

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the 2023–24 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne – Friday 9 June 2023

### **MEMBERS**

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Paul Hamer

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Ellen Sandell



**WITNESSES**

Ms Jaclyn Symes MLC, Minister for Emergency Services,

Ms Kate Houghton, Secretary,

Ms Kate Fitzgerald, Chief Executive and Deputy Secretary, Emergency Management Victoria,

Mr Andrew Crisp, Commissioner, Emergency Management Victoria, and

Ms Corinne Cadilhac, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services and Infrastructure, Department of Justice and Community Safety.

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

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

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

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

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

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

I welcome the Minister for Emergency Services the Honourable Jaclyn Symes as well as officials here today from the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Minister, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, and committee members will start their line of questioning. Thank you.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Much appreciated. Thank you, Chair. I am certainly pleased to be here in my second appearance at PAEC as Minister for Emergency Services. It has certainly been a most challenging 12 months, with major floods, storms and earthquakes, but I am still looking forward to taking you through this amazing portfolio.

I would like to take the opportunity to again acknowledge the traditional owners and pay my respects. I acknowledge the unique role that they play in preparing for and recovering from natural disasters.

I am joined by officials today, but I would certainly like to take the opportunity to acknowledge Commissioner Crisp because this will be his last attendance at PAEC, as he finishes up his five-year term in the next few months. I certainly wanted to take the opportunity to thank him for his amazing work. It certainly makes my job a lot easier. You kind of pale and he is a bit of a rock star out there when you are out with him, but he does do an amazing job. I am sure we will have plenty of opportunity to thank him for his service at another time, but I did want to put that on the record for PAEC.

**Visual presentation.**

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I am going to take you through a presentation. Hopefully I can get through it reasonably quickly. At last year's PAEC and of course in a lot of the visits that I take and everywhere I go I try to highlight the incredible work of volunteers and our other emergency services personnel and have certainly come across a lot of them in the last 12 months because so many towns have faced some really challenging conditions. But what we know is that emergency services personnel are always there. They are putting their lives on hold to help others, and even today we have got several that are deployed to Canada to help with the fires over there. The dedication is so inspiring, and it is certainly one of the best parts of the job. Just on Sunday I met more than

80 people that were receiving the National Emergency Medal, for example, and they are some of the best events to go to – very humble people but very, very decent humans.

There has been also outstanding commitment not just of our traditional frontline services but also the amazing staff at ESTA. I like to call them the front line of the front line, and despite sustained record high demand, they continue to ensure the best quality care and support for Victorians when they are most in need.

This year's budget has significant investment to continue to support those that protect us. We are investing an additional \$677 million in flood recovery, building on the \$1.8 billion that was committed last year. On top of base funding, an additional \$84.78 million will invest in new and upgraded facilities as well as technology for critical information systems. The funding has also been allocated for a new, next-generation computer-aided dispatch, or CAD, system to support those at ESTA.

In a changing climate, where disasters are more frequent and severe, these investments are absolutely necessary to ensure that the people who want to keep Victorians safe are supported to do so. Last year's floods, as many will know, caused immense damage, which sadly included the deaths of two people. Recovery from disasters does not happen overnight and involves a continued effort, so the \$677 million that I referred to before also includes \$150 million for state-coordinated clean-up; \$245 million support for primary producers through grants, concessional loans and transport; and \$22 million for regional recovery hubs and recovery officers so that communities can have that all-important local, tailored support. We also continue to work collaboratively with the Commonwealth on eligibility for funding and support under cost-sharing arrangements, something that the councils are particularly interested in and are certainly bringing to my attention on a regular basis.

Coming back to ESTA, you would know that they provide life-saving emergency call taking and dispatch for all Victorians. The past couple of years have seen unprecedented demand for ESTA, and it continues to be one of the busiest periods in their history. But we are investing in the next-generation computer-aided dispatch, which is the CAD system, which will provide greater capacity for them to take calls, dispatch functions, increase emergency call handling capacity and support improvements to operational response times. The funding is not published in the budget due to commercial-in-confidence arrangements to ensure that we get the best value for money, but I can disclose that amount once the tender has been secured. The budget also has \$2 million to continue the important reform program at ESTA.

Slide 5 goes through the new facilities and assets for volunteers, which is a range of programs and a range of facilities across the state. I knew I was running out of time. Sorry, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, Minister.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** \$34.22 million in relation to initiatives. But let us focus on what you guys want to talk about.

**The CHAIR:** The first 7 minutes is going to go to the Deputy Chair.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Thank you very much. Thanks, Attorney-General. I saw recently there was a government decision in respect to advertising. Obviously it would be an important part right across your portfolio. As it pertains to the budget, it is obviously informing the public about emergencies that are impending but also trying to educate and so forth. This new ban on the two daily papers in Melbourne: did you have any input into that decision?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** I can give you some comments in relation to that decision as it impacts on the emergency services portfolio. It is appropriate for you to ask me that question. As you would appreciate, the government is recalibrating its advertising spending, involving different methods, particularly television and digital channels, as the advice is that that is where the greatest community impact is, and that is what also provides value for money. All Victorian print advertising will continue in regional papers, which is obviously a big audience in relation to emergency services needs, and that is where a lot of our impact in relation to disasters unfortunately occurs.

In relation to the decision to reduce advertising in the metro papers down to the legal requirements, my advice is that that will not have a significant impact on bushfire or flood awareness campaigns. In an emergency, for preparedness, there are a range of other means that agencies use to communicate advice, such as radio, TV,

warnings issued by the BOM and the VicEmergency app, websites, social media. I certainly follow the Broadford CFA Facebook page for local updates, for example. There are a range of community events, which is a way to engage with people in their local towns about the risks that they should be aware of. We have several open days at our volunteer organisations, and in high-risk areas dedicated awareness activities are undertaken, such as doorknocking, for example.

