

# 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 Consumer Affairs,

Mr G. Wilson, Secretary,

Dr C. Noone, Deputy Secretary, Regulation, and

Mr S. Condron, Chief Finance Officer, Department of Justice.

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

**The CHAIR** — I resume the hearings for the portfolio of consumer affairs, hearing no. 49 for the 2014 estimates process. I now welcome back the Honourable Heidi Victoria, and from the Department of Justice: Secretary, Mr Greg Wilson; Deputy Secretary, Regulation, Dr Claire Noone; and the Chief Finance Officer, Mr Shaun Condron.

The minister now has an opportunity for a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the budget estimates for the consumer affairs portfolio.

**Overheads shown.**

**Ms VICTORIA** — Thank you, Chair. I thank members of the committee. I cannot believe how short that last one seemed to be. I had so much more I wanted to say, so hopefully I will be able to discuss so much more in this particular one. It is a great pleasure to be able to talk to you about what we have been doing in the consumer affairs portfolio this year. The 2014–15 budget delivered by this government for this portfolio maintains Consumer Affairs Victoria's ability to protect the interests of Victorian consumers. It is a budget that supports CAV's focus on being a risk-based, intelligence-driven regulator and provides a framework for new ideas and also initiatives.

You can see there that the budget for consumer affairs is \$123.4 million over this budget, which is 2.3 per cent of the Department of Justice portfolio. Consumer Affairs Victoria administers 30 acts of Parliament and is responsible for the thousands of activities that go along with that responsibility. In the coming year CAV expects to deliver individual information and advice to close half a million Victorian consumers and businesses by phone, email and also face to face. In addition there will be about 2 million visits to CAV's website, and its social media following is expected to exceed 20 000 people. CAV expects to complete 12 000 compliance and enforcement activities and close to 520 000 registration and licensing transactions. More than 40 000 financial counselling sessions will be delivered to Victorians in financial hardship, and about 5000 vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians will get access to advocacy, help and support at VCAT.

This government is focused on modernising the statute book and ensuring that the right legislative framework is in place to protect Victorians. The launch of the Co-operatives National Law in March this year makes it easier for co-ops in Victoria and New South Wales to operate across state borders. The government is undertaking a targeted review at the moment of the Retirement Villages Act to remove inconsistent and unclear provisions that are hampering its proper operation. This will complement the work that we have been doing to improve information disclosure by retirement village operators or prospective residents.

We are undertaking a large program of work to reduce red tape. This, of course, will help boost productivity, reduce costs for Victorian businesses and make it easier for small businesses and community organisations to operate. By amending the Sale of Land Act the government is prepared reducing red tape and clarifying requirements for Victorians buying or selling a property, and we anticipate the red tape reduction on that will be about \$6 million a year. Legislation to repeal the Travel Agents Act was passed in March this year. The deregulation of travel agents will cut red tape for Australian-based travel agents by over \$25 million a year without compromising consumer protection.

The government and CAV are focused on making living easier for Victorians. In November last year I launched the RentRight app, which is fantastic. If you have not had a play, I encourage you to. It is the first app of its kind in Australia and quite possibly in the world; we have not found another one like it. It ensures smooth communication between renters and landlords or property managers. It has already been downloaded over 8000 times.

Following the introduction of rooming house minimum standards last year the government launched the rooming house statewide register in October to better inform the public about the location and ownership of rooming houses. The register, which is updated by local councils, makes operators more accountable for complying with rooming house laws. The register increases transparency in the sector without adding unnecessary red tape for operators who do the right thing.

The government is committed to taking enforcement action against those who evade the law and do the wrong thing by consumers. Between July last year and March this year CAV finalised 15 prosecutions, ran 38 civil proceedings and had 11 parties sign up to court-enforceable undertakings. Some areas where CAV has had legal success has been in estate agents misuse of trust funds and a court win against Dimmeys stores, the outcome of

which sent a very strong warning to businesses that product safety breaches will not be tolerated and harsher penalties await those that try.

The fire services levy monitor, established to oversee the abolition of the insurance-based fire services levy, has also had some great results for Victorian consumers — two enforceable undertakings over the last 12 months. QBE and also Insurance Manufacturers of Australia, which is the underwriter for the RACV, have seen consumers refunded over \$12 million — a great outcome for more than 200 000 affected policy-holders.

