

# VERIFIED VERSION

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into budget estimates 2014–15

Melbourne — 23 May 2014

#### Members

Mr N. Angus

Ms J. Garrett

Mr D. Morris

Mr D. R. J. O'Brien

Mr C. Ondarchie

Mr M. Pakula

Mr R. Scott

Chair: Mr D. Morris

Deputy Chair: Mr M. Pakula

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Ms H. Victoria, Minister for Women's Affairs,

Ms G. Callister, Secretary,

Ms K. Haire, Deputy Secretary, Community and Executive Services Group,

Ms A. Congleton, Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services Group, and

Ms A. Bamford, Director, Youth, Disability and Women's Affairs, Department of Human Services.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to  
executive officer of committee**

**The CHAIR** — We resume the estimates hearings with the hearing for the portfolio of women's affairs. I welcome the minister, the Honourable Heidi Victoria; and from the Department of Human Services, the Secretary, Ms Gill Callister; the Deputy Secretary, Community and Executive Services Group, Ms Katy Haire; the Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services Group, Ms Anne Congleton; and the Director, Youth, Disability and Women's Affairs, Ms Annalise Bamford.

In accordance with the guidelines for public hearings, I remind members of the public gallery that they cannot participate in any way in the committee's proceedings. Departmental officers may approach the table during the hearing to provide information to the minister or other witnesses if requested, by leave of myself. Written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the media are requested to observe guidelines for filming or recording proceedings in the Legislative Council Committee Room.

All evidence is taken by this committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege, including any comments made on social media from the hearing itself. The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but I remind you all that the questions must be answered in full and with accuracy and truthfulness. Any persons found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for fact verification within two working days of the hearing. Any PowerPoint presentations will be placed on the committee's website as soon as they become available, and verified transcripts will be placed on the website within five days of receipt.

Following a presentation by the minister, committee members will ask questions relating to the inquiry. Generally the procedure followed will be that relating to questions in the Legislative Assembly. Sessional orders provide a time limit for answers to questions without notice of 4 minutes while standing orders do not permit supplementary questions. It is my intention to exercise discretion in both matters; however, I do request that each answer be as succinct as is reasonable, recognising that often we are talking about complex issues. I ask that all mobile phones be turned off or to silent. The minister now has an opportunity for a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the budget estimates for the women's affairs portfolio. Welcome, Minister.

**Ms VICTORIA** — Chair, I thank you and the other members of the committee very much for this opportunity to talk about what we are doing in the women's affairs ministry.

**Overheads shown.**

**Ms VICTORIA** — If we can have look at the slides, I want to talk through a little bit about what we have been doing within the last year, but obviously also we are going touch on what is coming up here.

Australia is ranked within the top 50 of OECD nations for the participation rate of women. In Victoria some statistics that might interest you are that there are more women in part-time work than men, women make up 46.3 per cent of the overall Victorian labour force and as at May 2013 the gender pay gap is 13.5 per cent between men and women. That is down, I am glad to say, from May 2012 when it was 15.2 per cent.

By providing employment and leadership opportunities for women in Victoria and acknowledging the contribution made by women, the government is strengthening our community and thereby boosting economic and also workforce outcomes. Increasing the participation of women in the workforce is not only important to women and also their families — it improves their wellbeing and reduces the negative impact of financial pressures — but it is also a critical part of strengthening our economy in Victoria. Over the last three years our government has invested over \$1.8 million across the women's affairs portfolio. This is very targeted investment and delivers value for money.

Through the women's economic participation action agenda 2013–15 our aim is to increase choice and financial independence for women; help women to create jobs for themselves and others, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds; and assist more girls and women to realise opportunities in the Victorian economy through non-traditional occupations.

Gender diversity in corporate leadership is linked to improved performance of both financial and non-financial members, yet women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions. This is why women's leadership and recognition are two of our very key priorities. Our range of programs focus on helping women to be leaders in business but also in the community, recognising and promoting the contribution of women to Victoria's economy and community, supporting the Victorian government's target of 50 per cent of all new appointments to government boards and committees being women and supporting women in rural and regional Victoria to share news about events and opportunities and also the achievements of women.

In September last year I announced a \$2.4 million package to improve women's economic participation. That is part of what I was talking about before — the Women's Economic Participation Agenda 2013–15. The action agenda includes key actions and targeted initiatives to help women access educational opportunities. This includes vocational and skills training, the initiative we call pathways into employment, the social enterprise and small business initiative and non-traditional pathways. There has been substantial investment in both the social enterprise and small business initiative and non-traditional pathways. I will talk about those when I have more opportunity a bit later.