Kate Fitzgerald, who is sitting next to me, is the Deputy Secretary for emergency services, and I think one of the issues that has come up and people have asked about is whether there is going to be an impact on the communication with senior Victorians. I certainly took from her meeting with the commissioner for senior Victorians some comfort in some of the discussions that she had with how we can target our warnings and campaigns to that cohort of the community. Are you happy to elaborate on that?

**Kate FITZGERALD:** Yes.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** I might just ask Kate to talk to you about that because I know that –

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Happy for Kate to talk to me about it, but I am particularly obviously concerned that more people, particularly in this state – we have one of the largest distributing papers in the country, if not the largest on a particular day in the week, so I am concerned. Governments of all persuasions have generally engaged with it because they know it can disseminate a message and, as the Attorney-General has said, particularly an older cohort who still rely very heavily on that kind of medium as opposed to digital.

**Kate FITZGERALD:** As the minister said, I did meet with the commissioner for senior Victorians Gerard Mansour. During 2022, as a result of COVID, the commissioner undertook an online survey, and that received 47,000 responses from older Victorians. Through that survey, during COVID 50 per cent of respondents developed new skills in relation to technology, 62 per cent wanted to do more online specifically in relation to –

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Ms Fitzgerald, I do not mean to be rude. If you could just put that information to me on notice, that would be wonderful. I have just got very limited time. Without being rude, if I can move on. Attorney-General –

**Jaelyn SYMES:** We can add to that, yes.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Thank you. That would be wonderful. I just want to ask a question: in budget paper 3, page 92, it refers here to the ‘Next generation computer aided dispatch system for Triple Zero’, and there are no funding figures there because as the asterisk says:

*(a) Funding is not reported at this time as commercial arrangements are still to be finalised.*

Do we have any idea, Minister, when the arrangements will be finalised – or Ms Fitzgerald?

**Kate FITZGERALD:** ESTA, as recently as last week, have now gone out to market to bring on a delivery partner for the delivery of the next-generation CAD system. That is the first stage within their procurement process, and that tender will run for – I think it is a period of six to eight weeks. But they have stepped now into the tender arrangement in relation to that, so they are on track in terms of being able to deliver the next-gen CAD.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Okay. As of yet have you had any inquiries or any tenders come to you at this point, or are you still –

**Kate FITZGERALD:** So that will occur through the work that ESTA is now doing in terms of testing the market. So that is where that engagement with the market will occur.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Right. And with a view to the implementation of the new system when?

**Kate FITZGERALD:** That will be defined. I mean, as you can imagine, the initial work in terms of being able to work with the emergency services agencies to identify the scope and requirements is quite significant, and that is really ESTA’s focus for the first sort of six to eight months of the program. The delivery of the next-generation CAD is over the sort of forward years in terms of how that funding is provided through the budget.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Is there an internal goal? Are we expecting to have a new system for Victoria in two years time? Or that has not yet been ascertained because of, as you are saying, the delivery –

**Kate FITZGERALD:** It has not yet been ascertained, and I think it is important to note that ESTA currently have a CAD system that is functional and is operating as required.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Okay. Thank you very much. Attorney-General, on page 272 there is a reference there to the six performance measures relating to call answering by ESTA. Will the current benchmark for answering emergency calls remain as is at 5 seconds?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** The current benchmarks are different depending on the agency that you are referring to, and the one that I have received the most inquiries about and the most discussion about obviously is call-answer speeds, which is currently set at 90 per cent of calls in 5 seconds. But the issue that you ask about is not a matter for me; I do not set the benchmarks. That is a matter for the IGEM.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Sorry, can I just ask, Minister, you said the 90 per cent in 5 seconds was for who? The ones you get the most calls about –

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Hang on, 90 per cent – now I have got –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Sorry. You said 'the ones you get the most questions about'. But who was it for, though?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Ambos.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Ambos. Thank you.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Yes, yes. But yes, the benchmark is set by IGEM, and he has not given an indication that he has a view to change it, but – sorry, Chair – for relevance is that in ambulance we have a benchmark higher than other states.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Mr Galea for the next 7 minutes.

**Michael GALEA:** Thanks, Chair. Afternoon again, Attorney. Afternoon, Commissioner and officials. Thank you for joining us. Attorney, I am interested to know how we are supporting the firefighters, who of course put themselves in harm's way every day to keep us all safe. On page 22 in the questionnaire the Fiskville remediation and redress scheme initiative is referenced in the department's output appropriation. Attorney, could you please provide an update on this scheme?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Yes, I can, Mr Galea. Thank you for your question. And look, the Fiskville redress scheme is a really important program because it supports attendees that have had health issues as a result of the time that they spent at Fiskville, and there was a thorough inquiry in relation to that. A redress system is about acknowledging that and supporting people that have been caught up in that. The scheme opened on 5 September 2022, and demand has been reasonably high. I was able to announce this last year, and it was particularly humbling because I had had a lot of feedback from people who were, rightly so, very invested and emotional about the issues in relation to Fiskville – a time that a lot of people enjoyed being there, but the ramifications of the health impacts as a consequence certainly have affected a lot of people.

We announced \$57 million for the redress scheme, and certainly that came along with an apology from the CFA. People who worked or trained at Fiskville, lived at or in the vicinity of this facility or attended the Fiskville state school are among the groups of people that have been encouraged to apply for support. Over 1700 people have submitted draft applications, and there is a dedicated team that provide case support through the application process to make it as easy as possible for people. The 2022–23 expenditure is \$2.27 million to implement the scheme. Of this, \$1 million has been made in financial payments already to applicants. The total funding of the remaining \$56.74 million was committed in 2023, of which \$13.3 million was phased for this financial year, which is reflected in some of the information that has already been provided to the committee.

