

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne – Thursday 23 November 2023

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Ellen Sandell

Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Tim Ada, Secretary,

Heather Ridley, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services,

Peter Betson, Deputy Secretary, Sport and Experience Economy,

Danni Jarrett, Deputy Secretary, Industry, Trade and Investment,

Lill Healy, Deputy Secretary, Skills and Employment,

Beth Jones, Deputy Secretary, Regional and Suburban Development,

Daniel Rodger, Executive Director, Investment and Procurement,

Claire Febey, Chief Executive Officer, Creative Victoria,

Dr Xavier Csar, Chief Executive Officer, Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery, and

Julian Lyngcoln, Deputy Secretary, Economic Policy, Projects and Coordination, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes. Its aim is to assess what the government achieved in both financial years compared to what the government planned to achieve.

All evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

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

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

I welcome the Secretary of the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions Mr Ada – you are very much welcome here – as well as other officers and officials you have brought alongside you today. I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 10 minutes. After this time the committee will ask you some questions.

Visual presentation.

Tim ADA: Thanks, Chair, and good afternoon, committee members. At the outset I would like to just acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathering this afternoon and pay respects to elders past, present and emerging.

The former Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions became the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions on 1 January 2023. I joined the department as Secretary at the end of March this year. My short presentation this afternoon sets out the department's ministers, operating context and purpose; financial year 2021–22 achievements of functions that moved to other departments effective 1 January this year; and DJSIR's 2022–23 achievements. The PAEC questionnaire response that was provided is inclusive of functions of the then DJPR and the new DJSIR covering the last two financial years. In line with the advice provided by the committee secretariat, I understand the focus of today's hearings will be on questions related to the functions of the department that it is from 1 January this year.

To that end, around 15 machinery-of-government changes accompanied the establishment of the new department this year. Key incoming functions included the training and skills and higher education functions from the then Department of Education and Training, Invest Victoria administrative office from DTF, responsibility for Breakthrough Victoria from DPC and consolidation of functions that make up the outdoor recreation portfolio. Key outgoing functions included the agriculture and resources portfolios moving to DEECA, local government to the Department of Government Services and racing to the Department of Justice and Community Safety. These MOG changes have substantially changed the complexion and size of the department but also created the opportunity for some new synergies and outcomes.

As at 30 June 2023 DJSIR supported nine ministers spanning 15 portfolios, which is what is reflected in the department's 2022–23 annual report, tabled in Parliament on 1 November this year. Following some portfolio changes in October this year and as of today, the department supports the ministers and portfolios that are represented on this slide. Of note, we are progressing two further machinery-of-government changes, with the suburbs portfolio moving to the Department of Transport and Planning and the medical research portfolio coming back to the department from the Department of Health.

This slide lists the numerous public entities that are attached to the department's portfolios. The department invests significant effort in supporting our ministers with the governance and oversight of these entities.

This slide summarises the department's core purpose. DJSIR is focused on growing Victoria's prosperity; building the productive capacity of the economy; and increasing participation in the economy, creative industries, sport and recreation – or in shorthand, supporting prosperity, productivity and participation. This purpose is set out in the department's new 2023–27 strategic plan that was published in August this year. The department operates across 20 sites in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria and in 23 international posts.

This slide summarises some of the key challenges and opportunities facing the department over the last two financial years. Specifically, the department played a key role in administering economic support during the periods of COVID-19 restrictions and for recovery and revitalisation initiatives, including administering a total of 3.17 million grant payments during the pandemic. It administered economic support and advice for impacted businesses and sporting and recreational organisations following the October 2022 floods. It implemented training and skills, skilled migration and other talent initiatives to help address skills and workforce shortages. And the department's programs and services are being delivered in a dynamic post-pandemic environment, with low unemployment and high inflation creating both opportunities and challenges for workers and businesses.

This slide summarises some of the achievements of the functions in the former department in 2021–22 that subsequently moved to other departments in 2022–23. A selection of these achievements include supporting the entry of over 3000 seasonal workers to Victoria in the agriculture portfolio; design and early development of the Australian Institute for Infectious Diseases in Parkville, in the medical research portfolio; funding of 43 community infrastructure projects and 14 library projects in the local government portfolio; and funding of 68 broadband infrastructure upgrades and 11 new mobile base stations commissioned in regional Victoria.

I will now turn, for the balance of the presentation, to summarising some of the achievements of the department in 2022–23, starting with training, skills and higher education. The department worked to expand eligibility and access to subsidised training courses, including by increasing Skills First subsidies; processed almost 2.7 million claims for \$927 million in Skills First payments, providing funding support for up to 276,000 students; the Reconnect program helped re-engage 1562 participants from disadvantaged cohorts with a pathway to education and training; continued to support the recruitment of what were 821 apprentices and trainees by 30 June employed on Big Build sites; developed the *Clean Economy Workforce Development Strategy*, a 10-year time framework for planning and investment in the skills and training needed to meet the state's net zero commitments; continued to support the delivery of 56 capital works projects at Victoria's universities, funded through the Victorian Higher Education State Investment Fund; and the inaugural Victorian skills plan was also developed in this year.

The industry and innovation group facilitated investment projects that supported 1771 jobs and \$1.3 billion in capital expenditure. It also launched the Victorian medtech skills and devices hub and established the new Cremorne Digital Hub; supported the operations of LaunchVic and Breakthrough Victoria, the two government

entities charged with growing the startup sector and supporting growing commercialisation of R and D and new technology; supported almost 2900 people through digital skills initiatives via the digital jobs program, supporting mid-career workers to build their digital skills; and nominated more than 15,000 skilled and business migrants. Small Business Victoria delivered targeted programs, capability-building initiatives and advisory services, including the business recovery and resilience program, noting over 21,000 one-on-one mentoring sessions were delivered since the program launched in August 2020, helping more than 6000 businesses navigate the challenges arising from the pandemic. Support was quickly provided for businesses after the October 2022 floods, with over 7700 businesses provided grants to assist in their immediate clean-up and recovery, and the Victorian Small Business Commission resolved almost a third of its 2028 disputes before going to mediation.

The trade and investment group supported economic growth by facilitating international investment in Victoria, helping Victorian businesses trade into global markets and growing Victoria's share of international student enrolments. FDI attraction activities in 2022–23 secured 2549 ongoing jobs, over \$332 million in wages and over \$625 million in innovation expenditure. Global Victoria supported over 3000 Victorian firms to achieve just over \$700 million in export sales through participation in government programs, including inbound and outbound trade missions, and the government also launched *Victoria's International Education: Recovery Plan 2025*, with the vision to drive recovery and innovation in the sector.

The employment group's focus in 2022–23 was supporting people into job opportunities and helping to boost labour supply and build a more inclusive Victoria. Through Jobs Victoria the employment group enabled just over 18,000 disadvantaged Victorians to gain employment, including women, young people, Aboriginal Victorians, refugees and people with a disability. The group also administered the sick pay guarantee, the government's pilot safety net for casual and contract workers to access sick and carers pay.

The department's Aboriginal economic development unit worked to help embed the principles of self-determination into the department's policies and programs. The group drives the implementation of the *Yuma Yirramboi* strategy, which has the ambition to achieve economic parity for Aboriginal Victorians within a generation. In 2023 substantial progress was made in a number of areas, including developing culturally safe employment models, financial literacy training and business mentoring programs, growing the Aboriginal business sector in its export readiness and supporting traditional owners to set their own economic priorities. In our department's new strategic plan we have identified growing Aboriginal economic development as one of eight departmental strategic priorities.

In 2022–23 visitation picked up significantly, with around 27.5 million domestic visitors and 1.4 million international visitors. The government released a new 10-year plan, *Experience Victoria 2033*, to grow the state's visitor economy. The group continued to support the delivery of almost 150 tourism infrastructure projects. Forty major events were supported during the year, noting that there was record attendance at a number of these. The group supported the provision of more than \$100 million to support community sport infrastructure across 215 projects and delivered more than 50,000 vouchers under the active kids voucher scheme. The department also led the planning and early preparations for hosting the 2026 Commonwealth Games during 2022–23, noting the government's ultimate decision in July of this year.

In addition to supporting the effective function of the state's creative agencies in 2022–23, Creative Victoria invested more than \$10.6 million to support over 100 Victorian artists and creative groups. It supported 27 screen projects and launched the \$5.4 million screen industry skills and training package to support Victoria's digital games, TV and film professionals. The department progressed the design and construction of the \$1.7 billion Melbourne arts precinct transformation, with major works getting underway on upgrades to the Arts Centre Melbourne's theatre building, and 10.8 million visitors attended Victoria's creative institutions.

And lastly, some of the achievements of the regional and suburban development group: the group supported the work of the nine regional partnerships as well as 225 regional economic development and service delivery projects in 2022–23, it supported eight suburban revitalisation boards and six metropolitan partnerships and it supported the delivery of 393 projects across metropolitan Melbourne. Thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Ada. It is very much appreciated. I am going to hand over to Mrs McArthur to kick off the questions.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Maybe, Mr Ada, I could go to you first. How many people were originally employed to run the Commonwealth Games?

Tim ADA: Thanks for the question, Mrs McArthur. At the time of the government's decision in mid-July, there were 91 people employed in the Office of the Commonwealth Games, which was a business unit in the department. There were about a similar number employed in the organising committee, which was a company that ran external to the department. There were also a small number of other people in the department that were supporting Commonwealth Games preparations.

Bev McARTHUR: How many are still on the payroll?

Tim ADA: For the cohort of what was 91 Office of the Commonwealth Games staff, about 40 staff have either left the Office of the Commonwealth Games for other roles within the Victorian public service or outside of government, which leaves about 50 staff from the former Office of the Commonwealth Games. Mrs McArthur, indeed all Office of the Commonwealth Games staff were redeployed very soon after the government's decision to support the mobilisation of the government's regional package. Indeed some former Office of the Commonwealth Games staff are now supporting the close out of Commonwealth Games activities, including the support for a number of inquiries and audits that are underway.

Bev McARTHUR: Can we get a list of all those staff? On notice?

Tim ADA: Can I take that on notice, Mrs McArthur?

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, terrific. Thank you. What is Commander Weimar doing now? He was in charge of the operation, wasn't he, on a \$2 million package?

Tim ADA: I do not think his salary was nearly that high, but his annual salary –

Bev McARTHUR: It is in total.

Tim ADA: Sorry, in total, okay. Sorry, Mrs McArthur. I understand Mr Weimar –

Bev McARTHUR: Commander.

Tim ADA: finished with the organising committee at the end of October, and I confess to not know what he is currently doing.

Bev McARTHUR: And he would have had his contract paid out, I imagine?

Tim ADA: That is likely Mrs McArthur, yes.

Bev McARTHUR: What about the Indigenous affairs director? I think that was a quarter-of-a-million-dollar package. Is that person still – or did they just have the contract paid out?

Tim ADA: The Indigenous affairs –

Bev McARTHUR: Director, for the Commonwealth Games.

Tim ADA: Oh, the Indigenous affairs director. The board of the organising committee, Mrs McArthur, would have overseen the payments made to staff when they left the organisation. I would have to take that question on notice. I am not familiar with that position.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you very much. Was the Visit Victoria delegation that was overseas at the time of the cancellation aware of the cancellation prior to the announcement?

Tim ADA: I understand the government spoke to the chair of Visit Victoria, and I spoke to the CEO of Visit Victoria just prior to the government's announcement.

Bev McARTHUR: Is the department aware of any tenders on Commonwealth Games projects or contracts that need to be paid out that have not yet been released?

Tim ADA: I think I can check with Ms Ridley, but I am of the understanding that most of the contracts that we held have now been terminated without penalty. I am aware of one complaint that has been raised with the department that we are working through.

Bev McARTHUR: What is that about?

Tim ADA: A firm that has contacted the government about a tender process that we are working through. Outside of that, there are no other matters to report, Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: When did you inform Minister Shing that lawyers had been called in to provide advice on the potential cancellation of the Commonwealth Games?

Tim ADA: I did not advise Minister Shing, Mrs McArthur. As I think I told the select committee at the hearing in early October, I was advised on or around 19 June by the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet in strict confidence and advised that Minister Shing would be told by a member of the government, which I understand she ultimately was some days after.

Bev McARTHUR: So why wasn't Minister Shing advised on 19 June when you found out?

Tim ADA: I do not know, Mrs McArthur. I do not know, but I was –

Bev McARTHUR: Nothing to do with the department or your role?

Tim ADA: No. I was told at the time that Minister Shing would be told by a member of the government and that was not something that I was required to do.

Bev McARTHUR: Who would have had the job of telling her?

Tim ADA: Well, it was put to me that a member of the government – presumably the Premier or the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery at the time.

Bev McARTHUR: Did you have any other communication with Minister Shing on that topic between 19 and 22 June?

Tim ADA: No. Certainly not on that particular topic, because I was told very clearly by the Secretary of the department of Premier that that was not something that I was allowed to divulge. It is possible that I spoke to Minister Shing on other matters related to her regional development portfolio. I would have to check my diary, Mrs McArthur.

Danny O'BRIEN: Secretary, is it common that a departmental secretary would be specifically precluded from sharing vital information about a portfolio with their minister?

Tim ADA: The usual practice, Mr O'Brien, is that secretaries are required to advise ministers of matters of materiality.

Danny O'BRIEN: That was my next question.

Tim ADA: That is certainly the approach I take to this role. I also take quite seriously when the head of the public service talks to me about a matter such as this one, so –

Danny O'BRIEN: You have got competing bosses on this one.

Tim ADA: That is how I felt at the time, Mr O'Brien, yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: So it put you in a very difficult position, presumably, because your public service standard would expect you to keep your minister informed.

Tim ADA: That is right, and that is certainly the approach I have brought to this role over the last eight months.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, we feel for you, Mr Secretary, in that situation. What role did DJSIR have in preparing the brief to the Treasurer dated 22 February 2023 and described as ‘Budget supplementation: Commonwealth Games resourcing’?

Tim ADA: Can I ask you to repeat the question, sorry, Mrs McArthur?

Bev McARTHUR: What role did DJSIR have in preparing the brief to the Treasurer – budget paper 3, page 178 – dated 22nd February 2023 and described as ‘Budget supplementation: Commonwealth games resourcing’?

Tim ADA: I do not know the answer to that question, unless one of my colleagues does. 22 February 2023?

Bev McARTHUR: Correct.

Tim ADA: It was before I started in the organisation. I just do not have with me the nature of that brief.

Bev McARTHUR: Maybe somebody could find out and get back to us on notice?

Tim ADA: The only other thing I would add, Mrs McArthur, is that we obviously support Minister Pallas in his capacity as now the Minister for Economic Growth. We obviously would not brief him on matters outside that portfolio. That is a matter for the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Danny O’BRIEN: I guess what the question is getting at, Secretary, is that this was specifically about budget supplementation on the Commonwealth Games, which was then your portfolio. Does anyone else know? I appreciate you were –

Tim ADA: No. Looking at my colleagues here, I would have to take the question on notice.

Bev McARTHUR: If you could just search it out, that would be great. We will get it on notice. And perhaps you might have to take this on notice: when was the work to form that bid started?