There has been a series of workshops across Victoria that have been delivered by a wonderful organisation called SALT — Supporting and Linking Tradeswomen — and they are being delivered at the moment. They have been over delivered the last few months. I have had the opportunity to go out and participate. That is for women and girls interested in non-traditional careers. As you can see, these programs are being delivered right across the state, reaching women in metropolitan, outer suburban and rural and regional areas.

The government has a target of 50 per cent of new appointments to government boards and committees, making sure they are women. To support this target, we have developed a range of initiatives to expand leadership opportunities. The Victorian Women's Governance Scholarship program is something that we are very happy to be continuing, not just now but also into the future; and we are awarding scholarships to women currently serving on boards of not-for-profit organisations that are in receipt of Victorian government funding. We have also received a lot of great feedback from women about how this is affecting them and their communities.

The Victorian Honour Roll of Women is one of our most highly revered and significant programs that has been run over successive governments. It is focused on women's leadership and obviously recognition. There are currently 538 inspirational women who have been inducted onto the honour roll since 2001. In recognition of their vision, leadership, commitment, hard work and exceptional contribution to their communities or area of expertise, they have earned their places on the roll.

We also run and fund other programs to support the leadership and recognition of women. These include the Victorian Women's Register, the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, the Rural Women's Network and the e-newsletter that goes with that. We also have the Pathways to Exit program. This is a wonderful program that provides sex workers with new employment opportunities and training aimed at improving lives for these women. The program is effectively shifting across from my consumer affairs portfolio into the women's affairs portfolio this year, to better leverage the skills that we have within the Department of Human Services for these women.

The Victorian government recognises that for women to increase their economic participation and to become business and community leaders, a whole-of-government approach is required to support the health and wellbeing of women. The government is expanding the successful programs that help some of our most disadvantaged and also vulnerable women in our community. As Minister for Women's Affairs I meet a diverse range of inspiring and also determined women who are contributing to the growth and development of Victoria and helping to shape our economy, our community and our future.

The positive feedback that I receive about our programs shows the very real difference that we are making for women at both an individual level and in the broader context of the community, whether it be through the economy or through cultural life or civic life in our state.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. We have until approximately 2.30 p.m. for questions, and I will start. Can you outline to the committee the budget initiatives in this portfolio which will strengthen Victorian communities both in the coming year and over the forward estimates period?

**Ms VICTORIA** — Thank you, Chair. Yes, I would be delighted. Obviously something that we are passionate about in this government — it is a whole-of-government approach — is making sure that we have strong local communities. In the women's affairs portfolio we know those sorts of strengths are underpinned by opportunities for women to be able to contribute to local decision making, but also to be able to make sure that they have the opportunity to participate both economically and civically across the spectrum.

I would like to highlight for you a range of programs that we are doing through the women's affairs portfolio which contribute to supporting and strengthening our local communities. I spoke briefly in the presentation about an initiative that I launched in September last year called the Women's Economic Participation Action Agenda 2013–15. It was \$2.4 million that we invested in that. It is providing women with the skills that they find are essential to participate more fully in the workforce but also to be able to be stronger in their local communities.

Some of the initiatives within that are the pathways into employment initiative, which is assisting 180 women into sustainable employment, because there is no point just getting them into work if they cannot stay there. So it is about helping them through, making them aware of their rights and their obligations, but also providing that nurturing that some of them really need. There is also the social enterprise and small business initiative. This is supporting more than 400 women to develop their skills so that they can be better businesspeople and better leaders. Some people do not want to work for other people. Some people have great ideas and they want to go on to use those for their own financial independence, so we are equipping them to be able to go and do that.

There are also non-traditional pathways, which I suppose is one of the things that I am most enthusiastic about. Being a parliamentarian for a woman is not a traditional pathway, but I am sure that every one of us ladies in Parliament would say is well worth it and would recommend to other women. We do not have traineeships for parliamentarians through that pathway, but we do help promote women and girls into what are traditionally thought of as non-traditional careers. I was talking before about the SALT workshops, and I went to one at the Preston town hall the other day. There is a woman from the organisation called SALT, which is delivering these workshops for us. Fi and her team are touring around, delivering these forums, and there were — off the top of my head — probably about two dozen participants who were from varying backgrounds, all from that part of Melbourne. They were on the tools, so to speak, creating beautiful things out of wood — no, out of timber; I have got to get that right.

It was about equipping them so that they did not feel as though this was a male-only dominated space and that they could not pursue opportunities in that particular space. One woman in particular was a young architecture student. She said, 'Even though I don't particularly want to get on the tools myself, it's really important for me to understand how the tradies work so that I'm better at my job'.