That is just a brief overview, and I will be delighted to embellish some of those.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. Could 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** — I will; thank you very much. There are some incredibly strong things that we have been doing in the area of consumer affairs, and obviously when we are talking about strengthening communities we need to make sure that we are talking about all community members, so not just those who are living in cities, not just those who can speak English, but those from all different backgrounds. We are very much in favour of supporting all people to know their rights and also their responsibilities. This budget provides for continued delivery of some very tailored services across Victoria to make sure that communities have access to the information and assistance they need, and most importantly, when they need it.

In the nine months to 31 March this year CAV delivered nearly 700 information sessions to businesses and consumers across the state. This includes information on a range of issues, whether it be about scams, which is something we get asked about an awful lot, travelling comen or product safety. That is obviously done not only in metropolitan Melbourne but out in the regions as well. And also there are other programs. We go from Morwell to Mildura and everywhere else, and we have very good local officers.

The consumer information sessions that our officers conduct are across a broad range of topics. They are tailored obviously to whichever people they are talking to. It could be about baby equipment safety for new or expectant parents; it could be about motor car buying; it could be about retirement village living — there is quite a lot of information that we get asked for about that. It could also be about renting, buying and selling real estate, and also about general consumer rights.

We also have business information sessions. These are really important, especially for small businesses that may not have a lot of financial opportunity to go out and get a lot of legal help and that sort of thing so they come to Consumer Affairs Victoria, and also for incorporated associations, owners corporations and real estate agents. We have really good front-line resolution services, which a lot of people take advantage of. Again it helps to cut the cost of resolution without getting a compromise in outcome. We have lots of different opportunities there for people to gain good outcomes.

We have a wonderful financial counselling program that sees face-to-face sessions, but there is also a lot of information that people now want online, and a lot of people now want to just talk on the telephone as well. That of course is based on the MoneyHelp service. We have reviewed the reach of that program, and there are changes to that program. I am really quite delighted at what that will bring to people in areas where they have not had access before.

We are also very much about educating and informing consumers from, as I was saying before, all sorts of different backgrounds. We produce a lot of our literature and a lot of our resources online in many different languages. In fact some of our scam information comes in 23 different languages, so we try to provide an opportunity for everybody and we work a lot with the community to make sure that we are delivering what it is that they want in the method in which they want it. We are doing lots. It is a good time for consumers here in Victoria. They can feel well protected.

**Mr SCOTT** — Minister, I want to ask a question first seeking some clarification relating to the total output cost, because if you look at the note underneath on page 202 of budget paper 3, there have clearly been some machinery of government changes relating to VCAT and some other matters relating to trust funds. What I am really seeking is some information which allows an apples with apples comparison about the total expected outcome costs. For the total expected outcome and target from 2013–14, could we get a comparison with 2014

that excludes these changes? If you did not have the machinery of government changes that take place, what would the target be for 2014–15 based on what the criteria had been for calculating this measure in 2013–14?

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Point of order. The question is hypothetical but I am not necessarily taking that point; I am just explaining that there is a deeper problem. Mr Scott has referred to machinery of government. As said in the footnote, there is actually the introduction of the CAV court services as well. It may be well beyond just this portfolio in relation to the whole justice portfolio that some of these changes relate to, including the introduction of Court Services Victoria, which is a very new statutory body that runs its own budget.

**The CHAIR** — I do not uphold the point of order. I think the points you make are probably a fair comment, but I do not uphold it as a point of order. I am sure the minister would appreciate the opportunity to answer the question to the extent that is possible, with the advice of the secretary, but recognising that clearly areas of the department that pertain to the Attorney-General or other portfolios are well outside her domain.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — On that, Chair, can I seek clarification from Mr Scott. Is he asking the minister to back out some of the costs associated with the total output costs that are outside her portfolio interest? Is that what you are saying?

**Mr SCOTT** — There is a protecting and promoting the consumer interest output. There has been a change that relates to those outputs, and it is reasonable for this committee — if I have to respond to the point of order as much as it was a point of order, rather than a comment —

**The CHAIR** — I think it was a request for information actually.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — A response to get clarification.

**Mr SCOTT** — It is reasonable for the committee to seek information which allows meaningful comparison of the figures, and that is essentially what I am trying to do.

**The CHAIR** — And that is what I am happy to allow.

**Mr SCOTT** — I am not seeking to undo or make commentary on the merits or otherwise of policy initiatives related to it.

