

TRANSCRIPT

INTEGRITY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2022/23

Melbourne – Monday 11 November 2024

MEMBERS

Dr Tim Read – Chair

Hon Kim Wells – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Jade Benham

Paul Mercurio

Rachel Payne

Dylan Wight

Belinda Wilson

WITNESSES

Victoria Elliott, Commissioner,

Alison Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, and

Anna Higgs, Executive Director, Corporate Services, Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.

The CHAIR: I welcome everyone back to the Integrity and Oversight Committee's hearings into the performance of the Victorian integrity agencies in 2022/23.

Since the break we now have with us, from the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission [IBAC], Victoria Elliott, the IBAC Commissioner; Alison Byrne, Chief Executive Officer; and Anna Higgs, Executive Director of Corporate Services, who are giving evidence at this hearing.

I will introduce the group quickly. Going from north to south: Paul Mercurio, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson, Ryan Batchelor, Tim Read, Kim Wells, Rachel Payne and Jade Benham.

If you have got some opening comments, we would welcome those, and then we will go on to some questions.

Victoria ELLIOTT: Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to make some opening remarks and good afternoon to members of the Integrity and Oversight Committee. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet here today, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

As you already know, I have Alison Byrne and Anna Higgs here today to assist me in answering your questions. I would also like to acknowledge the work of the former IBAC Commissioner, Robert Redlich, and Acting Commissioner Stephen Farrow, who both presided over the organisation during the 2022/23 performance review period, which is the subject of today's hearing. This was a significant period for IBAC.

I will now take the opportunity to briefly highlight some of the key work undertaken in fulfilling our mandate of preventing and exposing public sector corruption and police misconduct. During the review period, IBAC completed 26 investigations and preliminary inquiries into public sector corruption and police misconduct. Noteworthy investigations included Operation Watts, jointly conducted with the Victorian Ombudsman, into allegations of misuse of electorate officers and ministerial resources for branch stacking and other party-related activities; the Operation Clara investigation into lobbying relating to a \$31-billion development proposal; and the Operation Daintree investigation into how improper influence compromised a procurement process for a healthcare worker training contract. Importantly, many of IBAC's investigations found gaps or weaknesses that heightened the risk of public sector corruption or police misconduct. This led to IBAC making 68 formal recommendations for public sector agencies, including Victoria Police and local government, to improve their systems, practices and controls.

Earlier this year, the Victorian government passed the *Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Act*, representing an important example of the impact IBAC's investigative work can ultimately have. Implementing many of the recommendations from the Operation Watts special report, this legislation provides for the establishment of a parliamentary workplace standards and integrity commission to investigate allegations of misconduct and also a parliamentary ethics committee to promote ethical practices by members of the Victorian Parliament.

Preventing public sector corruption and police misconduct remains a top priority for IBAC. Guided by our corruption-prevention strategy, we do this by informing the public sector, police and community about the risks and impacts of corruption and police misconduct and collaborate with them to reduce the likelihood of this occurring. During the review period, IBAC delivered 157 preventative initiatives, which included engagements and external events as well as our special and research reports, resources and campaigns.

I would also like to talk about IBAC's police oversight role, which focuses on ensuring police act fairly and are held accountable for all Victorians. An important part of this function is to review the outcomes of Victoria Police's internal investigations to ensure they are completed thoroughly and fairly. During 2022/23 we conducted 192 reviews of Victoria Police investigations, including oversight of incidents that involved deaths

or serious injuries after police contact. IBAC also works with Victoria Police to build and maintain a strong integrity culture by actively contributing to and participating in a range of different police education programs.

We recently piloted a dedicated team to improve the efficiency of our assessment and investigation of single-incident police complaints from community members at a higher risk of experiencing police misconduct. Pleasingly, over the six-month pilot period the median number of days to assess complaints significantly decreased, as did the time taken to complete an investigation. We plan to build on the success of the pilot with the establishment of an ongoing team to continue this work.

Another critical focus area during the review period was supporting the wellbeing of witnesses through the establishment of a dedicated witness liaison team, which works to ensure we maintain regular communication with witnesses throughout the operation's life cycle.

In closing, I want to emphasise how thankful we are to those people who are willing to provide information or make a complaint to IBAC and in doing so help us strive to realise our vision for a public sector and police that act with integrity for all Victorians.

The CHAIR: Terrific. Thanks very much. Let us go to Belinda Wilson for our first questions.

