

**CHAPTER 8: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

## 8.1 Veteran's Affairs Transcript

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

#### Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 11 May 2009

#### Members

Mr R. Dalla-Riva  
Ms J. Huppert  
Ms J. Munt  
Mr W. Noonan  
Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr G. Rich-Phillips  
Mr R. Scott  
Mr B. Stensholt  
Dr W. Sykes  
Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt  
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Mr J. Brumby, Minister for Veterans' Affairs,

Mr T. Robinson, Minister Assisting the Premier on Veterans' Affairs,

Ms H. Silver, Secretary,

Mr P. Reed, Deputy Secretary, Government and Corporate Group, and

Mr A. Fennessy, Executive Director, Policy and Cabinet Group, Department of Premier and Cabinet;  
and

Mr Y. Blacher, Secretary of the Department of Planning and Community Development.

**Overheads shown.**

**Mr BRUMBY** — Just a couple of things if I can on the veterans portfolio. Firstly, on the Victorian Veterans Council's veterans sector study, the veterans council reported back in 2008 on a range of issues. There are a lot of challenges there. This just shows, I guess, what we all know and we see on Anzac Day. We are seeing significant increases in the number of people attending dawn services right across the population. Our veterans population overall is of course ageing, and that graphic shows it very well indeed. Having said that, RSL membership is in fact growing, mainly because of affiliate members, but many branches face issues impacting on their viability. There are challenges there, including obviously with the health and welfare of veterans and protecting their heritage. On the other hand, there are great opportunities in the education area and great opportunities I think as we move up to the centenary of Anzac in 2015. That study was, I think, instructive in identifying some of those issues — as I said, demographic changes, organisational sustainability, commemoration, and education and preserving heritage.

Just in terms of achievements over the last year, many members of Parliament were at the dedication of the Cobbers statue in July 2008, which I opened jointly with the mayor of Fromelles. That is a beautiful statue, and it emulates the one of course at Fromelles. It shows that no mate gets left behind.

On the Anzac Day just past I attended the dawn service at the Mount Macedon memorial cross. I did that because that is another dawn service which is growing in attendance and popularity. They had over 4000 or nearly 5000 people there. We have made improvements there to the car parking, to the access and so on. It is a very moving service up there. I was told that as the sun comes up the views of the city over Melbourne and Port Phillip Bay would be just quite dramatic, but when the sun came up all I saw was more swirling mist, as you do on the top of Mount Macedon at that time of the year.

The Spirit of Anzac study tour has just been conducted. This is the fifth. This is very successful. The students this year went to Gallipoli and South Korea. The Korean war is in many ways the forgotten war but important to commemorate.

We have continued to support the Victorian Veterans Council roll out half a million dollars in grants to projects as diverse as winter heating for war widows; increasing understanding about Alzheimer's and how that may affect veterans and their loved ones; money to the shrine to improve the gallery of medals; secondary and tertiary scholarships to veterans' dependants; Restoring Community War Memorials grants — we have granted 37 of those around the state, and they have been fantastic, and I have seen many of the memorials; and the restoration of honour rolls. Members would know this — in many of the smaller country towns you go into on some of the old honour rolls you see from the First World War you will see the names often of two or three members of the same family who lost their lives in that First World War. Preserving that history I think is so important.

We have also started work on recording veterans' oral histories, and ACMI is working closely with us on that. In terms of veteran welfare, we have continued work on the centre for trauma-related mental health, which is a \$14.5 million investment alongside the health and wellbeing centre at Heidelberg repat, which will provide a new hydrotherapy pool and a redeveloped COTA gymnasium, and that will be completed next year.

Just finally very quickly, the key priorities for next year. The shrine — we dedicated extra money over the forward estimates period to the shrine for their education program. For those members who have been down there or taken school groups through, the number of school groups going through that is almost growing exponentially, so they have needed more support down there. We have provided, Minister, a lot of support there, haven't we, since 2005?

**Mr ROBINSON** — Yes.

**Mr BRUMBY** — The budget also provides funding of \$1.6 million over four years to directly address some of the issues raised in the Victorian veterans sector study. That is a priority. We are also conducting the Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize 2009–10 schools competition and study tour and the Restoring Community War Memorials Grants program. The tour in 2010 will be to the Western Front. I think hopefully the students will be able to participate in the ceremony at Fromelles.

You will have seen that many of the bodies are now being exhumed at Fromelles. Many Australians are being asked to contribute DNA to assist with the identification of the bodies. It may well be, I think, that a large

proportion of the bodies identified at Fromelles will be Victorian, so I think the links with the Western Front and our state of Victoria will be even stronger.

Later in the year, around Remembrance Day, we will also be launching our guidebook to Victorian veterans' heritage, which will cover the history, stories, memorials and other institutions that form part of Victoria's rich history since colonial times. Finally, we will be working very closely with the commonwealth and other states as we work up to the centenary of Anzac celebrations in 2015. I know that sounds a long way away, but it will come around pretty quickly, and if you think of some of the programs that we might want to put in place, anything that involves things that are to be built or perhaps trees that are to be grown, they do need a bit of lead time. So we are starting to run into that space now, and we will work with the federal government and other states to make sure that that is a truly significant commemoration in 2015.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. We have 15 minutes for questions, so we need to keep them pretty focused.

**Dr SYKES** — Questions of clarification, I think, as much as anything: first of all, in relation to advertising, is it correct that it is government policy for 5 per cent of the advertising budget to be spent in ethnic media?

**Mr BRUMBY** — Yes.

**Dr SYKES** — Is that so?

**Mr BRUMBY** — Yes. I will come to your question.

**Dr SYKES** — Secondly, if that is the case, has that policy been implemented or has it fallen short? My second clarification relates to page 437 of budget paper 3, where there is a bar chart showing the proportions of Victorians who think multiculturalism makes life better. That is chart B.55. The explanation there I find difficult to match up with the visual impact, in that there would appear to be a drop-off in people appreciating multiculturalism. In 2001 about 90 per cent of urban people thought multiculturalism was favourable, and 80 per cent of country Victorians. By the time you get to 2008 the figure for city people has dropped to 80 per cent, and for country people it has dropped to about 65 per cent. I am not sure that the explanation above reflects my interpretation of the data, so I would appreciate clarification on that.

**Mr BRUMBY** — Firstly, on the ethnic media expenditure, I think it was back in 2002 we released a policy on this, and that was then updated in 2004. That policy stipulated that government departments and agencies would commit a minimum of 5 per cent of their campaign advertising budgets to the CALD communities. I am advised that the core Victorian government departments have reported a spend of \$1.123 million on CALD campaign advertising during the 2007–08 period, which is of course the last year for which we have full data. This represents 5.6 per cent of the total expenditure by departments on CALD campaign advertising, and that figure would indicate that departments have exceeded the policy commitment.

In relation to the proportion of Victorians on that question about page 437, I might ask Mr Lekakis to comment, but I assume that that is because of what the footnote here says:

An extra category was added from 2005 onwards to enable respondents to answer 'not applicable' if they felt that was the more appropriate response, for example, if multiculturalism was not a feature of their area.

**Mr LEKAKIS** — Yes, there were three extra categories of questions asked for 'Do not know', 'Not applicable' and 'Refuse'. Therefore the answering of those questions has a larger field. One would assume in the times of global problems that we experience and post-September 11 that 75 per cent of the Victorian community believing that multiculturalism is a good thing is a very, very positive rating. But yes, there have been other questions asked as part of the survey. Therefore, overall, one would assume that people would answer in other areas.

Importantly and arguably, the more critical indicator in the survey is that the number of people who expressly rejected the notion that multiculturalism made life in their area better decreased by more than a quarter, from 8.9 per cent in 2001 to 7.1 per cent in 2008. So they are some of the variations to the survey, but we are confident that the high rate that has been expressed in support of multiculturalism in the survey is a good one.

**Dr SYKES** — Can I just make the comment that — —

**The CHAIR** — I think you can make the comment by letter, if you like.

**Dr SYKES** — We have the very successful North East Multicultural Association in north-eastern Victoria that is run very well by Rozi Parisotto and Nino Mautone.

**Mr BRUMBY** — You do; it is a very good association up there. I think the answer to your question is the extra questions in post-2005, so a bit more choice, so the positives dropped down. A key point out of the answer is that the number of negatives have declined, which is very positive.

**Ms HUPPERT** — Premier, I also want to focus on the area of multicultural affairs, and as the child of a refugee who found safe haven and a good life in Victoria, it is a subject dear to my heart. I refer you to page 192 of budget paper 3, which talks about the Victorian Multicultural Commission grants program. Can you provide some more information on the types of grants and projects funded by this program?

**Mr BRUMBY** — Yes, I can, and thank you for your very strong support of these programs. The grants were outlined, I think in part, on the slides that I put up the on the screen. I am just trying to find — to add to what I put up there. The grants program has grown from \$750 000 per annum in 1999–2000 to \$4.6 million in the 2008–09 financial year, so it has been very substantial. In 1999, 970 organisations received grants.

This year the program distributed more than 2600 grants to something like 1730 community organisations. Some of the great projects that the VMC has funded in this last year include the Dandenong Muslim women's swim project, in partnership with the Springvale Neighbourhood House; the Victorian YMCA; the Dandenong Oasis Leisure Centre; and the disadvantaged students at risk project, where Victoria Police and students from Debney Park Secondary College will trek along the Kokoda Trail in PNG.

There is another program called On the Banks of the Tigris, a community education project celebrating the Jewish contribution to Iraqi music; the Australian Multicultural Foundation; and North Melbourne Football Club's state-of-the-art learning and life centre, and that is as part of the club's \$15 million Arden Street redevelopment.

There is the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre 20th anniversary heritage publication documenting the establishment and history of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, and of course there are so many other grants, as you mentioned.

**Ms HUPPERT** — Thank you, Premier. Just to follow up, page 346 of budget paper 3 refers to community harmony funding, which is of course a very important aim, and it includes some reference to training and mentoring for faith communities. I imagine some of this will fit in well with the upcoming Parliament of the World's Religions that is going to be held in Melbourne later this year. Can you provide us with more information about how this event will benefit Victoria?

**Mr BRUMBY** — Yes, I can. As I said before, I think the Parliament of the World's Religions, which will be held later in the year at the new convention centre, will be a fantastic event for our state. There will be 5000 visitors come to our state from all around the world, representing all the religions. I think you could not get a better event in terms of reinforcing our community harmony and our multiculturalism. As I said, it will be held at the new convention centre, which is 6-star rated and the largest in Australia.

There have already been three events in relation to the Parliament of the World's Religions final event. On 11 December 2006 in Melbourne, Reverend Dirk Ficca, the executive director of the Council of the Parliament, announced that we had won the bid. A year later, in December 2007, the minister assisting me on multicultural affairs took part in the global launch in front of 300 religious and spiritual leaders. Most recently, on 8 February, an official pre-Parliament event for the Parliament of the World's Religions was held in Melbourne.

I think this will really showcase us around the world. Previous parliaments have been held in Chicago, 1993; Cape Town, 1999; and Barcelona, 2004. As I said, based on the success of these events, it is estimated that between 5000 and 10 000 people will come here. I think it is going to be great for us. It is a good fit. We have supported it strongly, as I said, with \$2 million. The federal government has as well, and there has been \$500 000 from the City of Melbourne.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for that.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Premier, I would just like to ask you about output funding for the veterans affairs output group. I take you to page 172 — —

**Mr BRUMBY** — Of which paper?

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — The big one, BP 3. There is a decline in target from last year to this year — \$11.5 million down to \$10.2 million. What proportion of this funding actually relates to veterans, as opposed to seniors predominantly?

**Mr BRUMBY** — As you correctly pointed out, it does include seniors and veterans. The total 2009–10 budget for the veterans portfolio is \$3.3 million. That represents an aggregate \$800 000 increase since last year, which was comprised largely of two new budget initiatives — namely, the \$700 000 being the first year of the \$3 million additional operating funding delivered to the Shrine and, secondly, \$400 000 from the \$1.6 million budget allocation that we are devoting to implement the recommendations of the Victorian veterans sector study. So there is significant funding there. The budget includes an adjustment that reflects a decrease of \$300 000. If you add the \$700 000 and \$400 000, that is \$1.1 million, and less the \$300 000, you get a net increase of \$800 000 for the veterans portfolio.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Sorry. What was that reduction of \$300 000?

**Mr BRUMBY** — It is just an accounting adjustment.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — What does that mean?

**Mr BRUMBY** — It means it is an accounting adjustment.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Where does it come from?

**Mr BRUMBY** — It comes out of the department. The key thing is the increase is just a variation to the forward estimates from last year.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — So it is?

**Mr BRUMBY** — Did you get the figures before? It is an extra \$400 000 plus an extra \$700 000, which is \$1.1 million, less \$300 000 — —

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Which has come from something else.

**Mr BRUMBY** — No, it has not come from anything else. It is an adjustment to estimates. The net increase for veterans is \$800 000.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — So \$300 000 has come off some spending from last year?

**Mr BRUMBY** — No.

**The CHAIR** — It has come off the forward estimates from last year.

**Mr WELLS** — It is a reduction in the forward estimates.

**Mr BRUMBY** — No. The net increase in funding is \$800 000, which is a good result.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — But you allocated \$1.1 million for new projects, so the \$300 000 difference must be something else you have cut.

**Mr BRUMBY** — Yes, but these are always variations that move around from year to year, in terms of departmental estimates. We are happy to give you some advice on that.

**The CHAIR** — All right, you can do that. Thank you very much.

**Mr NOONAN** — Premier, you alluded to the growth in numbers at dawn services and in particular the growth at the Shrine of Remembrance. I note in your key priorities for 2009–10 a couple of dot points in your

presentation for the Shrine of Remembrance. I just wonder whether you could go into further detail about the government's support for the Shrine in the forward estimates?

**Mr BRUMBY** — Yes, I will, in just one moment. This concerns, as I have said, the Galleries of Remembrance. I have attended many functions there and we have seen huge increases in the numbers of schoolchildren who go through there. The additional funding that has been provided, as shown on the slide there, the \$3 million over four years, what it does is further redevelop some of that undercroft area and creates new gallery space underneath. So we have been looking at that with them.

I think your question was really in relation to the \$3 million extra. As I have said, that is basically for education for all the school groups who go through, to make sure that the staff can be employed by the shrine to complete that educational program. I do not have the numbers of the number of students going through. I did have that on Anzac Day; I have not got that with me now, but they have gone way beyond expectations in terms of the number of students going through. I will get that information for you, Mr Noonan, because it is a great example of the importance of the Shrine and the growth that has been occurring there.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Premier. More jobs as well. Ms Pennicuik, to ask the last question?

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you, Premier. An issue that has been raised with us is young refugees who are resettling in Australia who suffer from acute educational problems, which of course can vary across the refugee community. Some in particular have not had much schooling background due to their circumstances and they need intensive and ongoing bridging education. It has been raised with us that they are getting 6 to 12 months and then they are put into the normal schooling and are struggling. So I am wondering, Premier, is there anything in the budget to assist in that area, with refugee students who are struggling in the general school system?

**Mr BRUMBY** — Mr Lekakis has just indicated that we are happy to give you some detailed information. Some of those areas to which you have referred will be in the education portfolio.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Yes.

**Mr BRUMBY** — Some of them include subsidies from the federal government. In terms of what we have done in the budget, as I referred to before, it is really through the refugee support package. There was additional funding provided, if you go back to the 2005–06 budget, and then in this budget we announced we would renew the refugee brokerage program with \$1.8 million over two years from 2009–10, and the refugee action program assists refugees across 22 locations in Melbourne and Victoria. Though I think your question goes more to education, and we are happy to provide you with — when is the education minister appearing?

**Mr WELLS** — Soon.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Can I have that before I see the education minister?

**Mr BRUMBY** — No; I am trying to be helpful.

**Mr LEKAKIS** — There is a raft of programs

**Mr BRUMBY** — If it is later in the week, we will not be able to, but we will try to get it to you this week.

**The CHAIR** — All right, we will see how we go. Thank you for that, Premier. That concludes the consideration of budget estimates for the portfolios of Premier and Cabinet, Multicultural Affairs and Veterans Affairs. I thank the Premier and departmental officers for their attendance and of course the minister assisting. Where questions were taken on notice we will follow up with you in writing at a later date. The committee requests that written responses be provided within 30 days, and I understand you will try to even exceed that target.

**Mr BRUMBY** — We will try to do that for Ms Pennicuik.

## 8.2 Aboriginal Affairs Transcript

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

#### Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 18 May 2009

#### Members

Mr R. Dalla-Riva  
Ms J. Huppert  
Ms J. Munt  
Mr W. Noonan  
Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr G. Rich-Phillips  
Mr R. Scott  
Mr B. Stensholt  
Dr W. Sykes  
Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt  
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Mr R. Wynne, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs,  
Mr Y. Blacher, Secretary of the Department of Planning and Community Development;  
Mr I. Hamm, Executive Director, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria; and  
Mr S. Gregory, Chief Finance Officer, Corporate Organisational Development and Communications,  
Department of Planning and Community Development.



**The CHAIR** — I welcome the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and departmental officers. I now call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial performance information relating to the Aboriginal affairs portfolio.

**Mr WYNNE** — Thanks very much, Chair. I introduce Mr Hamm, who is with us today as the incoming director of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria. Mr Hamm was appointed when?

**Mr HAMM** — About six weeks ago.

**Overheads shown.**

**Mr WYNNE** — I think I will start, Chair, by really acknowledging the bipartisan way in which the Parliament has sought to address the question of closing the gap in the outcome for life expectancy of indigenous Victorians. As you know, we had a very significant ceremony here in Parliament House in Queens Hall where the leaders of our major political parties signed on in a bipartisan way to commit themselves to closing what is a completely unacceptable life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians — a gap of 17 years in life expectancy.

As you know, the incarceration rate among Aboriginal people is disproportionate — 12 times that of non-Aboriginal people. The unemployment rate is 2.3 times that of non-Aboriginal people. It is in that context that I sincerely do welcome the bipartisan way in which both government and opposition do have a deep commitment to making a difference in the lives of Aboriginal people.

Can I say that from the point of the view of the government the Victorian indigenous affairs framework is in fact the umbrella policy with which we are tackling these issues. Below that, of course, we have a ministerial task force which is chaired by the Deputy Premier, Rob Hulls. Clearly I am on the task force, as are Maxine Morand as Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development; Lisa Neville, the Minister for Community Services; Bronwyn Pike, the Minister for Education; Daniel Andrews, the Minister for Health; Jacinta Allan, the Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation; and Tim Holding as minister for finance.

That is an important group because it brings together all of the ministers who have a direct impact on this target of closing the life expectancy gap and all of the concomitant social issues that surround that as well. Below that, of course, is the secretaries group, which Mr Blacher is on representing us. All of the portfolio areas that interface with Aboriginal affairs are in fact on that secretaries group to really drive the bureaucracy in terms of getting outcomes.

Aboriginal Affairs Victoria is, of course, also working with Aboriginal communities, particularly in the area of leadership, capacity building and governance, because we see that as being absolutely fundamental to driving change at a community level. You must ensure that there is good governance in place and that you have strong leadership at the local level. In that respect I can say that recently I was down at a very prestigious event at the state library, the Ricci Marks awards, which award young indigenous leaders coming through. These are young people in their 20s. It is clear to me, Chair, after having been at two of these events, that the young Aboriginal leadership coming through is absolutely first-class.

The work that has been put in by the government over a number of years is now bearing fruit, and you can see these young people are going to take up these leadership roles going forward. It is really a very exciting time for the future of young Aboriginal people.

Heritage is a key element of our work, and the Aboriginal Heritage Act absolutely underpins that. We understand, and I am sure both sides of Parliament understand, the important link between land and heritage. It is fundamental in the lives of Aboriginal people, and access to land and respect for Aboriginal heritage, particularly within the broader development of the state, is a really important initiative.

As you know, we have seven registered Aboriginal parties in Victoria who speak for 45 per cent of the land in our state.

I will make only two further brief points. We fund through the Aboriginal Land and Economic Development Program a number of local enterprises which seek to bolster and support Aboriginal employment across regional Victoria, and indeed metropolitan Melbourne. We will soon be launching a fantastic catering and

hospitality project, which I am happy to talk about further, in Gertrude Street at the old Aboriginal health service.

We continue to support the local voice of Aboriginal people through the local indigenous networks — we have 38 now that have been rolled out. That is again a very important initiative because it provides a venue and a voice for local Aboriginal people who have often tended to be shut out of the conversation, both with government and more broadly. In that context it is a good place that we are in.

Economic development: Stolen Generations Victoria is a fantastic commitment by the government of \$6.2 million over the next four years, which really shows a fantastic level of support to an organisation that is doing really profound work with some of the most dispossessed people in our community, and I can talk about that further as we go forward.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. I want to start off by asking in respect of this portfolio, what departments and agencies in regard to federal grants or funding, both output and asset, will receive from the budget. We would like a list of those and a description of them and the accountability mechanisms that are used both for the federal government, and also the accountability mechanisms you have for providing any grants to organisations.

**Mr WYNNE** — We get virtually no federal funding.

**Mr HAMM** — No federal funding.

**Mr WYNNE** — Virtually none, except in CHIP housing, as I indicated in my earlier contribution. I wish I could elaborate further, but unfortunately we do not, Chair.

**The CHAIR** — So in respect of the CHIP housing, are there accountability mechanisms for those?

**Mr WYNNE** — That is an important question. Now, because the CHIP housing has been transferred to the state, the accountability will be a two-way one. Once the co-operatives have registered as housing providers they will be required to report to me on a six-monthly basis on outcomes in terms of the delivery of the program, and I am required to simultaneously report to the federal government on those outcomes as well in terms of maintenance and rent.

**The CHAIR** — What is the responsible entity in the federal government? Is it the Aboriginal affairs area?

**Mr WYNNE** — Minister Macklin's area, FaHCSIA.

**The CHAIR** — So it is not the housing area, it is not Minister Plibersek?

**Mr WYNNE** — No, it is through Minister Macklin.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — It has been more than two years since the inquiry into the stolen wages in Victoria began, and we have heard and seen pretty well nothing since then. Can you inform us of the progress of that and what the department is doing; and will there be any resources and funding set aside to speed up the inquiry and to interview Aboriginal people who are getting older and whose opportunities for recompense and remuneration are obviously dwindling?

**Mr WYNNE** — That is a terrific question, because it goes to work that Stolen Generations Victoria has done. Public Records Office Victoria has done some fantastic work in this area. I can report that the government is responding to the Senate inquiry on stolen wages — we indicated we would.

A researcher was appointed through the public records office in mid-2007 to examine Victoria's and the commonwealth's archival material which we hold. The Aboriginal affairs department is currently reviewing the final draft report on the research project to provide a dialogue back to the public records office.

I can indicate to you, though, that the findings of the draft report indicate that on the basis of available financial records, there is no evidence of systemic withholding of earnings and wages of Aboriginal people in Victoria. Although, as you know very well from the Senate inquiry's report, there is quite a body of evidence in other states.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Minister, when are you expecting that report to emerge?

**Mr HAMM** — We are working with PROV now to finalise the report. We should have it finished in — I will be conservative and say the next couple of months; two to three months we should have that finished.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Early next financial year?

**Mr WYNNE** — We want to get it done as soon as possible.

**Ms MUNT** — I refer you to page 173 of budget paper 3, 'Indigenous Community and Cultural Development'. It is my understanding that the Aboriginal Heritage Act and the review of the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations are currently under way. Could you please detail for the committee the progress in that regard?

**Mr WYNNE** — The review of the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations was undertaken by the member for Mill Park, Lily D'Ambrosio, and I can report that she engaged in very extensive consultations with a range of interested parties. She talked to a number of people in the development community, and we have made some minor amendments to the regulations, but more broadly the pleasing aspect of the review was that it stood up very solidly. From the point of view of both the development community who are seeking to undertake developments and from the point of view of seeking to protect Aboriginal heritage, the act has stood up very well.

As you know, the act commenced operation in May 2007, and from May 2007 until March we have had 378 plans approved; and 23 had been approved by registered Aboriginal parties as I indicated in my earlier comments.

We continued to meet the time lines of 30 days, and I think Tony De Domenico is a very important test of these things. He is, as you know, with the Urban Development Institute of Australia — he has publicly said that the implementation of the Aboriginal Heritage Act has brought surety to the process for both Aboriginal people and indeed the development community more generally.

I think it has stood the test of the last couple of years that it has been in operation, and I am pleased to say that plans are being approved in a timely fashion, and the relationship between our representative Aboriginal parties where we have been in place and the developments in their areas are going along in a timely fashion.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Minister, I refer to budget paper 3, page 173. I am looking at the total output cost and I note that the target for this year was \$26.8 million, expected outcome was \$25.3 million and the forward estimates figure is \$19.8 million. Footnote (s) on page 177 indicates a number of programs lapsing at the end of this financial year and says:

However, these programs have received additional funding as part of the 2009–10 budget from the Community Support Fund.

The issue I am asking about specifically in relation to the forward estimates concerns Reconciliation Victoria. Reconciliation Victoria as you are aware — the indications are certainly reported and from their press releases — are of the view as it says here:

At the time of printing, Rec Vic has heard from a reliable source within the government that Rec Vic will not be funded beyond June 2009 — that is, we are being defunded!

So I am probably asking you, firstly, why is there a reduction in the total output costs in the forward estimates; is the total output costs for the indigenous community and cultural developments — although it is not within that specific performance — located somewhere else? And secondly, can you give an unqualified commitment that you will commit to Reconciliation Victoria being funded beyond the end of this financial year? If so, where will it come from?

**Mr WYNNE** — Firstly, I will deal with the broader budget issue and the reconciling of the 2008–09 and the 2009–10 budgets. I will start there and then come specifically to Reconciliation Victoria.

In relation to the 2008–09 budget of \$26.8 million, that budget included a carryover of the land and economic development program of \$2.7 million and \$4.7 million in concluding initiatives; the stolen generations \$1.3 million and a further \$3.4 million comprising \$3.05 million of the indigenous community

infrastructure improvements and \$0.35 million for new representative arrangements. So that is where the gap adds up to.

The \$19.8 million includes \$0.8 million which is carryover of indigenous community infrastructure program and does not include the \$3 million CSF-funded initiatives for stolen generations, which is \$1.5 million for stolen generations, ALEDP of \$0.8 million and indigenous leadership of \$0.7 million.

In relation to reconciliation as indicated in my opening comments, the commitment that we have made to stolen generations is a very significant commitment of \$6.2 million over four years. I am aware, as I indicated to Ms Pennicuk following her earlier question, the work of Stolen Generations Victoria is regarded certainly by the commonwealth government as groundbreaking. The commonwealth looks to what we are doing here in Victoria in terms of practical reconciliation as being one of the leaders of any state in Australia.

Particularly the work we have done through the public records office has been really very therapeutic for families who really have lost their lineage, lost their attachment to family, lost their attachment to the broader Aboriginal community. It is in that context that we would seek to continue with our support for what we really are calling practical reconciliation.

A lot of that is also about supporting people who are really going through a grieving process. The apology was fundamental because I think for the first time our most senior level of government said, 'Yes, we are sorry, and we do recognise the past acts that have really caused great harm to Aboriginal people across Australia'. But in a Victorian context it is our view that we want to move in very practical ways with our Stolen Generations Victoria group.

That is not to say that Reconciliation Victoria is going to be left behind, in that we have funded Reconciliation Victoria, as I am sure a number of members of the committee know, since 2000. I think in the order of \$1.3 million has been spent with Reconciliation Victoria. It is my view that going forward there is a real opportunity for the great goodwill that is out there and that has been harnessed through Reconciliation Victoria to work much more closely with Stolen Generations Victoria, because essentially they are on about the same sets of issues.

I cannot give you an unequivocal answer today, Mr Dalla-Riva, but I can say to you that I am looking at providing some interim funding to Reconciliation Victoria for next year and the following year to bring the two organisations and the goodwill and energy that is a part of Stolen Generations and Reconciliation Victoria into what I think will make for a much more engaged outcome from a community level.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Sorry, where would that come from?

**Mr WYNNE** — Those funds would be generated from within AAV itself.

**The CHAIR** — Time for two more quick questions on this portfolio.

**Mr NOONAN** — Minister, you moved through your presentation pretty swiftly.

**Mr WYNNE** — Yes.

**Mr NOONAN** — But I wanted to ask a question about the land and economic development program, which you touched on in both your 'Achievements for 2008–09' and 'Focus for 2009–10', so I wonder whether you can outline in terms of this budget period how funds that have been allocated for the increase in economic participation will be used? I think you mentioned a development down in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy?

**Mr WYNNE** — We are in a situation where economic development is quite fundamental in my view. We think this is the next really big challenge for us going forward as a government. If you go to any community where there is a large conurbation of Aboriginal people and you talk to those communities anywhere across the state, the take-up of employment opportunities for Aboriginal people is woeful; it is woeful right across the state, particularly in private enterprise. You go to a place like Shepparton and you talk to the good folk at Rumbalara and ask how many Aboriginal people are employed in Shepparton in mainstream employment, outside of Aboriginal organisations, and the answer is a handful, literally a handful. That is not acceptable. It is not acceptable to anybody here.

It is really about saying, ‘What are the impediments to Aboriginal people getting employment — whether it is in Shepparton or Morwell or indeed any other community across Victoria or in metropolitan Melbourne?’. We are trying to look at this in a very systematic way. In that context we have put together what I think is a really interesting group of people who are dealing with the issues of economic development and really developing a strategy to inform the government about how to move forward in our investment around economic development and land, because we see there are great opportunities for synergy between land and economic development.

In that context we have set up a new task force, for want of a better term, on employment issues. There are an equal number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on this task force and many of these people are entrepreneurs in their own right or have extensive experience in running businesses themselves. We have got two co-chairs: Jason Eades, who would be known to many of you as the CEO of the Koorie Heritage Trust, based down here in King Street — a fantastic organisation and great people — and John Morse, a former managing director of the tourism commission and a former chair of the Victorian Tourism Board. It has got a whole range of people who would be very well known to you — Jason Mifsud — —

**The CHAIR** — Okay, we might take that on — —

**Mr WYNNE** — Anyway, I can table that. They are developing an economic — —

**The CHAIR** — Table that because Ms Pennicuk wants to ask a short question as well just before we wrap up the Aboriginal affairs portfolio.