Tim ADA: My understanding is again I think I have provided this information to the select committee, Mrs McArthur, that the department – the Office of the Commonwealth Games – led a piece of work over late 2022 and early 2023 to identify in light of the decisions the government had taken, including host contract requirements during the course of 2022, what the cost would be to deliver the games as they were defined. I think I have told the select committee that the responsible minister was briefed in early March and then a submission was considered by ERC in April. I can only suspect that preparation of that was underway by the time I joined the department in late March.

Bev McARTHUR: And which minister sponsored that budget bid?

Tim ADA: Which was considered by ERC, about the cost of the games? That, from recollection, would have been the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, who had the lion’s share of the responsibilities for the delivery of the infrastructure and the operations of the organising committee. I believe it would have been that minister.

Bev McARTHUR: And when did you learn it had been successful – or your department, if it was before your time?

Tim ADA: Which –

Danny O’BRIEN: Unsuccessful.

Bev McARTHUR: Unsuccessful, sorry.

Tim ADA: The submission in April was not endorsed, and as I have said to the select committee previously, we were asked to go away and do further work. I would have been told the outcome of that following the meeting; I just do not recall the day. I just do not have that in front of me, but again, I can let you know.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you very much. That would be helpful. Let us go now to the Australian Grand Prix. I refer to budget paper 3 of 2022–23, page 270. The Australian Grand Prix Corporation annual report

reveals that the government's contribution to funding the Australian Grand Prix has increased significantly from \$12.477 million in 2021 to \$78.1 million in 2022 and in 2023 over \$100 million. What were the primary drivers behind the increased contribution?

Tim ADA: Mrs McArthur, I might ask Mr Betson to respond to you.

Peter BETSON: In terms of the drivers for the increase from the \$78.1 million to the \$100.6 million, they were attributable to increase in event costs related to global increases in freight fees and the introduction of F2 and F3 racing to the event schedule. That was the difference between the \$78.1 million and the \$100.6 million, noting there was an increase in attendances of 419,000 to 444,000, which did lead to an increase in revenue from sales. But the net result in terms of cost increase was attributable to those two factors between those two years. In relation to historic changes, I have further information here. In terms of the 2022 F1 and prior costs that you were quoting from 2018 and 2019, there were a number of factors that led to that increase: exchange rate movements related to payments made to F1, inflationary costs associated with the event, as well as costs associated with event delivery with growing attendances, where the event went from 295,000 in 2018 to the 444,000 in 2023.

Bev McARTHUR: So did Victoria's contract renegotiation contribute to this increase? In other words, were you not any good at negotiating a better deal for Victoria?

Peter BETSON: The contributors to the cost were the introduction of F2 and F3 and the freight fees. They led to a program that led to a significant increase in attendances for the event –

Bev McARTHUR: In what area? How much did it increase by, that particular –

Peter BETSON: I do not have the breakdown in terms of the difference between the F2 and F3 costs in freight fees, but I am happy to –

Bev McARTHUR: Provide it? That would be terrific. And would you expect the government – in other words, the taxpayers – contribution to rise again in 2024?

Peter BETSON: In terms of the AGPC, we follow an annual budgeting process, so it is a bit premature to forecast the effect of future costs and how they might affect the gross or net result for AGPC. But that will be published, as it always is annually, in the annual report.

Bev McARTHUR: But given inflation and all these other factors – if they want improvement in their contract or something – surely you would be factoring in what might be happening in the future. It is not very far away.

Peter BETSON: They would be factoring in a number of things, including trying to grow attendances and grow revenue and looking at efficiency savings within the business, so it would be a combination of factors driving revenue and cost, one would expect, yes.

Bev McARTHUR: So you have told us that you increased the number of patrons attending the event, but on page 39 of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation 2023 annual report it shows there was an operating outcome for the Australian Grand Prix suffering a \$90 million collapse, from a profit of \$60.5 million to a staggering \$30.8 million loss. So you have increased the patrons, but they have gone down the gurgler a bit.

Peter BETSON: Well, in terms of sales revenue, they have increased sales revenue by \$20 million, and they have had increases in expenditure, which I said has led to that net result in terms of the government investment. In terms of the particular matters to which you are referring in the annual report, I would have to take that away on notice and refer that question to the AGPC.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you. Secretary, I am not sure who this should go to, but it is about the Victorian mRNA vaccine manufacturing capability – budget paper 3, page 80. I refer to page 80, specifically the output initiative of the 'Moderna mRNA vaccine manufacturing facility'. On page 80 it states:

Funding is provided to secure Moderna's Australian pharmaceutical manufacturing facility, Australian Headquarters and Regional Research Centre in Victoria ...

How much funding has been provided?

Tim ADA: So the amount of funding provided, like is the case for a number of international projects which are footloose, is commercial in confidence, Mrs McArthur. But I will ask Ms Jarrett if she has got anything further to add.

Danni JARRETT: Thanks, Secretary. Thanks for the question, Mrs McArthur. As the Secretary said, it is a commercial-in-confidence contract that we entered into with the Commonwealth government as well. But I would say that the project is on track for delivery with the construction of the manufacturing facility located at Monash University.

Bev McARTHUR: This commercial-in-confidence excuse is becoming quite convenient so that the taxpayers of Victoria or Australia cannot get a handle on actually where their taxes are going. If government through taxpayers are investing money in these operations, isn't it right and fair that in the transparent process of this operation we know exactly how much money is being invested in these operations?

Tim ADA: I think the thing I would say, Mrs McArthur, is the vast majority of grants provided by the department are declared and published and announced, but there are –

Bev McARTHUR: 'Vast majority'?

Danny O'BRIEN: We have been having fights with Mr Phemister on this for about five years.

Tim ADA: I am talking about grant programs generally in the department. If you are talking specifically about foreign direct investment, then clearly a number of projects – and it has been convention as I understand for a number of years, many years, that the state is not wishing to telegraph to other jurisdictions what its financial incentive might be to attract an investor. That has been a longstanding policy, I understand, Mrs McArthur. I, clearly, and the department favour transparency, which is why I made the point about the annual report. And indeed many grant programs are announced by the government, including the amount of money. There are clearly a number of projects that the government classifies as commercial in confidence for the reasons that I have said.

Danny O'BRIEN: Can I just follow up on that? This has been annoying me for a long time, Secretary. How can the government – and I appreciate it is not your department – announce funding to support offshore wind developers, including foreign direct investment, because most of them are actually foreign, and be quite up-front – \$21 million for Star of the South, \$5 million for this one? Where is the consistency?

Tim ADA: Look, it is a good question. Probably the delineation – and I am not trying to move away from the point you make, Mr O'Brien – is that clearly offshore wind is a government commitment that the government has made commitments to around generation capacity and timing, and they have chosen to talk about the investment the state will be making in pursuit of that opportunity or that commitment. Our business, related to the attraction of private sector foreign direct investment, is a little bit different in the sense that those firms have got choices. I am not wanting to make an artificial distinction, but –

Danny O'BRIEN: I am pretty sure there are plenty of choices in offshore wind, Secretary. And I do not mean to have a go at you on that, because it is not your department.

Tim ADA: I understand.

Danny O'BRIEN: I will not take up any more time of Mrs McArthur's, but there is a great inconsistency in government on this issue and far too much of a lack of transparency.

Bev McARTHUR: Given how important vaccines have become in our world these days – and the spin was that the state's investment would support the production of 100 million mRNA vaccine doses in Victoria every year from 2024 – aren't we entitled to know what the investment is?

Tim ADA: Danni, I do not know whether there is anything you want to add to the question. We understand the question. It is a good question. I have tried to explain the principal reason for why those investments are not made public at the risk of telegraphing the state's position, effectively on an open market. It is with that in mind that the government has declared these projects are commercial in confidence. That is the rationale. I am not sure if there is anything you want to add to that.

Danni JARRETT: The only thing I would add is it is an incredibly competitive industry globally from a pharmaceutical perspective, and many of these global pharmaceutical companies are incredibly protective of their contractual obligations that they enter into around the world.

Bev McARTHUR: Perhaps they should not have taxpayer investment then. Let us go to fishing. In March 2022 the then Premier announced that the state government would deliver Australia's first offshore wind farm. Given wind farms have the capacity to impact key commercial fishing grounds, what discussions have taken place with the commercial fishing sector on the potential impacts of offshore wind farms?

Tim ADA: I might refer the question to Ms Jones.

Beth JONES: Thanks, Ms McArthur. I would need to get back to you on the specifics of that question. Fisheries came into the department this year. I can certainly take on notice the specifics of that question, but what I would say is that it is very much a part of the work of the VFA to be having those sorts of conversations in relation to interface with commercial development and recreational issues.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, just because we are running out of time, for instance, the Lakes Entrance fishing fleet and the cooperative have the highest seafood input of any port in the state. What discussions or consultations have been made with that sector? If you could get back to me –

Beth JONES: Yes, Ms McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: That is fantastic. I will go to Mr O'Brien, if he has got something to ask.

Danny O'BRIEN: No. I would be very interested in that, though, too, Ms Jones. We have got 10 seconds left. I know the industry is getting more and more concerned about being squeezed out altogether. The issue will be Commonwealth waters as well, so Victoria needs to take a lead with the Commonwealth as well as the industry and the fishing industry.

Beth JONES: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. We will go straight to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Secretary and officials, for joining us today. Secretary, I would like to start with community sport. I note that in the 2022–23 budget, budget paper 3, page 73, there is a commitment of \$88 million for local sport as well as active recreation infrastructure. Can you please talk to me about what has been delivered under this program and the benefits that have been able to be achieved for local communities in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, both combined, out of this program?

Tim ADA: Thanks for the question, Mr Galea. I might ask Mr Betson to respond.

Peter BETSON: Thank you. The 2022–23 state budget provided total output funding of \$88 million to meet Victoria's demand for local sport and active recreation infrastructure. The initiative included \$55.5 million towards 61 community sport infrastructure projects across the state. It also included \$30 million towards delivery of the 2022 Local Sports Infrastructure Fund, with five streams as part of that infrastructure fund. Stream 1 had indoor stadiums and aquatic facilities; stream 2, female-friendly facilities; stream 3, community sports lighting; stream 4, community facilities; and stream 5, planning. There was also \$2.5 million towards the 2022–23 country football and netball program.

Community sport and recreation projects, we know, have significant benefits to Victoria and Victoria's community. KPMG has done some work for the department, which has been published, highlighting that investment in community sport infrastructure delivers a \$7 billion economic benefit to the state, of which there are significant economic benefits in terms of jobs, through construction and the ongoing operation of these facilities, but also significant benefit in terms of preventative health benefits that go along with people being more physically active as well as social benefits. We know through community sport and community clubs that social cohesion really drives improved outcomes for society in general, and we have been able to quantify those significant benefits to the state.

As part of the funding that was provided, there were a number of projects that are also supported. So we have multiple sports, including active recreation, that are supported as part of that investment, and it has been an

investment that has been around for a number of years and one that is really important in terms of really ensuring we get really good participation outcomes for the community. If you build modern infrastructure – in particular for women and girls and female-friendly facilities for which we have seen a really significant increase in participation in women's and girls' sport, particularly from traditionally male-dominated sports – the infrastructure is really critical to the state and a really welcome investment.

Michael GALEA: Fantastic. I will come back to female-friendly – actually I might even raise that now because it such a good project, these female-friendly facilities that have been upgraded. I know one facility in my electorate which is getting an upgrade, which is fantastic to see, but the current situation is not that great for the boys even. They have got to walk through the kitchens to get to their change rooms. The girls are even worse because they have to walk all the way outside around the building to get to their very limited, very small, very dingy change rooms. So we are very much looking forward to that project in my community as well, which will be part of these programs. But I understand the local sports investment fund, which is also outlined in page 85 of the same budget paper, is also going to be assisting directly to help people who have disabilities or other accessibility issues and helping them to actually access sport as well. Can you please talk about that and what that has been able to achieve?

Peter BETSON: So the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund has a number of components to it, including supporting people with a disability and including universal design. So those infrastructure fund arrangements, in particular ensuring that the design of those programs provide accessible outcomes for people, are really critical and really important. We know with the government's recent announcement of \$40 million into all abilities that investments in that space are really critical, and we have seen an uptick in participation of people with a disability since 2016–17, and that is really critical to ensure the infrastructure and the equipment. And then the programs and services are really critical. So in addition to the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund, through our Together More Active program, we also support programmatic investment for coaches and training to support programs that support people with a disability, and it is encouraging to see that some of the recent data has supported an uptick in participation. But there is still a long way to go because people with a disability are behind those in the general population, but we look forward to continuing to work with the community.

Michael GALEA: Obviously, and as you mentioned, there are other programs that factor into this as well, but in broad terms, since 2016–17, can you give me an indication of what that uptick has looked like?

Peter BETSON: Yes. It is around about a couple of percentage points since 2016–17. I will just go to my other points here for you. In terms of people with a disability, there has been an uptick of a couple of percentage points in relation to people with a disability. There were 14,200 extra participants between 2021–22 and 2022–23. And the data point I have here is 2018–19 to 2022–23 – add an extra 80,000 people participating, those who identified as having a disability through the AusPlay data, in terms of participation three times a week.

Michael GALEA: Those are quite big numbers.

Peter BETSON: Yes. They are. There is a long way to go, but it is encouraging.

Michael GALEA: Very good. And we did just mention before as well female-friendly facilities. Can you talk to me to specifically about that? I understand that there is a fund dedicated to that as well. Can you talk to me about that program and how that has gone over the two years in which we are looking at as part of this period?

Peter BETSON: In terms of the Female Friendly Facilities Fund, that is a significant stream and component of the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund. What we have seen is significant investment over the period in relation to community sport and sport infrastructure. Sorry, I am just finding my numbers for you. In terms of the funding available for female-friendly facilities and the number of applicants submitted, we had 28 applications submitted as part of a 2022 round. We supported \$11.7 million in terms of the investment into female-friendly facilities, which was a very welcome investment for that program. That was of the total of \$23.8 million approved through the total program of that year.

Michael GALEA: Great, thank you. I know how important local football and netball clubs, not to mention others as well, are in my electorate in the south-east suburbs, and usually they are even more so in regional areas, of course. So can you talk to me about – I understand there is also the country football and netball

program specifically for those regional towns – what that program has been able to achieve in the last two years as well, and what have you been able to deliver through that program?

Peter BETSON: The country football and netball program has been a longstanding program, importantly developed in partnership with Netball Victoria and AFL Victoria. We know that country football clubs and netball clubs being joined provides a unique opportunity for investment for the state and engaging with community for women and girls, and boys and men as well. Investment in that program has been incredibly successful. To 30 June 2023 we supported 11 projects in the country football and netball program with an amount of funding of \$2.55 million. All grant agreements have been executed and payments processed and projects are underway in that program, so it is another successful and well-received program.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Mr Betson. I understand, Secretary, we might have the CEO of Creative Victoria here today?

Tim ADA: We do. I will ask Claire to come up.

Michael GALEA: I will direct the question to you at first, and then you can defer as necessary. I would like to ask in particular about VicScreen: what has been able to be achieved since the peak of the COVID pandemic in terms of the Victorian screen industry, and how has that program through Creative Victoria – welcome, Ms Febey – been able to support that very important industry?

Tim ADA: Thanks. Claire, I assume you heard that question, which was really about VicScreen's operations and achievements.

