

# VERIFIED VERSION

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into budget estimates 2013–14

Melbourne — 13 May 2013

#### Members

Mr N. Angus  
Ms J. Hennessy  
Mr D. Morris  
Mr D. O'Brien

Mr C. Ondarchie  
Mr M. Pakula  
Mr R. Scott

Chair: Mr D. Morris  
Deputy Chair: Mr M. Pakula

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Mr E. O'Donohue, Minister for Crime Prevention,  
Mr G. Wilson, Secretary,  
Ms J. Griffith, Executive Director, Corrections, Health and Crime Prevention, and  
Ms J. Brennan, Director, Community Crime Prevention, Department of Justice.

**The CHAIR** — I am pleased to welcome Ms Julianne Brennan, the Director of Community Crime Prevention at the Department of Justice. I call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes. I think he has the drift by now, so I will not go through the other pro forma part of the announcement, but the emphasis is on the 5 minutes. Thank you, Minister.

**Overheads shown.**

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — Thank you, Mr Chairman, members of the committee and the public for the opportunity to present to you in my capacity as the Minister for Crime Prevention. The objectives of the portfolio are to deliver on our community safety and crime prevention program, which is one of the government's highest priorities. The key philosophy is to listen to local communities, to allow them to identify local problems and to help them apply local solutions.

This is the first ever dedicated crime prevention portfolio, established to oversee the delivery of the coalition's crime prevention agenda. Mr Chairman, \$35 million has been allocated over four years, between 2011–12 and 2014–15 to support crime prevention election commitments. That funding is split into \$24.6 million for the community crime prevention program, which includes the community safety fund grants, public safety infrastructure fund grants, reducing violence against women and their children grants; the \$10.1 million anti-graffiti plan, which includes the graffiti removal program, graffiti prevention and removal grants, education and awareness about graffiti laws and initiatives. The portfolio also oversees the \$550 000 reinvigoration of Neighbourhood Watch.

All applications under the competitive grants programs are assessed against published selection criteria. An expert assessment panel then provides recommendations to me on the projects to be funded. The government has allocated nearly \$8 million to 320 projects across 75 of the 79 local government areas. For the community safety fund there are 274 projects across 69 individual local government areas; for the public safety infrastructure fund there are 46 projects across the 35 individual local government areas; and for graffiti grants there are 36 projects across 28 individual local government areas. In addition, \$7.2 million is awarded to 12 projects across Victoria to help prevent violence against women and their children, eight regional projects and four Koori community safety projects. An additional \$2.8 million has been allocated to minor election and other commitments. The next slide provides further information about where that funding has been allocated.

The next slide deals with community safety fund grants. Grants of up to \$10 000 are provided for councils, community, sporting and business groups to implement practical community safety projects. I am pleased to advise the committee that round 3 applications are now open. They close on 29 May this year, and \$1 million has been allocated to fund projects under this round. These grants are enormously popular and provide significant value for local communities.

The committee can see on the next slide that the public safety infrastructure fund grant provides local councils with grants of up to \$250 000 to help develop public safety and security infrastructure. Eligible projects include security infrastructure such as vandal-resistant external lighting systems, urban planning and crime prevention through environmental design initiatives and CCTV infrastructure.

This slide identifies one of the new projects that has been funded under the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund. I was pleased to announce recently with Mr Katos, the member for South Barwon, that funding had been provided to install 11 new cameras and data transmission infrastructure to enhance the existing CCTV system in the Geelong CBD, including the waterfront project, a project warmly welcomed by the City of Greater Geelong, the local police and other members of the local community, including members for the Western Victorian Region.

The portfolio also has a focus on reducing violence against women and their children. As I said earlier, \$7.2 million has been allocated over three years for 12–13 to 15–16 for programmatic grants to help prevent violence against women and their children; \$4.8 million has been allocated to eight projects, \$600 000 each across Victoria; and \$2.4 million has been dedicated to support four projects in Koori communities. The focus is on primary prevention and early intervention initiatives.

With respect to graffiti prevention and removal there are grants of up to \$25 000 for councils to partner with communities to prevent and remove graffiti. The 12–13, or round 2, graffiti grant outcomes were announced on 23 November last year by the previous minister, Mr McIntosh, providing \$300 000 in funding to 18 projects

across 15 local councils and six community education information projects. For example, Adopt-a-Place and peer-to-peer education will develop resident and retailer graffiti groups. There are six projects distributing graffiti removal kits to traders and residents and two projects utilising portable removal systems to engage communities in graffiti removal.