**Mr WYNNE** — I haven’t finished.

**The CHAIR** — I know. I am just telling you that we are trying to wrap up this particular portfolio.

**Mr WYNNE** — Okay. They are developing a strategy. That strategy will inform where we invest the ALEDP funds going forward to make sure that they are very much on the money in terms of getting the employment outcomes that we want. The second thing is that you cannot go and ask the private sector to be involved in employment opportunities for Aboriginal people if you are not doing it yourself. There are targets that are being set for the state government in the broader public sector to ensure that we are up to the mark ourselves in terms of employing Aboriginal people, so that we do not just have an Ian Hamm as an Aboriginal person at a senior level of government but we have lots of Ian Hamms right through the Victorian public service, and not people just at the lower levels of employment.

It is an opportunity to bring Aboriginal people through to the highest levels of both our state service and the public sector more generally, but also to look at what are the real opportunities for Aboriginal people to be employed in the private sector as well. This is a terrific initiative, and one that I think is going to reap big benefits going forward.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Just as a follow-up to Mr Dalla-Riva’s question about Reconciliation Victoria, I was interested in your comment that you are providing interim funding for Reconciliation Victoria to continue.

**Mr WYNNE** — Yes.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — We have had recent conversations with RV, and they have indicated that they assumed they were on the way out — —

**Mr WYNNE** — Yes, that is right.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — My question is: has this development been communicated to them?

**Mr WYNNE** — No, it has not.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Is the funding going to be commensurate with current funding?

**Mr WYNNE** — No.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — How long is it going to last for, and what is the strategy going forward?

**Mr WYNNE** — This is a different journey that Reconciliation Victoria has to go on. They were fantastic in really galvanising community support and understanding of the issues that confront Aboriginal people in Victoria. I am very respectful of that, and I am very respectful of the work they have done at a community level. But now we have moved forward to a different stage in the conversation. We have had the apology; the apology is in place. That was a really fundamental move by the government which I think has lifted a burden off many people, and now we are moving forward in terms of practical reconciliation with Stolen Generations Victoria. There is a place for Reconciliation Victoria to be part of this next stage of the journey.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Will you guarantee that no Aboriginal person in Reconciliation Victoria will lose their job as a result of your decisions?

**Mr WYNNE** — I cannot indicate to you how many Aboriginal people are employed in Reconciliation Victoria. I think it is — —

**The CHAIR** — Take that one on notice, Minister.

**Mr WYNNE** — My colleagues tell me none is employed in Reconciliation Victoria. But I want to indicate — —

**The CHAIR** — We want to finish off.

**Mr WYNNE** — I will finish by saying that in the conversation we will have with Reconciliation Victoria I can indicate it will not be in the order of \$200 000 that will be provided to them, which is what they have got over the last number of years. But I am sensitive to trying to bring those two organisations together to really achieve the outcomes that I think we would all agree on.

**The CHAIR** — I thank Mr Hamm for his attendance.

## 8.3 Local Government Transcript

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

#### Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 18 May 2009

#### Members

Mr R. Dalla-Riva  
Ms J. Huppert  
Ms J. Munt  
Mr W. Noonan  
Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr G. Rich-Phillips  
Mr R. Scott  
Mr B. Stensholt  
Dr W. Sykes  
Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt  
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Mr R. Wynne, Minister for Local Government,  
Mr Y. Blacher, secretary,  
Ms P. Digby, Deputy Secretary, Planning and Local Government, and  
Mr S. Gregory, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Planning and Community Development.

**The CHAIR** — I now welcome the Minister for Local Government, Richard Wynne; again Mr Yehudi Blacher, secretary; Mr Stephen Gregory; and Ms Prue Digby, deputy secretary, planning and local government, Department of Planning and Community Development. I call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial performance information relating to the budget estimates for the portfolio of local government.

**Mr WYNNE** — Thanks very much, Chair. Can I start by saying that we strongly argue, as I am sure both sides of this committee would argue, that the community has a right to expect good government from its local councils — and we expect it. We expect them to act responsibly in the interests of their communities.

As you know, last year we had a series of reforms to the Local Government Act through the Local Government Amendment (Councillor Conduct and Other Matters) Act 2008, which as you know defines the standards of conduct expected of councillors. We are putting in place the councillor conduct panels, and the subsequent powers which will be extended to VCAT to discipline councillors who fail to meet those standards.

We have also made significant reforms in relation to conflict-of-interest rules for councils, providing clearer direction about what is and what is not a conflict of interest. As the Premier indicated earlier this year in his statement of government intent, further legislation is proposed for later this year to amend the penalties for offences under the Local Government Act which have not been reviewed for a number of years.

As members know, we went to the election on 29 November for four-year terms. Whilst we had significant interest from people seeking to contest the local government elections — we had 1975 nominations for 631 vacancies — I am not pleased to report that we had a drop in the number of female councillors who got themselves elected, down from 30.5 to 29.8. I was hoping for a better result. The Office of Women's Affairs is going to have a look at this and do some further work in this area because we want to see if there were impediments to women seeking to stand. Anecdotally, I would indicate that there seemed to be some reluctance by women candidates to stand because of the four-year term. I think that is something we will need to get some assessment of through the Office of Women's Affairs.

Post the council elections we put in place an extensive induction and training program where we invested \$600 000 to ensure that going forward councillors understood their obligations and responsibilities under the act. We have a kit which has now been distributed which is an outcome of that work. Between February and April over 400 training places were taken up by councillors, which I think is a terrific result.

We continue with our \$4.7 million Councils Reforming Business initiative, which is really about trying to change the way that councils work, in terms of both shared resourcing and a new range of strategies around procurement. As you know, we have released the Ernst and Young report which indicates that there are potential savings on procurement of the order of \$350 million per year going forward if we can do it better and smarter.

Neighbourhood houses are, as you know, a great success story for all of us; we all have neighbourhood houses in our areas. We had more than \$19 million in recurrent funding in 2008–09, and that will increase to over \$20 million in 2009–10. I am pleased to say that in the fire-affected regions we provided one-off grants of an extra \$10 000 to 23 neighbourhood houses and one of the networks to provide a bit of further assistance for those communities that were devastated by the fires. Needless to say, you are all great supporters of neighbourhood houses and they do a fantastic job.

The final area I want to briefly touch upon is public libraries. Again this is a wonderful opportunity for us to take up the opportunity that has arisen through the extraordinary investment of the federal government in school refurbishments, and I would be pleased to talk a bit further about some of the examples that we have now seen coming forward where municipal libraries are twinning with schools to provide terrific outcomes. Indeed in Mr Noonan's area we were down turning the first sod at — —

**Mr NOONAN** — Altona North.

**Mr WYNNE** — Altona North Secondary College, where the council and the school have come together to provide a comprehensive library service for the broader community.

**Mr NOONAN** — Outstanding.



**Mr WYNNE** — Yes. There is more than \$32 million in recurrent funding in 2009–10, and there is a terrific program of \$2 million for wireless internet in public libraries. So you can take your laptop in and hook into the internet. That is a terrific initiative which we are rolling out across our public libraries.

There is \$6 million for the Premier's reading challenge. For anyone who has young children or knows people with young children, the Premier's reading challenge is a very simple idea but a fantastic outcome in terms of encouraging young kids to read. It has been a wonderful initiative over the last few years.

**The CHAIR** — It has been.

**Mr WYNNE** — And there is \$15 million over four years for the Living Libraries program, which has so far funded 106 projects across the state to improve and expand library facilities. Public libraries are a great success story, and I am delighted to have them as part of the portfolio, obviously along with neighbourhood houses.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. I had complaints about the Premier's reading challenge; it only allows for 99 books.

**Mr WYNNE** — Only 99? Not bad, though.

**The CHAIR** — That is a lot.

**Ms HUPPERT** — Minister, this is similar to a question you have been asked in previous portfolios. Could you please outline what federal grants or funding your departments and agencies will receive in the budget, and can you provide the committee with a list and description of the grants and also outline the accountability mechanisms that are in place in respect of these grants?

**Mr WYNNE** — Thank you very much, Ms Huppert. The big-ticket item for local government direct from the commonwealth is the financial assistance grants. We have talked about this in the past. In 2009–10 we will get an estimated \$451 million; it will be provided by the commonwealth to Victorian councils through the grants commission. That is an increase of about 1.5 per cent over 2008–09, but by any measure the pool of funds is still too low. You have heard me speak in the Parliament about this before. In 1996 the share of federal government outlays was 1.02 per cent. It is now down to 0.64 per cent, as I indicated. That is a shortfall for Victoria of near enough to \$250 million.

If you look at that in the context of a range of our smaller councils, where the community's capacity to pay is limited and where you have dwindling populations, infrastructure asset issues and environmental issues, there are a number of our municipalities that are reliant on rates to the order of 50 per cent of their entire income. Not only is this a big problem for local government in Victoria, it is a big problem going forward for the sustainability of local government more generally. In that context, as you know, the Auditor-General indicated in his monitoring of local government that whilst all of our local governments, particularly our smaller ones, are in good shape, the broader question of their ongoing sustainability really cannot be supported unless you do something about the financial assistance grants.

We had a big seminar of local governments only a couple of weeks ago here in Melbourne, and it was the topic of conversation. So with the 20 smallest municipalities this is a major issue for us and it is a major challenge for me going forward. It is one that I will and must continue to advocate for on behalf of local government, because if you look structurally at some of those small councils, they simply do not have the capacity. I have had numerous representations from people associated with the Victorian Farmers Federation and a whole range of other rural — —

**Dr SYKES** — The member for Benalla.

**Mr WYNNE** — The good member for Benalla, Mr Delahunty and a whole range of rural members who are really quite concerned about this systemic problem that we have got going forward. But I guess in that context my obligation is to continue to advocate for two things: both the quantum and the formula. I think they are the two key issues that we have to talk to the commonwealth about. I think that if we can get them to a space where they really, truly understand that it is in fact a national problem — it is not a Victorian problem; it is a national problem — and a systemic problem, we may be able to get better outcomes.

Finally, I just want to indicate for the benefit of the committee that the Auditor-General's report for 2007–08 noted that no council received a high risk rating for that year, which is important. Of the three councils identified as being at high risk in the last report, Colac Otway and Moorabool have moved to a medium risk rating and Central Goldfields, which was the third, is now categorised as low risk. The number of local governments rated at medium risk has reduced from 18 last year down to 15 this year. I think that is a pretty good result.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. I refer members to appendix D of budget paper 3, where there is a discussion of local government financial relations.

**Mr WELLS** — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 179, in relation to local government accountability and in particular Brimbank council. I note with interest that last week you announced that Bill Scales had been appointed to be the municipal inspector.

**Mr WYNNE** — Yes.

**Mr WELLS** — Given that you said that Brimbank was such a vital issue and needed to be resolved, I am concerned that you are allowing the factional warlords to dictate to your department in regard to that.

**Mr WYNNE** — Sorry, just say that again. Factional?

**Mr WELLS** — Factional warlords to dictate to your department.

**Ms MUNT** — And how does this relate to the forward estimates?

**The CHAIR** — I am not sure it relates to the forward estimates, Mr Wells. Do you want to rephrase your question?

**Mr WELLS** — Just wait; I am just about to ask.

**Ms MUNT** — There is no mention of Brimbank on page 179.

**Mr WELLS** — Just wait; I am about to ask the question. I know you are very keen to shut down this part of the hearing.

**The CHAIR** — I do not shut down anything, Mr Wells.

**Mr WELLS** — I just want to be able to get my question out.

**The CHAIR** — Get on with the question.

**Mr WELLS** — Given that the actions of the municipal investigator will take place over the period of the forward estimates, can you explain why you have failed in your duties in Brimbank council and allowed Bill Scales to take three weeks leave?

**The CHAIR** — I am not sure this actually relates to the estimates.

**Mr WELLS** — Of course it does.

**The CHAIR** — It does not, actually.

**Mr WELLS** — Hang on a minute. His actions are going to take place over the forward estimates.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells!

**Mr WELLS** — And we want to know, if it is so important, why he is allowed then to take three weeks leave.

**The CHAIR** — Minister, I would like you to answer questions in relation to the forward estimates. I do not regard that particular question as relating to the forward estimates. Mr Scott?

**Mr WELLS** — Hang on. On a point of order.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Scott has the floor.

**Mr WELLS** — We want to call a point of order.

**The CHAIR** — There is no point of order.

**Mr WELLS** — You have not heard the point of order.

**The CHAIR** — We do not have points of order during hearings, supposedly.

**Mr WELLS** — I would call a point of order.

**The CHAIR** — What is your point of order?

**Mr WELLS** — The point of order is very clear: I referred the minister to budget paper 3, page 179 — —

**Ms MUNT** — Which makes no mention of Brimbank at all.

**Mr WELLS** — It talks about accountability. He is responsible for local government accountability.

**The CHAIR** — There is no point of order.

**Mr WELLS** — You have not heard the point of order, and I want to be able to put my point of order.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Are you saying there is no accountability by this minister?

**Mr WELLS** — The minister is responsible for accountability. We want to be able to support the issue of accountability.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Scott has the floor.

**Mr WELLS** — We have raised a point of order.

**Ms MUNT** — Chair, can I raise a point of order?

**Mr WELLS** — Hang on.

**The CHAIR** — Just a moment, please.

**Mr WELLS** — I am calling for a point of order.

**Ms MUNT** — And so am I.

**Mr WYNNE** — Mr Chairman, I am happy to answer the question.

**The CHAIR** — Okay, Minister, you can answer. But before you answer the question let me just make it very clear to the committee and to you that I do not regard the question, as finally phrased, as relating to the budget estimates. I do, of course, regard the issue of accountability as very important.

**Mr WYNNE** — Absolutely.

**The CHAIR** — But in terms of asking about — at the moment — individual councils or individual organisations and somebody's leave, I think is really not something regarding the budget estimates. Minister, if you are willing to answer this question, I am happy for you to answer it. I wish for you to answer it as succinctly and quickly as possible before I pass to Mr Scott.

**Mr WYNNE** — Thank you very much, Chair. The appointment of Mr Bill Scales was welcomed. It is welcomed, I think, more generally by every person around this table. I do not need to remind members of the committee that Mr Scales comes to this job with a very distinguished record as a public servant at the highest level of the Victorian public service. He is well known to both the previous government and this government. I do not hear anybody suggesting to me that Mr Scales is not a person of substance, a person with a track record in governance and a person with an impeccable public service record. To be able to get Mr Scales to take on responsibility as a municipal inspector, in my view, is a coup to actually get him. Can I indicate — —

**The CHAIR** — Very quickly, please.

**Mr WYNNE** — Can I say to the committee that at the time that Mr Scales indicated that he was prepared to take on this duty — and I remind the committee that Mr Scales will be taking on this duty for a period of four years — he indicated to the secretary of my department that he already had in place some overseas leave or some leave arrangements that were for a duration of about three weeks. Prior to that, in taking up the position, he met, along with senior officers from Local Government Victoria, with the mayor and the CEO last week. He also met with the full council last week to outline what his role and what his expectations of the Brimbank council were going forward. He has also indicated, as I understand, to the CEO and the council that he is certainly available to be consulted over the short period of time whilst he will be away.

**Mr WELLS** — What is your definition of ‘short period’? He is away for three weeks.

**The CHAIR** — The minister to answer, please.

**Mr WELLS** — He is away for three weeks. What is your definition of ‘short period of time’?

**Ms MUNT** — Does he have to call you up to check leave arrangements before he goes away?

**The CHAIR** — The minister, to answer.

**Mr WYNNE** — He has indicated that he will be available whilst he is on that period of leave. I remind the committee that Mr Scales will be in place until 2012.

**Mr WELLS** — If sorting out Brimbank was so important, why didn’t you cancel his leave?

**The CHAIR** — Mr Scott has the call.

**Mr WELLS** — If sorting out Brimbank was so important, why didn’t you cancel his leave and make it a priority, Minister?

**The CHAIR** — Mr Scott has the call.

**Mr SCOTT** — Minister, I refer to your presentation relating to the progress of Councils Reforming Business initiative. Can you tell the committee how this reform program is changing the way local government works over the estimates period?

**Mr WYNNE** — Thank you very much, Mr Scott. The Councils Reforming Business program, as I indicated in my introductory comments, is a \$4.7 million program which really goes to try to dig down into local government and seek some systemic reform. It does provide a platform, in my view, for collaborative arrangements between state and local government to improve the efficiency and service delivery at the local level.

It is my view that the release of, in particular, the reforming business program has led to 13 projects, as I indicated, across a broad range of councils which have collaborated together to deal with three key areas. The first is procurement, and I indicated earlier that we think there is a huge body of opportunity for systemic, ongoing cost savings to local government from new and different procurement strategies.

The second is local laws. Anybody who deals with local government across the board would know about the inconsistency in terms of local laws for particularly, say, the building industry. It is a major problem for them: when can you start, when can you finish, when can you work on Saturday, can you work on Sunday? There are things like crossovers — you name it. From the very minutiae of building industry issues through to the broadest level of reform, this is what this program is about.

The third area is shared services, and I think this is one that offers tremendous opportunity, really building upon the conversations we were having earlier about the sustainability of some of our smaller councils. Where you have got the opportunity for a smaller council to have shared services with, say, a larger regional council we think there are great opportunities in that area as well, particularly where there are skill shortages. Some of the big skill shortages as, for instance, Dr Sykes knows, are in regional Victorian planners. That is a really big problem for us. How do you go about thinking about opportunities for shared service delivery in planning is one of the classic outcomes that we would be looking for through this program. It has been very successful to date,

and we think it is very strongly in place in local government and we are going to see some big reforms in this area.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — No automated toilets as part of the business plan? I know a former councillor who can fix them up.

**The CHAIR** — That is true; in some councils they are quite controversial.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 180. It relates to the total output costs in the forward estimates and in particular the fact that the expected outcome of this financial year is \$46.2 million. In the forward estimates there is a total output cost of \$41.7 million, so there is a drop in the amount of money for community value and accountability in that performance indicator of \$4.5 million. I draw you to the Ombudsman's report on Brimbank City Council of May 2009 and the impact that this will have on the forward estimates specifically given that there is a reduction of \$4.5 million in the forward estimates.

**The CHAIR** — Make sure the question is in regard to the forward estimates.

**Mr WELLS** — It is a direct quote.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — There is a \$4.5 million reduction in money available for local government. The Ombudsman in his report said:

My investigation identified concerns about the way in which Local Government Victoria discharged its statutory responsibility to investigate potential breaches of the Local Government Act in relation to Brimbank.

At page 929 he stated:

I note in this context that Local Government Victoria does not appear to be sufficiently resourced to discharge its statutory responsibilities.

Given that in your previous answer you indicated that you have now, all of a sudden, discovered corruption in Brimbank, despite the fact that we on this side of the table are having difficulty understanding that you are having difficulty with what has occurred given that these issues were raised over the years by the local residents group, in Parliament, in the media and by individuals who live in Brimbank, the question is: firstly, what have you been doing, why have you put your head in the sand in relation to what has been occurring in Brimbank as the local government minister?

**Ms HUPPERT** — How does that relate to the estimates?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Why have you got a reduction in money for accountability if the reduction — —

**The CHAIR** — One at a time, please.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Can I finish?

**The CHAIR** — Mr Dalla-Riva has the floor.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — There is a reduction of \$4.5 million for this department.

**The CHAIR** — I think the question is clear.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — It is a department that has its head in the sand, with you, Minister, in relation to Brimbank. It is an issue that has been ongoing for year upon year upon year, and you have got no money available to investigate all these allegations.

**The CHAIR** — I think the question is clear. The minister, to answer in respect of the forward estimates and action going forward.

**Mr WYNNE** — In any year Local Government Victoria receives about 1500 pieces of correspondence and not surprisingly many phone calls. Most, as I am sure the committee would be aware, relate to minor concerns that do not warrant investigation, but serious allegations are carefully assessed by the department. Where there is a prima facie case, a formal investigation is undertaken. I can indicate to the committee that since early 2007 there have been 36 formal investigations, many involving multiple complaints.

**Mr WELLS** — This is for Brimbank?

**Mr WYNNE** — No, this is more generally.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — How many for Brimbank?

**The CHAIR** — The minister, to answer.

**Mr WYNNE** — I am answering the question, Chair. Seven current investigations involving 10 serious complaints are under way and there have been seven completed prosecutions since 2007. There are five current prosecutions. In Local Government Victoria we have seven inspectors of municipal administration, and as I am sure the committee is aware for particularly complex cases it has always been the department's policy to supplement resources by drawing on people with particular specialist skills. You would be well aware of the work of Chris Wren, a barrister, and the current Crown counsel, Karin Emerton, who have both undertaken inquiries.

The unit cost is about \$1.29 million in 2007–08 and \$1.71 million in 2008–09, so that is a substantial increase. I can also indicate to the committee that in 2008–09 an additional \$300 000 was made available to Local Government Victoria to ensure that it did have sufficient investigative capacity — another \$300 000. I also want to indicate that a dedicated investigation team was established before the Brimbank report was tabled in the house — this was some months ago — that includes a manager of investigations and a senior inspector.

**Mr WELLS** — That was to investigate Brimbank?

**Mr WYNNE** — No.

**The CHAIR** — No? It was after?

**Mr WELLS** — It was not? Then what were you doing in Brimbank?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — This is Labor mates.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells!

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Did the ministers come to you and tell you to shut down the investigation?

**The CHAIR** — You are out of order.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Minister, somebody must have shut him down.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Dalla-Riva, you are out of order, and so are you, Ms Munt. The minister, to answer, and particularly also to cover the issue of adequate funding and resources going forward.

**Mr WELLS** — What happened in Brimbank?

**Ms MUNT** — Chair!

**The CHAIR** — Let me make it quite clear to the members of this committee that when the Chair is standing, no-one else says anything. That is the normal practice of Parliament. Mr Wells, you are a senior parliamentarian. You should be aware of the rules and the precedents in Parliament. I ask you to respect the Chair and respect the proceedings of this committee. The minister, to continue.

**Mr WYNNE** — Thank you very much, Chair. We have also recruited a senior investigator from the Ombudsman's office.

**Mr WELLS** — To investigate Brimbank?

**Mr WYNNE** — Can I indicate to the committee also that, as the Premier and indeed I have indicated in the house, all of the recommendations of — —

**Mr WELLS** — The horse has bolted.

**Mr WYNNE** — Of the Ombudsman's inquiry will be — —

**Mr WELLS** — You knew about it for years and you did nothing about it. We are waiting for you to tell us what you did.

**The CHAIR** — Continue, Minister. Finalise your answer.

**Mr WYNNE** — All of the recommendations of the Ombudsman's report will be implemented in full. I can advise the committee that today, on the recommendation of the Chief Commissioner of Police, we will be appointing Mr David Walker — —

**Mr WELLS** — Is he on annual leave?

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Mr Wells! The minister, to answer.

**Mr WYNNE** — — to investigate matters relating to the recommendation of the Ombudsman's report on Brimbank. This appointment will be made today and Mr Walker will commence tomorrow. Mr Walker — —

**Mr WELLS** — So how long before he goes on leave?

**Mr WYNNE** — Chair?

**The CHAIR** — I agree with you, Minister. I am just sick — —

**Mr WYNNE** — I am trying to answer the question in an open way, Chair, and trying to respond, but this provocation really — —

**The CHAIR** — The minister, to conclude this so we can finish the session.

**Mr NOONAN** — They do not care.

**Ms MUNT** — They are bullies.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you!

**Mr WELLS** — We are just asking important questions.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — We are not bullies. You have got some councillors who are bullies!

**The CHAIR** — Thank you!

**Mr WYNNE** — Mr David Walker is a highly experienced investigator, having spent 23 years with Victoria Police, with the last 10 years as a detective at the fraud squad. In his time at Victoria Police he investigated many types of fraud, including financial institutional fraud, secret commissions, government corruption and most other known frauds. Can I say to the committee that Mr Walker comes with the strong recommendation of the Chief Commissioner of Police. He will commence tomorrow on implementing the recommendations of the Ombudsman.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — He is a serving police officer?

**Mr WYNNE** — No, he is not. Can I indicate he is a former police officer.

**The CHAIR** — That concludes the consideration of budget estimates for the portfolios of housing, Aboriginal affairs and local government. I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance today. It has been an interesting session. Where questions were taken on notice the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. The committee requests that written responses to those matters be provided within 30 days. Thank you.

## 8.4 Senior Victorians Transcript

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

#### Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 19 May 2009

#### Members

Mr R. Dalla-Riva  
Ms J. Huppert  
Ms J. Munt  
Mr W. Noonan  
Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr G. Rich-Phillips  
Mr R. Scott  
Mr B. Stensholt  
Dr W. Sykes  
Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt  
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Ms L. Neville, Minister for Senior Victorians,

Ms F. Thorn, Secretary,

Mr A. Hall, Executive Director, Financial and Corporate Services,

Dr C. Brook, Executive Director, Rural and Regional Health Aged Care Services, and

Ms J. Herington, Director, Aged Care Branch, Department of Human Services; and

Mr J. MacIsaac, Executive Director, People and Communities, Department of Planning and Community Development.



**The CHAIR** — I welcome Lisa Neville as Minister for Senior Victorians; Dr Chris Brook, executive director, rural and regional health aged care services, and Ms Jane Herington, director, aged care department from the Department of Human Services, and I welcome back Mr James MacIsaac, executive director, people and communities in the Department of Planning and Community Development.

I call on the minister to give a brief presentation of not more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the budget estimates for the portfolio of senior Victorians.

**Overheads shown.**

**Ms NEVILLE** — Thank you, Chair. I will run through quickly some of the achievements in this area, emerging challenges, and how through the estimates the budget addresses some of these challenges. The total budget for senior Victorians is \$1.16 billion in 2009–10; of this, \$1.15 billion is allocated through DHS to aged care services and \$10 million into the Office of Senior Victorians in DPCD.

A longer life expectancy is perhaps one of our greater achievements in the past century. Victorian men now have a longer life expectancy at 79.5 years compared to men in any other country: apparently Victoria is a good place for men. Life expectancy for Victorian women at 83.8 years is exceeded only by France and Japan.

Improvements to health and wellbeing have underpinned this achievement, and four out of five older Victorians rate their health as good, very good or excellent. These outcomes reflect an increasing emphasis on promoting healthy behaviours and communities, which is translated into long and healthier lives.

To prepare us for the changes that are ahead, as we do have an ageing population, we are in the process of developing and finalising an ageing policy framework that will inform Victoria's response to population ageing particularly in relation to planning and the coordination of government policy and programs to strengthen the health, wellbeing, independence and participation of older Victorians in the community.

The framework will have a long-term strategic outlook based on ensuring that the investments that we make now and in the future continue to contribute to improved good health and wellbeing, ensuring that Victoria is livable, safe and sustainable and that the economic challenges and opportunities are realised for senior Victorians.

It is vital that we establish appropriate strategies and resources for the growing numbers of senior Victorians, to ensure we meet their mental health and physical health needs and their economic wellbeing. The framework takes a structural ageing approach and addresses the key elements of our society and economy that will shape the future.

As part of this I asked my Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians to hold public consultations. In total they held 35 public meetings across the state, and in total we received over 1400 submissions from senior Victorians. We have also spoken to stakeholders and examined policy directions in other states and overseas to ensure world best practice. The framework also involves collaborative work across government reflecting all the policy areas, and will shape future activity in many areas of government.

In terms of some of the achievements, at the moment we help around 250 000 Victorians with HACC services every year. We have continued our commitment to increase HACC resources as our community ages. In community support services, over the last seven years there has been a nearly 50 per cent funding increase to the Victorian eye care services, with 74 000 people assisted in the last year.

We have also provided \$13.5 million for aged care support for the carers initiative providing respite services and support to 22 000 carers. We have also continued to invest in our positive ageing strategy which is a partnership with local government and also with COTA (Council on the Ageing). We have also continued our University of the Third Age support, and we have allocated 60 U3A growth areas which will see 70 new programs delivered across our U3A program.

We also have another very successful annual seniors festival with over 355 000 participants. We are also now in agreement with the commonwealth and rolling out the national reciprocal transport concession regime. The seniors budget initiative is \$49.8 million over four years to continue our contribution to HACC funding. This will mean we will contribute \$11.5 million in the 2009–10 year. This will ensure an additional

commonwealth growth rate of around \$17.3 million, seeing an extra \$28.8 million in this year for HACC services.

We also put in \$5.8 million over four years for an additional 4000 personal alert units. This program has grown from 8200 people having a personal alert unit in 1999–2000 to over 22 000 people now, and next year will grow to 23 000 people — a 184 per cent increase. There is further funding to roll out stage four of our aged-care land bank to help secure land in the inner city to provide residential aged care. We are also extending our men's sheds program by a further \$2 million. We have already funded 25. We have a new round currently under way and this will enable up to another 50 men's sheds to be built over a two-year period.

This budget continues to provide the commitment that we made back in 2006, which includes our denture program with 1500 extra sets of dentures to be provided in the 2009–10 year. An additional 3000 subsidised spectacles will be provided and over 1000 additional mobile eye care services will be provided to SRS clients. There is further funding for Carers Victoria for its training and education programs for carers, continuation of our dementia programs, and the continuation of our elder abuse prevention strategy — \$5.9 million — which will see the Senior Rights Victoria advocacy service continue to operate and the other initiatives that sit under the elder abuse prevention strategy.

There is also \$1 million allocated in 2008–09 for the seniors register initiative. I think all of these additional measures show our continued commitment to supporting services that make a difference to older Victorians, and I think we will continue to see the health and wellbeing of senior Victorians improve.

**Mr NOONAN** — I wanted to ask a question about men's sheds. I note a reference on budget paper 3, page 25, to a commitment to have people of a senior age engage in the community. It is a significant commitment to put funding up to develop up to 50 new sheds under this budget round. I am just wondering whether you can explain in greater detail why the government is committing to men's sheds in such big numbers, what the purpose of the sheds is and how they will support senior aged men?