Belinda WILSON: Thanks, Commissioner. Welcome to your first performance hearing today. My first question is: What are your priorities as the new Commissioner?

Victoria ELLIOTT: Certainly. Well, obviously IBAC currently has its IBAC plan in operation. We are now under the Annual Plan, which I released earlier this year, for the current financial period, and that sets our strategic focus and initiatives and our key priorities for this financial year: further work on our complainant experience, implementing frameworks, data maturity and people strategy. They are our key focus areas that we are looking at in this plan. We will also now be embarking on developing our next IBAC plan.

Belinda WILSON: You have previously served on IBAC and have a background in police oversight. Based on that experience, what do you see as the most pressing issue in your police oversight function at IBAC?

Victoria ELLIOTT: IBAC has a significant oversight function in relation to police oversight. The public is not fully aware of what IBAC's work does. When I applied for the job of IBAC Commissioner I too was not. When you read the annual report you get a glimpse of that work, but you are not fully across everything that goes on at IBAC. That is the nature of our role. The legislation is set up under a confidentiality regime, but also the legislation does prohibit a lot of the work that we do from coming to the public. I think we need to work out ways to get that information out, because IBAC does undertake a significant amount of work in relation to our oversight function; whether it is undertaking investigations – the review function is very significant. We undertook, as I said, 192 reviews – that is actually just over 50 per cent of investigations that Victoria Police did that we referred to them, and in the last reporting period we reviewed over 60 per cent of matters that we referred.

Reviews enable us to look at whether those investigations were conducted thoroughly, fairly, impartially, whether they were evidence-based, the outcomes were reasonable and met community expectations. They also enable us, at the end of conducting that review, to provide lessons learned, say, in a closing letter, but also under the Act we do have the ability – but this is in private – to request further action and also for Victoria Police to then respond to us. We also then could conduct our own investigation.

Then we also have on top of that all our education work. We are at the academy on a fortnightly basis. We provide education, ethics and integrity, cultural training to Professional Standards Command officers and also to the Professional Standards committees across all of the regions. Plus our special reports that you might see in public, but there is a significant amount that IBAC does that is not open, I guess, to the public.

Belinda WILSON: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Great, thank you.

Paul MERCURIO: So many questions. I just want to decide – I want to know everything, I guess.

The CHAIR: Paul Mercurio.

Paul MERCURIO: Looking back over the period of 2021–24, I was just wondering what your reflections were or are on the success and impact of IBAC’s corruption-prevention strategy.

Victoria ELLIOTT: Certainly. The corruption-prevention strategy commenced in 2021/22. In this review period that we are looking at today, the key initiatives or outcomes in that period were the launch of the website and also making IBAC’s resources far more accessible. There were also the corruption-prevention surveys that we have done both in that review period and more recently. There was the development of the stakeholder management system and also the establishment of the Prevention and Education Advisory Committee, which was launched in this review period and now is business as usual, which is a very important initiative and works very well. It provides a cross-agency integrity committee where we share information and collaborate to deliver education and prevention initiatives across the public sector.

Paul MERCURIO: And you feel like all of those have been very successfully implemented and are working accordingly?

Victoria ELLIOTT: I do. We still obviously have many things in the annual plan we still need to deliver, and we will still continue obviously in our mandate when we look at planning our next strategic plan in future, but we will still continue to work on our complainant experience, because that is part of our corruption prevention and strategy, and we will still need to work in that complainant experience [area] in obviously looking at ways to improve our complaints system and looking at our trauma-informed process. We have already undertaken a significant amount of work in there, but we need to continue. There are plenty of strategies that we still have outlined in our plan that we have recently released.

Paul MERCURIO: Great, thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Dylan Wight.

Dylan WIGHT: Thank you. I might refer to IBAC’s most recent annual report, being 2023/24, and, if that is okay, I might just ask a question in a few parts that I think need relatively prompt, short answers, though. What was IBAC’s budget in 2023/24, and was that higher than in 2022/23? If it was higher, how much by in both dollar and percentage terms?

Victoria ELLIOTT: Okay. In relation to budget, shall we go to Ms Higgs?

Anna HIGGS: I can tell you in dollar terms. If I had a calculator, I should be able to work it out.

Dylan WIGHT: No, that is okay. Dollar terms will be enough. That is fine.

Anna HIGGS: So our budget envelope for 2022/23 was \$63.5 million and for 2023/24 was \$63.4 million. There was some one-off funding that was part of the 2022/23 budget, hence a slightly smaller number, a very small difference there. Does that answer the question? Was there another limb to that?

