

VERIFIED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2015–16

Melbourne — 14 May 2015

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Mr Robin Scott, Minister for Multicultural Affairs,

Mr Mark Duckworth, Chief Resilience Officer, Community Resilience Unit, and

Mr Hakan Akyol, Director, Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The CHAIR — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2015–16 budget estimates. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Honourable Robin Scott; Mr Mark Duckworth, Chief Resilience Officer, Community Resilience Unit; and Mr Hakan Akyol, Director, Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship.

All evidence is taken by this committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege. The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

Departmental officers may approach the table during the hearing to provide information to the witnesses if requested, by leave of myself. However, written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way.

Members of the media are to observe the following guidelines: cameras must remain focused only on the persons speaking; operators must not pan the public gallery, the committee or witnesses; and filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I invite the witness to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 5 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

Mr SCOTT — Thank you. It is my pleasure to be here to discuss the multicultural affairs portfolio.

Visual presentation.

Mr SCOTT — Victoria's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity is one of our defining features. We come from more than 200 countries, speak more than 200 languages and follow more than 130 faiths. As of 2011 nearly 47 per cent of Victorians were either born overseas or had one parent born overseas, and approximately 23 per cent of Victorians speak a language other than English at home.

It is important to note, as you can see from the graph, that our diversity is increasing. The table shows a significant increase between 2006 and 2011 in each of the key measures. It is also important to note that the number of Victorians who indicate low English proficiency also increased between 2006 and 2011, from approximately 187 000 to 213 000.

Moving forward, the 2014–15 financial year was busy in the portfolio but importantly in the activities that were undertaken during that year. The 2015–16 budget has secured funding on an ongoing basis for all of those activities. So all the activities that were proceeding to lapse, and there was a large number, have been funded in this budget. The Andrews government has secured funding for all existing programs within multicultural affairs, including consolidating, lapsing and ongoing programs.

As Victorians we are well known for the way that we openly embrace and celebrate our diversity. This is reflected in the continuing government investment, sustained by a strong and enduring legislative and policy framework. I would say that Victoria's success in managing our cultural diversity is due to the longstanding non-partisan — I will not say bipartisan because there are more than two parties involved in this process — support for multiculturalism in this state. It is one of the defining characteristics of Victoria compared to other states and something we should be proud of. That is echoed by strong community interest, so it is not just people in the political class who support multiculturalism; it is across the community that there is strong support for multiculturalism in Victoria, and it is something I think we should all celebrate and work to support. This has really been at the heart of making Victoria the most socially cohesive state in the nation. This support must continue if all members of our community are to reap the social, cultural and economic benefits of a growing, vibrant and diverse society. The Victorian government will focus its investments across government to ensure a

welcoming and harmonious Victoria; strong, resilient and engaged multicultural communities; and accessible and culturally inclusive services and policies.

If we go to the budget itself, the budget target for the multicultural affairs portfolio in the 15–16 year is \$28.5 million, compared to the 14–15 budget estimate of \$24.4 million — a 17 per cent increase. All portfolio funding that was due to lapse, as I said previously, has been maintained and secured on an ongoing basis. This translates to \$42.3 million over four years. The budget honoured all of the multicultural affairs election commitments, with an additional \$4.02 million over four years, comprising \$1.76 million over four years for initiatives that strengthen social cohesion and promote community harmony, \$1.55 million for projects to build and improve community infrastructure and enhance cultural precincts, and \$0.71 million over four years to increase the capacity of multicultural organisations to meet community needs. This is referencing the election commitments.

In addition, two election commitments have been funded through other portfolios. There is \$600 000 to upgrade security at Jewish and Islamic schools and \$150 000 to Multicultural Arts Victoria for a feasibility study on the proposed House of World Cultures at Princes Pier. The budget also provides additional funding of 2 million over two years for CALD family violence response and \$450 000 over three years for the Islamic museum education program. In addition, \$25 million over four years has been committed to develop a whole-of-community approach to reinforce Victoria's social cohesion and community resilience.

