

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2019-20 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne—Thursday, 25 February 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O’Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

Ms Bridget Vallence

WITNESSES

Mr Jeremi Moule, Secretary,

Mr Andrew Campbell, Acting Deputy Secretary, Governance Policy and Coordination,

Mr Tim Ada, Deputy Secretary, Economic Policy and State Productivity,

Ms Kate Houghton, Deputy Secretary, Social Policy,

Mr Toby Hemming, General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel,

Mr Matt O'Connor, Deputy Secretary, Industrial Relations Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet; and

Ms Brigid Monagle, Deputy Secretary, Fairer Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

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

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, the elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be here today.

On behalf of the Parliament the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2019–20 Financial and Performance Outcomes. Its aim is to gauge what the government achieved in 2019–20 compared to what the government planned to achieve.

We note that witnesses and members may remove their masks when speaking to the committee but must replace them afterwards.

We ask that mobile telephones be turned to silent, as we have each day.

We note that the Member for Mordialloc is an apology, as he and his family are celebrating the birth of their new baby.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

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 as soon as possible.

We welcome the Department of Premier and Cabinet. We invite you, Secretary, to make an opening statement of 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Chair and committee, for the opportunity to make an opening presentation. I apologise in advance for my voice. I have been unwell this week but I can assure the committee I have had a negative COVID test in the last 24 hours, so I am pleased to be able to report on the department's activities in the 2019–20 financial year. The Department of Premier and Cabinet works for the people of Victoria by leading the public service and supporting the government of the day to achieve its strategic objectives. As a central agency our leadership aims to improve the effectiveness of the public sector and promote collaboration across government to drive performance and improve outcomes. Our work upholds the public sector values as outlined in the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

DPC's output performance structure reflects our purpose through four objectives: strong policy outcomes, engaged citizens, professional public administration and a high-performing DPC. 2019–20 gave rise to a series of extraordinary challenges, from the summer bushfires to the global coronavirus pandemic, which have impacted the way Victorians live and work like never before. The scale of the bushfires in early 2020 across the eastern part of the state was devastating. DPC supported the rapid establishment of Bushfire Recovery Victoria and the Victorian Bushfire Appeal to work with local communities impacted by the fires and led the coordination of planning and recovery efforts. The government's declaration of a state of emergency in

response to the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 prompted a new way of working across the Victorian public service and saw the department's successful transition to a remote working model. DPC worked quickly to implement changes to the structure of the Victorian government to support the response to the unprecedented health, economic and social policy challenges presented by coronavirus. DPC employees, whether responding directly to the pandemic on the front line or working from home to support the core business of government, embraced new ways of working to continue to serve the Victorian community. Importantly the bushfires and coronavirus did not stop DPC from delivering notable initiatives and ably supporting the core business of government over the course of the year.

During 2019–20 the department delivered through a structure of eight groups as depicted in the chart. By way of introduction I am joined today by Andrew Campbell, the Acting Deputy Secretary of the Governance Policy and Coordination group; Brigid Monagle, the Deputy Secretary of Fairer Victoria, noting that Fairer Victoria is now part of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; Kate Houghton, Deputy Secretary, Social Policy; Tim Ada, Deputy Secretary, Economic Policy and State Productivity; Toby Hemming, DPC's General Counsel; and Matt O'Connor, the Deputy Secretary of Industrial Relations Victoria. The Jobs and Skills Exchange and Service Systems Reform groups have since moved out of DPC, and I will endeavour to respond to any questions relevant to these areas. There were a number of structural changes to the department throughout the 2019–20 year. The portfolio agency Respect Victoria transferred to DPC from the Department of Health and Human Services on 1 July 2019. Bushfire Recovery Victoria was established as a new permanent administrative office on 8 January 2020. A missions office was set up in the office of the secretary in April 2020 as part of the Victorian public service missions to coordinate the response to the coronavirus crisis. Machinery-of-government changes effective from 1 May saw some independent officers and public sector integrity functions transfer from DPC to the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Also on 1 May the policy and coordination functions of Infrastructure Victoria and the Parliamentary Budget Officer were transferred to DTF.

Turning to performance, this overview highlights the department's key financial results for 2019–20 and compares them to 2018–19. The increase in DPC's 2019–20 income and expenditure is mainly due to bushfire recovery activities and responses to the coronavirus pandemic. DPC's assets decreased due to reductions in financial assets from the use of funding received in prior financial years and from machinery-of-government decisions where functions were transferred from DPC.

Over the year, DPC met or exceeded 76 per cent of its targets against outputs—that is, 86 out of 113. The two measures that were not able to be reported on were 'Attendance at Cultural Diversity Week flagship event, Victoria's Multicultural Festival' and 'Victorian population engaged by multicultural and social cohesion initiatives'. This is because the festival was not held due to coronavirus and the *Victorian. And Proud of it* campaign did not continue in 2019–20. For the 25 measures that did not meet target, the main reasons for variance were reprioritisation of funding to bushfire recovery, changed focus of activity due to coronavirus, impacts on stakeholders of Victorian bushfire and coronavirus that delayed the start and completion of projects and impacts of the stay-at-home directions on the ability to undertake activity.

Those are the performance highlights. In terms of strong policy outcomes. Bushfire Recovery Victoria was obviously a significant piece of work midway through the period being reviewed. The COVID-19 response through a public health campaign that was led by DPC delivered wideranging state public information campaigns to inform the Victorian community of coronavirus restrictions and support for other measures. The Victorian Centre for Data Insights partnered with departments and agencies across government to deliver better policies, services and outcomes for Victorians through improved use of data and advanced analytics. DPC delivered the inquiry into the Victorian on-demand workforce, which investigated the conditions for on-demand workers in the Victorian labour market and made recommendations aimed at fairer arrangements and promoting a level playing field.

Through the 'Engaged citizens' objective, in December 2019 and in a major step toward treaty, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria of Victoria was officially declared Victoria's Aboriginal representative body in accordance with the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018*. The assembly, consisting of Victorian traditional owners, is the first democratically elected body for Aboriginal Victorians in the state's history and is working in partnership with the Victorian government to establish the framework to support future treaty negotiations.

DPC led the planning for the historic 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, including online collaborative services, to ensure Victorians could mark this important milestone. The *Gender Equality Act* is the first legislation of its kind in Australia. It aims to improve gender equality across Victoria's public sector, universities and local councils with 50 or more employees and to get better results for the Victorian community through improved policies, programs and services.

Through the 'Professional public administration' objective, DPC fosters and promotes a high-performing public service. Single Digital Presence has trained more than 300 public servants to use the platform's content management system and more than 600 VPS have attended a writing for the web training session. The Jobs and Skills Exchange has designed and implemented new approaches to enhancing workforce mobility and career development in the VPS. By June 2020 over half the VPS workforce had registered as Jobs and Skills Exchange members and more than 10 000 VPS jobs had been advertised on that platform.

In 2019–20 the Victorian Public Sector Commission developed a workforce capability framework, recruited 92 people to the 2020 Victorian government graduate program, developed a new Victorian leadership academy induction program for executives and HR guidance to help the public sector transition to remote management of the employee life cycle during the coronavirus pandemic.

Finally in terms of the 'High performing DPC', in March 2020 DPC pivoted to remote working, with the organisation adapting to new digital technologies and ways of communicating, collaborating and managing across teams. DPC is in its second year of supporting the VPS Enablers Network for people with a disability. The network has grown to more than 500 members, and it held a key event in December 2019 with senior executives across the VPS to celebrate International Day of People with a Disability. The continued implementation of the VPS mental health and wellbeing charter has been a key focus in 2019–20. Initiatives include introducing a second cohort of volunteers to DPC's peer support program and mandatory mental health and wellbeing training for executives, managers and staff. As at 30 June 2020, 95 per cent of staff had completed the training. That concludes my presentation. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Secretary. I will pass the call to the Deputy Chair, Mr Richard Riordan, MP.

Mr RIORDAN: Thanks, Chair. Welcome, DPC and Mr Moule. Thanks for your time this morning. My first question is in light of the fact that there have been a few role changes in your department since this budget we are talking about. I refer to the decision of Mr Eccles, your predecessor, and former commissioner Ashton, who both claim they did not make the original decision to procure private security for hotels. In his resignation letter Mr Eccles stated:

My evidence is emphatic—

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, I think this matter falls within the realms of the government's response to the COVID—

Mr RIORDAN: But you have not heard the question.

The CHAIR: Well—

Mr RIORDAN: Can you please give me the courtesy of letting me ask the question?

The CHAIR: So long as you relate it to the relevant period that we are talking about, the financial and performance outcomes for 2019–20.

Mr RIORDAN: That is exactly right. And we all know the hotel fiasco was started in this period, so it is absolutely relevant. In his resignation letter Mr Eccles said:

My evidence is emphatic that neither myself nor the Department of Premier and Cabinet made a decision to use private security ...

Since becoming Secretary have you made inquiries to satisfy yourself that that is the case and that DPC did not make any decisions to use private security in this period?

Mr MAAS: On a point of order, Chair, I have heard the question now, and I believe that this line of questioning would have fallen in previous inquiries which have already been held. I do not believe that Secretary Moule has to answer this question.

Ms VALLENCE: There are no limitations on this inquiry.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, would you like to make a contribution on the point of order?

Ms VALLENCE: Just on the point of order, Chair, as far as I can recall, in the terms of reference for this there are no limitations on this inquiry, and it is related to the 2019–20 year. We know that this expenditure commenced from March 2020. It is entirely relevant, and the point of order should be ruled out.

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, did you—

Mr D O'BRIEN: You said it. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Ms Vallence.

The CHAIR: Anyone further? I will uphold the point of order. I believe the question is out of order. There have previously been two inquiries in which it would have been far more appropriate to pursue this line of questioning. We are here to discuss the financial and performance outcomes of 2019–20, and I ask that you bring your questions back to the financial and performance outcomes of 2019–20.

Mr RIORDAN: I will ask again, Mr Moule. The Chair thinks it is not appropriate that you would review last year's budget, which would probably rule this whole inquiry out today or make it a complete waste of everyone's time if she continues the approach that you cannot advise us whether you have reviewed matters of the budget from the 2019–20 year—we all know that you were not in the job at the time, so for everything today we assume that you are going to be able to use a lens of looking back in time. And unlike the Chair, I do not think that that is an excuse for you not to answer the question. So I will ask another question, and the question is: have you reviewed the position of your predecessor on decisions that your department made between March and June last year to your satisfaction, and do you believe that your department was not involved in organising private security?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Deputy Chair. I am familiar with the evidence of Mr Eccles and that period of time and have reviewed material related to that. I am satisfied that DPC did not make that decision and am confident that the evidence given by Mr Eccles is correct.

Mr RIORDAN: And you have done a thorough investigation of that?

Mr MOULE: I am familiar with the material that was presented at the inquiry and familiar with the activities of the department through that period, and I have had cause to review that in this role.

Mr RIORDAN: So you have reviewed it?

Mr MOULE: I am familiar with the material, and insofar as you would call that a review I have read the material. I am familiar with the activity of the department during that period of time, as I was a Deputy Secretary in DPC at that time.

Mr RIORDAN: So since taking charge of this department you have not done a normal 'new boss at the top' and just done a review—

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, I would remind you we are talking that the financial and performance outcomes of 2019–20. I think you have taken a degree of licence.

Mr RIORDAN: And I will remind you, Chair, I am specifically—

The CHAIR: I think the Secretary has indulged you. I think you should move on to questions relevant to the financial and performance outcomes of 2019–20.

Mr RIORDAN: I am specifically referring to decisions made in this department between March 2020 and June 2020, which is the whole purpose of this inquiry, and I am just asking the new Secretary whether he has reviewed that period separately.

The CHAIR: And the Secretary has answered your question.

Mr RIORDAN: The Secretary has told me—and Secretary, please clarify if I am wrong: you have said that you are aware of what happened at that period, but you have not done a separate investigation of it, like an internal investigation.

Mr MOULE: Deputy Chair, I have not undertaken any investigation as such, but I have reviewed all of the material that was prepared by DPC as part of the inquiry. I am also familiar with the circumstances, having been in the department at that time. I am satisfied that the evidence given by Mr Eccles about that period was accurate, as I think your opening remarks alluded to.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. Thank you. The decision to fund the Migrant Workers Centre included the extension of funding of some \$510 000 in the 2019–20 year. When did you first become aware that the multicultural workers centre funding had been used for improper purposes, in particular to require Migrant Workers Centre staff to campaign against the Liberal Party at both the state and federal elections?

Mr MOULE: Since coming into this role, Deputy Chair, as a result of the VAGO investigation at that point I became aware that they were the findings of that investigation.

Mr RIORDAN: So you were only aware of this issue since the VAGO inquiry?

Mr MOULE: That is correct.

Mr RIORDAN: So the media reports nearly 12 months earlier, you did not sort of—

Mr MOULE: I have no recollection of media reporting at the time. It was not a portfolio area for which I was responsible.

Mr RIORDAN: So as a senior executive in the department at the time, just no-one noticed it?

Mr MOULE: I would not say no-one. I am speaking on behalf of myself, Deputy Chair. It was not an issue that was directly my responsibility. I may well have read the articles, but I do not recall them.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. So now that you are aware of it because it has been in the VAGO report, what action have you and the department taken to deal with this misuse of public funds?