Claire FEBEY: Yes. Thank you for the question. VicScreen, as you might know, is a whole-of-government plan as well as an entity to invigorate Victoria's screen industry. We are looking to create jobs, to foster new talent and to generate economic value. The strategy was launched in May 2021, and it guides the Victorian government's record four-year \$191.5 million investment, which was responding to the global opportunities and challenges in the screen industry.

This is about knowing the sector and making sure that Victoria is established as a world-class screen centre. Over the course of its lifespan the strategy is set to deliver 40,000 project jobs and inject more than \$1.2 billion into the Victorian economy. We are two years in, and outcomes to date show a very healthy Victorian screen industry that has bounced back from the COVID-19 pandemic. VicScreen consistently delivers against the key priorities in the strategy while also responding to emerging opportunities and challenges that have come up along the way. Since the launch of the strategy, taking us up to 2022–23, VicScreen has secured up to 22,721 project jobs in the state and injected more than \$825 million into the Victorian economy. VicScreen is investing in local content and IP, and since its launch, taking us up to 2022–23, the Victorian Production Fund has supported 125 Victorian film, television and online projects, generating a further \$275.2 million for the state's economy and 9751 jobs, or the equivalent of 2105 direct FTE.

Substantial economic activity and jobs have also been delivered through VicScreen's flagship Victorian screen incentive program. This is aimed at securing large international productions for the state, and since its launch, taking us up to 2022–23, the program has generated \$611 million in Victorian production expenditure and 13,457 project jobs, or around the equivalent of above 4660 direct FTE. They also have continued to deliver key industry development initiatives. These include the key talent placements program and specialist placements program, and they have supported 203 screen industry professionals over 2021–22 and 2022–23 through a range of funded screen placements.

Also a recent achievement: the digital games, visual effects and animation vocational pathway expression of interest is soon going to provide up to \$3.6 million for a new dedicated training initiative that is going to help meet the growing demand for jobs in the digital games and visual effects sector. The value of this ongoing work has been bolstered by the recent Victorian digital screen rebate initiative, so another new initiative. This rebate will attract more digital games and visual effects projects to Victoria, creating more jobs in this fast-growing, future-focused global sector, and again strengthening our position as a global screen industry leader. In 2023–24 the Victorian government will expand further on the VicScreen strategy commitment, with a further \$10 million committed to a pilot program to deliver a dedicated Victorian digital games and visual effects rebate. They are just some of the things that have happened so far through that four-year strategy.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. It is a quite a lot. I think the figure I heard was an \$825 million economic benefit just from projects that this strategy has supported, which is very significant. So that is really, really exciting to hear. It sounds like as well that the local screen industry has really strongly bounced back. This is literally the post-COVID period we are looking at in these budget outcomes hearings today. It looks like there has been a really strong bounce-back in that period. Would that be fair to say?

Claire FEBEY: Yes, that is correct – yes, recovering very strongly.

Michael GALEA: How have we compared in comparison to other states around Australia in terms of the current state of our industry but also that bounce-back as well?

Claire FEBEY: Well, I think the thing to know about Victoria is it is a place where people do really want to do business in a screen space. You might be aware that in digital games we have a strength that is nationally recognised, so we have more than 50 per cent of the digital games businesses that exist nationally right here in Victoria. What we are known for is delivering really narrative-based and really forward-looking content that people are wanting to take up all around the world. A recent game such as *Cult of the Lamb*, which was something that was developed right here in Melbourne, sold just within the first weeks of it being available to purchase around 1 million copies. One thing to say is that we are very recognised in Australia for our strengths in digital games. We are also able to offer global world-class facilities in terms of screen and other types of virtual production. So with Sound Stage 6 now online at the Docklands Studios Melbourne and also the introduction of new virtual production technology, it is a very attractive place indeed for international partners to come and deliver their screen content.

Michael GALEA: That is great. I actually recall that it was during PAEC estimates hearings this year when I first learned about the game *Cult of the Lamb*. It shows how much out of the cultural zeitgeist I guess I am, but I also had a lot of people messaging me when that was being discussed, saying, ‘Oh, that’s like my favourite game.’ It is great to see that that is a Melbourne innovation as well.

Claire FEBEY: It is.

Michael GALEA: You also mentioned Dockland’s stage 6, which we actually spoke about with Development Victoria the other day as well. What difference has that made for the local screen and digital and games industries in what they can produce and deliver?

Claire FEBEY: Docklands studio 6, for anyone that walks into the space, is unparalleled in terms of the size and scale of what it can do. It is a huge space where people can come in and create life-size sets of all types. There is also the provision for people to be able to build and film underwater, so it is a space that is quite unique in what it is able to offer. It really does put us on the map in terms of the sophistication of that offer – size, the professional nature of everything that is available and what can be done in Sound Stage 6. But to have it there, part of that precinct now, really means that we have something that is, no doubt, of international standing.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Every now and then we will see those big international projects, a film project or something being filmed in Melbourne. Does Creative Victoria have much of a role to play in that?

Claire FEBEY: Those partnerships are really through VicScreen – so Caroline Pitcher is the CEO of VicScreen. They, for example, would be the ones who are working to attract international productions, such as *Better Man*, which was the first thing to film in studio 6 after that build was completed on time and on budget – so Robbie Williams features in that. VicScreen would be leading all of the discussions that attract that type of international opportunity into our sound stages. Creative Victoria would fund government support to VicScreen in doing that.

Michael GALEA: Great. Thank you. And just lastly in this space, if I can ask as well around local content. Obviously it is very important for Australians, and Victorians more specifically too, to be able to see themselves on screen, and hopefully not just on reality TV shows, although they are a very important part of the screen industry as well and I am sure they –

Mathew HILAKARI: This might be a pitch.

Michael GALEA: This is definitely a very bad audition, if that is what it is.

Claire FEBEY: It is never too late to change careers.

Michael GALEA: What does the landscape look like now in terms of that local content, especially for scripted entertainment, and how does having agencies like Creative Victoria and VicScreen help to make that happen?

Claire FEBEY: It is really important for our screen industry that we have a balance of international opportunities and local content. There have been terrific investments through VicScreen in films that have become internationally really significant as well – *The Dry* is just one example of a fantastic piece of local content that was supported by VicScreen and happened in one of our regional towns. Obviously it is about seeing stories from this place told to people here in Victoria but also sharing those stories across the world. That is significant and really important as part of VicScreen’s investment. But it is also about what filming a production like *The Dry* or any of the many others that they support, what it does for that local town in terms of their sense of pride and confidence in being able to take up an opportunity as an extra one of those films or being able to see their local shop brimming with energy and patrons for the time that that is filming. I think just having that balance all of the time, thinking about the value of those Victorian stories being shared here and globally, but also how it enlivens places across Victoria, whether it is in the city, our suburbs or regions.

Michael GALEA: I am sorry, I did say that was the last question, but you have just prompted in my mind me to ask one more, and that is about regional Victoria specifically. With the great example of *The Dry*, I know there have been other shows such as *Glitch* that have also been filmed in regional Victoria. What is the landscape looking like for regional productions specifically and any particular projects that Creative Victoria has supported out in regional and rural Victoria?

Claire FEBEY: I wish I had at my fingertips – and I do not – the pipeline of exciting opportunities across regional Victoria. You can pop onto the VicScreen website and you can see there the immense list of towns, places, halls – even a local hall in my community – that are listed there as opportunities to film and to create content. I know there is a really rich pipeline, and perhaps with the committee’s support I could table some further details of what we can see coming up ahead.

Michael GALEA: That would be great, thank you. We will take that on notice as well. Thank you, Ms Febey.

Secretary, if I can also ask in terms of the skills space, international education is obviously one of our most important industries, and speaking of things that have bounced back significantly since COVID of course, can you outline the state’s strategy for restoring and stabilising that industry and where we are tracking, specifically over the two-year budget period that we are looking at?

Tim ADA: Thanks, Mr Galea. Ms Jarrett might answer that question.

Danni JARRETT: Thank you very much for the question. International education is indeed an incredibly important sector for the state, both through the involvement of all the universities and private providers and vocational providers as well as being our biggest export from a services sector. We are seeing a really strong return to international education and international students in Victoria.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mr Galea. We will go to Mr O’Brien.

Danny O’BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Secretary, can I return to mRNA manufacturing. Is the proposed facility up and running, in terms of the announcements that Mrs McArthur were referring to earlier?

Tim ADA: Mr O’Brien, the headquarters have been opened, I understand, here in the CBD, and as Ms Jarrett said earlier, the manufacturing facility is progressing as scheduled and co-located out in Monash University in Clayton. So that is well underway and progressing as scheduled. Is there anything you might like to add?

Danny O’BRIEN: When is it scheduled to open?

Danni JARRETT: In 2025.

Danny O'BRIEN: 2025. And it is on track at the moment?

Danni JARRETT: That is correct.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. The questionnaire indicates that over the two years there was an additional \$66.8 million added to the mRNA vaccine manufacturing capability via Treasurer's advances. That is well over twice the original \$30 million budget allocation. What was that for, and was it provided to Moderna for this facility? Pages 41–42 of the questionnaire if you are looking.

Danni JARRETT: Thank you.

Danny O'BRIEN: But I am sure you can trust me; I am a politician.

The CHAIR: I am not laughing!

Danny O'BRIEN: Endorsement – thanks, Chair.

Tim ADA: Just looking for the reference, Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: There are broad references to what it was for, but I am just trying to get to an understanding of – literally double the original amount – what it went to.

Tim ADA: The Treasurer's advance was required to support the establishment of the mRNA vaccine and therapeutic manufacturing, and it really goes to the contingency release based on the government's prior decision.

Danny O'BRIEN: So that is entirely for the Moderna facility?

Tim ADA: I am not sure. Do you know, Ms Jarrett?

Danni JARRETT: Yes. There were additional projects that were also supported that are mRNA related. It is really about building up the ecosystem in the state around mRNA capability in production and working with research institutes and the like and again to be very complementary to when the Moderna facility is up and running. That is a commercial-scale manufacturing site, and we are really wanting to lean in to mRNA being a leading medical research capability, not just for vaccines but also for RIP cancer and the like.

Danny O'BRIEN: Sorry, can I just clarify – because I think you just answered my question as yes, that money went to the Moderna facility.

Danni JARRETT: No, no, it went to other research projects that are complementary and will be aligned with the Moderna manufacturing facility.

Danny O'BRIEN: It refers to 18 investment and research projects in 2021–22 and a further 32 in 2022–23. That is where that money went?

Danni JARRETT: That is correct.

Danny O'BRIEN: Can we get a breakdown of the projects and the recipients of that money?

Danni JARRETT: We can provide you with more detail on that, yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: We can? Really?

Danni JARRETT: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Wow, okay. Great. Move on, Danny, quick, before they change their minds. Okay, moving on to another issue. The Victorian Skills Authority – the budget papers for 2021–22 indicated \$85.9 million to establish the Victorian Skills Authority. Given it is referred to as establishing it, we just wanted to know was that literally money to establish the authority or is it for the ongoing operation as well?

Tim ADA: Mr O'Brien, I might ask Ms Healy to respond to that.

Danny O'BRIEN: Ideally if we had a breakdown of what that money was for.

Lill HEALY: Thanks, Secretary. Thanks, Mr O'Brien, for the question. The investment of \$85.9 million for the skills authority was to establish and have an ongoing operating budget for the authority over the years through to 2024–25.

Danny O'BRIEN: So that actually pays salaries and for the operation.

Lill HEALY: It does. It covers the operation of the authority for all the work that it does, including, as you would be aware, the *Victorian Skills Plan*, which has just been recently released, that people might want to have a look at there on the website but also here on the table. It is for the full operation of the skills authority as part of the overall skills system.

Danny O'BRIEN: The budget allocation for 2021–22 was \$17.7 million, but the questionnaire response, at page 232, lists expenditure in that year as \$33 million. Can you explain why there is an almost doubling of the expenditure for that year?

Lill HEALY: There was additional expenditure of the \$17.7 million, as you say, in the budget paper. My colleague is just checking this, but just in addition to that there were existing funds from within the portfolio as we set up the skills authority, and what was previously, as an example, staff from the department were transferred across to the authority, so some of that funding was transferred across.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. So the \$17 million was the new funding, the new initiative.

Lill HEALY: That is right.

Danny O'BRIEN: And there was other existing funding that was reprioritised.

Lill HEALY: That is my understanding, yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Could I get a breakdown for the out years related to that 2021–22 budget as to what the total was spent on the Victorian Skills Authority –

Lill HEALY: We can follow that up –

Danny O'BRIEN: given that it is slightly different?

Lill HEALY: Yes, certainly we can take that on notice, Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Just on numbers also – page 232 of the questionnaire lists 57.8 FTE staff. Could you provide a breakdown of the executive level and non-executive level staff for the authority?

Lill HEALY: I am certainly happy to again take that on notice to give you precise numbers –

Danny O'BRIEN: That would be great.

Lill HEALY: but I think you would find the annual report would also have those numbers.

Danny O'BRIEN: Sure.

Lill HEALY: But I will follow that up for you.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you. And just to clarify too, there are 10 additional staff listed as part of a Treasurer's advance of \$1.5 million on page 73 of the questionnaire. Could you just clarify whether those 10 are included in the 57 FTE that I just referred to?

Lill HEALY: Again I will do that. That was for the regional specialists. I will follow up with some detail for you.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Has there been any increase in the budget for the skills authority in addition to the \$85.9 million originally allocated?

Lill HEALY: What has been allocated is what the expenditure has been and is projected to be in the forward estimates.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. You said money has been reprioritised, but in terms of additional money in the budget in 2021–22, that is all that has been provided?

Lill HEALY: That is right. I think the Secretary has found the answer to the executive question.

Tim ADA: Yes. There are four senior executive staff in the Victorian Skills Authority.

Danny O'BRIEN: And the rest are all non-executive?

Tim ADA: They would be VPS.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Page 28 of 2021–22 budget paper 3 refers to the Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy review, and former federal MP Jenny Macklin was appointed to chair that review. Can I ask: was that a paid position?

Lill HEALY: I would actually have to take that on notice. That was prior to my time in the role. Ms Macklin did lead that review, which then resulted in the improvements to the skills portfolio and in fact the creation of the skills authority, as you have just identified. I will take that on notice, Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Naturally, of course, my next question is: if it was a paid position, how much was it?

Lill HEALY: Thank you. I will take that on notice.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you. A question – I think it will go to Ms Jones. If she has disappeared, can I get Ms Jones back? No disrespect, Secretary; you may be able to answer it. Ms Jones, there have been significant reductions to the regional development funding in the portfolio in your section. Can you tell me how many jobs have gone in your section of the department in the two years in question? Perhaps the easiest way might be to ask: what was the full-time equivalent in your section in June 2021?

Beth JONES: I can actually give you the figure, Mr O'Brien, if you would like. I will just make sure I give you the right figures. Over the period that you have asked for we have had a reduction of staff of 23 positions.

Danny O'BRIEN: Twenty-three – literally from 30 June 2021 to 30 June 2023?

Beth JONES: Correct. Yes, that is correct, noting, Mr O'Brien, that that is the result of a consultation process with staff to make some reductions. Of course the FTE of Regional Development Victoria ebbs and flows in terms of core versus surge capacities as things come on and different programs are fixed, so there is some movement. But there was a 23-person reduction in the ongoing component of those staff.

Danny O'BRIEN: What is the 30 June 2023 figure – the total?