Total additional funding for the multicultural affairs portfolio and social cohesion initiatives combined amounts to approximately \$74 million over four years. Over the next four years the total budget for the multicultural affairs portfolio output will be \$121.6 million.

The last slide shows the history of funding for multicultural affairs. I note that that last slide incorporates under the multicultural affairs portfolio the \$6.25 million for social cohesion and community resilience initiatives. I am happy to take questions.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. Could you please inform the committee how commitments contained in *Labor's Financial Statement* for your portfolio area of multicultural affairs have been acquitted in this budget?

Mr SCOTT — I am very happy to do so. The budget provided has in fact acquitted all of the Labor Party's policies it took to the last election in relation to multicultural affairs. Under the heading of social cohesion and community harmony there is funding for the Islamic Council of Victoria's youth engagement of \$200 000 over four years. There will be support for a research institute on cohesion and resilience of \$800 000. There is funding for the Greek antipodes festival of \$400 000. The Greek Glendi in Oakleigh — which I am sure the member for Oakleigh is interested in — has funding for one year in 2015–16 of \$60 000. The Holi festival, which is again in 2015–16, has funding of \$30 000. Celebrate India in the CBD gets total funding over two years of \$60 000. The Holi festival in the south-east has funding over four years of \$120 000. Diwali in Wyndham has funding over two years of \$60 000. The Pan-Macedonian Dimitria festival has one-year funding of \$30 000. So under that social cohesion and community harmony, as I said earlier, there is 1.76 million.

In community infrastructure and cultural precincts there is half a million dollars for the Beth Weizmann centre upgrade. There is another half a million dollars for the Indian cultural precinct. There is \$100 000 for the Vietnamese community museum. There are multicultural media grants, which are capital grants, of \$450 000. That gives you a subtotal for that community infrastructure and cultural precincts of 1.55 million.

There is also community capacity and participation funding, which includes \$360 000 over four years for the Greek welfare society; \$100 000 over two years for the Vietnamese community dual identity program; and a 25 per cent increase in the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria's core funding, which amounts to \$250 000.

All of the election commitments the Labor Party took to the election on multicultural affairs have been acquitted in this budget, which is a very happy turn of events in terms of delivering in such an important portfolio. This shows the commitment the government has to multicultural affairs, which as I said is a commitment that I take to be shared by, I would certainly believe, all members of this committee.

Mr T. SMITH — Minister, welcome. I refer you to budget paper 3, page 138, which refers to your \$6.3 million in annual funding over the next four years and your \$25 million for social cohesion and community

resilience programs. In a press release of 3 May this year you announced that this money would be for 'social cohesion, community resilience, marginalisation and extremism' and for a task force to 'look at ways to combat racism and bigotry'.

The CHAIR — Mr Smith, could you just clarify your reference?

Mr T. SMITH — Budget paper 3, page 138.

Ms WARD — I cannot see it.

Mr SCOTT — I know the funding. I am happy to take the question. It is in the presentation.

Mr T. SMITH — How about we go off your presentation?

Ms WARD — You will have to do some proofreading.

Mr T. SMITH — Anyway, we will move on. Minister, can you explain how much of that total \$25 million in funding will be allocated to support the operations of the task force, how much will be allocated to rolling out programs for deradicalisation and how much of this money is new money and what component of it is federal money?

Mr SCOTT — There are a number of elements to that question. I will start with the last one, which is the easiest one. This is all new money; it is not reprioritised from any other program, so it is all additional funding. In terms of the actual policies and a breakdown, the decisions made about an exact allocation of the funding between different streams has not been made, and there is good reason for that. These are in fact quite complex and difficult issues, and one of the intentions in spending this money is to ensure that there is effectiveness and to ensure that the policies are actually evidence based. It would be, I think, a mistake to move too quickly to allocate the funding between different programs.