We also support leadership and recognition, and the idea is that we want to help increase the opportunities for women to be able to contribute to local decision making. There has been an announcement that I have made today that we are further investing in women who want to go into local government. Given the opportunity, I will talk about that a little bit more further down the track.

We have also got our women's governance scholarships, and this is a fantastic way for women to learn about being on community boards, but also taking those skills back to their communities. There are lots of things that we are doing, and I wish I had 20 minutes just to be able to talk about all these great initiatives, but I am sure I will get an opportunity to discuss them a little bit further.

**The CHAIR** — I think the opposition members might get a bit upset if you did.

**Ms VICTORIA** — I am sure they are very excited about them, nonetheless.

**Ms GARRETT** — Absolutely. Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 178, regarding the descriptor of the Office of Women's Affairs, which is to lead and coordinate whole-of-government policy, engage with women from diverse backgrounds, deliver initiatives to improve the lives of Victorian women and support their economic, social and civic participation. I think what we are all grappling with as a community at the moment — one of the major, profound hurdles for women to fully participate in economic, social and civic life — is the incidence of family violence.

In the Treasurer's speech at page 9 he explains the budget initiative of \$4.5 million to target family violence, and I note your statements on Channel 9 only last Saturday, Minister, that the government is 'on the ground now making a difference'. I would like you to take the committee through how much your department, the Office of Women's Affairs, is dedicating to the response and prevention of violence against women across the forward estimates.

**Ms VICTORIA** — Thank you very much. This is an area that is obviously touching all of us at the moment, as it has done through the generations. I wish it was something we did not have to talk about; I wish it was eradicated. What we have to do as a government is ensure that we obviously empower women and that we prevent family violence before it occurs, but that is not always possible. This is of course under Minister Wooldridge's portfolio, so I hope you are aware of how the Office of Women's Affairs is divided, and family violence is a particular area.

**Ms GARRETT** — The issues are across a range of portfolios.

**Ms VICTORIA** — They are, but the particular funding for those initiatives does come under Minister Wooldridge, and I am sure you have had an opportunity to talk with her about that. I note today that the Premier has made an announcement in Bendigo for a \$3 million investment into a women's refuge there, which doubles the capacity of the facilities there. It is called Annie North.

**Ms GARRETT** — Yes, we had the opportunity to question the Premier on that last week. Funding did not appear in the budget for that.

**Ms VICTORIA** — The announcement has been made today, so I am delighted that we are going to help women out there. Again, prevention is always better than cure, and there are an awful lot of preventative measures that we are doing. I am sure you are aware of the foundation, which was a joint initiative between Minister Wooldridge, when she was there, with the federal government, which is being headed up by the former Senator Natasha Stott Despoja, so there is an awful lot of work being done in that space as to how we best target resources and where it is that those resources are channelled.

Obviously we are looking very holistically at a package. There is over \$22 million that this government is putting into the prevention of family violence. Again, I think we need to talk about prevention, and something that we have been very proactive on is the stance of being tough on law and order and also putting more front-line police on the streets. This is something that the police commissioner Ken Lay is very passionate about. Commissioner Lay and I are quite often at events together on all sorts of things, even the arts — believe it or not — these days. He has spoken to me on multiple occasions about how much of an impact he believes front-line police are having by having people more comfortable with reporting family violence but also making sure not only that they are comfortable coming forward but that we have the resources there to be able to help them once they do come forward. Of course removing the stigma is very much a part of that as well.

A particular initiative that is happening through my office — and it could just as easily be happening under Minister Wooldridge, but it is under me, and, as I alluded to before, it was with Consumer Affairs Victoria but we decided that the fit was far more appropriate here in the Office of Women's Affairs — is the Pathways to Exit program. I am not sure if the committee is aware of Pathways to Exit. It has been running for several years now. It is being delivered in the South Melbourne area. I have been down to visit them, and it is about enabling some of our most vulnerable women, those who are sex workers, to be able to leave what is often a violent career. Many of them are not in sex work as their first choice of career path, so what we are doing is that we have very intensive programs that are being delivered for those who want to leave sex work.

As I say, so many of them have been victims of violence. We give them an opportunity to skill themselves so that they have alternatives, whether it be through education or whether it be through opportunities. Sometimes it involves drug counselling; sometimes it involves things like mental health issues. It is one of those issues that is so holistic that we have to look at it across all portfolios. As I said, it does actually come under Minister Wooldridge, but the package that she has put together is certainly heading in the right direction and has proved to be beneficial already. It is a significant investment of over \$22 million in this particular package.

**Ms GARRETT** — By way of clarification, are there no programs or initiatives coming out of the Office of Women's Affairs on family violence?