**Ms NEVILLE** — Members might be aware that the Victorian government was the first government in Australia to have a specific men's sheds program. We know that as you age it is really important to continue to be engaged in communities, continue to be engaged with friends and provide spaces for people to get together to talk about health and other issues that they might face. This is particularly important for mature men over 50, and that is where the men's sheds program is targeted. It is about ensuring that we can provide lifelong opportunities for learning, that we can ensure that people have opportunities to volunteer and, importantly, for social connections. Men's sheds have been incredibly important in helping us to deliver that.

Some research that we did with ACFEB back in 2006 showed that men's sheds play a really important role in drought-affected communities as well. We have seen some of the new men's sheds invested in some of those communities. They play a role in reducing depression levels, reducing isolation and engaging men in other health, employment and education initiatives.

As you mentioned, we had a program that commenced in 2007 that committed \$2 million for infrastructure for men's sheds. So far 25 men's sheds have been established as a result of that. They are across our rural, regional and urban communities — for example, in Barwon south-west region, in the eastern metropolitan region there are 5 in the Gippsland area, in the Grampians there are 3, and in the north-west metropolitan region there are 4. These men's sheds are located in a broad spread. In fact 24 per cent are located in areas with populations of less than 1000 people. They are going into very small and often isolated communities, 44 per cent with populations of between 1000 and 10 000 people. Again there is a focus on rural and regional Victoria particularly.

They have been funded right across the state — for example, Bright, Benalla, Altona and Whittlesea. There are some great examples of the work they have been doing. Some are providing connections into adult education and some are building new facilities or toys or playgrounds for their local communities. Men are gaining something from it but also making huge contributions back out into their local community.

This \$2 million over two years will enable us to put in place we hope up to another 50 men's sheds. We have got the 25 already committed, 25 for the funding round that closes this week, and hopefully this \$2 million will enable another 50, which I think will be extremely welcomed by communities. It is an oversubscribed program.

It is a very popular program because it is providing important social connections for particularly isolated and vulnerable men in communities.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 97, in relation to aged and home care. I understand that last year the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee had a review of the fabric survey. In the questioning that I undertook on 27 March 2008 — and this is on page 9 of the report — Ms Thorn in part of her response said:

The fabric survey itself takes quite a long time.

I then asked:

And when do you anticipate to have it done by?

Ms Thorn said:

We anticipate that it will be done — —

I said:

For the aged-care sector.

Dr Brook said:

It will be completed by early 2009.

My question is in relation to how we are going with the fabric survey in the forward estimates and the total output cost? Can we get a breakdown of what the increase in the commonwealth and third-party revenue is, as referenced in footnote (d) on page 99 of budget paper 3? How many facilities are now in category 1, 2 and 3 as a result of the 2008 fabric survey? How many of the 17 facilities identified in 2001 but not developed as of last year are now in category 1 and 2, and have they now been funded to fix their facilities?

Is there any funding for the category 1, 2 and 3 facilities in the forward estimates of this budget as a result of that review and the Auditor-General's report last year?

**The CHAIR** — Minister, I would like you to answer this one quite carefully because this is an Auditor-General's report which is currently before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and the committee has not reported yet. Therefore any proceedings of that, apart from the public hearing, obviously have not yet been reported to Parliament. I think you need to answer very carefully, particularly only in relation to the forward estimates. You can take the rest on notice.

**Ms NEVILLE** — I suppose what I can talk about — and I presume this goes to the issue — is the category 1 and 2 facilities that were identified originally in the Auditor-General's report. If I talk about those category 1 and 2 facilities originally identified in the Auditor-General's report and the status of those?

**The CHAIR** — The plans are in the forward estimates.

**Ms NEVILLE** — PAEC is aware obviously that the performance audit was done and was published by the Auditor-General in 2006. There were 11 facilities at the time identified as category 1 facilities. Of these, 10 facilities have been rebuilt or redeveloped and one has closed. All the facilities have met the commonwealth accreditation requirements. There were 33 facilities identified as category 2 facilities. To date, 14 have been or are being rebuilt or redeveloped. Two have closed, 10 have had service and/or capital planning undertaken and 7 have had no further detailed planning.

All the category 2 facilities, rebuilt or not, have achieved certification and have demonstrated that they meet the requirements of the commonwealth in relation to fire and safety standards and, where required by safety, upgrade works have been undertaken.

Over the last 10 years we have had a significant investment in upgrading — I think \$497 million has been spent on upgrading public sector residential aged care facilities. Of those, I think 45 out of 47 have occurred in regional and rural Victoria, and we have a number currently in the construction stage at the moment that were announced in last year's budget. So our program to upgrade residential aged care is continuing.

I spoke about it at the last PAEC last year and will continue to ensure that our residential aged care facilities meet the standards required by the commonwealth and meet community expectations.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Chair, through you again, I know we discussed this in March last year and I guess the issue is about the delay in our reporting, but that is a separate issue that we will deal with. I am trying to work out, given that there was a fabric survey which I understand was taken in 2008, it was anticipated that something would happen in the year 2009 and in the forward estimates there would have been some provision. You have obviously undertaken the fabric survey and from that analysis you have now determined what needs to be done and there must be something in the forward estimates to say, ‘Yes, we have identified these’ or am I sort of — —

**Ms NEVILLE** — The fabric survey, as I understand it, was across health so it was not just about aged care. There was a fabric survey; it is going to be completed this year.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — So it has not been completed?

**Ms NEVILLE** — No. In this budget there are significant capital works for health services, so that continues. As I said, there are mental health service upgrades and redevelopment, there is the Geelong Hospital upgrade, Bendigo Health Service, so there are a number of significant investments that go to issues of redevelopment of health services more broadly, and they are in the forward estimates.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Ms Thorn said in March last year that the fabric survey was:

taking place now.

**The CHAIR** — March this year.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — In March last year you, Ms Thorn, said:

... it is taking place now.

I asked:

... and it will take the year to complete by 2009?

You replied:

Yes.

**Ms THORN** — If I can add to that, Mr Dalla-Riva? Yes, it has not yet been completed. It is a fabric survey of the total health system, so it is a very comprehensive one. We did say it would be done in 2009 but I remind members of the committee that very large parts of the department spent up to two months of early this year very much focused on assisting with the bushfire effort, and that led to the redeployment of large numbers of staff into that relief and recovery area. But I am happy to take it on notice and give you an estimated time of completion for that fabric survey.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — That would be good, Ms Thorn.

**Ms HUPPERT** — Minister, budget paper 3, page 25 refers to the government’s commitment to services that enhance the capacity of senior Victorians to maintain their independence and personal safety in the home and engage in the community. In your presentation you referred to \$1 million for the new seniors registers initiative. Could you outline for the committee what this initiative will do to enhance that aim during the forward estimates period?

**Ms NEVILLE** — The announcement in relation to the \$1 million investment to roll out state-wide seniors registers really came out of the extreme heat conditions and the outcomes of those extreme heat conditions that we experienced at the end of January-early February. People may remember that we experienced in Melbourne temperatures of 43, 44, 45 degrees; on a couple of nights the temperature did not drop below 35 degrees; in some rural and regional areas — in Geelong, where I live — it was almost 49 degrees.

They were very hot days and we took a number of steps, as a government, in the lead up to that heat wave to ensure that all Victorians were aware of those conditions coming up and also what action they could take to take care and minimise the impact of those extreme heat conditions.

We encouraged people to be very mindful of people around them, ensure that they were looking out for their neighbours. We alerted health and aged care services about the heatwave and how they should manage heat-affected patients. Ambulance Victoria also had extra officers and services deployed. Personal Alert Victoria, which I mentioned before, is getting some extra money; it also provided an extra monitoring service for their clients, the 22 000 people they currently service.

But, based on the data that was collected — this is through the chief health officer — from paramedics, locums, emergency departments, the death registry and the Coroner's Court, it is estimated that around an extra 374 deaths were recorded during that period compared to previous years. Unfortunately there was a large increase, about a 64 per cent increase, in the number of deaths for those aged over 75 compared to the previous four-year period.

This has highlighted to us the need to add to the supports we have for senior Victorians, particularly those who are isolated and living alone in their communities. We currently have around 20 community and seniors registers operating in Victoria. They are run by community volunteers, often in partnership with local organisations — most with the police; about 18 are actually based at police stations.

They basically are a list of older people who are living alone and who want to be on a register and to be linked into some volunteer support. These people will receive regular contact calls. Some registers provide visits to check up and ensure people are safe and well. They hold information such as emergency contacts and any medical risks. In the event of any emergency, like floods, heatwaves or storms, the registers can be used to make sure vulnerable seniors are safe and secure.

They can be a very valuable resource for emergency services as well, if they need to contact next of kin or if they need information for evacuation purposes. We also want to target some of the seniors' registers to people who have a disability and live alone, because they often experience the same sort of isolation as older people in our communities.

They are a very important and valuable tool for social connection for people on the list. Many registers send out regular bulletins, they hold events, they make regular phone calls to check up, and they visit the homes. As I said, there is a register card in the event of emergencies, and they are coordinated in conjunction with the police, but they are really coordinated by volunteers — often seniors themselves who want to contribute back to their community and ensure isolated seniors have the support they need to feel secure continuing to live as independently as possible at home, and that is what we know seniors want to do.

This rollout will ensure that we can provide grants — provide the existing ones, but also roll out the initiative in those communities statewide who feel they may benefit from it.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, I would like to ask you about the cognitive dementia and memory services (CDAMS). Alzheimer's Australia Vic in their dementia manifesto indicated that:

CDAMS capacity meets less than 50 per cent of current demand. Waiting lists are very long.

In response to a question on notice from the shadow minister, indeed Mr Dalla-Riva, you indicated that funding had been provided — around \$4.5 million for recent years — but no evaluation had been undertaken of the program. Why has that program not been evaluated, and is that the reason we are still seeing capacity far short of demand?

**Ms NEVILLE** — All services that we fund are required to meet outcome measures, report against KPIs — there are a whole series of ways in which we monitor the effectiveness of programs across our communities. For some of our services we have a consultant do an evaluation and ask, 'Are they working, are they effective?', particularly where they are new services. For others we require regular reporting against certain outcome measures. All the services, including that service, are required to be reporting against service measures.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — But you have indicated there has been no evaluation of CDAMS. The question was: has the funding been evaluated, and the answer was that it has not been evaluated.

**Ms NEVILLE** — Well, I suppose that is a technical issue about what you mean by ‘evaluation’. Are they monitored, are they meeting KPIs, how is the service tracking? Absolutely, all of that goes on every year. And where people have funding agreements they are required to report around finances but also around outcome measures — that is, how the program is operating, what difference it is making.

All of that continues as a continuous program of monitoring our services to ensure they are delivering the best service to their client group, as well as ensuring that they are meeting the community’s needs.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — The substantive part of the question concerned the funding, with Alzheimer’s Victoria saying that there is a 50 per cent shortfall in capacity. When can we expect that to be met? They said the program is very good but it is 50 per cent short.

**Ms NEVILLE** — There are a number of services provided to people who have dementia. This is one of those important programs that do that, and we continue to support Alzheimer’s Australia, as does the commonwealth. These are jointly shared responsibilities in aged care, and we provided additional funds in 2006 to roll out over a four-year period to this important service.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — How much funding was provided?

**Ms NEVILLE** — I would have to have a look at that.

**The CHAIR** — We might have to put that one on notice.

**Ms NEVILLE** — It is around \$2 million.

**The CHAIR** — Around \$2 million? Perhaps you can put a more exact answer on notice. Are we happy with that?

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — We will take on notice, thank you.

**The CHAIR** — That concludes consideration of budget estimates for the portfolios of Community Services, Mental Health and Senior Victorians. I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance today. With the questions we have taken on notice, the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. The committee requests a written response to those to be provided in 30 days.

## 8.5 Community Development Transcript

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

#### Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 19 May 2009

#### Members

Mr R. Dalla-Riva

Mr G. Rich-Phillips

Ms J. Huppert

Mr R. Scott

Ms J. Munt

Mr B. Stensholt

Mr W. Noonan

Dr W. Sykes

Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt

Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Mr P. Batchelor, Minister for Community Development,

Mr Y. Blacher, Secretary,

Ms G. Miles, Deputy Secretary,

Mr D. Ferrie, Executive Director, Community Programs, and

Mr S. Gregory, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Planning and Community Development.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on the 2009–10 budget estimates for the portfolios of community development. On behalf of the committee I welcome the Honourable Peter Batchelor, MP, Minister for Community Development; Yehudi Blacher, secretary; Gillian Miles, deputy secretary, community development; Damian Ferrie, executive director, community programs; and Stephen Gregory, chief financial officer, from the Department of Planning and Community Development. Departmental officers, members of the public and the media are also welcome.

In accordance with the guidelines for public hearings, I remind members of the public that they cannot participate in the committee's proceedings. Only officers of the PAEC secretariat are to approach PAEC members. Departmental officers, as requested by the minister or his chief of staff, can approach the table during the hearing. Members of the media are also requested to observe the guidelines for filming and recording proceedings in the Legislative Council committee room.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. There is no need for evidence to be sworn. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript to be verified and returned within two working days. In accordance with past practice, the transcripts and PowerPoint presentations will then be placed on the committee's website.

Following a presentation by the minister, committee members will ask questions related to the budget estimates. Generally the procedure followed will be that relating to questions in the Legislative Assembly. I ask that all mobile telephones be turned off. I now call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 10 minutes of the more complex financial performance information that relates to the budget estimates for the portfolio of community development.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — It is a pleasure to be here as the Minister for Community Development. You will have to bear with me; I am not quite 100 per cent today, but I did not want to miss PAEC. It is the highlight of my parliamentary career!

**The CHAIR** — I have a frog in my throat too.

#### **Overheads shown.**

**Mr BATCHELOR** — I just want to make a brief presentation. The context is that I will be going through some areas more quicker than others — A Fairer Victoria, where the future holds, the Community Support Fund, and emerging challenges.

The cornerstone of our social policy position to address disadvantage is A Fairer Victoria. This year we have continued the large investments in A Fairer Victoria. This year we have provided some \$925.6 million. As you can see from the graph, it continues a five-year program.

The importance and the relevance of A Fairer Victoria is that provides our social framework. As the minister responsible for coordinating this, it provides myself and our department the opportunity to get some of the mainstream agencies to deliver social outcomes.

This year we have paid particular importance to that, identifying four priorities. The first of those is getting the best start in life. In the budget we have provided some \$215 million. Our second priority was improving education and helping people getting into work. You would recall from earlier presentations that we understand the importance of providing economic participation, particularly in terms of helping people in employment. Those two subcategories provided some \$96.6 million of initiatives in the budget.

The third priority area was improving health and wellbeing — some \$288 million. The major boosts came in mental health and disability services. There is a significant increase for indigenous health with the important objective of closing the gap in life expectancy. We see great disparity between the indigenous life expectancy and the life expectancy of the rest of the community, particularly when you see that the life expectancy for males in Victoria is the highest in the world. When you contrast that with the indigenous community, it is quite a significant task that we have to do to bring about greater equality there. The fourth priority was developing livable communities — some \$325 million. In this area, and in other areas of government activity, significant partnership has provided additional funds over and above these from the commonwealth government.



I will just outline some of the specific initiatives in this year's budget. For community facilities, particularly in bushfire-affected areas, we are providing some \$11.6 million. A three-year funding initiative from the Community Support Fund and some reprioritisation in existing grant streams to help rebuild those communities which were affected by the bushfires. This initiative will address a portion of the demand for community facilities in local government areas.

We will work in partnership with those not only in the bushfire areas but also those areas facing rapid population growth. It is to support the construction of community facilities such as libraries, neighbourhood houses, community centres and sporting facilities. It is important not only to meet the bushfire recovery but as our population grows in both the outer-metropolitan area and country Victoria we are seeing there is a need for the expansion of community facilities. An example you might say is in the city of Wyndham which will require an additional 10 multipurpose community facilities and 38 sports fields over the next 10 years to deal with population growth. We are trying to identify how we might help councils. A lot of this is their local responsibility, but we are trying to increase the strength and resilience of local communities.

Volunteering is an area that is important to this government. We are developing a volunteering and participation strategy. There has been \$9.3 million allocated in this budget. It is a whole-of-government volunteering and participation strategy. The strategy will deliver an online single-entry portal for volunteering in Victoria. This will provide some matching services on information and resources for community organisations and individuals who want to volunteer. A particular emphasis through this program is going to be on the engagement of young people, because we know that the engagement of young people goes to the issue of the longevity and helping the community organisations be sustainable, but also it will be of great assistance to young people, particularly as a tangible support tool for our Respect strategy.

We will also be providing a major awareness and recruitment campaign to promote community participation, particularly by young people and particularly to get people to volunteer post the bushfires. In earlier times we have understood that in times of natural emergencies and higher demand on volunteers and volunteer-based organisations, there is a bit of exhaustion. We want organisations to know that that is a realistic response. To try to address it by trying to retain volunteers but also trying to recruit new volunteers in the years ahead — knowing that this is a problem, trying to get ahead of it before it causes significant problems. We will also be providing resources and support to community organisations and local government to attract particularly younger volunteers. There is a bit of an emphasis this year on trying to get younger volunteers to contribute.

The other emphasis of this year's budget is place-based initiatives. We have a number of programs that have been in operation — community renewal, community building initiatives and Transport Connections. We have also got programs that are leveraging funds from the commonwealth. We are also providing, as I indicated, some money for community infrastructure. This map is an attempt to show the extent of participation of the combination of those community building programs.

The Community Support Fund is my area of responsibility. It operates, as you know, under the Gaming Regulation Act of 2003. There are a number of decisions made by government as to the allocation of funds under this annual expenditure of about \$108 million. You can see from the diagram there is a stream called the Victorian community support grants. That is a scheme administered by me to provide assistance to local communities and help deliver the Fairer Victoria agenda, with gambling services with \$28 million to deal with problem gambling. That is administered by the Minister for Gaming. There is a number of area activities and grant programs under the community services and grants programs, which are administered by separate ministers as a result of government decisions to allocate funds in those streams.

In 2008–09 the Community Support Fund provided \$15.4 million for our community support grants program. It included things like the Churchill community hub, which opened recently with the local member Russell Northe, or the refurbishment of the old Mornington Secondary College library. What we are trying to do is revitalise shared-use facilities in communities.

The support fund for 2009–10 is set out. That is how we expect the expenditure to flow and the allocation of the \$108 million. There is a range of programs: \$7.8 million for building community programs, as I mentioned before; and there is also some \$21.6 million for sports programs, which are administered by the minister for sport.

The continuing and emerging challenges for us are, of course, the bushfire and the emergency recovery response. Recovery, as opposed to fighting the emergency, is longer and is drawn out. The other major response is climate change and its disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities. The impact of the global financial crisis and the economic downturn will be felt hardest by those who currently experience disadvantage. It will have an impact on the community sector, including the not-for-profits, whose income stream has dropped because of the loss of the value of their corpus and the loss of dividend — income coming in. This will flow through to community organisations. The other emerging issue is population growth, putting pressures of all sorts on people living in those areas.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. I asked previously for details of federal grants under your department from the previous minister. I assume there will be a total response to us on that. I thought I would begin. You mentioned the bushfire response and the involvement of your portfolio and department in that and presumably also ongoing as the recovery phase is undertaken. There were details of this in budget paper 3, page 284. Could you give us some details, Minister, about what is happening and what is going to happen?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Our department, like many others, has been required for, and happily responded to, the task of helping out at the time of the bushfires, and particularly this department has an ongoing responsibility to help during the recovery phase. We have played an important role, a useful role I believe, and we are doing that in a number of ways. To date we have provided direct financial support. We have used existing grant programs and some money provided by the budget to provide financial support to those organisations and councils in the bushfire-affected areas.

For example, grants of up to \$20 000 were made available to volunteer organisations. We also negotiated with some local councils and statewide organisations assistance of up to \$100 000, those in particular to coordinate volunteering partnerships. We have provided grants of some \$10 000 to neighbourhood houses, which played a very supportive role not only at the emergency time but also in the recovery phase, and there was some \$30 000 for recovery officers for local councils. We have taken the view that local councils were very close to the communities and to individuals, and we have responded to their requests in a number of these ways to make funds available.

In addition to that, we have also helped in an administrative way. The department has had personnel deployed to help with various tasks, such as providing secretariat support for the Community Recovery Fund. We have also had our local teams assisting local councils and working on the ground. We have also been managing the overwhelming response from business and the community. We have established a website and a hotline to register more than 22 000 people who volunteered to support the bushfire response.

We coordinated the massive response coming in from businesses and corporations that wanted to donate goods and services. Just some examples of that are: a New South Wales company called Duraplas donated six 10 000-litre water tanks to Flowerdale, and BP donated the fuel to transport the tanks there; OneSteel donated 800 pairs of overalls to relief centres in Whittlesea, Wandong and Buxton; Husqvarna donated not sewing machines but equipment such as chainsaws, spare parts, gloves and helmets to Mitchell Blaze Aid and relief centres in Wandong and Buxton; and a Sydney-based company, Shoes & Sox, donated 250 pairs of assorted shoes and socks to the Whittlesea material aid centre.

Our bureaucrats, our public servants, provided the coordination and assistance to match the offer and the areas of need in not only those instances, but they are just typical of a whole host of activities. I would like to use this as an opportunity of placing on record my thanks as minister for the work our staff did during this period of time. It was outstanding and it is ongoing.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. I am sure the committee is highly appreciative of the work of the staff and also the many volunteers, who I am sure through all our communities have been involved. Flowerdale Road in my electorate ended up giving a special sort of assistance to the people of Flowerdale. Simple connections like that were repeated so often and so willingly throughout our community.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — That is right.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, I would like to ask you about the no-interest loans schemes. The year before last government committed \$4.7 million over four years to that program. Can you tell the committee in view of the worsened economic environment whether any additional funds have been committed to that scheme

this year; in terms of money already committed, how it is treated either as an output or asset initiative in the sense that it is a loan; and the performance of that scheme in terms of numbers of loans on issue, any history of defaults and the total value of the loan on issue?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — I will ask Mr Gregory to comment in a moment on its accounting treatment, but the no-interest loan scheme I think is a terrific scheme. It is run by the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service. They provide low-interest loans of up to about \$1200 to low-income earners, and they assist these qualifying participants at times of emergency to purchase essential household items, say, maybe if the fridge breaks down or a baby might arrive and they might not have a washing machine or dryer — these sorts of things. Not only are they provided with the loan but they are provided with counselling and assistance to encourage them to manage their household budgets and to meet their various commitments.

In 2006–07 we committed \$4.7 million over four years. This increased the number of providers from 41 to 77, and the number of loans over this period increased from 850 to 4000. So it is a program that when it was established was for over a four-year period, and that commitment is continuing. Accordingly the number of loans and the number of people that it is servicing is systematically increased. The program, however, is, as I said, delivered by Good Shepherd but also the National Australia Bank. From an original commitment of \$3.3 million, the NAB has extended its commitment to \$5 million, in response to the success, as they see it, of both delivering assistance and the participants repaying those loans. Our commitment to this program in the 2006–07 budget has enabled us to leverage the external contribution from the National Australia Bank to extend the quantum and the reach of the program. You asked about accounting treatments.

**Mr GREGORY** — It is treated as a grant, because the loans are not with us, they are with the Good Shepherd, so we have granted the money to the Good Shepherd. The loan will get repaid to the Good Shepherd, and it will reissue the money as new loans.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Do you have any information on success in terms of default rates or any feedback from Good Shepherd?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Yes, we do. The feedback is that about 95 to 97 per cent of loans are repaid without default. This is a very high level of repayment amongst what in conventional terms would be regarded as a high-risk group. A fairly rigorous assessment process is undertaken by the Good Shepherd before a loan is provided, and they are provided through organisations not just necessarily the Good Shepherd but local organisations — community health centres, refugee and settlement organisations and Odyssey House — which have an additional relationship with the applicants in addition to the loan testing. The process also provides, as I said, some additional counselling support and financial assistance, and the hosting organisation takes an ongoing interest in terms of how they are going and if there are any problems. It is intensive, but it does produce a return.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Does the government grant contribute to the counselling mechanisms or does the grant purely go to the actual loan mechanism?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — The corpus — the amount that is loaned out — comes from the National Australia Bank, and we fund the support services to facilitate it.

**The CHAIR** — There is also an emergency grants program, is there not, for white goods?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Yes. It is a no-interest loan scheme. Elsewhere in government?

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Yes, but not as part of this; that is correct. There is one in East Burwood — a NILS program. What do you think of it?

**The CHAIR** — Pretty good. I have not used it, but I am told it is very good.

**Ms MUNT** — I refer you to page 178 of budget paper 3 under ‘Community development’ where it mentions:

Projects funded through the Victorian Community Support Grants program for the purpose of planning, community strengthening and infrastructure.

I noticed in your opening presentation that the estimated expenditure under the Victorian Community Support Grants program for 2008–09 was \$15.4 million, dropping in 2009–10 to \$11.9 million. Could you explain that revised expenditure? Are there any other streams of funding that are taking up that slack? Could you explain that to me?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — As I said in my presentation, the government determines the allocation of funding from the Community Support Fund. As you can see from that chart, it does that to a range of portfolio departments' initiatives that are consistent with the legislation covering the fund. One of those grant streams is the Victorian Community Support Grants program. It is a program that supports communities to become stronger, better resourced and more inclusive places. This was announced in 2004. It enabled many communities to undertake a broad range of activities, such as community planning, infrastructure initiatives and community strengthening. It was a program based on applications. They were considered and provided to those community organisations and local councils that fell within the funding guidelines.

Subsequently the government provided other streams or grants within programs within the Community Support Fund. Some of the programs that were previously incorporated under the community support grants program were picked up by other funding streams. It is not a diminution of the amount going to these, but rather an expansion of the sorts of programs and grant streams that are now available in a broader range. In addition to the community support grants program, which is of similar size, we also have other programs, such as Modernising Neighbourhood Houses. Previously you could get that under the Community Support Fund, but another stream of funds has been made available for that specifically targeted towards neighbourhood houses.

We have also had volunteer grants that previously were part of it but which now have their own grant stream. We have also got a stream fostering the participation of men through the men's sheds program. Another stream is the development of community enterprises. Whilst it may look like the level of support provided to the Victorian Community Support Grants program has decreased, actually there are these additional programs that are now available. We provide other funding streams, but they all still come under the umbrella of the Community Support Fund.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, can I take you to page 178 of budget paper 3, which is the community development output group. The question is in relation to the key performance measures which, with one exception, are all new for this year.

Equally you have abandoned roughly 20 key performance measures that were applicable to last year and earlier years that were in quite a degree of detail as to the performance of various programs under the community development portfolio. Given this committee's previous comments, of which you would be aware, about the need for continuity of measures in order to be able to compare years, could you explain why those 17 or 18 measures have been abandoned and these new ones put in place?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — I am aware of the need for continuity, but the structure of government does change and we need to have the public accounts reflect those changes. Even within government areas of ongoing activity, decisions and priorities change over time, and that is true with community development in particular, because many of our activities are based on funding of programs for limited periods of time. An objective is sought and action is taken to address that, and then at a later point in time new priorities come forward.

We do not have the funding either in this program or indeed in the Victorian budget just to always incrementally add on top of an existing base. We are very specific in community development because we want to try to grow organisations and grow their strength and resilience so they can be financially independent and sustainable themselves. Then we place a bit of an emphasis on having programs that run for a defined period of time and address a issue, and we try to make that organisation sustainable or that program address the issue and address a contemporary issue of disadvantage.

We believe the new community development measures streamline the previous ones. They better reflect initiatives for Victorian communities, and hopefully they will be more sustainable going forward. But subject to that qualification always, as we change initiatives, which is a key feature of this portfolio — that is, changing initiatives over time — we do so to meet the required circumstances. You would have heard how within, say, our community support grants program we have placed great emphasis on supporting volunteering in bushfire-affected areas this year rather than spreading them thinly across the state. That has happened in a number of areas, and I think the reason for that is quite obvious. But we did undertake a review in consultation

with the Department of Treasury and Finance, and we think it satisfactorily meets the requirements of the new community development area going forward.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — I guess, Minister, the old ones, which are on page 457, did relate to a lot of programs that are going forward, such as the CSF, community funding, the NILS program et cetera; so they are still contemporary programs, even though you have abandoned the measures.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — The footnotes there in the budget papers do provide an explanation of the linkages between the old and the new.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — There is a lot of consolidation.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Yes.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — So a lot less detail.

**The CHAIR** — You will find in the department's response to the questionnaire in question 8.1 there is a detailed explanation of that: to allow for the assessment of the department's production and delivery of outputs. We are very interested in outcomes rather than just simply the outputs, Minister, and I am sure you are too.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — And some detail.

**Mr NOONAN** — Minister, I want to follow up on A Fairer Victoria. You spent a considerable period of time in your presentation just setting the social framework in terms of your responsibilities in this area. I note in budget paper 3 that pages 37 right through to 42 outline in some further detail all the commitments under A Fairer Victoria. I just wonder whether, for the committee's benefit, you might outline what new commitments exist as part of this budget estimates period and how those new commitments will support communities in the current difficult economic climate.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Sure. I think in the presentation I outlined the four priority areas: getting the best start, improving education, improving health and wellbeing, and developing livable communities. We have achieved really quite significant improvements in these areas, and we want to continue that.

This year's *A Fairer Victoria* reflected the unprecedented cooperation with the commonwealth government, particularly around education, housing — social housing — health and indigenous Victorians. We have our \$926 million A Fairer Victoria initiative, but we also have \$2.8 million over five years of new commonwealth funding. That will be for important social initiatives, which will be organised through the national partnership agreements. There are an number of specific purpose payments which will also have a beneficial impact on the disadvantaged in this area in Victoria.

The areas that the national partnership will concentrate on include indigenous early childhood development and literacy and numeracy in our schools, particularly in low socioeconomic communities. In terms of health the concentration is on promotion and illness prevention. Also included are, as I mentioned before, closing the gap on life expectancy for indigenous Victorians and the area of particular importance to the Prime Minister, which is homelessness and the development of new housing units.

These are the areas that we think can lead to significant improvements because of the additional quantum provided by the commonwealth on this occasion.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, I take you to page 173 of the same budget paper, which refers to the indigenous community and cultural development outlook group, which I assume is under the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs rather than yourself.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — That is correct.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — There is a footnote there in relation to the output cost — relating to the decline in output cost. The footnote is (s), which says:

The decrease in total output cost from the 2008–09 expected outcome to the 2009–10 target relates to a number of programs lapsing at the end of 2008–09. However, these programs have received additional funding as part of the 2009–10 budget from the Community Support Fund.