One of the issues that has to be grappled with, particularly in the more difficult issues that you are alluding to — and the Premier has made a number of comments, which I would endorse — is that these are complex issues and we do not have all the answers to resolve them at this current point. So one of the clear intentions is to ensure that there is sufficient evidence. There will be the involvement of researchers, academics, communities and especially young people in advisory processes to ensure that in the development of the specific programs they are based on the best local and international evidence and, secondly, that there is evaluation of their effectiveness. It is important not just that we ensure that the government spends these public funds in a way that most effectively addresses the important issues raised in your question but also that they are evaluated to ensure their effectiveness.

There is going to be a new community resilience unit located within the Department of Premier and Cabinet to coordinate a whole-of-government approach in this area. There will also be liaison with other levels of government, including the commonwealth government, to ensure the effectiveness of programs that are undertaken. So quite advisedly, I cannot give you a breakdown of how the money is going to be spent exactly, because the expenditure will be based on the best advice possible to ensure the effectiveness of the programs and to ensure that they are based on both international and local evidence and in consultation with local communities.

There have been a number of programs in other jurisdictions where quite a lot of money has been spent in these areas, and you would have to say that the evidence is a bit mixed about the effectiveness of those programs. We want to make sure that the expenditure of these funds in such an important area is done based on evidence, not supposition, and that it is properly evaluated as well.

I can answer the last part of your question in a straightforward way, but the second part I advisedly inform you that I am not going to give a breakdown, because we want to make sure that it is done as effectively as possible, not just in how the money is allocated but in the construction of the programs themselves based on the best available evidence.

Mr T. SMITH — Minister, can you advise who is on the task force, when it has met and what its remit is in terms of reference and the like?

Mr SCOTT — I can certainly give you some advice on that matter. The task force has been established recently, so it has not actually formally met, although there have been some discussions certainly at the departmental level — there have been a series of discussions. The task force involves myself; it is chaired by the Deputy Premier; it involves the Minister for Police, who is also the Minister for Corrections, the Honourable Wade Noonan; and it involves the Honourable Jenny Mikakos, the Minister for Families and Children, who is also the Minister for Youth Affairs. It is a ministerial level task force, but there will also be advice that will be provided to that task force from across government. It is very important in these areas to have a whole-of-government approach, so I can certainly provide that information to you.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — Thank you, Minister. I note that you have a very broad portfolio and an obvious commitment to bettering the lives of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and I commend that. I would like to draw your attention to the whole-of-government commitment to family violence in budget paper 3, page 5. I wonder if you could outline for the committee what you, as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, have been able to contribute to ensure that the voices of women and children from multicultural communities, especially those who might not be functionally literate, as you would understand, in English and therefore unable to make written submissions to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and who may be unlikely to participate in the open discussion forums that have been established as well. How have you been able to ensure that these voices can be heard directly so that the issues of family violence in our multicultural communities can be recorded, understood and acted on?

Mr SCOTT — I really welcome the question, because it goes to issues about fairness and how people can access services but also have services respond to need, if I understood it correctly. So there is a \$2 million allocation for family violence, to specifically address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. There is a specific funding allocation. That is intended to improve the responsiveness of family violence services to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse women and children, to improve cross-sector collaboration and referrals and to improve and enhance the capacity of the culturally and linguistically diverse communities themselves to identify and respond to family violence. That is the actual purpose for that funding.

I would say that, sadly, family violence occurs in all families, so there is no one group that is exempt in the community. The anecdotal evidence, which is in part informed by this funding, is that for people from a CALD background, women and children, there is an underutilisation of services and they are less likely to access family violence or specialist services and, in fact, are often not aware of their rights. So there are a number of issues. This funding has a strong focus on refugee and new and emerging community groups, and part of the purpose is to increase the capacity of those groups to access services. This is obviously part of a broader \$81.3 million funding package. I would say that the Victorian government wants all Victorians, no matter their background, to be safe, supported and have the opportunity to prosper, and ensuring that both the responsiveness and accessibility of family violence services to the needs of our diverse community is an important part of that.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS — Thank you, Minister. I am aware of the initiative that you have described and it does sound like a very good initiative. If I could just go back, will this initiative be able to assist women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to access the royal commission so their voices can be heard in that context?