Mr MOULE: So what I might do is ask the Deputy Secretary responsible for Fairer Victoria, which is where the multicultural grants sit, to come to the table. Thank you, Ms Monagle.

Mr RIORDAN: Sorry, this person's name?

Ms MONAGLE: Sorry, I am Brigid Monagle.

Mr MOULE: Deputy Secretary Brigid Monagle.

Mr RIORDAN: Thanks, Deputy Secretary.

Mr MOULE: Deputy Chair, if I may, Ms Monagle was the Deputy Secretary responsible during the period of time in question. She has now, as a result of the machinery-of-government changes, moved to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing along with Fairer Victoria, but she appears here today given the relevance to the period of the inquiry.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. Thank you.

Ms MONAGLE: Sorry, would you mind repeating the question?

Mr RIORDAN: So my question is: what actions has this department taken since it has become aware of the pretty drastic misuse of public funds?

Ms MONAGLE: I wrote a letter to the Migrant Workers Centre chair requesting the full repayment of the funds. That has now been received. We have also counselled people involved to make sure that procurement training and conflict of interest training are well known across all areas of Fairer Victoria and across also the second recommendation of that report, which you would know about, looking at grants across the departments. We are all committed to looking at that and making sure the processes align properly.

Mr RIORDAN: As you were the Deputy Secretary responsible at the time—Mr Moule said he was at the time the Deputy Secretary too, and he was unaware of it—presumably you saw the newspaper articles on it at the time?

Ms MONAGLE: Personally, at that stage I was on secondment working on COVID. I did see the article at the time, but I was not in the chair at the time. I do know, though, that the Acting Deputy Secretary at that time did have—

Mr RIORDAN: Who was who, sorry?

Ms MONAGLE: Sorry?

Mr RIORDAN: Who was the Acting Deputy Secretary?

Ms MONAGLE: That was John Batho.

Mr RIORDAN: Right. He is not with us today, is he?

Ms MONAGLE: No.

Ms VALLENCE: He was on the list yesterday.

Mr RIORDAN: Oh, he did not come today. Right.

Ms MONAGLE: So he was there at the time. They did a full review of all the grant—

Mr RIORDAN: So he did a review at the time when he became aware of it?

Ms MONAGLE: He did a review of what DPC had received in terms of making sure—

Well, if I step back a bit, for any sort of common funding agreement or grant agreement we have a range of milestone payments, and for funding to be released, people need to achieve certain goals along the way. So all of those had been met for the Migrant Workers Centre, and they reviewed that process.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. So if all the goals had been met, are you saying that the goal to campaign against the Liberal Party at the state and federal election was one of the goals?

Mr MAAS: On a point of order, Chair—

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Clearly a—

Mr RIORDAN: Mr Maas, look, why don't you just put your text messages up on the—

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan! Could you allow—

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, Mr Maas has the call.

Mr RIORDAN: This is laughable, but anyway.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan!

Mr RIORDAN: Go for it, Mr Maas. What is your point of order?

Mr MAAS: I remind the committee and members of the committee that we are speaking with public servants. To ask such blatant politically pointed questions such as that, which I suspect the official will not be able to answer, is just clearly pointless in this regard.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Maas. I would remind—

Mr Riordan interjected.

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan.

Mr RIORDAN: The point of order is a ridiculous point of order. The Deputy Secretary has made it quite clear that she was responsible at the time but had handballed to another secretary, who has magically not appeared today. They said to us—they have given in evidence—that they were aware that this was a problem in this period. What this question seeks to do is find out: when you became aware there was a problem, what did you do? Now, what we have heard is that we gave people who have literally taken half a million dollars of taxpayers money—

The CHAIR: Mr Riordan, a contribution on a point of order should be on the point of order and not a further opportunity to prosecute your question. Are you speaking to the point of order?

Mr RIORDAN: The point of order is totally in question, because we are talking about taxpayers funds spent in this particular period. These are taxpayer funds spent in this period. To rule the question out of order because it is uncomfortable for the government is not a reason to rule it out of order.

The CHAIR: I would ask all members of the committee when phrasing their questions to members of the public service who appear as witnesses at this table to refrain from adding political commentary to those questions and putting the witnesses in such a position that they are uncomfortable to answer the question. In the interests of this committee receiving as much information as possible, it would be appreciated if members of this committee could respectfully raise their questions and appropriately raise their questions to the witnesses who appear. I ask you, Mr Riordan, if you would like to rephrase your question.

Mr RIORDAN: Well, no. My question stands, because the Victorian Auditor-General has done an inquiry and found the misuse of funds, and these allegations were made much earlier. My question is: what role did DPC play in following up allegations of misuse? It is not just a little bit of misuse. We are not talking about buying a couple of coffees on a department credit card, we are talking half a million dollars of taxpayers funds used in an incredibly political way.

The CHAIR: The Deputy Secretary answered that question. She replied—correct me if I am wrong, Deputy Secretary, if I misheard you or if I misquote you at all—saying that the department wrote to the relevant agency or organisation and asked for the repayment of moneys and that subsequent training was initiated. Is that—

Ms MONAGLE: That is right. It was around \$17 000 that was not used in accordance with the agreement, and that was repaid in full.

Mr RIORDAN: So only \$17 000 was repaid?

Ms MONAGLE: That is right. That is what VAGO found.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. So to follow up on that question then, are you telling me that you paid them because they had filled in their milestones? Did you receive paperwork? I mean, I have been involved in grant applications and things where it is standard practice. So not only are you saying that you have counselled them, but what process has been put in place? Because clearly documents were fraudulently filled in if they have said, 'We've expended it on X, Y and Z', but you have now found and the Auditor-General has found that they were not in fact spent on that. Are there further repercussions other than just counselling someone?

Ms MONAGLE: I would go back to the common funding agreements, which are consistent all across government in that payments are generally made on terms of achieving certain goals. So you would say, for instance, that up-front—and this is not what relates to this agreement—\$150 000 is delivered, say, potentially, on the employment of five people, and that is when the payment is done. That is the nature of the way that organisations report to government in terms of milestones to achieve their next payment. The detail that we had said that everything that we had required of the Migrant Workers Centre to be delivered had been delivered as per the agreement.

Mr RIORDAN: They just delivered a little bit more than what you had planned on.

Ms MONAGLE: They delivered what we required as per the agreement.

Mr RIORDAN: So did you overpay them?

Ms MONAGLE: Did we overpay them?

Mr RIORDAN: Yes.

Ms MONAGLE: Well, it is an interesting question because we do not necessarily pay per output, we pay per deliverable. Generally in common funding agreements we do not say that you can have three staff or five staff; we leave that up to them, how to deliver it best so that we get the deliverables that government has paid for.

Mr RIORDAN: So the fact that this was done and you were unable to pick it up at the time, the VAGO report said:

Under the contract, DPC may conduct an audit of MWC Inc and VTHC if it has reasonable concerns that they have misused grant funding. The contract gives DPC access to all information and records needed to undertake the audit, along with full access to MWC Inc's and VTHC's premises.

DPC did not undertake an audit despite knowing about the allegations and misuse of funds. Why did DPC not conduct an audit in line with its purview after learning about the allegations?

Ms MONAGLE: So, the allegations, as I recall, came to light in June, and VAGO started its report in September. Within that three months time, DPC did a full review of all the deliverables to make sure that they had been delivered in line with the contract. At that point we did not necessarily go in and do a full audit, and then VAGO did it in September.

Mr RIORDAN: Sorry to sort of pursue this, but what I am hearing is that, 'Because they ticked the boxes and did something wrong, we're going to ignore the fact they've done something wrong because they have ticked the boxes'. It is a little bit like saying about a bank robber, 'Oh, he put some money in the Salvation Army donation tin on the way to robbing the bank, but because he's done that, it's okay; we won't worry about the fact that he's robbed the bank'. Now, you know, these guys have done this, and you are saying, 'Well, it doesn't really matter. We'll just counsel them, because they did all this other stuff'.

Ms MONAGLE: I think, though, you are getting the time lines a bit confused. We were not aware that they had misused those funds, so we did the analysis based on what our requirements with them were—which they had met. It came to light as part of the audit from VAGO, which happened pretty much exactly as we ended the review of the documentation, that the funding had been misused.

Mr RIORDAN: So, in light of now what we know—that you cannot necessarily believe everything you read that they fill in on the forms—have you given any further grants to either Victorian Trades Hall Council or the Migrant Workers Centre following this revelation?

Ms MONAGLE: There is a funding agreement that ends—I will just check—on 15 March. So there is a funding agreement that goes to the 15 March, but that is with the Migrant Workers Centre.

Mr RIORDAN: And how much is that?

Ms MONAGLE: I might have to take that on notice, sorry.

Mr RIORDAN: Right. Are we talking a considerable sum of money?

Ms MONAGLE: No. I think from memory, or from here, it is about \$150 000.

Mr RIORDAN: Right. And will you be not only checking up what their deliverables were but whether they delivered themselves anything else as well?

Ms MONAGLE: We will absolutely be doing a full review, and also the Migrant Workers Centre has indicated in their response to the VAGO review that they will be moving to deliver the products on their own.

Mr RIORDAN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Riordan. Mr Maas, MP.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Chair. And thanks, DPC, for your attendance before the inquiry today. I would like to move to specifically pages 9 and 10 of the questionnaire, which talk about the establishment of the Victorian Centre for Data Insights. I was hoping that you would be able to take the committee through what role that exactly plays.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Maas, for your question. The Victorian Centre for Data Insights is really the government centre of excellence for data and analytics, and it sits within the Department of Premier and Cabinet but in large part plays a whole-of-government role. That role is to improve the maturity and use of data and analytics across government, to support decision-making, policy development, service design and of course delivery. VCDI goes about this by partnering with departments and agencies on their priority projects. I think one of the critical aspects, in terms of the way that they work, is that when they go into a partnership to support a department, one of their objectives is to make sure that they leave behind an uplifted capability within that department so that for future similar projects or work in the same space that department is in a much better place than before those highly qualified experts went in and spent time with the department.

So, VCDI provides advice on data strategy, governance and ethics. It develops data and analytics solutions, such as dashboard reports, importantly predictive models and some specialist algorithms. It coordinates the sharing, integration and linkage of data across different departments and jurisdictions and it supports data systems projects. The linking in particular is quite important I think—we see across government as data repositories have developed over many years that because of the format or the nature of those repositories they do not necessarily talk to each other very easily. VCDI is expert at being able to put in place arrangements that allow datasets to be enriched by looking across several sets instead of just at a single silo. Across the 2019–20 period there was a doubling of these types of projects.

With the 2019–20 bushfires followed by COVID, VCDI experienced an associated increase in demand for its data and analytics capabilities, and this has driven an uplift in the number of projects undertaken by VCDI. During the bushfires it supported Emergency Management Victoria to improve its reporting and management of relief services. VCDI also worked with Bushfire Recovery Victoria to establish its data and analytics capability, including recovery reporting, again bringing together multiple datasets held by different levels of government. Early in the pandemic VCDI also partnered with EMV to better understand and measure COVID-19 risk in high-risk industries. It supported the then Department of Health and Human Services to accelerate the identification of possible outbreak sites, referencing contact-tracing investigations using specially designed algorithms. It also played a central role in engaging with the commonwealth to access critical data for the public health response and economic recovery.

During 2019–20 VCDI also supported many non-pandemic-related activities. They included critical linked data work, providing analysis for the Victorian royal commission into mental health amongst others; supporting the government's base review initiative by collecting departmental data and making it available for use through a central technical solution; and development of machine learning modules that identify swimming pools in backyards to support regulation enforcement on appropriate safety barriers being in place. It supported DELWP's business systems support rollout, which is an internal corporate system—this involved integrating Oracle financial and a human capital management system into a common reporting platform—and conducted a number of governance and data strategy advisory projects, and that has certainly kept it busy over the course of the year.

One of the other key attributes of the work they do is it reduces the cost of some public service initiatives. Through access to VCDI specialist technical skills and personnel the public service saves millions of dollars a year on what would otherwise be money spent on consulting fees, so it really is a significant in-house capability shared across departments. Its work with departments has also assisted them through analysing data and improving processes to identify the most cost-effective ways of delivering services and administering government funds. By assisting departments to better understand the service needs of communities, VCDI supports departments to invest in services that work and divert funds from those that do not and deliver on expected outcomes. I might just ask whether Deputy Secretary Campbell has anything to add to that response.

Mr CAMPBELL: Thank you, Secretary. I think one of the things is just in regard to the establishment of Bushfire Recovery Victoria. That is a really great case study of the contribution that VCDI is making in DPC and across the system. BRV engaged VCDI to help build its data reporting capability. As a new agency established in response to a crisis in the midst of a crisis, BRV had to deliver important recovery work

immediately while figuring out how it would operate. The VCDI team quickly mobilised a multidisciplinary team of data-sharing experts, data analysts and data engineers.

The focus of the team was to get and report data to monitor the progress of the government's response to the bushfires. I cannot stress too strongly the real critical need for BRV to be able to bring together data from across government, external organisations, to deliver recovery services and work in partnership with the federal government. VCDI established a coordinator data acquisition process which follows best-practice data governance and data-sharing processes. It also set up technology to ensure secure transfer for data processes to reduce the risk of disclosure of personal data and agreements with data owners to provide data on a weekly basis. This is obviously really important. It is one thing to have the expertise to deploy the team, but we also need to treat the data with great care and respect, and so those governance arrangements are front and centre of the chief data officer's leadership. In providing this support to BRV they were able to provide data in a fortnightly state recovery report that reported on over 30 grants and operation recovery initiatives. Reporting focused on grant disbursement to ensure that money committed by the government was getting to communities that needed it most.

