

TRANSCRIPT

INTEGRITY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Performance of Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare

Melbourne—Monday, 16 May 2022

MEMBERS

Ms Harriet Shing—Chair

Mr Brad Rowswell—Deputy Chair

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr Dustin Halse

Mr Jackson Taylor

Ms Vicki Ward

Hon Kim Wells

WITNESSES

Ms Deborah Glass OBE, Ombudsman,

Ms Megan Philpot, Deputy Ombudsman, and

Dr Marija Maher, Chief Operating Officer, Victorian Ombudsman.

The CHAIR: Welcome to this afternoon's hearing of the Integrity and Oversight Committee's performance review with a focus on witness welfare. My name is Harriet Shing. I am Chair of the Integrity and Oversight Committee.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are coming to you here from the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and I would like to acknowledge any and all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander leaders or emerging leaders who are either joining us today, listening online or indeed participating in the work of integrity agencies.

I would like to also introduce fellow members of the Committee: the Deputy Chair, Mr Rowswell; the Honourable Kim Wells; Mr Dustin Halse; and, joining us virtually, Mr Stuart Grimley, Mr Jackson Taylor and Ms Ward, who I anticipate will be joining us shortly.

We are now in a position just to let you know a couple of things around attendance at today's hearing. Thank you very much for your submission and for the materials that you have provided already to the Committee.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. You are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you repeat the same things anywhere else, including on social media, those comments will not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the Committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

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I would again, as I have with every other witness, ask that you confine your evidence and comments to general observations only, and not stray into the territory of individual matters or complaints, including but not limited to any matters that are the subject of investigation, inquiry, reports, findings or recommendations. It is really important that this is an overarching review on the performance of integrity agencies as it relates to witness welfare.

So, with those opening remarks, I might ask you, Ombudsman, Dr Maher and Ms Philpot, to perhaps make an opening presentation of around 5 minutes, and then perhaps we can get into some questions from there. There may be questions on notice that are taken at the end of this hearing, and we will go from there around the process for them being provided. So, Ombudsman, perhaps over to you.

Ms GLASS: Thank you, Chair, and can I also acknowledge that we are meeting here today on Aboriginal land that has never been ceded. It is good to be here in person for the annual discussion of my annual report, and I would like to introduce my deputy, Megan Philpot, and my Chief Operating Officer, Marija Maher.

The CHAIR: My apologies for mispronouncing your name.

Ms GLASS: Let me start with a brief overview of my office's performance over the 2020/21 financial year. Now, when I appeared before you last time, which I think was on Zoom, I described 2019/20 as a tale of two parts, as nine months of that reporting period were in pre-COVID times. 2020/21 was squarely in the middle of

the pandemic, and the impact of COVID-19 made itself felt in a multitude of ways. The most obvious of these was the impact on the complaints we received and the systemic issues we investigated.

Last year saw an increase of 12 per cent in the number of jurisdictional complaints received to over 18,000—a record number for the office. Despite the higher workload, some 90 per cent were finalised within 30 days. Our geographical spread also increased; we have taken complaints from almost half of all Victorian postcodes. While not all were related to the pandemic, many were, raising new themes for the Ombudsman, such as the fair distribution of grants to small businesses affected by lockdowns and the impact of hard lockdown on public housing tenants.

These complaints resulted in two major systemic investigations. Complaints about the Business Support Fund, numbering over 1000, helped bring about systematic changes in the way the Government rolls out grant schemes supporting many thousands of people. The outcome of the Business Support Fund investigation included the department's agreement to reassess over 10,000 grant applications. The investigation into the hard lockdown of an inner-Melbourne public housing tower exposed another series of official failings, in this case a failure to properly consider the human rights of 3,000 people. While the Government did not accept my recommendation that it apologise to those people, I was pleased to see a very different response to a COVID-19 outbreak in the public housing towers a year later. As I reflected in my last annual report, actions do indeed speak louder than words.

These investigations focused on the experiences of Victorians in extremely challenging times. In both cases, we continued to deal with individual complaints while investigating systemic issues—and with the challenge of remote working. I think we rose to that challenge. For example, with the multicultural community in the public housing towers my staff held sessions over Zoom, and we accepted submissions in any language or format.

