

## PAEC Inquiry into the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes - Questions taken on notice

Monday, 20 November 2023

### Question 1:

**Elizabeth MOLYNEUX:** *Thank you very much, Secretary. Thank you for that question. There is a fair amount of information in the public domain. We did undertake some modelling, and we have got some fact sheets that we continue to update which are on the DEECA website which relate to the emissions of a household, which would be an all-electric home. It would be something like 16 per cent lower emissions than a new dual-fuel home – that is if it is built today – and that increases to 29 per cent lower emissions –*

**Danny O'BRIEN:** *Sorry, Deputy Secretary, I am limited for time. I just really want to know about the modelling behind all that. So there are fact sheets on the website. Can the department have a look for any reports that might have been commissioned, either internally or externally, and if available, can they be made available to the committee?*

**John BRADLEY:** *We are happy to take that on notice.*

### DEECA response:

The modelling required to produce the following three factsheets was undertaken internally by Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA):

- Attachment A – Save money and the environment with your new all electric home;
- Attachment B – Embracing electricity to cut your bills at home (for existing homes);
- Attachment C – Victorian new build emissions forecast.

Internal modelling analysis was undertaken to support the development of the above factsheets with the key inputs detailed in Attachment D – New and Existing Home Electrification Savings Key Assumptions.

**Question 2:**

**Danny O'BRIEN:** *Okay. The note in the questionnaire says that that money was, among other things, used for engaging traditional owners. How much was spent engaging traditional owners?*

**Chris MILLER:** *Thanks for the question, Mr O'Brien. We have certainly spent quite a bit of time engaging with traditional owners. All 11 traditional owners corporations have been engaged over the course of last financial year and this financial year. The outcomes of that are reflected actually in the SEC's strategic plan, which talks in the introduction about the relationship principles and, post following building our relationships with traditional owners. I would just have to take on notice, Mr O'Brien, exactly what the costs associated with that engagement were.*

**DEECA response:**

The SEC has been engaging with Traditional Owners through the First Peoples Assembly as well as directly through Traditional Owner Corporations. No money has been spent engaging consultants or paid to Traditional Owner Corporations.

**Question 3:**

**Danny O'BRIEN:** *Okay, that would be great. Thank you. While I am on energy, can I ask, on page 45 of the questionnaire there is a \$4.3 million Treasurer's advance:*

*... to support a large energy user according to the conditions defined in the support agreement.*

*Can anyone tell me who the large energy user is and what that was for?*

**John BRADLEY:** *Sorry, could you just give me –*

**Danny O'BRIEN:** *I am going to hazard a guess it was Alcoa at Portland.*

**John BRADLEY:** *I would like to check and take it on notice if I could, Mr O'Brien.*

**DEECA response:**

The payment was to support a large energy user according to the conditions defined in the support agreement. The details of the current support agreement are commercial in confidence and details cannot be released.

**Question 4:**

**Danny O'BRIEN:** *Okay. Can I continue with the SEC, perhaps, Mr Miller. How much of the money allocated to the SEC so far has been spent on SEC branding and products – things like mugs, tote bags, caps, jelly beans and the like?*

**Chris MILLER:** *Mr O'Brien, I do not have those details right in front of me, so I can take that on notice.*

**DEECA response:**

The SEC has produced engagement material as part of its remit to engage industry, students and families in the SEC's objectives to accelerate Victoria's energy transition, help householders go electric, and create the renewable energy workforce of the future.

The total spend on engagement material to 30 June 2023 was \$5,863.

**Question 5:**

**Carolyn JACKSON:** *Thanks, Mr Bradley. Thanks, Ms McArthur. The Victorian government has committed \$4 million over four years to support the surveying and mapping work that is required to create the parks through legislation. This has enabled the recruitment of six dedicated resources within the Surveyor-General Victoria to undertake this work. In March 2022 the Surveyor-General Victoria commenced preparatory work on the park plans required to create these three national parks, two conservation parks and seven new and expanded regional parks through legislation. This work includes detailed land status checks, confirmation of road alignments, investigations of encroachments and identification of any freehold inliers. On-ground surveying and mapping to support the preparation of park plans commenced in the second quarter of 2023 and is anticipated to continue for the next three years. It is common for the preparation of these plans to create a national park to take 12 or more months depending on the location and size of the park and the complexity of the boundaries and boundary issues. That work has started and is underway, and once that is completed we will then be looking to introduce legislation into the Parliament.*