**The CHAIR** — Exactly.

**Ms VICTORIA** — I am happy to discuss this as much as I can within my portfolio. We can talk somewhat hypothetically and say, 'If there had not been machinery changes', but there have been. I have to discuss what is within the budget papers as they stand, but I am happy to try and walk through these changes, if you like. The budget that we have given you, and obviously the total cost there, is how we come about being an effective regulator, how we protect consumers and businesses and make sure that they understand their rights and their obligations and that sort of thing. It is 2.3 per cent of the Department of Justice budget. That is an increase from last year of \$35.4 million in comparison to the target for 13–14.

Let me outline some of the changes that are underpinning this increase. The 2014–15 output cost now includes \$16.5 million in estimated payments to VCAT, so that might be some of the changes you are talking about there. The Court Services Victoria Act that was passed this year established the courts as a statutory public sector body to provide administrative services and facilities for the courts and also VCAT, and that is currently delivered through the Department of Justice. These take effect from 1 July this year, and the estimates for the budget reflect this separation. We cannot take them out because that is what has happened.

The payments to VCAT relate to the operation of three lists that we have at VCAT. You have got the residential tenancies list, the domestic buildings list and also the owners corporation list. This money was previously allocated to the courts output, and there is an MOU that is being established at the moment between CAV and VCAT regarding payments to this fund or how these operations are funded, if you like. That is a significant part, I think, of what you are asking.

There is also a variation in costs for the VPF — the property fund — where there has been an increase in grants there. Of course this helps fund not-for-profit organisations that want to provide affordable housing to those who are not able to get into housing on their own. I think we have had some outstanding results on that, and I

am sure you have read some of the press releases that we have put out about the initiatives that are there. For example, there was \$4 million that was given in a grant to Haven homes up in Bendigo. Haven; Home, Safe have worked with the Sidney Myer affordable housing project, and this is going to help prevent homelessness in that area — obviously something they are very conscious of up there. This is going to be a big help. It is going to be helping people between 18 and 35 years of age.

If we look at young people, we also can look at the Kids Under Cover program, and there was a very big grant given to them this year. There was \$2.6 million for the type of dwellings that Kids Under Cover build to make sure that young people do not become homeless in a situation where they might have been, where it is unworkable to live in the family home under the same roof, so to make sure that they still have that backing, that sense of community, but not being under the same roof where that is untenable. There has also been some \$10 million or so for affordable housing through various different grants given to registered housing agencies, and they will benefit communities right around the state.

We are currently looking at other applications that are before us wanting grants from the VPF and assessing the range of projects that are proposed to make sure that they are providing affordable housing, making sure that they are in the areas of need that really need the most amount of opportunity and also making sure that they are sustainable houses. We make sure that we are looking after everybody. We promised at the last election that we would look after consumers, and certainly this budget gives us the opportunity to continue on that really good work that we are doing.

**Mr SCOTT** — By way of supplementary, you listed a number of items under the Victorian Property Fund.

**Ms VICTORIA** — Yes.

**Mr SCOTT** — Because the note makes reference to those two items — one relates to the courts, the other to the Victorian Property Fund. If I could just seek clarification on what are the expenditure and grant payments to be made from the Victorian Property Fund to support affordable housing for the coming financial year, 14–15?

**Ms VICTORIA** — Sorry, it was a bit hard to hear — the VPF?

**Mr SCOTT** — Sorry, I should have spoken directly into the microphone. I am just seeking clarification on what, in dollar terms, will be the allocation for grant payments to be paid from the Victorian Property Fund to support affordable housing for the period 14–15?

**Ms VICTORIA** — I will just get the exact number for you. It is \$22 million in the 14–15 year, which is an increase of \$15.9 million.

**Mr SCOTT** — An increase of?

**Ms VICTORIA** — An increase of 15.9.

**Mr ANGUS** — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 202 and the indicator entitled ‘Compliance activities, from compliance assistance through to court actions’. You also touched on this in the last slide of your presentation. Minister, can you please outline to the committee how the consumer affairs portfolio continues to protect Victorian families from unsafe products, especially dangerous children’s toys?

**Ms VICTORIA** — I was hoping somebody would ask about this, and I have got to say there was a —

**Ms GARRETT** — Wow! What a coincidence!

**Members interjecting.**

**Ms VICTORIA** — The reason why I wanted somebody to talk specifically about this was I did want to bring in some show-and-tell. We discussed it within the office, and we thought perhaps one of the crossbows that we had had seized would not be let through security here.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — We could have done with one of them this week, I will tell you!