Beth JONES: The 30 June 2023 total just for Regional Development Victoria is – I will confirm this, Mr O'Brien – about 202 people.

Danny O'BRIEN: 202, right – so when we say 23, it was 225?

Beth JONES: Correct – roughly.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. I think this will be for you too. The Ready to Grow program – page 8 of the questionnaire talks about the Ready to Grow program creating local employment opportunities, addressing disadvantage and supporting local businesses and supply chains. Are you able to tell me how many jobs in total the program created?

Beth JONES: I would need to take the total number of jobs that that program created on notice, because they are created through about five different GROWs across the state, Mr O'Brien. But yes, I will take it on notice.

Danny O'BRIEN: My next question, and perhaps you might take this a notice too, is: how many did it create in Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Shepparton and the Latrobe Valley?

Beth JONES: Correct. That is correct.

Danny O'BRIEN: If you can provide that breakdown, if you have it as well –

Beth JONES: Can do, yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: The questionnaire mentions there was an evaluation of that program completed. Is that able to be provided to the committee?

Beth JONES: I would need to take that on notice, Mr O'Brien. That was an internal evaluation done within the department, so I just need to take on notice whether that is something that could be released.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. This is a speculative question. I am aware that ministers or at least parliamentary secretaries go through leadership training. Indeed I think parliamentary secretaries are getting leadership training today. Is that funded through your department, or would that be DPC?

Tim ADA: I do not believe it is our department.

Beth JONES: No, not that I am aware of.

Tim ADA: It is more likely to be DPC.

Danny O'BRIEN: Righto. As I said, they are literally doing some leadership training today. The decision to discontinue the regional community leadership program, what informed that? I appreciate that was in this year's budget, but was there an assessment done in the period we are looking at now of the success of that program?

Beth JONES: There was some evaluation of that program done during the period of the two years, Mr O'Brien. Essentially the decision to discontinue that program was a decision of government. The funding for that program, Mr O'Brien, concludes at the end of this calendar year to see through the existing cohort of people in that program.

Danny O'BRIEN: If there was an assessment done of the success of the program, what did it find?

Beth JONES: There was some work done, Mr O'Brien. My recollection is that it talked about the value of the program to the participants in terms of some pathways for leadership for regional people –

Danny O'BRIEN: I guess the key question, Ms Jones, is: did it find that it was worthwhile continuing to fund it?

Beth JONES: There were certainly a lot of strengths to the program identified through the evaluation, yes.

Bev McARTHUR: But it is more important to fund the parliamentary secretaries.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, they are all getting looked after. And that is not Ms Jones's fault, because clearly it was a decision of government.

Bev McARTHUR: No, no, definitely not. It was a decision of government, clearly.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, I understand that. Has the department done any analysis now of the ability of those programs individually in the regions to go ahead without the ongoing state government funding?

Beth JONES: Mr O'Brien, there has been work that has gone on with the secretariat of the community leadership program across the state to explore different pathways for how those programs can continue. I know that that looks different in different places across the 10 leadership programs. But, sorry, if I could just go back to your specific question –

Danny O'BRIEN: Has the department done any analysis of whether they will be able to continue?

Beth JONES: No. We have just been working with the local providers to try, as best we can, to support the remainder of the delivery of the program and look at what other funding pathways there might be that could support that.

Danny O'BRIEN: Is there any indication from the 10 that any of them will have to fold?

Beth JONES: I am not aware of that, Mr O'Brien. I would expect there may be some folding of those leadership programs. I would expect that some would continue. But in terms of the exact decision for each one individually, I do not know that those decisions have been reached. I would need to take that away.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you. Moving to my old favourite, the Latrobe Valley Authority, the questionnaire indicates the department took an independent lapsing program evaluation of the Latrobe Valley Authority. Can that be provided to the committee?

Beth JONES: I would need to take that away and find out, Mr O'Brien. It is a practice that is common when a program is lapsing that there is an evaluation done to inform what has occurred and what may occur in the future. I would need to take away whether that is something that I can provide to you, Mr O'Brien.

Tim ADA: It just would have been appended to a budget submission, Mr O'Brien, so we can consult the government and come back to you.

Danny O'BRIEN: I think it may actually say that it was an internal review – or was it an external review?

Beth JONES: It was done externally but as an internal evaluation. But it was done by an external person.

Danny O'BRIEN: By a consultant?

Beth JONES: Correct.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. So you will come back to me whether it can be released. Can I ask how much it cost?

Beth JONES: I would need to come back to you on that as well, Mr O'Brien, in terms of the exact cost of that, unless –

Danny O'BRIEN: The Secretary is looking for it madly, so you never know –

Beth JONES: There you go.

Danny O'BRIEN: I might get lucky twice in a day.

Tim ADA: So many evaluations, Mr O'Brien. If we find it, I will come back to you.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you. I guess in terms of what did it find: the fact that the government has only funded the LVA for one more year again, does that suggest not a ringing endorsement of its work?

Beth JONES: Mr O'Brien, I cannot comment on why government has made the decision to fund that for one year. That is a matter for government. I know that the work of the LVA has certainly produced a whole range of outcomes against its objectives. As you would well know, it is deeply embedded in the community down there. The work of the LVA continues in a range of ways, but in terms of the decision, that was a government decision, Mr O'Brien, to fund it for one year, and government will have the opportunity to revisit that as a part of its budget process this year.

Danny O'BRIEN: So probably the question then, and I will put some context around it – LVA was obviously set up in the aftermath of the Hazelwood closure decision.

Beth JONES: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: In 2028 we have got Yallourn closing. In 2035 we have Loy Yang A closing – and B, actually, under the government policy. We have got 200 jobs lost this year at Maryvale over timber industry issues, and we have got countless other jobs from the native timber industry as well. Is the department doing

any work to provide advice as to what is needed for supporting Latrobe Valley and the wider Gippsland area in future?

Beth JONES: Yes, Mr O'Brien. That is core to our work in terms of providing advice to the Minister for Regional Development and government on exactly those matters. What I would say is that all of the things that you mentioned that are going on in the valley, and there are a lot of them – the LVA and RDV are at the heart of that in terms of support for forestry transition and the support for the continuing transition away from coal-fired power generation. As you know, Mr O'Brien, the Latrobe Valley transition plan has been released, and there is a big focus from the LVA on coordinating a range of efforts across that.

Danny O'BRIEN: I will not ask you to comment on that report, but I will offer the opinion that it was pretty flimsy. There were not really any outcomes. But probably the question is: with only one year's funding, how can the LVA or any other government agency pursue those recommendations for the future of the valley when they do not even know if they are going to be there beyond 30 June next year?

Beth JONES: That report has got about 52 recommendations and a whole range of activities identified in there, Mr O'Brien. The LVA has a role too. They convene a cross-government committee that is designed to think about how government coordinates across those actions. It is not just the work of the LVA that is captured in that document. The idea of it is to synthesise the work of business, community, government, Mr O'Brien. So that work goes on with a range of actors. The LVA has got a coordination role.

Danny O'BRIEN: Can I ask: if the LVA did not continue beyond 30 June next year, could RDV step in and continue that work?

Beth JONES: Look, that is a hypothetical question, Mr O'Brien. RDV has got a big role to play in terms of helping the delivery of that plan, and RDV and the LVA in Gippsland both work very closely – they have in the development of the plan, and they do in the coordination of it. The RDV will absolutely continue to play a role in that. At the moment it is the LVA that is doing the coordination. In terms of what the world looks like at the conclusion of this financial year, Mr O'Brien, I would be speculating.

Tim ADA: Mr O'Brien, just to add to Ms Jones's comments and just to reiterate the point, there is an expectation that whole-of-government endeavour and services in that part of Victoria are put behind the implementation of the actions and the recommendations in that transition plan. As Ms Jones said, the government have got an opportunity in the upcoming budget process to think about the resources that they will allocate more generally to support the implementation of those recommendations.

Danny O'BRIEN: If you want some more opinions from the opposition, you are more than welcome to give me a call, and I will have some suggestions.

Tim ADA: And I have found the cost of that external evaluation.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes?

Tim ADA: It is \$149,949.

Danny O'BRIEN: Am I allowed to know who did it?

Tim ADA: I do not have that here, Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: \$149,000. Thank you. Ms Jones, you mentioned some support with the LVA for the timber industry. I think there is a Treasurer's advance mentioned of \$700,000 for the LVA to deliver services to the timber industry and its workers. Are you able to provide a breakdown of what that money was used for and who it went to?

Beth JONES: I can take that on notice, Mr O'Brien, yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: So looking literally at the criteria for allocating that funding and also whether there will be an evaluation of the success of that funding when it is completed.

Beth JONES: Yes, Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: If you can provide me a breakdown of who and what it went to, that would be useful.

Beth JONES: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Just very quickly, regional car parks – the department received a Treasurer's advance for 1149 car parks in Ballarat and Latrobe Valley across 13 sites. How many of those car parks have actually been delivered in Ballarat and how many in the Latrobe Valley?

Beth JONES: Just bear with me, Mr O'Brien. I will get the exact numbers for you. As of this date, Mr O'Brien, there are 306 car spaces that are now available for use in the Latrobe Valley and Ballarat.

Danny O'BRIEN: 306?

Beth JONES: 306.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes.

Bev McARTHUR: How many in Ballarat and how many in the Latrobe Valley?

Beth JONES: Let me just –

Tim ADA: 113 in Ballarat and the balance in the Latrobe Valley.

Beth JONES: Thank you. 113 at Ballarat.

Danny O'BRIEN: When are the rest going to be delivered?

Beth JONES: There will be a further 34 spaces available in Ballarat at the end of January 2024.

Danny O'BRIEN: If you have the opportunity to provide that data on notice, because my time has run out, that would be great.

Beth JONES: Certainly, yes. I can give you a breakdown.

The CHAIR: We will go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair. On international education, if I can come back to the 2021–22 budget allocation funding directed to the international student industry, can you tell us what outcomes in terms of student enrolment the department has started to see so far?

Danni JARRETT: Thank you, Mr Tak. Since the reopening of Australia's borders in November 2021 our international education has seen encouraging signs of recovery, and between December 2021 and August of this year the number of students onshore in Victoria has increased by over 100 per cent, from around 68,400 students to 159,400 student visa holders onshore. The distribution of student visa holders in and outside Australia has largely been normalised to pre-COVID levels, and as I said before, in 2021 and 2022 international education remained Victoria's largest services export and is its third-largest export overall behind food and fibre and manufacturing. In terms of the value of international education to the state, in 2021 the sector generated \$6.9 billion in export revenue and supported around 41,000 FTE jobs. Between January and December 2021 there were around 227,000 Victorian international student enrolments and 86,600 commencements from over 170 countries. In 2022–23 Victoria's international education sector increased significantly in its export revenue, to \$8.4 billion, and supported around 43,000 FTE jobs. So clearly there is an increase. The sector is recovering, and the international student enrolments for 2022 are equal to 73 per cent of the 2019 enrolments, so it is getting back to where it was pre-COVID. The largest source country for international students is India, and it is the highest nationality for international students in 2022, with around 53,189 enrolments in 2022, followed by China, which is just behind at 52,678. Then rounding out the top five are Nepal, Vietnam and Sri Lanka.

Meng Heang TAK: Good to know.

Danni JARRETT: I will add that Victoria is ranked as the country's best student city, and globally we are ranked as the fourth-best student city.

Mathew HILAKARI: Not surprising at all.

Meng Heang TAK: The Education State.

Danni JARRETT: Exactly.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you so much. Also, with budget paper 2021–22 on page 86, it references operations of the Study Melbourne student centre and the global education network Study Melbourne hubs. Can you tell us about the service that these centres provide to students and the outcomes achieved from the government's investment in these initiatives?

Danni JARRETT: Thank you, Mr Tak. We have a Study Melbourne hub in Melbourne, in Hardware Lane, and that hub provides information and referrals and also supports quite complex casework to around 1500 international students. That is by way of counsellor support, emergency rent assistance and food vouchers for international students. We also have international Study Melbourne hubs in some of our international offices. We have a Study Melbourne hub in Shanghai, in Ho Chi Minh and in KL, I believe.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Now to the international student travel pass, which is very good. The budget paper 2022–23 also includes an initiative called the international student travel pass. Can you tell us more about this program – is it up and running, and what does it entitle students to?

Danni JARRETT: Absolutely. The international student travel pass was one of the initiatives that was included in the government's \$52.9 million international education recovery and growth plan for 2025, and that was announced in the 2022–23 budget. The student travel pass provides accessibility to and affordability of public transport in Victoria for international students by offering discounts on three-, six- and 12-month passes. It is eligible for international students, as I said, in Melbourne and regional Victoria. That is one initiative of the recovery and growth plan for international education, alongside the Study Melbourne hubs that I mentioned before. We also have 15 projects in 2023 for the Study Melbourne inclusion program, which is designed to provide wellbeing support and really build stronger connections for international students to the broader Victorian community, and also to deliver an empowered series, which delivers face-to-face support to more than 2500 international students, which achieves a 90 per cent satisfaction rate. Those programs are intended to deliver a range of strengths-based employability. Our focus with international students is not only to provide a high-quality and effective educational experience but to really increase their employability when they return home as well as while they are here in Victoria. There are a number of empowerment initiatives and building social capital and leadership skills for that international student cohort.

Meng Heang TAK: I am sure – this is a very interesting topic. Is there any question that you have?

Mathew HILAKARI: Sure. I am just wondering who are the other three places that are doing international education really well. You said we were one of the top four, I think.

Danni JARRETT: That is right. London, Tokyo and Seoul are the other leading cities.

Mathew HILAKARI: Is there anything that we could be understanding from them that could improve our own experiences in Victoria, or are we spending some time understanding that? Because we can always improve –

Danni JARRETT: Yes, that is right.

Mathew HILAKARI: and they are our competitors.

Danni JARRETT: Exactly. It is a very competitive space. It is a very good question. We do have international offices in each of those cities.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. Get some learnings from them.

Danni JARRETT: We certainly have our people engaging with those providers in those cities as well.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Sick pay guarantee – my question relates to the sick pay guarantee, especially question 3, section 3 of the questionnaire, details the outcome achieved, and also on page 92. I refer

to payments being provided to 71,349 workers in 2022–23. I am interested to know more about the kinds of workers who access the scheme. What was the industry make-up of these workers, and who received those payments?

Tim ADA: Thanks for the question, Mr Tak. Obviously it is a pilot initiative by the government. The government, when it was announced, identified a set of occupations, and then that was subsequently expanded significantly in August this year. I might just ask Ms Healy to talk to that question in more detail.

Lill HEALY: Thanks, Secretary, and thanks for the question. As you know, the sick pay guarantee is an Australian-first initiative, providing up to that 38 hours a year of sick and carers pay at the national minimum wage for casual and contract workers in eligible jobs. You have asked about what sorts of roles they might be. The way we go about determining the occupations that are eligible occupations is a data-driven methodology which effectively looks at insecurity within those industries. For example, we would be looking at the number or proportion of people casually employed in occupations. We do that through a data-driven methodology, and then we test that with our advisory committee, which involves businesses such as Ritchies and also industry bodies – AIG, VCCI – and other community organisations. So that is how we determine the occupations that are eligible. An example is: if you think about the retail industry, there is of course a lot of casual and insecure work there, so we have occupations where people are eligible. In fact as at November, now, I think we are up to 96,000 people who have registered for the sick pay guarantee – 96,682 Victorians have registered for the pilot. If I could add, we have a pretty positive set of feedback from those who have registered and used it. We use Service Victoria as our point of registration and contact and survey points. For example, 98 per cent of workers have provided really positive feedback via Service Victoria on the sign-up and their claims experience.