COVID aside, local councils topped the list of most complained about public bodies in 2020/21, which is not surprising given almost all Victorians have some form of interaction with their local council. Issues complained about were similar to previous years. How councils communicated with ratepayers was the biggest area of concern, followed by how complaints were handled. Drawing on those themes, we updated our good practice guide into complaints handling to help councils develop their own complaints-handling policies. We also investigated how councils deal with financial hardship of ratepayers—a regular theme for the office, made even more topical by the financial impact of the pandemic. We found both good and bad practice across Victoria's 79 local councils, but pleasingly many councils have since updated their hardship policies.

Within my whistleblower jurisdiction, our strong collaborative relationship with IBAC continues. In 2020/21 my office finalised 108 public interest complaints involving 234 allegations, and undisclosed conflicts of interest continue to be the dominant theme.

My budget itself received a modest uplift in 2020/21, although not the full amount I had requested of the Government. I am pleased I have received the Treasurer's commitment to make up the shortfall to allow me to do the job expected of me by Parliament and the public.

Moving to witness welfare, this has been an important issue for me since I first came into the role in 2014, when I was told by many people the Ombudsman's office did not have a reputation for caring about such things. We have worked very hard in the last eight years to change this perception, in particular to ensure the use of coercive powers is exercised with care, restraint and consideration for those affected. My staff interact with a variety of people, including complainants, disclosers, witnesses, subjects, public officers and members of the community. The challenges faced by some of these groups necessarily warrant a welfare-centred response, and we have over the years developed a range of policies and guidance to assist staff to deal with people and their challenges, including welfare support. While these documents have been in effect for some time, and continually evolve and improve, your review prompted my office to consolidate key expectations into an overarching policy on supporting the welfare and wellbeing of complainants and witnesses, a copy of which you have received.

As I also noted in my submission, promoting welfare is more than providing information about process or ensuring a witness has access to water and breaks during an interview. It is a dynamic process to be considered during all phases of the exercise of functions and powers. No policy could comprehensively document how to respond to every possible scenario. However, several overarching principles guide practice at my office—

namely: one, that people are at the centre of VO's work and affected parties must remain at the centre of decision-making; second, being flexible, thoughtful and responsive to individuals' needs will ensure welfare risks are, where reasonably practical, eliminated or reduced; and, finally, that integrity bodies must exercise their extraordinary powers responsibly and with restraint. Routine use of coercive powers may become unjust and oppressive. Thank you, Chair. I welcome the Committee's questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ombudsman. Thank you, Ms Philpot. Thank you, Dr Maher. I would like to pick up from your concluding remarks, Ombudsman, and I thank you for the submission, which does go in considerable detail to the range of considerations that apply particularly on the matter of witness welfare. I note that section 13A of the governing legislation enables informal enquiries to be undertaken, and you refer to treading lightly to eliminate or reduce welfare risks. With that in mind, I would like to flesh out a little more where you see that very fine balancing act to be undertaken—on the one hand, between the use of coercive powers, and indeed any sort of public process, and, on the other, that informal enquiry that might well exist by way of making sure that references under Section 38(1) as they relate to the [Victorian] Charter [of Human Rights and Responsibilities] are observed and incorporated into the work that you do, whereby you say people are at the centre of your functions.

Ms GLASS: Well, let me give you an example, if I may, Chair. When I first came into the role, the protected disclosure legislation was particularly inflexible. When a matter was referred to me by IBAC I had no choice but to investigate it, and that is a formal investigation with all the panoply [of things] that go [along] with formal investigation. One of the things I asked for, and I am grateful that Parliament has since provided to me, is an enquiry power where, for example, when I receive a public interest complaint I can make inquiries—and we do this through agencies—really to ensure that there is enough in this to justify a formal investigation and potentially the use of coercive powers. And the result of that is that—and you will see this in our numbers—the number of formal investigations we have undertaken has actually reduced considerably because we are able to eliminate many of the matters that involve what may be serious allegations where, upon enquiry, in fact it is not necessary to subject people to a process that is inherently stressful.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. Just following on, and my last component of the question before I hand over to Mr Rowswell, I would like to understand a little bit more about the way in which those informal inquiries and your decision-making on the path that you will choose to proceed is informed by the 'protection from degrading treatment' and how you interpret 'degrading treatment' in the context of Section 10(b) as it relates to your overall considerations around the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. What does that look like in practice, based on your experience?