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR — Order!**

**Ms VICTORIA** — One of the things that we are very proud of in my office — and can I take the opportunity to thank Claire Noone and everybody at Consumer Affairs Victoria who is really so careful in looking after Victorian consumers and making sure that we only have safe product on the shelves. We had a lot of fun with this this year. If it was not so serious, it would be fun. The destruction of things that should not be out in people's hands is one of the good parts of my job because it means they are not in the hands of our children. Obviously it is not just about seizure; it is about dealing with companies and making sure that they are aware of their obligations, making sure that they are aware of what is safe, making sure that they are aware of product safety standards here and why we have them.

It is something that we do a lot of. You might have seen in past years big campaigns about curtain blind cords, and unfortunately almost every year we have a tragic death of a child who has used a curtain blind cord inappropriately. We do that sort of education. Children's toys that shatter and splinter or can be swallowed. Also things like sunglasses that can almost shatter in your hands — I have had a pair of those in my hands, looking at them and saying, 'If this was in your eye, obviously you would be blinded'. Quad bikes, monkey bikes, that sort of thing where kids thought because it was little it was safe, and of course it was not safe. Something that has come to the fore quite a lot is inflatable pools — people wanting to cool down over the long, hot summer and not realising that you only need a couple of centimetres of water to drown in. We saw tragic deaths in that area. The Consumer Affairs Victoria inspectors have been really diligent in making sure that anybody who has that type of product has the appropriate warnings on it.

We have been — I say 'We'; I mean Consumer Affairs Victoria. We are all one big, happy family. The CAV team have been making sure that it is not just about making sure people understand their rights but when they do break the law that the book is thrown at them, so to speak. We have had some very good wins in court. The idea is we actually want people not to get to that stage. We want to make sure through compliance visits that, as I said, businesses understand what their obligations and rights are, but make sure that they are not bringing goods into the country for sale that are unsafe. So there are regular inspections of wholesale and retail businesses, and seizures do happen as a result of that if something is found to be unsafe. There are those who are offenders on more than one occasion, and they do get the full force of the law thrown at them.

We are also really intent on making sure that consumers understand what it is that the safety standards are there for and making sure that what they are buying is compliant — so if you were going in to buy a cot, for example, a children's cot, making sure that you understand that there is a reason why there needs to be a certain amount of space — not too much, not too little — because obviously little limbs and necks get caught in between and tragedy does happen. We make sure that we work with the best possible deliverers of these types of information campaigns. We deal with people like Kidsafe, who I am very pleased to say we have just awarded a \$10 000 grant to to work within this space. We also work with the Royal Children's Hospital safety centre to make sure that we are promoting these sorts of messages.

One thing we do is very much set standards. We need people, as I say, to make sure that they understand what their rights and responsibilities are. We work a lot with other regulators in other states, we work with the ACCC, and we like to think that there is a collaborative approach across Australia. Certainly at the last ministerial meetings we found that that is very much the case.

In the nine months to March 2014 we confiscated some 37 000 unsafe products. They were identified, removed from sale and are now not in the hands of our Victorian consumers. Twenty-six thousand of those were non-compliant toys — really scary. If I could show you the crossbow — I wish I had it here — it was the rubber-end things that were in there, the projectiles were obviously dangerous from a face point of view and blinding and that sort of thing. But even more scary is the circumference, or the diameter, of what was inserted in it was exactly the same as some nails. I do not know whether anybody is good at inches, but they were about that big. For Hansard's sake, I have no idea — very long. The sort that are used on — big.

**The CHAIR — Six-inch nails.**

**Ms VICTORIA** — Six-inch nails? Thank you. You can see on the screen the largest of the nails, which are commonly used on building sites, fits perfectly into that crossbow. I think you are talking instant death with something like that. These were to go out onto the shelves, and our inspectors made sure that they did not. We

have a wonderful inspector called Charles, and he is right at the forefront of all of this. To all of our inspectors I say thank you very much for making sure that these sorts of horrific products do not end up in our kids' hands.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — Who would ever want to buy one of those, though?

**Ms VICTORIA** — It is not my idea of fun.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Scott.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — Mr Scott would? I do not think so.

**The CHAIR** — No, Mr Scott has the call for the next question.

**Mr SCOTT** — I have no particular desire to shoot anyone with a crossbow. I may have been here for 10 days, but that has not occurred to me.