My question is: why is the Community Support Fund being used to replace funding that was previously provided through a general appropriation? You may be aware of the all-party committee on gaming licensing last year which made a finding that the CSF should not be used to replace general appropriation. There is another example like this. The question is why is the CSF being used in this way to fund something that was previously funded through the budget appropriation?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — I think on this occasion some of the decisions that were made by the government in relation to the allocation of funding streams from the Community Support Fund provided on this occasion some funding for some programs but they were not on an ongoing basis; they might have been for one or two years, from memory, but not on a recurrent basis. These are programs that were within the legislative guidelines of the Community Support Fund and really provided a mechanism for meeting the needs of that occasion but not on an ongoing or recurrent basis, which I think was the basis of the original concern expressed by the all-party committee. I am not aware that we made any ongoing. I will check the veracity of that; there might be one or two-year commitments or that type of commitment but not an ongoing commitment to fund them from the Community Support Fund.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Could you please clarify how long they do run for under CSF funding? Will you take that on notice?

**Mr BLACHER** — That depends on the program. You asked specifically in relation to the indigenous program?

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Yes.

**Mr BLACHER** — There is three years of funding coming out of the CSF for that particular program.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — So up to 2011–12?

**Mr BLACHER** — Up to and including 2011–12. That period of funding — one, two, three, sometimes four years — is quite usual; nothing exceptional there.

**Ms HUPPERT** — Minister, in your presentation relating to A Fairer Victoria you talked about the renewal programs. I note that in budget paper 3 on page 285 there is an allocation of \$9.3 million for community renewal programs; it is an extension. Could you please outline for the committee some of the work that has been achieved by community renewal so far and how that extension will benefit communities during the forward estimates period?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — This is part of our place-based initiatives. You would have seen the distribution map.

**The CHAIR** — Do you want to show that again?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — The community renewal projects, if you like, are a companion to the neighbourhood renewal which is administered out of the DHS and has been going for a longer period. This is a program that addresses location disadvantage in specific locations which are not dominated by the DHS housing estates and has been going for three years. It has been funded for three years.

The government made a decision to extend that funding for a further three years. We believe what had been achieved in terms of forming the strong local partnerships between residents and businesses and governments and community organisations had been helping people have a say and was worthy of extension. The sorts of things we would like to see developed over this three-year period are primarily to see the activities in each of these eight locations become more self-sustaining. They understand that and their primary objective is to access external sources of funds or to build up all community organisations that would enable them to continue operating without government assistance.

We would expect them to work with local businesses to see if they can stimulate employment opportunities as well as a funding stream. We also want them to see if they can reciprocate that by stimulating local business activities through the use of community and social enterprises. These are where local people get together and establish a community enterprise that provides local employment and training opportunities but does that in the context of a business setting and teaches them business skills and can help them get job-ready or, if they are

really successful, keeps them employed in viable local businesses. We also think they should look at increasing training opportunities, particularly linking with the federal employment programs.

There is a lot of money available at the federal level for employment programs and training opportunities, and we would like to see our community renewal programs leverage funding from those areas. We also want to see the community renewals — and we think that they will — link both children and importantly I suppose the decision-makers, the parents, into early childhood services and quality education in their local community, which is all designed to invest in the human capital of our young citizens.

We want them to enhance their ability, to be sustainable in the long run by developing confidence, new local leaders and networks so that people can essentially take charge of their community's own future. We are providing the support for them through the extension of this program.

To date we have seen seven community enterprises already funded, and they have created 46 jobs. That is not a large number, but it is at a very local level. It helps disadvantaged people, citizens who might not have been terribly interested in employment activity but have become job ready. We think that that will help them to be resilient during this economic downturn.

We have also seen local partnerships and collaborations right across the state, partnerships between other state departments and local community renewal activities, with federal governments, with businesses and, increasingly, with philanthropic organisations. We have also had local residents — in excess of 1500 — participate in volunteer activities. They have brought together nearly 100 community events to try to strengthen and bolster community participation, ranging from thankyou days through to ceremonies for young people and skateboarding events. They are the sorts of activities that have been successful in the past and we would like to see them continue.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Minister, with regard to the Community Support Fund, I note that Victorians lost \$2.6 billion on poker machines in pubs and clubs last financial year, the Community Support Fund is the same \$108 million as it was the year before, and \$29.6 million of that goes on problem gambling. I just make that point. I am interested in the community support grants, which are the \$11.9 million. If you look at page 475 of budget paper 3, there are four of what look like large projects there. They add up, in my figures, to \$4.45 million. I presume that is \$4.45 million of the \$11.9 million. It also states there:

... approved funding for a number of local governments to undertake community infrastructure and planning projects.

It is not detailed, because you cannot get the information from the councils, or something, in time to detail it here. Can you confirm that? There are two questions to this. One is: would that information be available to be put up on the website, detailing those other projects funded by the community support grants? The other question is: what is the criteria for the allocation of those grants in terms of allocating the money to particular areas? The money comes out of particular areas — for example the Skyways Taverner in Airport West, which you might know about.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — No, I don't. What is it like?

**Ms PENNICUIK** — It reaped almost \$60 million from poker machines in three years and it is the biggest poker machine venue outside Crown Casino. Obviously money from there goes into the Community Support Fund. My question is about allocation to areas where the money is coming from.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — There were two questions there, and I am happy to answer both of those. The first one was, 'Is there a detailed list of the grants under the Victorian community support grants program?'. The answer to that is, 'Yes'. I think it is in our annual report, and it is also on the Web.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I could not see it on the web. I was looking.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — It might be easier to find in the annual report.

**The CHAIR** — The tables office would have a copy.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Yes, that is right. They are listed in the annual report in a chapter or on a page in the appropriate section. But that is just for that grant stream. If you look at the blue table you have there, I think it is

the one on the left. They have been published in our annual report for quite some time. They are the ones that I am responsible for, and we itemise them there for three years, for transparency reasons.

The criteria for what can be funded under that grant program are also on the Web and they change over time, as I indicated earlier on. This year we will be having greater emphasis on bushfire areas. I do not know what number of poker machines there are in the bushfire-affected areas. There are probably not many but, because of the needs basis, they will receive a greater proportion of that grant stream over the last financial year and the next financial year. Once the recovery process has concluded, there will be a needs basis somewhere else. We do not link the grant streams directly to the areas where the activity takes place.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — So there is no correlation between the gambling losses and the amount of money that comes through the Community Support Fund?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — No, the fund receives money from the electronic gaming machines, and that is a fact of law. Then when we allocate our portion of the Community Support Fund to various allocations, they are based on an assessment of needs and how they match the guidelines that are current at that point in time.

**Mr SCOTT** — Minister, I would like to ask you a question regarding the whole-of-government volunteering strategy which you referred to in your presentation and is also referred to on page 343 of budget paper 3, which refers to development of a volunteering strategy to promote community participation in volunteering. Can you please outline what this strategy aims to do?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Volunteers make a substantial contribution to our community. I have described them elsewhere as the lifeblood or the glue that holds communities together. I think at the time of the recent bushfires emergency, the role and preparedness of people from right across the state to lend a hand at a moment of need was really important, and volunteering can hold its head up high as a result of the contribution people made.

There have been estimates that in economic terms it is worth about \$10 billion a year to the Victorian economy. Volunteering is an important part of the economic, as well as the social, life of Victoria. We have allocated \$9.3 million to implement three key areas of this strategy. We want to have a major awareness and recruitment campaign to promote community participation.

We have learnt from, as I think I said earlier, the experience after earlier or other bushfires that there is an exhaustion factor. We want to say to community organisations, particularly ones like the CFA, ‘Be aware of this phenomenon and take steps to keep those that you have got’, and try to help them gain new volunteers. We are going to provide another element to this campaign for this year, which is resources and support to organisations to attract more younger people, and we are establishing an online portal which is in the language of the vernacular of young people and makes it a bit more accessible in terms of trying to get people to volunteer.

We do all of this because we know that when people are connected, they are happier and healthier, you have stronger and more active communities, and when a troubled time arrives, if you have a more connected community, you are able to deal with issues in a more constructive and meaningful way.

Again this came through in a number of areas that were severely affected by the bushfires. The local leadership that came to the fore was best in those areas where the community building initiatives were in place; they are a bit like our neighbourhood renewal programs, which you would know about from your own area, Mr Scott.

In 100 towns across country Victoria, there is the rural equivalent, the community building initiative. Up at Kinglake the outstanding community person was Anne Leadbeater, and she just happened to be the person who was the community building initiative engagement officer for that area. The skills that she learnt undertaking that task were able to be brought forward at a time of great need, and people turned to her. That is why we are wanting to maintain these place-based initiatives and to be similarly supported by an active campaign of retaining, gaining and training volunteers.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, I take you back to the community development output group on page 178 of budget paper 3. Given this is now a consolidation with other things including neighbourhood houses, men’s sheds and so forth, I wonder if you could provide the committee with a breakdown of that output cost? I understand that some of it is the net CSF money and the difference between inflows and outflows, but



could you please break down the rest of it into its component parts as they relate to neighbourhood houses and men's sheds et cetera?

**Mr GREGORY** — I would have to take that on notice.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Is that clear — what the request is?

**The CHAIR** — Yes, that is clear? Thanks for that.

**Ms MUNT** — Budget paper 3, page 178, refers to support for community enterprises. How will social traders build on this support, and how will that provide outcomes for disadvantaged Victorians? Could you please explain how social traders will work in a little bit more detail?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — I spoke earlier about our concept of community enterprises — they can also be referred to as social enterprises — where within an area, community members identify a commercial task that could be supported. They establish a business, work at it in a business-like way, gain skills in employment and bring social good to their local area.

An example of this is a fresh fruit and vegetable market that was established out in Frankston North. It is in a community renewal area. It is a social enterprise set up through the Brotherhood of St Laurence, I think, and the community has established a small fresh fruit and veggie market for the local community. It was established in the school hall, and every Friday, I think it is, people come along and buy their fresh fruit and vegetables and in increasing quantities. They buy fresh fruit and vegetables that they have not purchased previously and are given assistance on how to use and prepare meals from them. This is being set up with some assistance and guidance from the Brotherhood of St Laurence, and we have provided money to the Brotherhood of St Laurence to provide the administrative support to these organisations.

There are a number of examples of these where the Brotherhood of St Laurence and AMES have been leading the way. It is a social phenomenon that has been observed to deliver sustainable and enduring outcomes. There is a network of around 100 community enterprises that have been supported through our strategy since 2004 and they have generated up to 500 new jobs. Another example is the Sorghum Sisters, who have set up a catering business. They are refugees from the Horn of Africa. They have set it up in a refurbished kitchen in Carlton and they have now got a viable business supplying catering facilities but also training opportunities for refugee women in the high-rise flats here.

Social Traders is an extension of this. It is an arrangement we have entered into with a philanthropic organisation to provide a new source of community enterprises. Social Traders is a partnership where we have put in \$4 million and the philanthropic organisation has put in \$4 million. They are also providing in-kind support from businesses and community organisations and they will provide the community sector with relevant social businesses and community enterprises. It is in its embryonic and establishment phase at the moment and will start establishing enterprises later this year.

But there are a couple of significant and interesting developments here. Firstly, the government has gone into partnership with a philanthropic organisation, or a philanthropic organisation has gone into partnership with the government. They have put substantial amounts of money into a program that both they and we see as valuable in helping community organisations foster what in the jargon is called economic participation. We are helping people get a job, and often the best social help you can provide somebody is to help them get a job, an enduring long-term job.

**Ms MUNT** — Do you think as the program develops it might also link to other government departments? I see a link with social housing and a range of other links that could be put in place.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Yes. This idea of community enterprises is already a concept that is adaptable and able to be picked up by other government departments. Sustainability Victoria, for example, has a retrofit program for homes in disadvantaged areas where they install water and energy-efficient devices. It provides jobs and training for people from the local area or from housing estates. Also, of course, in providing this training opportunity in the way that it does, it reduces the energy and water bills of those individual households, so it helps them.

The Department of Human Services uses it as part of its tools for community engagement in the neighbourhood renewal program. These are areas that get good support.

**Ms MUNT** — In my electorate there is a group that makes curtains for people when they move into social housing so that they have their own curtains. There is an embryonic business going on there.

**The CHAIR** — That is a good idea. I might add, Minister, that with this new rollout of federal money in terms of insulation, there should be enormous opportunities there in order to provide many jobs for exactly the people you are seeking to target, I would have thought.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Yes. There is a bit of an issue there. We would have liked it to have been a much more structured program through community enterprises in the delivery of the federal program to install insulation. It is effectively going to be available to almost every house that does not have it in Victoria. It is a huge program. I think they have decided on a slightly different delivery model. You will be able to participate in that as a sort of provider by getting an accreditation. Then you would be able to go to work for one of those who undertakes this, so it is going to provide local opportunities and skill up people in a relatively quick and useful way.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, can I take you again to that community development output group?

**Mr BATCHELOR** — On page 178 again?

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Yes, 178, and the footnote on 181, which is footnote (h) relating to the Community Support Fund. It notes that it includes an adjustment of \$6.1 million for the CSF:

... being the difference between the estimated revenue of \$101.9 million and estimated payments of \$108 million in 2009–10.

It is that figure of \$101.9 million for revenue. I am just wondering, holding that figure in mind, if you could go to budget paper 4, which is the statement of finances, at page 237. Down the bottom it lists the actual payment into the Community Support Fund under the Gambling Regulation Act.

It lists it for 2009–10 as \$98.86 million, which is roughly a \$3 million difference between what the other budget paper says and what that appropriation says. I am just wondering if you can reconcile the difference between those two amounts.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Sure. I will do that by asking Mr Gregory to help.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — You or Mr Gregory. I thought I would put the question to you first.

**Mr GREGORY** — In relation to that, that is the appropriation from the gaming money, but it is also \$3 million worth of interest on funds within the CSF expected to be earned through the year. So there is \$3 million worth of interest revenue that stays within the fund to fund programs.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — And does that figure include the money that goes off to the veterans fund?

**Mr GREGORY** — Yes. It is within the \$108 million, yes.

**Mr NOONAN** — Minister, I wanted to ask about the Office for the Community Sector, which was established not so long ago and is referred to in budget paper 3. I wonder whether you could provide an update on the progress of the office and details of any performance measures that have been sent to the office over the forward estimates period.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — The Office for the Community Sector was established following a review that was undertaken by Professor Fels and our response to that review. It was launched in 2008, and it has got a funding commitment of \$13.8 million. Our response to this review by Allan Fels is to set out our practical strategy to fulfil the government's commitment to developing the not-for-profit sector and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

I think I mentioned to you before that volunteering delivers about \$10 billion to the Victorian economy, and as part of that the not-for-profit community organisations really deliver a valuable service to individuals and the community. In particular they provide opportunities for economic participation — I mentioned that before —

but also for social participation. They are really central to developing strong communities, and that is why we are keen to see that the integrity, the strength and the capability of this sector as a whole and of individual organisations are established and enhanced.

To support them, if you like, to establish a champion for the not-for-profit sector within government, we established the Office for the Community Sector to work with the not-for-profit sector and to work with other government agencies to try to identify areas where government assistance could be provided to help reduce any barriers, to reduce red tape and to try to provide for financial sustainability. A number of bills, for example, have been amended around fundraising as part of this program to reduce the regulatory burden.

We are trying to establish some community foundations in areas that are experiencing disadvantage. We have set money aside to do that through the Office for the Community Sector. I would acknowledge that that is probably a lot harder these days than when the idea was first germinated, but nevertheless we will continue to do that. We want to have foundations that are from and for local communities to help organisations on an ongoing basis.

The Office for the Community Sector is also working with NGOs to develop a model framework in relation to workforce challenges. There are a variety of challenges facing the not-for-profit sector, including issues of retaining staff, getting in new and fresh ideas and retraining. We are also working with the sector through the Office for the Community Sector to see whether it is appropriate to establish a new representative body so that the voice of the not-for-profit sector can be heard loud and clear, and unambiguously.

A new task, I suppose, that the Office for the Community Sector has had to take on board is working in a way that is proactive to the challenges that are presented to NGOs from the economic downturn. We recognise that the economic downturn is going to have an economy-wide impact, and we want to know how it impacts on our not-for-profit sector as well as in other areas, and our Office for the Community Sector will do that.

**The CHAIR** — The final question on this portfolio, from Mr Rich-Phillips.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, just a question on the CSF again about the balances. I note the government has had a policy in the last couple of years of committing more expenditure each year than revenue to bring down the balance of the fund. Can you tell the committee, please, what the estimated 30 June balance in uncommitted funds will be for this year?

**Mr GREGORY** — The estimated balance at the end of this financial year will be \$47 million.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — And that is uncommitted funds, or is that a cash balance?

**Mr GREGORY** — No, it is committed funds.

**The CHAIR** — Unexpended, isn't it?

**Mr GREGORY** — It is committed but unexpended. We have committed that we will spend these moneys, but the timing of the payments will occur over the next two or three years.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — So effectively there will be a zero uncommitted balance that has not already been committed to projects?

**Mr GREGORY** — Yes, that is correct.

**Mr BATCHELOR** — Each year we get \$108 million to commit.

**Mr GREGORY** — There are no uncommitted funds for the next two years in relation to the CSF. It has been committed on three or four-year programs and grant programs that will cover the next two or three years.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — So going forward you will not be able to commit more than you are receiving in revenue?

**Mr GREGORY** — There are programs within there, like the VCSG, that are uncommitted in themselves. Out of the program that the minister administers himself we have not committed all the funds, but in theory we have allocated them to a program. We will not be allocating any more programs. There are individual grants

you can pay out of those programs, but they are all allocated in relation to programs over the next couple of years.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — I thank Ms Miles, Mr Ferrie, Mr Gregory and Mr Blacher for their attendance.

## 8.6 Planning Transcript

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

#### Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 20 May 2009

#### Members

Mr R. Dalla-Riva  
Ms J. Huppert  
Ms J. Munt  
Mr W. Noonan  
Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr G. Rich-Phillips  
Mr R. Scott  
Mr B. Stensholt  
Dr W. Sykes  
Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt  
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Mr J. Madden, Minister for Planning,  
Mr Y. Blacher, Secretary,  
Mr S. Gregory, Chief Finance Officer,  
Mr J. Gilmore, Executive Director, Planning Policy and Reform, and  
Mr D. Hodge, Executive Director, Planning Services and Development Facilitation, Department of Planning and Community Development.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on the 2009–10 budget estimates for the portfolio of planning. On behalf of the committee I welcome Mr Justin Madden, Minister for Planning, and departmental officers. Members of Parliament and members of the public and the media are also welcome.

In accordance with the guidelines for public hearings, I remind members of the public that they cannot participate in the committee’s proceedings. Only officers of the PAEC secretariat are to approach PAEC members. Departmental officers, as requested by the minister or his chief of staff, can approach the table during the hearing. Members of the media are also requested to observe the guidelines for filming and recording proceedings in the Legislative Council committee room. I made some comments on this earlier in the week, and said that I would be looking to speak to the Speaker and the President and also to the president of the press gallery about arrangements in this regard in the future.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing — that is, outside the door — are not protected by parliamentary privilege. There is no need for evidence to be sworn. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript to be verified and returned within two working days of this hearing. In accordance with past practice, the transcripts and PowerPoint presentations will then be placed on the committee’s website.

Following a presentation by the minister, committee members will ask questions relating to the budget estimates. Generally, the procedure followed will be that relating to questions in the Legislative Assembly. I note that there have been some occasions in the past week or two where members have got a little overly excited, and I think that occasionally a minister has got overly excited too. I ask members, ministers and witnesses to respect the processes of Parliament. The Chair always gives people the call, and I ask members to respect that. Questions need to relate to the budget estimates. This is not a fishing expedition; this is a committee inquiry which has limited terms of reference and we have to deal with it like that. I will make a judgement on the appropriateness of the behaviour. I do not wish to pull anybody up, but I do wish this process to proceed smoothly, so I ask for the cooperation of the minister, witnesses and members of Parliament to make this a productive hearing.

I now call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 10 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information that relates to the budget estimates for the portfolio of planning.

**Overheads shown.**

**Mr MADDEN** — Thank you very much, Chair, and I thank the committee. I might just run very quickly through a series of slides. It should take only 10 minutes. If it looks like we are pushed for time, I will try to terminate as quickly as I can.

Basically, the goal of the Department of Planning and Community Development is to lead and support the development of liveable communities in Victoria through improved planning and design for sustainable communities; ensuring better access to housing infrastructure, jobs and services; and increasing opportunities for participation. Victoria’s strong population growth contributes to our prosperity but continues to require investment in maintaining and improving the liveability, particularly in growth areas. Managing sustainable population growth will continue to be the focus of the department in 2009–10.

Given the significant events of the last year, including the global financial crisis, the Victorian bushfires and ongoing climate change, the department’s 2009–10 budget also has a strong focus on creating economic stimulus and jobs for Victorians by facilitating significant urban development renewal initiatives and supporting more resilient communities that are better able to respond to the impacts of change, overcome disaster and disadvantage, and recover from crisis.

In terms of the next slide, the DPCD’s 2009–10 budget will deliver the goals of growing Victoria together. It contributes to a range of key government policy directions, including *Melbourne @ 5 Million*, the Victorian transport plan, *A Fairer Victoria*, the women’s policy framework 2008–11, and it respond to the Victorian veterans sector study.

The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee’s 80th report at recommendation 9 states:

Departments continue to review their output performance measures to ensure that they are relevant to, and that they reflect appropriately, the department's service outcomes and strategic objectives.

The department supports this recommendation and reviewed the current budget paper 3 output structure and performance measures. The review was undertaken in collaboration with DTF and PAEC, and the proposed new outputs and performance measures will assist the department to focus on existing and new service policy and priorities and assist the community in understanding the nature and services provided.

I would like to focus now on the planning portfolio. In the past 12 months there have been substantial pieces of work undertaken across the portfolio. These include, in particular, the bushfire response. The planning response to the 2009 bushfires is multifaceted and includes: supporting recovery activities by ensuring there are no impediments in the planning schemes to bushfire recovery and the provision of temporary accommodation; facilitating rebuilding by exempting the need to obtain a new planning approval for replacement homes, garages, storage sheds, dependent person's units and buildings used for farming — a further exemption has been introduced to community infrastructure affected by bushfires for development up to \$1 million; building capacity for fire-affected councils including skill-supportive design, mapping and statutory planning; planning for future bushfire risk including examining existing policy, risk identification and assessment of methodologies and the effectiveness of existing planning scheme tools; and strengthened new interim building standards for homes to improve to defend and defence ability and resilience of homes at bushfire risk.

These standards that apply across Victoria include methods for assessing the bushfire risk, which in turn informs the building design and the required construction methods and materials.

In terms of central activities districts, work to date includes the likes of Broadmeadows, Footscray, Dandenong, Geelong and Ringwood. We have a range of initiatives there to support these central activities districts. In terms of creating better places as well, there is \$2 million worth of urban improvement projects announced under round 4 grants for local councils.

*Melbourne @ 5 million* is a very significant piece of work. Melbourne is expected to reach a population of 5 million much faster than previously expected because of the attractiveness and liveability of Melbourne. *Melbourne @ 5 million*, released in December last year, identified that some 600 000 additional dwellings will need to be accommodated over the next 20 years, including 316 000 in established areas and 284 000 in growth areas. It also recognises the need to review the urban growth boundary to create an additional 134 000 dwellings, included in that previous figure of 284 000 dwellings required in growth areas.

Critical transport and employment priorities designed to reduce overall journey to work times were also identified. There is projected to be a significant need for new jobs located closer to where people live. In overall terms, it will maintain Melbourne's housing competitive advantage, lead to greater density in choice, shape the city, focus on employment closer to where people live and promote greater housing density near public transport.

I am pleased to advise that good progress has been made, with Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Latrobe and Wodonga having all identified growth management projects which are to be undertaken by them with the assistance of the government. The urban development program approach has been extended to regional Victoria and will support the provision of land supply and demand information in key regional areas. Initial monitoring systems are currently being established in Ballarat, Bendigo, Latrobe and Wodonga.

The housing capacity of each municipal council will be assessed over the next financial year through my department's housing growth requirements work, identifying the opportunity for new housing throughout Melbourne. I recently announced \$1.5 million in grants to enable local governments and the Municipal Association of Victoria to provide the necessary assistance for this work.

I mentioned *Melbourne @ 5 million* and the population growth, but it is worth appreciating that even if we did not have that population growth, we still have enormous demand for housing, because people are living longer, household numbers in each house are smaller and people are forming their households later. Regardless of the population growth, we need an enormous number of dwellings to complement the lifestyle choices that people make.

We are working with the Growth Areas Authority to make sure that we fast-track work in the growth areas. The urban growth zone was introduced in 2008 and that has been applied to land in the five growth areas. The

Growth Areas Authority is developing the draft precinct structure plan guidelines, or has. As well as that, the Growth Areas Authority has completed nine precinct structure plans for new communities. We have anticipated 21 under way and we are expecting work to be completed very shortly on those.

We are also undertaking a review of the Planning and Environment Act. It is an opportunity to modernise and address the system and ensure improvements in the act going forward.

On planning applications online, six councils participated in a pilot project — Banyule, Greater Dandenong, Hepburn, Hobsons Bay, Melbourne and Moreland — as well as 12 applicant firms, more than 30 referral authorities and VCAT. The early indications are that that has been relatively successful.

Metropolitan planning has basically been a priority, too. The state planning services have supported councils in the past 12 months by providing technical, policy and process support while dealing with requests for authorisation of planning scheme amendments in a timely manner.

As well as that building policy, the plumbing regulations 2008 came into effect on 24 November 2008 and replaced the plumbing regulations of 1998. The regulations include a number of variations and inclusion in key areas relating to the plumbing code. That seems to have been relatively successful and we are confident in that work being sustained as we go ahead.

In terms of Heritage Victoria, the heritage strategy grants program, which has funded \$2 million of projects to Heritage Victoria for heritage places, objects and collections management, represents a very significant investment and also supports those community groups who are very active in that space.

In terms of priorities for the forthcoming year, \$2.13 million in Creating Better Places grants will be provided for minor capital works projects as well as assistance to complete structure plans and the employment of place managers in metropolitan activity centres and certain regional centres and towns while \$1.5m will be provided in grants under the Expert Assistance Program to directly assist local councils in the planning and development of metropolitan activity centres.

In terms of development assessment committees, funding of over \$2 million over two years has been allocated to establish the development assessment committees outlined in *Planning for all of Melbourne*. In terms of development facilitation, \$3.2 million over four years has been allocated to the development facilitation strategic priority projects to fund new planning reforms and fast-track key building projects.

Then, on the statewide electronic planning applications online, \$10.4 million over four years to implement statewide electronic planning applications has been allocated.

**The CHAIR** — We might — —

**Mr MADDEN** — As well is that — I will finish up — there is a range that I hope to touch on as well: targeted urban renewal programs, central activities districts and basically significant investment on a number of fronts. I am happy to take questions on all those matters.

**The CHAIR** — The remainder of time for this hearing has been allocated for questions on the planning portfolio and the budget estimates. Minister, as I have asked other ministers, what federal grants or funding, both output and asset, will your portfolio or department or various agencies have received in the budget? Can your department provide the committee with a list and description of these grants? What accountability mechanisms, both to the federal government and your expectations from the organisations that you fund, will there be in respect of these grants?

**Mr MADDEN** — There is quite a body of work to explain in this area. Whilst there have been no new federal grants reflected directly in terms of the 2009–10 budget for the planning portfolio, that is not to say there is not a lot of involvement of the planning portfolio in a lot of other funding initiatives by the federal government.

Planning has been allocated \$6.5 million by the federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs under the housing affordability fund for further development and integration of the electronic development systems and processes, which is commonly known as e-planning. The funding for



2009–11 will enable existing systems to be modified to meet the national electronic development assessment technical standard, known as eDAIS, and also enable full integration of systems at participating councils.

The funding of \$6.5 million is subject to a memorandum of understanding, which was signed and returned to the federal government last week. The MOU stipulates funding conditions including six milestone payments for commencement to the end of the project in 2011. In addition, I understand there may be further funding announcements from the commonwealth in relation to the planning portfolio in coming weeks.

As well as that I made an announcement this morning, which is particularly pertinent to the question that you asked, Chair. All governments are very conscious that in Australia in 2009 the global economic environment is one of uncertainty, and we need to provide as much certainty as we can. It is certainly a contrast to a year ago.

The world is currently caught in the worst economic crisis since the Second World War. Growth has slowed, not only in emerging economies; recessions are being experienced in a number of Western developed economies — the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan and Europe — but we are making sure that we minimise these global impacts on our local economy. That is a top priority for the government.

To that end I have announced today, and I am pleased to announce here, some key planning reforms this morning, which will help Victoria secure its share of the federal government's \$42 million Nation Building economic stimulus plan. In particular I have announced a streamlined planning process for projects funded by the commonwealth's Building the Education Revolution and social housing initiative.

We have cut red tape to exempt non-government schools from the need for a planning permit where they meet certain criteria. I have made myself the responsible authority for schools and housing projects funded under the commonwealth's stimulus package. Where a permit is required I have streamlined the provisions to exempt them from the standard notice requirements and the review rights of the Planning Environment Act 1987.

That is not to say that poorly designed projects will get the automatic green light or that councils will be cut short of the process. For education proposals, with higher levels of amenity impacts and all social housing proposals, local governments will be notified and requested to provide comment. I will consider their views, and advice will be provided to me on their views when making those decisions.

These measures will take effect from this Friday. Without these measures, the projects could be languishing in approvals and at the VCAT system for up to 18 months, and this simply will not allow the projects to meet the commonwealth time frames to be eligible for the funding. For example, the funding contributions from the commonwealth require that 75 per cent of all new housing projects be completed by 31 December 2010. The time lines for the education funding are even tighter, with some projects needing to commence next month. I should point out that government schools are already exempt from planning requirements. This streamlined planning process will require that non-government schools are not disadvantaged in seeking funding under the Building the Education Revolution program.