It is a really important scheme, and I am really proud of the work that we did to deliver it. It is certainly making a difference, and it is just one way that we can continue to stand with our emergency services personnel, who despite the risks continue to roll out in protection of others. Recognising the dangers that they put themselves in is one of the drivers for a lot of initiatives from this government, including the redress scheme.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Attorney. Noting that work on supporting firefighters who have been exposed to chemicals at Fiskville, we obviously know that many firefighters are exposed to a range of chemicals in their daily work. How is the government's landmark presumptive rights scheme continuing to support our fire services?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Pretty topical today, because I had the pleasure of being able to make some announcements into further expansion of our presumptive rights legislation, which has been in place for some time. It is about recognising the invaluable service of firefighters and the dangerous work that they do, including their increased susceptibility to certain types of cancers. It was from opposition that this now Andrews government committed to presumptive rights compensation as well as broader fire services legislation reform. The legislation provided what we deemed much-needed presumptive rights for cancer compensation for career and volunteer firefighters, which was really about acknowledging the nexus between the work that they do, the risks that they take and the carcinogens that they can be exposed to, unfortunately with a higher rate of contracting particular cancers.

The scheme has already provided peace of mind and support for hundreds of career and volunteer firefighters. Some of the work I committed to do previously was to look at the female-specific cancers. There is a little bit less evidence in relation to the nexus because traditionally there have been less female firefighters, but today being able to announce that we will expand the scheme to female-specific cancers of uterine, ovarian and cervical is something that I know is going to be welcomed by the more than 5000 women engaged across all the services – CFA, FRV and our forest fire management firefighters. A lot of those women have been asking for some time for specific female cancers to be included in the list of cancers because certain men's cancers were included in the first tranche. That is something that I have been wanting to achieve for some time, so being able to announce that today and inform you guys that that is what we have done was a pretty good day.

**Michael GALEA:** Absolutely, a very, very important development. Thank you for that, Attorney. What is the government doing to ensure the safety of firefighters on the fireground itself?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I think following on from the conversation about presumptive cancer rights, again you do not want anyone to have to access these rights at all, because in doing so it means that you have contracted cancer, but the system is designed to ensure that it is as less stressful as possible. You do not have to prove anything: if you meet the eligibility criteria, it is presumed that that is the cause of your cancer and you are eligible for that support. But importantly, our fire services have come a long way from earlier times where you were probably more likely to be exposed to dangerous chemicals, because now we have much better protection for our firefighters, conscious of the risks that they are exposing themselves to. One of the latest pieces of kit that is available for our firefighters was shown to me when I got to tour a local manufacturer in Mulgrave. They are delivering new wildfire personal protective clothing for CFA volunteers. It is protective clothing that is going to be rolled out to – oh, wow, all right. It is yellow and it is cool, and it protects people.

**Michael GALEA:** Thanks, Attorney. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Attorney. The next 7 minutes I am going to hand to Mr O'Brien.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, can I just very quickly confirm: with the presumptive announcement today, will CFA volunteers and paid firefighters be treated exactly the same in terms of all of the criteria?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Yes. There is no change to the eligibility at all for anyone. It is just adding three cancers to the list of eligible cancers.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Okay. Thank you. Can I go back to the next-generation CAD for 000. In the department's questionnaire response it states:

The proposed solution and new CAD system will meet the needs of the Victorian community, especially members who are vulnerable and more likely to require emergency assistance during their lifetime. By making women and girls feel safer in public spaces, by –

it says 'by emphasising'; I assume it is meant to be 'by empathising' –

... with people from CALD communities and by making people who suffer hearing impairment feel heard, the new CAD system will provide a level playing field so that they can be confident in knowing that they will be able to ask for, and receive, help during an emergency.

Shouldn't a 000 call system service all Victorians equally?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Yes, Mr O'Brien, and it does. When you call 000, it is a risk assessment that is undertaken and the appropriate response and deployment is activated according to the specific circumstances of the incident, but what we want to ensure is that the system is accessible to all, which is why there are references there to people with hearing difficulties, for example, speech difficulties and people from CALD backgrounds. It is not about providing a different level of service to anybody that calls but ensuring that we can ensure that people have equal access to the platform.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Is the insinuation though in this statement that those people are not getting equal access on 000 now?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** No. I think it is just a response to the gender-responsive budgeting part of the questionnaire. I can confirm for you that there is no preferential treatment for people that hold a particular attribute. It is –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Race, gender or disability.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** No. You all get the same service from ESTA, but we want to make sure that everybody who is accessing it can do so as easily as possible. It does not mean that the response is any different based on any particular attribute – that is based on a clinical assessment of the particular needs of why you are calling and the emergency that you are reporting.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Thank you. Budget paper 3, page 73, shows the performance measures for FRV, among others, and shows that on two of the three emergency response time performance measures they will not meet their targets – that is, FRV 'road accident rescue response' and 'structural fires' response. The government has gone through huge disruption, huge additional cost –

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Chair, sorry. If I may, do you just want to check that budget reference?

**Danny O'BRIEN:** BP3, page 273.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Oh, 273. Sorry. Thank you.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Given the huge expense and disruption that the creation of FRV has caused and the promises that the government made that this would improve response times, why are we still going backwards – still not meeting our targets, I should say?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** I take issue with the framing of your question.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Which bit? It is in your budget papers. You are not meeting those targets.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Well, the fire services reform is a 10-year reform process, and our agencies, whether they are CFA or FRV, are absolutely committed to responding to the needs of Victoria. Some of the data that you referred to does not really take into account changing responsibilities, changing lines or where we are picking up other people's work –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** No, it does. These are the current response time performance measures in this budget. It is not comparing apples and oranges. It is your data right here.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Response times can be variable based on weather, time of day, road congestion and the like.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** They always have been. Nothing has changed in that respect. This is three years since FRV came into existence, and they are still not meeting response targets.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Their response times are nation-leading.



