider, as per their agreed contractual arrangements. Serious breaches of professional ethics may be raised with NAATI, which has the authority to revoke credentials.

Witness **Deputy Secretary Brigid Sunderland**

Committee member **Mathew Hilakari**

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Question:

Mathew HILAKARI: Just on the employment brokers, that was almost 700, you mentioned in your initial presentation. Are we following and tracking and seeing the employment experience over time? I have got no expectation that someone stays in the same job. You know, people move across employment industries all the time; there is a big churn. But are we following their experiences and seeing what their employment pathway is following that – whether they are still in work or whether they have gone into new work?

Brigid SUNDERLAND: I would need to just follow up on the exact nature of the follow-up. Certainly those relationships are developed and they are very strong between the person being placed and the employment broker; that is part of why the program works so effectively. Sometimes that relationship will continue in terms of support post the placement. That would give us visibility of how that person is going and the length of the placement and how well that is progressing, but I would need to just follow up in terms of the formal mechanism that we would have to track or follow people over a longer period of time.

Answer:

Reporting for the Victorian African Communities Action Plan (VACAP) Employment Brokers initiative monitors the medium and long-term progress of program participants. This includes monitoring the duration of participants' employment placements, in addition to the type and scope of post-placement support delivered by the eight organisations funded under the program. In 2023–24, 271 people were placed into employment, with 36 per cent of these participants placed in employment for more than six months and 29 per cent of these participants placed in employment for between two and six months.

In addition to targeted, culturally appropriate job readiness and post-employment support, the Employment Brokers program targets work retention through the delivery of ongoing outreach, mentorship and regular check-ins with post-placement participants. The program also provides wrap-around support to address the multiple and complex challenges that may be experienced by some participants. This includes through referral services in the areas of mental health, alcohol and other drugs, housing, disability, financial and material aid, family violence and legal aid.

Witness **Deputy Secretary Brigid Sunderland**

Committee member **Mathew Hilakari**

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Question:

Mathew HILAKARI: And the homework club that you were just about to talk about – is that located down in Cranbourne? Is that the location of it?

Brigid SUNDERLAND: I think we have got a couple. I would need to just double-check the exact locations of the homework clubs.

Mathew HILAKARI: If it is, the Member for Cranbourne is very, very proud of that program. But I would love to hear about it more.

Brigid SUNDERLAND: As I said, the reason I sort of hesitated for a moment is there are probably about 17 different locations.

Mathew HILAKARI: Fantastic.

Brigid SUNDERLAND: Yes, so we have got a few different organisations delivering that program. We have got 1350 children supported throughout the program across 53 schools, so quite a breadth in terms of, again, practical support to families, children needing help with their homework and, particularly when there are language difficulties or cultural barriers, just helping those parents with those children engage with their homework and participate better in school.

Mathew HILAKARI: Have we done any assessment? Do people do a survey at the end of it? How do they assess whether they are satisfied with it or unsatisfied with it, and can you provide the locations of those or which LGAs those 17 are in?

Brigid SUNDERLAND: Yes. I would be very happy to take that on notice if you like and come back to you with those details.

Answer:

The VACAP Homework Clubs initiative is currently delivered across 13 local government areas (LGAs). An overview of the program's service locations and providers is provided in the table below:

Homework Club Provider	Location	Local Government Area
54 Reasons	Collingwood/Fitzroy	City of Yarra
Afri Aus Care	Cranbourne	City of Casey
African Youth Alliance	Dandenong	City of Greater Dandenong
Australian Burundian Community in Victoria Inc	Corio	City of Greater Geelong
Ballarat Regional Multicultural Centre	Ballarat	City of Ballarat
Djerriwarrh Education and Community Services St Michael Homework Club	Melton	City of Melton

Homework Club Provider	Location	Local Government Area
	West Melbourne/Ravenhall	
Drummond Street Services Somali Community Inc	Carlton North Melbourne	City of Melbourne
Edmund Rice Community and Refugee Services	Flemington	City of Moonee Valley
Endeavour Youth Australia Islamic Society of Victoria	Thornbury Preston	City of Darebin
Himilo Community Connect	Macleod / Heidelberg	Banyule City Council
Living and Learning Pakenham Inc	Pakenham	Shire of Cardinia
Networking African Australians Umoja Empowerment Group	Greater Shepparton	The City of Greater Shepparton
Regional Victorians of Colour	Bendigo	City of Greater Bendigo

The Department of Education actively monitors and evaluates the progress and success of each VACAP Homework Club provider. In alignment with their contractual obligations, providers are required to submit a report each term, mid-year, and end-of-year. These reports include qualitative and quantitative data, including:

- student attendance and engagement levels
- family and carer participation and engagement levels
- partner school feedback
- student satisfaction and surveys
- student attitudes towards education
- student and family (and carer) case studies
- a financial summary.

Additionally, a bi-monthly Homework Club Community of Practice forum is conducted by the Department of Education. This forum allows providers to collectively strengthen their approaches, troubleshoot challenges, and work towards best practice models, fostering collaboration and shared learning across the network, and enhancing the capacity of providers to deliver impactful and sustainable support to students and families.