Mr SCOTT — I can give some advice separate to that that the office of multicultural affairs and VMC will advise the royal commission on how to best access and assist culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Separate to this funding there is a specific role that will be performed by the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, because the issue you raise is really important, that every Victorian, particularly those who have language problems, should be able to access the royal commission and have their voice heard.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — I have got to be slightly indulgent. I am sorry, but in the last 24 hours I have had the unusual pleasure of interviewing two of my previous bosses, today Mr Akyol, through the minister, and yesterday Mr Clayton. That is one thing off my bucket list. But I will go easy, I promise.

I just want to ask you specifically, Minister, about the community capacity and participation budget line item, 13.2 million over the forward estimates, in the table on page 92 of BP3. You have sort of touched on it, I think,

in response to the Chair's question at the beginning, but could you give us a bit more information about that bucket of money and that line item and what it will be used for?

Mr SCOTT — I think it is worth saying, and I am happy to do so, that this brings together a number of programs — in fact I think it is nine grant programs — that have been brought together in this line item, so I will go through them. They include the settlement coordination unit, the VMC's organisational support and education grants, the CALD senior organisational grants, the VMC's community strengthening grants, the refugee action programs, the asylum seekers support programs, the rights and responsibility programs, the new and emerging community leadership program and the East Timor program — that is not a grant program but it is a program that exists within OMAC — the peak multicultural fund and the ethnic communities council's core grant.

To go to the last first, the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria core grant has been increased by 25 per cent to \$312 500, and I am sure as the member for Oakleigh, Steve, you are well aware from your previous role that the ethnic communities council is the peak body. It had a strong role under governments of different persuasions. In fact it has people of different political persuasions involved in its governance. It has been the peak non-government representative body, and it plays a critical role in ensuring that the voice of our diverse community is heard.

The Australian Greek Welfare Society has had a \$90 000 increase in funding provided to it over four years and they play a fantastic role in ensuring that welfare services are provided to our Greek community which has, as I am sure you are well aware, an increasing ageing population. There are also newer migrants coming at the moment because of the various economic problems in Greece, so that has got a particular role that has been more traditional plus a new function with the increasing issues.

There is also funding for the Vietnamese dual identity leadership program, and, if I recall correctly, both myself and the shadow minister were lucky enough to meet some participants from an earlier iteration of that program at a function. I have to say that is a fantastic initiative. On the 40th anniversary of large-scale Vietnamese migration to Australia the real enthusiasm for embracing Australia and the get up and go, for want of a better phrase, of the Vietnamese community and their thank you 40th year anniversary celebrations, their raising of money for charity and also the development of new leaders in the Vietnamese community is something which really should be applauded. They are very proactive and very dedicated and very grateful for the opportunities that have been afforded to their community in coming to Australia. I cannot commend the leadership of the Vietnamese community enough for the opportunities they have taken within Australia but also for the service they have given back to the Australian community. The dual identity leadership program is important.

There is also funding included, as I said, for the peak multicultural organisation fund, which is \$750 000 per annum; the settlement coordination unit, which I might talk about in other contexts because it is part of a response, including a previous Auditor-General's report, plays a critical role; the various services, which, again, I will be happy to expand upon, that the Victorian government provides to assist our refugee community; and also the various grants.