I am pleased to advise the committee that over 1.5 million square metres of graffiti has been removed since the program began in 2005, equal to more than 80 MCG playing fields and worth \$40 million at commercial removal rates; and offenders have undertaken more than 500 000 hours of unpaid community work.

**Mr PAKULA** — It is good to see the no-spin government in place.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — As members can see from the slide, 80 MCG playing fields is a significant amount of graffiti.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — The government has also reinvigorated Neighbourhood Watch, providing \$550 000 over four years for a state manager and accommodation for its state headquarters. Neighbourhood Watch is partnering with Victoria Police in the Eyewatch scheme, expanding the reach of the program. Mr Chairman, if I may continue?

**The CHAIR** — We are into question time, I think, Minister, if you are all right.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — Thank you, Mr Chairman. I have many other things I would like to — —

**The CHAIR** — I would normally ask a question about capital infrastructure projects, but I am mindful that we now have very limited time in this portfolio, so I will move on to Ms Hennessy.

**Ms HENNESSY** — Minister, last year when the former minister gave evidence we talked a lot about the evaluation of these projects, and in the transcript of last year you would note that the minister said that many of the applications they were receiving for the grants programs were 'not up to scratch'. They are my words, not his. But effectively he said that what the department was going to be doing was improving the evaluation of all of the community safety grants. Can you tell us what evaluation has occurred, and are you prepared to make any such evaluation publicly available?

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I welcome the question from the member. The previous minister made references to this, as described by the member, in his evidence to this committee. I am pleased — and perhaps I will be happy to table this — that the community crime prevention unit within the Department of Justice has undertaken a significant amount of work to assist local councils in particular but also local community groups to formulate their grant applications so that they can present them in a more robust fashion and in a fashion which makes it easier to form assessments against the relevant criteria. I explained in my opening presentation that there is an assessment process done at arm's length from me which makes recommendations to me as the minister.

But I have, Mr Chairman, the *Guide to Developing CCTV for Public Safety in Victoria*, which as I say has been put together by the Department of Justice. I congratulate Ms Brennan, who is here with me today, for her oversight and leadership in delivering this. I note that the Victorian Ombudsman in his published guidelines for closed-circuit television in public places, which were released in November last year, in effect picks up many of the points made by the Department of Justice in this document. That has assisted significantly in enabling local councils in particular to formulate their submissions to the government for funding pursuant to that particular program.

In relation to evaluation, which the member refers to, I would like to provide some information to the committee about the feedback the government has had in relation to various programs. I will quote from a letter from the City of Casey, from a Ms Caroline Bell, who is the manager of community safety. She says in her letter, talking about a project which the portfolio has funded:

Due to the positive response to the Gone in a Moment project we have identified the program for continued implementation in 2012 and beyond.

It goes on to say how the City of Casey looks forward to continuing to work with the Department of Justice. That is an example of a project which the government funded with the City of Casey. The success of that project means that the City of Casey is determined to continue to fund that project out of its own resources,

which I think is a win-win outcome and a very good outcome. It demonstrates that that was a valuable project. I also have correspondence from Ms Grace Tarabene, who says in response to the project at The Gap on Graham youth centre in Melton:

Overall as a volunteer I feel a lot more at ease being at The Gap as it is a safer and more secure place to be at with the introduction of ...

the items that were funded.

I don't feel daunted or apprehensive anymore as I know that wherever you go outside every area is visible, no-one can get onto the grounds without causing a disturbance (therefore everyone is aware of it) and property inside the building are a lot more secure.

I have a ream of materials that have been provided by community groups and other groups in response to these funding applications and this infrastructure that has been funded by the government. Perhaps the last one I will quote to the committee is a letter from Victoria Police, from the Melton police service area — —

**Mr PAKULA** — Can I take a point of order, Chair?

**The CHAIR** — Point of order, Deputy Chair.

**Mr PAKULA** — This extensive quoting from material is fascinating, no doubt, but my recollection of the question was whether or not the minister could take the committee through what evaluation tools and criteria have been put in place to give the government confidence in the efficacy of various programs. I did not take it as an invitation to quote from happy people.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — On the point of order, Chair, we expect ministers to give us a fulsome answer in response to questions. I know Mr O'Donohue has a number of other testimonials and frankly I would like to hear them, but I will leave that up to him.