**Danny O'BRIEN:** They are not even meeting your targets. When will they be able to meet their targets?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** We have aspirational targets, and we are continually supporting our agencies to get to emergencies as quickly as possible.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Okay. Thank you. This one might be for Ms Fitzgerald perhaps. Page 37 of the questionnaire notes \$2.3 million in new initiatives provided for additional staff at FRV command. Can you tell me how many new staff this is for?

**Kate FITZGERALD:** Thank you, Mr O'Brien. That is in relation to additional fire services command staff.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Yes.

**Kate FITZGERALD:** We are working with CFA and FRV to identify how to target this investment to achieve the optimal response outcomes for both organisations. So it is a critical part – commanders and assistant chief officers as part of fire services reform, as part of the secondment agreement. We have commenced conversations with both FRV and CFA to identify –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Can I just correct you on that? It specifically says in the questionnaire, 'FRV'. It does not say 'CFA'.

**Kate FITZGERALD:** The way in which the secondment model operates is that the staff who are provided to FRV –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Okay. Because CFA does not have its own staff. Yes. Okay.

**Kate FITZGERALD:** So it is important we work with both agencies to identify how best to target that money.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** So you do not know how many new staff it involves?

**Kate FITZGERALD:** We have not agreed on an operating model yet for that.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** How do you know how much money to put into it then?

**Kate FITZGERALD:** It is estimated based I suppose on the last three years of operations of the secondment model but is really an opportunity for us to be able to work with both CFA and FRV on that.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Okay. Minister, in the budget papers again, page 271, budget paper 3, shows the number of operational volunteers is again dramatically below your targets. What are you doing to actually stop this huge loss of experience from CFA volunteers and recruit more people back into the organisation? It is at 32,400 – 38,500 is the target.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** The expected outcome of the 32,400 published in the budget paper is likely to be exceeded due to the expected transfer of SES numbers from the probationary membership category and those that are returning from leave. So we are, based on our current data, actually expecting the outcome to be closer to 32,600.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** That is 200 more. It is still 6000 below what you are aiming for.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Again, we want to be aspirational. We want more and more people to be signing up to volunteer –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** But it is down so much on what it used to be.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr O'Brien. The time is up.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** All volunteers are, across the board in every part of society.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Attorney. We will go on to Ms Kathage.

**Paul HAMER:** I will be actually taking this, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Hamer.

**Paul HAMER:** Thank you, Attorney. Thank you, Commissioner, and thank you for your service over the last five years. And thank you, officials. I would like to take you to budget paper 3, pages 7 and 8, \$45.9 million allocated to the immediate response costs incurred by emergency services organisations, specifically in relation to the flood recovery. I was wondering if you could just outline how that funding has supported our emergency service organisations?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Thank you, Mr Hamer. Look, it is a really important investment to respond to a really massive disaster that impacted the state. Unsurprisingly, during major emergencies our emergency services incur significant costs, such as wages for staff as well as deployment of workers, operational costs associated with various equipment or assets and the important work that we have to do very, very quickly in testing times. As indicated in the budget paper that you referred to, \$45.9 million was allocated towards covering those costs for the emergency services organisations. It is a cost that I do not think anyone can dispute needs to be expended in relation to emergency management arrangements, and we try to make them as streamlined as possible so that emergency services can respond at the time and worry about the cost later. That is what the system is designed to do. You do not want any hesitation in relation to our emergency response.

As you know, the rains and floods that impacted the north had some significant effects across a large part of particularly my electorate. Impacted communities included Seymour, Rochester, Echuca, Euroa, Kerang, Shepparton – basically any communities that abut the Murray River – as well as Maribyrnong in Melbourne. It was protracted and complex. We know that the experience was that a lot of people had quick flooding and it was kind of blue skies and gone the next day, whereas it just hung around in other communities for some time. Shepparton and Kerang particularly had areas of their towns isolated for weeks in terms of waiting for the water to recede.

I certainly would like to take the opportunity to commend all of our emergency services in their response. A lot of people worked around the clock, and it went for basically 13 weeks if you go from the actual emergency response, so there was a lot of support and resources that were having to be allocated to that. So VICSES was the lead, but they obviously worked in collaboration with FRV, CFA, Life Saving Victoria, FFMVic, local councils the ADF came and helped. There was a range of activities that indeed saved lives and protected homes and businesses.

It was a massive incident if you look at the numbers. Between 6 October and 3 January, SES received 20,062 requests for assistance – very much the highest that they have received in a period, ever. To break that down, that included over 900 flood rescues alone, so there were significant resources deployed to that. We talk about figures, but the invaluable benefit that we got from the amount of volunteers that really were there to help was incredible. SES control centres were filled with volunteers, administrative support and the like. We estimate that there were more than 2500 volunteers from 147 units involved in this response, and that is the equivalent of 145,000 volunteer hours. So not only did we invest a lot financially, a lot of the assistance can be attributed to the hardworking Victorians that put their hand up to volunteer in our important agencies. I think, to Mr O'Brien's point, celebrating and talking about the efforts of the volunteers hopefully encourages more people to put their hand up for this important community work. It is hard work. It is not for everyone. I understand that. But I think anybody that wants to consider it should pay a bit of a visit down to their local SES or CFA, and I am sure people will be there to tell them how rewarding volunteering in the emergency services space is.

**Paul HAMER:** Thank you, Attorney, and I thoroughly endorse your last statement on the volunteers. I would also like to thank the volunteers in our local SES – the Whitehorse SES. I know they always say that, I think, they are the busiest SES in terms of the number of call-outs across the state, and they often volunteer for activities outside our local area.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Which unit is that?