**Ms VICTORIA** — Absolutely. Pathways to Exit is about — —

**Ms GARRETT** — It is a program about sex workers, and I understand that. It is a laudable program, but in terms of the issue of family violence, I seek clarification.

**Ms VICTORIA** — I would have to disagree on that and say it is very much about violence and family violence. Many of these women obviously have families; they are not in this by choice.

**Ms GARRETT** — I accept that, but for a lot of them it is violence not related to a family situation.

**Ms VICTORIA** — This is very much about family violence, when we talk about Pathways to Exit. One of the other ones we are doing is extending the family violence risk assessment and risk management framework, which you might know as CRAF. That falls within the Office of Women's Affairs, but because DHS comes across Minister Wooldridge, Minister Smith and me, so many of these programs cross the boundaries, if you like.

**Mr ANGUS** — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 29, which identifies funding over four years as part of the women's economic participation strategy. You also touched on that during the course of your presentation. Can you advise the committee about this strategy and what it delivers for Victorian women?

**Ms VICTORIA** — This is something that I am extremely proud of as Minister for Women's Affairs. This is a new way of tackling some of our age-old programs, not just within the state but further afield. Quite often we know that women from disadvantaged backgrounds or from, for example, CALD backgrounds — that type of thing — have less opportunity. This is about increasing opportunity for women — and young women, not just those of us who are a bit more established in life. Certainly this is an exciting program that has lots of different facets, and I might walk you through some of them.

One of the things that I want to talk about is being engaged in the workforce, which we know is good not only for the woman involved but also for her community. It is also good for Victoria. When we have women participating — obviously the participation rate for women in the workforce is relatively low in comparison with men — it is good for our economy across the state.

A couple of the things that sit within the economic participation strategy include the governance scholarships, which I touched on briefly before. This is an opportunity for women who are interested in decision making and in strategic direction within their community or community organisation. Some of them do not know that they have the skills or do not know how to put a label on the skills that they have. I get that a lot from talking to women. They say, 'I'm not really qualified to do this', and I say, 'But you are. You just don't know what those skills are called'.

We give 34 women a year an opportunity to do one of these scholarships with the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and it is changing communities. In fact one of the people I spoke to, who has been awarded one of those scholarships this year, is one of our Aboriginal elders here in Victoria, Aunty Di Kerr. I am sure many of you have been at events with Aunty Di, who is a very passionate woman. She came up to me recently at an event and said, 'I can't thank you enough for this opportunity. This is not something I would have done, but it is something that, when I learn these skills, I can take them back to my community. I can also share them with some of our younger women and teach them these skills and bring them through'. It is great to hear that feedback. We have a target of 50 per cent women on government boards and committees. We can only have that sort of target if we help women to get there. It is part of the whole program.

Another part of it is the economic participation action agenda, which I have spoken about a couple of times. They have programs and services that are being delivered by great organisations such as Salvation Army Pathways, Gippsland Employment Skills Training, Hanover services and the like. There is also E-focus, which is a great organisation. What they are doing is helping to assist and empower women, whether it is about overcoming barriers, whether it is about gaining skills or whether it is about gaining employment. But even more importantly, it is about sustainable employment. I am thrilled at the sorts of things we are getting out of that already, and there is quite a lot of money attached to it.

Regarding the small business workshops, I was delighted to be at one of those in Knox in my electorate just last week. It was the last day and we were handing out the certificates. All the women said they had got something

beneficial, whether it was about marketing their business, whether it was about learning more about themselves as businesspeople or whether it was about simply learning how to do the financials for their business. We are giving very real, tangible outcomes to a lot of women, where those opportunities did not exist before. It is something I am very proud of.

**Ms GARRETT** — If I can refer to budget paper 3, page 179, regarding the total output cost for the Office of Women's Affairs, the expected outcome is 6.4 million in 2013–14, which is less than the 7.1 million target. There is a note saying it is carryover funding. I would like you to advise the committee what programs were delayed or not delivered in 2013–14 as a result of this underspend.

**Ms VICTORIA** — Obviously I can talk about the ones that I am responsible for. The programs that are the anomaly there in that particular figure come from Minister Wooldridge's area of delivery, so she would obviously be best placed to talk about that. I guess the most important thing out of what you see there is that there has been no change — there has been no diminishment of the money that we are investing in the programs that we are delivering through the Office of Women's Affairs. I am very pleased, obviously, that we have additional funding through Pathways to Exit and other programs like that. They are programs that fall under Minister Wooldridge, and she would be better placed to comment on those.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. That concludes the hearing for the women's affairs portfolio. There are no questions on notice. I thank the secretary and departmental staff for their attendance today.

**Witnesses withdrew.**