Ms GLASS: Human rights are at the heart of everything we do in my office, and it is about the proportionality of the work we do, of how we investigate. I do not know whether you want to give some examples here, Megan.

The CHAIR: General examples, if that is okay.

Ms PHILPOT: Certainly I can give some examples, but I might say first that our workflows in the case management system have an inherent structure around the human rights charter such that when people receive a matter, or when investigators receive a matter, they have to go through a human rights analysis as concerning the subject and as concerning as well the witnesses. There is also a risk matrix that we look at as well, which also is built around the charter legislation.

The CHAIR: So proportionality is a big part of the work that you consider.

Ms PHILPOT: Absolutely, and it is always operative, so not just at the beginning of an investigation, because as you can imagine an investigation might lead into areas that we did not anticipate. There is always the human rights lens that we are looking at.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ombudsman, Deputy Ombudsman and Dr Maher. Mr Rowswell, over to you.

Mr ROWSWELL: Ombudsman, you will be familiar with my ongoing interest in your funding levels, and you mentioned in your opening remarks that the Treasurer had given you assurance that your funding levels

would be made good—my words, not yours—commensurate with your request. How was that assurance provided to you?

Ms GLASS: Agreement to a Treasurer's advance.

Mr ROWSWELL: In writing or verbally?

Ms GLASS: In writing.

Mr ROWSWELL: Right. Thank you. I am very conscious in this inquiry—and we have dealt with these matters consistently last Monday and again today—of the need to not reference specific matters which could have implications for ongoing investigations. You would be aware of a report that you completed titled *Investigation of a Matter Referred from the Legislative Council on 25 November 2015*.

The CHAIR: Mr Rowswell, I am just going to ask you to keep remarks to the general.

Mr ROWSWELL: This is a completed—

The CHAIR: Yes. Performance matters over the period that is in question are able to be countenanced here. Again, just please be aware of the territory that we have covered very extensively here around scope of Section 7 of the [Parliamentary Committees] Act.

Mr WELLS: On a point of order, I am sorry, but the Ombudsman's report into red shirts in 2018 should not be covered by 7(2). The Ombudsman should be able to answer freely the questions that are being asked by Mr Rowswell. So, 7(2), which we have been talking about a lot, does not cover the completed report by the Ombudsman. We get that it is with the IBAC and the ongoing issues around witness welfare, but not in regard to a report that was completed four years ago. 7(2) should not cover it, so Mr Rowswell should be able to ask any question he likes about red shirts.

The CHAIR: The subject matter is being contemplated by an integrity agency, Mr Wells. You know about the operation of Section 7 as well as I do. My remarks to Mr Rowswell are of a general nature around the way in which we are conducting our review into witness welfare. So, again, these are matters for our consideration and not for the consideration of integrity agencies, who are in a position to say whatever they see fit in relation to the work that they have undertaken.

Mr WELLS: Okay, but I am just saying, with respect, you cannot shut down Mr Rowswell on 7(2) if the report is four years old.

Mr ROWSWELL: I will just give the question—

The CHAIR: Again, I am just wondering. If you can proceed—and I am not saying you cannot proceed—I am just saying please proceed with caution because there is an overlapping matter here with another integrity agency.

Mr ROWSWELL: Sure. That is exactly why I do not want to specifically reference anything currently on foot. My question is in relation to that report, which as Mr Wells has alluded to is otherwise referred to as the red shirts investigation, which you will be familiar with. It was broadly reported at the time that there were a number of witnesses who, although invited to, did not cooperate with that investigation. I am just wondering your view on that matter through the lens of witness welfare. So, do you think that there was a consideration for non-cooperation at that time because of the impacts on those witnesses, whether they be personal or professional?

Ms GLASS: I am not aware of any welfare considerations [of those who did not cooperate] that applied to that investigation, Mr Rowswell.