**Ms VICTORIA** — Are you glad I did not bring it in?

**Mr SCOTT** — Minister, I want to deal with another issue relating to compliance. One of the issues that has been raised, I know not just with consumer affairs but with organisations like the Consumer Action Law Centre and others and a number of MPs' offices, including my own, the issue of the behaviour of private car park operators, particularly in the issuing of what is described as liquidated damages and claims for liquidated damages. This has been an ongoing issue. A number of things have been done over the years to try to deal with this behaviour, but it is still clearly a very live issue in the community. I would ask, if I could, two things. What is Consumer Affairs Victoria doing to protect consumers in relation to this particular problem; and will Victoria be following other states in seeking to prevent these sorts of claims being made against persons parking vehicles in private car parks?

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — On a point of order, Chair, I am not sure how the issue of LDs associated with private car parks is an element of the budget estimates hearings. I thought if that sort of question needs to be asked, you might take it offline, you might do it in the house by way of question time — —

**Mr SCOTT** — I am very happy to respond — —

**The CHAIR** — Order!

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — You might do it as an adjournment matter or you might do it as a members statement. I am not quite sure how it relates directly to the budget estimates.

**The CHAIR** — Your point of order is relevance to the estimates process?

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Further to the point of order, Chair, the second part of it — —

**The CHAIR** — Hang on. Mr Scott, did you — —

**Mr SCOTT** — I am very happy to respond on both parts to pre-empt — —

Since I cannot speak twice on the same point of order, I think I understand where Mr O'Brien may be heading. Firstly, Consumer Affairs Victoria has undertaken actions in relation to this matter, and I am seeking to understand what actions. There is no specific output for these actions undertaken in this area, so I am seeking to understand what will be undertaken during the estimates period in relation to this particular matter, which is a very reasonable matter to raise at estimates.

Secondly, in dealing with that I am seeking clarification, not a hypothetical, about whether there are any actions that will be taken in relation to this by Consumer Affairs Victoria or the government in relation to the matter, which would prevent — there are a number of things that can be done, but I did not ask specifically — or end this practice. I am seeking clarification from the minister about what action she and the department are taking in relation to this matter, which is perfectly reasonable in the estimates process.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Further to the point of order, Chair, I think the first time the question was put as to what has been and what policy will be undertaken, which would be out of order. Mr Scott has then asserted that the

department has undertaken some activity. There could be a budgetary question about that potentially, but that is not the question he asked. He then went back to his speculative policy question as the ultimate question he put to the minister, which is, 'Will the minister take some legislative action?'. As you have already ruled earlier this week, Chair, such questions are not a matter for the budget estimates.

**Mr SCOTT** — It actually does not have to be legislative; it could be regulatory as well. It is in the inspectorate. There is a whole series of — —

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — Show us in the budget the line you are talking about.

**The CHAIR** — Order! I will allow the question, but with the rider that it is not appropriate, as we have established in earlier hearings, to ask the minister to anticipate any policy changes that may or may not occur. That would be speculative, but in terms of the substance of the question, I am happy to allow it.

**Ms VICTORIA** — I actually thank you for the question, because it is a space that we have obviously talked about in the past and it is something that consumers have a right to have protection from. You might know that in April — I was going to say last year, but we are in 2014 already — two years ago, in 2012, the Supreme Court in Victoria found that there were misleading tactics by private car park operators in some circumstances and that they were unlawful. There were proceedings taken against a company called Ace Parking. Ace Parking and its directors have had lots of complaints targeted against them. Basically the outcome affects the practices that they can now do. There are lots of issues that they needed to tackle, including better signage and making sure that people understood that they were not allowed to fine. That is not an opportunity afforded to those companies.

Obviously this is something that the minister for transport is very much aware of, and this is within his space as well. He has indicated that we are not proposing to amend any legislation at this time, but that does not rule it out for any time in the future. But what I do have to say is that as a result of the legal proceedings, the private car park operators have been far more honest in the way they have undertaken their dealings. The contacts that we have had at Consumer Affairs Victoria have come down by half since the proceedings, so obviously they are being far less unscrupulous. This is not to say we can stop all of them from being dodgy, if you like, but what we can do is make sure that when they are doing the wrong thing we proceed with action against them and make sure that they are fully aware that they are doing the wrong thing.