Meng Heang TAK: It is very positive to hear. On that positive note, how quickly are payments being made to those who are using the program?

Lill HEALY: It is really pleasing to be able to say that we actually have overachieved that target. We have 93 per cent of claims that are approved within the five days against the target of 92. That is actually important, because if people are having to take a day without pay, then that payment to them, particularly if they are in insecure work, is just critical. That is a high measure for a good reason.

Meng Heang TAK: You already alluded to this in terms of data, but what other demographic data do you have about those who are using the program?

Lill HEALY: We collect a whole range of data, and we are currently preparing an evaluation of the program, as it is a pilot. That evaluation is in process now, so I will take that question on notice in terms of the detail. But suffice to say as it is a pilot, and a pilot on an area that is really critical to the health of individuals and therefore our economy, we are looking at a very complex evaluation looking at productivity measures and a range of benefits that will come from that. So it is important that we do collect that data over a range of cohorts as well in terms of age and gender and ethnicity et cetera, as you would expect. If I can take on notice what I cannot tell you now, and then when we will actually have some more knowledge of that –

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. In terms of feedback, I understand that you are receiving it – and also it is very positive – from workers. Have you got feedback from employers or other stakeholders?

Lill HEALY: Yes. The government has a ministerial advisory committee that informs the design and monitors the ongoing implementation of the pilot and again assists with the impact there. We have that broad range of stakeholders. For example, the Centre for Multicultural Youth is one of those stakeholders. As I mentioned, there are industry bodies, business and also workers' representatives. Right across that mix we get feedback from groups, including business. What is really interesting is that if I think about the individual business represented on the committee, their interest is to ensure that they can retain a healthy workforce. Clearly they have a range of casual workers, so they are very keen to be right beside this pilot, because if this is impactful, there will be a lot to learn for business as much as there will for workers and others. So they are positive, around the table. It is up for grabs. It is a pilot, and we are testing it for those reasons.

It is also worth noting, I think, that now – being the first in Australia – that Victoria is doing this pilot, there is also interest from other jurisdictions about it. Again it goes back to the importance of our evaluation. Businesses are a critical part of that; they benefit. Business benefits by having a healthy workforce as much as the individuals obviously benefit for themselves and for the broader community.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you so much. It is enlightening to hear your response. Secretary, if I can refer you to the department's mission statement contained in budget paper 3 of 2022–23, page 245, 'More jobs for more people'.

Tim ADA: Yes, I have got that. Thank you, Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK:

the Department is helping to grow the economy by working with businesses to create and maintain jobs so more people have meaningful work that is safe and secure.

Can you outline how the department's activities over this time have helped to contribute to a strong Victorian economy?

Tim ADA: Thanks, Mr Tak. I touched on some of these points in my presentation earlier, but it largely goes to the work of the training and skills system, producing a workforce that business and industry in the private and the public sectors need to be able to deliver on their own business aspirations, and obviously the needs of the Victorian community. Developing a workforce with the right skills is a really important part of growing a productive economy, and then there is a suite of industry developments, trade and investment and small business services that we offer that go to helping lift the capability of businesses in Victoria through training and advisory services, grant programs to bring forward private sector investment that might not have happened as quickly, which goes to obviously boosting their own performance and productivity as an organisation, and then we used some examples earlier this afternoon about the work that we do to build the export capacity of Victoria, and also attracting many foreign companies to invest and build their business here in Victoria. So there is a broad suite of things both on the workforce development side of things and the business and industry development side of things, Mr Tak, that go to delivering on that mission statement, which is about creating more employment opportunities but also a more productive economy.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. And what sorts of cohorts are you targeting in these programs?

Tim ADA: Most of the businesses in Victoria are small businesses, so one of the things that we provide – I used some examples earlier, Mr Tak – are capability building and advisory services. There is the Small Business Bus that visits every LGA in Victoria every year. There is a range of information and supports, including wellbeing support, to small businesses in Victoria. I referenced a program earlier today that has supported 6000 small businesses to navigate challenges in recent years. Building the capacity and the resilience of the small business sector in Victoria is really important. The work of the Victorian Small Business Commission is important to avoid costly litigation. The Victorian Small Business Commission plays a really important role trying to bring those disputes into a forum where they can be resolved in a really efficient manner that avoids lengthy and costly processes for small businesses. That is an example I would use in terms of the work that our department does with regard to small businesses.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you.

Mathew HILAKARI: Particularly we have got some really great medtech programs going on, and I might actually take you to that specific one – the medtech skills and devices hub. We launched that over the 2022–23 period. Can you just talk a little bit more about that? I am happy to hear from others.

Tim ADA: I might ask Ms Jarrett to talk to that, Mr Hilakari.

Danni JARRETT: Sure. Thanks, Mr Hilakari. We have the funding for the Australian Medtech Manufacturing Centre, the AMMC, which attracted \$20 million for that establishment over three years. The centre works with health and industry partners to grow the medtech manufacturing sector in Victoria. It also is intended to grow local content in government health procurement and to strengthen collaboration across the manufacturing and medtech sectors. So there are a number of initiatives that the centre has supported around the medtech manufacturing capability program, which is a competitive grants program that has been awarded to 12 businesses. Some of those grants are to assist companies to establish, for example, high-volume injection moulding capability for device manufacturing. Medical devices is a highly competitive and growing sector, and it is a sector that Victoria is finding itself to be particularly competitive in, both in its support for local companies and also as an attractive location for international investment.

Mathew HILAKARI: And that fits so well with our leadership in biomed and everything that is going on in the Parkville precinct as well.

Danni JARRETT: Exactly. It really is part of building that ecosystem capability.

Mathew HILAKARI: Fantastic.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Jarrett. The committee is going to pause and have a short break. We will return at 3:15 pm.

The committee will now resume its consideration of the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions. Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Just going back to the mRNA issue – Ms Jarrett, you did say that the facility would be up and running in 2025, right, but we know from the budget paper that you are going to produce 100 million units from January 2024. So that is just in two months time. Are you producing them as they build the facility, or are they producing them somewhere else? Or are they not producing them?

Danni JARRETT: The facility is still under construction. So that construction is on schedule to be completed by the end of 2024 to open in 2025. When the facility is open, it will have the capacity to produce 100 million vaccines per year. So it is certainly not going to be producing them from January next year.

Bev McARTHUR: So the budget paper has misled us – is that right, Mr Secretary?

Tim ADA: Have you got a reference, Mrs McArthur?

Bev McARTHUR: Yes – where is it?

Danni JARRETT: It may be the allocation of the funding that that is referring to.

Bev McARTHUR: Hang on. We referred to it before in the beginning. It is just that you said it was going to open in 2025 but we know that the budget paper said that it would be –

Danny O'BRIEN: It is page 80 I believe.

Bev McARTHUR: Page 80, yes. They would be busy producing them by January 2024. We just wondered how they might be doing that. Or is the budget paper wrong?

Danni JARRETT: I think it is, if I understand, if I am reading it correctly, 'support the production of up to 100 million mRNA vaccine doses in Victoria every year from 2024'.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, yes.

Danni JARRETT: Well, I would say that at this stage – and this is obviously in discussions with Moderna – the schedule is that the facility will be completed by the end of 2024. I guess it is an interpretation of 'from 2024'.

Bev McARTHUR: Do you want to add anything, Mr Secretary? They are clearly wrong, the budget papers.

Tim ADA: I was just going to make the same point. My interpretation of the budget paper is 'from 2024' – being the facility completed in 2024 and the capacity to make the vaccines from 2025 onwards.

Bev McARTHUR: So we know that they are not going to be produced at all until 2025.

Tim ADA: No. The facility will not be complete until the end of 2024.

Bev McARTHUR: The budget needs amending, right.

Danny O'BRIEN: How can they be producing while they are building?

Bev McARTHUR: They could be and they could be doing it in a shed somewhere else, for goodness sake.

Danni JARRETT: I guess it could be argued it is the financial year of 2024–25. It could be an interpretation of that.

Bev McARTHUR: Oh, right, okay. That is a lovely interpretation as well. Okay, let us go to the Lumos Diagnostics–Planet Innovation rapid diagnostics manufacturing and innovation hub.

A member: A mouthful!

Bev McARTHUR: Now, this is budget paper 3 – wasn't I good to get through all that? – page 78. Budget paper 3 outlines the output initiative for Lumos Diagnostics–Planet Innovation rapid diagnostics manufacturing and innovation hub. Now, it said that this facility will produce up to 50 million COVID-19 rapid antigen tests per annum from October 2022. Were 50 million rapid antigen tests produced? Ms Jarrett?

Danni JARRETT: I can answer that if you like, Secretary.

Tim ADA: Ms Jarrett, yes.

Danni JARRETT: So the short answer is no, there were not. That project did not proceed as it was contemplated or presented in the budget papers. That project was subject to the company getting TGA approval, and it was a requirement of the project proceeding that then those tests were to be produced. Because it was not able to get TGA approval, those doses were not –

Bev McARTHUR: So the spin was that it would create at least 70 new jobs, but no jobs were created. Is that right, Ms Jarrett?

Danni JARRETT: Not under that particular project, no.

Bev McARTHUR: What investment was expended in this project that did not go ahead?

Danni JARRETT: Well, the project did not proceed, so the investment did not proceed.

Bev McARTHUR: So there was no investment in any form in that operation?

Danni JARRETT: No. That is correct.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. We are now going to Mr McGowan, the Deputy Chair.

Nick McGOWAN: One of my long-held passions, Secretary, is my interest in the Commonwealth Games – albeit I was very disappointed – and of course my interest remains in the mascot. Who handled the mascot and the development thereof over the reporting period we are talking about? There was going to be a mascot for the Commonwealth Games, is that not correct? Was it Banjo or Bongo or No-go or something like that?

Bev McARTHUR: Or Ms Shing's donkey, or –

Danny O'BRIEN: Donkeys.

Bev McARTHUR: Donkeys.

Tim ADA: I will confess to not knowing the name of the mascot. I should, but I do not. That was under the carriage of the organising committee.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. I am trying to understand whether we actually manufactured any of these poor mascots – whether they are out there, homeless, as we speak – or whether we expended any money in the periods we are covering.

Peter BETSON: That is a matter for the organising committee. We would have to –

Tim ADA: We would have to take that question on notice, Mr McGowan.

Members interjecting.

Nick McGOWAN: I suppose I would love a care bear of some sort after the trauma of losing the games. Yes, that would be a dramatic improvement upon getting nothing.

Members interjecting.

Nick McGOWAN: Trauma bears.

Members interjecting.

Nick McGOWAN: I suppose the serious point is: to the extent that you know in the reporting period, how much was spent on projects like the mascot and other things, where we actually bought – that is, we purchased – goods and/or services that were then not actually used in any way, shape or form? What concerns me is that we have got some warehouses somewhere full of – I do not know – key ring chains and pens that are never going to be used and these kinds of things, because presumably some people are very efficient and got on and did their job very efficiently. I am just keen to know whether we have got any taxpayer merch that perhaps we can flog at some point in the future.

Tim ADA: On that particular question, I would have to take that on notice. On the broader question about the funds that have been allocated, I think I made the point at the select committee last month that I anticipate the total cost incurred by the department, including grants to third parties like the organising committee and said commercial payments, will be up to \$200 million. As of the end of August, the actual expenditure is about \$173 million. Now, some of the effort, Mr McGowan, has obviously continued under some of the initiatives that the government has supported as part of the regional package. But as to your question on merchandise, of which there will be some, I will just have to take that question on notice.

Nick McGOWAN: That would be great. If we have any designs, I would be most interested to see what the design looked like, whether it was Banjo or Bongo or No-go or whatever it was called. That would be great.

On other matters, the establishment of the Victorian Skills Authority – I am referring here to budget paper 3, 2021–22. I am keen to understand what we received from the establishment costs. Back then it was \$85.9 million –

Danny O'BRIEN: We did that one, Nick, sorry, when you were out.

Nick McGOWAN: You have done that already?

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. Sorry. Apologies. Student numbers – are we on good ground there?

Danny O'BRIEN: Student numbers – you are on good ground.

Nick McGOWAN: Great. On student numbers, there was a claim that was made recently in respect to Victoria's reputation. I think I heard it earlier today. It might have been one of you here who was talking about our performance when it comes to international student numbers here in Victoria. It may be part of your report in fact, from memory.

Lauren KATHAGE: 53,000.

Mathew HILAKARI: 53,000, I think, wasn't it?

Nick McGOWAN: 53,000. On page 29 the trade and investment year in review report states that Melbourne was ranked first in Australia and the fourth best student city in the world, according to QS rankings. How, Mr Secretary, does the department explain that, given that Melbourne in fact is somewhat significantly behind New South Wales when it comes to numbers? Am I reading that correctly?

Tim ADA: The rankings you mentioned go to a ranking that is administered by a third party. As to actual student numbers and how we compare to other states, I do not know whether you have got that, Ms Jarrett.

Danni JARRETT: New South Wales has more international students than Victoria does, but as a ranking of being a better city for international students, the third party has ranked Victoria as offering a better offering to international students than other states in Australia.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. Thank you. I think I have got my answer there, don't I?

Danni JARRETT: Yes.

Nick McGOWAN: International investment outcomes – Secretary, can you tell us why the innovation expenditure generated from international investment secured through government facilitation services and assistance dropped from \$596 million in 2021–22 to an expected outcome of \$135 million in 2022–23.

Tim ADA: Have you got a reference, Mr McGowan?

Nick McGOWAN: Budget paper 3, page 247.

Tim ADA: Is it the 2022–23 budget paper?

Nick McGOWAN: Yes.

Tim ADA: Have you got the question, Ms Jarrett, or we might ask –

Danni JARRETT: No. I am just still looking for it.

Tim ADA: Could you repeat the question, sorry? I think I have got the table now in front of me.

Nick McGOWAN: Yes, sure. I am curious as to why the innovation expenditure generated from the international investment has dropped from \$596 million in 2021–22 to an expected outcome of \$135 million in 2022–23.

Danni JARRETT: Mr McGowan, are you comparing the actual to the expected?

Tim ADA: I am happy to take the question on notice. I cannot quite interpret the question from the table on that page reference, sorry, Mr McGowan.

Nick McGOWAN: That is okay. No, that is fine, if you could take it on notice. Further question: can you tell us why the jobs generated from international investment dropped on actual delivery from 3721 in 2021–22 to a projected 1250 in 2022–23? I suppose what we are interested in there is the trend – ‘Why is the trend going down?’ really is the question.

Danni JARRETT: I would speculate – so I do not think that the target has dropped as such, but in terms of the actual delivery the international investment market globally is getting more competitive, and so the nature and the number of jobs that are available as part of international investment projects that are being secured is lower than what they may have been in previous years, just in terms of the types of investments that are being secured into the state. As I said, the nature of those international investments is getting tighter where there are many other jurisdictions also bidding for international investments. So we are still meeting our targets in the budget papers, but they are not necessarily reaching the levels they were pre COVID.

Nick McGOWAN: Do you anticipate that that will actually pick up going forward?