Mr ROWSWELL: Further, you do have the opportunity to compel witnesses to appear in investigations that are before you. My understanding is that during that particular investigation you chose not to exercise that opportunity, specifically in reference to members of the Legislative Assembly. Was consideration to those potential witnesses' welfare given as a matter for you making your decision?

Ms GLASS: No. I provided an explanation in the report for that, and that was around the assertion of exclusive cognisance by the Legislative Assembly.

Mr ROWSWELL: Are you satisfied with the opportunity you have to compel witnesses to appear before you in your investigations, or do you think that that needs to be looked at?

Ms GLASS: I have broad royal commission powers in relation to the ability to compel witnesses, and on the whole I think they are pretty good ones.

Mr ROWSWELL: So no changes?

The CHAIR: That is probably a very long conversation.

Ms GLASS: That does not mean that there are not powers that I would like to see changed. You know, there are certainly aspects of the powers I hold that I think present some limitations that I would like to see addressed. If I can perhaps take that question on notice, Mr Rowswell, I will be very happy to present you with my shopping list.

The CHAIR: Against the backdrop of course of what you have identified are wideranging powers.

Ms GLASS: Indeed.

Mr ROWSWELL: Thank you, Ombudsman. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Rowswell. Mr Grimley, I might pass over to you via Zoom.

Mr GRIMLEY: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Ombudsman and your office, for your submission to the Committee. My question is in relation to witness welfare particularly, and I would be interested to know how the VO [Victorian Ombudsman], first of all, assesses, and, second of all, manages, the risk that persons involved in any agency investigations will harm themselves or indeed others?

Ms GLASS: Look, I think that is a really important question, Mr Grimley, and it is something that we are conscious of throughout an investigation, because investigations involve people. Investigations are inherently stressful, and the impact of that is something that we must never forget and our investigators must be conscious of throughout—you know, from the beginning, throughout and at the end of an investigation. So it is something that is an ongoing process. There is not a box to tick to say ‘witness welfare considered’, because things can change from the beginning, throughout and during.

One of the things we provide to staff is mental health training. It is something that I am very conscious of. It is something that we work on throughout—not only in relation to investigations, but we deal with thousands of people every year who contact us to make a complaint, and they have welfare considerations. People contact us who exhibit very challenging behaviour, who can threaten self-harm, so mental health is so much at the heart of everything we do in my office, and awareness of that is incredibly important.

So there is not a single answer to your question. It is about being mindful of the individual circumstances, the individual signs. If somebody is represented by a lawyer, these are matters that can be discussed with them. Advocacy is something that we also take into consideration, and we have. We have counsellors who provide services to our staff, and we can make those services available to witnesses. So it is an ongoing assessment about whether that kind of support is needed.

Mr GRIMLEY: Thanks, Ombudsman. Just further to that, at the conclusion of a questioning period of time with a witness is there any closure provided to that witness in terms of a written or verbal closure? It could be a questionnaire, for instance—‘How have you found this process?’ et cetera, ‘Do you require any further assistance with any of these matters?’ Is that provided at all to witnesses, or is it just a matter of finishing the conversation and ‘We’ll be in touch’?

Ms GLASS: Well, it is not only a conversation, because there are so many ways in which we might take evidence. We will consider people’s welfare, for example, in deciding whether or not to interview them. We will not use coercive powers if we think that will detrimentally affect somebody’s welfare and there is another way of obtaining that evidence. It is much more complex than simply following a process and perhaps

completing a survey. We would want to ensure that at every step of the way we have taken somebody's individual circumstances into account, and that may mean that we do not do things that we would otherwise do, that we would not interview when we would otherwise wish to. And that has happened in my investigations.

Mr GRIMLEY: Okay. Thank you, Chair. Thanks, Ombudsman.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Grimley. Mr Wells, over to you.

Mr WELLS: Thanks, Ombudsman, and thanks for the work you do. When you call a witness for examination, for example, government corruption, do you have a statement that you give the witness regarding their actual welfare and what they can do and cannot do?

Ms GLASS: Again, what I hope I can convey here is that there is not a statement or a box that you tick that refers to people's welfare. Everybody's circumstances are different, and what we would be considering are those circumstances before we even get to the stage of inviting them for interview. It should be an ongoing or iterative process.