**Bev McARTHUR:** *Have you had any consultations with Indigenous groups or other groups on how you are going about all this?*

**Carolyn JACKSON:** *I do not have the specific details, but there has been consultation to date on the work that is underway.*

**Bev McARTHUR:** *Could you get us the specific details on notice?*

**Carolyn JACKSON:** *I am happy to take a question on notice.*

**DEECA response:**

There are currently five Traditional Owner groups with recognised interests over the land on which the parks will be established. These are the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (Djaara), Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, Taungurung Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) has engaged with the Traditional Owner groups, and will continue to do so, to understand their current level of interest in the new parks, how they would like to be involved, and what support from government is required to enable their involvement.

**Question 6:**

**Bev McARTHUR:** *Terrific. Recommendation 4 of that investigation, which the government has partially accepted, states that:*

*Upon government acceptance of VEAC's recommendations, relevant land is to be managed in accordance with those recommendations.*

*Has there been any management of the three proposed national parks, in line with this recommendation?*

**Carolyn JACKSON:** *I will need to take that on notice, Mrs McArthur.*

**... John BRADLEY:** *And also, just to supplement if I could, Ms McArthur, there is progress towards implementing the response through of course the immediate cessation of commercial timber harvesting in Wellsford in addition to the Bendigo Regional Park and an embargo on the granting of new exploration licences in those parts of the proposed new national parks which are not currently covered by exploration licences. As Ms Jackson said, we have begun the engagement process with traditional owners whose country incorporates the proposed parks, and through the Victorian great outdoors package work is well underway now to upgrade recreational facilities in the central west parks, including upgrades at Ditchfield, the Glut, Richards, Mugwamp and Chinamans campgrounds in the Mount Cole area. Planning is underway or nearing completion for the Wombat four-wheel drive tour, Wombat walking trails and the Firth Park projects, with the commencement of on-ground works delayed pending the completion of some storm and flood recovery works required to restore access to those sites. So there is some work underway.*

**DEECA response:**

The Victorian Government's response to Recommendation 4 stated that the Government will manage public land in accordance with the intent of the Government response to accepted recommendations, within the constraints of existing legislation, relevant policies and land management obligations, noting that fully implementing some of the responses will require legislation and some particular recreational activities may continue in some parks until the legislation is in place.

Work in line with this response has included placing an embargo on the granting of new exploration licences in those parts of the proposed new national parks which are not currently covered by exploration licences, and upgrading various recreational facilities and planning for a Wombat four-wheel drive tour and Wombat walking trails in the Wombat Forest.

In addition, forest produce licences allowing timber harvesting in parts of the proposed parks will cease by 30 June 2024.

**Question 7:**

**Bev McARTHUR:** *And since the Secretary has mentioned Mount Cole, have any steps been taken to revoke the game sanctuary?*

**Carolyn JACKSON:** *I am not aware of that, Ms McArthur.*

**Bev McARTHUR:** *Does the Secretary know?*

**John BRADLEY:** *I am not aware, Ms McArthur. We are happy to take that on notice.*

**DEECA response:**

It is proposed to revoke the Mount Cole Game Sanctuary as part of the Bill to create the Mount Buangor National Park. This comprises the existing Mount Buangor State Park and part of the Mount Cole State Forest. This Bill is expected by 2026.

**Question 8:**

**Phuong TRAM:** *I think it is probably a more detailed answer than I will have to hand. The Victorian Forestry Plan then transitioned to the forestry transition support once the government announced bringing forward the end of native timber harvesting to 1 July. The investment that was made as part of the Victorian Forestry Plan in 2019 was repurposed and scaled up to provide support for business, community and workers, so that is a package of supports that is available for everyone. We do not have that itemised; it is just compensation provided to sawmill businesses for timber volumes unrealised based on the contracts they have with government, standdown payments offered to harvest and haulage operators for work that they are unable to do and worker support payments available for eligible workers of up to \$150,000.*

**Danny O'BRIEN:** *Okay. I assume you will not be able to give us data on payments to individual workers or companies, but can we get a breakdown of the grants to the recipient organisations? So that includes the ones that have gone to local councils, local areas, industry and business. Is it possible to get those?*