They know that they cannot issue a fine but that they can issue a notice that says somebody is in breach of contract, but of course you can only be in breach of contract if you knew that that contract existed. Again, it was about signage and that type of thing. Certainly the court system has caught up with these people to a certain extent. There will always be people out there who try it on, and that is why we have Consumer Affairs Victoria.

**Mr SCOTT** — By way of supplementary, is this issue particularly a problem — and you alluded to the issue about whether someone has entered into a contract or not — for persons of a non-English-speaking background? There is a particularly large problem relating to that community. If you do not read and write English, it is pretty extraordinary to accept that you have entered into a contract by having a sign up. What material and other information is available for persons of a non-English-speaking background relating to this matter that will be available to consumers?

**Ms VICTORIA** — At this point in time I believe the information that is up on our Consumer Affairs Victoria website is only in English. That is my belief.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 202, and the indicator entitled 'Compliance activities, from compliance assistance through to court actions'. This is further to the earlier issue you mentioned in relation to consumer product safety. Could you outline to the committee what compliance activities Consumer Affairs Victoria is taking to support vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians?

**Ms VICTORIA** — We are doing a lot in this space. I could touch on many things or I could specifically talk about one in particular. One that this government is incredibly proud of is the area of rooming house minimum standards. Obviously we came to government knowing this needed fixing, and we said that we would do that and do it effectively and efficiently. It was really important for us to get reform in the rooming house sector.



I have been out on inspections with our inspectors, and the people who live in rooming houses are quite often the most vulnerable people. We have gone in to protect them to make sure that their rights are protected and that as consumers they have every shred of decency afforded to them that they possibly can. Apart from changing the minimum standards, we have also put in place the rooming house register, which came online late last year. That is also another protection mechanism, but I will talk about that in a moment.

We put 15 minimum standards in place. These were predominantly about amenity and safety. For example, I was appalled to hear that some rooming houses did not have locks on bathrooms when both men and women were both living in these areas. Anybody could walk into the bathroom at any stage, so there was no dignity there for those people.

There were no standards before about how many power outlets there should be, or the safety of gas appliances, or even how much room they should have as far as a fridge or cupboard space in a kitchen. People living in these rooming houses have to be able to eat and store their food, and there were no minimum standards in place. We put these minimum standards in place and have achieved, I think, brilliant outcomes in this area. It is something that we do along with councils.

By the way, councils also maintain the list that I was talking about. The registration list has been something that councils have worked very well with us on, making sure that all registered rooming houses are listed, so that if somebody is operating across multiple municipalities, it can be checked as to how many rooming houses they are operating and that type of thing. But it can also be checked if somebody is doing something badly. We can check what else they own, and then inspections can be made. It is also very important for housing agencies to be able to know where registered rooming houses are that are reputable and working within the minimum standard that we have now legislated for. Agencies can make sure that when they are referring somebody from their agency across to a rooming house that they are sending them somewhere that will treat them with great respect.

We have taken a very comprehensive approach to this reform, and the outcome has been terrific. There was a very long process of coming in — a year of preparing rooming houses to make sure that operators knew their responsibilities and knew what was coming in. There were a lot of compliance assistance visits, and then when the legislation was brought through there was also lots of opportunity for them to work with CAV if they had not quite met those standards.

But there are those out there who have not been as willing to adjust and not willing to give their residents the dignity and the rights that they deserve. We have taken enforcement actions against many of these operators. In fact some have just gone to court this week. We are satisfied that most rooming houses — and there are over 1000 registered rooming houses in Victoria — are compliant, but there are still a handful that are not compliant. Enforcement action has commenced against nine rooming house operators. Eight of the owners have elected to have their infringement notices — because we obviously go to an infringement notice method first before we end up taking enforcement — heard in court. Good luck to them, is all I can say. If you are going to break the law, we are going to make sure that we are doing the right thing by consumers. Five of the eight have pleaded guilty, which is interesting, and fines have been issued by the court; and three remain to be heard. This is well and truly under way. We have had 173 infringement notices and a dollar value of nearly \$190 000 against these people who are not operating in a fair and legal way.

**The CHAIR** — The time available for consumer affairs has now concluded. I do not have any record of questions on notice, but if there were we will write to you and we would appreciate a response within 21 days. I thank the secretary, the deputy secretary and Mr Condron for their attendance today. We will resume in a couple of minutes with the arts hearings.

**Witnesses withdrew.**