Danni JARRETT: I think that the market is still in the process of stabilising. It may, but I would see that that would take some time.

Nick McGOWAN: Have you been able to identify the impediments to Victoria performing at its past, or coming up to part, in terms of its competitors?

Danni JARRETT: I would characterise it more as a reflection of global conditions, market conditions, rather than a reflection of Victoria's offering. We have seen very high employment, as you know, in the state, so the nature of the jobs we are also pursuing are arguably more at the level where we are looking for jobs that are at the higher end of the skill range, and higher value in terms of the wages that are attached to those jobs, so we are really pitching our investment-attraction efforts to the types of jobs that increase our productivity levels,

which are arguably less volume of jobs but higher value of jobs. So that comes with, again, a higher level of competitiveness in terms of the types of companies that we are looking to secure here.

Nick McGOWAN: I had an associated question – I think you have touched on it really – in respect to the wages generated from those investments as well which have dropped significantly over the same period. I am sure you have noticed that yourself. Again, is there something we can be looking to? Does that form part of the future strategy going forward, because clearly we would still be very keen to make sure we have –

Danni JARRETT: Absolutely, yes. We very much focus our pipeline efforts in terms of where we look at the markets, and the types of companies and the sectors that we are competitive in are very much focused on identifying where we can be as attractive as possible for those types of jobs and at the higher end of those wages.

Nick McGOWAN: Just going back to the students for a second, do we have a particular target? I have just got a note here in terms of I think we have gone from – we are expected to drop to 80 per cent of the market from a high of 94. Now, 94 is a high, but do we have our own target that you have developed over these years we are looking at in terms of what Victoria can expect, or pitch, certainly in the post-COVID environment, to international students?

Danni JARRETT: Number of international students, Mr McGowan?

Nick McGOWAN: Studying, yes.

Danni JARRETT: We are certainly looking to meet our pre-COVID figures, and that was a high, so our efforts are very much continuing to work with markets where we know we are strong but also looking at other potential markets where there is growth. The African continent, for example, is another area that we see as an opportunity to attract international students from. So we are always looking at consolidating different markets where we have strong student representation but also looking for new markets that are growth opportunities for us.

Nick McGOWAN: Do we project a year where we will actually go past our previous best?

Danni JARRETT: Not at this stage. We are really just looking to that continuous improvement, rather than having a target.

Tim ADA: Mr McGowan, we do not per se have a student target. We have got a market share target. It has been a longstanding BP3 measure which really goes to the share of the country's international students that are being attracted to Australia, and we are firmly focused on achieving a significant share of the national market. We have traditionally been just shy of a third, so one way to answer your question is that we remain focused on growing our market share, which is a relative measure of our attractiveness compared to other jurisdictions – principally New South Wales and Queensland.

Nick McGOWAN: Great. Thank you. Changing tack here slightly, arts – the Prahran arts precinct is in budget paper 3, page 67. Oh, I am stealing yours. Sorry. We can cooperate on that.

Tim ADA: We might just ask Ms Febey.

Nick McGOWAN: We are just keen to understand when the sale and the related planning matters – does that include when future usage will be completed?

Tim ADA: Actually, if you do not have that – Dr Csar. We are just pre-empting your question. Sorry, Mr McGowan. It is actually Dr Csar.

Danny O'Brien: It is a departmental conspiracy to steal our time.

Nick McGOWAN: I will ask again. We will keep going: in respect to the Prahran arts precinct, which was meant to be completed by the end of the 2022 calendar year, when will the sale and related planning matters, including the future usage, be completed?

Xavier CSAR: Thank you for the question. This is the former Swinburne site in Prahran, which the government purchased effective December of last year. The ownership has transferred, and in that time we have commenced, really, a consultation and strategic options piece of work. Around the middle of the year we engaged with stakeholders, tenants and so on. In fact currently, I think from 13 November till 13 December, on the Engage Victoria website we are engaging the community more generally about ideas around that site. We would expect early next year to have a sense of strategic options that stakeholders put forward, and that will then go into a master planning process and we will provide government with options around what you might do with that site.

Nick McGOWAN: Will that include any public housing component that you are aware of?

Xavier CSAR: That has not been a drive, but there are a range of views from a range of stakeholders about the various things you might do there, and it could possibly come up.

Nick McGOWAN: Page 125 of the questionnaire refers to the arts precinct – sorry, the Melbourne arts precinct – which had a cost increase of 162 –

A witness: Let us get Ms Febey.

Tim ADA: That will be a different question in a different portfolio.

Nick McGOWAN: A different portfolio – thank you.

Tim ADA: This just relates to the TEI for mapped projects, Ms Febey.

Nick McGOWAN: It does indeed, yes. A significant – I say, cost blowout, but it sounds like it is sensational when I say it like that. Can you explain how that occurred?

Danny O'BRIEN: That is what we are meant to do, be sensational.

Nick McGOWAN: That is right. We are just trying to be cognisant – it is late in the afternoon.

Claire FEBEY: Thanks for the question. I will just find my papers, but I will say there was an increase in the TEI that you have noted but that came with a significant increase in scope. Added to that in particular were the changes to the Arts Centre Melbourne – so the refurbishment of the State Theatre, for example, was part of that change. Yes, there was an increase to the TEI taking the total project to \$1.7 billion, but a significant change in scope came with that.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. I have a question here that says: there is a divergence between the figures on page 125 with the figures on page 119, which had the funding utilised at a different number of \$70.25 million spent for different stages – can you provide a detailed reconciliation of spending across the project?

Claire FEBEY: There are quite a number of entries about the Melbourne arts precinct transformation in the questionnaire. A number relate to Treasurer's advances and TEI. In general, nothing has changed about the total of \$1.7 billion. The funding is being managed to reflect the project management needs and the particular milestones of the project. Yes, I agree. There are quite a few entries to it, but it does not indicate any change in that total investment.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay.

Tim ADA: Mr McGowan, the first reference is to the total TEI for the project over the life of the project. The other one goes to annual cash flows and funding that is released from central contingency.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McGowan. We are going to go straight to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you so much. I am going to take us to the digital jobs program, and I will reference page 27 of the questionnaire. I think we have all seen a huge uplift in our digital capacities, particularly after COVID. We see it in some great investments in schools – for example, in the community that I represent with the Wyndham Tech School in East Werribee – and in members of our community who already

bring great capacity with their IT skills. Just yesterday we were talking about Service Victoria, which is getting accessed tens of thousands of times every day. All of that needs to be led by people with really good skills. So I am just hoping you can give me a bit of an update on how the program has been rolling out, particularly with reference points to the periods that we are looking into in this inquiry.

Tim ADA: I might just make a couple of very quick statements and then throw to Ms Jarrett, Mr Hilakari. As I mentioned in the opening presentation, the digital jobs program is particularly focused on building the digital literacy of Victoria's workforce, particularly focused on mid-career folk who are transitioning from one career to another. If anything, the pandemic accelerated the need for businesses and workers to have those contemporary digital skills. So that is the focus of the program and about 2900 people have been through the program very successfully to date. But Ms Jarrett might want to add to that.

Danni JARRETT: Thanks, Secretary. And to add to that, the digital jobs program has been very successful in meeting its intended objectives. Those were really to support older workers and women and culturally diverse Victorians to find jobs in the digital economy. Of those people who have been supported, 58 per cent of the participants were women, 65 per cent spoke a language other than English and 40 per cent were over the age of 40 across the life of the program. One example of the digital jobs program includes a person who worked in a childcare business for more than 10 years, re-skilled in cloud computing through the digital jobs program and then secured a work placement in ANZ and now works as an engineer in the bank's infrastructure and cloud services team. One other example is someone who worked in very non-technical roles, who really struggled to find secure, steady work. Again, he upskilled in cyber – cyber security is, as you would appreciate, a very important and emerging strategic sector for the broader economy – and was able to get a job at Carsales and now has an ongoing role as a cyber analyst with that company.

I will add that alongside the digital jobs program there is also a digital jobs for manufacturing program. Again that offers a number of different streams to support mid-career people and small, medium and large Victorian manufacturers, particularly in the streams of additive manufacturing, robotic process automation and computer-aided design manufacturing. Over 100 eligible manufacturing businesses were supported through the program, and that allowed up to 252 employees to undertake training in their chosen course.

Mathew HILAKARI: Were you delivering that training directly, or were you working with partners? And if you could outline some of those partners, if we are –

Danni JARRETT: Sure. We do work with partners for delivery in that program. We primarily work with Hudson and InternMatch. Both of those providers work to identify the selection of candidates as well as career coaching and the management of the training providers for participants in the program. InternMatch in particular works to place those interns once they have done the training, to find placements for those interns, who then, as has been the case for many of them, go on to find ongoing employment.

Mathew HILAKARI: Quite life changing as well.

Danni JARRETT: Exactly.

Mathew HILAKARI: Fantastic. Thank you for that. I might just take us to a different matter, one of those things that really dominated the 2022 year, which was the October 2022 floods. I am just hoping you could outline some of the involvement by the department and your role that was played in those floods, particularly for small businesses and the support that was provided to them.

Tim ADA: Sure, Mr Hilakari. Similarly, I might ask Ms Jarrett to supplement my comments.

Mathew HILAKARI: You are getting all of my ones there.

Tim ADA: The department is not a response agency per se for floods; our role is very much supporting business relief and recovery. The government made some allocations, including some programs that were cost-shared under the Commonwealth disaster funding arrangements, to administer immediate \$5000 relief payments to businesses in flood-affected parts of Victoria following the October 2022 floods. Then once businesses had had a chance to sort of gather themselves, there was a \$50,000 grants program for highly impacted businesses, which had some more onerous eligibility requirements and payments over time based on receipts and other things. That program actually closes at the start of next month, Mr Hilakari, and then we will

be standing up an audit and evaluation of those two programs once that program closes. From memory, 8200 businesses were supported by those two programs over the course of the last 12 months. I do not know whether you wanted to add anything, Danni?

Danni JARRETT: I think just to add, one of the challenges – and obviously very mindful of the impact that the floods had on small businesses – small businesses, as the Secretary said before, are one of the largest employers in the state and so they are very much also impacted by events such as this. So we were very keen to ensure that we provided the flood relief services within a fortnight of the floods happening, so that responsiveness.

Mathew HILAKARI: Did we meet that target?

Danni JARRETT: We did, yes. We were very cognisant of that, and as the Secretary mentioned, there were the two streams: the small business immediate flood relief program, which offered up to \$5000 grants for small businesses – and that stream is really the bulk of where most of the support was offered for businesses – and then the business relief service, which offered the \$50,000 grants support for companies, and that is really for hardest-hit areas, where businesses in flood-affected areas were supported through that grant program.

Mathew HILAKARI: What was the information that was required, particularly for those small businesses? Because if we are looking to get the money – and rightly – out the door within two weeks so they can get back on their feet, particularly for the communities that are then re-engaging with them, do we have a sense of what some of those requirements were, and was there satisfaction in general from those businesses?

Tim ADA: I was going to say, Mr Hilakari, there was a basic set of eligibility in demographics. But the \$5000 program, given the government's interest in the speed by which this relief was provided to impacted small businesses, also relied on an attestation of those businesses – that they met the criteria and the requirements, including that they were in a flood-affected area. That is something as part of the broader administration of the program we will be more broadly evaluating as part of the post-program audit that I mentioned to you before. Clearly the government was eager to make sure that these grants were provided quickly to support businesses that in many cases were still submerged.

Mathew HILAKARI: Fantastic. I am going to move to a different water issue, but one related to the Go Fishing Victoria program, which for reference is in 2021–22, BP4, on page 100. I might just start actually with boat ramp parking and launching fees, which is around phase 2 of the Go Fishing Victoria program, just getting a sense of how that has improved access for Victorians to go fishing. Getting out on boats within my own community, Werribee South is a really well used boat ramp. We see cars and trailers parked all the way around the streets of Werribee South as the area fills up and people get out on the water. I am just wondering what sort of difference the abolishment of boat ramp parking and launching fees has had.

Tim ADA: I might ask Ms Jones to respond to that question.

Beth JONES: Yes. I think in relation to, just as you said, a really growing opportunity, a really important outdoor recreational activity in the current environment, providing opportunities to do that in a cost-of-living constrained environment is pretty critical. So I think we are seeing more and more people take the opportunity to get out and about and really get boats into the water, get lines into the water as well. There are obviously two things happening there. There has been a range of initiatives through the Better Boating Fund that have really focused on taking those fees away, but also reinvesting into a whole range of infrastructure projects in terms of boat ramps and jet access and all of those things. It is part of a broader focus on how we are getting more people out in the outdoors and out on the water fishing, boating and enjoying the outdoors. In terms of an access issue, that has been pretty significant to open up opportunities every day.

Mathew HILAKARI: And fish stocking – could you just talk through some of the government's approach to fish stocking and the locations that that is occurring in, the sort of quantum of fish that we are stocking lakes with?

Beth JONES: Yes, certainly. Fish stocking is obviously a really significant part of the current programs and commitments. And in terms of the previous – sorry, Mr Hilakari, I am just getting some –

Mathew HILAKARI: That is okay. Fishing is a moment of relaxation, so take your time. Enjoy the serenity.

Beth JONES: Yes. Thank you. Just in terms of fish stocking, there was quite a bit through the Arcadia and the Snobs Creek hatcheries, and there has been significant investment in those facilities in terms of their ability to increase the production of fish. There were some challenges during the period in which this accounts and estimates relates to in terms of just seasonal conditions. I think we had during 2020–21 some reduction, but that has certainly recovered, and there has been some significant recent investment in fish-stocking programs through the last two budgets and into the 2023–24 period.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. Just in terms of some of the facilities that we are rolling out, particularly relating to safety, are you able to provide any updates on that?

Beth JONES: Any updates on that? Yes. In terms of the Better Boating Fund there are a range of components of that in terms of how that Better Boating Fund, which is of course fees from licence and registration renewals, gets reinvested. The focus areas for that are on infrastructure but also on marine safety. Some of that goes to Emergency Management Victoria – so a whole range of issues. So there is a really considerable safety focus as a part of that process. I do not have it in front of me, Mr Hilakari, but all of the locations of those places where we are making those safety upgrades are available on the website –

Mathew HILAKARI: Great.

Beth JONES: just in terms of lighting upgrades, safety upgrades in terms of facilities, upgrades to personal protective equipment on the waters.

Mathew HILAKARI: There are some really big fans of everything we are doing with fishing just rolling outside.

Beth JONES: That is it. Yes. So there are a range of programs. If I can go, Mr Hilakari, to – there was \$33 million that was generated in 2021–22, and \$19 million of that was into a whole range of programs, including safety upgrades at various locations across the state. And in 2022–23 there was \$32 million deposited into the Better Boating Fund, of which there were \$30 million worth of projects, including a whole range of safety upgrades as well.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. Fantastic. I am going to move to a different subject now, which is the agricultural workforce pilot program. Secretary, I am just hoping you could outline some of this program. You might pass it on to one of your colleagues here. And I will take you next after that, just so we are prepared for it, to CFA volunteer station refurbishments.

Tim ADA: Mr Hilakari, that program is being delivered by DEECA now as a result of the machinery-of-government changes.

Mathew HILAKARI: Oh, shocking.

Tim ADA: Probably to give you the best answer to the question, I suspect I could take that on notice or have it referred to the relevant department.