Ms PHILPOT: I can offer a bit of assistance.

Ms GLASS: Please.

Ms PHILPOT: I can offer you a practical example.

Mr WELLS: Well, maybe the example regarding red shirts, when the witnesses came forward. What actually happened to those witnesses when they came forward?

The CHAIR: Can we just, again, talk generally, Mr Wells? And are you talking about a document or are you talking about a process?

Mr WELLS: I am talking about a process.

The CHAIR: Okay. Not an information statement, for example?

Mr WELLS: No. I am talking about a process. So someone was being investigated regarding red shirts, which is now completed.

The CHAIR: No, Mr Wells. There is territory that you are straying into that is the subject of other integrity agencies' investigations that are ongoing.

Mr WELLS: Okay. So someone who wore a shirt that I cannot name the colour of—

The CHAIR: Mr Wells.

Ms GLASS: We could answer this if you want us to.

The CHAIR: Only in general terms. Thank you.

Mr WELLS: What happens in regard to the witnesses that came before—of a person who I cannot mention the shirt colour of?

Ms PHILPOT: I can answer generally that it is a practice, a policy and a guideline whereby investigators develop a basic interview script, and in that script is a particular section where we address witness welfare. We ask how they are doing, whether they need support, whether they have got sufficient support, and that occurs also at the end of an interview.

Mr WELLS: So during the cross-examination, for example, if the person is saying, 'I need help', what happens at that point?

Ms PHILPOT: We cease the interview. We ask what kind of help they need. It is not uncommon that it might happen. They take a break, or we might suspend the interview and continue another day. And we ensure

that they have welfare support either through our employee assistance program, which we can offer to witnesses, or through their own psychologist. We ensure that there is support there, and we stay updating them.

Mr WELLS: Ombudsman, when was the last time the witness welfare statement or policy was updated? Is it an ongoing—

Ms GLASS: It is ongoing. We update and improve our policies all the time, and we have been doing this, as I say, since 2014, when I first came into the role. This is not something that has recently started in my office. It has not started as a response to anything that has recently happened. It is an incredibly important series of developments accompanied by changes to legislation that have given me the flexibility to not, for example, use coercive powers when otherwise they might have been in the past.

Mr WELLS: Just finally, to follow up [on] Mr Rowswell's question, you have the powers of a royal commission, but in regard to the red shirts you did not compel all witnesses—

The CHAIR: Again, this is the subject of an investigation by another integrity agency, Mr Wells.

Mr WELLS: Sorry?

The CHAIR: This is the subject of an unresolved investigation by another integrity agency, and so on that basis we can receive general information. But again—

Mr WELLS: But this report is four years old.

The CHAIR: There is another matter which is before another integrity agency which goes to the same substance as the question that you have just raised.

Mr WELLS: But it is not this report.

The CHAIR: It is still a matter that is before another integrity agency.

Mr WELLS: Yes, but it is not the report that I am asking the Ombudsman—

The CHAIR: Mr Wells, you know full well—full well—the operation of Section 7.

Mr WELLS: But it does not apply under this one.

The CHAIR: It is currently a matter the substance of which is an investigation by another integrity agency. I am really happy if you can answer in a general fashion.

Ms GLASS: I can actually answer very simply, because the answer is in the report. The methodology chapter of the report explained when and how coercive powers were used and why.

Mr WELLS: Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Wells. We might go then to Mr Halse.

Mr HALSE: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Ombudsman, for appearing today. Just on that theme of flexibility, and how in your time as Ombudsman that has been incorporated, I would like you to tease out if you could just how that has shaped, and the importance of that in shaping, the way in which you deal with witness welfare.

Ms GLASS: Well, let me give you an example, Mr Halse, because as it happened, I plucked out a few numbers before I came to talk to you today. So if I look at the 2020/21 financial year, which we are here to discuss, my office finalised 44 formal investigations, and in those investigations we issued confidentiality notices in only five of them. Summons to produce documents were issued also in five of them, and we issued summonses to appear for a compulsory interview in nine of them. So I hope that explains that I use these powers sparingly, judiciously and only when necessary.