**John BRADLEY:** *Mr O'Brien, I might be able to assist with some of those details. Under the local development strategy grants that were being provided to councils, in 2021–22 a total of \$3.2 million in local development strategy grants was awarded, which includes Wellington Shire Council to deliver the Yarram and Heyfield local development strategies at \$720,000; Benalla rural city, \$360,000; Yarra Ranges Shire Council, \$500,000; Upper Murray Inc. to deliver the Corryong local building strategy –*

**Danny O'BRIEN:** *Secretary, could that be provided on notice, given I have now run out of time?*

**John BRADLEY:** *Sure. Of course.*

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

**DEECA response:**

***Industry and business payment***

The VicForests Annual Report 2022-23 indicates that the amount provided for sawmill customer compensation was \$109.5 million. Similarly, the amount paid to contractors as compensation for the year was \$40.8 million.

***Community and Local Councils***

Under the Local Development Strategy the following grants were provided:

**2021-22**

In 2021-22, a total of \$3.2 million in Local Development Strategy grants were awarded to:

- Wellington Shire Council, to deliver the Yarram and Heyfield Local Development Strategies: \$720,000
- Benalla Rural City: \$360,000.
- Yarra Ranges Shire Council: \$500,000
- Upper Murray Incorporated, to deliver the Corryong Local Development Strategy: \$360,000
- East Gippsland Shire Council, to deliver the Swifts Creek Local Development Strategy: \$500,000



- Baw Baw Shire Council, to deliver the Noojee Local Development Strategy: \$360,000.
- Murrindindi Shire Council: \$400,000.

2022-23

In 2022-23, most of the Community support programs were well underway. One Local Development Strategy grant was awarded in 2022-23, being \$500,000 to the Nowa Nowa Community Development Group.

**Question 9:**

**Mathew HILAKARI:** *Just on community involvement, I have been to Werribee Zoo to plant there and Victoria University in East Werribee. Can you just talk to some of the other community organisations that are involved in this program?*

**Carolyn JACKSON:** *I might have to take that on notice, if I can. I do not have the number or the types of community organisations. As I mentioned, there have certainly been over 3,000 volunteers that have taken part, but I do not have those community groups with me.*

**DEECA response:**

There have been many community organisations involved in the More Trees for a Cooler Greener West program.

The Werribee River Association has been allocated grant funding in phase two and three for tree planting projects within the Werribee River Park. This has translated in the planting of over 10,000 trees.

Friends of Lower Kororoit Creek have been instrumental in guiding the delivery of a new urban forest made up of 3,000 trees and shrubs in an area of high urban heat at Brooklyn.

Other community groups involved in projects and tree planting activities include Friends of Melton Botanic Gardens, Friends of Maribyrnong Valley, Avondale Heights Football Club, Avondale Heights Cricket Club, Rivervue retirement village, Nature West, Rotary (Keilor East and Kensington), Club 60 Tarneit, Tarneit Harmony Club, GenU, the Karen Aunties and Uncles, Wyn Tree Friends group and Koala Clancy Foundation.

*Note: this is not an exhaustive list of the community organisations involved.*

**Question 10:**

**Mathew HILAKARI:** *so we are really getting some brilliant things happening there. While we are on biodiversity, I might take us to budget paper 3, 2021–22 state budget and page 40. There is a quote there around the unique biodiversity protection through community-driven action program. Could I just hear a little bit more about some of those community-driven biodiversity action programs?*

**Carolyn JACKSON:** *Sure, happy to. It might be one that we perhaps take on notice, because I do not think I could answer it in 4 seconds.*

**DEECA response:**

The 2021-22 State Budget provided \$51.9 million over four years for ‘Unique biodiversity protection through community-driven action’ initiative. This funding continues Victorian Government’s long-standing support to environmental volunteering and Landcare.

Victoria has a strong history of environmental volunteering. Volunteers, including Friends of groups, Landcare and Coastcare, make an enormous contribution towards protecting and improving the state’s environment, our local communities and the economy.

Volunteering efforts underpin the outcomes of *Protecting Victoria’s Environment - Biodiversity 2037*, Victorian Government’s plan to stop the decline of our native plants and animals and improve our natural environment.

In 2022-23, over 213,500 volunteers undertook 1.92 million volunteer hours that represented an economic contribution of almost \$85 million<sup>1</sup>.