At a local level within DPC the VCDI team plays a critical role in helping the leadership, the Secretary and the board of management, providing insights into performance—so people and culture, procurement, wellbeing, critical projects. So it is not just an external service provided across the system, but it is also a critical service that at the heart of government is providing guidance and insights on the critical issues that we are seeking to prioritise.

Mr MAAS: That is great. Thank you very much, and thanks for the example to illustrate the how factor. There were a couple of things, Mr Moule, that you mentioned. One was the different datasets, and the other was the reduction of cost to the public service. I was wondering if you would be able to talk to the committee about the use of mobility data to improve the government's response to the coronavirus, and also talk about the reduction in costs that you previously noted.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Maas. Obviously throughout the pandemic the understanding of the movement of the public was critical in some of the decisions that were taken. I think the phrase used quite often is, 'The virus only moves when people do', and that is why restricting movement is one of the tools used around the world to try to slow the spread of the pandemic.

In order to understand the impact of that, or where the need might be most for those types of controls, VCDI was able to access and bring together in a cohesive way various datasets that are available to government to give a picture of where movement occurs and when. That was critically important in both the forward consideration of the types of things that you might put in place to control the movement of the virus; it is also important for the monitoring of those things once they are in place. So the types of datasets that we are talking about might include the City of Melbourne, I think it is, that does quite a lot of work monitoring foot traffic within the CBD. Obviously we have access to public transport patronage data. There are various datasets commonly available through the most dominant mapping apps that exist, and if you can bring those things together, you start to get quite a holistic picture of movement. So the work in that space was largely focused on those activities.

In terms of the broader reduction in costs, there are two types. One is really around stripping costs out of an activity that government is already undertaking—or a project. That can be through driving an efficiency because you can automate a process that might otherwise need to have been done manually, including the bringing together of datasets. That can have a very significant impact on the cost of a project or a service being delivered, particularly when you go down to the activity-per-unit level.

But also, as I alluded to, the types of services delivered by VCDI, by public servants, are the types of things that otherwise you would be paying a very significant premium for if you were going to the open market to have consultants come in and work with a department or an agency on those types of projects. And then most significantly is that as well as the cost saving that you might achieve in undertaking the activity in that way, often the use of consultants will not result necessarily in an uplift in the capability of the department itself to be able to do that work on future projects. One of the really core focuses of VCDI is to make sure that anywhere that it goes to partner with a department or an agency it invests time in the people who are in that department—because they will have their own data specialists. But the unique skills, the approaches that are taken by VCDI, there is a real focus on making sure that they embed those things so that next time that they might be called on

to support that department it might be a lighter touch because they know that there is a capability that has been developed within that organisation.

Mr MAAS: Great. Thanks very much. In the time I have remaining I might move to the issue of family violence. Regrettably, but especially in the 2019–20 year, the issue of family violence has really come to the fore in the state, and I know in my community in the outer south-east there are so many community organisations which are doing exceptional work. I take you to page 13 of the questionnaire and was hoping that you could detail the department's work in the prevention of family violence, and particularly how it is assisting those community organisations.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Maas. I might defer to Deputy Secretary Houghton, who can answer that question.

Ms HOUGHTON: Thank you. Thanks, Mr Maas. So, the prevention of family violence portfolio has continued to successfully implement the *Free from Violence: First Action Plan 2018–2021*, aimed at ending family violence and violence against women in Victoria. To support this work, 17 grant programs were delivered for the prevention of family violence portfolio in 2019–20, and that totalled 135 individual projects and initiatives in a range of settings. The grants specifically support a range of community organisations to engage with Victorians where they live, where they work and where they play to raise awareness of the impact and drivers of family violence.

The department has undertaken evaluations. The ones that have been conducted to date include formal review of 56 projects across the Free from Violence Innovation Fund, the women's health services workforce capability-building program, the Aboriginal Innovation Fund and the prevention in TAFEs program. The findings—these are early findings—are showing success, particularly around knowledge and awareness of how gender inequality drives family violence amongst organisational leaders, prevention practitioners and program participants; knowledge and confidence in delivering primary prevention activities with communities; formal primary prevention partnerships and communities of practice that are essential for expanding the reach of prevention activities; and the willingness of leaders to take action to improve gender equality, contributing to sustainable changes in policies, practices and structures.

Mr MAAS: Thanks very much. If I could move to the assistance during the bushfire period, with family violence. Can you say what impacts the government initiatives with the bushfires had? And what was the response?

Ms HOUGHTON: The bushfires and through its extension also the pandemic did exacerbate existing gender inequalities, with disproportionate impacts on women—women's mental health, economic security, caring responsibilities and experiences of family violence. So the bushfires and the pandemic impacted funded organisations' capacity to deliver primary prevention activities, and some delays resulted from that. So while our programs were impacted by the bushfires and COVID, we still met or exceeded many of our targets for service delivery throughout 2020.

If we look at the BP3 departmental performance statement in relation to the women's policy output, there were six performance measures, in four of which we met or exceeded our targets within the context of bushfires and the pandemic. Of those four, the number of meetings, forums and events held with stakeholders was exceeded, the number of women participating in funded projects, programs and events was exceeded; the percentage of women newly appointed to paid public boards was also exceeded; and the timely delivery of policy analysis and papers was met.

There were two performance measures that were not achieved in 2019–20. One was the timely delivery of projects and programs which supported prevention of family violence and social and economic participation. The target was 100 per cent; the actual was 82. And for service agreements and contracts that delivered agreed outcomes the target was 100 per cent; the actual was 97.5 per cent. If we look into bushfire recovery more specifically, in August 2020 the government released the Bushfire Recovery Victoria package for the eastern Victoria fires, and there were a range of local projects to support recovery in bushfire-affected communities. As part of that there were two specific programs particularly around women and family violence.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Ms Houghton. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. The call is with Mr Sam Hibbins, MP.

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Chair. And thank you, Secretary and your team, for appearing before the committee this morning. I would like to ask about the questionnaire, page 59, in relation to the base reviews that were undertaken. The final cost indicated on the questionnaire was \$8 814 601, and then it also states that it was across multiple consultancies. Am I reading that correctly that you got outside consultants to undertake the base reviews?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. Yes, that is correct. The figure that you have quoted refers to the contracts that were entered into to undertake the base reviews with individual departments given the volume of work required over the period.

Mr HIBBINS: And which consultants were they?

Mr MOULE: I might defer to Deputy Secretary Ada to give you that information.

Mr ADA: Thanks, Mr Hibbins, for your question. It is perhaps just worth noting in response to your question that it had not been done before, the concurrent base review of all the departments that serve the government. To your question, there were three consultants that were engaged: the Boston Consulting Group, McKinsey & Company and PricewaterhouseCoopers. The contract value has been declared in the annual report for 2019–20. I can take you to those numbers if you would like me to. The significant outside advisory service that was required just to undertake the sheer volume of work in a fairly compressed time frame was why we engaged those three firms to work with the departments to complete those base reviews during 2019.

Mr HIBBINS: And was it individual departments getting a separate consultant or did the consultants work across all?

Mr ADA: The funds were provided to DPC in 2019–20. DPC contracted those consultants, Mr Hibbins, and then DPC worked very closely with each of the departments to actually undertake their base reviews.

Mr HIBBINS: I am just trying to get my head around how it worked. Did the consultants work across all—how did they divvy up the work themselves?

Mr ADA: A steering committee was set up to oversee the conduct of each base review for each department and its general government sector entities. That was chaired by the then Secretary of DPC and had representation from the relevant secretary and senior executives. The relevant consultant worked to that steering committee, and that was supported by a secretariat in each department.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, thank you. Could you just give the committee some more information to outline how the actual base reviews were actually undertaken within each department?

Mr ADA: The purpose of the base reviews was really to understand in a very granular sense how moneys were being allocated within departments and their relevant entities to provide government with that level of information for them to have the opportunity to consider how that expenditure aligned with their priorities. I think Secretary Martine spoke on Monday that the intention was for the government to consider that in last year's deferred budget, but that has been pushed out to the forthcoming budget, Mr Hibbins. But it was very much about understanding how money is actually allocated within departments and entities and how that aligns with the government's priorities.

Mr HIBBINS: And when they undertook the base reviews, was the target the \$1.8 billion that was announced in the 2019–20 budget? Was that the aim that they were working to or were they working to individual department targets at that stage? What was the actual—

Mr ADA: Departments were not working to a predetermined target, Mr Hibbins. I think Secretary Martine said on Monday that there was a whole-of-government efficiency allocation in the 2019–20 budget over the forward estimates, provisioned for then what decisions government might make specifically about efficiencies that might arise from the base reviews, but predetermined targets were not set for the departments. It was a bottom-up review to then provide that information for the government to consider.

Mr HIBBINS: So in terms of now, for the final outcomes of the base reviews is there a global figure or a number of figures or options? For example, the Treasurer, I think, at some point flagged a further \$4 billion in cuts. Within those base reviews, are there various options and targets available to government?

Mr ADA: Each department base review report that was completed towards the end of 2019 set out a number of specific initiatives that could be considered by the government and each of those initiatives obviously has a dollar figure and attended with some implications to consider, and that is largely still ahead of the government.

Mr HIBBINS: To what extent are the savings identified in relation to staffing costs and reducing staffing costs?

Mr ADA: Some of the initiatives would or could have implications for workforce. There are other initiatives—for example, the provision of grants and services to third parties—that would not have direct workforce implications, but they are a mix of initiatives that the government has before them to consider, Mr Hibbins.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. I just want to ask now about the Jobs and Skills Exchange. My understanding at the time that that was set up was that that was actually announced at the time of the savings initiatives outlined in the 2019–20 budget, and that one of the main purposes of it was to actually have members of the public service, who may have found that they lost their job through the savings, able to then look for other works or be aligned for other works in the public service; is that correct?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. So the purpose of the Jobs and Skills Exchange is to provide essentially for mobility for public servants and visibility of roles available within the service, so that they can pursue career options that are not limited to their local environment, be that a department or a physically local environment. It may well have some implications for what you describe, but for the normal churn of government in initiatives commencing and coming to an end and people leaving for perfectly normal reasons to go elsewhere, it deals with all of those turnovers of jobs. It was not specifically a base review initiative, but certainly insofar as there may be changes in staffing profiles, it would afford people an opportunity to see where opportunities were within the service.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. I think in your opening remarks you gave some figures in relation to the exchange, but—you can take this on notice—how many public servants have actually been successfully placed through the job exchange?

Mr MOULE: I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr HIBBINS: And how many public servants—in relation to the savings initiatives—who may have lost their jobs or work not continued through savings initiatives in 2019–20—would you have the figure of how many of those public servants have been successfully placed through the jobs exchange?

Mr MOULE: So you are referring to savings requirements of departments that are already embedded in budgets passed flowing through; is it?

Mr HIBBINS: Yes.

Mr MOULE: I do not have that information at hand, but we could take that on notice.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, thank you. Just finally, in previous budget years, or even in the previous term, there was a forestry task force that was managed by DPC. My understanding is its work has concluded. Does DPC now have any involvement within the forestry industry?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. I might defer to Deputy Secretary Ada.

Mr ADA: Mr Hibbins, thanks for your question. DPC has been working closely with relevant departments over the course of the last couple of years, particularly in the development of the *Victorian Forestry Plan* that was announced by the government in late 2019 and more recently over the course of the last nine months with regard to a code review that was announced by the government in the middle of last year. We have been particularly working closely with DELWP and DJPR in that regard.

Mr HIBBINS: The forestry plan was announced in 2019–20, but the task force ceased its work, in my understanding, or was no longer continuing, I think, in 2016. Is there a connection between the two bodies of work?

Mr ADA: Mr Hibbins, the work of the task force to some extent predated my time in DPC. I might have to take that specific question on notice. But just to make the point, DPC did work closely with departments with regard to the formulation of the *Victorian Forestry Plan* and again has worked in a formal sense with other departments over the course of the last nine months with regard to the code review. With regard to the interrelationship between the task force you mentioned and that work, perhaps I could take that on notice.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. Mr Danny O'Brien, MP.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, everyone. Secretary, can I just begin—the department let a contract that started on 31 January last year for \$905 000 for Givit, the not-for-profit donations broker, I guess you would call them. It is described as for 'End-to-end management and coordination of individual and corporate donations associated with disaster and emergency recovery Victoria'. Could you provide some information on what that actually was? Was that the bushfire fund?

Mr MOULE: Sorry, Mr O'Brien, do you have a reference for that that we might be able to—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, you have got to take your mask off, Secretary.

Mr MOULE: Excuse me. Are you referring to an item specifically in the questionnaire, or just not—

Mr D O'BRIEN: No, it is a contract on the government contracts website—Department of Premier and Cabinet, \$905 407. It is a two-year contract. There is a number on it, a contract number—DPC19-20-149—if that helps. I just wanted to get an idea of what it was for and what they are doing and whether it was perhaps related to the government taking over the bushfire donations fund.