I am sure all members would have been, and I know we have got some new members here — —

Senior citizens grants, for example, provide a very broad support for the wonderful activities provided by our senior citizens community which do so much to ensure that there is not social isolation, particularly as one of the issues for CALD communities is that as persons age they often revert to their original language, so the need for there to be social activities that take place in the language of their mother tongue increases because the ability to hold onto a second language decreases with age. Those seniors grants play a really critical role in ensuring that there is effective social engagement for our ageing CALD communities, particularly as they revert. Many of the members of those communities find it more difficult as they age to socially interact outside of the language with which they were born.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — My question relates to budget paper 3, page 302. It indicates that the total output cost for multicultural affairs policy and programs for 14–15 — the current year — has been cut by 3.3 million. Can you explain which multicultural programs have been cut or will be reduced this financial year as a result?

Mr SCOTT — The premise of the question is based on a misunderstanding of what is going on. There has been no cut to multicultural affairs. What has happened over a very large number of years — and there are

certainly examples under the previous government — is that there has been a carryover of money. In this case it is largely due to delays in the delivery of some infrastructure projects funded under the Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund and other grants where milestone payments have been extended, and that is a very common occurrence. It occurred between 13–14 and 14–15. It also occurred between 2012–13 and 13–14. In fact the carryover figures for between 13–14 and 14–15 were \$3.216 million, and for 2012–13 to 13–14 they were \$6.279 million, so the characterisation of this as a cut misconstrues what is actually going on.

These are grants that go out in large part, and at the organisation there are often delays in the meeting of milestones. Within grant funding programs, it is appropriate that there is milestone funding and that community organisations that receive grants have quite appropriate requirements to meet milestones and to hold up, in effect, their end of the bargain with the community and the broader society through the government. It is not unusual at all that community organisations are often delayed in meeting those, and therefore there is a carryover of funding. But the characterisation of this as a cut both misconstrues what is going on and also would imply that there were significant cuts of around \$9.5 million under the previous government in the last two years.

Mr D. O'BRIEN — Thank you, Minister; that clears that up. Further to that, though, in relation to the multicultural grants program, page 95 of budget paper 3 highlights that the Victorian Multicultural Commission will run Cultural Diversity Week and the Multicultural Awards for Excellence only. As I understand, it has in the past administered many grants and programs, so my question is: is it now the case that you and your department will administer those grants solely and the commission will no longer be involved?

Mr SCOTT — No. The VMC will still have an important role in grants. It is not the case.

Ms PENNICUIK — I draw your attention to budget paper 3, page 92, the output initiatives, and the line item 'Multicultural access program' and the accompanying explanatory material on page 95. The government has committed to spending \$500 000 each year on a range of initiatives, including cultural competence training for government service providers et cetera. Can you provide further detail about how that cultural competence training will be provided, through whom that will be provided and which initiatives, if any, other than cultural competence training for government service providers are to be paid for out of this budget?

Mr SCOTT — There is an interpreter scholarship program. The information I had was about existing programs, so I just had to clarify next year. There will be an interpreter scholarship program, the regional interpreter training project, a professional development program for translators and interpreters, training on using language services and on cultural competence, and a multilingual government information online project. There is also some evaluation of those programs built into that funding. I am happy to provide some further information on notice in terms of those programs, if you wish.

Ms PENNICUIK — That would be very much appreciated, thank you. Perhaps we could go to which service providers are actually included in this line item and who will be providing the training.

Mr SCOTT — My understanding — and I am just receiving some advice on that — is that that specific line item, that funding, is within government departments, but I am happy to provide you with some more information.

Ms PENNICUIK — That would be great, thank you.

Ms WARD — I ask you to go to budget paper 3, page 5. How will the \$2 million allocated in the 2015 budget for CALD family violence help multicultural communities address the scourge that is family violence?

Mr SCOTT — That is essentially the same issue that was dealt with by Dr Carling-Jenkins's question. The \$2 million is designed to develop a family violence response that specifically addresses the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. As I outlined previously, the response will bring together key stakeholders to improve the responsiveness of family violence services for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and of course children. It will also improve cross-sectoral collaboration and referrals and improve and enhance the capacity of culturally and linguistically diverse communities to identify and respond to family violence.