In 2021-22 and 2022-23 this funding contributed to a range of community-driven outcomes for the environment, including by:

- Continuing the important work of 80 part-time Landcare facilitators, who support 740 Landcare and environmental groups and enable community driven action, with over 18,300 active volunteers contributing over 421,000 volunteer hours;
- Supporting Landcare and environmental volunteering groups to deliver 206 on-ground projects with that delivered over 23,000 hectares of revegetation and weed and herbivore control – equivalent in size to almost 13,000 MCGs;
- Engaging over 7,800 young people in hands-on projects who contributed 9,800 hours and planted over 15,700 indigenous plants to improve habitat for native animals;
- Supporting Traditional Owners with their aspirations for caring for Country and connections with Landcare to work together by funding Landcare for Country Officers employed by three Aboriginal organisations;
- Delivering Regional Landcare Coordination working in partnership with Catchment Management Authorities to build the capability of groups, networks and Landcare facilitators with over 1,600 participants attending training, workshops and field days;
- Providing a range of resources and training to support environmental volunteers and Landcare facilitators to build capability and acknowledging and celebrating the outstanding achievements of volunteers through the Landcare Magazine and Volunteering Naturally report; and

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteer economic contribution has been calculated using an estimated hourly rate of \$44.16. This hourly rate is based on extrapolated 2017-18 ABS volunteer data, using annual wage increases.

- Supporting more than 100 wildlife shelter operators and foster carers to rehabilitate and release injured wildlife.

### Question 11

**Ellen SANDELL:** *Okay, thank you. On a different topic, as you would likely be aware, 55,000 square kilometres off the coast of Victoria's Otway Basin has been released for seismic surveying by TGS through a special prospectors authority. In what ways has the Victorian state government enabled the delivery of surveying for offshore gas in Commonwealth waters off the coast of Victoria? For example, was there any investment made in port infrastructure or other infrastructure that enables boats to undertake this surveying?*

**John BRADLEY:** *If it suits, I might ask Chris Webb, our Acting CEO of Resources Victoria, to join us at the table. He might have some detail for you on that. Chris, if you do not, then we will take it on notice, but I am not aware of any information that could assist.*

**Chris WEBB:** *Thank you. I do not have it at a detailed level, but what I can talk about is that the releases that are out in Commonwealth waters are subject to regulation by NOPSEMA and they are then referred to us for assessment locally, and we have our jurisdiction within three nautical miles, so those assessments are done. There is a significant environmental management plan as part of that, and then we reassess that under our local provisions.*

**Ellen SANDELL:** *I understand all of that. I guess my question is more around: has there been any investment by government to enable that to occur, such as in ports, or also perhaps has there been any funding granted for research into the impacts of it, for example, which might be one for Ms Jackson?*

**Chris WEBB:** *Yes, it is not really my portfolio.*

**John BRADLEY:** *I am not aware of one, but we will take that on notice.*

### DEECA response:

DEECA, through its regulatory arm, the 'Earth Resources Regulator' administers the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* (Vic) which regulates all offshore activities (including seismic surveys) that are undertaken for the purpose of petroleum exploration and development within the Victorian coastal zone (low tide mark to three nautical miles offshore). This regulatory framework includes the requirement for project proponents to have environmental and operational plans in place showing what risks certain activities may create and how these risks will be managed. This includes best practice regulation of the impacts of seismic surveys on marine life.

However, DEECA is not involved in, and does not provide any means to, enable the delivery of surveying for offshore gas in coastal waters or Commonwealth waters.

**Question 12:**

**Ellen SANDELL:** *That would be great. Thank you. I appreciate that. Just to Ms Jackson as well about the central west proposed parks, you talked before about the surveying having started. Do you know how much of the boundary survey has already been completed?*

**Carolyn JACKSON:** *I do not. I can take that on notice. It is the surveyor-general that is undertaking that survey work.*

**DEECA response:**

The Victorian Government has committed \$4 million over four years to support the surveying and mapping work that is required to create the central west parks through legislation. In March 2022, Surveyor-General Victoria commenced work to prepare the plans required to create the three national parks, two conservation parks and seven new and expanded regional parks through legislation. The work to prepare the park plans is on-track, with the initial focus being the proposed Wombat-Lerderderg National Park.

Surveyor-General Victoria has completed 100 per cent of the desktop research and investigation for this park, with the survey assessment phase estimated to be 90 per cent complete and plan production approximately 60 per cent complete.