We are taking action now to make sure we secure Victoria's fair share of the federal funding. We want to see our schoolchildren in Victoria and families in need of social housing have access to the commonwealth funds where they deserve them. My actions will ensure that \$1.4 billion of federal funding can be accessed for new school facilities, such as libraries, science and language centres. The funding will help equip schools with infrastructure to meet the needs of current and future generations.

My actions will also help secure around \$1.5 billion of commonwealth funding to build approximately 5000 social housing dwellings. Many members of this committee would be aware that earlier this year, the Premier announced the government would identify key projects where decisions could be fast-tracked in order to secure more jobs and help Victoria through the global financial crisis.

These streamlining measures I have announced today build on this momentum. They highlight the importance of the development facilitation unit in the planning portfolio. The Victorian budget supports these streamlining packages by providing \$3.2 million over four years to further the capacity of the department, the DPCD facilitation unit. My actions mean that \$3 billion of investment will flow to Victoria. These changes will pave the way for the largest number of simultaneous education and housing projects to be undertaken in Victoria's history. This will boost local infrastructure and support jobs for Victorians. It will support projects with lasting benefits to communities across Victoria.

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**The CHAIR** — Thank you Minister. It was a little bit long, but thank you.

**Mr WELLS** — Minister, the Ombudsman has reported that in relation to planning issues with the Keilor Park Reserve, a member of your staff, Mr Hakki Suleyman, inappropriately influenced this planning issue for the purpose of an ALP preselection dispute. The Ombudsman said:

Mr Suleyman was involved in the issue of a direction to the CEO which could have cost Brimbank at least \$100 000. I received evidence that Cr Suleyman and Mr Suleyman agreed to return funding to the 2009 council budget for development works at Keilor Lodge Reserve if Mr Seitz supported Cr Suleyman at the impending Kororoit preselection.

So my question to you is: when did you first become aware of the intervention of a member of your staff into the Keilor Park planning issue? Did you direct Mr Suleyman to conduct the actions he did at Keilor Park; and if you did not, who did?

**Ms MUNT** — How does that impact on the forward estimates?

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Ms Munt.

The questions need to relate to the forward estimates. My judgement is that that one does not; it is more appropriate to a question on notice. Minister, my suggestion is that you do not need to answer that one, because it does not seem to be appropriate to the forward estimates. If you wish to talk about — and it is not for me to direct you, of course — planning arrangements for councils in that regard in the forward estimates, in the budget context, then I would be satisfied.

**Mr WELLS** — In fairness, can I just — —

**The CHAIR** — Through the Chair, please.

**Mr WELLS** — Through the Chair: in fairness, yesterday we had an assurance by the Premier on the Neil Mitchell program that the minister would be coming before public accounts, he would be asked these sorts of questions and he would be accountable. That is the assurance the Premier gave yesterday on the Neil Mitchell program, so we are assuming that the minister will be able to answer these questions.

**The CHAIR** — Neither the Premier nor Neil Mitchell actually run the arrangements for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

**Mr WELLS** (to the Chair) — Are you saying that the Premier has deliberately misled people on the Neil Mitchell program?

**The CHAIR** — Excuse me, Mr Wells, I did say at the beginning that we need to conduct this hearing in accordance with the normal practices of Parliament, so when I have the call and I am speaking, I really do not need to be interrupted. What I have suggested here is that this question does not actually fall within the estimates hearing. If the minister wishes to answer it, that is his prerogative, but in terms of the Chair and in terms of this hearing, it is outside the terms of reference, except in relation to planning and the council.

**Mr WELLS** — Just on that point, with respect.

**The CHAIR** — The minister has the call.

**Mr WELLS** — Through you, Chair. With respect — —

**The CHAIR** — No, the minister has the call.

**Mr WELLS** — The Premier said yesterday that — —

**The CHAIR** — The minister has the call.

**Mr WELLS** — ‘Justin is appearing this week before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — I think on Wednesday’.

**Mr MADDEN** — Chair, I am happy to answer.

**Mr WELLS** — ‘I am sure he will get questioned before the committee about all of those matters’.

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**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells, you are ignoring the Chair.

**Mr WELLS** — I am wondering if he can then answer the question.

**The CHAIR** — Order! Mr Wells, you need to respect the processes of the parliamentary committee; you are clearly not doing that. As I said before, you are an experienced parliamentarian, and you need to follow the procedures of the committee. I have asked all members, and that includes you, Ms Munt, who was also making an intervention when someone else had the call. There are processes which we have to follow, and we need to follow them properly. I have already given a ruling on this particular one, and I have left it to the minister and given him the call. I ask you to have respect for the call.

**Mr WELLS** — With respect, Chair — —.

**The CHAIR** — Minister!

**Mr WELLS** — With respect to you, Chair — —

**The CHAIR** — I will take no more.

**Mr WELLS** — With the greatest respect, Chair, we have had the Premier say one thing, and now you are contradicting what the Premier said yesterday. He gave assurances that he would answer these questions.

**The CHAIR** — I have already ruled on this matter. Minister, you have the call.

**Mr MADDEN** — I am happy to provide answers to this committee on anything I possibly can. In relation to Mr Wells' questions about my electorate office, let me just say that if you read from cover to cover the report from the Ombudsman's office, it is no doubt an appalling indictment on the operation of the Brimbank City Council. They are of course very grave and serious matters reflected by the Ombudsman, and I acknowledge that.

Mr Suleyman has been an electorate officer in my electorate office for the time that I have been a member for the Western Metropolitan Region and a member for Dousta Galla. He was employed in my office prior to my taking up my position in Parliament, and I have stood him down on the basis of the report that has come to all of us from the Ombudsman.

Can I just say that I have lost faith in Mr Suleyman. I have asked the President to deal with these matters and to resolve these matters at the earliest possible time.

The extent of allegations made against Mr Suleyman were significant in terms of the report, and they have been acknowledged by everybody and myself. I was not aware of his undertakings in any shape or form in relation to these matters, and as such I have lost faith in Mr Suleyman and stood him down accordingly.

**Mr WELLS** — But you did not actually answer the question. The question to you was: when did you first become aware of the intervention of a member of your staff into the Keilor Park planning issue? When did you become aware of that, and did you direct Mr Suleyman to conduct the actions he did at Keilor Park; and if you did not, then who did? That is the part that I need an answer to.

**Mr MADDEN** — Can I just make this point — —

**The CHAIR** — Before you answer — —

**Mr WELLS** — He agreed to answer the question.

Members interjecting.

**The CHAIR** — Without assistance from members who are getting a little excited. Minister, as I said before, I do not regard this as a question dealing with the estimates. If you wish to answer that one, that is your prerogative. I would prefer that you did not because — —

**Mr WELLS** — Hang on, he should be given the chance

**The CHAIR** — I am giving the ruling, thank you very much.

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**Mr WELLS** — He should be given the chance to answer the question, and he has agreed to answer the question.

**The CHAIR** — Without the interruptions. If you actually listen, Mr Wells — —

**Mr WELLS** — He agreed to answer it first-off, and now you are giving him a chance not to answer it.

**The CHAIR** — You are not listening, Mr Wells, and your behaviour is not good.

Minister, I am giving you the prerogative if you wish to answer that one. I judge, as Chair, that it has nothing to do with the estimates.

**Mr MADDEN** — I have answered many of these questions publicly, and I have answered many of those questions within the Parliament. Those answers still pertain to your question, too, Mr Wells, and I am happy to repeat those answers because almost the exact question has been asked of me within the Legislative Council, and that relates to when I became aware of these matters.

The extent of Mr Suleyman's involvement in any matters dealing with the council came to my attention through the Ombudsman's report.

**Mr WELLS** — You cannot be serious! You did not know anything was going on in your own office until you read the Ombudsman's report. Is that what you are saying?

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr WELLS** — Are you saying that you did not know anything that was going on in your office until you picked up the Ombudsman's report.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells, I warn you.

**Mr WELLS** — How long has he worked with you — 10 years? If he has worked with you for 10 years and you have not done one thing about it, you are either being dishonest or you are incompetent in the way you have handled it.

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — I formally warn you, Mr Wells, that you are ignoring the Chair. While it might be good for the television — —

**Mr WELLS** — We just want some answers.

**The CHAIR** — The Chair is standing. It is a convention of Parliament that when the Chair is standing the members are quiet — that includes the witnesses as well. You are flouting the conventions of Parliament. If you wish to show such bad behaviour as a parliamentarian, or if any other members of the committee wish to do the same, then I will formally warn them. After warning them, I will not give them the call. If you wish to participate properly in this proceeding, then do so. If you do not, then do not participate.

**Mr WELLS** — Get him to answer the question, then.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells, I am talking. The minister was answering the question.

**Mr WELLS** — Right.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Mr Wells.

**Mr WELLS** — So you are saying — —

**The CHAIR** — Without assistance.

**Mr MADDEN** — Thank you very much, Chair — —

**The CHAIR** — And it is not a laughing matter, either.

**Mr MADDEN** — No, I have — —

**Mr WELLS** — But you are saying that you have been working in your office for 10 years and you did not know anything about it?

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells, that is totally inappropriate behaviour.

**Ms MUNT** — Absolutely. It is just too much.

**Mr WELLS** — You started in 1999, and for 10 years you had no idea whatsoever about the intervention into the Keilor Park planning issue?

**The CHAIR** — All right, Mr Wells. I think we have had enough of that question.

**Mr WELLS** — Is that the case?

**The CHAIR** — I give the call to Ms Munt.

**Mr WELLS** — Hang on. He agreed to answer the question.

**The CHAIR** — You are flouting the rulings of the Chair.

**Mr WELLS** — He agreed to answer the question.

**The CHAIR** — But you are not allowing him to answer.

**Mr WELLS** — No, I am just asking. He agreed to answer the question — —

**The CHAIR** — You are flouting the rulings of the Chair. You are taking no notice of the processes of Parliament.

**Mr WELLS** — Now what you are doing is letting him cherry pick — —

**The CHAIR** — I am not letting anybody cherry pick anything. If the committee members are unable to control themselves, then I will have no alternative but to suspend the hearing while we discuss this, as the committee. This of course will detract from the hearing. We actually want to have a hearing on the estimates. Unless the minister has anything quickly to add without any assistance from other members of the committee — that includes you, Mr Wells, and it includes you Ms Munt — then we will move on to the next one. The minister, to very succinctly finish answering the question.

**Mr MADDEN** — I believe I have answered that question.

**The CHAIR** — All right, Ms Munt?

**Mr WELLS** — No. This is about accountability.

**The CHAIR** — Ms Munt has the call.

**Mr WELLS** — Are you saying that the first time you knew about the Keilor Park planning issue was when you picked up the Ombudsman — —

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells!

**Ms MUNT** — Minister, in relation to page 284 of budget paper 3 under '2009 Victorian Bushfire Response and Recovery' and in particular 'Bushfire Building Standards', I note that \$1 million has been allocated in 2008–09 to communicate new building standards in response to the Victorian bushfires. Can you please provide the committee with an update on this initiative?

**Mr MADDEN** — The profound impact of the bushfires earlier this year no doubt weighs heavily on people's hearts right across Victoria. What has been no doubt impressive for all of us is the fact that all Victorians and Australians beyond Victoria have really supported those affected by the bushfires. I would like

to place on record my thanks and my compliments to the community for the broad support and the way in which everyone has responded.

I would just like to hand out to the members of the committee some documents I want to draw your attention to. These relate very much to building matters in relation to the bushfires. There is an array of documents there. We recognise that people wanted and needed the support to move back as quickly as possible into their communities and reassemble their lives and begin the rebuilding process following the devastation of the Black Saturday bushfires.

As a government we have moved quickly to identify strategies to address emerging issues facing communities impacted by fire. What you have in front of you is a collection of material that has been published by one of my agencies, the Building Commission. The information will assist people to understand what steps they need to take to rebuild. These publications follow a decision by the government, made soon after the bushfires, to introduce tougher building standards by bringing forward the new Australian design standard, AS 3959–2009, which is for the design and construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas. This standard will help to improve the defensibility and the resilience of homes at bushfire risk. There are three documents there: a guide to returning to your property safely, *A guide to building in Victoria after the bushfires* and a plain-English document for people to understand how they can rebuild within the new building code or the new standard in relation to domestic dwellings.

Whilst it might appear initially technical, it is not too technical. I will try to simplify it and put it in layman's terms. The new system of rebuilding means that all locations have to be assessed for bushfire risk. Then, on the basis of the bushfire risk — and I draw your attention to almost the centrespread of that document, which is 'Rebuilding after the devastation'. That basically has the varying bushfire attack levels, or the BAL levels. There are six of them. They range from low to those dwellings in the flame zone. Then, in layman's terms, down the other side of the chart it indicates the sort of works that need to be undertaken to fit into those categories. That helps people understand the practical implications and the materials they need to put into the dwelling, and also assists them to feel more confident that they are building at the highest possible regulatory standard of the time.

It will apply to all new homes across Victoria. All homes will be considered under the bushfire attack level. The bushfire attack level is determined by a number of factors, including the likes of aspect, slope and the proximity and type of vegetation at the site. One of those critical issues is the type of vegetation. If it is low-lying or if it is located in a rainforest, that has significant implications.

There will no doubt be the prospect that some homeowners may have to apply additional costs to their homes in the high-risk category. It is expected that around 80 per cent of new homes will be in the low-risk category across the state. This is new dwellings right across the state, not just in bushfire-prone areas. To ensure that communities have the information they require to make informed decisions when rebuilding and applying the new building standard we have invested \$1 million in educating and training for communities, councils and professionals. This has been done in a number of ways: seminars, industry roundtables, publications, voluntary programs, a website and an information hotline where people can talk to a technical expert.

Again I want to put on record that the government has been overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity of all Victorians in their willingness to assist. I also want to put on record the volunteer services, particularly within the building industry. The building industry itself has a number of volunteer programs under way to assist in the rebuilding effort. Many of those are professional organisations. That is being coordinated with the Building Commission. I announced one volunteer program that was the bushfire attack level assessment project, where volunteers who are registered professionals are available to assess a property's bushfire attack level, which is a requirement before people start building.

That program will assist people in making a call as to how, where on the site and to what extent they might want to rebuild, and what other works they might want to undertake if they need to undertake any clearance as well. We are grateful for the number of professionals who offered to pitch in and help rebuild, and no doubt the royal commission will consider longer term issues. We are getting on with the job and helping people now when they really need it, and we also look forward to the longer term recommendations that might come from the royal commission and might assist us with planning and building matters well into the future.

**Ms MUNT** — Do you know how much rebuilding is currently under way?

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — I will take the specific details on notice, but it is quite comprehensive. There are those who are now reaching a critical point where the sites are cleared. Recently it was announced that more than 30 per cent of sites are cleared. We have had fine weather this week, so that could be almost 40 per cent by the end of the week, I understand. With the clearing of a lot of these properties people are now having to make the judgement call themselves as to whether they will or will not rebuild because they are at that critical point. That support from the volunteer services is critical to inform them now, if the site is cleared, what the implications are and how they might rebuild, whether it be on exactly the same location or with slightly different materials. For some it might even be a bigger property, for others it might be smaller, depending on where they are in their life.

**Ms MUNT** — And their family responsibilities.

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — That is right. For many of them it is a critical point. We want to support them, and we certainly are conscious of that. It is a very big decision for some people, and some people are electing not to rebuild. We can support them in any form around making that decision with counselling or support. We are happy to provide that.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Minister, the Ombudsman has reported that in relation to the property issue at 76–78 Biggs Street, St Albans, the property was provided free of charge to your of staff Mr Hakki Suleyman, who then used it for the purpose of ALP recruitment and meetings, and in particular it became the address of the Maribyrnong North Turkish branch of the ALP.

**The CHAIR** — I am not sure where we are going with this.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Did you direct Mr Suleyman to use these premises for those purposes? If so, who directed him? And when did you first become aware of this arrangement and the uses of Biggs Street by your staff member?

**The CHAIR** — That does not seem to relate to the estimates at all. There is not even anything remotely relating to the estimates, so I call on Mr Noonan.

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — You cannot pick and choose. We have had the Premier yesterday saying, ‘Justin is appearing this week, by the way, before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, I think on Wednesday. I’m sure he’ll get questioned before the committee about all these matters’. We are questioning the minister about all these matters.

**The CHAIR** — I have made my ruling, Mr Dalla-Riva.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — We have been trying to uncover the stench coming out of this office for over 10 years. If he does not know what occurred, this was in May of 2006. This came out of his office.

**The CHAIR** — We do not need any props, thank you. Mr Noonan has the call.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — We need an answer. The stench out of his office is unbelievable, and we need to know exactly what was being used.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Noonan has the call.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — You cannot shut me down. I have asked a question.

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr WELLS** — We need this question answered. He answered the first one in part, and we need an answer to the second one. This is blatant corruption.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells, you should know that any imputation against another member of Parliament has to be done by way of substantive motion in the house, and that has to be given by way of a notice of motion. It is not for any member of this committee to make any imputations in the committee hearings. I think that is completely out of order.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — We are not making the imputations, Chair. This is a report.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Dalla-Riva, your behaviour is not good either. I have made a ruling on the question. The question had no relation to the estimates. If you wish to ask those questions in the house, you are free to do so.

**Mr WELLS** (to the Chair) — He needs the option of answering that question. You need to give him the option of answering that question.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells, thank you very much. I have made a ruling, and Mr Noonan has the call.

**Mr WELLS** — Hang on! He needs to be given the option to answer this question.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Noonan, go ahead, please.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — The Premier yesterday said, though, he would be held accountable — and he is not.

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells, you are out of order.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** (to the Chair) — You are just randomly picking and choosing what is happening.

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells — —

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr NOONAN** — Can you advise the committee how the planning system has is being streamlined to assist bushfire-affected residents to rebuild their communities?

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — Thank you very much, Mr Noonan.

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells, you are out of order. The minister has the call.

**Mr MADDEN** — Thank you very much, Mr Noonan.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Hang on! When are we going to get an answer on the first matter?

**Mr WELLS** — Why are you shutting down this part of the committee?

**The CHAIR** — I am not shutting down anyone.

**Mr MADDEN** — In relation to the very profound matters around the bushfires, I am conscious that Victorians have been profoundly affected by the bushfires.

**Mr WELLS** — He had this man in there 10 years ago.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — This is selective.

**Mr WELLS** — This is a joke.

**Mr MADDEN** — I would hope that the opposition recognise the significant impact and profound effect of the bushfires on all Victorians.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — When do we find out — —

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Mr Dalla-Riva!

**Mr WELLS** (to the Chair) — The Premier gave us an assurance that he would answer these questions, and he is not answering the question.



**Mr MADDEN** — I welcome your question about streamlining the planning system.

**Mr WELLS** (to the Chair) — You are shutting it down. This is a disgraceful situation.

**Ms MUNT** (to Mr Wells) — No, you are shutting it down by your behaviour.

**Mr MADDEN** — The Premier made a commitment to help those rebuild after the bushfires, and all those affected by the Black Saturday bushfires.

**Mr WELLS** (to the Chair) — That was a straightforward question — —

**The CHAIR** — The minister has the call.

**Mr MADDEN** — As communities begin that rebuilding process, as I mentioned in my previous answer, people are at a very important point in the process. As sites are being cleared they are having to make very profound and significant decisions about whether they go back or whether they do not and what they can expect from going back. One of the big questions that people ask is: what are the planning requirements? I have mentioned the building requirements. In the vast majority of cases people will not need a planning permit, but there will be some instances where because of various overlays that exist and have existed that will have an impact on the rebuilding process.

What we have sought to do is reduce the burden, in a sense, of the planning system. My aim is to ensure that the planning process is streamlined as much as possible and is as straightforward as practically possible. One of our government's first steps in the wake of the fires was to ensure that there were no impediments to the process of bushfire recovery and to provide for temporary accommodation on sites affected by bushfires. To make sure this could happen quickly, we introduced a planning exemption to the planning schemes to provide for works associated with recovery activities and recovery uses such as depots and temporary accommodation.

You have before you an advisory note that was produced. That is not only for council officers but also the general community to assist them in understanding what the implications of rebuilding are in terms of the planning system. We took a further step last week to assist rebuilding by introducing a new provision as well, clause 52.39, to the Victorian planning provisions 2009, titled 'Replacement buildings'. The new provision enables landowners to rebuild their homes and other types of buildings that were damaged and destroyed in the 2009 Victorian bushfires without having to satisfy what might be the normal planning scheme requirements.

The new provision has been welcomed by the Municipal Association of Victoria, I understand, and by bushfire-affected councils. The provision exempts the rebuilding of dwellings and other types of building from any requirement of the planning scheme, including any requirement to obtain a planning permit to use or develop land. The provision has been designed to allow simple site plan approval by local councils to enable people to seek building approval and commence rebuilding. The new provisions include several important conditions that must be satisfied before rebuilding can commence. These conditions are mainly to ensure the safety of residents and focus on things such as flood plain areas and land subject to inundation. We believe we have cleared most of the planning permit requirements, but there might be just a tiny fraction where you have a flood plain overlay or inundation or a landslip where some technical requirements might still need to be considered.

The approval of a simple site plan will provide for a streamlined process and ongoing security for future owners of land and legal proof of the right to develop. The new provision makes it easier for people to rebuild their homes and farms and saves residents and councils time and money in processing planning permit applications, appreciating that for some smaller rural municipalities this is an enormous task to deal with given the volumes that we are seeing. In most cases the site plan replaces the need for the planning permit, but most likely a building permit will still be required to ensure the structural safety and the implementation of the new bushfire building requirements.

Another piece of work — and I know that this is very much in the consciousness of the community — that the department in conjunction with the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the CFA is currently undertaking is a review of native vegetation management in bushfire risk areas. The review will establish if changes are required to current vegetation controls and management practices to take into account the increased bushfire risk in many parts of Victoria. It will also consider whether landowners have sufficient capacity and understanding of the current regulations to manage vegetation and reduce bushfire risk around their homes. The

review will be completed in time to assist the deliberations of the royal commission. We will continue to work with affected communities with bushfire recovery to ensure there continues to be a consistent and coordinated approach to rebuilding.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, the Ombudsman has reported that a member of your staff, Mr Suleyman, used his position to inappropriately influence a planning decision involving leasing Cairnlea Park to the Cairnlea Soccer Club. Did you direct Mr Suleyman to act on this issue; if not, who did? When did you first become aware of this conduct by your staff member? Given that you have employed this crook for 10 years, why do you expect us to believe that you did not know about the corruption in your own office?

**Ms MUNT** — Does this mean, Chair, that the opposition is absolutely uninterested in planning in Victoria?

**Mr WELLS** — That is a straightforward question.

**The CHAIR** — Without assistance from members — —

**Mr WELLS** — We are interested in the way he conducts himself.

**Ms MUNT** — No, this is — —

**Mr WELLS** — This is about the way he conducts himself as the Minister for Planning.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells and Ms Munt!

**Ms MUNT** (to Mr Wells) — It is also about the way that you are conducting yourself.

**Mr WELLS** — But the Premier gave an assurance yesterday that he would be able to answer these questions and be held accountable — —

**Ms MUNT** (to Mr Wells) — You have no interest in planning in Victoria.

**The CHAIR** — If you wish to conduct a conversation, conduct it outside, please. Mr Rich-Phillips has asked a question. Once again, I see a limited relationship to planning. Insofar as it relates to the planning portfolio — —

**Mr WELLS** — What do you mean ‘planning’? It is all about planning.

**The CHAIR** (to Mr Wells) — Excuse me, I am speaking. You are continually rudely interrupting. I am dealing with the question that Mr Rich-Phillips asked. Insofar as it relates to the planning portfolio and the budget estimates, the minister, to answer.

**Mr MADDEN** — In relation to these matters around Mr Suleyman, as I have previously answered in the Legislative Council, to the media and here today, Chair, I was made aware of Mr Suleyman’s involvement in these matters and the extent of those matters through the Ombudsman’s report. I have stood aside Mr Suleyman. The employment of Mr Suleyman is dealt with by the Parliament. He may have worked in my office — —

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — For 10 years.

**Mr MADDEN** — But he is employed by the Parliament. I have asked the President to deal with those matters, and I have asked — —

**Mr WELLS** — See this? This was in your local paper in 2006. You cannot say that you did not know — —

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Mr Wells!

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — The minister has the call.

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr WELLS** — You cannot say that you did not know about it until you read the Ombudsman’s report.

**The CHAIR** — Minister, do you have anything further to add?

**Mr MADDEN** — No. I believe I have answered that.

**Ms HUPPERT** — In your presentation you referred to — —

**Mr WELLS** — On a point of order — —

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Just a moment. If you call a point of order, we will need to consider any point of order in a private hearing, which means I will need to ask the witnesses and the people who are attending this hearing to withdraw.

**Mr WELLS** — We do not need to go down that line.

**The CHAIR** — I did not think we needed to.

**Mr WELLS** — No, we do not need to go down that line, but we need clarification on why you are not directing the witness to answer the question.

**Ms MUNT** — Ms Huppert has the call.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you! Mr Wells, I understand what you are saying. I did ask the minister had he finished answering the question.

**Mr WELLS** — He had not started answering it.

**The CHAIR** — He said yes. I actually gave him the option to answer it. I did rule it as largely not relating to the estimates, particularly the questions at the end. The statement at the beginning and the first sentence could have been vaguely related to the estimates. The minister said he had answered the question. I gave the call to Ms Huppert. Ms Huppert, to continue.

**Mr WELLS** — Hang on! The Premier gave an assurance yesterday that when it comes to accountability — —

**Ms HUPPERT** — The question is in fact, Minister, if you could outline to the committee how the development assessment committees will implement the government's metropolitan strategies?

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr MADDEN** — Thank you very much, Ms Huppert. I have passed around to the committee, two documents. One is an information document based on the development assessment committee policy announcement for clarity around the way in which the development assessment committees would operate. There is a significant amount of misinformation out there, and a lot of that has been that — —

**Dr SYKES** — Where is it emanating from, Minister?

**Mr MADDEN** — A lot of that misinformation in relation to the development assessment committees has come from the opposition.

**The CHAIR** — Without assistance please, Minister!

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr MADDEN** — I just want to clear the air on how they would operate and how they are intended it to operate. In 2008 the Brumby government completed its first five-yearly audit of Melbourne 2030. As part of the audit process an independent group of experts reported that the fundamental principles of Melbourne 2030 were more relevant than ever. In the face of climate change, population growth, traffic congestion, housing affordability and demographic change it reinforced that it was more important than ever.

The Brumby government's metropolitan planning policies support new housing and growth opportunities in a range of locations, including some in greenfield locations at the fringe of Melbourne and some in established areas. That is a very important component of Melbourne 2030. Some people interpret it as either one or the other; it is not one or the other — it is both. It is providing a diversity in a range of housing types and housing provision right across the Melbourne metropolitan area.

In established areas in particular, principal and major activity centres are intended to be the major focus of change. Of course people are a bit concerned about their green leafy suburbs or their green leafy streets, so they do not want to see development occur in those streets. The intention of Melbourne 2030 is to concentrate new housing, new business opportunity, new development and any intense development in those central activity districts or the principal activity centres.

The expert audit group of Melbourne 2030 recommended that a greater focus should be made on a smaller number of activity centres in order to have the greatest impact. It recommended a new entity to facilitate the rapid and focused development for decision-making. I will reinforce that: decision-making, as opposed to the controls, because, again, there is a bit of confusion out there in the community around the difference between the controls and the setting of the controls and the decision-making.

It recommended considering revised planning responsibilities in such centres. The Brumby government's response to these findings and the recommendations has been the establishment of development assessment committees.

The development assessment committees will enable state and local governments to partner in making planning permit decisions in relation to areas and matters of state, regional and metropolitan significance. The development assessment committees offer a number of benefits. They offer the ability for more balanced decisions to be made where state and local planning policies can be equally considered. This is particularly important for projects that have impacts beyond their immediate locality, because the development assessment committee as modelled in that sheet comprised two members from state and local government and an independent chair. They offer the ability for councils and the state to share the pleasure — and the pain, of course — and responsibilities for the decision-making process.

The DACs are not about streamlining; they are about making quality decisions on projects and matters of significance. Those decisions will be informed by the relevant controls, and those controls will be established and set by local councils in collaboration and consultation, in conjunction with the state government. They are about giving confidence to Victorians that the impact of a decision down the road or the next suburb are made and assessed in a balanced way. They are about ensuring that the decisions of today are also in the interests of future generations.

They might look for a dwelling in their immediate locality that is smaller, that does not provide for their children because their children have moved on, but their children might also want to live in that locality in a smaller dwelling as well until they form their own household or their own family; so it is important to be conscious that we are not talking about outsiders, we are talking about people who live in those communities needing more dwellings into the future.

The DACs will assist in making the decisions in relation to these areas nominated for potential development, and this mechanism is not only in the best interests of today's generation but also future generations.

Our children and grandchildren can benefit from the decisions in the context of their housing and employment needs. They are about partnering in decision-making with local government, and that has always been the premise to establish the DACs.

Over the past 12 months — and if we refer to the development assessment committee model on the paper in front of you — a technical working group comprising officers of the first five councils has been established to offer advice about the best model to be implemented to establish the DACs. The model suggested by the technical working group — so these are representatives or officers from the council — will see, by and large, the existing council processes for lodging a permit application remain the same; however, when it comes to the decision itself, instead of the delegated officer or a committee of council making the decision, the DACs will make that decision.

Let me stress that the model and the legislation drafted for the DACs does not impact on third-party appeal rights. Legislation for DACs was introduced in Parliament on 2 April this year and passed in the Legislative Assembly on 7 May, and I look forward to the passage of this legislation through the upper house. It will be interesting to see what the opposition's position is on this.

**Mr WELLS** — At least it will be honest! When it comes to planning, it will be based on honesty.

**The CHAIR** — The minister!

**Mr MADDEN** — It is very important that the DACs are a balanced approach, a partnership approach, and are understood. Currently there are only two models for dealing with planning decisions in these sorts of spaces. The council makes the decision or alternatively, the minister makes the decision.