Dylan WIGHT: That is an entire budget envelope?

Anna HIGGS: Correct.

Dylan WIGHT: I was also going to ask about a Treasurer’s advance in 2023/24 and whether that was approved, how much was sought?

Anna HIGGS: I do not have the figures. That budget envelope is for the full amount.

Dylan WIGHT: Everything from government to the agency?

Anna HIGGS: The amounts I have given you are for the full budget envelope, including any supplementary funding. We would need to take on notice the specifics, because we have got the detail of the 2022/23 but not the 2023/24. I will take that on notice about the detail.

Dylan WIGHT: Sure. The final part of the question was whether IBAC is subject to any efficiency dividend or any other saving measures that apply to government departments more generally.

Anna HIGGS: I can answer that. We obviously are continuing to look for internal efficiencies like any prudent government agencies. We make the most use of our funds, but we are not subject to any specific efficiency dividends. We recognise that there is the normal CPI [Consumer Price Index] process, et cetera, that is added to your appropriation funding.

Dylan WIGHT: IBAC has an exemption from those efficiency dividends and saving measures that apply more generally?

Anna HIGGS: We do not have any specific general efficiency dividends or any other dividends that are specifically applied. I guess like most government agencies we get the CPI index, which assists in terms of that escalation of the funding.

Dylan WIGHT: Yes. All right. Thanks.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ryan Batchelor.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thank you, Chair. Welcome, Commissioner. Last year in these hearings the Committee uncovered a practice, after a little bit of back and forth, of IBAC occasionally providing copies of its final reports to selected journalists prior to their tabling in Parliament. We made a couple of recommendations in our report last year with respect to that practice. I was wondering if IBAC had any response to those recommendations that were made in the report.

Victoria ELLIOTT: As I understand, we have looked into the practice of whether we can provide reports. I do not have the documentation in front of me. In relation to whether you specifically want to know the reports that were released currently now, I can say I did not provide them –

Ryan BATCHELOR: We made the recommendations in our performance report last year. I was just interested if there has been a response from the agency to the recommendations the Committee made in our hearings last year.

Victoria ELLIOTT: I do not know if the agency has specifically responded to the IOC. We are not, as I understood, prohibited from providing those reports. There is no prohibition for us to be able to do that, but it is an IBAC policy and it is my policy that it would only be on a case-by-case basis that it be done.

Ryan BATCHELOR: One of the things that the Committee recommended was that some sort of framework be established. I noticed in this year's annual report that you said that you had developed an external communication reporting framework.

Victoria ELLIOTT: Yes, sorry. That is what you are talking about. I am sorry; I apologise. We are developing – we do have –

Ryan BATCHELOR: Has it been developed?

Victoria ELLIOTT: The reporting framework is being developed. I do not know if it is currently finalised.

Alison BYRNE: It has not been released as yet, but it is in process and it encompasses a whole range of products and reporting of communications externally to key stakeholders and of course committees and so forth.

Ryan BATCHELOR: So it has not been finished yet?

Victoria ELLIOTT: It has not been finished, but it has been developed. I am sorry. I thought you were talking specifically about the provision of embargoed copies to journalists as opposed to generally. I apologise.

Ryan BATCHELOR: All of the above is what I was interested in. There was the stuff that we discussed last year with the former Commissioner, and the Acting Commissioner made some recommendations. I am just interested in what the follow-up to the recommendations of the Committee is.

Victoria ELLIOTT: Yes, that is in progress – the framework.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Having read your annual report, I saw a reference to the development of an external communication reporting framework. I thought the two things might be connected, but –

Victoria ELLIOTT: Yes, they will cover how we do all of our reporting.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I am interested in if that framework has been finished. ‘No’, is the answer to that question?

Victoria ELLIOTT: No, it has not been arranged.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Okay. When do you expect it to be finalised?

Victoria ELLIOTT: It is actually part of our –

Alison BYRNE: Within this financial year.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Within this financial year.

Alison BYRNE: It is part of our IBAC plan for this year, yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Okay. I think it would probably helpful if the Committee were to receive a copy of that once it is finalised. You can take that on notice.

Victoria ELLIOTT: We will, thank you.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The other is that the [Victorian] Inspectorate, not in relation to IBAC but in relation to another agency, has jurisdiction over the release of a report in June about investigations into unauthorised disclosures by an integrity officer relating to the Office of the Special Investigator [OSI].