**Paul HAMER:** Whitehorse SES.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Whitehorse, yes, okay.

**Paul HAMER:** And they are often volunteering to areas outside their jurisdiction, which is a tribute to all of the work –

**Jaelyn SYMES:** They do not hesitate. Any emergency that I go to, it does not matter where it is, you meet someone and you go, ‘Where are you from?’, and I expect them to say, ‘Around the corner’, but it is, like, the other side of the state. They will drive in the middle of the night to help people in need. I think, as I referred to in my presentation before, we have got people who put their hand up to leave their families to go to Canada to help the response there, and we see that in return – amazing people.

**Paul HAMER:** Absolutely. I was wondering if you could also just talk a little bit about the preparedness, so how these emergency service organisations prepare for a flood event of the magnitude that we saw in October and, I guess, how they would be preparing for future events?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Look, I think I will speed through this in the time that I have got, but there is significant work that goes towards preparedness. We continually take lessons from previous disasters and responses to ensure that we learn from everything and continue to put that in practice. Using last year as an example, we did an exercise before the floods. Unfortunately, they were pretty spot on about almost what happened, so I am a little bit hesitant about doing the next exercise as they become a bit of a predictor. But a lot of the work that goes into preparedness is briefing of state response control centres, conducting state briefings, targeted discussions with at-risk communities, workshops and just basic provision – making sure we have got enough sandbags and the like. So I have full confidence in the experts in relation to the preparedness but also their willingness to continue to adapt and learn from previous experiences.

**Paul HAMER:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Attorney. I am now going to hand to Ms McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair. Ms Fitzgerald, the 2022 FRV annual report shows in note 3.2.1 on page 121 that the employee benefits amount for WorkCover payments has increased by 63.2 per cent to \$34.2 million. How many FRV employees are on WorkCover, and why is this the case?

**Kate FITZGERALD:** Mrs McArthur, I do not have that annual report in front of me, and I do not have that data in front of me.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Can you take it on notice then?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** I would be interested in the Chair’s view of how that relates to the budget papers for this year.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Attorney. Mrs McArthur, if you are going to ask those kinds of questions, can you show how that is relevant to the inquiry before us, please, and also the minister and the Attorney in front of us.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** I did not bring the annual report, sorry.

**Danny O’BRIEN:** I can assist you, Chair. Annual reports have always been part of the process, and given that the 2022 annual report is not tabled until October of the current financial year, which is in the budget papers, that is exactly why it is relevant. We repeatedly ask about annual reports, questionnaires, budget papers – all of the above.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** There we are. Can we answer it or not?

**Danny O’BRIEN:** I think they said they would take it on notice – didn’t you?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Yes. We do not have the data on us. FRV is the relevant employer, but we can see what information we can obtain for you.

**Bev McARTHUR:** You do not know how many employees are on WorkCover?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I do not even have the annual report on me. I have got the budget papers, which I am ready to respond to, but I did not bring annual reports with me.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Can you take it on notice, though, Minister?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I will see what information I can get.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Thank you so much. Again, the 2022 FRV annual report shows in note 3.2.1 on page 121 that the employee benefits amount for overtime payments has increased by 33.8 per cent to \$96.1 million. Why is this?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** In terms of the turnout of our firefighters, they respond to community need, and we need to ensure that we have the service provisions so that when people require a fire response it is made available. We do not apologise for having to move people around if we need to.

**Bev McARTHUR:** So there has been an increase in call-outs, perhaps, Minister?

**Andrew CRISP:** Can I add to that?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Yes, of course you can.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Thank you, Mr Crisp.

**Andrew CRISP:** If I can use just a couple of specific examples, we have talked about volunteers being prepared to travel interstate and across the state. That has also happened with FRV. During the flood events earlier in Queensland and New South Wales, they committed swiftwater rescue teams, which incurred quite significant overtime. Similarly, in relation to our own flood event, FRV had the responsibility in relation to initial impact assessment, and quite a number of their resources were committed. There are a couple of examples of where additional overtime would have been expended for FRV.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Yes, and similarly to my response to Mr Hamer just in terms of coming across FRV staff from a range of parts of Victoria up in the flood-response area when it was not near their actual home station, there were a lot of them.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Again in that report the 'Comprehensive operating statement' on page 110 shows that FRV made a loss from transactions of \$142.3 million. This is obviously not sustainable. Minister, how and why did this happen, and what are you doing to fix it?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** In relation to the FRV budget and their financial position, many of the deliverables relating to fire services reform were not realised and attributed to the FRV bottom line until the 2021–22 financial year, including such things as staff entitlements and transfers and the transfer of equipment and infrastructure. So in relation to the annual report that you are referring to, the figures that I am referring to from the budget would indicate that some of these have impacted FRV's financial position in 2021–22, resulting in deficits compared to the surplus for previous years. A lot of the moving around of the reform has caused some discrepancies or some outcomes in the budget outcomes. But what I would say is that we continue to invest appropriately in our fire services because we want to ensure that those response times and the protection that people get are well resourced. But as with any agency that I am responsible for, we continue to have conversations with management about their budgets, about their needs and about their priorities, ensuring that they are sustainable going forward.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Minister, let us go to budget paper 3, page 271. With 1214 CFA stations and only three upgraded in the past year, how many fire stations are you upgrading and rebuilding this year?

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Just for clarification, which budget page are you looking at at the moment?

**Bev McARTHUR:** Page 271.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I am sorry, I just cannot seem to see what line you are pointing to.

**Bev McARTHUR:** I think we have a different online version to the printed version, in page numbers. It might be 272, or it might be –

**The CHAIR:** Can you refer to the budget papers in front of you, Mrs McArthur?

**Danny O'BRIEN:** I do not think how many fire stations we are building is contentious.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** No, no, it is not contentious. I am just trying to understand what it is.