This is a shared approach which we believe will allow for more balance rather than the black-and-white approach of the council or — —

**Mr WELLS** — Which council?

**Mr MADDEN** — Or the minister making that decision, and through development assessment committees we can do this a third way. We have also provided — and I know there is some misinformation around the way this is supported — \$2 million over the next two years to help support the establishment of these models.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I note that the three government members have asked questions which virtually allow the minister to make a ministerial statement on various aspects of planning, which is a bit of a segue into my question.

The minister, in answer to the question on the building standard, did not address the issue that the CSIRO had raised concerns about that building standard not being as good as the one it was replacing. In your answer about development assessment committees, you mentioned statements made by Melbourne 2030 but you forgot to say that the Melbourne 2030 expert group did say that the community had not been brought along — one of the key themes of that finding was that the community had not been brought along in terms of Melbourne 2030 and that not enough resources were being given by the government to implementing Melbourne 2030. Therefore we now have a rushed or a streamlined or fast-track planning process that is being put in place — —

**The CHAIR** — Your question, please.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I am getting to my question thank you, Chair. Added onto that layer that you are talking about in *Melbourne @ 5 million* and the streamlined fast-track planning process you have been describing all morning, we have the federal government's stimulus package resulting in millions of dollars for social housing, which is a good thing.

But while increased funding for social housing should be encouraged, there is a growing concern among stakeholders and the community that the state government is fast-tracking social housing and other planning through the state planning system at the cost of careful planning and good design.

**The CHAIR** — A question, please.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I am getting to the question.

**The CHAIR** — You are taking a long time.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — The decisions that we make today will cast long shadows.

**The CHAIR** — Can you ask your question, Ms Pennicuik?

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Buildings and new dwellings are going to last a long time, and my question is: the president of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects says that we may end up, without careful planning and good design, with ghetto communities. I want to know what resources are being put in place in the department to address this serious issue, and also to ensure that particularly social housing is state of the art in terms of energy efficiency and ecologically sustainable design, because that is what we will need as we go into this century.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for that question. The minister, to answer.

**Mr MADDEN** — There are two issues I will try to do justice to in your question. The first was in terms of the bushfire standards. I am conscious that we want to assist people and give clarity to them rebuilding as quickly as possible. The standard which we brought forward — the adoption of that standard — would have been recommended for adoption at a ministerial council on a national basis, I understand, in May next year.

So it had really gone through all the gateways to get to May next year, but it was just the last few ticks in the boxes that it needed from all ministers and their departments right across the country, for agreement, and of course there was going to be some negotiations and discussion, I anticipated, behind the scenes by the departments of various state governments to deal with these matters.

What we did not want was people being uncertain about building to the best possible standard. We wanted to ensure that in people trying to make the critical decision as to whether or not to rebuild, they could feel very confident that the standard or the methodology that they were going to adopt would do justice to their expectations and their understanding.

They needed that information. This was basically ready to go, other than national agreement on the compliance of it. We decided to bring forward that. It is, we understand, the best possible standard at this point in time. That is not to say that it is going to be the perfect standard. We will, no doubt, continue to monitor the standard, and I know that other jurisdictions will be particularly interested in the successful implementation of the standard.

The ACT has also adopted the standard. There were some comments made by one or two organisations which have been involved in developing the standard. I think one or two made comments that they thought it could have been better. I am sure that we will see a standard develop beyond this one which will be even better, but a standard does not occur overnight; it does not just appear on paper. I understand this standard has taken five years to get to this point. This is the best we can possibly offer people at this point in time.

The royal commission is highly likely to make some comments around building and planning issues. We look forward to the comments that they make, and of course we will consider those. We have already stated that we will take very seriously any recommendations made by the royal commission in relation to any planning or building matters, and any other matters for that sake. It takes five years to get one of these standards up, and we are at the end of the five years.

We do recognise that the flame temperatures in these fires were higher than the flame temperatures that have occurred previously. These standards are built to a certain flame temperature, and it is likely that it will be confirmed that an increased flame temperature has additional risks. Any new standard that will emanate from the royal commission work being developed and the work which will continue to be developed, I am sure, by ministerial councils and the relevant building authorities nationally will seek to improve this standard to a greater extent given what we now know took place on Black Saturday. I certainly understand your interest in these matters, and am happy to also keep you up to date on the progress.

**The CHAIR** — All right, Minister, the other part of the question, please, quickly. We have taken a lot of time.

**Mr MADDEN** — The other part of the question was the fast-tracking based on the major announcement made today and the federal government's announcements. I am very conscious of quality of design when it comes to the built environment. My background as an architect has been very useful in terms of this portfolio. It is very important to make sure that we do not just build for building sake, that we do not build for use alone.

The greater urban amenity of the built environment is an important component of the livability of Melbourne, the livability of our regional cities and our rural areas as well. We do not want to risk that component of our livability by having buildings that appear poorly designed from an aesthetic point of view or the way they relate to their communities. We have put in place \$3.2 million over four years, allocated to the development facilitation unit for strategic projects within the state as well as assisting in providing advice as to what projects need to be facilitated at a rapid rate, as has been the case recently, but also to provide strategic facilitation advice on how to overcome difficulties around design issues, amenity issues and how to resolve many of these matters.

At the end of the day planning can only improve where we get people to try to resolve matters collaboratively rather than just denying the entitlement to build. It is very important that we encourage planners at the local government and state government level and the professions to work collaboratively and listen to one another in a way that we can resolve these matters. That is what we are seeking to do through the facilitation unit, and a major component of that is the amenity issues and the concerns of locals. The announcement we made today does not exclude locals from having input.

What it will do is if projects show signs of controversy in the sense of their design, then we will ask the council what its views are. We would hope the local councils would consult and provide some of that information to us, because they are in a place where they can listen to locals' views and respond to us rapidly as well.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Minister, it seems you are stepping up the speed of planning. Are you stepping up the requirements for quality in terms of ecological sustainability?

**Mr MADDEN** — What we have seen recently are the five-star arrangements for domestic dwellings and a national agreement through COAG around lifting that standard to six stars. We would also anticipate that we will also have other requirements locally on a number of environmental issues. In terms of higher density, we would expect those matters to be considered thoroughly, and advise that they be considered thoroughly. A lot of the provision of these projects is done through the Office of Housing, particularly in the housing and education buildings. We are seeing investment in these environmental initiatives. I think the Office of Housing has benchmarked the quality sort of development that can be achieved in the likes of Prahran recently, where they have developed an award-winning public housing development. The government appreciates that it needs to, in a sense, lead the way in terms of what the private sector can do and also make that a major consideration in how these developments occur.

**Mr SCOTT** — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 338, and the funding provided for development facilitation for strategic priority projects, which you just touched upon in your previous answer. I would like to ask about a different aspect of that particular funding project. Can you please advise the committee how this initiative will support the delivery of jobs to Victoria during the global economic downturn?

**Mr MADDEN** — We recognise that timely planning decisions play a critical role in securing jobs in the construction and development industries. There has no doubt been a slowdown in the commercial construction industry, and that can have a significant impact on jobs. We are very conscious that in providing more construction, that has to be good for jobs. That is why in February this year the Premier and I announced that we would fast-track decisions for key building projects. From time to time some projects become roadblocked, and some of these are very complex. This is not necessarily a criticism of councils. Sometimes those complexities are difficult to resolve and they need a mechanism to bring a decision to a head.

Our decision was not about disenfranchising communities or denying councils a role in the process. Our decision was not about approving just anything that can create a job. Our announcement was basically about paving the way so that more timely decisions could be made on projects so that people can move on with their lives. Our focus is on unblocking decisions for projects of such a scale that they would have a significant impact on jobs or on projects with significant community benefits. To put it into perspective, I will give you a few examples.

The first example is 670 Chapel Street, South Yarra. In February I made myself the responsible authority for a development at 670 Chapel Street, South Yarra. This development, which was already under construction, was about to come to a standstill and the construction workers were threatened with the real possibility of being told not to come back to work because of a dispute over the stamping of plans. My decision to become the responsible authority and make a timely decision on the plans meant 146 people could return to their construction jobs.

Also in February I announced that I would facilitate a process for making a decision on the future of the Chirnside Park Country Club. The background of this one is that the council chose to exhibit a rezoning proposal for a residential subdivision of the golf course. The council abandoned the rezoning after its exhibition, which attracted over 900 submissions. Without some form of intervention, the proposal would have been unable to go any further. There would have been no chance for people to put forward their views and not even a chance

for the proponents to appeal. I have decided that the proposal is, at the very least, worthy of future consideration.

The proposal has the potential to make a significant contribution to the metropolitan housing supply. It has the potential to generate in excess of \$335 million of construction work and approximately 2460 jobs. I have set up an independent advisory committee to consider the proposal. I have also called in from VCAT the development application for the new golf course at the former quarry site so that the two matters can be considered together. This will give all interested parties an opportunity to have their say and be informed so an informed decision can be made.

The various projects that I have intervened in since February have the potential to create more than 18 500 jobs, both directly and indirectly, for Victorians. Jobs are important to the government, particularly where they can be supported through timely decision making. The 2009–2010 budget supports jobs in the construction and development industries by providing \$3.2 million over four years for the capabilities of the development facilitation unit, which I mentioned previously. This money will assist proponents and councils with projects on a case-by-case basis. It will enable a rolling audit of major projects to be conducted so I can be advised of projects' progress and any appropriate actions that will fast-track decisions. The money will also support my department to facilitate projects that are funded under the commonwealth stimulus package, as I have mentioned before, bearing in mind issues that I have also mentioned.

We have streamlined the planning process for the building and education revolution and social housing initiatives. My actions will mean that around \$3 billion of federal investment can flow through to Victorian schools and families in need of social housing without being bundled up in bureaucratic red tape. We support jobs. We support a planning system that delivers decisions in a timely but also fair and transparent manner.

**Dr SYKES** — Minister, in relation to the Sunshine pool planning issue, the Ombudsman documents how a member of your staff inappropriately sought to intimidate members of the community concerned with this planning issue. When did you first become aware of this issue, and did you direct Mr Suleyman to act on this issue?

**The CHAIR** — Minister, once again I feel that this particular question — —

**Mr WELLS** — We just need one answer to one of our questions. We have asked four questions now, and we have not had one answer.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells, I am speaking.

**Mr WELLS** — This is a disgraceful cover-up.

**The CHAIR** — There is no cover-up. It is a matter of doing the estimates. Minister, as I said, I do not think this question actually relates very much to the estimates at all, but it is up to you if you wish to answer it insofar as it does seem to relate to a planning matter. I do not regard it as having anything to do with the estimates hearing, but I will leave it to your discretion.

**Mr MADDEN** — Thank you very much, Chair. In terms of the word 'planning', I just want to be very clear here. I think the use of the word 'planning' by the opposition is different from the strategic planning and planning authority status that I have. I think the use of the word 'planning' in their instance relates to actually somebody just doing the planning proposal for a project as opposed to an application or a regulatory authority request, which is slightly different. In terms of the information that was reported in the Ombudsman's report, the extent of that became knowledge to me in the Ombudsman's report.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — We have got copies here in November 2005 re Mr Hakki Suleyman!

**Mr WELLS** — You have said that for the whole four questions.

**The CHAIR** — The minister has the call.

**Mr MADDEN** — Can I also make it very clear, Chair, that there is no formal relationship between the ministerial office and the electorate office.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — No, don't go down that path!

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**Members interjecting.**

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — There is no formal relationship.

**Mr WELLS** — You have no idea what your electorate officer was doing?

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells! The minister, to answer.

**Mr WELLS** — This is a disgraceful cover-up.

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — There is no formal relationship between those two offices. It is very important to be aware of that. In relation to Mr Suleyman, Mr Suleyman, as I said before, has been stood down. The extent of his involvement in matters with the council no doubt is deplorable. The activities of the council have been deplorable, and as such he has been stood down and I have asked the Presiding Officer to deal with these matters.

**Members interjecting.**

**Dr SYKES** — Please, Chair — —

**The CHAIR** — On the estimates, Dr Sykes.

**Mr WELLS** — We have not had one answer to any of our questions.

**The CHAIR** — Dr Sykes has the floor.

**Ms MUNT** — Not one question on the estimates.

**The CHAIR** — Ms Munt and Mr Wells! Dr Sykes has the call — on the estimates, please.

**Dr SYKES** — I respond to your comment. I have a clarification, Minister. I understand you have had difficulty in ensuring relevance and consistency, Chair, but as Ms Pennicuik identified earlier, the minister has had the opportunity to make broad-ranging comments on a number of issues today. I am seeking a specific clarification.

Minister, in relation to my question about when you first became aware of the issue, you have answered to the effect that you became aware of the extent of the issue in the Ombudsman's report, but that is not the question I was asking. My question was, and is, when did you become aware of the issue, not the extent of the issue?

**Ms MUNT** — How does this relate to the forward estimates?

**Dr SYKES** — When did you become aware of the issue?

**The CHAIR** — Minister, once again, I regard this as — —

**Mr WELLS** — Chair, just one answer.

**The CHAIR** (to Mr Wells) — Excuse me. This does not relate to the estimates.

**Mr WELLS** — This is a disgraceful cover-up.

**The CHAIR** (to Mr Wells) — Minister, if you wish to answer, it is at your discretion. I prefer that you answer questions about the estimates, but the minister has the call.

**Mr WELLS** (to the Chair) — He does not need your protection in regard to — —

**Ms MUNT** — And he is not getting it.

**The CHAIR** — The minister has the call.

**Mr WELLS** (to the Chair) — He does not need your protection. We just need an answer.

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — I repeat my previous answer, which was, as was reported by the Ombudsman, then I was made aware of these issues.

**Members interjecting.**

**Dr SYKES** — You were first made aware of the issues when reported by the Ombudsman. This is what the minister just answered.

**Ms MUNT** — Minister, you touched in your presentation on central activities districts, which are also mentioned on pages 166 and 167 of budget paper 3, and my question is — —

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Chairman, I wish to move a procedural motion. The Premier committed that he would answer questions and this committee should direct him to answer questions.

**The CHAIR** — Just a moment, Ms Munt. Mr Rich-Phillips wishes to move a motion. I ask that the sitting be suspended and that the room be cleared. Thank you very much. You wish to do that?

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — I want to move that the minister be required to answer questions.

**The CHAIR** — No, I do not want to hear the motion. If you wish to move a motion, you will have to do it in a private meeting.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — I wish to move that the committee direct the Chair to require the minister to answer the questions put to him by the committee.

**The CHAIR** — If you wish to move a procedural motion, we will need to have a meeting — —

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — I do not care whether it is done in public or in private.

**Dr SYKES** — Point of clarification, Chair — —

**Mr WELLS** — It should be done in public.

**The CHAIR** — I suspend this hearing. Clear the room while we have — —

**Dr SYKES** — Point of clarification, Chair. Under what standing order do you need to clear the room to discuss this procedural motion? Under what standing order do you need to take this action to deal with a procedural motion?

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — We have nothing to hide. You may wish to hide the proceedings, but we do not.

**The CHAIR** — The session is suspended, and that includes any filming.

**Dr SYKES** — Under what standing order, Chair, do you need to take this action to proceed with a procedural motion?

**The CHAIR** — We just need the secretariat here.

**Proceedings suspended.**

**The CHAIR** — I recommence the hearing and I ask Ms Munt to repeat her question.

**Ms MUNT** — Minister, in your presentation you touched, under ‘2008–09 achievements’, on the central activities districts, also mentioned on pages 166 and 167 of budget paper 3. Can you please explain how work over the coming year will continue to support employment and urban improvement in the central activities districts, particularly in light of the *Melbourne @ 5 Million* planning update?

**Mr MADDEN** — As I have made very clear, we support jobs and we are very keen to make sure that we gear the economy for increased job numbers. We are very eager to make sure that we entuse the private sector to invest in opportunities to provide jobs. We are taking action now to provide services and infrastructure for the growing population who are choosing to call Melbourne home, and we are doing that right across Melbourne. But we are doing it with a plan. The Melbourne 2030 planning update, *Melbourne @ 5 Million*, was delivered

hand in hand with the Victorian transport strategy. The two were developed together and they should be read together.

Central to the Brumby government's land use and transport strategies is the development of central activities districts. These centres will offer CBD-like functions and a range of housing opportunities with the view to providing more jobs closer to where people live, to minimise congestion flows in and out of the Melbourne CBD. This year's state budget delivered \$19.7 million for urban development strategies and urban improvement projects in the six designated central activities districts of Melbourne. I will nominate what they are: they are Box Hill, Broadmeadows, Dandenong, Footscray, Frankston and Ringwood. These funds will be used to undertake business and project cases and streetscape improvements. The funds will also be used to increase employment opportunities along priority corridors that link the central activities districts with the likes of universities, research technology, medical precincts and other areas of high employment.

As part of this year's budget, the Brumby government has allocated \$80.3 million to transform the Broadmeadows central activities district into, I suppose, the equivalent of Melbourne's northern capital. This includes \$62.9 million to redevelop infrastructure and community spaces and \$17.4 million to develop a new government services building. Specifically, the budget will see the delivery of the train station and bus facilities. It will provide a green-spine pedestrian cycling path to connect residential areas with the town centre, and it will help deliver new leisure and recreation facilities and provide for new housing demonstration projects.

The \$17.4 million investment in a new government services building will kick-start provision for the Broadmeadows central activities district. It will co-locate key government community and support services, like the departments of human services, justice, and education and early childhood development, making essential services more readily accessible for people in Melbourne's north. We envisage that the new government services building will create in the order of 500 construction jobs.

This is great news for the people who live and work in Melbourne's north. It capitalises on the Broadmeadows rich and diverse community and its close proximity to the city and the airport. It is an important longer-term project that will see Broadmeadows transformed into Melbourne's northern capital, creating jobs and building key infrastructure. It is a very exciting project and yet another example of the Brumby government delivering on our commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family.

**Mr WELLS** — Especially if you are a branch — —

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much. Mr Dalla-Riva has the call.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Minister, I again ask: the Ombudsman has reported that in relation to a property issue at 76–78 Biggs Street, St Albans, this property was provided free of charge to your member of staff, Mr Suleyman, who then used it for purposes of ALP recruitment and meetings. In particular, the premises became the address of the Maribyrnong North Turkish branch of the ALP. I again ask: did you direct Mr Suleyman to use these premises for these purposes? If so, who directed him? Was it you? When did you become aware of this arrangement and the uses of Biggs Street by your staff member?

**The CHAIR** — Mr Dalla-Riva, I have already ruled that that particular question does not relate to the estimates. It does not even relate to government business.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — The Premier yesterday said that he would have an assurance by the minister.

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — We are getting shut down again. Why is there a cover-up by this committee? The Premier yesterday, Chair, said — and you knew about this in 2006.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Where is the transparency?

**The CHAIR** — Mr Noonan has the call.

**Mr WELLS** — Why would you say that you only knew about it when the Ombudsman's report came out?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Why will you not answer it?

**Mr WELLS** — We just need a straightforward answer — for the fifth time.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — We will keep on asking.

**The CHAIR** — Mr Dalla-Riva, recognise the Chair, please. I have already ruled that Mr Noonan has the call. As is well known, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and indeed parliamentary committees deal with matters which pertain to the terms of reference of the particular committee. I have ruled that question does not relate — —

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — The Premier — —

**The CHAIR** — Excuse me.

**Mr WELLS** — He gave an assurance that we would get some answers today.

**The CHAIR** — This question does not really to the estimates, and Mr Noonan has the call.

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr NOONAN** — Can you please explain to the Committee the role of e-planning, and how this will increase efficiency in Victoria's planning system?

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — Thank you for your interest in the planning system, Mr Noonan. It is a very important matter in the sense that people in the construction building industry are very keen to see rapid improvements in the planning system, and we are going to make sure that we improve the planning system.

**Mr WELLS** — Especially in Brimbank.

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — We are committed to continual improvement of the Victorian planning system. We are conscious of the resource demands by local councils — —

**Mr WELLS** — Why don't you just table it? It will save us a lot of time. You are just reading it, anyway.

**Mr MADDEN** — We are conscious that lengthy delays in the planning system translate into costs on the development industry and this a very critical component. If you are a land-holder and the planning system delays your ability to deliver what it is you are seeking to deliver on that land, those costs build up into that project, particularly housing. So any delay in the likes of housing end up being transferred into the final price of the house.

That has a very profound influence on the housing sector. It has a very profound impact on those seeking to purchase housing. So it is very important that we improve the efficiency of the planning system to reduce the holding costs in order to improve the affordability and in a sense the accessibility and diversity of housing stock. We are conscious that at any local government level resource demands are very prominent in how they deal with the planning system. Lengthy delays in the planning system translate into effects — —

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — The minister, to answer.

**Mr MADDEN** — — on jobs, on businesses, home-buyers and of course the broader community, so cutting red tape from the actual mechanics of processing a planning permit application has been an important element in this government's cost-cutting program of reducing regulatory burden.

If there is one thing this government is very committed to, it is reducing regulatory burden. If we have to in any way introduce regulation, we seek to take regulations away. We balance that approach. We do not want any more regulatory impost on any industry, particularly the building and construction industry. This is an important part of the 2009 state budget.

We have allocated \$10.5 million over the next four years to further develop online planning application processes, and I refer you to budget paper 3, appendix A, pages 338, 342 and 344 where that is referenced. This will make the permit assessment process quicker by reducing the referral and approval time frames between

agencies, so when a permit application is made it can be electronically referred to and received by another agency. That agency may have an interest in the matter, such as a water or power authority.

This may not seem that exciting in terms of administration, but at the end of the day it will have a very significant benefit because rather than send it off by hand or even fax it, you will be able to basically send it electronically and have a response fairly rapidly; and also catalogue and monitor all those things. It will allow for the collection of application of permit application data in ways that councils have been unable — —

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr WELLS** — He's talking till 11.30 to avoid another question. Are we going to get another question?

**Mr MADDEN** — In Victoria the development of electronic planning systems is guided by an e-planning roadmap which is done in conjunction with the Municipal Association of Victoria, and this means we are well placed to work with the federal government on this initiative. With 79 councils across Victoria and more than 50 000 permanent applications made across the state, it is critical that there is a consistent approach to developing — —

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Ignore the interjections, Minister.

**Mr MADDEN** — In February this year we concluded a pilot plan for applications online. Six councils participated in the project, metropolitan regional, and in addition to 12 applicants, more than 30 referral authorities in VCAT participated. The results from this pilot indicate that the average reduction in the time taken for permit processing was 30 per cent. This is very important.

If you can reduce the processing by 30 per cent, then the holding costs on these projects are potentially also reduced by 30 per cent, and that will end up having a direct and significant positive impact on the purchaser at the other end. The program of work over the next year will deliver the capacity for the councils, referral authorities and the state government to offer integrated planning application services throughout Victoria. I look forward to making sure that over the next 12 months we see this expanded, developed and offering benefits to the broader community.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Clearly the Premier is in to protect you because what he said yesterday — —

**The CHAIR** — Mr Dalla-Riva, the question, please.

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — It has been absolutely disgraceful behaviour. You are the planning minister. You are in fact the senior minister of the Department of Planning and Community Development.

**The CHAIR** — Your question?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — This is exactly what we are getting at. Minister, you are the senior minister of the Department of Planning and Community Development. Part of your department's strategies for the year ahead is to put the residents front and centre to make our suburbs and towns better places to live, as you always say. Why did you not investigate or make any investigation into the Brimbank council when it became abundantly clear that the councillors there, some of them well linked to you, were not living up to your own department's expectations of putting residents' interests front and centre?

I have given you examples about Biggs Street, Keilor Lodge Reserve, Keilor Park allocation and the list goes on. You cannot seriously, Minister, after 10 years have your head so buried in the sand you are unaware of what was going in your office. I ask you to answer the questions as was promised by the Premier yesterday.

**Mr MADDEN** — In relation to basically politics in the western suburbs, it is not for the fainthearted. Can I just say, Chair, that — —

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Or the honest, it would seem.

**Mr MADDEN** — There will always be muckraking in politics. The opposition is enjoying that today.

**Mr WELLS** — What? Hang on, are you saying it is muckraking rather than dishonesty and incompetence?

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — You have had a crook in your office for 10 years.

**The CHAIR** — Minister, the question was about Brimbank and planning. I would ask you to confine your answer to that.

**Mr MADDEN** — As I was saying, in politics generally there will always be people making comments for all sorts of reasons on all sorts of bases — —

**Mr WELLS** — This is corruption. You are not making excuses for corruption, are you?

**The CHAIR** — Mr Wells, thank you.

**Mr MADDEN** — All sorts of comments in relation to many, many matters.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — I think he is about to say why he ignored it.

**Mr MADDEN** — The opposition will make comments in Parliament, they will make them in the chamber.

**Mr WELLS** — This is the Ombudsman's report.

**Mr MADDEN** — There will always be others who will make comments, Chair, and they have to be seen in context and in that light.

**Mr WELLS** — So you ignore them?

**Mr MADDEN** — In relation to the Ombudsman's report and the findings of the Ombudsman's report, as I have said in my previous answers — —

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — You ignore anything put under your nose.

**Mr MADDEN** — They are very profound findings by the Ombudsman. We take them very seriously as a government.

**Mr WELLS** — No, you do not. You did not answer one of our questions.

**Mr MADDEN** — We have committed to and promised to adopt all the recommendations by the Ombudsman.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — What choice did you have?

**Mr WELLS** — Your inaction is a disgrace. You are part of a disgraceful cover-up.

**The CHAIR** — Without assistance!

**Mr MADDEN** — I am very keen that they happen as quickly as possible. In relation to Mr Suleyman, he has been stood down from my office — —

**Dr SYKES** — On full pay?

**Mr MADDEN** — — because of what the Ombudsman has reported on.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — After 10 years of corruption.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — When are you going to be stood down?

**Ms MUNT** — Chair, please; this is just abuse of the minister.

**The CHAIR** — The minister, to answer without assistance.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Everyone else has been stood down.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — You should just resign.

**Mr WELLS** — He thinks it's funny. He thinks it's a joke.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — This is not funny.

**Mr MADDEN** — I seek for the President to resolve the matter. Mr Suleyman has been stood down and I do not want him to return to my office because I have lost trust in him.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — They are close, but they have not got the main one.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. That concludes consideration of the budget estimates for the portfolio of planning.

**Mr WELLS** — What a disgraceful cover-up.

**The CHAIR** — I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance today. Where questions were taken on notice, the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. The committee requests that written responses to those matters be provided within 30 days.

## 8.7 Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs Transcript

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

#### Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 20 May 2009

#### Members

Mr R. Dalla-Riva  
Ms J. Huppert  
Ms J. Munt  
Mr W. Noonan  
Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr G. Rich-Phillips  
Mr R. Scott  
Mr B. Stensholt  
Dr W. Sykes  
Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt

Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Mr J. Merlino, Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs,  
Mr T. Healy, Deputy Secretary, People and Community Advocacy,  
Dr P. Hertan, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation Victoria,  
Mr S. Gregory, Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Finance, and  
Ms K. Krsevan, Director, Office for Youth, Department of Planning and Community Development.



**The CHAIR** — I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on the 2009–10 budget estimates for the portfolio of sport, recreation and youth affairs. On behalf of the committee I welcome Mr James Merlino, Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs; Mr Terry Healy, deputy secretary; Dr Peter Hertan, executive director, Sport and Recreation Victoria; Mr Stephen Gregory, chief financial officer; and Ms Kati Krsevan, director, Office for Youth, all from the Department of Planning and Community Development. Departmental officers, members of the public and the media are also welcome.

According to the guidelines for public hearings I remind those present that members of the public cannot participate in the committee's hearings. For the record, I noticed in the last hearing that there seemed to be a few members of the public who were trying to participate. We discourage that. Only officers of the PAEC secretariat are to approach PAEC members. Departmental officers requested by the minister or his chief of staff can approach the table during the hearing. Members of the media are also requested to observe the guidelines for filming or recording proceedings in the Legislative Council committee room.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and protected from judicial review; however, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. There is no need for evidence to be sworn. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript to be verified and returned within two working days.

In accordance with past practice the transcripts and PowerPoint presentations will be placed on the committee's website. Following a presentation by the minister committee members will ask questions relating to the budget estimates. The procedure followed will be that relating to questions in the Legislative Assembly — that is, there will be no supplementary questions.

I now call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 10 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information that relates to the budget estimates for the portfolios of sport, recreation and youth affairs.

#### **Overheads shown.**

**Mr MERLINO** — Thank you, Chair, and I thank the committee for the opportunity to present this morning. I will try and run through these as quick as possible. I will present on sport and recreation first and then present on the youth affairs portfolio.

With sport and recreation, the portfolio overview is based on three goals: strengthening communities, A Fairer Victoria and social and economic development. Sport and recreation is a key part of the way of life of every Victorian, and we see through the drought and post bushfires the importance of community sport. A couple of highlights in *A Fairer Victoria* is the sporting uniforms grant, which I am happy to talk about later. In terms of social and economic development an example would be the economic drivers of construction, such as the Melbourne rectangular stadium, the state athletics centre, the state basketball centre and AFL/VFL upgrades.

In terms of key achievements in 2008–09, a key focus obviously this year has been on the post-bushfires recovery. The importance of sport as a community recovers has been demonstrated by the determination of communities to get sporting activities up and running as soon as possible. With the Premier there was an announcement of the joint \$3 million fund with the commonwealth to assist sporting organisations affected by the fire to get back on their feet. Grants of \$100 000 have been made available. I also want to mention, Chair, the great efforts of state sporting associations and elite sporting clubs and bodies in their support for communities affected by the bushfire.

Continuing in terms of key achievements, there is record funding for local pools facilities and drought proofing projects. We continue our record \$76 million community facilities funding program, including \$46 million for aquatics. It is expected that at least 150 community facility projects will be approved during 2008-09. One of the key projects will be the synthetic surfaces program. There is \$4 million for state sporting associations, and also our very significant Go for Your Life campaign, with the Premier's Active Families Challenge. We have had 50 000 individuals taking part, which is a massive increase over last year.

Key achievements include major sporting events. Victoria hosted a range of sporting events in 2008–09, including the Homeless World Cup, the Australian Masters Games, the World Cup Track Cycling, Australia v. Ireland International Rules and the Rugby League State of Origin, which will be held shortly.