Victoria ELLIOTT: I am aware of that report, yes.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I just wonder whether you have any reflections. There was obviously some critique of the particular circumstances of the OSI, but the Inspector made some more general reflections that would apply more broadly to all of the bodies which the Inspector oversees about risk in relation to this area. I am just wondering if you had taken any action or had any perspectives on matters in general terms that the Inspector raised that would be relevant to IBAC’s operations.

Victoria ELLIOTT: That report actually was circulated amongst the executive, and we did discuss the report at one of our meetings. It has been shared across the executive and across the organisation. So, yes, we did consider it. IBAC does, as that agency does, work under a very strict confidentiality regime, and everybody that works at IBAC does have to take an oath before commencing their work. This is something that we regularly reflect upon and remind staff about, and we have various policies and procedures in relation to the sharing of information. That is something that we continually discuss within the organisation and reinforce within the organisation. But in relation to that particular report, it was actually shared. I actually do recall the Attorney [-General] even bringing that report to my attention to share it, but I had already shared it at the time.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I might ask now, while we are talking about reports, how many IBAC reports are currently held up because of action by the courts or legal action that is delaying the release of those reports?

Victoria ELLIOTT: There is no legal action delaying IBAC’s reports at present.

The CHAIR: So there has been in the past, I understand, but that is not currently an issue?

Victoria ELLIOTT: I cannot make any comment in relation to that. I am sorry; I cannot answer that question.

The CHAIR: Okay. Because you do not want to identify issues with a particular investigation.

Victoria ELLIOTT: No. I cannot answer those questions.

The CHAIR: Right. Okay. In that case I will just come at it perhaps in a way that you might be able to, which is: Is the problem of legal action preventing the release of reports? Has that been a barrier for IBAC that might need reform?

Victoria ELLIOTT: I guess I will take a step back. IBAC investigations can take a while. The investigation itself can be complex and take time, and then there is the natural justice process, which is articulated in our legislation. The natural justice process is a very important process because it provides, as it is set out in the Act, an opportunity for any public body or person to respond to any adverse comment made or finding made and then provide the necessary material for that to be considered, and then that needs to be set out in the report. Then there is also the common law, and that is the legal framework that we operate under. If there was to be any reform in relation to that, that would have to be a matter for Government, I think I would have to say in relation to that. It is a long process.

The CHAIR: Indeed. Thank you. Let us go to Deputy Chair Kim Wells.

Kim WELLS: Thanks, Commissioner. Mine is probably along the same line, and it is about Operation Richmond, which has been an ongoing investigation for many, many years between the issue of the UFU [United Firefighters Union Victoria] and former Premier Daniel Andrews.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Just, Chair –

Kim WELLS: No, no, I was not going to ask about the operation; I was just wondering if we could get an update.

Ryan BATCHELOR: You cannot get an update on their ongoing investigations. It is contrary to –

Kim WELLS: I am not asking anything about the operation. I just want an update on maybe time, or if it is in the Supreme Court, or is it –

Ryan BATCHELOR: That would be a breach of the *Parliamentary Committees Act* [2003 (Vic)].

The CHAIR: I think one at time. I do not think we can get any content or anything that relates to content of the report. If you are planning to ask about the timing of the release of the report, that would be fine.

Kim WELLS: That is exactly what I was after.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Sorry, Chair, to clarify: Wouldn't that go to a question about an ongoing investigation? Wouldn't it be contrary to the *Parliamentary Committees Act* for us to be asking an IBAC Commissioner about when a report is going to be released?

The CHAIR: I think we can leave it to the Commissioner's judgement as to whether she can answer that or not. It is not –

Ryan BATCHELOR: Isn't it within your remit as the Chair of the Committee to make decisions about whether the Committee is complying with the law?

The CHAIR: I am happy to allow the question about the timing of the release the report, but we cannot go any further in terms of content. The Commissioner is at liberty to say that that is –

Kim WELLS: To make it very clear, I am not asking about any of the details of the operation –

Ryan BATCHELOR: Other than progress.

Kim WELLS: What I am after is an update in regard to, as the Chair has said, when we would expect a report.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Chair, I really think the terms of the *Parliamentary Committees Act* are very, very clear and that it is expressly prohibited under the terms of that Act for this committee to make enquiries of the Commissioner about the ongoing conduct of particular investigations.