Mathew HILAKARI: I will take it on with them. I might just move then to skills and TAFEs and the apprenticeship growth strategy. I will go to the questionnaire and page 19, which is the apprenticeships growth strategy, and I am just hoping you could outline the program, particularly in relation to the Big Build and our clean energy commitments and how they are aligning together. As I think we are probably all aware on this committee, with those big infrastructure programs we do have an extensive focus on making sure we are upskilling and training up the next generation of really great workers, so I would be really pleased to hear about that.

Tim ADA: Sorry. Ms Healy.

Lill HEALY: Thank you, Secretary. Thanks, Mr Hilakari. So the investment broadly in Apprenticeships Victoria has a primary objective to really grow not just the number of apprentices serving our economy but to grow the diversity of the apprenticeship base in order to increase participation more broadly. And one of those

primary initiatives to do that was the Big Build implementation, which really has a goal to ensure that we increase the number of apprentices on government-funded projects. And as of November we are at over 1000 apprentices now through that project.

The broader growth strategy also has made significant investments in proactive, supportive projects that enable women, Indigenous people and people from non-English-speaking backgrounds to get a taste of apprenticeships and to be supported through those. And so the Apprentice Innovation Fund was the vehicle by which grants were made to a range of different organisations. I use women as an example – there is a project that was invested in called women in apprenticeships, and in fact they were just last week the winner of the national training award for diversity and inclusion in apprenticeships. And that has seen significant numbers of women coming in to a range of different sorts of apprenticeships – electricians is an example – and staying the course because the program works with the employers through group training organisations to do all of the things that need to be done to retain women in the workforce, examples being: having mentors, having facilities onsite that are appropriate for women, having cultural change as part of the employers' investment so that they actually understand how to work with different cohorts on what have been obviously traditionally male-dominated organisations. That is just another one of the examples in addition to the Big Build, where apprentices have been supported.

Of course for many of us this is not rocket science, it is just what you need to do to change a workplace to make it inclusive. But what we have seen through the Big Build program now and through things like the Apprenticeship Innovation Fund is that we have got significantly higher participation of those priority groups than the construction industry average. For example, 24.5 per cent of the Big Build apprentices are women, and that is more than double the industry average; nearly 7 per cent are Aboriginal apprentices; and about 6 per cent are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. So those are promising figures. They are not anything to stop the attention on, that is for sure – we have got a long way to go – but it does show that with dedicated, well-informed and user experience informed investments, where business and workers organisations and training providers are together planning how we do this, we can actually make a difference, and we have to make a difference. That is what the work of Apprenticeships Victoria and that broad growth strategy of course are all about.

If I could make one other comment that I think is important here, one of the things that we are also doing on the back of that work and consistent with where this is going nationally is that the government is investing through its apprenticeship taskforce to really look at some of the traditional and very difficult impediments around attracting apprentices. That is about safety on the worksite, so the apprenticeship taskforce is doing some work, and that taskforce is again across businesses and employers and young apprentices and unions, who are around the table having a look at those issues and will be making some recommendations to government in the near future. One of the groups around that table are what we call our group training organisations, which is a model of employing apprentices to deal with what can often be insecurity for apprentices. When a project finishes or a small business finishes up, the apprentice can be left high and dry. A group training organisation becomes the employer and then puts those apprentices out to your subbies and others who are not as able to be as long term.

Mathew HILAKARI: Terrific.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. We will now go to Ms Sandell.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you, Chair. A question perhaps to the Secretary: earlier this year the Treasurer travelled to Japan and announced in-principle support for the HESC coal-to-hydrogen project. I think this is the third time I have asked this question this week. It has been selected for a grant from the Japanese government. Did the department provide any analysis, advice or support related to the decision that led to the Treasurer travelling to Japan?

Tim ADA: The answer is yes. We would have supported the Treasurer's travel to Japan, Ms Sandell. I might ask Ms Jarrett to answer your question.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you.

Danni JARRETT: Thanks, Secretary. Thanks, Ms Sandell, for the question. Just by way of clarification, the Japanese government has not awarded a grant to that project at this stage. They are doing their due diligence on the project. The Japanese government has a green innovation fund that it announced in 2022, and it has selected

the HESC as the most prospective project to then do the due diligence on the project, which it is currently doing. As the Secretary said, we supported and provided advice to the Treasurer as part of his travel to Japan for that announcement, and we are working with the Japanese government and the private providers, the consortium, as part of their due diligence and their feasibility study.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. I understand that no further public funding was committed to it in the budget, but I am seeking to understand the nature of the support that the department and the Victorian government are providing. The Treasurer mentioned that he is providing in-principle support. Could you detail a little bit more about the kind of support the department is providing to that process?

Danni JARRETT: Sure. As you would appreciate, there are a lot of regulatory requirements that would be attached to the project. We are assisting the project partners so that they understand what the expectations of the government would be in terms of what those regulatory approvals are and the pathway to seeking approval through that regulatory pathway and also being very clear around the standards that are required as part of that due diligence for the project.

Ellen SANDELL: So am I right then in saying that the support is primarily just advice?

Danni JARRETT: Facilitation services and advice – that is right.

Ellen SANDELL: Could you quantify the value of that? Is there any actual expenditure associated with it, or is it just staff time in terms of advice?

Danni JARRETT: It is staff time that our people who are providing that assistance and advice to the project –

Ellen SANDELL: So no actual expenditure on anything else other than just advice?

Danni JARRETT: That is correct.

Tim ADA: We have a team in the department called invest assist, Ms Sandell. Their day-to-day work, not just for this project but for many other projects every year, is supporting investors to navigate what they need to do to operate effectively here. There is salary associated with that and on-cost, but that is their job.

Ellen SANDELL: Fair enough. I guess I am seeking to understand what the Treasurer meant by providing in-principle support for the project. We have been told that obviously no decision has been made yet about whether the project should proceed to commercialisation or not, and you mentioned that that due diligence is ongoing. So was the Treasurer premature in saying ‘in-principle support’? What did he mean by ‘in-principle support’ for the project?

Danni JARRETT: The way I would interpret it, rather than necessarily knowing exactly what the Treasurer was referring to, I would suggest that the Victorian government did fund the HESC pilot co-funded with the Commonwealth government, which proved to be successful, so that is an important piece of intelligence, let us say, in terms of the capability of the pilot project. In line with that we are keen to ensure that any decision that is made is the most informed decision based on the science of the feasibility of the project, so we are supporting that due diligence and that feasibility process to then be able to make an informed decision at an appropriate time.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. And you mentioned providing advice about the expectations of government in relation to that project. What are the expectations of government in terms of how it would meet the government’s threshold for support or approval?

Danni JARRETT: We would be looking to ensure that it meets requirements around carbon capture and it is consistent with other government policies around its commitment to achieving net zero targets and the like.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. You mentioned that the pilot was successful. What measure were you using to determine that it was successful?

Danni JARRETT: The pilot was to test the ability to liquefy coal into liquefied hydrogen and then transport it by ship to Japan and to test the supply chain – so it is the hydrogen energy supply chain project. That process

and that supply chain proved the technology, and it proved the ability to be able to produce liquefied hydrogen and then transport it by ship to Japan.

Ellen SANDELL: My understanding – and you might have more information than me – was that the pilot did not actually transport as much hydrogen as it had intended and that it had to be supplemented. Is that correct?

Danni JARRETT: I could not comment on that. My answer would be it met the requirements of the pilot, the requirements of the project.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. I guess your threshold for success, or your definition of success, did not include how much was liquefied and transported. It was just that some was liquefied and transported?

Danni JARRETT: There may have been an amount. I would have to take that on notice.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that. I also assume that the project – my understanding is it did not capture its emissions. They were not part of the pilot, those emissions. They bought offsets instead. Is that your understanding, that that was not part of the criteria for success?

Danni JARRETT: It was a very small amount of carbon.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. I would like to ask a bit more about carbon capture, and particularly the CarbonNet project. I assume that is for Ms Jarrett as well.

Tim ADA: Yes.

Ellen SANDELL: The 2022–23 budget papers state there have been delays in finalising contracts supporting the regulatory work program for CarbonNet. Could you tell us what the cause of those delays in finalising contracts was?

Danni JARRETT: I would need to take that on notice.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. And who those contracts were with?

Danni JARRETT: If I could add that to the –

Ellen SANDELL: Add that to the list on notice, thank you. What is the current status of the project?

Danni JARRETT: Of the CarbonNet project? We are currently going through a feasibility stage at the moment and expecting to work towards a final investment decision in 2024.

Ellen SANDELL: 2024, thank you. Could you detail any of the work the government is undertaking in terms of environmental impacts related to CarbonNet?

Danni JARRETT: That is part of the feasibility study that is currently underway.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. Given what we have seen this year and also last year relating to some of the concerns and failures at Gorgon, which is the world's largest carbon capture and storage project for that purpose, as I understand it, they are operating at a third of their capacity at the moment and are anticipating that they will capture less emissions this year than they did last year, and they are already capturing much less emissions than they initially had said that they would. Does this change anything about CarbonNet and the government's support for CarbonNet?

Danni JARRETT: Well, I would say that I could not comment specifically on Gorgon. It is not a project that we have been involved with, although I am aware that it is not an apples to apples comparison; the technology and the nature of the carbon capture is different. I would, though, point to the fact that CCS is recognised as an important part of the climate change mitigation strategy and transition to renewable energy, and so it is basing itself on the science of the feasibility work that we are currently doing for this specific project, as well as new global research that suggests that carbon capture is an important piece of the energy transition.

Ellen SANDELL: I guess I am seeking to understand what global research the department is using, given that Gorgon is primarily held up as the biggest example of capturing carbon from a fossil fuel project. Many other projects around the world are not used for capturing carbon from fossil fuel projects, they are actually used for enhanced oil recovery, for example, which is more fossil fuels. So what research and what projects is the government actually looking to when they are thinking about the possible success of CarbonNet?

Danni JARRETT: Well, I would say that the work that the government is doing is very focused on the –

Ellen SANDELL: But it is not proven, right, so you must be looking at research from elsewhere that suggests that this may actually work or not work?

Danni JARRETT: Well, we are doing a very detailed analysis of the reservoir that the CarbonNet project is focused on – the sealant capability of that and the feasibility of transmission to the reservoir and the like. That is the key focus of the feasibility work that we are doing.

Tim ADA: So if I could just add, Ms Sandell, obviously it is not apples and apples in the sense that the geology matters enormously. We have actually just earlier this year undertaken some benchmarking around the prospective nature of the quality of the storage capacity in the Gippsland Basin. So to your question around understanding the relative prospectivity of this opportunity in Victoria, relative to others, yes, that is some work that we have commissioned a third party to do on our behalf, as well as some other feasibility-related –

Ellen SANDELL: Can you tell us who the third party is?

Danni JARRETT: There are a number of different technical reports and consultants that we are engaging as part of that feasibility.

Ellen SANDELL: That is not public information?

Danni JARRETT: Not at the moment.

Ellen SANDELL: I take your point about the geology, but my understanding is that in the Gorgon project the geology is part of the problem and it was not something that they necessarily anticipated. They thought the geology there would work and now it is not, so I think there are some comparisons to be made.

Danni JARRETT: I would say that with the learnings that may have been acquired as part of the Gorgon project, we would be able to then look at what those learnings are as well.

Ellen SANDELL: Yes, sure. Could you tell us how much, over those two years, was spent on CarbonNet?

Danni JARRETT: It is a joint project with the Australian government. The budget for 2021–22 was \$5.4 million and in 2022–23, \$7.8 million.

Ellen SANDELL: Is the entire project, forgive my ignorance, government funded or is there any fossil fuel company contribution to that?

Danni JARRETT: No. It is a joint project between the Victorian and Australian governments.

Ellen SANDELL: So those figures that you gave me were just the Victorian contribution. Is that correct?

Danni JARRETT: That is correct.

Ellen SANDELL: And is it an equal contribution from the federal government?

Danni JARRETT: It is matched funding.

Ellen SANDELL: Matched, yes. I do not know if you can speak to this, but can you speak at all to the justification for public investment in this as opposed to fossil fuel companies paying for it? Essentially, it is a project that is aiming to deal with the waste products of fossil fuel use. Why is that an expense taxpayers should fund as opposed to an expense the industry should pay for?

Danni JARRETT: I think that is a decision by government in terms of identifying carbon capture as an important piece and really, as I say, doing the feasibility of the project to test its feasibility as part of the objective of reaching our net zero targets. That is the process that we are following at the moment.

Tim ADA: Ms Sandell, I think just more broadly there is a perspective that carbon capture and storage, if it were to be feasible, would support the state's broader decarbonisation of the economy, not just related to fossil fuel companies but more broadly. There are certainly some proof points around the world with that perspective, and clearly, as Danni has said, there is a decision for government next year based on the work that we are doing.

Ellen SANDELL: Yes, absolutely. I have some questions for the director of Creative Victoria and then following that probably for your colleague as well. It is probably no surprise that I am going to ask about the Nicholas Building.

Claire FEBEY: Sure.

Ellen SANDELL: The 2022–23 budget allocated \$6 million for the creative spaces and places program in my electorate of Melbourne. My understanding is the money was used to turn an office building into the Collins Street Studios. The website for this space says that it is:

... a rare opportunity to co-locate your practice within a creative hub environment that can host over 100 creative workers ...

Fabulous. We love to see it, but at the same time we already have a space like this that is just a couple of blocks away – the Nicholas Building. It has been a creative hub for about 90 years and, as you would be aware, it is under threat. A lot of the tenants are moving out due to rent rises, and it has not had any state government investment to enable it to continue to be a creative hub. Could you talk about why this program funding was allocated to a new space as opposed to supporting an existing space that is under threat? As you would know, creating a whole new community is a lot harder than supporting an existing community.

Claire FEBEY: Thank you for the question. We have talked before about space being one of the most important things to creative practitioners. Alongside funding, space is what they need, and they need secure and affordable space. We have also talked before about the creative spaces and places program, which is the program that you referred to with \$3 million per annum over those two budget years. That follows many years of investment in creative spaces. Creative neighbourhoods came before that. Through creative neighbourhoods, creative spaces and places and what we have invested so far, over 40 creative spaces and projects across 21 local government areas have been created. Each of those projects, with that investment, have unlocked space that has been under-utilised, and they have also leveraged significant investment from the local government or whoever the partner was that was responsible for that space.

You have mentioned the Collins Street Studios. That was something that creative spaces and places co-invested in with the City of Melbourne to create and unlock new space for creatives. So I think what I would say is we understand the value and importance of the creative community that you are talking about at the Nicholas Building. The focus of this project is to create as much space as we can in Melbourne, in our suburbs and in our regions, so we are looking for ways to leverage under-utilised spaces and to leverage other funding sources, and as you can see 40 projects so far in that investment of \$6 million over two years and some –

Ellen SANDELL: So that funding was not available then for supporting existing spaces? I take your point, but I just make the point that the Nicholas Building is also supported by the City of Melbourne. They have indicated a willingness in the past to put investment into that space, and we have a space that is under threat, where people are leaving, and there has been no state government investment. So I am just trying to understand: what exactly is the barrier here that is seeing the government invest new money in new spaces and not in existing spaces?