**Bev McARTHUR:** The minister has got an answer.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Yes. Pleasingly, in this budget there is a \$34.22 million investment for emergency service upgrades, which cover all of the agencies but in particular redeveloping CFA stations at Raywood, Kinglake West and Yarram, which has been on Mr O'Brien's to-do list for some time –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** For a thousand years.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** and I am very happy to put a tick next to that, Mr O'Brien. I know you have got two others that are high on your priority list.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Foster and Mirboo North next year, please.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** I will take that on notice, Mr O'Brien. There is significant investment for assets that CFA brigades ask for. I have been travelling around the state in relation to the rollout of additional vehicles, for example, and there is a program that is continuing to roll out to deliver more trucks to more areas – a lot in your area actually, Mrs McArthur. I can get you some of the details in relation to that.

**Bev McARTHUR:** That would be good. Thank you, Minister. How many FRV employees were sacked for not complying with the COVID-19 vaccination mandates?

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, Mrs McArthur, your time is up.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** None.

**Bev McARTHUR:** None?

**Danny O'BRIEN:** None? Okay, thank you.

**The CHAIR:** We are going to go to Mr Hilakari.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** We have talked a little bit with Mr Hamer around response preparation, and I will take you to recovery. And I just want to say thank you, Attorney – again, seeing you a second time – and Commissioner and officials, for your time this afternoon. On budget paper 3, page 7, the whole-of-government response to floods, I just want to understand how community-led recovery from devastating floods is outlined in this budget and what the intent is of government here.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Thank you for your question, Mr Hilakari. Community-led recovery is the only way to do recovery, frankly, because local communities know the needs of their community better than anybody else. As I ran over in my presentation, this budget has \$677 million in whole-of-government flood recovery initiatives, which is a significant amount of money, but there has been a significant amount of impact. There is a variety of measures that you need to ensure to help people get back on their feet as best as possible. This is indeed on top of \$1.8 billion that was invested in the year in response to the floods. They are focused on meeting the immediate needs of individuals, as you would appreciate as the emergency services minister, and the immediate needs of families and communities; providing support to councils and emergency management agencies, because we really want to line everything up for continuity of essential services; and restoring critical and community infrastructure. There are a lot of loans and support available for businesses and primary producers. Community relief and recovery needs are ongoing, and we are spending some money on regional hubs to make sure that that is better facilitated.

We know that longer term support will be critical to communities recovering and rebuilding not only physically but mentally. We have priority cohorts, such as those that are experiencing family violence or homelessness,

people from culturally diverse backgrounds and people with underlying health conditions, to ensure that we have dedicated support for those people. I saw firsthand in my electorate before the floods that we are still recovering from the 2019–20 fires, we are still recovering from the storms in the Yarra Valley and indeed there is a lot of recovery ongoing from Black Saturday as well. We know that it takes a significant amount of time for people to recover, if ever, but it means that you have got to continue to have those supports.

Recovery does look different in different places and will happen on different time lines. When you have an event of this significance it does take some time to even get an accurate picture of the impact. You have got to have assessments undertaken. We know that for this event, for instance, there were 630 homes that were destroyed – so primary residences that were destroyed – and a further 1850 that were damaged, and that does not include holiday homes or other buildings, just to give you an idea of the scale of the impact and the recovery efforts. It is a huge task. But, importantly, getting out into communities is why we have Emergency Recovery Victoria to really understand the unique needs of individual communities.

One example of a community-led response to the floods was the Elmore village. When we went to Rochester and talked to people whose homes had been destroyed, there is not a lot of alternative accommodation in Rochester. There is not a lot in a lot of towns, but nothing in Rochester. But what was important to that community and what they asked for was, ‘We don’t want our community members having to live far away if they’re displaced.’ So they were the ones that asked for a temporary village in a nearby location, and we happened to have Elmore Field Days. I think it was three days after being there that we started to establish that. There are still people living there today as they are either rebuilding their home or working out what their next options are. That was specifically a community-led program. It was not me that went to them and said, ‘Would you like a village?’ They actually suggested that and were able to respond, because that is what that community needed – to keep together. It is part of their recovery as well. They did not want the kids having to go to different schools or it being difficult to get to your place of employment and the like. They wanted people to remain in Rochester and to recover together, so that was part of the reason for their suggestion.

Other suggestions that communities have made we have responded to as well. In Shepparton we have got the Homes at Home program, which is enabling people to access a modular facility or a caravan to put on your own land so that whilst you are preparing your property you can still live on your land. A few people are interested in that as a model because it is seen as a better model for Shepparton than, say, what Rochester wanted. Having said that, there are quite a few people in Rochester that are doing similar things – being on their own property as they are undertaking repairs.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** I noted in the questionnaire that Bushfire Recovery Victoria has changed to Emergency Recovery Victoria. I am just hoping you could outline to the committee how they will support the flood recovery.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Yes, I can. I think it was at last year’s PAEC that I actually announced the transition from Bushfire Recovery Victoria to Emergency Recovery Victoria.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Lots of announcements on PAEC days. It is great to hear.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** I did not have too many surprises for you today, unfortunately. But that was a good announcement at the time. I do not know if it was coincidence or a bad omen, really, but BRV was scheduled to transition to ERV on the weekend where we experienced significant rainfall and flooding, so it was timely that it was no longer called Bushfire Recovery Victoria, because they were responding to the wet stuff not the hot stuff. ERV’s remit is to coordinate recovery across government, and they deliver a handful of programs that support community recovery. A particular focus of the floods was their clean-up program and also running the flood recovery hotline and, importantly, the accommodation program. Indeed anyone that was displaced had access to support for accommodation, and there was a range of options, whether it was taking up residence at Mickleham or whether it was accessing motel–hotel accommodation, serviced apartments and the like – a range of different options for people depending on their particular circumstances. I have taken you through Elmore, for example, but ERV continue to be on the ground helping people recover on a daily basis.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Attorney. We will go to Ms Sandell.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Thank you, Chair. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Commissioner Crisp. We have worked together in a couple of different capacities over the years, and I always very much appreciated the way that you have engaged with us, so thank you.