Mr HALSE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Is that it, Mr Halse? Thank you very much. Ms Ward, over to you.

Ms WARD: Thank you, Chair. Thank you to the three of you for being here today and taking time out to answer our questions. I really appreciate it. And thank you for providing that matrix that did come through with your submission. It was really interesting to read through all of that and the length and the breadth, if you like, of how you have tried to help and accommodate people.

I am interested to know a little bit more about your communication strategy for the process of an investigation with someone who is before you in terms of how that person understands what their obligations are, what the obligations of the Ombudsman are and what their journey might look like, recognising that for different people it could be different. But also could you talk to us around the understanding of confidentiality and how that still allows somebody to seek mental health support if they should need it?

Ms GLASS: Absolutely. I am not sure how to break up your question, so if I can take this in—but if I could just take the latter part first, and you might need to remind me of some of the earlier questions.

First of all, we issue, as I said in response to the last question, confidentiality notices only when we really need to, so we do not do that routinely. And fundamentally you would only issue a confidentiality notice if it is necessary to protect the integrity of the evidence in particular circumstances. So it is not routine. It might be necessary, for example, when you have multiple witnesses who work together from whom you need to obtain evidence. Then it may be necessary to issue notices so they are not able to speak to one another and therefore potentially compromise the evidence that you will receive. Sometimes people ask for them; a notice protects them if they are asked a question by a colleague. So I think the important point here is that there have to be particular circumstances, you know, a particular necessity, before those powers are in fact used.

If they are used, there is a form that is prescribed in the regulations. So it is not a matter for the office to tinker with, you know—at all, in fact. There is the form; that is served. The form allows for matters to be discussed with a medical practitioner—

Ms PHILPOT: A spouse.

Ms GLASS: or a spouse. And again in very rare instances that might need to be altered—if, for example, the spouse was a colleague and equally implicated. You might in those rare instances say that this exception would apply. But otherwise healthcare practitioners invariably are excluded from the requirement. I apologise, was there another aspect to your question?

Ms WARD: No, thank you very much for that. The starting point was around communication strategy to help people understand what is before them, what their obligations are as well as what the Ombudsman's obligations are.

Ms GLASS: Although of course we have documents that set these things out and we work very hard at improving those on a regular basis, in my view the important part of this is to ensure that we are communicating with people in a way that is effective. So it depends on the person and that person's needs, and we need to be sensitive to those needs. So if it is better to communicate in person or on the phone or by some other method, then that is what we would seek to do wherever possible.

Ms PHILPOT: I would just add, Ms Ward, that we have a procedure whereby our officers are required to speak with the person who is about to receive the confidentiality notice beforehand and explain the process to settle understandings about what will happen next.

Ms WARD: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Ward. And finally, Mr Taylor.

Mr TAYLOR: Thank you, Chair. Ombudsman, can you give an update on the progress in the VO's development of a digital-first approach at the agency?

Ms GLASS: Can I invite my Chief Operating Officer to answer that question? Thank you, Mr Taylor.

Dr MAHER: Thank you. COVID has largely derailed the process. We hope by the end of this financial year to be in a position to have significant majority of our documents fully converted to digital only. We are 60 per cent through the migration to SharePoint as the source of truth and collaboration platform, but we are not there yet as much as we would like to be. It is a work in progress.

Mr TAYLOR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Continuous improvement is what I am hearing.

Ms GLASS: Indeed.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr Taylor, did you have any other final questions before we wrap up?

Mr TAYLOR: No, Chair. Thank you.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you very much. There may well be questions on notice from today, given the limited time that we have available. I do want to note the volume of the submission that you have made and that the materials that you have provided have been exceptionally useful for this committee's review and for the work that we are undertaking, so thank you to everyone involved in the preparation of that vast amount of documentation. As I said, we may well be in touch in relation to questions on notice, but thank you, firstly, for your forbearance in our late start today and, secondly, for attending in three dimensions for the purpose of giving your evidence to us.

Ms GLASS: It is a great pleasure, Ms Shing.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much. And on that basis, we will now close the hearing.

Committee adjourned.