Kim WELLS: But we are not talking about the conduct.

Ryan BATCHELOR: It is the conduct of the investigation. Until the report is tabled, it is an ongoing investigation.

The CHAIR: All right. Well, I take your point. In that case, let us –

Kim WELLS: Let the Commissioner decide.

The CHAIR: Let us put the question out of order now. What we can do is get advice and ask it as a question on notice if it is allowed, but we will rule it out of order for now. Do you have any other questions?

Kim WELLS: Well, no, it is all relating to the same. Ryan's point is about the conduct of the investigation – I understand that that is the issue – but mine is about the timelines of when we are expecting to get a result in regard to when a report may or may not be released.

The CHAIR: Rather than waste everybody's time having this argument, what I can do is ask for the broadcast to be suspended while we get brief advice on the appropriateness of the question. Do you want to do that, Deputy Chair?

Ryan BATCHELOR: I am not asking for the broadcast to be suspended, just so you are aware.

The CHAIR: I know, but we want to get advice. So I can get advice or you can ask another question and we can ask that one on notice if it is allowed.

Kim WELLS: Okay. Well, I am mindful of the time, so I will continue on. I mean, they are along the same line. I guess my next question was: If you are not able to answer in regard to the timeline of an expected report, would your expectation be that it would be before the next election?

Ryan BATCHELOR: It is the same question, isn't it, Chair?

The CHAIR: That is the same question.

Kim WELLS: Well, I am just asking; I can ask. Okay, I will have another go. In regard to your annual report, I noticed that there is absolutely no mention of Operation Richmond anywhere in this report, and if you go to your website and key in 'Operation Richmond', nothing comes up. It is almost like it has been hidden. It is almost like it has been taken off the website and taken out of the annual report. I would have thought an annual report should be a true reflection of what IBAC is doing – the issue of finances but also the work that it is working on. There should have been at least some reference to Operation Richmond in the annual report.

Victoria ELLIOTT: How about I answer it in this way. IBAC reports on matters when it is able to report on those matters – when they are able to be in the public domain. It does not report on ongoing matters. It reports when a matter is then closed and can be made public. Hence many of our investigations are ongoing and none of those will be reported on in the annual report because they are ongoing. When a matter is concluded and is able to be reported in a public way, it will be. Other investigations are concluded. You might not get a snapshot of all of the investigations because to put things in the annual report we would have to go through a natural justice process. On anything that we put in a public forum we would have to go through a natural justice process in relation to the persons involved in a particular investigation. So IBAC when it is ready to and when it is in the public interest to and it has gone through a natural justice process will put things in the public domain. If it can put things in a de-identified way in relation to a closed matter, it will do so in an annual report or in another publication. Does that answer your question?

Kim WELLS: It is just that this has been going on for a number of years now, and I would have expected some sort of update or timeline, or expected timeline, so the public has some idea of a serious matter coming to a conclusion.

Victoria ELLIOTT: I appreciate that. As I said earlier, IBAC's investigations can be complex, but the natural justice process can also take a considerable amount of time. When IBAC is in a position to and if it is in a position to, it will make a public comment.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Commissioner.

Kim WELLS: So it will be a question on notice?

The CHAIR: We will get advice on what we can ask, and if it is allowed, we will do that. Let us go to Rachel Payne.

Rachel PAYNE: Thank you. Thank you for appearing today. My question is relative to the 2024 People Matter Survey. I would just like to understand your observations of that survey. Have you identified any concerns or areas for improvement?

Victoria ELLIOTT: Thank you. Ms Byrne will answer that question.

Alison BYRNE: I think, firstly, to put some context around it, it is important to note that IBAC staff members participate in the People Matter Survey at a rate significantly higher than across the public sector. We generally have around the 70 per cent range of staff members participating in the survey compared to other public sector agencies and the public sector at large being around 50 per cent. So what that says is that our people feel that there is value in the survey and that they will be heard through participating in the survey. Year on year, and again in this most recent period, you will see that IBAC has increased our people's rating of us in terms of satisfaction, engagement and inclusivity, and that has been an incremental increase, as I said, year on year. You will see in the most recent survey that staff members can see the value of their work in promoting IBAC's objectives. They feel heard and comfortable to speak up, which is of course really important, and indeed we have seen an increase in our staff members' views around recruitment and promotion and so forth.