Mr MOULE: We may need to take that on notice, Mr O'Brien. We cannot seem to find at hand material related to that. But we are happy to take any questions on that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay, could you provide a bit more detail on it, including a breakdown of what the contract actually involves, what services they are providing and what sort of money they are managing, so for nearly a million dollars, was it managing \$5 million donations or was it 100? And was there was a tender process as well for that? That would be appreciated.

Can I just ask a quick question that has arisen? Again it goes back to hotel quarantine, which I appreciate is not with the department at the moment. But you would be aware of the mix-up yesterday in Queensland with vaccines, which relates to Healthcare Australia, which I also understand is heavily involved in Victorian hotel quarantine. Does Premier and Cabinet have any role in providing assurances about the companies that are involved, their background, their training and the services that they are providing?

Mr MOULE: Not in regard to that question, Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So in regard to that company or—

Mr MOULE: Well, the question about hotel quarantine services, that is entirely managed within COVID Quarantine Victoria.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. So that is a DJCS one.

Mr MOULE: Yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Can I just move to some enterprise bargaining questions, so perhaps Mr O'Connor: In relation to major EBAs for 2019–20, can you provide a list of the annual pay increases agreed to under the various EBAs that the central bargaining unit has been involved in that were settled in 2019–20?

Mr O'CONNOR: We can take that on notice, Mr O'Brien. We are happy to provide that, as usual.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Just a technical question: are you still the central bargaining unit or are you Industrial Relations Victoria now?

Mr O'CONNOR: The central bargaining unit sits within the public sector IR team within Industrial Relations Victoria.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Right, okay. For 2019–20 what was the wages policy in terms of actual pay increases?

Mr O'CONNOR: For 2019–20? So the wages policy is based on a base 2 per cent increase, with increases to other allowances possible in exchange for government priorities, service delivery improvements and other policy items.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Is it 2 per cent plus CPI or was that inclusive?

Mr O'CONNOR: No. It is 2 per cent per annum to wages, with other increases possible, but not to base wages.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Any increase above 2 per cent had to be in terms of allowances or additional payments of some description. And was there any cap on those?

Mr O'CONNOR: No cap on those, but they obviously were in return for, as I have said, service delivery improvements, efficiencies or other policy items.

Mr D O'BRIEN: What percentage of public sector wage agreements complied with the government's enterprise bargaining framework for 2019–20?

Mr O'CONNOR: All of them, as far as I am aware, Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: 100 per cent?

Mr O'CONNOR: Yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Did any of them only comply with the framework because ERC approved a variation from wages policy, and if so, which agreements?

Mr O'CONNOR: I would have to take that on notice, but I am not aware of any falling within that category. I am obviously not able to talk about cabinet deliberations.

Mr D O'BRIEN: No. So as far as you are aware, though—well, not as far as you are aware; you are the man—did all EBAs comply with the wages policy?

Mr O'CONNOR: Yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Can I ask: which EBAs, for the full final year aggregate costs of that, are higher than the offsets for that EBA so as to create a net cost to the government that is likely to continue beyond the EBA period? Were there any of those?

Mr O'CONNOR: I am not quite sure what your question is there, Mr O'Brien, in the sense that obviously the agreements are assessed by Treasury and Finance for financial viability and sustainability, and all of the agreements will have passed that test—but I am not sure whether that answers your question or not.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Well, I guess, looking at the, as I said, the final year aggregate costs, if there is any increase in those costs, whether they are offset by departments or are there any where they were not?

Mr O'CONNOR: Again, I am not aware immediately of whether any fall into that category, but I might have to take that on notice.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I ask you to check that on notice?

Mr O'CONNOR: Yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: The portable long service leave scheme for 2019 set a target for workers registered of 75 000—that is on budget paper 3, page 303, of the 2019–20 budget—and as stated that 'reflects the total number of estimated eligible workers under the scheme'. But the outcome in this year's budget papers showed that there were 114 000 registered workers for the portable long service scheme. So the question I have is: was

the original target wrong and the estimate of who would actually be eligible to be registered, or is the authority registering workers outside the industries that were supposed to be covered?

Mr O'CONNOR: No. Look, I think the original target would have been an estimation of what we thought would be achievable within the time period. If it has been exceeded, that would be in recognition of the processes that we have put in place. The original estimate was not based on estimating the total number of workers that would be eligible for the scheme; it was more linked to the time period within which we would have to register them.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Well, like I said, the actual note in the budget papers says it 'reflects the total number of estimated eligible workers under the scheme'.

Mr O'CONNOR: In relation to the 75 000?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes.

Mr O'CONNOR: Well, I will have to take that on notice, but I think my understanding was that we were setting a target based upon the time frame within which the authority would be up and running. We never contemplated that we would be registering every worker within the three sectors in that first year.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Right. So what you are saying is you think you have just registered a lot more than you expected you would get to.

Mr O'CONNOR: I think so, yes. That is right.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. And the regulations were introduced to include in the definition of 'community services work', 'health or aged care work' and 'services that support, supervise or manage the provision of any of the prescribed services'. Were any workers in these additional categories being registered by the authority prior to the introduction of the regulations?

Mr O'CONNOR: Not that I am aware of, Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you. I will move on back to the Secretary, if I may. The Victorian Public Sector Commission has reported that the number of executives in the VPS has increased from 691 five years earlier to 1471 as at 30 June 2020. Secretary, what increase in executives did the government forecast for 2019–20, and has the government exceeded that estimate?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. I am not aware that we forecast in the way that you might have described in terms of how many be it executives or VPS staff might be coming on in a forward year, so I think the actuals are probably the best reflection of what occurred throughout that—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, if you could speak up a little bit, Secretary. I know you are struggling a bit.

Mr MOULE: My apologies. I am not sure that we calculate a forward projection in the way that you have described of be it executives or broader VPS staff for the year ahead. It is more a product of the activity of government for that year and meeting those requirements, so I think the actual figure of what those were in that year is probably the best measure.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, is what?

Mr MOULE: Would be the best measure.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes. Okay. Well, in 2019–20 alone there was an increase of 212 executives. The next question is: the government came to office with a commitment to reduce the number of executives in the public service. That has clearly not been met, but is there still any policy to do so within the public service?

Mr MOULE: There is not a policy specifically related to that, Mr O'Brien, that I am aware of. I think the increase in both executive numbers and the broader VPS is reflective of the investment by government over that time. Reflecting the period between 2013 and 2020, there was about a 45 per cent increase in total employment across the VPS, which—

Mr D O'BRIEN: In total employment?

Mr MOULE: Across the VPS. And output expenditure at that time also increased by 45 per cent. I think that is what is the clearest determinant of why as new projects and investments by government come online they require people to deliver them.

Mr D O'BRIEN: That dovetails neatly with what I was coming to. The 691 to 1471 is nearly a 100 per cent increase. What KPIs of government have improved in proportion with that increase in executives, given, as you have just said, about a 45 per cent total employment increase in the VPS and a 45 per cent increase in government output but yet nearly a 100 per cent increase in executives? So what have we got for that?

Mr MOULE: So I think the first thing that I would reflect on, and I am happy to provide you more precise information on this, Mr O'Brien, is that there was a process undertaken where a category of the VPS—senior technical specialists, sometimes referred to as VPS7—over a period of time prior to and including the terms of this current government had been used almost to create quasi-executives who might have otherwise not fit the pure definition of a senior technical specialist, who are employed not to manage large groups or large projects but because of their expertise. At one point in the period of time that you are referring to there was an uplift as a result of reclassification of those individuals to their correct classification, so I think that has contributed to the number.

Mr D O'BRIEN: So they were changed from VPS 7 to executive level?

Mr MOULE: Yes. They were reclassified, because the nature of their jobs meant that they should be. I am happy to provide you the data on that change. And then I think in terms of the broader growth, it is reflective of the government's agenda and its investment in new projects and activities.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I ask—on notice if you do not have it—what the average salary of an executive in the department was for 2019–20?

Mr MOULE: In the Department of Premier and Cabinet specifically?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes.

Mr MOULE: Yes, we can provide that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Presumably you hold that information across the whole public service, do you?

Mr MOULE: We at DPC would not hold that information. It may be reported by the VPSC in their state of the public sector report each year.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. If I could get it then. Do you have it there, Secretary, or is it best to take on notice?

Mr MOULE: In terms of the entire public sector, I do have that figure in front of me. So the median salary for VPS executives to June 2020 was \$235 000. That is a figure that is in the VPSC state of the public sector report.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you. Can I move on to ministerial offices. For 2019–20 could you provide for us for each quarter the number of ministerial staff in each office, including the Premier's private office?

Mr MOULE: Yes, insofar as we are able to do that, we can. The payroll that we are responsible for does not always clearly delineate; given that all ministerial advisers are essentially employees of the Premier, they are grouped together. But we have provided similar information before, so we should be able to do that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: But who pays them, Secretary—DPC?

Mr MOULE: Yes. That is correct. So the payroll information that we have does not always clearly delineate the attachment to the office, so usually we need to do further investigation to understand exactly which ministerial office they may be in.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I do not understand. If you work for the Premier in the Premier's private office, you work for the Premier in the Premier's private office. Or are you saying that they are floating among different offices at different times?

Mr MOULE: I think we have reported this previously. There are essentially staff who work in the Premier's office who are, you might say, core to the function of that office. There are other staff who provide services either specifically to other ministers or services across the ministry, and depending on the model that the government of the day applies—I am going to use media advisers as an example. Some governments sit their media adviser for a minister within the ministerial office; others—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, some departments, did you say?

Mr MOULE: Some governments choose to attach their media adviser—I was just using it as an illustrative example—attach that position to the relevant ministerial office for that adviser. Other governments choose to—

Mr D O'BRIEN: When you say governments, I am only interested in the Victorian government. Do you mean departments?

Mr MOULE: No, I mean Victorian governments.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Right. Okay. Are you able to tell me how many staff were in the Premier's private office as at 30 June?

Mr MOULE: Yes, we are.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Now, or not?

Mr MOULE: I do not have that figure with me, but we will be able to provide that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I get that information, as I said, as best you can for all ministerial staff? Is it possible also to get the staff numbers broken down by job title? So, for example, if we find out there are 100 staff in the PPO, there is a chief of staff, four deputy chiefs of staff, whatever—obviously not their names, just the titles, if that is possible, please.

Mr MOULE: Yes. I think we should have access to some delineation within the payroll system that allows us to do that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Secretary, how much did the department pay to promote the Premier's Facebook page in 2019–20?

Mr MOULE: So, the Premier's Facebook page is paid for out of the Premier's office budget. The only interaction with the department in that regard is that the office does not hold a credit card, so the department credit card is used to pay those accounts. That money is then journalled to the department for that payment, but it is money that is within the purview of the Premier's office to spend at its discretion.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien, your time has expired, and I will pass the call to Ms Pauline Richards, MP.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Secretary and officials. Secretary, I think you can have a bit of a break while I pursue some of the insights that Mr Maas was unpacking earlier around women and family violence. I would like to refer you to page 13 of the questionnaire and again just get some more information about family violence as it relates to diversity, something that is important to many of us because of the communities that we represent. I am interested in understanding what programs are run to support women from diverse backgrounds.

Mr MOULE: Sorry, we will call Deputy Secretary Monagle to respond to that question. Thank you, Ms Richards.

Ms MONAGLE: Sorry, would you mind repeating that? Apologies.

Ms RICHARDS: I am interested in finding out, as it relates to family violence, what programs are run to support women from diverse backgrounds.

Ms MONAGLE: Absolutely. That is a great question. Thank you. It is a really important piece of work that we worked on in 2019–20 and 2020 onwards. It is an interesting question because in my area it is actually covered off between the two portfolios—multicultural and also the Office for Women and the women’s portfolio—so it is really nice synergy to have them together. It means that we can work together on those elements. I am just trying to find my notes, which have got all the details on it that I can give you. In 2019–20 we delivered a range of primary prevention activities for women; it is also multicultural women, CALD women, Aboriginal women and LGBTI communities as well. We also do a lot of work on prevention of family violence for older people and elder abuse and also for women with disabilities as well. Funding that was delivered as part of the *Free from Violence* strategy, which Kate Houghton spoke about before, supported that.

For the multicultural communities, in 2019–20 prevention of family violence activities were undertaken with over 65 multicultural and faith communities. Some of these initiatives have now moved into the new department, where I am now, in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

For Aboriginal communities, in 2019–20 there was around \$700 000 in programs for an Aboriginal Free from Violence Innovation Fund. What that did was support 12 Aboriginal-led organisations, so a range of ACCOs or traditional owner groups, to deliver community-led prevention activities with Aboriginal communities across Victoria. Fundamentally that was in line with the principles of self-determination. So the funding had very broad guidelines but it was up to those organisations how they delivered it for their own community. Early evidence is saying that as a result the people who were involved feel much more confident in accessing culturally appropriate support and equipped with the knowledge and skills to prevent family violence.

For our support for people from LGBTIQ communities, in 2019–20 the government allocated \$350 000. That was allocated to Rainbow Health Victoria and that was to test and deliver a range of community-based prevention activities with people from LGBTIQ+ communities in the community and health sectors. Importantly, that is in its very early stages; that is really starting to inform a lot of work about prevention of family violence and support for people in those communities.