**Mr ANGUS** — Further to the point of order, the question is asked to suggest — —

**The CHAIR** — Order! I think we have heard enough. The Deputy Chair's point of order in essence is relevant. I think thus far the minister's response has been relevant, but given that we are operating under Legislative Assembly rules and the 4 minutes has well and truly elapsed I might ask the minister to bring his response to a conclusion.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — If I could, Mr Chairman, just quote from this letter from the Melton police, which will be very brief. It says:

As the local area manager for a police service I have no doubt that the improvements made to the centre have significantly improved the safety felt by the youth attending, the parents' peace of mind, as well as the many volunteers that devote their time to the centre. I feel that this has generally contributed to the community's actual and perceived levels of safety.

Volunteers are the glue that binds our community. These grants that I have described help to make that glue stronger. These funds have been embraced by the community, and for a relatively small cost have delivered a significant benefit to the broader community. When it comes to evaluation, each of the four grant programs run by the community crime prevention unit will be evaluated as part of the overall community crime prevention program. In addition to this, each grant program has evaluation mechanisms built in. Individual projects within each of the grant streams are required to undertake an evaluation of the funding agreement commensurate with the level of the grant funding. Individual responses say as much about the benefit of this grant stream as any formal evaluation document does, as important as that also is.

**Ms HENNESSY** — Just a very quick supplementary. A yes and no is fine, Minister. You are the Minister for Crime Prevention. How do you measure whether or not your publicly funded grants programs prevent crime?

**Mr ANGUS** — He cannot answer yes or no that.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — We know that Labor can't prevent crime very well.

**The CHAIR** — The minister is not required to answer yes or no.

**Mr ANGUS** — That is what the member asked.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — Mr Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to respond to that question. This portfolio is about local communities identifying local solutions to crime and behavioural matters within their local communities. This government is proud to be responding to those initiatives and to be partnering with local communities. This portfolio is all about local solutions to local problems. The examples I just — —

**Mr PAKULA** — It's like *Little Britain*.

**The CHAIR** — Order!

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Take it easy.

**The CHAIR** — Order! The minister.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — The examples I just provided, Mr Chairman, are some of many where as a result of funding by this government community places are safer; community houses are safer; there is improved lighting, activating open spaces to provide security. I think that these projects deliver very good value for money for those local communities, but also for the taxpayer. I think the testimonials we received, as well as evaluations that are done, demonstrate that there is value for money.

To respond perhaps more particularly to the problem, I note also that I appreciate very much as the minister that there is bipartisan support from some for these initiatives.

**Ms HENNESSY** — Do you measure crime?

**Members interjecting.**

**Mr O'BRIEN** — It is much better that crime is prevented in the first place.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Mr O'Brien.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — Surely it is. That is what the portfolio is all about. Labor does not seem to understand that.

**The CHAIR** — Minister, we have been on this question for some time, so I would ask you to just wind it up very quickly, if you can.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I am happy to table correspondence received from the state member for Brunswick, Ms Jane Garrett, and in addition correspondence that has been received by the Moreland City Council from Mr Kelvin Thomson, the federal Labor member for Wills, endorsing and seeking funding from this government pursuant to this portfolio.

**Ms HENNESSY** — There is no question about that. It is: how do you ditch your responsibility as the Minister for Crime Prevention in taking us through — —

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Order!

**Mr O'BRIEN** — You can certainly measure when a government has failed on crime, and that was a measure that people took of the previous Labor government.

**Mr PAKULA** — Your poor man's defence — tabling correspondence from MPs.

**Mr ANGUS** — No need for those comments, Mr Pakula.

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Every minute — —

**Mr PAKULA** — Why do you not move on to one of your questions, Chair?

**Mr O'BRIEN** — I support crime prevention.

**Ms HENNESSY** — Thank you, Mr O'Brien. Wow. I support people being able to breathe oxygen. I mean, Captain Bleeding Obvious.

**The CHAIR** — Every second we spend — —

**Mr O'BRIEN** — It is clear where your government put its priorities: desalination plant, myki — —

**Mr PAKULA** — Oh, David.

**Ms HENNESSY** — Someone's village is missing its idiot.

**The CHAIR** — If members will please remember that every minute we waste with this sort of nonsense is a minute you do not get to ask the minister questions.

**Mr PAKULA** — I am not sure there is much point.

**Ms HENNESSY** — It is a lineball call, Chair.

**The CHAIR** — If you would rather give the presentation yourself, perhaps we could try that. At the moment we have the minister.