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Events won include Australian Masters Golf — with some big announcements; I will be happy to talk about that later — four more years of Rip Curl Pro; Geelong Week and Sailing World Cup, which I announced just recently; and a new Dancesport events package.

The performance of our VIS athletes at Beijing at the Olympic and Paralympic games was outstanding, with 85 athletes. We won 15 medals across six sports — 4 gold, 6 silver and 5 bronze — bettering the total of 14 medals won at the Athens Olympics.

Further on key achievements, state facilities include the MCG concourse. You will see that over Brunton Avenue. I am very happy to talk about the Melbourne Park business case. Work has commenced — excitingly, finally! — on the national ice sports centre and the redevelopment of Skilled Stadium, the rectangular pitch stadium seating and a number of AFL training venues, a continued emphasis on the facilities funding program, drought and bushfires.

The major priorities in 2009–10 in terms of new budget initiatives include strengthening the world game. There has been a massive increase in the participation in soccer, as you, Chair, and other members of the committee well know. There is also the development of the new state basketball centre, and there is local, state and federal funding for that. There is also additional funding for country football and netball, and additional funding for sporting uniforms.

Women in sport is a key priority. Women's Sport and Recreation Initiative is supporting a wide range of projects including leadership initiatives delivered by VicSport and targeted projects aimed at increasing participation of women and girls, including disadvantaged women and girls. Access for All Abilities is a program funded at over \$11 million for the next three years.

Priorities for 2009–10 in terms of facilities: obviously the iconic one is the rectangular pitch stadium at Olympic Park. It will be completed in early 2010 to kick off the Rugby League season. It will be the new home of league, union and football — soccer. Works will continue at Lakeside Oval in 2009–10 to develop the new state athletics centre and the new home of the VIS. The Melbourne Park redevelopment will ensure that the Open remains in Melbourne until at least 2036, and the redevelopment will continue of former AFL grounds and VFL grounds.

In terms of priorities for major events, the Australian Masters golf in November will have Tiger Woods in Melbourne, which was a great win for this city and this country. The Champions Trophy will have the best six men's hockey teams competing at the State Netball Hockey Centre. In the sailing events package there is the grand slam of sailing, and Melbourne is one of seven cities worldwide that will take part in that event.

The road world cycling championship will be held in 2010, as will the Presidents Cup golf tournament in 2011. So that is sport and recreation. If I can quickly move on to youth affairs.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister.

Overheads shown.

**Mr MERLINO** — In terms of a snapshot of young people in Victoria, they make up 17.7 per cent of Victoria's population, almost three-quarters of whom live in metropolitan Melbourne. Overall, Victorian young people are travelling well. In 2008, 88.7 per cent of young Victorians had completed year 12 or its vocational equivalent — an increase from 86.1 per cent in 2007. This rate is higher than all other states and territories with the exception of the ACT.

In terms of the youth affairs portfolio, the Office for Youth is young people's connection to government. It looks at the needs of young people and drives relevant policy across government. It does this in a number of ways, as you can see on the next slide, which is the program slide.

Advance is a school-based youth leadership and skills development program, mentoring — which I am happy to talk about — youth participation, and access grants. This is about focusing particularly on young people who have barriers to participation in community life.

Youthcentral is the government's online initiative for young people aged 12 to 25. It is Australia's leading youth information website and we should all be very proud of that.

Young People Direct is a multi-faceted consultation mechanism for young people to direct their views to government. Youth Foundations Victoria is a great partnership with Bendigo Bank and local communities. There are the Positive Body Image Strategy, FReeZA, and FReeZA Central, which we all know quite well.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — An excellent program.

**Mr MERLINO** — Indeed. *Future Directions* is the policy framework, and I will not spend too much time on that. In terms of key achievements for 2008-09, the establishment of the Ministerial Youth Advisory Committee and the Positive Body Image Strategy, which is quite a feather in our cap. We led the way on positive body image and the federal government has just recently announced that it wants to have a national code in regards to body image and has acknowledged the leadership role of the Victorian government in that area.

The renewal and strengthening of the government's partnership with the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust is in relation to mentoring, and the establishment of eight Youth Foundations Victoria sites, located at Laverton; Upper Yarra; Whittington, Newcomb and Thomson; Portarlington, Drysdale and Clifton Springs; West Heidelberg; Traralgon and district; Ashwood, Ashburton and Chadstone; and Neerim district, So there are a number of great achievements in 2008-09.

In terms of priorities for 2009-10, they are: continuing to develop the Young People Direct strategy, including continued consultation with my Youth Advisory Committee; continuing to work to assist young people to have a more positive body image through programs, education and creating awareness; strengthening Victoria's mentoring program; the release of a vulnerable youth framework and implementation plan later in the year; and continuing to support the young people affected by the bushfires.

I will keep those comments brief. I am happy to answer any questions in the sport, recreation and youth affairs portfolios.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Minister.

**Ms HUPPERT** — Page 344 of budget paper 3 specifies investment of \$5 million in the Melbourne and Olympic Parks redevelopment, which you also referred to briefly in your presentation. Could you please outline for the committee progress on this redevelopment?

**Mr MERLINO** — I am happy to answer this question. This is a quite exciting development. When you think about the Australian Open, for the month of January this is the biggest sporting event in the world. There is no doubt about it. It is that important for this state and for this city, and it holds that place on the international sporting calendar.

As sport continues to evolve at an international level, it is important that our sporting facilities are not just keeping pace but remain the best in the world. To ensure this is the case, on Australia Day this year the Premier announced a master plan for the Melbourne and Olympic Parks precinct, with \$5 million funding for detailed design work on the master plan in the 2009-10 financial year. This funding was confirmed in the budget and it builds on the \$1 million we announced 12 months previously, which was the feasibility in terms of what needs to happen.

Melbourne's reputation as the world's sporting event capital will reach new heights as Melbourne Park is transformed into the ultimate sports and events precinct. We all know this is a great precinct — the MCG, Rod Laver Arena, Hisense, the new rectangular stadium — but there are some issues with the Australian Open. If you are a fan of tennis and you go to the Open, you know it is not that easy to get from point A to point B. There is no easy access, there are different levels, there are a couple of very significant pinch points, and there are a number of issues for the players and officials in terms of broadcasting and player facilities.

It has been 21 years since the Australian Open was moved from Kooyong to its new home at Melbourne Park and since that time the Open has grown to impressive new heights, last year attracting 605 000 patrons, compared to 250 000 patrons back in 1988.

This is two years in a row that we have broken the 600 000 barrier, which is a great achievement considering the tougher economic environment this year. Now is the time to have a look at how we can refresh and improve this terrific precinct to ensure that it remains a world-class facility. The proposed master plan is designed to

ensure that Melbourne Park remains the home of the Australian Open until at least 2036. The proposed master plan includes a new piazza-style town square, environmental features such as ecoroofs over the town square, a water recycling system, expanded media and broadcast facilities, better connections to public transport and a better connection of the precinct to the city. I have actually got a fly through. It only takes a minute, Chair, but it gives you an idea as to what we are looking at.

**The CHAIR** — I assume you will make copies of these overheads available to members of the committee?

**Mr MERLINO** — Indeed.

**The CHAIR** — We can put them up on our website.

**Mr MERLINO** — I will just mention a few of the highlights: a new city entrance, better connection to Federation Square East, an expanded concourse area at grade — so it is all at the one level. You have got a spine right through the guts of the precinct.

**Ms MUNT** — It is an architectural term.

**Mr MERLINO** — This is the town square in between Rod Laver and Hisense. It will be a great addition, not only for the Australian Open but also for a range of other major events and activities.

**Ms MUNT** — Outdoor rock concerts?

**Mr MERLINO** — Outdoor rock concerts — all that sort of thing.

**Dr SYKES** — Can you add rainwater tanks, Minister?

**Mr MERLINO** — Indeed, Bill! Here is the new headquarters for the Tennis Australia museum, and you can see here a single entry point. At the moment you have got an entry point into Rod Laver and an entry point into Hisense; there is no major entry into the facility. As it goes back, you can see on the left what will be the new AFL training venue and the iconic rectangular stadium, so it really will be quite a special — —

**Ms HUPPERT** — The best sporting precinct in Australia.

**Mr MERLINO** — It will be quite incredible.

**Ms HUPPERT** — In the world!

**Mr MERLINO** — There will be a new national tennis academy, because the one thing we must not lose sight of is the fact that we need to get Australian men and women and boys and girls back in the top 100. That is going to be a major focus; it is not just about facilities. There will be a new entry point from Olympic Boulevard, an expanded concourse area, a new broadcast centre and the upgraded Rod Laver Arena. It hosts about 14 500 patrons, but it will be about 15 000 patrons once this is constructed. The general view in the tennis world is that if you are well above 15 000 patrons, you start losing it from a visual point for the fans. At Flushing Meadows I think it is 22 000 patrons or so, and it is just hopeless at the top of that facility.

**Dr SYKES** — But you wouldn't have sat up there, Minister. You would have sat down near the front when you were at Flushing Meadows, wouldn't you?

**Mr MERLINO** — The other thing about Flushing Meadows — making that comparison — something like the last couple of rows at Rod Laver is the start of the public seating at Flushing Meadows. There is a quite a difference in philosophy.

**The CHAIR** — A bit like going to a rock concert!

**Mr MERLINO** — The \$5 million funding in 2009–10 will also be used to finalise the exact components of the master plan in consultation with Tennis Australia and the Melbourne Olympic Parks Trust to prepare detailed design and costings on the first stage of the project, ensuring that it will be carried out while the Australian Open continues to operate. That is one of the other challenges — working out the timing, what are the priorities and doing that work in between Australian opens. The open makes a significant contribution to Victoria, generating around 1000 equivalent full-time jobs, injecting \$164 million into the economy and raising

the tourism profile of our great city with almost 240 million viewers worldwide. This is a significant project for the next financial year.

**Dr SYKES** — My question follows on from that, Minister, and I would have to say it is an extremely impressive proposition that is being proposed for the central Melbourne area and, I appreciate, for Victorians in general. However, it does raise the issue of importance to me, and I refer to budget paper 3, page 340, the creating better places and expert assistance programs. The shadow minister for sport and recreation has raised the question: does that funding program only apply to growth areas? The background to the question is that in his area the Horsham Rural City Council missed out on two funding programs because apparently it was deemed not to be in a growth area. If this is the case then we have a compounding issue. Kids are leaving country Victoria at a disappointingly high rate. One of the reasons they leave is because there is ‘nothing to do’.

**Mr MERLINO** — Yes.

**Dr SYKES** — If there is not a development of facilities in those areas then that compounds the ‘nothing to do’ issue. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy that we end up losing more and more kids from country Victoria. We do actually need kids there to grow food and fibre for everyone.

**Mr MERLINO** — In terms of the specific reference in budget paper 3, page 340, that reference to creating better places and expert assistance programs is not a sport and recreation reference. That is within Justin Madden’s portfolio responsibility in planning and community development. But I am happy to answer the question in terms of facilities in rural and regional Victoria, if I am permitted to do so, Chair.

**The CHAIR** — I think that would be a good idea, particularly any support you can give to councils like Horsham. The member for Lowan would be quite interested in that.

**Mr MERLINO** — Indeed. This program is something I am quite proud of. We have the community facilities program and the country football and netball program, which Bill and many regional members would be well aware of. In addition to that, there is the drought assistance program. The \$28 million over the last couple of summers means in effect well over \$200 million for well over 200 000 community facilities right across Victoria. I know full well the importance of sport and recreation facilities for rural and regional Victoria. On one of my regular road trips yesterday we visited Gippsland and I made five local announcements, including a synthetic hockey pitch which can also cater for soccer at Monash University’s campus at Churchill.

That is Gippsland’s second synthetic hockey pitch. They went from having absolutely no hockey pitches in the whole of the Gippsland region to now having two in Churchill and Drouin. Later on that day we visited Buln Buln, a tiny community. The only community facilities in that town were the local recreation reserve and the primary school across the road.

I was there announcing just over \$23 000 in funding from the bushfire support funding program to replace fencing and signage that was destroyed as a result of the fire. If it were not for the quick action of a couple of people who were actually at the club at the time — this was spotting from kilometres away — and who got on top of it, the school and the recreation reserve would have been under serious threat. Frankly without that sporting oval the community would have been absolutely devastated, so I absolutely understand and appreciate the importance of sporting facilities for local communities.

In regard to the community facilities funding program, since 2000 the government has invested over \$186 million in over 950 community sport and recreation projects. The facility funding is distributed across all areas of the state, and this will continue to be the case over the current four-year program. We have got a map which is showing the location of funded Better Pools, aquatic access and seasonal renewal projects since 2000. That shows metropolitan Melbourne, and then we have got a regional spread.

The seasonal pool renewal program, Bill — this was targeted not specifically but predominantly at regional Victoria. We knew that all a lot of these pools that were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s needed was a little bit of work to stop them leaking or to do some improvements to their amenity and that their participation, their usage, would just go through the roof. I was talking to the mayor of Baw Baw shire yesterday. She was saying the funding we provided to the Drouin outdoor pool through the seasonal program has led to a massive increase in participation, and they are running Learn to Swim and all those sorts of programs through them.

**Dr SYKES** — The hot summer may have helped, Minister, given that generally it is a bit chilly down in Gippsland!

**Mr MERLINO** — Indeed!

**The CHAIR** — This is true. Have we helped Horsham in this regard under this program?

**Mr MERLINO** — Certainly there are a number of projects in Horsham. The most significant recent one was the \$1000 of assistance to Horsham golf club as a result of the devastation from the fires. I know that we are also talking to Hugh in terms of a number of other facilities in his community, including one in regard to the country footy-netball program. You can assure Hugh, Bill, that my department will continue to work with him in that program.

In addition to the country community facilities funding program we have also got the country football-netball program, the new community soccer program, and I also want to mention the sporting uniform grant. Country footy-netball is now an \$11.2 million program. This will run right through until 2010–11, with \$9.2 million from the state government and an original \$2 million from the Australian Football League. Since 2005 the government has announced funding of more than \$8.4 million for over 230 individual projects across rural and regional Victoria. The drought relief program I have mentioned. One of the focuses for me in this budget was dealing with the massive increase in participation in basketball and in soccer. I am happy to talk later about the State Basketball Centre.

**Ms MUNT** — Especially girls in soccer.

**Mr MERLINO** — That is right. One of the things about basketball and soccer is that there are boys and girls right through to seniors, and the pathway is exactly the same. I think that is one of the reasons why basketball and soccer have been so popular. In addition to the community facilities funding program we are providing an additional \$5.7 million specifically directed at grassroots soccer facilities. There are many opportunities, Bill, for rural and regional sporting clubs to access that funding, and I will be releasing the guidelines for the soccer program shortly.

The final thing I want to mention, Chair, is the sporting uniforms grant. You may recall that out of the savings from the Commonwealth Games we had \$1 million set aside for sporting uniforms. This was up to \$1000 for uniforms or footwear — massively oversubscribed!

**The CHAIR** — It would be popular!

**Mr MERLINO** — We have got \$1.6 million in the budget, and the first round of that will probably be in June or July, very shortly, and I encourage clubs right across Victoria to apply for that funding program.

**Mr SCOTT** — Minister, I refer you to page 12 of budget paper 3, which lists funding to sporting clubs and community facilities as part of a \$10 million community recovery fund for the bushfires. Can the minister inform the committee of the support provided in the budget to sports clubs and community facilities which are affected by the bushfires?

**Mr MERLINO** — Thanks, Rob. I am very pleased to answer this question. As you would appreciate, this has been a massive priority for me as sports minister visiting the devastated communities in the days and weeks after the fires. It was quite incredible that once people had looked after the affairs of their own families and their own properties, as a community what they wanted to see was their sporting clubs get on their feet as soon as possible. We wanted to provide some immediate funding to ensure that that happens.

The recent Victorian bushfires have had a considerable impact on the Victorian community, and the government recognises the importance of local sport and recreation in helping to rebuild community strength and wellbeing. As I mentioned earlier the Brumby government, together with the commonwealth and state sporting associations, has provided significant support to ensure local sport and recreation clubs can operate again in bushfire-affected areas.

Local sport is vital in building the social fabric of Victorian communities. Reflecting this, the Premier announced in partnership with the commonwealth the \$3 million fund that I mentioned, providing grants of up to \$100 000 for immediate rebuilding and repatriation works. To date over \$1.2 million has been provided from

the fund to assist these sporting organisations. Examples would be the \$200 000 to the Marysville golf and bowls club to replace essential machinery, just over \$195 000 to the AFL, over \$64 000 to the \*Yarra Ranges Shire Council and \$59 000 to the Mitchell Shire Council, totalling over \$319 000. That was to restore 23 sportsgrounds for the upcoming sports seasons.

We are also aware of the significant contribution made by major professional sporting organisations such as the AFL, Cricket Australia, Football Federation Australia, the NRL, Tennis Victoria and Tennis Australia. They have been absolutely fantastic, both in terms of getting athletes into the communities — I was at Whittlesea when the Australian cricket team was there, and just the positive impact it had on particularly the young kids was quite profound — but also in terms of equipment and in supporting facility redevelopment.

I want to recognise the contribution of those state sporting associations as well and assure the committee that this is the no. 1 priority. A number of facilities were completely destroyed, and we are absolutely committed to making sure they get completely rebuilt and are even better for the local communities.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Minister, on one of the slides you had up there one of the dot points referred to the Vulnerable Youth Framework, which was:

developed to guide and strengthen action across state and local government and communities, including schools, to better respond to the needs of vulnerable young people ...

It appears that little in the budget has been offered to that program. My question is: how will it be implemented and what funding will be allocated to that framework?

**Mr MERLINO** — If I could firstly speak to the Vulnerable Youth Framework and the work around that and then speak more broadly in terms of what has been provided for young people across government, with a particular focus — —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Bearing in mind that with the financial situation this is going to be even more important.

**Mr MERLINO** — Indeed. Firstly, in regard to the Vulnerable Youth Framework, a discussion paper was released in late 2008 to gather advice from those working with young people on the development of a policy framework for better addressing the needs of vulnerable young people in Victoria. It is not just something across my portfolio, it also concerns Lisa Neville, Bronwyn Pike in education, and Maxine Morand. The final framework and implementation plan is currently being developed based on the responses to the discussion paper. It will provide a foundation for coordinated and effective youth services that assist vulnerable young Victorians at a time when they most need support, giving particular attention to providing support early in the onset of problems.

This is through both the discussion paper and the work we are doing on the vulnerable youth framework, but we have also got some better youth services pilot sites in Frankston, Wyndham and Bendigo. There are a couple of things that have really come out through that work, including the importance of early intervention and the importance of education of schools and making sure that there is that communication coordination. Look at the municipality of Wyndham. There are something like 86 youth services from local, state and federal government and non-government organisations, but what we need is better coordination. Early intervention and coordination is a focus of that. The framework will be launched a bit later on this year.

In regard to support for young people, this year's budget provides over \$270 million in new funding. One of the challenges of a portfolio like youth affairs is that it is a relatively small bucket of money. My responsibility as youth minister is that whole-of-government coordination. When you are talking about young people, they may have issues with transport, they may have issues in the justice system or in education. My role is really a coordinating one, in addition to the programs that we run through OfY.

One of the focuses in the budget this year was supporting services for vulnerable Victorians. You are absolutely right — in this current climate we need to maximise our support for young people. The government has committed \$134.7 million to reforming the out-of-home care system through securing more home-based care placement, building the capacity of residential care and recruiting living carers and new family mentors. Some \$36.3 million will be invested in prevention and early intervention programs to take action before people become homeless, and \$52.6 million will be directed towards improving and expanding homelessness services

through targeted programs for specific groups, such as women and children experiencing family violence, indigenous people and young people.

There has been significant investment in mental health, which you have probably already heard about through Lisa Neville — \$21.3 million to the early life program to provide diagnosis, treatment and support for children and adolescents, including early intervention and outreach services, mental health services and youth justice. In addition, \$8 million has been allocated for two new youth prevention and recovery care services in Bendigo and Frankston, and \$4.2 million for mental health service enhancements to improve service quality, support staff training and provide greater access to mental health services, particularly for young people and adolescents experiencing autism.

In addition to that there is the Respect strategy. I am not sure if you have had Peter Batchelor here yet, but we have quite a significant focus on young people and volunteering. Across a whole range of areas we are focusing on early intervention and providing assistance to vulnerable youth. The framework will be released later this year.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Can I just clarify: how is the Respect strategy related to the Vulnerable Youth Framework, if at all?

**Mr MERLINO** — I was expanding my comments in terms of support for young people and getting young people involved in the communities. To answer your question, look at the advanced program through my portfolio, which is about getting young people involved in the community through their school or through the Youth Participation and Access Program which is removing barriers to participation. Often the young people involved in those programs and who will be the target of the Respect community volunteering program will be young people who, if they are not engaged, will become much more vulnerable. I suggest there is a holistic approach, if you like.

**Ms MUNT** — Minister, I love a major event. I love going to them, I love seeing them; they are very exciting. But I am also interested in the benefit for Victoria as a whole. Budget paper 3, page 175, lists the expected outcome for 2008–09 of 15 major events for Victoria. I was wondering if you could just give some detail of those major events that I love going to and the benefit they will have.

**Mr MERLINO** — Thanks, Janice. I am happy to answer this question. When you think about major events — and if you have heard from Tim Holding, he has probably already said this — the major events calendar is our Sydney Opera House, it is our harbour bridge. It is what sets Melbourne and Victoria apart from the rest of the nation, and we do it better I think than anyone in the world. Whilst Tim is major events minister, my role through Sport and Recreation Victoria is to manage almost all these major events. Tim gets them and then we run them through contract management.

**Ms MUNT** — He handpasses them.

**Mr MERLINO** — That is right. The Brumby government is committed to hosting major sporting events that place Melbourne and Victoria in the national and international spotlight, boosting tourism and investment in Victoria. Victoria's strong reputation for holding premier sporting events was again recognised in 2008, when we retained our position as the ultimate sports city — ahead of Sydney, Berlin, Hong Kong, London, Los Angeles, Madrid, Paris, Tokyo and Vancouver.

In 2008–09, we hosted a range of major sporting events: obviously the annual ones like the AFL Grand Final, the Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix, and the Jayco Herald Sun Tour. We also had the international rules match, Australia–Ireland; the Rugby League World Cup match, Australia–England; the UCI Track World Cup; the Masters golf; the Homeless World Cup; the World Latin Dancesport Championship, which was an outstanding event; the Australian Dancesport Championship; Skandia Geelong Week; the Australian Open; the Women's Australian Open golf; lawn bowls Australian Open; Australian Masters Games; the World Superbike Championship; the formula one grand prix; and Rip Curl Pro. The list goes on.

In total, well over 1 million people attended these events, with the AFL Grand Final — which was a wonderful grand final — attracting over 100 000 spectators, the highest attendance since 1986. For the second consecutive year, over 600 000 spectators attended the Australian tennis Open, which was really a great achievement. We broke that record the year before, but we got 600 000 again in this current climate. What we



did find was an increase in people buying the \$29 ground pass, as opposed to upgrading their tickets. You would expect that in the current climate, but to break 600 000 again was outstanding.

**Ms MUNT** — It is great value, though, the \$29 ground pass.

**Mr MERLINO** — Great value, that is right. Other highlights included the Rugby League World Cup match between Australia and England, which attracted over 33 000 spectators, including 9000 interstate and international visitors, generating a benefit to Victoria of \$15.5 million. The Australian Masters Games, which is the largest multisport participation event in Australia, attracted over 8000 participants, volunteers, families and spectators, with 63 sports at over 70 venues throughout the Geelong region. That was a great event, which I participated in.

**The CHAIR** — I think the Parliament had a team in it.

**Mr MERLINO** — The Parliament had a team, but I really do not want to answer questions about that particularly again!

In addition, June will be a bumper month for sport, with Melbourne to play host to the Rugby League State Of Origin Queensland–New South Wales at Docklands, the Australia–Japan football match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, and the rugby union Australia–Italy match, again at the Docklands.

Over the next three years, an outstanding variety of sporting events will continue to build and enhance Victoria's reputation. Tiger Woods, the world's no. 1 golfer, will appear exclusively in Melbourne in November for the 2009 Australian Masters golf at Kingston Heath Golf Club — in your electorate, Janice. This will be a great thing. It will bring a worldwide spotlight to Victoria's outstanding golf courses, as well as many international and interstate visitors. We made the call to rotate the Masters through the sandbelt golf courses, and that is one of the key reasons that we secured Tiger Woods. He recognises that these are absolutely world-class venues, and that was one of the key reasons why we secured him for that event.

The tourism benefits arising from Tiger Woods's appearance at this tournament are tremendous, with between 10 000 to 20 000 visitors expected from outside Victoria. World no. 4 golfer, Australian Geoff Ogilvy, will also be a strong drawcard. The economic benefit of the tournament has been estimated by Ernst and Young to be in the vicinity of \$19 million.

Finally, Chair, just a couple of other very quick highlights. As I mentioned, the Champions Trophy, the six best men's hockey teams, will be a great event. Australia, England, Germany, Korea, the Netherlands and Spain will be competing. On the water, Melbourne has secured the first leg of the prestigious seven-city Olympic-class Sailing World Cup for the next three years. This will be the major annual event for world-class Olympic-class sailing, and it is great to build on the renowned Sail Melbourne regatta.

I will probably finish there. There are many other things to talk about because it is a great major events calendar.

**The CHAIR** — I am sure. We may need to have some more questions.

**Dr SYKES** — Minister, my question relates to your role as whole-of-government coordinator for youth programs and also the point you have made that education is the no. 1 priority for the Labor government, as I understand it. You did touch on year 12 completion rates and you said how good they are in relation to the rest of Australia. Just a point of clarification, or for your information, you realise that year 12 completion rates in country Victoria are substantially lower than in metropolitan Melbourne, so there is a need to address that. Similarly, tertiary education uptake levels by country young people are far lower than in Melbourne.

That brings me to my question: with the federal government's changes to the youth allowance, which are basically going to require young people to work for longer before getting independent Austudy and therefore disadvantage young people taking up tertiary education, what are the Labor government and you in your role as youth coordinator doing to address that issue and ensure that particularly our country young people can have equitable access to tertiary education?

**Mr WELLS** — I think you have got him stumped.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — He does not have that one ready. Who has failed?

**Dr SYKES** — I should say while the minister is conferring that I have had a lot of correspondence already from a young fellow called James Morrow, who is about to go down this path of tertiary education, and another young fellow, Alex Robb, has written to me. They see it as a major impediment to country young people being able to pursue tertiary education. Obviously you then end up with kids on the streets and rising unemployment in country Victoria and a further reason for country young people to leave the country.

**Mr MERLINO** — Thanks, Bill, for your comments. I will make some comments in terms of retaining young people in school and providing those opportunities and then I might ask Kati to give some comments in terms of the national framework and our role and what we are doing in that space.

The Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development outlines the government's commitment to continuing improving school retention and assisting all Victorian young people to attain year 12 or an equivalent qualification. Bill, I understand your comments in regard to rural and regional Victoria, and often when we are out on community cabinet one of the common questions I ask — I hold a youth forum at each of these community cabinets, and it is generally with students at school — is about school retention: what are they doing? I ask them about their employment. I ask about their intentions post-school and how many are staying in the local region and how many are intending to travel to Melbourne or elsewhere to pursue their educational and employment goals. So I understand the importance of regional facilities like Churchill Monash University campus, which I visited yesterday.

The Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development policy statement acknowledges that factors outside schools directly affect student outcomes and identifies partnerships with families, the community and industry as a strategy to address these factors. Of the factors schools can influence, the most prominent is the provision of a broader range of subjects to match student interest and career aspirations, and this is again something that is quite common in my comments with schools. Some schools have quite a broad range of subjects and opportunities, and other schools less so.

A key strategy to drive the blueprint agenda forward is the employment of 67 regional network leaders to work with schools to improve their performance. RNLs are experienced educators who provide advice and assistance to all schools and more targeted support to underperforming schools.

In late 2008 the effective strategy is to increase the school completion record, and a guide to help schools increase school completion were provided to all schools. These documents identify successful strategies that schools are implementing to improve student engagement and increase rates of completion.

In 2009–10 additional student counselling and career advice services will also be provided in four pilot localities. These new services will work more closely with young people who are about to leave school without a year 12 qualification.

I will not go through some of the budget details, but I am happy to provide that detail. I might ask Kati to comment in terms of the youth allowance and the national framework.

**Ms KRSEVAN** — In relation to the youth allowance there are probably two key things that we will be involved in and that we will be working on with the department of education and also Regional Development Victoria. The first one with the department of education is in relation to the national partnerships that are currently being finalised between the commonwealth and the state government around three key areas. If I can remember them all, they are literacy and numeracy, extended schools and — I cannot quite remember the third one, but we can come back on that. That will be one key piece of work that we will be doing around this whole issue of young people's options in regional and rural areas.

The other key piece of work is that Regional Development Victoria is currently developing a blueprint for retaining people in rural and regional areas, and it has had a focus on young people. Access to tertiary education is a key issue for retaining young people in regional and rural areas. We have been involved in conducting some research for Melbourne University and providing advice to RDV on that. I understand the blueprint will be released later this year, and that is one of the issues that has been picked up on that.

The youth allowance is creating an issue for regional and rural Victorians. I was given an anecdote from Warnambool on Tuesday about the impact that it is having. We are very aware of it, and we are working with other parts of government to try and look at ways we can minimise that impact as well as talking to the federal government.

**Dr SYKES** — It would certainly be an opportunity for cooperative federalism because, as I presume you know, the uptake of tertiary education by country Victorian students is 30 per cent and falling, whereas with Melbourne students it is 55 or so, and a major factor is cost. So you can be doing this good work, but it is tinkering around the edges unless the cost issue is addressed, and these current proposals by the federal government are going to make it extremely difficult for young people.

**Mr NOONAN** — Minister, I wanted to ask you about one of the more significant announcements in the budget in your area of responsibility, and that is the \$7 million for the construction of the State Basketball Centre in the Knox area. It comes at a time where the sport of basketball at an elite level is going through some interesting times, but I gather from your comments that at least at a grassroots level participation levels seem to be up with that of soccer as well. I wonder if the minister could inform the committee why such a facility was considered a priority for this budget.