Then for people with disabilities, our funding was allocated to Women with Disabilities Victoria to deliver the workforce program on gender and disability. Our initial evaluation results for that are really positive, with participation not necessarily in very high numbers but really committed participation. They are showing, again, also understanding and skills to prevent family violence against women and also about gender equality in the workplace and how to support them in the workplace as all of the evidence shows that gender inequality is the key problem in terms of family violence.

Ms RICHARDS: Great, terrific. I am not sure where to direct this, so I think I will allow one of you to give me the guidance. On page 13 of the questionnaire, it says there is a focus on the prevention of family violence. One of the areas of focus is:

To trial, test and evaluate the effectiveness of a range of new and innovative primary prevention initiatives across a range of settings and contexts.

I am interested in perhaps if the committee can have some detail about how this was done and if there were any particular focus groups or issues in the Victorian community that you would like to provide some particular insights on to the committee?

Ms MONAGLE: Are you focusing mainly on prevention of family violence initiatives?

Ms RICHARDS: Yes, and in terms of evaluation.

Ms MONAGLE: Absolutely. In 2019–20 there was \$18 million allocated for the prevention of family violence, and \$9 million of that went to Respect Victoria, which conducted some really important and successful behaviour change campaigns and research projects. I do not necessarily have the evidence to hand, but that campaign that you are remembering, in terms of the woman sitting on the train, was really successful in lots of people understanding and comprehending and seeing that, and evidence showed that it built understanding about just the little things that can be done and the little things can be changed. Also there was a lot of effort put into the primary prevention initiatives under the industry plan, which is run by Family Safety Victoria, and it is about building up competencies in the workforce to support primary prevention activities.

Then also the funding to deliver Free from Violence as well—I will go into a bit more detail in terms of the funding for the Free from Violence initiatives. One of the key things that we did there was fund Australia’s

National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, ANROWS, and that is to partner with Our Watch to continue the evaluation and the evidence base for the drivers of family violence and also other forms of violence against women. That database that ANROWS runs and that we have had a big role in is really critical in understanding what is happening in family violence across Victoria so that we are able to better target services and understand what is working.

We also provided funding to Our Watch to develop a practice framework to support practitioners to engage men and boys in the prevention of family violence efforts and importantly, as part of that, support implementation in the workplace equality and respect program in the public sector as well.

Ms RICHARDS: Terrific. I am going to take a bit of a track change now, and I am interested in exploring public health communication. At page 6 of the questionnaire I am interested in perhaps having an explanation in broad terms of the public health communications campaign and why that was important during the pandemic.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Ms Richards. I might start by saying that all Victorian government departments have had a responsibility for making sure that there is communication related to changes because of coronavirus for their portfolio areas. So each of the departments has undertaken activity in that space. Perhaps the two primary pieces of work that have been conducted in a campaign sense and particularly in the period of time that this inquiry is considering were delivered by the then Department of Health and Human Services and then by the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The first of those was called Managing This Together. I would describe that as a very transactional campaign. It was really focused on delivering the fundamental health and safety messages—the coughing into your elbow, the wearing of masks, the sanitising of hands, and so on—because at that time it was a significantly new paradigm for Victoria and globally as well. That had a very specific and transactional purpose around those things. That campaign ran from early March 2020 until April 2020 under the emergency advertising provisions. In May 2020 DPC took on a leadership and coordination role for a campaign that became known as Staying Apart Keeps Us Together.

I should say that during the procurement process for that campaign the quality of submissions that we received from agencies that we were prospectively looking to work with was really quite outstanding, and the support that we got from the sector was well above what we would usually see in a tender process. The level of engagement was great, but ultimately we settled on that campaign. Its purpose was to really bring an overarching brand and communication framework to as best as possible bring together the various elements—everything from the specific health messages to broader behaviour change to communicating restriction levels and other things—into a common brand that we hoped Victorians would become familiar with. The significant part of that campaign was really to try to bring to life real people in those campaigns to deliver messages. That took various forms depending on the stages of restrictions and the key messages that needed to be delivered. Of course that included communication activity during what became known as—we did not call it this at the time, but it became known as—the first wave. There was an intervening period, and then, as we know, the communications needed to change focus again as we moved into the second wave and the levels of restrictions that were achieved as we moved into the 2020–21 financial year.

One of the key aspects of the campaign's design was to make sure that we were able to pivot quickly as and when the need arose, and we certainly saw that. With the arrangements that we had in place, particularly from a digital perspective—so whether they be digital billboards that are scattered above freeways throughout Melbourne in particular or our broader social media approach—we had arrangements in place where we were able to turn different pieces of creative around within about 3 hours. Also, using social media channels we were able to geo-target where some of those messages might have been required. We were doing a range of contingency planning at that time in the event that a local community, a regional town, might have had an outbreak and there was a need for very specific communications in those areas. Although in the period that this committee is reviewing that was not necessary in that way, ultimately in places like Shepparton, for example, where we did need some response activity, those types of mechanisms were deployed and we saw a very successful turnout of people—a great response from that community, for example, in coming out to get tested and following the health advice that was in place at that time.

The other thing that we were keen to make sure we made use of were any insights gained around the behaviour of people—what might prompt people to follow the advice that was being provided and of course adhere to any of the rules that might have been in place. To do that we drew on a lot of data sources—things like infringement data or even just the police assistance line information that comes through there. Obviously we

had a lot of testing data and cases and so on that were available through the Department of Health and Human Services at different times. The need for us to talk to either geographic or ethnic communities specifically was incredibly important, so having access to that type of information and providing all of our communications material in specific languages—but it is so much more than language. Sometimes advertising can certainly be very useful, but at other times it is face-to-face communication, the distribution of flyers, so the campaign as a whole needed to make sure it accounted for multiple audiences, multiple channels and multiple communities.

The Staying Apart Keeps Us Together campaign was measured for reach, which is essentially an advertising measure of what proportion of the population you think that you might have got to. It was consistently reaching in the very high 90s, most commonly around the 98 per cent mark, in terms of reach to Victorians aged 18 or older. The highest reaching platforms across the entire population were Facebook, free-to-air television, radio and then out-of-home advertising, which is largely billboards.

The qualitative campaign evaluation research confirmed that the audio cue—so people may be aware that there was a specific audio tone used; I will not try to replicate it, but it was used at the start, and continues to be used, at the start of ads—was really resonating with people in terms of the familiarity and then hearing that cue and expecting that what you are going to hear next was a message from government. Our evaluation of that mechanism showed that that was effective and has continued to be so. For a large period of time there was a very common colour used; it was a purple sort of colour. Again, even showing people that colour meant they became associated with the campaign. In more recent times, so beyond the second wave, that colour has changed. That was to indicate a different phase of the types of messages that needed to be communicated.

The campaign initially launched in 47 languages, including English, and grew to 57 languages in total as further specific sub-language needs were identified. A lot of work was invested in making sure that we were effectively using CALD channels to get messages to people in the way that they receive them. Not everybody uses Facebook or reads what we might consider mainstream media, and although over time government has become better at using those channels effectively for broader campaigns, really the amount of time and effort invested, both in the early period of this campaign and then as a continuing feature has I hope significantly uplifted government's understanding of using those channels, so that rather than learning some of the things that we did, we will start from a position of having that knowledge going forward.

Ms RICHARDS: Absolutely fascinating. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ms Richards. I might pause the committee for a short break and adjourn until 11.20 am. Thank you.

We will reopen this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and the call is with Mr David Limbrick, MLC.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for appearing today. I would like to just pick up firstly some of the points that you were raising previously around the Staying Apart Keeps Us Together campaign that you were running. What was the total cost that was paid out in advertising fees during that campaign?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Limbrick. I think I do have that, if you could just give me one moment. For the Staying Apart Keeps Us Together campaign, for the period within 2019–20, the cost of the campaign from 1 May to 30 June was \$6.31 million. This included \$4.54 million in advertising costs, and the balance was for the creative material and the agency that was leading the campaign.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. And with those advertising costs, what was the break-up of media types? I think you said 4 point—sorry, what was it?

Mr MOULE: The media buy itself was \$4.54 million.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes. And do you know what types of media that was broken up between? I know that there was some stuff on radio and social media and television and bus shelters and all those sorts of things.

Mr MOULE: In terms of the channels used, it was probably one of the broadest campaigns the government would have run. I do not have the entire breakdown here. Some of that material would be in our annual report, but otherwise I am happy to provide what we have on notice.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. Do you have information about the proportion of the advertising market that that made up? I know that when the lockdowns started there was a collapse in advertising on radio and lots of other channels because people could not sell their products so they pulled their ads, and all of a sudden government was probably one of their biggest customers. Do you know what proportion of the market the government became at that point, let us say for radio, because on radio it was like every second ad seemed to be a government ad all of a sudden?

Mr MOULE: I certainly do not have the figure, and it may even be difficult to ascertain, but your reflection is absolutely correct. Commercial advertising slowed significantly. We made conscious decisions to cease or slow broader government communications that were not considered essential. And between us and the commonwealth, who also invested significantly—both the commonwealth and the states made best endeavours to make sure our campaigns were not duplicative and were pushing the same messages.

But yes, I think your reflection would be right. During that period government advertising would have dominated I think most, other than perhaps supermarkets.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay. Thank you. I sort of had concerns that the organisations like media organisations that were out there that were meant to be holding the government to account all of a sudden had the government as their biggest customer. Was much consideration given to that?

Mr MOULE: I am sorry, Mr Limbrick, which organisations are you referring to?

Mr LIMBRICK: Like radio stations, television stations, newspapers who previously were reliant on the private sector all of a sudden during this period were dependent on government funding effectively.

Mr MOULE: I mean, government is routinely a very large buyer of media. I think that has always been the case. We certainly do not outrank some of the larger commercial interests who purchase. I am not sure—in fact I would be reasonably certain in saying that the proportion of advertising that the government was buying at that time did not impact the news media coverage, if you like, if that is the question you are asking, Mr Limbrick.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes, I was just asking if consideration was given to that, I suppose.

Mr MOULE: I should say, Mr Limbrick, at that time more than any other—in my experience at least—the collaborative way in which news organisations worked with government to get those messages to air or into their formats was as good as I have ever seen, and in fact for the most part we were receiving a lot of what are called bonus spots—essentially spots that we were not paying for—in order to get the messages out. So my reflection is that this sector actually worked very well with government to support strong community messaging at that time.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. On another topic, with regard to the bushfire disaster appeal fund, when this fund was set up there was a lot of advertising and the community was very generous in donating to that, and I see in the papers that the government itself donated \$2 million to it. It is my understanding that this is administered as a standalone fund. I have had questions from constituents who have made donations to this fund—I have made donations to this fund personally—in where has this money actually gone? When I looked at the reporting on the website, it was not very clear to me how the money had been paid out. What sort of reporting is there on where the money has gone and who is receiving it? I think the Premier said when it was first set up that every cent would go out, there would not be any administration fees because it was covered by existing administration functions within the department, but what sort of transparency is there around how those funds were disbursed and what proportion are still remaining to be disbursed?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Limbrick. The secretariat for the bushfire appeal fund did sit with DPC for some time but later transitioned to BRV, which also moved to the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Mr LIMBRICK: But it was part of this at the time, wasn't it?

Mr MOULE: Yes, that is correct. So in the early stages, particularly in that establishment period, I think it is fair to say that the focus was on enabling a place where community and corporate could make donations. I would need to check, but only a very small proportion of what was ultimately received—which I recall to be

around \$35 million to \$40 million—into the fund would have been disbursed during the period of time that it sat with DPC. I am certainly happy to have a look at the issue of the reporting and where you might best find an accountability for that. I can certainly attest that all of the administrative costs associated with what was ultimately set up as a panel to consider disbursements of funds, which was chaired by former Deputy Premier Pat McNamara—all of those costs were borne by DPC and then Bushfire Recovery Victoria. So the funds that were donated, in their entirety, were to be made available for those in need.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. A couple of other things unrelated to that, in budget paper 3 on page 320 there are a couple of performance measures that I am interested in learning a bit more about. Firstly, there is one saying the jobs resulting from government facilitation services under the Victorian Jobs and Investment Fund, and it says that there are 474 jobs created during the 2019–20 financial year. How much money was expended to create those jobs?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Limbrick. I might defer to Deputy Secretary Ada for a response to that question.

Mr ADA: Thanks, Mr Limbrick, for the question. The Victorian Jobs and Investment Fund was established in the 2019–20 budget. As you point out, the output measures fell well short of the target in 2019–20. That was for a number of reasons. There was some reprioritisation out of the fund to a number of urgent bushfire projects in eastern Victoria that did not contribute to new jobs growth or capital investment. That was a particular reason why the actual performance fell short of the target.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes, I am aware of the reason it states in the budget paper, but my question is: how much money was expended for those 474 jobs?

Mr ADA: I think probably the best thing to do is to take that question on notice and provide that breakdown for you, Mr Limbrick.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay. Excellent, thank you. Another performance measure that is in here is the number of projects facilitated by the behavioural insights unit. What were these projects? What are the topics of these projects, and are the results of those projects publicly available? Does this form reports that are only used internally, or are they public reports?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Limbrick. Not unlike the Victorian Centre for Data Insights that I referred to earlier, primarily the behavioural insights unit works across government in an advisory capacity, particularly where there is activity that requires a deeper understanding of human behaviour, and as a result there are a variety of activities that they undertake, some large and some small. The degree to which they are bespoke pieces of work that might be visible externally is probably lesser, again similar to the VCDI. The other significant thing that they undertake is training across the VPS, sort of workshops for people who deliver projects that involve engagement with the community.