**Andrew CRISP:** Thank you.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I asked him to stay but he said no.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Congratulations. I have got a few questions. Let us see if I can get through them all. The first one is regarding the transfer of the responsibility for flood warnings and forecasts from Melbourne Water to the Bureau of Meteorology, and I notice it says that the two agencies will work to improve the systems with the SES. Is there actually money in the budget for this? I could not see specifically where that is and what the time line is for that transfer.

**Andrew CRISP:** I might defer to Ms Fitzgerald in terms of the budget, but just a couple of comments in relation to that: again, I have just got back from overseas and I did see that announcement myself. I know there has been discussion with the Bureau of Meteorology previously in relation to how they might assume those responsibilities from Melbourne Water, and there has been very positive discussion around that and the ease with which the bureau could take on that particular function.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** It is a water portfolio question. I knew he would be able to add value, so that is why I referred –

**Ellen SANDELL:** No worries. Okay, I will move on to my next question. I do not have a shortage. In terms of SES funding, I am pleased to see \$500,000 in there for Footscray SES, which covers my electorate – something that we have been asking for. Is the full redevelopment of that facility or the building of a new facility subject to future budget decisions; is that correct?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Yes, the \$500,000 that has been allocated will help us firm up the site. There are a few options, but there are a couple of leading contenders that I am sure the locals have told you is their priority. I am certainly wanting to help facilitate what is best for them, and so this will enable us to be in a strong position to fund the project when we have finalised the plan.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Any idea of a time line, or has that planning work started – I assume.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The planning money will be available from July, and I am very keen to use that and be in a position to have a request for government so that we can get on with that project. I have personally visited the current facility. It is not fit for purpose, but they are still attracting volunteers, which is amazing – they are doing a great job – so I gave them a personal commitment when I visited with the local member Katie Hall about my personal commitment to helping advance their new facility.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Thank you. In relation to the SES overall – it is so pleasing to see some funding in there for that – I guess that given climate disasters that it is looking like we are going to face, we are relying on organisations like the SES even more. We do have an ageing volunteer base, and it is hard to attract volunteers even at the best of times at the moment. We are also relying on the defence force now more and more when it comes to things like disasters. I guess my question is: is the SES model fit for purpose, given the increasing scale of disasters that we are facing? Maybe it is one for the minister or the Commissioner.

**Andrew CRISP:** I am happy to kick off with a couple of comments.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I know you want to, so, please.

**Andrew CRISP:** No, no – thank you. It is a very good question, and I know that that would be further explored in another inquiry; however, this is not just about the emergency services. This is about the whole of the Victorian community and about what the future looks like for us. I have had a number of conversations with the minister in relation to a program in New Zealand called Get Ready. I think we are shifting too much from resilience or preparedness to reliance on our emergency services and government and ADF. This has been raised at a national level. It is about: what is the work that we need to do with our communities? And there are opportunities to do that. We had changes through our planning legislation a couple of years ago. We introduced the regional layer, so we have regional emergency planning committees; we have plans at all those levels.

There is still more work to be done around that, but our focus needs to be on those people that are able to look after themselves and should look after themselves. The clear message in that New Zealand program is about: 'Be prepared for 72 hours – food, water, anything you need'. So it enables the emergency services, and if the ADF are to be called in, to actually look after, as in the discussion before in relation to CAG, the most vulnerable in our community. Do not get me wrong – there is definitely a role for emergency services, and I will be interested in the next inquiry to see what that looks like, but at the same time –

**Ellen SANDELL:** Sorry, which inquiry are you referring to?

**Andrew CRISP:** The flood inquiry – I am sure that is all part of it, but we need to shift our thinking in relation to the role of community.

**Ellen SANDELL:** Understood. Thank you. Just finally in relation to emergency grants, we have had a number of problems over the last little while about, I guess, that the difficulty with eligibility based on LGAs means that – and there is often confusion between the feds and the state. For example, I am in the City of Melbourne LGA, but people do not think floods affect us, so grants are only eligible in the City of Maribyrnong, and that has happened a number of times. I am just wondering what the state is doing to try and reconcile some of those confusions which keep coming up again and again around grant eligibility.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Do you mean the activation of the joint grants with the Commonwealth and how that goes by LGA?

**Ellen SANDELL:** Yes. Flood recovery grants, also business recovery grants. So we have had a number of instances where it has just been extremely confusing, and often our LGAs are completely left out because they might only form a very small part of the affected area but the LGA boundary is drawn and then people are missing out. It just seems like a systemic problem.

**Kate FITZGERALD:** I am happy to follow up on any specific examples you have, Ms Sandell. I can say that there are two measures that we put in place there for the most recent floods – 63 councils were activated for the disaster recovery funding arrangements. So we do try to be expansive in relation to the identification of councils to be included in the activations of the state–federal funding arrangements, and the reason for that is that through grant processes, then you identify eligibility in terms of impacts that people may have.

**Ellen SANDELL:** I guess it is just – is that sufficient? Because a couple of times we have been left out of that because the LGA boundaries – there must be some kind of failure or some quirk there, and whether LGAs is the right way to be administering those grants.

**The CHAIR:** Apologies, Ms Sandell. Your time is up. I am going to move on to –

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Point of order – you have one more.

**The CHAIR:** Excuse me?

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** You have one more person.

**The CHAIR:** We most certainly do, Mr McGowan. We will move on to Ms Kathage.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you, Chair, Minister, officials. I want to refer to budget paper 3, page 82, and I want to hear about how government is supporting emergency services through upgrades to facilities.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I can take you through lots of the projects that have been funded in this budget, because there are some really good ones. I know that your personal interest in having state-of-the-art facilities for your local members was on full display when we opened Plenty CFA fire brigade not that long ago. I know that all members have a strong interest in ensuring that we are providing the best assets possible to their communities. Mr O'Brien is a strong advocate for his local community as well, which is why I was very pleased to be able to announce that the budget contains a station upgrade for Yarram. Closer to your neck of the woods –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Foster and Mirboo North – don't forget.