**Mr MERLINO** — Thanks, Wade. I expected Kim to ask me this question.

**Mr WELLS** — Which one?

**Mr MERLINO** — About the State Basketball Centre.

**Mr WELLS** — From the marginal seat of Scoresby!

**Mr MERLINO** — It is a great project in your electorate. Thank you for that question. I am happy to provide the committee with an outline of this particular project. As you say, basketball is quite an extraordinary sport because at the grassroots level it is absolutely booming. One of the reasons why we looked at Kim's electorate and the site of Knox is that when you think about the EastLink corridor from, say, Frankston to Dandenong, Knox, Kilsyth and Nunawading, this is quite literally the heart of basketball in the country. It has about 35 per cent of Victoria's registered basketballers. Fifty per cent of national basketballers are registered in Victoria, but the major section is along this corridor. So you have the sport booming at the grassroots level.

At the elite national level, the Opals and the Boomers are in the top echelon of teams world wide. The Opals are world champions and silver Olympic medallists, but at the men's elite level in the nation it is a bit of a basket case at the moment. Working with Basketball Australia, hopefully they will work themselves through this and the reform process, but at the moment, as we speak, we do not currently have a Victorian team scheduled to play in the NBL. I am working closely with Basketball Victoria and Basketball Australia to see if we can reverse that situation, because it is essential that this state is represented in the National Basketball League.

But back to the State Basketball Centre. The state government has committed \$7 million in the 2009–10 and 2010–11 state budgets to contribute to the development of the State Basketball Centre and the Knox regional sports complex in the city of Knox. The commonwealth government has also announced a commitment of \$7 million for the centre through its community infrastructure program, and I understand that commonwealth funding is provided on the condition that construction will commence later this year. This project was always going to be one that needed the three levels of government to get up, and I am just delighted that the federal government has committed along with the state government. We welcome that partnership with the City of Knox and the federal government.

Our confirmed funding partners for the project include Knox City Council, Basketball Victoria, Knox Basketball Association and Football Federation Victoria, because this will not just be the State Basketball Centre, it will also be a regional facility for Football Federation Victoria. It has a vision to have a number of regional facilities across metropolitan and regional Victoria, so it will be a major facility for the FFV. It will be the home of the Knox Basketball Association, and it will also provide sporting opportunities for netball and gymnastics. It is a large site. It will be a developing site for generations, and it is quite a rare opportunity.

The total project cost for stage 1 of the State Basketball Centre is \$27.6 million. The project will provide enormous benefits to basketball in Victoria. The CEO of Basketball Victoria, Wayne Bird, stated that funding for the project is 'further recognition of our sport's importance in the Victorian community'. The new stadium will enhance participation in basketball, and Melbourne's eastern suburbs have the highest rate of basketball participation in the country. The new stadium will help to harness and develop Victoria's junior basketball talent for the future.

Lindsay Gaze was at the announcement, and he talked about basketball seeking a home for more than 50 years. He said they almost got there with the Bolte government, they almost got there under the Cain government and they almost got that under the Kennett government, but it is the Brumby government that has delivered a state basketball centre. It will include six courts, and it will include a show court. It will be — and this is one of the key reasons why we got federal support as well — a key construction job providing construction jobs immediately and in the long term it will provide employment opportunities both to the state association and to the local sporting clubs.

**Dr SYKES** — Minister, I would like to explore further the respect strategy, again with your hat on as a coordinator for youth programs. I am interested in ensuring that we are addressing vulnerable youth and also linking that to the coordination between various government departments in relation to social housing. I will use Benalla as an example. Benalla is a great town in north-east Victoria — a great place to live, work and raise a family — but it has a very low socioeconomic status rating. Linked with that low socioeconomic status in the case of our social housing we have a lot of clients who come to Benalla from other places. They have no connection to the town, no support services and no extended family network, and often they have complex needs. That really puts pressure on and increases the demand for youth services in the area.

It would appear from what is happening in our town now that those services have been overloaded, in that unfortunately we have an increase in drug and alcohol-fuelled violence. We have a lack of respect by young men — or youth — for females; we have a lack of respect by a small proportion of young people for teachers at the schools; and we have a lack of respect by a small proportion for the police, in that we had an assault on police recently in our town, which was appalling.

We have a serious situation in the community. I am sure it is reflected in other communities, but I am just speaking from firsthand knowledge. Some of the ways of addressing this are to do things like supporting a skate park proposal which I am going to bring to you, Minister, because I have a couple of young people who are really driving that. Leaving that specific thing aside, do you have a strategy in place that ensures coordination between the various arms of government so that we do not have an increased demand on services in a community that results in a breakdown of our social fabric and a loss of respect by our young people?

**Mr MERLINO** — Thanks, Bill. There is a lot in that question.

**Dr SYKES** — We have a big problem.

**Mr MERLINO** — If I can start with the respect agenda, this will be an evolving thing. As we move forward there will be additional things that will be picked up as part of the respect agenda. But in its essence it really emerged from community concern about the alcohol culture and violence in the CBD, and you see it reflected also in regional cities and in local towns. That is where it emerged from. One example of young people themselves calling for some action on this issue was the Step Back Think campaign led by concerned young people to address violence in the city, particularly as it relates to the misuse of alcohol.

When we talk about the respect agenda there are some people in the youth sector who think this is just about government whacking young people over the head saying, ‘You should be more respectful’. But the respect agenda is actually a lot broader than that. It is about having some respect for yourself; it is about self-esteem. Do not put yourself in vulnerable situations. It is about having respect for your friends, for your mates. If you think your friend is getting into a vulnerable situation, do not let them get in that position. It is about respecting your community. If you vandalise and spray graffiti, or if, as you say, you have incidents with the local police, you are not respecting your community.

So it is really a three-pronged approach. We recently announced a \$17.7 million strategy to promote community respect as part of the Victorian government’s actions to build more resilient communities and address alcohol-related violence among young people.

It really does build on some of the existing Office for Youth programs, like our mentoring initiatives and our advance program on youth participation and access program. So the strategy will focus on strengthening the connection of young people with their communities through volunteering and programs to address juvenile offending. We are going to expand this quite innovative program.

This is about young people working in the community — young offenders — and not getting them sucked into the juvenile justice system, but getting them actually involved in their community and cleaning up some of

the mess as well. This whole program has great potential to change not only the individuals but also their communities as well. There is the \$9.3 million volunteer strategy.

That is the respect agenda. As I mentioned before with Sue's question, there is a whole range of programs right across government specifically targeted at early intervention across various areas, whether it is mental health or whether it is homelessness.

Finally, in terms of the youth services on the ground, we are acutely aware of the pressure points, but we also acutely aware that it may not take a lot of money, it is just about better coordination of youth services that are actually available on the ground, feeding much better connections between school communities and support services within the education system and the support services within communities.

**Dr SYKES** — Speaking on behalf of Benalla, we would love to be involved in that and work with you to take advantage of the program and address the issues which are of great concern to many people — our families and our young people.

**Mr MERLINO** — I was at a local government forum which we have done for a few years in a row with ministers who have direct involvement with local councils — Justin Madden, the Minister for Planning; Peter Batchelor, the Minister for Community Development' and me.

I talked about the three pilot better youth services in Bendigo, Frankston and Wyndham. I mentioned what we are hoping to do as we get the resources is to start expanding this into other communities. One of the comments from the floor with regard to Bendigo, which is quite obviously a populated regional and major regional city, was that we need to make sure that we have a fourth category, if you like, because I talked about metro, interface and regional, which was a municipality or municipalities that have quite isolated rural communities. I said that when we expand those pilots, we will be expanding to include a community like yours, Dr Sykes.

**Ms HUPPERT** — Minister, I refer you to page 170 of budget paper 3. One of the output measures is:

Number of organisations funded through youth participation and access program and mentoring and capacity building initiative.

You have referred to mentoring program in a couple of your previous answers just in passing, but could you please provide more information about this program and what will be involved during the 2009–10 period?

**Mr MERLINO** — I will talk about mentoring perhaps a little bit on youth participation access as well. The mentoring program is fantastic, and it really does make a difference. It has been one of the focuses of the Office for Youth.

The Victorian government committed \$3.9 million over four years from 2008–09 to 2011–12 for the mentoring and capacity building initiative for young Victorians, particularly those disengaged from education, employment and training. This investment will boost mentoring programs for young people across the state. In the future the mentoring capacity building initiative will continue to be developed through and build on the three key components which are: building mentoring — these are the programs we provide; tools for better mentoring — this is about providing the resources and education to organisations and individuals; and capacity building — which is about having sustainable mentoring programs in communities right across Victoria.

The Victorian government and the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust have a strong partnership to help build the capacity of communities and develop innovative ways of helping young people. The partnership has afforded the opportunity to support the delivery of youth mentoring and help young people reconnect with their community as well as with education, employment or training.

There are 12 targeted mentoring projects which are funded to provide quality youth mentoring with priority grouped young people in areas of disadvantage. As at December 2008, the regional coordination projects were providing support to 159 Victorian youth mentoring programs, in turn supporting over 4500 young people and 4220 volunteer adult mentors.

Three regional coordination projects are funded to provide support, training and networking opportunities for mentoring programs and additional support in Gippsland, the Grampians and Melbourne metropolitan regions. A partnership with the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust has provided funding to three more regions — Hume,

Loddon Mallee and Barwon South West — completing state wide coverage. So we have done a lot of work in this space.

We have provided tools for better mentoring, which were *A Guide to Effective Practice for Mentoring Young People* and *A Guide to Supporting Effective Programs for Mentoring Young People*. In addition last year we provided a guideline for organisations to engage with business. Mentoring is one of those programs — and I think, Wade, you know a couple of specific organisations involved in mentoring — that is something that business communities react well to. So it is just providing the tools for getting that engagement between those organisations and the business community. It was developed in partnership with the Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance, youth mentoring organisations and business, and was launched at the business breakfast event.

Activities planned for 2009–10 importantly will have an evaluation framework and tools will be completed in 2009 to be made available along with training workshops to Victorian youth mentoring programs which are looking to review and measure the benefits of continuously improving the program outcomes for young people.

A new MOU between the Victorian government and the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust has been signed this year, taking the partnership to January 2012, and under the MOU the Victorian government and the trust are jointly funding the regional coordination projects and the Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance.

**The CHAIR** — That is a pretty full answer.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — The budget appears to allocate \$21 million for community sport, but if you look at that closely, it seems to be about \$8.6 million for local sport. Given that your office manages the contract for the formula one grand prix that is reported to have lost \$40 million in its last year, which is five times the amount of money that is being allocated for local sport, my question is: how much in the forward estimates is being allocated to losses for the grand prix, and how is that commensurate with money for local sport?

**Mr MERLINO** — Firstly, in regard to community facilities, if you look at the combination of the community facilities funding program, the country football and netball program, the \$28 million of assistance for clubs as a result of the impact of the drought — well over \$200 million and well over 2000 projects — that is a rate five times greater than the previous government. I do not think anyone can dispute the fact that as far as grassroots sport goes, this government is delivering in absolute spades.

If you are talking about the \$21 million, there is the funding we are providing for soccer facilities — \$5.7 million; there is the funding we are providing to expand the country football-netball program — \$1.2 million; the sporting uniform grants — \$1.6 million. There is also \$7 million to the state basketball centre. The state basketball centre will be a facility that will host national and international events, but this is about providing pathways.

It will be the home of the Knox Basketball Association; it will be a key grassroots facility, providing those opportunities for tens of thousands of young and not-so-young basketball and soccer players and other sportspeople as well. I will stand quite proudly on our record of funding community sport.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I support money for community sport, Minister.

**Mr MERLINO** — Just in relation to the grand prix, SRV's budget includes funding for the grand prix. You will notice in the budget, Chair and committee members, that there has been an increase in the major events cap. The reason for that increase in the major events funding for SRV, or primarily the reason for that, is that the funding for the grand prix was originally provided to the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development and directly to SRV. Basically, a lot of that has come within SRV's budget.

These funds are placed in the SRV budget as SRV has traditionally overseen the grand prix for the Minister for Tourism and Major Events. The funding does not include the full amount for the grand prix, as most of the funds remain in the major events cap. Direct questions on the grand prix and funding should be directed to the Minister for Tourism and Major Events.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — A bit of a tennis match on that one, isn't it!

**The CHAIR** — We did ask him a number of questions about that — almost similar questions.

That concludes the consideration of the budget estimates for the portfolio of Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. I thank the minister and departmental officials for their attendance today. Where questions are taken on notice the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. I also ask that the overheads be made available to the committee. The committee requests that written responses on notice to the matters raised by them be provided in 30 days.

**Mr MERLINO** — Thank you, Chair, thank you members of the committee.

## 8.8 Women's Affairs Transcript

### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

#### Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 21 May 2009

#### Members

Mr R. Dalla-Riva

Ms J. Huppert

Ms J. Munt

Mr W. Noonan

Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr G. Rich-Phillips

Mr R. Scott

Mr B. Stensholt

Dr W. Sykes

Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt

Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Ms M. Morand, Minister for Women's Affairs; and

Mr T. Healy, Deputy Secretary, People and Community Advocacy,

Ms F. Mort, Manager, Policy Development, and

Ms R. Green, Manager, Family Violence, Department of Planning and Community Development.



**The CHAIR** — I welcome the Minister for Women's Affairs and departmental officers from the Department of Planning and Community Development. I call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial performance information relating to the budget estimates for the Women's Affairs portfolio.

**Overheads shown.**

**Ms MORAND** — I would like to give committee members a brief outline of what we have achieved in this portfolio across the past 12 months.

**The CHAIR** — Very quickly, Minister. We need to focus on the estimates.

**Ms MORAND** — Very quickly, we have launched the new policy framework and completed a very successful celebration of the centenary of women's suffrage. That was funded by a budget allocation which included \$354 000 to 51 community groups across Victoria to enable them to participate in the celebration of the centenary of women's suffrage.

At the beginning of this year we had a new member of Parliament coming in, Jennifer, who is with us today. She is the 90th woman elected to the Victorian Parliament. That compares to 1550 men, so we still have a long way to go. I also want to note that two have been members of the Greens party, one of whom is with us today. Congratulations, Jennifer, on being the 90th woman elected.

We also had the Abortion Law Reform Act passed successfully through the Parliament last year. The Rural Women, Drought and Climate Change initiative has been a really successful program which culminated in the forum we had about a month ago. In the lead-up to that we had 700 women participate in developing ideas for this forum that was held in the city. Christine Nixon was one of the speakers.

Our achievements have also been our commitment to increasing the participation of women on government boards and authorities to 40 per cent and we have achieved that target. The original proportion of women participating was 31 per cent; it is now 40 per cent. As part of our new framework we have set a target of towards 50 per cent of all new appointments made by government to boards and statutory authorities being women. We have also successfully increased the number of chairs of these boards from 12 per cent in 1999 to 32 per cent in 2008.

The honour roll continues to be very successful, with another 20 women being inducted earlier this year as part of International Women's Day celebrations. We are continuing to provide a financial literacy program to women. At the end of last year, the Premier's women's summit was also a great success.

On family violence I only note as lead minister that those are the other four ministers that are very closely involved in the actual delivery of the commitments that we are making. We have invested \$75 million since 2005 in an integrated response to family violence. We continue to do our work there, which includes the recent release of a 10-year plan for indigenous families and communities, which Deputy Secretary Terry Healy, who is with us today, had a very close involvement in the development of.

In family violence reforms, this year we are developing a state plan to prevent violence against women and continuing to roll out the Enough campaign. So far we have had community consultations and launches of this program in Colac, Swan Hill and Traralgon. I attended the roadshow in Swan Hill which continues to promote the message that violence is unacceptable. There are more roadshows to be held in Benalla on 12 June, in Ballarat on 18 June and in Dandenong on 26 June.

**The CHAIR** — I am sure the local member will attend that one.

**Ms MORAND** — You would be very welcome to attend that, and I hope you are able to participate on 12 June.

On the budget, two items are the women's leadership grants and also continuing the Rural Women, Drought and Community Change engagement officers' funding for another two years.

**The CHAIR** — I am sure the member for Benalla will have a strong interest in that one as well. He has already raised the issue, I think. Thank you, Minister.

**Ms HUPPERT** — Minister, I want to ask you a question about the women's leadership program, which is referred to on page 343 of budget paper 3. I have to admit I did benefit from the government's policies, having previously served on a government board. I wonder if you could outline for the committee what you will be doing in the current budget period to increase the participation of women in political and civic life?

**Ms MORAND** — We know that there is still a significant underrepresentation of women on boards and committees, and that is particularly in the private sector, where the latest survey of the Australian Stock Exchange top 200 companies showed that only 9 per cent of the board members were women and in fact 50 per cent of the boards on the Australian Stock Exchange have no women on the boards whatsoever. We are determined to improve representation of women on boards and committees. We have had success in increasing women's representation on government boards and committees to 40 per cent, and we are determined to move that towards 50 per cent and in doing so provide opportunities for women to get recognition for the skills and experience that they do have, which is why they have been selected to serve on government boards and committees and therefore also get opportunities to participate in private sector boards and committees.

The grant that we have been able to announce in the budget is to try to improve women's leadership opportunities. The program is under development. We want to develop it in a way that we get the most benefit from the grants for the people who have the opportunity to assist them in their leadership opportunities. One program that has been a great success is the one done through DPI, which is Rural Woman of the Year. The recipient of that award gets the opportunity to do the Australian Institute of Company Directors course as part of the prize. We are having a look at what programs have been successful, what sort of programs can offer the best opportunity to assist either individual women or organisations to support women in their organisations to have further opportunities for promotion within organisations or opportunities outside their organisations but assisted by their organisations to have more opportunities for leadership participation. This is very, very important.

The last thing I would say about that is that the Victorian Women's Register now has 1800 women on it. We are looking at that at the moment to see if there are other ways we can improve the register, the way people can access it and make sure people know that it is available so that there is no, if you like, excuse that you cannot find a woman with the necessary skills and experience for that particular board. We have 1800 women who have registered from a hugely different range of backgrounds, skills and experience, so there should be a woman that fits that category for whatever role is being desired.

**The CHAIR** — Minister, I assume you are dealing with VECCI and all these organisations such as AIM, as you have already mentioned — —

**Ms HUPPERT** — Have you contacted some of the women's networks that are run within some of the private professional services firms, because they are really good?

**Ms MORAND** — Yes, there are several organisations. One is called Serious Women's Business, and one of the people involved in that is Anne Summers. We have also had discussion with some private sector firms about what they do in their own organisations.

**Ms HUPPERT** — Yes, I know a number of them.

**Ms MORAND** — The ones that have been identified through the recognition of — what is it called?

**Ms HUPPERT** — The Employer of Choice for Women awards, yes.

**Ms MORAND** — Thank you, the employer of choice. We have spoken to some of those organisations about programs that they have put in place that have been successful.

**Ms HUPPERT** — I benefited from those programs at the private firm I was working at, which had a very active women's network. It was a really good way of progressing women through the firm. It was very good.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, I would like to ask you about the evaluation of the women's safety strategy, which was something that was raised with you last year. I see that the performance measure has been discontinued as the strategy has been dealt with. You said last year that the evaluation of that strategy would be published on the website last year. My understanding is that it has not been published, so the question is: why have you not published that evaluation as you said you would, and what does it contain that led you not to publish it?

**The CHAIR** — I generally prefer questions to be about the estimates and in terms of women's safety as well as a wider issue for the minister to answer.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Chair, it is a matter — —

**The CHAIR** — I am just asking you to put it in a wider context.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — But it is something the minister committed to do for this committee last year.

**Ms MORAND** — Apparently it is now on the website. I have just been informed by the Office of Women's Policy that — —

**The CHAIR** — Perhaps Ms Mort could give the committee the website address, so we can chase that one up.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — When and where would be useful. Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Do you have any further comment in terms of women's safety programs in the wider context of the budget?

**Ms MORAND** — Family violence and women's safety remain a very high priority for me as Minister for Women's Affairs. The incidence of family violence is still absolutely unacceptably high. We have been very effective in terms of initiatives such as the police code of practice, which was introduced in 2004 and which has meant that police have responded to family violence in a new way. That has seen a really huge increase in a number of measures, such as intervention orders, which have gone up something like over 150 per cent since the code of practice came into effect.

We are also developing a violence against women policy statement, which will be a new focus on prevention. I cannot speak on behalf of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, but I do know that in terms of responding to family violence there have been significant improvements in the way police have responded to family violence. This strategy is building on the Enough campaign. We did get some funding in last year's budget for a communication campaign to provide information on the reforms that were included in the Family Violence Protection Act that was passed by Parliament in December last year.

Now we are focusing on prevention, and that is going to be in a range of different ways and settings — from schools, through the community, through the media and through sport — those different forums to try to improve people's attitude to women and respect for women, and therefore are focusing on prevention of violence.

**Dr SYKES** — With drought-specific family violence, do these positions help address that, Minister? First of all, are you aware that there has been an increase in domestic violence associated with the drought?

**Ms MORAND** — I have not got any specific data on that, but there has been some discussion about the impact of drought on the incidence of family violence because of the increased stress and pressure on families leading to depression and perhaps a family violence increase, too. I do not have any specific data.

**Dr SYKES** — In terms of your response, is there anything happening that particularly picks up on that issue, given that you have recognised that the drought exists, whereas Mr Brumby and Mr Helper do not recognise that fact?

**Ms MUNT** — I do not think that is quite right.

**Ms MORAND** — Rural Women Leading Change is not specifically focused on family violence. It is to assist women coming together with other ideas around responding to climate change and issues of sustainability. For example, at the conference one thing that got a lot of discussion was a thing called nanna technology. I do not know if you have heard of that. I thought they were referring to nano — —

**Dr SYKES** — It is the nanny state that the Brumby government seeks to promote. Is that what you mean? It is the nanna, not the nanny. Sorry, Minister.

**The CHAIR** — Without assistance. Minister?

**Ms MUNT** — So you do not believe in — —

**Dr SYKES** — Keep going! I am listening, Minister.

**Ms MORAND** — It is two different programs.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Just on the evaluation and strategy, Minister, I understand as of Tuesday it was not up, and women's groups have not actually seen the evaluation. If you could let us know where it is and when it went up, that would be helpful.

**Ms MUNT** — Minister, I have been increasingly concerned about reports, particularly in the press recently, about attitudes by men in sporting organisations towards women. I think there are some fairly poor attitudes being displayed across a whole range of sports with a whole range of behaviours. I recall quite a few years ago now a previous Minister for Women's Affairs, Mary Delahunty, put some programs in place with the AFL. I was wondering if you could please detail to the committee if there is anything that the government is currently doing to address these worrying attitudes in some sports.

**Ms MORAND** — First of all, thank you for the question. I agree with you that media reports of incidents of behaviour towards women in some sporting codes have been absolutely horrifying, but we will not go into any further discussion about that particular incident. Respect for women and the role that sport plays in developing attitudes are important for the players, the volunteers, the fans, the parents, the administrators, at both the local level and the elite level. Because of the profile of sport, it is such an important way of influencing broader community behaviour and broader community culture.

What behaviour is undertaken by people with a high profile would have to have some impact on whether people think that behaviour is acceptable or not. We believe that sport is one of many key settings in which to make a cultural change; the other ones being schools, through workplaces and through the media. The state plan, which we have provided \$200 000 to develop, is going to focus on those key settings — the schools, the communities, the workplaces and the media — and it does recognise the importance of those particular settings in setting a culture of attitudes towards women and therefore towards violence and respect for women and violence against women.

There is a report that VicHealth has undertaken looking at violence prevention programs in schools. I have not seen that report yet, but that was going to assist us in evaluating what respect programs are already undertaken in schools and perhaps build on them or have a look at what best practice is with the view to having a broader approach in schools in terms of respect and in terms of information about violence against women and children.

**Ms MUNT** — I agree that it has to start very young.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Minister, when is the plan due?

**Ms MORAND** — The plan will probably be ready to launch by the end of the year.

**The CHAIR** — Good.

**Mr WELLS** — Does anyone else have a follow-up question before I ask mine?

**The CHAIR** — I think that is the pot calling the kettle black.

**Mr WELLS** — Minister, I would like to ask you about the Queen Victoria Women's Centre. This is the third year in a row that I have asked about this particular centre, and for some reason there is a blockage between the government, the minister and this committee in receiving information. I asked Jacinta Allan in the first year and I asked you last year.

Budget paper 3, on page 171, has the Queen Victoria Women's Centre occupancy rate. What is the annual rental charge to each of the tenants in the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, and what square metreage does each tenant occupy? That is all we are after. This is the third year in a row I have asked for this, and for some reason we have been given assurances that we would receive that information, and we are obviously happy for it to go on notice because we understand you will not have it there, but we would also be very keen to know why we do not get this information.

**Ms MORAND** — I am just deferring to my deputy secretary here, who informs me that that is a matter between the trust and the tenants. It is not information that the department actually holds, because the Queen Victoria Women's Centre has a relationship and contracts with the trust.

**Mr WELLS** — Who owns the building?

**Ms MORAND** — We do.

**Mr WELLS** — Right. I understand deferring it to here and a committee of management, but what we want is the rent and the metrage. That is all we are after. Surely if the government owns the building, then we can have the rent that is being charged and the metrage that has been applied to these people.

**Mr HEALY** — The building is actually vested in the trust.

**Mr WELLS** — Right, but it is owned by the government.

**Mr HEALY** — Yes. My recollection of it is if you look at the act, it is actually vested in the trust. The trust actually — —

**Ms HUPPERT** — So it is vested under certain conditions. If it is Crown land, it is vested in the trust under certain conditions; it is not actually owned by the government?

**Mr HEALY** — Right. We can come back and advise you on the specific conditions under which it holds the building. We have taken the view always that we have a business plan, which the minister approves, for the trust; and the trust conducts its own business affairs in accordance with that plan. It is responsible for striking its arrangements with its tenants and that is a commercial matter between the trust and the tenants it brings on board, and we have taken that as the legitimate thing. They are reporting against the performance objectives that are set forward.

**Mr WELLS** — But there are accountability mechanisms between the government and the trust?

**Mr HEALY** — Yes, to the business plan.

**Mr WELLS** — Right. So all we need are those figures.

**Ms HUPPERT** — But those figures may not — —

**Mr WELLS** — Why is there such a problem with this particular — —

**The CHAIR** — Minister?

**Ms MORAND** — Do you have a particular concern with any of the tenants?

**Mr WELLS** — No. This is a committee about accountability. I am not sure why everyone is so sensitive about it. We just want to know the number of tenants that are in there, the amount of rent they are paying and the metrage that they are occupying. It is not that difficult a question.

**Ms MORAND** — We can have a discussion with the trust about that request and see if there are any issues of sensitivity or confidentiality.

**Mr WELLS** — Can you report back to this committee? As I said, this is the third year — —

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. Minister, we will take that one on notice. What you have suggested is a good idea.

**Mr WELLS** — And can you put a red star next to it so we can get some sort of response?

**The CHAIR** — The red star is 'questions on notice', and we ask for them to be provided to the committee within 30 days.

**Ms MORAND** — Yes.

**Mr WELLS** — Thirty days! I am still waiting on the answer from last year.

**The CHAIR** — That is the standard arrangement we have.

**Mr WELLS** — I am still waiting on the answer from last year.

**Ms HUPPERT** — Minister, you referred in the slide that you have up there at the moment to the Rural Women Leading Change program, and I note that the member for Benalla did ask you a couple of questions about some of the rural women's programs. Could you please outline in more detail how the budget will be supporting some of the rural women who may be more isolated by both drought and current economic conditions?

**Ms MORAND** — We are really happy that funding was continued for the Rural Women Leading Change initiative. This is going to ensure the continuation of five part-time women and drought community engagement officers. They have been really successful. They are employed across Victoria and partner with a lot of key agencies in their areas. They are involved in climate change-related initiatives, including farming futures, energy efficiency campaigns and drought and bushfire recovery.

I know the communities that these women are supporting were really pleased with the ongoing funding that gave them certainty about those positions continuing into the future. I do not know whether anybody here had the opportunity to participate in the forum that was held in April but it was a fantastic success and a great opportunity for a dialogue about climate change between women and rural and regional communities, and also women from leading organisations in the environment and primary industry and natural resources.

I want to share with committee members that the five experts we had at the forum included Rosie Rowe, the director of community services and allied health, Western District Health; Alex Gartmann, the CEO of Birchip Cropping Group; Professor Marg Alston, who is a gender, rural communities and climate change professor; Jennifer Cain, who is a policy analyst with the Department of Sustainability and Environment; and Dr Jane Fisher, who is a policy manager in the Department of Primary Industries.

All of them spoke about their experiences in their own specific communities. There was a huge range of different responses by different communities on how they are adjusting to climate change and how they are approaching the issue of sustainability. There was a real sense of commitment about doing what they could in their local communities to initiate change, which is essentially behavioural change, through the programs they are operating, because behavioural change can have such a tangible impact on sustainability.

It really was a great success, and Christine Nixon was one of the key speakers as well, and spoke about her work in the reconstruction recovery authority that is responding to the bushfires.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Minister, it is just a general question with regard to the global financial crisis and the stress on jobs et cetera. There has been a focus, in terms of job creation, on infrastructure, construction and other areas which are not necessarily traditionally women's areas of employment. I am wondering whether your office is keeping an eye on what is happening with women's employment and the traditional areas where women are mostly employed and participating, and whether you are feeding that into government initiatives.

**Ms MORAND** — There are a couple of general answers I would like to provide, but we do have the Skills to Transition program, which is supporting training places for women and men, and the new workforce partnerships to help people facing systemic workforce barriers.

In general terms, obviously the economic stimulus package from the commonwealth government really impacted on the retail sector where a large proportion of women are employed. Hopefully, that assisted the employment security of women working in retail. But we will keep a close eye on the impact of the global financial crisis, specifically on women who are more likely to be employed on a casual or part-time basis, and are therefore more vulnerable — —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — There are already stories of people's shifts being reduced et cetera.

**The CHAIR** — Make sure the program is not just for men.

**Ms MORAND** — Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR** — That concludes consideration of the budget estimates for the portfolios of children and early childhood development, and women's affairs. I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance today. Where questions were taken on notice, the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. The committee requests that a written response to those matters be provided within 30 days. Thank you, Minister.