But as a couple of examples of work within 2019–20, the unit provided some behavioural science informed advice to Victorian public service departments on their communication with Victorians—the best way to express what was required for health and safety and then also compliance with any of the rules that might have been in place at any given time. That is an externally facing piece. Internally they undertook work to understand how public servants were dealing with the en masse reverting to working from home and making sure that what was being communicated to them was meeting the needs of those people as employees. So it is a range of advisory services across government.

Mr LIMBRICK: So they are a mix? Some of those are just internally used and some of those are publicly available pieces of research, is that right? Where could one find those if they wanted to find one that was publicly available?

Mr MOULE: I am happy to take on notice providing you with advice on where there is specifically a bespoke piece of work that is now publicly available and not just incorporated in perhaps the outcome of the overall project. I am certainly happy to do that.

Mr LIMBRICK: Would it be possible to get a list of those 10 projects and a one-sentence summary of what they did? Is it possible to take that on notice, maybe?

Mr CAMPBELL: If I can comment, I think the answer will be yes, but because of the partnership approach we obviously would want to check with those who we are working with to make sure we take any sensitivities into regard. But we can give you that list and provide that.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay, thank you. One other thing, with the chief parliamentary counsel services, was part of their job after the state of emergency to help write new legislation for the state of emergency? Is that part of their job in this? So what I am asking is there were a lot of questions around writing specific legislation for the state of emergency rather than in place of the state of emergency. Was there any work done on that during the period?

Mr MOULE: I might just defer to our General Counsel, Toby Hemming, to respond to that.

Mr HEMMING: Mr Limbrick, yes, the chief parliamentary counsel's role is to draft legislation, but that is based on drafting instructions which that office receives from departments. So the role of the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel is particularly the drafting of legislation as per instructions provided.

Mr LIMBRICK: But was there any legislation drafted as an alternative to a continuing state of emergency? Was there any legislation like that drafted? I know none was presented at Parliament, but I am wondering whether there was any work done on that at all.

Mr HEMMING: Not that I am aware of, Mr Limbrick.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay. All right, thank you. Okay, that is all from me. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Limbrick. Ms Nina Taylor, MLC.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you, Secretary and officials. I was wanting to explore the treaty process. I know that you have detailed on page 7 of the questionnaire the work done by the DPC in advancing the treaty process, so could you update the committee on the status of the Victorian treaty process?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Ms Taylor. I might defer to Ms Houghton for a detailed explanation.

Ms HOUGHTON: Thank you, Ms Taylor, thank you for the question. Victoria's treaty process is in now phase 2 of a three-phase process. Phase 2 commenced with the establishment of the First Peoples' Assembly—the assembly—the first statewide, democratically-elected representative body for Aboriginal Victorians in the state's history. During this phase, phase 2, of the treaty process the state is working in partnership with the assembly to establish the treaty elements that are required under the treaty Act. There are three components to that: a treaty authority, a treaty negotiation framework and a self-determination fund and dispute resolution process. Substantive discussions have already occurred between the assembly and the state, and they will continue.

Discussions to date have focused on agreeing to the phase 2 dispute resolution process and the treaty conduct protocols. These essentially guide the relationship between the parties in phase 2. The dispute resolution process has been agreed to, and the assembly and the state have now commenced negotiations on the treaty negotiation framework, the authority and the self-determination fund. Phase 3 will commence when the state and the assembly have agreed the treaty elements required under the treaty Act. That will involve the negotiation of treaty or treaties.

The budget in 2019–20 provided \$30.4 million over two years to progress the treaty process in partnership with Aboriginal Victorians. The allocation comprised the following: \$13.6 million over two years to deliver a traditional owner nation-building support package to support traditional owners to engage nation-building and treaty readiness initiatives, \$11 million over two years to fund the establishment and operation of the assembly and \$5.8 million over two years to build DPC's capacity to progress the treaty process and public support for treaty. That includes setting up our state negotiation team to discuss treaty and negotiations to coordinate across whole of government for those negotiations and continuing the Deadly Questions communications campaign to drive awareness and understanding of the treaty process and build maximum momentum towards a treaty. Investment through the 2019–20 Victorian budget builds on an investment of \$9 million the previous year, and there were further budget allocations in 2020–21.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. Just with regard to that communications process, could you expand on what actual work is being done in that space and what specific initiatives have been rolled out? I note this was detailed to some extent on page 8 of the questionnaire as well.

Ms HOUGHTON: Yes, thank you. I will just find my sheet for Deadly and Proud. The 2019–20 Victorian budget as part of that \$30.4 million had the Deadly and Proud communications campaign to develop a new communications way called Deadly and Proud to drive awareness and understanding of the treaty process and, as I said, build momentum. What Deadly and Proud does is demonstrate to Victorians that Aboriginal cultures, heritage and resilience are important, not just to Aboriginal Victorians themselves but to all Victorians, and all Victorians should be proud together. The campaign features 21 Aboriginal storytellers and is focused on showcasing pride in Victoria's rich heritage of Aboriginal cultures, resilience and communities on our path to treaty and truth and justice.

Traditional owners and Aboriginal Victorians are key to truth telling and sharing stories which make up our past. It is important that we all talk about our shared history if we are to move forward as all Victorians, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and build a collective future which we can all be proud of. Deadly and Proud builds on that successful Victorian Deadly and Proud campaign.

Ms TAYLOR: Very good. Thank you. You did mention about the framework to support future treaty negotiations. Could you share a bit more on how the assembly and the state are working in partnership to really establish that framework?

Ms HOUGHTON: Yes. It is really important, setting how the two equal parties in treaty move forward. The treaty Act really sets out what we need to do. There are three elements to treaty, as I have spoken about. The Victorian government has set its specialist team to represent the state in phase 2 of the discussions with the assembly, and also develop an appropriate and efficient authorising environment and approvals process for the state's position in moving to those three elements of treaty. The treaty Act requires both the state and the assembly to act in accordance with certain guiding principles, and those guiding principles are self-determination and empowerment, fairness and equity, partnership and good faith, mutual benefit and sustainability, transparency and accountability. Our commitment as a state and as part of the negotiation team is to always shape our interactions with the assembly based on those guiding principles. They are very much a feature of the code of conduct and also the dispute resolution process.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. Now, I was just wanting to explore the purpose of the traditional owner engagement officer positions. I believe page 9 of the questionnaire details the recruitment of three of the four planned positions.

Ms HOUGHTON: Yes. It is part of a broader package of nation-building and treaty-readiness activities. So there was \$13.5 million provided in the 2019–20 budget for that. There are a number of elements that the engagement officers to support traditional owners in nation-building priorities seek to do to help traditional owners, both formally recognised and not formally recognised, to enable them to prepare for treaty readiness. There is \$0.747 million for mapping of traditional owner groups in areas without formally recognised groups. There are the engagement officers to support traditional owners in nation building.

Traditional owners themselves are the authority as to what nation building actually is and means. There are some core components to that in terms of country, culture, sovereignty and rights, but it is the traditional owners themselves that will work through that and are the authority to what that means. There is also \$1.4 million in services to provide foundational recognition and treaty-readiness support to traditional owners. This includes legal advice to support TOs without formal recognition to be ready for treaty; \$4.33 million for a nation-building resource pool, available to traditional owners across Victoria; and there is \$3 million to support the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations.

The department did some work through Aboriginal Victoria on the Strong Roots for our Futures program, and that was just under \$3 million, to really promote healing, build relationships and cultural connections and recognise the importance of both young Aboriginal Victorians but also elders and their connection moving forward.

Ms TAYLOR: Very good. Thanks very much. I would just like to move onto support with regard to veterans. I do not know who I am looking at, but anyway. Could you inform the committee as to the

department's involvement in veteran support programs and commemorations as they were noted in the questionnaire?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Ms Taylor. I might ask Ms Monagle to come to the table. Fairer Victoria is the area that is responsible for veterans in the Victorian government.

Ms MONAGLE: Thank you, Ms Taylor, for your question. In 2019–20 there was a range of services, grants and programs to support veterans and their wellbeing. That was your specific question?

Ms TAYLOR: Yes, that is right.

Ms MONAGLE: About wellbeing, yes. And obviously it was a tricky year for our veterans, given COVID-19 and the impacts on them. While there is a very big young component of our veterans community, a lot are older and were feeling quite vulnerable throughout the COVID pandemic. I am just getting to the detail of the veterans section. One of the key things we heard coming back from the veterans group was that they really wanted to maintain commemorations wherever possible. So one of the key things that happened last year was the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II in the Pacific—obviously both in Europe and in the Pacific. The veterans portfolio revamped what they were planning to do in terms of supporting and commemorating that event and had a weekend instead over 15 and 16 August, and it was online and a sharing of stories. Thousands of Victorians were able to recognise and give thanks to World War II veterans and share stories of those veterans who are still alive—and there are not too many left now unfortunately—but also their families were able to share their stories as well. So that was very popular over that weekend on social media and also participating online websites. We also had a number of online exhibitions through, for example, the shrine, where people were not able to go in and have a look but they made it more accessible online for people to view. So that was a really important sector.

I think also too there is a range of veterans welfare grants that are provided. In particular the government has funded a range of grants, but also what is called RSL Active, which supports younger veterans who are feeling socially isolated by providing ways to connect with other veterans and develop social networks, and it sort of centres around improving their physical and mental health. That is available to both the veterans and their families as well. There is a good spread of RSL Active across Victoria, and it includes Melbourne but also Warrnambool, Warragul and Drouin. So it has got a good spread across all of Victoria, and I think there is a big one in Sale as well. I think the feedback on RSL Active is that the program has been a really great way for veterans and their families to stay connected during COVID-19. The most recent budget allocated a further \$4.9 million over four years to support the wellbeing of veterans and ensure their service and sacrifice is remembered, and that includes \$200 000 for RSL Active.

Ms TAYLOR: Great. Thank you. On page 3 of the questionnaire you detail the veteran capital works program. I would like to hear more about how the department has supported ex-servicemen organisations. Can you provide those services through that program?

Ms MONAGLE: Thank you, Ms Taylor. The government does and has for some time provided a range of grant funding to the veteran community for education, commemoration, the restoration of war memorials and avenues of honour and also welfare support, as I have already spoken about. In 2019–20 the grants provided more than \$2.3 million to 150 projects. The capital works in particular funded 25 projects at \$600 000, and the projects improved facilities of organisations that deliver services to veterans and their families and also encouraged greater use of these facilities.

Through the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund 31 projects were funded to support the welfare programs that we have already talked about, but as I mentioned, there is a lot of connection between infrastructure grants and welfare programs as well. They cross over quite a lot, because quite often an infrastructure grant supports better facilities in an RSL. So it serves for two purposes.

In our project that focused specifically on restoring community war memorials and avenues of honour, there were 26 projects. An example of this included the installation of a damaged plaque and included the missing names of service men and women of World War I and World War II in—I am going to say this one—the Myrning Memorial Wall. Also we had 32 projects for the 75th anniversary, and that included updating and refreshing a lot of memorials that needed a bit more care. I can provide a bit more detail on individual grants for where some of the items went for the capital works if you are interested, but there was a huge range across the state, and it sort of went from improving clubrooms, toilet upgrades, new roofs and solar electricity at different

ones to the replacement of worn and frayed carpet or the framing of a flag that had been signed by World War I veterans and was becoming frayed—that was launched in Beaufort the other day. So there is a whole range, and what some people might see as a relatively small financial impact but is a huge impact on the local veterans communities.

Ms TAYLOR: Yes, definitely very meaningful. Okay, thanks very much for all that. Yes, so I would like to get back to the issue of bushfire relief, because I know we have had a bit of discussion about that, but it would be good to go a bit further into that. So I note that on page 4 of the questionnaire it details the government-wide response to the bushfire crisis at the beginning of last year. You note the development of a recovery framework; could you elaborate on that further?

Mr MOULE: Yes. Thank you. I might just ask Ms Houghton to answer that question for you, Ms Taylor, thank you.

Ms HOUGHTON: Thank you, Ms Taylor. So the Victorian government, in terms of its recovery framework, to June 2020 had invested approximately \$351 million to support communities impacted by the last summer's bushfires. This amount continues to grow as families and businesses continue to access financial support and other supports that are available to them. As of July 2020 more than \$120 million has been released to individuals, businesses and organisations in the bushfire-affected areas. This is comprised of a number of things, including \$22.9 million in grants to directly affected primary producers; \$14.6 million in grants to impacted small businesses; \$17.3 million to local councils for increased capacity to provide financial relief for residents and businesses; \$8.5 million for mental health programs; \$14.6 million in emergency payments to individuals and families; \$6 million for wildlife and biodiversity projects; and \$4.4 million for fencing and repairs. A component of that will also share investment with the commonwealth through the disaster relief funding arrangements.