Claire FEBEY: I think probably just the value for money we are able to achieve through those projects is what I am referring to. If we are talking about, on average, \$3 million per annum, we have been able to achieve 40 spaces across 21 local government areas. I think you would know that that is quite a different level of investment to what has been talked about in terms of the Nicholas Building. So we are just focused on, I guess, that maximum provision of space in as many parts of Victoria as we can.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thanks. I want to ask about Prahran – so perhaps your colleague. I will just start asking the question if that is okay. Following on from Mr McGowan’s question, my understanding is that consultation has opened but that consists of a four-question survey that is online. It does not actually, my understanding is, mention an arts and education precinct in those questions. Can you provide a bit more insight into the consultation that has occurred to date? Is it just the survey or have there been organisations consulted with? Can you detail that for us?

Xavier CSAR: Thank you for question. Yes, the Engage Victoria questionnaire is deliberately open, because of course it is not just the stakeholders and the people that we have been talking to date. But from the middle of the year we have convened a cross-party working group of various agencies and interested parties and talked to a long list of stakeholders – tenants, and there are quite a number and you know them well. We have been gathering information. I think the community consultation component will add to that, and really that all goes into the mix for a strategic vision for the site. We are not limited. As you know, we have Prahran High, we have NICA, we have Melbourne Polytechnic, we have the Patrick School and others, so the strategic vision will give the government options. It will reflect a breadth of feedback and passion for the site, and then that will inform a master planning process, which starts to get a bit real.

Ellen SANDELL: So could you tell us who is on the working group?

Xavier CSAR: Development Victoria, Department of Transport, Premier and Cabinet, Treasury – that is not an exhaustive list but those parties –

Ellen SANDELL: It is an internal government –

Xavier CSAR: It is indeed.

Ellen SANDELL: Yes. The Engage Vic website says that reporting back is occurring in January. Is that just reporting back on the survey or is that other elements like strategic asset planning, and will the report be made public?

Xavier CSAR: Well, it will be a strategic options sort of report-back. It will reflect the survey and reflect some of the ambition and some of the ideas. We will not seek to choose or rate or evaluate. It will be a very open –

Ellen SANDELL: You mentioned that the consultation will inform options, but are there particular options that are being not considered, for example, or considered more closely?

Xavier CSAR: No, no particular weighting. The starting position is government’s initial decision to acquire the site from Swinburne on their decision to vacate, sell. You will recall at that time it did reflect a desire to maintain the arts or at least make it possible.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you.

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

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Secretary and officials. Victoria is probably one of the smallest states, but we have got an absolute mix of different regions with totally different needs. If you compare Mallacoota and Mildura, there is not sort of a one-size-fits-all approach that we can take. In fact when we consider the investments that we are making in each area, we need to tailor them to make sure we are getting the outcomes that we want and the economic opportunities we are looking for. With the regional development output that is listed on page 249 of BP3, how are you making sure that those investments match the specific needs of each of the different areas of our state rather than that one-size-fits-all approach, and what sort of evidence base are you using to determine that?

Tim ADA: Thanks for your question. I might make a few opening comments and then ask Ms Jones to add to it. You are right. In not just our regions but our suburbs, place matters. We have a good footprint in regional Victoria. People who live and work in regional Victoria are well connected with both the public and private sectors. Across regional Victoria the work of the regional partnerships and indeed in a metropolitan context the metropolitan partnerships provide a really important engagement mechanism to better understand those needs and priorities of those different parts of Victoria. In a regional development context, the relatively recent

development of regional economic strategies, which have sort of been developed by the regions, provide a bit of a road map to where and how not just the state but collectively those actors in those areas sort of contribute to capitalising on some of the opportunities that matter to those communities. But I might ask Ms Jones to add to that.

Beth JONES: Yes. Thank you for the question. The Secretary sort of outlined the key elements there in terms of creating an ecosystem for how we think about those opportunities. There is a really important interaction between our footprint, the way we partner and the evidence and the opportunities that we bring. So I think, starting with the regional economic development strategies, they were released in 2021, and there was one for each of the nine regions. They take a really deep-dive look at what the comparative opportunities are of particular regions. And to your point about – whilst the issues might be cross-cutting in regional Victoria, things like tourism and agriculture afford big opportunities, but the way that looks in place can be very different in terms of the mix of industries. So the REDS are a really important way of coalescing strategic conversation of place around how we sort of pull government, community and business around these particular opportunities so that we are creating a really strategic and sustainable way of thinking about economic and regional development.

Importantly too we keep the evidence base around those updated. So as a part of the strategies there is a whole series of interactive dashboards, and all the data that we use sits behind it. As unemployment rates change or different industry mixes change, that is available and informing in real time. It is not only informing the work of government but informing the work of it could be local government, it could be stakeholders. So that is readily accessible so that people are thinking about that in the same way.

Tim mentioned the partnerships and the work that comes around that. I think one of the things, by way of example of how the work of the regional economic development strategies is then starting to shift opportunity in place, is if I take the example of a food and fibre investment attraction project that the government launched last year, which is a really exciting way of thinking about the value-add opportunity for agriculture. We know a lot of raw product leaves regional Victoria to other states or overseas, and there is a real opportunity that has been identified across all parts of the region to think about the value-add opportunities around manufacturing in place. Recently we have just drawn together a project that brings together subject expertise from the CSIRO, Regional Development Victoria and a whole lot of business and community people to think about what the real opportunities are that sit around that in terms of, you know, it could be fallen fruit from trees, or it could be walnuts or whatever it is. How do we get those crash-tested through in a way that you could think about how they get to market? So sitting around that also is other parts of government, like Danni's area in terms of the global and export aspect to that and the manufacturing and innovation aspect to that. So I think the work of the REDS is really changing how we work in place in terms of tailoring opportunities to the particular strengths of different regions.

I think the way also that regional development works is by being such an important lot of eyes and ears to bring those perspectives into the centre of government around some of those cross-cutting issues, such as some of the more challenging sort of double-edged sword issues like energy transition where there are issues that we need to work through for communities but significant opportunities in terms of jobs and community livability and prosperity.

Lauren KATHAGE: I think something that quite a few regions do have in common, though, is that they have got issues with labour shortages and key worker accommodation issues. It means people that are there for work cannot get a house near where they are doing their work; it means businesses cannot get the staff that they need. We do have a program working on this that is outlined in the budget. Can you update us on what that has achieved so far, and is it uniform across the state?

Beth JONES: So the regional workforce pilots is I think the project that you are referring to. That is again taking a very place-based 'start with the problem and bring the solution' approach to how we think about the particular aspects of worker shortages in different places. Obviously housing is critical to that, but so are things like transport and availability of child care. The regional workforce pilot is being piloted at four different parts around the state. There is one in Mildura that is really looking at the issues with seasonal workers, the challenges in the Robinvale community around teacher housing. So there has been some work done with the Department of Education there around how some of the education land could be utilised as housing for teachers into the future. Coming down to the south, in the Barwon south-west region it is more focused on

accommodation for tourism operators. It has led to the development of cabins in caravan parks and additional worker housing in that part of the world, and that is because there is such a seasonal tourist workforce aspect to that.

If we go up to the third area of the pilot, it was in Ararat, and that was more around the challenges that workers have and big employers in that part of the world have with finding workers. So there are some resettlement programs where we have funded a coordinator to link those communities into how they adjust into the Ararat community, but also pathwaying opportunities into local employers who are looking for workers. That has been a very successful program alongside, also in Ararat, investing in some enabling infrastructure to bring to market quicker some housing development to create the worker housing that was needed for some big employers in Ararat.

The final part of the workforce pilots was up in the alpine part of the state. Again, why it is so place-based is it is sort of taking a more novel approach and more flexible approach to 'Let's start with the problem and look at the solutions.' There are a range of different ways that the tourism workforce shortages for the tourism sector were thought about up there in terms of: can we match a combination of different seasonal jobs to a person to a house, or can we match Airbnb properties to give some certainty to tenants? So there are a whole range of different ways in which that has been thought through. It led in that part of the world to a pretty innovative way of thinking that has been developed by tourism operators around housing worker solutions that we are looking for pathways for solutions for now – so again, different ways, different parts of the state, different challenges.

Lauren KATHAGE: It does sound very place-based. It also sounds quite people centred in terms of understanding what people need in their lives.

Beth JONES: Yes. And getting the right people around the table to solve the problems, depending on whether it has got a transport element or a tourism element or whatever it is.

Lauren KATHAGE: So then when you seek to take learnings from that to apply to the regional workforce accommodation fund, I guess that you cannot really take the outputs. It is more like a process that you can apply the learnings to the larger picture – what learnings are you taking? What evaluations are you doing to best make use of that experience?

Beth JONES: I think it is a mix of how you apply learnings. There is an evaluation that is currently underway, because we are drawing to the conclusion of the four pilots. There is a formal evaluation that is being undertaken, so I look forward to talking more about the specifics of that. But there are certainly process learnings in terms of how you develop from the ground up solutions to this and some of those principles around failing and failing early where things do not work. There are certainly a lot of learnings that have come out of some particular things but also the process that we wrap around thinking about how you get the best solutions at place. But also some of the applications or the ideas that have come up – if I think about the way the tourism sector is sort of thinking about how they might wrap around housing solutions in that part of the world, even though it is specific to there, I think it is something that other parts of the state would still want to pick up and sort of see what application it might have for tourism challenges with seasonal workers in the south-west of the state. So a big focus of the implementation of this evaluation would be making sure that is available for others to kind of draw some of the insights from that but, again, make them real for place.

Lauren KATHAGE: Great, thank you. We had the Victorian cross-border commissioner established, which as a former resident of Wodonga I wholeheartedly support, all around reducing barriers between the two. Secretary or Ms Jones, are you able to speak to what happened since it was established and how it has supported regional communities?

Beth JONES: Yes. Unfortunately, the pandemic showed us the absolute value of the role of the cross-border commissioner in terms of really putting a spotlight on some of the challenges that businesses and communities in border areas confront just by the nature of where they fall on a line on a map. This was actually an initiative of the Mallee regional partnership, the cross-border commissioner, and it was first appointed in 2018. Luke Wilson is our cross-border commissioner and does a lot of k's in the car every year traversing our northern border and our western border and really has a strong focus on networking, working closely with the New South Wales cross-border commissioner and the recently appointed South Australian cross-border commissioner. The focus of Luke's work is to really understand that register of issues that create barriers or

opportunities for people in border communities, and that can be everything from just how grant program guidelines are conceived, or it might be just – it is very easy to write ‘state of Victoria’ on something but not think about people who live on one side of the border but work on another or vice versa, and I think that presents challenges. That can be students who access educational facilities in Victoria but live on the other side of the border, and again, we need to be continually thinking about that. One of the things that Luke has focused on in terms of – he has got a big focus externally on understanding what the challenges are, and he has got a big focus networking internally in government, encouraging government to be asking the border question in the way we design programs and design everything from V/Line fare access, which was recently an issue, to P-plate and L-plate rules and how they change between different parts of the state, to healthcare access. He has really shone a light on and has a register of issues that he then works proactively on with different parts of government and with the business community to see what can be done in relation to some of those challenges.

I think over the years that Luke has been in the role, there have been something like 9000 inquiries that he has taken since 2018. Obviously, a lot of those were during COVID, but he played a very, very significant role trying to assist people in what was a very challenging circumstance in terms of access to health care, access to family and friends or access to jobs. He played, I think, a really important role right across government just trying to bring the worlds together around where some of those unintended consequences of things that were necessary to do and how it was playing out for border communities and how we needed to get a focus on that. Things like the border bubble –

Danny O’BRIEN: Hear, hear – endorse that entirely. He did a great job through COVID.

Beth JONES: Yes. The border bubble was something that Luke had a big role in. I think it has been a really important role that he continues to do. You would be aware that he is concluding in his role. He is actually retiring, and the position is currently being recruited to. It is sad to see Luke go, because he has been a tremendous cross-border commissioner and he has got such a network of connections and people inside and outside of government that has meant he has been very, very effective in the role.

Lauren KATHAGE: Well, the committee certainly wishes him the best for his future. But it is probably not surprising, considering he spent most of his time on some of our best fishing and camping places along the river there.

Beth JONES: He certainly gets to see some great sights in his travels.

Lauren KATHAGE: I am not surprised he has retired, or left. I would do that too. You spoke about stepping up to the plate during the COVID pandemic, and we had the COVID-19 economic response, the Partners in Wellbeing program, and similar to what we have heard with the commissioner then, those learnings have been carried on and used to support people following flood events with the Partners in Wellbeing program. Can you explain a bit about that program and what sort of supports it provides for small businesses and communities affected by floods?

Tim ADA: Sure. Again, I might just make a couple of quick points and then ask Ms Jarrett to add to it. I mentioned before, I think, just to that question – advisory services to small business, including on their wellbeing and their resilience, are just vital, particularly during times of change and challenge like the pandemic or the floods. This program was put in place during the pandemic, and its effectiveness was recognised and indeed extended in flood-affected parts of Victoria as well as I think a hotline remaining open to all Victorian small businesses that wanted to take advantage of that telephony service. Danni, did you want to add to that?

Danni JARRETT: Yes. Thanks, Secretary. As the Secretary mentioned, the program predated COVID, but COVID heightened the need and really shone a spotlight on the importance of supporting businesses in their wellbeing and mental health. So as a result of COVID, the program continues to provide essential services. There are actually five initiatives that were rolled out and provided free of charge to small businesses and their employees. The first initiative under the program is Partners in Wellbeing, which is a confidential helpline service that offers wellbeing support and access to financial counsellors and business advisers. There is also a Partners in Wellbeing embedded clinicians program, which embeds mental health support available to members and their staff located in industry and business associations. Again, there is a Mindarma program, which is an online wellbeing program hosted by Business Victoria, and a WorkSafe WorkWell Toolkit that

supports creating mentally healthy workplaces. The fifth initiative is a mental wellbeing of business communities grants program, which is for business communities to develop and deliver support programs for mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. So the members of the community that I represent in the outer north, and I am sure it is the same for Point Cook and Laverton, are incredibly entrepreneurial communities. Many of them are new Australians who have an absolute knack and passion for creating a business, and I think it is really important, and I hope that the outcomes you have learned over the last two years, which is why we are here, will help inform support for these booming entrepreneurial suburbs on our edges, because they are just going for it – they are absolutely going for it. So I think any support they can be provided with would be fantastic.

The program sounds great. In terms of what you have heard back from businesses and the feedback you have had from people – my parents were small business owners so I know how stressful it can be and how uncertain it can be – do people give feedback that they feel they are getting the concrete support they need, or are you missing the mark?

Danni JARRETT: With support, I think there is very high take-up of the programs, and I think that in itself is also talking to the fact that it is meeting a need for small businesses. In terms, then, of just the feedback that we get through a range of different sources, it is positive. Those services are very bespoke to the individual needs of each business and their workforce. So I would say in short, yes, it is well received.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. We have been speaking a bit about apprenticeships and small business support. Can I ask about what programs and support Business Victoria has provided to Victorian businesses over the two-year period?

The CHAIR: Apologies, Ms Kathage. The time has ended for questions for this afternoon's session. I do want to thank you, Secretary and officials, for attending today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

I would also like to thank all secretaries and officers who have given evidence here earlier today and also Hansard and the secretariat. The committee will resume its consideration of the 2021–22 and the 2022–23 financial and performance outcomes on Friday 24 November. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Committee adjourned.