On the other side of the coin, the most recent survey showed that we still have some issues around negative behaviours and there is a slight increase, but an increase nonetheless, in terms of our people's reporting of negative behaviours, also reporting around stress and workload – stress in terms of the nature of the work and, as I said, workload. Finally, there are some indicators around our senior leaders and how we can improve senior leadership's direction and strategy across the organisation. So just as we have in any other year, we have presented those results and started to discuss those results with our people and involve them in an action plan to address the key areas where we need to improve but also focus on those areas where we have done really well and how we can keep improving in those areas.

Rachel PAYNE: I am just cognisant that as the Commissioner you are fairly new into the role, but in comparison to the 2022/23 survey results, have you seen much comparison there? What lessons have been learned from that?

Alison BYRNE: There is some similarity and some areas that show a difference between the two results. As I said, there is similarity in terms of the increasing positive results around staff satisfaction and engagement and inclusivity. We are seeing more positive results in this current period around people's perceptions of the fairness of processes. We are seeing a consistent approach around management structures, but where we have seen some differences is in relation to some aspects of negative behaviour and also some aspects of strategy and risk development across the organisation.

Rachel PAYNE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Let us go to Jade Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you. Just with regard to that, does IBAC have a culture problem with regard to bullying and trust in senior leadership?

Alison BYRNE: No. Like any organisation, there are certain things that work really well and there are other areas where we have to improve. We have had some periods across the years where there have been results that show that we have to really focus on specific areas of culture or performance or behaviours, and indeed the organisation has done so. Is there more to do? Of course. Can we do better? Of course. But each year – and not just each year; we do not wait for a PMS result to actually engage with our staff and say, where can we do better and where can we provide more support. But indeed we do that each year; we look at how we can support our staff. As I said, we look at what works really well, not just the negatives, and how we can incorporate that into what we do and overall looking at supporting our staff to contribute to the great work of the organisation so they feel that engagement and satisfaction, and you see that they do, and also ongoing support for them so that it's a healthy space they can provide that work.

Jade BENHAM: How is IBAC fostering more of a speak-up culture?

Alison BYRNE: Through a number of ways. First and foremost, in the relevant period we introduced Stopline for complaints by staff, be it that they are anonymous or identified complaints, about workplace behaviours or issues. That, you might say, is the extreme end, and of course there are external avenues to make complaints. But in terms of before that, we have engaged in leadership forums and that is ongoing leadership forums since the period in question and continuing to today with all of our leadership staff, learning and development for them, collaboration across the board, how they can continue to lead their staff in an open environment, foster that speak-up culture. Again the PMS [People Matter Survey] results are showing that staff feel comfortable to actually raise those issues, so that is working, and also talk about appropriate behaviours in the workplace. But it is not just talking about it but how we can foster that and how we can as leaders continue to promote it in a positive way to our people. We have further learning and development around, of course, culture. It is not just us but it is the external environment, so supporting our staff with vicarious trauma and supporting our staff with workload and work pressure, which of course is an issue as well.

Jade BENHAM: So since the 2021/22 period with regard to employee turnover, what kind of progress has been made in that area to help with attrition and the retention of staff?

Alison BYRNE: Firstly, obviously having capable and experienced staff is paramount to IBAC achieving its purpose. Having the right people in the right jobs, letting them do it is really important and keeping them is really important. In the relevant period, there was a turnover rate of just over 20 per cent. In the most recent period, that decreased to just under 13 per cent, which is a significant decrease, and that is a true reflection of the work that has been undertaken around our recruitment processes, both internal and external recruitment as well, making sure they are consistent and transparent across the organisation. Again, going back to the most recent PMS results, our staff commented favourably. It was a significant increase in terms of their assessment of the fairness of our recruitment responses. Also, the opportunity for promotions within the organisation has gradually increased year on year.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Just one last quick question: you were asked earlier about funding, but I would like to get an impression of whether you think you are sufficiently funded for the work you are doing.

Victoria ELLIOTT: Obviously every agency will say this: with more we can do more. IBAC did meet its funding envelope last year, and that was with us doing our own internal savings, with the attrition rates that we had. We will work with Government as required in the usual way to address any funding moving forward. You will also note in the annual report, in my foreword, I did allude to the previous report that IBAC and VAGO [Victorian Auditor-General's Office] and the Ombudsman made in relation to having [budget] independence – which I think the Committee also raised in the FOI [Freedom of Information] report, and that is something that I would like to look at in the future as well.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you, all, for answering our questions. I declare the public hearing closed.

Committee adjourned.