Just picking up that previous question around the bushfire appeal fund, there was \$36.9 million raised from that. In terms of its allocation, a total of \$20.4 million has been released to date, and then the remainder is in three pockets: \$20 million for local community foundations, so funds will be distributed over coming months to two existing foundations in Alpine and Towong and a new community foundation to be established in East Gippsland—so that will be continually allocated out; \$3.5 million to individuals in further assistance for permanent housing—and their needs are currently being assessed; and \$2.9 million in community grants programs—so organisations can contact their local council or community recovery committee for information on how to apply, and \$1.2 million has already been distributed through that. So there is investment already allocated out but continuing the needs of community, essentially based on what the community is saying they actually need—and that is a real focus of the community recovery committees.

Ms TAYLOR: Okay, very good. So really the role of the DPC in these initiatives in terms of engaging the communities with this program—how is that facilitated?

Ms HOUGHTON: That is through the community recovery committee. They were established very early on in post recovery.

Ms TAYLOR: Excellent. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Ms Bridget Vallence, MP.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Secretary, and department officials for appearing. I would just like to pick up on something that was discussed earlier, Secretary, and it is in relation to the Facebook page and expenditure related to promoting the Premier's Facebook page. Can you provide us a full figure for the 2019–20 year—on promoting the Premier's Facebook page?

Mr MOULE: Yes, Ms Vallence. And sorry, Mr O'Brien, that time beat us when I was answering this question last. For the 2019–20 financial year the expenditure was commensurate with but less than the previous two years. It was \$158 874; the previous two years were in the 160s.

Ms VALLENCE: So, \$158 874 for the 2019–20 year, and you mentioned there was a credit card that is utilised and then journalled back. What is the value on that credit card? Is it unlimited?

Mr MOULE: I understand that just to be the DPC credit facility that we have. I would need to get details on exactly that. It is not a Premier's office credit card, it is a department card, but in order to facilitate the transaction with Facebook you have to use a credit card.

Ms VALLENCE: No, I understand that, but if you could provide, on notice perhaps, in terms of if there are any limits there. Is that okay?

Mr MOULE: Yes.

Ms VALLENCE: Also, similarly, how much in the 2019–20 year was spent on the Premier's Instagram page, the Premier's TikTok page and all other well-known social media platforms?

Mr MOULE: I only have Facebook information with me. I am happy to provide that on notice if there is in fact any.

Ms VALLENCE: You will provide that on notice—for Instagram, TikTok and any other well-known social media platform?

Mr MOULE: Yes, Ms Vallence. Sorry.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you. I appreciate you have got a croaky voice. Mr Hemming, a question to you perhaps. Page 92 of budget paper 3 has \$1.2 million given to the chief parliamentary counsel to employ additional legislative drafters. How much was spent at 30 June 2020, and how many additional drafters did that provide?

Mr HEMMING: I might defer to my colleague, Deputy Secretary Campbell. I do not have that figure, I am sorry. Collectively we might take it on notice.

Ms VALLENCE: Yes, that is fine.

Mr HEMMING: Sorry, that does not fall within my responsibilities, but I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr CAMPBELL: I am happy to check it with my new data—

Ms VALLENCE: Take that on notice?

Mr HEMMING: Yes, we can do that.

Ms VALLENCE: Okay. Whoever is appropriate to take this question: did any of those drafters prepare any of the legal directions that were being discussed with Mr Limbrick for the COVID-19 lockdowns?

Mr HEMMING: I can answer that question. In the early stages of the pandemic there was some involvement by staff from the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel in relation to the directions but that was in an assistance capacity. The work itself was led by the Department of Health and Human Services, as it then was.

Ms VALLENCE: Were any external lawyers used in drafting the lockdown directions?

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, I would remind you this is not the COVID response inquiry but the financial and performance outcomes hearings for the 2019–20 financial year, and I ask that you relate your questions to that period.

Ms VALLENCE: I have, Chair—page 92 of budget paper 3 of the 2019–20 year.

The CHAIR: So you are just talking for that period?

Ms VALLENCE: Correct.

Mr HEMMING: Ms Vallence, I believe they were. They were engaged, I believe, by the Department of Health and Human Services, though. I do not have any further details about who they were or which firm they were.

Ms VALLENCE: Are you able to provide on notice the names of the firms and the total value spent on those external lawyers for the lockdown directions?

Mr HEMMING: I would have to check with my colleagues at the Department of Health, as it now is, but I can take that on notice and come back if appropriate.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you.

Mr MAAS: Just a point of order, Chair.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Ms Vallence.

Ms VALLENCE: I am moving up, Gary—I am moving on.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, you cannot move on until Mr Maas makes his point of order.

Mr MAAS: I think the question should be ruled out of order just given that it is a completely different department. We have the Department of Premier and Cabinet here. I do not think they should be responding on behalf of other departments.

The CHAIR: Would anyone else like to contribute on the point of order?

Ms VALLENCE: Only just to say that Mr Hemming said that he would take it on notice to see what he could provide.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Well, I—

Ms VALLENCE: I do not think it should be ruled out of order.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Vallence.

Mr HEMMING: Can I just clarify as well, Chair—

The CHAIR: Sure.

Mr HEMMING: I would also like to check whether it is appropriate for me to provide, given the information sits with another department.

The CHAIR: I was about to rule that I think the question is appropriate insofar as it relates to the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Any other elements of that question should have been asked of the Department of Health when they appeared before us previously. I am sure DPC will answer the parts that they are able to answer.

Ms VALLENCE: Secretary—whoever is appropriate as well if it is not you, Secretary, but through you, in terms of the youth portfolio and scout halls, I notice budget paper 3, page 98, refers to funding for 11 scout halls. How were these 11 scout halls selected? Can you provide to the committee the criteria and how they were selected?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Ms Vallence. I will ask Deputy Secretary Monagle to respond to that question. Thank you.

Ms MONAGLE: Just to confirm, Ms Vallence, that was about how the original 11 were identified?

Ms VALLENCE: That is right, yes, in the 2019–20 year.

Ms MONAGLE: In the 2019–20 year. The actual detail of how they were identified I would have to take on notice, but I can take you through those 11 if you would like.

Ms VALLENCE: Oh, no, well, they are clearly stated in the budget. The 11 are listed in the budget, so I have already seen those. So you will take on notice in terms of the selection process—

Ms MONAGLE: I will, yes.

Ms VALLENCE: And how they were selected?

Ms MONAGLE: Yes.

Ms VALLENCE: Can you explain also why 10 of the 11 are located in Labor-held electorates?

Ms MONAGLE: As I just said, I will take it on notice in terms of why they were identified.

Ms VALLENCE: Yes.

Ms MONAGLE: I know that the program is being delivered with Scouts Victoria—it is a partnership—and we would also need to talk to Scouts Victoria about how they prioritise these as well.

Ms VALLENCE: Yes, sure. And in terms of that selection and what advice you provided to the minister in relation to these scout halls, can I get that on notice?

Ms MONAGLE: We would have to refer that back to the Department of Health and Human Services. The youth portfolio was sitting with them at that time.

The CHAIR: Again, that question could have been asked of the Department of Health, and I would remind the member not to politicise her questions to the public service.

Ms VALLENCE: It is under the youth portfolio.

Ms MONAGLE: That is correct. It is just that at that time, though, the youth portfolio sat with the Department of Health and Human Services, so we will just have to go back and go through them.

Ms VALLENCE: Right. Okay. There was \$1.4 million allocated in 2019–20. How much was spent at 30 June?

Ms MONAGLE: All of the funding has been allocated to Scouts Victoria, who are delivering the project.

Ms VALLENCE: Sorry, could you repeat that?

Ms MONAGLE: Scouts Victoria is delivering the project, so the funding has been allocated to them to deliver.

Ms VALLENCE: So the full \$1.4 million has been expended at 30 June?

Ms MONAGLE: I would have to confirm that with Scouts Victoria.

Ms VALLENCE: If you could. Well, at least, has it been paid by you to Scouts Victoria?

Ms MONAGLE: That is correct, yes.

Ms VALLENCE: Yes, okay. You know, I do not think this is politicisation. I think it is pretty important for the public to know, because there are scout halls right across Victoria. It is very important information for this committee to hear why such a vast number, almost 100 per cent of the scout halls, are in Labor-held electorates.

Mr MAAS: You could have just lost those seats of course.

Ms VALLENCE: Well, the Chair can now no longer talk about politicising this hearing. Thank you, Mr Maas. So in terms of the Scouts themselves, do they have to contribute to that project?

Ms MONAGLE: They did; that is right. They brought the total commitment to \$11 million.

Ms VALLENCE: Okay. All right. Secretary, I refer to your questionnaire at page 16 regarding the Suburban Rail Loop, and the Treasurer's advance notes that over \$3 million was allocated to the Premier and Cabinet for the cost of the Suburban Rail Loop Authority. Why wasn't this money budgeted for in the first place, and if we could also have a full breakdown of the \$3.021 million—where that was spent?

Mr MOULE: Yes. Thank you, Ms Vallence. I will ask Deputy Secretary Ada to respond to that question.

Mr ADA: Thanks, Ms Vallence. Of the \$300 million allocated in the 2019–20 budget for SRL design and early planning, there was a process into 2019–20 which identified the specific proportion of that funding and how that would be allocated to a number of different departments, including DPC. It was determined that that was the amount that would be required by DPC, and it was provided as a TA because it was effectively out of the budget cycle. That \$3 million has been used for a number of different things, including DPC helping establish the Suburban Rail Loop Authority. DPC convenes a policy forum to help integrate various policy matters to do with the project.

Ms VALLENCE: Can we have a full breakdown of that \$3 million and where it went to?

Mr ADA: And how it has been allocated?

Ms VALLENCE: Yes.

Mr ADA: Yes, I would have to take that on notice.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you very much. Why wasn't that money then drawn from future years?

Mr ADA: My understanding, Ms Vallence, was that the \$300 million was provided for the 2019–20 year and—

Ms VALLENCE: The \$3 million from the advance?

Mr ADA: So my understanding is that the \$300 million—sorry, the \$3 million—was used in 2019–20 by DPC; and to your point, I can take on notice the question about how specifically that was allocated in 2019–20.

Ms VALLENCE: Okay. The Treasurer's advance—can you explain why it was allocated to Premier and Cabinet and not the Department of Transport?

Mr ADA: My understanding, Ms Vallence, is that there were a number of departments that were allocated specific functions to do with what is obviously a very large project that requires input from a range of different departments.

Ms VALLENCE: And in terms of that \$3.021 million, when you provide your breakdown, can you tell the committee now if that was exclusive of staff costs to set up the authority?

Mr ADA: Exclusive of staff costs—certainly a portion of the \$3 million within DPC was used in staff costs in DPC to provide various activities that went towards the establishment of the Suburban Rail Loop Authority and convening the policy forum and undertaking some of the work with regard to understanding the statute book and how that might be able to support the implementation of this project, just given its size and duration. So certainly a portion of that was used for staff costs in DPC.

Ms VALLENCE: So I presume the breakdown will detail whether it included staff costs. But if it did not cater for 100 per cent of staff costs, could you also provide to the committee the total value of staff costs to set up the authority?

Mr ADA: Happy to, yes.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you. It is widely reported now that the project will exceed \$150 billion. What is your estimate of the final budget for the Suburban Rail Loop?

Mr ADA: Unfortunately, Ms Vallence, I cannot answer that question. The costing of the project is being undertaken by the Suburban Rail Loop Authority in the transport portfolio. I understand the investment case is still being finalised. DPC is not in receipt of the final investment case, and so I am at risk of misleading the committee and I cannot answer that question.

Ms VALLENCE: So in terms of needing over \$3 million from the Treasurer's advance, is it fair to say that because there was no business case, the cost of setting up the authority was entirely missed?

Mr ADA: I am not sure I understand the question, Ms Vallence.

Ms VALLENCE: Well, the advance was needed in order to set up the authority, correct?

Mr ADA: In part DPC played a role in helping establish the authority; that is right.

Ms VALLENCE: So needing to access that—Secretary Martine has many times said the advance is a credit card—do you think that is because there was no business case or you had sort of botched it or there were sloppy procedures and no thought of needing to appropriate for those funds?

Mr ADA: No. I understand that the TA was the mechanism by which an allocation of the budget appropriation of \$300 million was allocated to DPC. It was the way in which the money was transferred to DPC as part of a broader budget allocation in the 2019–20 year.

Ms VALLENCE: Is there a business case for the Suburban Rail Loop?

Mr ADA: The investment case is almost finalised, as I understand it. Obviously there was work done prior to this term of government with regard to the project and the broader benefits and opportunities it would bring.

Ms VALLENCE: Are you able to provide that to the committee?

Mr ADA: I am not sure. It is not DPC's product, Ms Vallence, so I would have to take on notice the question about whether or not it would be possible to do that.

Ms VALLENCE: Okay.

The CHAIR: Again, Ms Vallence, I suspect that is a question that should have been asked of the appropriate department.

Ms VALLENCE: In the 2019–20 financial report, Secretary, at page 166, from the Treasurer's advance in relation to COVID there was \$6.5 million for 'COVID ... response—Public Health Communications campaign'. Could you provide a full breakdown of that \$6.5 million to the committee?

Mr MOULE: Yes, I am able to do that. I think that in some way goes to the answer I gave to Mr Limbrick as well.

Ms VALLENCE: Yes, I notice Mr Limbrick asked about that, but in terms of that \$6.5 million, if you could provide a breakdown.

Mr MOULE: Yes, we can.

Ms VALLENCE: And also there was \$2.24 million for COVID response—it just says multicultural and faith communities. It does not indicate quite what that is for. Can you provide a breakdown of that amount also to the committee?