**Mr PAKULA** — Move on to one of your questions, Chair.

**The CHAIR** — I think that is probably good advice.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — As I say, Mr Chairman, in the interests of being responsive to your order, I am happy to table this letter from Ms Garrett and the accompanying letter from Mr Thomson. In summary — —

**Mr PAKULA** — What a weak act.

**Mr ANGUS** — What are you talking about? He is allowed to table it.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — In summary, Mr Chairman, the coalition government looks forward to continuing to partner with local communities to identify local solutions to crime issues and perceptions of crime issues, to activate public spaces, to make our public buildings safer and to help to further strengthen our local communities. Some may scoff at that, some may diminish it, some may diminish the testimonials that I have read into *Hansard* and the others that I have tabled. This government takes — —

**Ms HENNESSY** — No-one is diminishing it, Mr O'Donohue. We are simply asking whether you were measure whether or not you prevent crime.

#### **Members interjecting.**

**Ms HENNESSY** — What is the accounts and estimates committee? We look at the effectiveness and accountability.

#### **Members interjecting.**

**Mr O'BRIEN** — It is not always easy to measure crime that does not occur.

**The CHAIR** — When we are all done, I will ask Mr Angus to ask a question.

**Mr ANGUS** — Minister, following on from these discussions and as touched on in your earlier presentation, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 180, and the enhancing community safety aspect that is covered in some detail there. Can you please outline how the community crime prevention program is contributing to the implementation of crime prevention infrastructure in Victorian communities?

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I thank the member for the question. The community crime prevention program includes the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund, the PSIF, which provides grants of up to \$250 000 for infrastructure for local councils to work in partnership with the government. This infrastructure can include

improved lighting and, of course, CCTV infrastructure, such as the Geelong CCTV project that I referred to earlier. It can also include urban design initiatives that convert areas that have become run down and inaccessible and hotbeds of crime into more accessible and usable spaces.

Well-designed and maintained public places where there is good visibility, plenty of activity and easy access are safer. Importantly also, people feel safer and people go to areas where they feel safe. A key flow-on benefit from this investment in infrastructure, local shopping centres and transport and community hubs is that it attracts residents and business into those areas, contributing to the livability and the economy of these local communities. This fund helps to support projects designed to reactivate spaces and prevent crime, with clear flow-on benefits to local communities. A number of the 24 projects funded under the first round of these grants will be completed in the coming financial year.

This also includes urban design infrastructure projects, such as Creating Clayton's Laneways. I believe we may have a slide in relation to that project. With funding of over \$131 000, Monash council is redeveloping a laneway complex which connects retail, residential and transport areas close to the Clayton shopping centre. The aim of this project is to create a lively public realm, reducing opportunities for antisocial behaviour and crime and improving community confidence in the safety of this area.

The City of Wodonga has a strategic plan for the Wodonga Gateway area, an area which had in the past been failing and was commonly referred to by locals as the crime precinct. The council has used safe urban design principles to turn this area around and the government has supported it to achieve this overall vision for its local community through an investment of \$85 000 to improve safety and amenity in its art and culture and events precinct areas. This project is almost complete.

One other example, if I may. In the city of Whittlesea, the government has provided funding of \$250 000 to redevelop Peter Lalor Walk, a pedestrian walk and trading area in the middle of the Lalor shops at the heart of the neighbourhood activities centre. The redevelopment will create a space that is active and vibrant, enhancing social connectedness and improving community safety at different times of the day.

**Ms HENNESSY** — Minister, I understand that the new crime statistics agency sits outside your portfolio responsibilities, but I did want to take up a question in relation to the role that that agency would play. The New South Wales model is that the crime statistics agency is also the chief policy adviser to the New South Wales government around crime prevention. Is it your intention that our crime statistics agency will do the same thing?

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I thank the member for the question. As the member identified, the matter to which she refers is a matter for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, who I understand will be appearing before this committee later this week.

**Ms HENNESSY** — Do you have a view around policy research and support in the field of crime prevention and what agency ought to best provide that?