**Jaelyn SYMES:** Closer to your neck of the woods, Ms Kathage, is Kinglake West, which is not far from your boundary, I suspect.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Minister, the Doreen CFA upgrade is underway at the moment.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Perfect. There are a lot of things going on. There is also Raywood that has been funded in relation to CFA. We have got some new VICSES facilities in Bannockburn and Kilmore, and Kilmore will also benefit your electorate there. It is certainly close to my house there, and I am pretty excited about getting a new facility to house them. They have got a waiting list for SES volunteers in Kilmore, so being able to have a new facility to get through that waiting list and get more volunteers out is going to benefit that region immensely.

In addition, there is works to be undertaken at Frankston – the Frankston VICSES satellite facility in Skye. Funding has also been allocated for redevelopments for upgrading Life Saving Victoria. We have not had the opportunity to talk too much about them as an emergency services organisation, but fantastic people, and they are getting some upgraded facilities at Bancoora Beach and also at Port Melbourne. What is important about these investments is a lot of us have recognised that it is harder and harder to attract volunteers across a range of areas that benefit from them, so when you can invest in equipment and facilities and new buildings, it really helps those organisations speak to their community, be visible in their community, and people are more likely to want to drop in and find out more about it. So I know it can be a really good boost to not only the morale and the value that you place on the existing volunteers, but it does place them in a good position to attract and retain more and more volunteers, and that is something that I know all Victorians are going to benefit from.

I also was really proud to be supporting some investments in the flood-impacted zones. We also had new co-located CFA–SES stations for Heathcote and Rochy. Both organisations have a lot in common, and they work side by side – and I saw that day in, day out on the visits during the floods. So to have some co-located facilities for those two towns is going to bring about a great benefit to both organisations, but again, particularly for women. We have a lot of ageing stations that we are trying to get through to ensure that they are female friendly in relation to having somewhere to turn out in your own facilities and the like, because it can be a bit of a barrier for women wanting to put their hand up to volunteer in emergency services as well. So, look, it is really important to have new facilities that are fit for purpose and that accommodate the existing volunteers, but it is also a really strong way to show them how much we value them and gives them an opportunity to attract more and more support to their organisations.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you, Minister. On a recent visit to Whittlesea SES I did note that they had a large proportion of female volunteers and a very young volunteer base there as well, so it is great to see the women volunteering. You did mention briefly Life Saving Victoria. Are you able to speak a bit more about – I thought the facilities were like a buoy and red togs, but there is a bit more to it.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Yes, the yellow and red people – they are unsung heroes, I have got to say, and a fantastic organisation that we certainly want to support through upgrading some of their facilities. A lot of the Life Saving Victoria facilities are real community hubs as well; they do not just house the volunteers, they house their community on a daily basis. Particularly in summer they become a really good meeting place. Some of the assets that will be upgraded in this budget, as I referred to, are Bancoora Surf Life Saving Club. They currently have 454 members, who logged over 2000 patrol hours recently, and they performed 2615 preventative actions, five rescues and 29 first-aid treatments – so really providing an incredible service for the safety of water users in that region. It is an organisation that pretty much activates more in summer, as you can imagine, but it is just so important, particularly when we know that the rates of drowning are unacceptable, and we really want to do all we can to prevent those disasters from happening. So giving support to Life Saving Victoria is essential. We have got a couple of inland support services that we support, but the majority of them are along the coast.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Thank you, Minister. Up the road from me and down the road from you is the Kilmore SES, and work will take place there, and I guess also Frankston SES – these areas where the populations are growing. Can you speak a bit about what difference those new or upgraded facilities will make?

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Yes, look, I think it is fair to say that the SES have been busier in the last 12 months than they have ever been, and I know the community is really grateful for the service that they have provided. But we do want to make sure that more and more people are volunteering for their SES, and investments such as the ones you have mentioned hopefully go towards that endeavour.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** On a point of order, Chair. Commissioner Crisp, on behalf of the Liberal Party and the National Party and the people of Victoria, I would also like to join with the Attorney-General in thanking you for your service and wishing you well. I know it has been close to four decades previous with VicPol, some time with the United Nations, and coming up for five years, so all the very best, and it is great to see you here today.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Hear, hear!

*Members applauded.*

**Andrew CRISP:** Chair, if it is all right, might I say –

**The CHAIR:** Absolutely.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** No, we are going to the pub now.

**Andrew CRISP:** If you buy, I'll come. Mr McGowan, thank you, and thank you to everyone for the kind words that you have said towards me and my service. But it has been mentioned on a number of occasions the incredible people that work in our sector – you know, the women, the men, the volunteers, the career staff, as the minister has touched on. And all of you – I know you get out and about to visit your local units and brigades. That is what motivates me. That is what keeps me going. How can I not attend a training night on a bitterly cold winter's night up in Gembrook or Emerald or somewhere like that? So that is really, really important.

Also to you as a committee, to current members and former members – some I have sat in front of on a number of occasions – again, we should never shy away from accountability, and that is exactly what this process is about, so thank you for what you do and the genuine and active interest that you show in your local communities, your electorates and the Victorian community more broadly. Thank you very much, everyone.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Commissioner. You will indeed be very much missed by all Victorians.

Thank you to you all for appearing this afternoon before the 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.

I thank all ministers and officers who have given evidence to the committee today as well as Hansard, the committee secretariat and parliamentary attendants.

I also thank the hospitality staff, security and cleaning staff, who have very much looked after all of us today and this week.

The committee will resume its consideration of the 2023–24 budget estimates on Tuesday 13 June.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

**Committee adjourned.**