Mr MOULE: Yes, Ms Vallence, we can do that.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you. And I notice also in the Treasurer's advance—I am not sure if it is for you, Secretary, or you, Mr O'Connor—there is \$2.89 million for the Wage Inspectorate Victoria from the Treasurer's advance. Can you provide a breakdown to the committee of that amount, of why that was required—why the wage inspectorate needed money from the Treasurer's advance to the tune of nearly \$3 million?

Mr O'CONNOR: I can provide that on notice, Ms Vallence, yes.

Ms VALLENCE: You can provide that on notice?

Mr O'CONNOR: Yes.

Ms VALLENCE: Is that because the wage inspectorate, you know, had insufficient funds to operate?

Mr O'CONNOR: No. So we are in the process of establishing the wage inspectorate as a statutory authority. It takes on responsibilities from 1 July this year in relation to the wage theft laws. I am presuming that the amounts you are talking about are part of that establishment, but I will provide more details about that if I can.

Ms VALLENCE: You are presuming. I mean, how would you not know? You know, that is a fairly substantial amount coming out of the—

Mr O'CONNOR: I do not have the particular budget reference that you have got in front of you.

Ms VALLENCE: Yes. So it is from the 19–20 financial report, the Treasurer's advance. Okay, so provide that on notice for us.

Mr O'CONNOR: Yes.

Ms VALLENCE: Just back to the youth portfolio, there was \$6 million at budget paper 3, page 92, for supporting young people. I am just wanting to know how much has been spent at 30 June 2020?

Mr MOULE: Thank you. I might ask Ms Monagle to come back to the table to respond to that question.

Ms MONAGLE: Sorry, Ms Vallence, do you mind repeating that, please?

Ms VALLENCE: Budget paper 3, page 92, there was \$6 million for supporting young people. How much has been spent at 30 June 2020?

Ms MONAGLE: The overall budget portfolio for youth was over by about \$2 million, so I would assume that that \$6 million was fully expended, but I would have to double check.

Ms VALLENCE: Okay. Then, if it was over, could you provide the full expenditure for that amount for that line item?

Ms MONAGLE: Yep, no problem.

Ms VALLENCE: Secretary, I refer to the outcomes questionnaire, page 23, which refers to the Victorian Pride Centre, and again there is a Treasurer's advance of \$10 million granted to the Victorian Pride Centre. Could you provide a breakdown of that \$10 million and explain I guess to the committee what has gone so wrong that it has escalated from \$10 million to \$20 million for that project?

Mr MOULE: Thank you. I will ask Ms Monagle to continue to answer questions.

Ms MONAGLE: I will answer the first question—

The CHAIR: I am sorry to cut you off there, Deputy Secretary, but the member's time has actually expired, and I will pass the call to Mr Gary Maas, MP.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Chair. Look, I might continue on the questioning with the Victorian Pride Centre. So there was an additional \$10 million of funding that was given to DPC for supporting the construction of that. Would you be able to update the committee on the progress of that construction?

Ms MONAGLE: I can, absolutely. So, as you have referred to, in February last year the government announced an additional \$10 million investment in construction, and that built upon the \$15 million that was originally provided in 2016. While the restrictions in response to the coronavirus pandemic have impacted the construction efforts throughout last year, the building is anticipated to open in mid-2021, so mid this year. There were some delays due to COVID. There were also issues in the philanthropic funding—the ability of the board to raise philanthropic funds due to COVID lockdowns, not being able to raise as much funds as was projected.

This will be Australia's first pride centre, and many organisations are starting to move in or starting to move out of their current premises. So organisations that are slated to go in are Joy FM, Thorne Harbour Health, Switchboard, Minus18, Australian Queer Archives, the Melbourne Queer Film Festival, Transgender Victoria, the Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council and Star Health. So it is going to be a very exciting building when it opens up in mid-2021.

Mr MAAS: Great, thanks very much. You mentioned many of the different community groups that are involved with the Pride Centre. Can you take us through the type of collaboration that is currently going on?

Ms MONAGLE: In terms of—

Mr MAAS: Between the department and those groups.

Ms MONAGLE: Yes, absolutely. As you might know, there is a board that is chaired by Jude Munro, and Jude obviously has very strong connections across the LGBTIQ community and many other communities—she is a very impressive woman. They have a reference group that provides advice to them on what sorts of services and what community is looking for in terms of that centre. The reference group includes a whole raft of LGBTIQ community groups, and I probably would do them a disservice to try and name them. But they have all done a huge collaboration effort, and what they are really excited about about getting into the centre is actually making that process of collaboration much easier as they will all be on the one spot and be able to group together when it does open to provide different advice. I do have details of who is on that reference group, but it is on my computer and not in my folder—sorry. The department really—in terms of our involvement with the board it is really the board that has been doing all the work. We observe the board and go along, but they have been doing all the work with community to get this project up and running.

Mr MAAS: Great, thank you very much. I would like to now move to multicultural and faith communities. I think it is page 5 of the questionnaire that details the multicultural community connections program's aim to support organisations to strengthen community connections in response to COVID. Would you be able to elaborate on the program and the role that DPC took in facilitating that?

Ms MONAGLE: That was one of the first programs that DPC worked with community on when COVID first started in March. From memory it was \$2.4 million or \$2.2 million. Really its objective was to make sure that communities which often meet face to face were able to stay connected during that time. So we provided support for IT, internet connections, some hardware support to different partnership groups so that then they could build partnerships online across Victoria. Also, as people would expect, there is a lot of trying to get translations and interpretations out, not necessarily in the traditional ways that the Secretary spoke about but verbally through these groups, if people are not able to access internet easily. So it was about replicating those connections that are already there but online and providing the support to do that.

Mr MAAS: Terrific, thank you. Would you be able to explain why DPC took a particular focus on this issue, how have multicultural communities been affected by the pandemic and how has the initiative tried to address those impacts?

Ms MONAGLE: Yes, multicultural and faith communities have been really significantly impacted through the pandemic. Starting with faith communities, not being able to go and pray or worship with their faith has had a profound impact on some members of faith communities, so DPC was very keen, with the Victorian Multicultural Commission, to support that as much as possible. There is a multifaith advisory group that provides advice to both Viv Nguyen, the commissioner, and also the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Also the Deputy Premier played a lead role in supporting those faith communities throughout COVID last year so that they were able to have a forum so that they could express challenges that they were facing and identify support that they needed. Likewise, with multicultural communities, there was a real challenge in terms of language, obviously, in terms of communication getting out there. Just the pace of information meant that, translating into the 69 languages or 52 languages that we were doing, by the time some translations even just 24 hours later were happening, they needed to be updated again.

So one of the key things the department did was utilise a WhatsApp group to community leaders. As soon as an announcement was made, that WhatsApp group was utilised, and people were able to translate themselves and then communicate that out to their group. So that was a really positive step. I think, too, in terms of multicultural communities who were significantly impacted—international students and people on temporary visas—many of them lost their work and were not able to access all the supports that permanent residents and citizens were able to access. In particular, international students who were located in Victoria were unable to go on campus and get the support that they needed emotionally and in terms of their welfare and were feeling quite isolated. So the need for a lot of support for multicultural and faith communities was quite profound, and that was supported through three different tranches of investment specifically for those communities in addition to all the work that was being done by DH and the general mainstream communications and support programs as well.

Mr MAAS: Excellent. Thank you. Page 22 of the questionnaire refers to an initiative, or initiatives, to support the South Sudanese community. I was hoping you would be able to elaborate on that initiative that is

supporting disadvantaged South Sudanese youth and what specifically the DPC has done to support those people.

Ms MONAGLE: There are two parts to that answer. One is through the multicultural portfolio, which was funding for the SUDD Foundation, which was established probably two or three years ago now as a representative peak group of South Sudanese Victorians. Funding was provided to them in particular for South Sudanese young people to stay connected during COVID. Like all young people not being able to go to school or to their part-time jobs, they were losing that connection and feeling quite isolated. So funding was provided to the SUDD Foundation to put a very specific focus on support for South Sudanese young people who, like all young people, were struggling but did not necessarily have the access to supports that a lot of other young people did.

There was also funding through the youth portfolio, which was already in existence for the community support groups. They provide funding to local—I guess ‘auspices’ might be the right word—auspices to provide support to South Sudanese communities, and they are focused on young people, but through young people they support their entire families. They did amazing work in supporting the South Sudanese community during last year, ensuring that messaging was getting out there; supporting them; if someone needed food, if they were isolating, to get culturally appropriate food to them; and to support them to apply for funding that was available to them. So just those local connections were really important in building trust, too, in the testing system, and also support too was provided when people had questions about their isolation. You know, ‘Am I allowed to go out yet or not?’—so those sorts of questions. They were integral in providing support to those communities throughout last year.

Mr MAAS: Thanks for the comprehensive answer, Ms Monagle. I might move to the Living Learning Partnerships addressing Disadvantage now. Page 23 of the questionnaire details the Treasurer’s advance for Living Learning Partnerships. It is an initiative that is aimed at helping young people with mental health conditions to engage in secondary education. I was hoping that you would be able to inform the committee why this initiative was undertaken and about the rollout of the initiative more broadly.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Maas. I will allow Ms Monagle to continue.

Ms MONAGLE: This is an initiative that has been a year or two in the making and has begun this term for schools. It is a partnership between the youth portfolio and Melbourne City Mission through the Hester Hornbrook Academy. It is called the Living Learning partnership. It is akin to what is also called the social impact bond sometimes as well. So, funding is provided through a partnership with the Melbourne City Mission to engage disengaged young people who have got mental health issues or have a history of mental health issues and who are not enrolled in school or further training, between the ages of 15 and 24. The funding is provided to support those individuals—and I think from memory it is around 30 or 40 that have started this term, and it will be 144 over the life of the agreement—and it is to provide very intensive both mental health and wellbeing supports but also school education and to support training into pathways as well. It is a three-year investment, with the overall objective in the longer term of improving, obviously, those young people’s outcomes but also reducing the requirements for the mental health system and making them have an employment pathway well.

There is a tranche of people who have enrolled this year. It was meant to start last year, but because of COVID and schools being shut down we had to delay it to term 1, and in the model it is really important that they actually get the full three years. So they start this year and they have a very intensive school plus a mental health support program and also additional learning needs programs for those kids as well if they need them and also support for their family as well. And the Melbourne City Mission will be working with a range of partners to deliver that within their academy, and then at the end of the three years the overall objective is that those individuals are ready to go into further training or work. And also, though, they have had that intensive mental health support as well so that they are feeling stronger in their mental wellbeing.

Mr MAAS: That is great. You mentioned the Melbourne City Mission, and you said that they had partners as well. What is the nature of that relationship commitment to DPC?

Ms MONAGLE: They are not so much connected through us, they are just connected through their academy. So they bring in additional learning supports—mental health, wellbeing support, counselling. It might be that there is a young person who is really into sport or art or whatever young people are into—algorithms; I

do not know—and they would bring in specific training and support around their individual needs rather than them necessarily having a set curriculum. I cannot, sorry, tell you the specific partners. They would be contracting in different providers depending on the needs of the young people.

Mr MAAS: And the last question just moves to the royal commission into the mental health system. I was hoping you would be able to elaborate on the role that DPC played in supporting that initiative, just in the remaining time we have.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Maas. Ms Houghton?

Ms HOUGHTON: Thank you for the question—very timely, given that the royal commission’s final report will be tabled on Tuesday, 2 March 2021. So, DPC’s role at the initial component, through Toby’s Office of the General Counsel, was around drafting the letters patent and obviously seeking government support and the Governor’s support for that. Once the royal commission was up and running we chaired an IDC—an interdepartmental committee. That did not replicate what the royal commission was doing, but we were starting to build a common understanding of all the portfolios’ needs around mental health, from housing—everything seems to come back to housing from a mental health perspective as well—to justice and department of human services and schools as well, as well as our frontline workers and workplaces. We were getting a really deep understanding across government of our own portfolios’ needs within mental health. We also coordinated the whole-of-government submission to the royal commission, and we supported the Premier in a number of ways when the interim report findings came out in November 2019. A number of subsequent budget allocations have happened, so we were not waiting for the royal commission but actually working through what we needed to do now, (a) through the pandemic, also through the interim report recommendations. I think there were nine recommendations that caused the budgets to be allocated. So DPC through its normal budget role did that.

We were also supporting the Premier within national cabinet. Mental health was a key theme in national cabinet conversations from the beginning and still is from a national perspective, with Victoria also leading the way particularly around the royal commission and what we are doing and in talking to our interjurisdictional partners about what we are learning and information sharing, particularly around mental health. Schools were not, obviously, open during the lockdown, so we have been supporting youth, as Brigid has just talked about.

So in a number of ways DPC have been supporting whole-of-government coordination and preparation for when the royal commission actually does hand down its final report, which, as I said, is next week, and really supporting the Department of Health, which now has the lead responsibility in the mental health area. Once the report is out we will get through that in terms of the government’s positioning. Obviously the government has already said that it will agree on all the recommendations, but it is how we then sequence implementation, how we budget implementation and how we do it through co-design with the community.

Mr MAAS: Terrific. Thanks very much. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration with your department today. We thank you very much for appearing before our committee. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee’s request.

The committee will now take a break and resume consideration at half past 1 with the Department of Education and Training. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.