**The CHAIR** — I am not sure that the minister's views are particularly relevant to the portfolio.

**Mr PAKULA** — I think you are right.

**Ms HENNESSY** — You are right; I am happy to move on.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — I would like to continue to ask some questions about the enhancing community safety initiatives that you have outlined in budget paper 3, page 180, and also in your presentation about the reducing violence against women and children grants. I ask you, Minister, to give us some examples of how your portfolio is contributing to the implementation of the action plan to address violence against women and children.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I ask the operator to bring up slide 9. In 2011 regional crime prevention reference group meetings were established across Victoria to enable the government to listen to local leaders speak about issues of concern to their communities. I understand that the primary concern raised at these meetings was the devastating impact of family violence and violence against women and their children more broadly in our local communities. It was in direct response to this that the coalition government announced \$7.2 million of funding for grants to help reduce violence against women and their children.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the previous minister, Mr McIntosh, the member for Kew, for his leadership on this most important issue.

**Mr PAKULA** — Why did he resign?

**Mr ANGUS** — We do not need stupid interjections like that.

**Mr PAKULA** — It is just a question. I just asked why he resigned.

**The CHAIR** — Members, can we just allow the minister to respond, please.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — Thank you, Mr Chairman. This funding includes \$2.4 million specifically targeted to support early intervention and prevention projects in Victorian Koori communities in recognition of the disproportionately high rates of violence that our Indigenous communities experience and to respond to the different causes and types of violence in Koori communities. These grants, part of our community crime prevention program, are set up to exclusively support partnership projects that help reduce violence against women and their children through primary prevention and early intervention initiatives.

On 16 October last year the government announced \$4.8 million funding for eight partnership projects across Victoria. In summary, the focuses of these programs are: bringing about systemic organisational change in a workplace setting to promote non-violent workplace cultures; promoting equal and respectful relationships between men and women during their transition to parenthood; working across local government, workplace and sport settings to develop region-wide strategies to prevent violence against women; and focusing within local government and faith-based settings to train and build the capacity of male community leaders.

In February the government announced successful recipients under the \$2.4 million Koori-specific component of these grants, the Koori community safety grants, which focus on implementing initiatives that prevent violence in Koori communities, in particular against Koori women and children. In summary, the focuses of these projects are: promoting antiviolence messages, increasing cultural engagement and providing skill development in areas relevant to violence prevention; addressing community safety, including behavioural change programs, early years workshops for young parents, workshops for women and a broadbased media campaign to bring issues of community safety into the public domain; and providing a social education campaign targeting Kooris of all ages to improve violence prevention through community education workshops, written resources and online elements.

All of these projects will play a critical part in statewide action to tackle violence against women and their children and in developing the evidence base to inform future work.

**Mr O'BRIEN** — I have a supplementary. Minister, can you please inform the committee of the response from the community, particularly the domestic violence sector, about these new grants?

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I am pleased to respond to that supplementary question, and I can provide some follow-up testimonials in relation to this matter. Ms Fiona McCormack, the CEO of Domestic Violence Victoria, has communicated this:

Just wanted to let you know how thrilled people are about the VAW prevention projects and really enthusiastic about now getting stuck into this work. We are really enthusiastic about the potential of these projects in beginning to build a safer and healthier community, so thank you and congratulations on all your efforts so far. We look forward to continuing our collaborative work with you to support the success of these projects.

There is an additional one from Ms Renee Imbesi, the project manager, preventing violence against women, from VicHealth, who says:

We are just so pleased that the minister —

and I must acknowledge that that is referring to Mr McIntosh —

is creating a focus on violence against women and primary prevention in particular and I am personally really impressed with the depth of thinking and research that your team is applying to this process — and confident that it will translate into some wonderful outcomes in the region.

**Ms HENNESSY** — Minister, are you prepared to have a crack at estimating what you think your government will reduce the crime rate by in the next 12 months?

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — As I have provided in a response to a previous question, this portfolio is about responding to local community concerns about local safety issues and perceptions of safety. The government is very proud to be partnering with a range of local communities right across metropolitan Melbourne and right across rural and regional Victoria to address those perceptions. Those testimonials that I read into *Hansard* earlier I think give some indication — a small snapshot, and I have many more here that I could read into the transcript — noting the success of those funding initiatives.

The member raises a question, though: part of the objective of this portfolio is about changing practice and changing behaviours, and perhaps the area of domestic violence is an area of significant attention for the government but also for this portfolio. In the answer I have provided to the member in relation to the previous question, this government is very focused on early intervention: about doing practical things, about funding real outcomes to prevent violence against women and their children, and supplying early intervention programs.

**Ms HENNESSY** — I take that as a no. Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. I think this is an appropriate time to conclude questions on this portfolio. We will take a 10-minute break and start again at 3.05 p.m. on the remaining Liquor and Gaming. It is now 2.55 p.m.

**Witnesses withdrew.**