It is important to note that there is no group within the community that is not touched by family violence. As I previously outlined, anecdotally those who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly women and children, under-utilise and are less likely to access family violence or specialist services, which is a critical problem. There is a real issue about awareness of rights; it is not just whether people are accessing services but the awareness of rights. So there is going to be a strong focus in this response, with this \$2 million, on refugee and new and emerging community groups and on increasing the capacity to access services by these communities.

This, of course, is part of a much broader response where I think, quite rightly, the Premier has identified family violence as being the most significant issue, particularly the law-and-order issue facing our community, and this is part of an \$81.3 million package, including the establishment of Australia's first Royal Commission into Family Violence. As I outlined to you previously, in response to the supplementary from Dr Carling-Jenkins, both the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship and the Victorian Multicultural Commission will advise the royal commission on how to ensure that those who are from diverse backgrounds, particularly women and children, have the capacity to access the royal commission and ensure that their voices are heard. The Victorian government, and I am sure all members of the Victorian community, or all those of good will, want to ensure that women and children are safe — that women and children from all backgrounds are safe — within the Victorian community. This is an important initiative. It is an initiative which is designed to ensure that there is equal access to services but also that services themselves are responsive to the needs of our diverse community.

Mr T. SMITH — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 92, where you allocated \$1.7 million out of the estimated costs of \$11.1 million over four years to the Community Infrastructure and Cultural Precincts Fund. How much of the \$1.7 million in the 2015–16 budget is funding for cultural precincts, and how much is for administrative costs, including the costs associated with the Indian cultural precinct advisory panel and any associated consultant fees?

Mr SCOTT — My understanding is that the exact allocation is a grant program, so therefore the exact allocations have not been determined at this point. I might just get Mr Hakan Akyol to supplement.

Mr AKYOL — If I may, the \$1.7 million is for a number of projects: Beth Weizmann, the Indian cultural precinct, the Vietnamese community museum feasibility study, the grants to the multicultural media program, in terms of \$450 000, and for the Islamic museum. The breakdown of any administrative costs has not been determined as yet in terms of the Indian precinct funding, but there has been a panel established that has met for the first time and will identify how that consultation process will occur with the community and so forth. So the budget has not been broken down as yet.

Mr T. SMITH — So, Minister, with regard to the Indian cultural precinct's advisory panel, can you confirm that this precinct will be meeting soon, and can you give me an indication about where this precinct will be built, or will this precinct be supported?

Mr SCOTT — There is an advisory process that is making determinations in relation to that — if you could just hold on for one second — and there will be a consultation process in relation to that. So while I understand there are strong views in some communities about where it should be located, if we are having an advisory process and there is a public consultation process, it would be unusual for me therefore to announce the results of that prior to it occurring.

Ms SHING — Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the representatives from DPC who are here with you today as well. Minister, can I take you to BP3, page 92. Further to a number of the contributions and questions that have been raised by my colleagues on this committee, can I ask you to explain how the \$20.7 million allocated in the budget to promote social cohesion and community harmony will be used?

Mr SCOTT — Thank you, Harriet, for that question. That \$20.7 million is to provide funding support initiatives that promote intercultural understanding and for cultural events and festivals that celebrate and preserve Victoria's cultural diversity. The new program brings together programs such as promoting community harmony and multifaith and interfaith grants, VMC festivals and events, Unity through Partnerships grants, VMC building and facilities improvement grants, Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund. This budget, as I have outlined previously, secured funding that was due to lapse, which was, in relation to these

particular programs \$2.665 million per annum on an ongoing basis to ensure that this important work to strengthen our social cohesion and harmony can continue.

This program, for example — I will just give an illustration. This funding overall in 2014–15 delivered such things as Cultural Diversity Week, featuring the Premier’s gala dinner and the VIVA Victoria festival, which I note had, from the last estimates, over 45 000 participants — a fabulous celebration. I had the opportunity to acknowledge the former minister, Mr Nick Kotsiras, at that meeting, and to congratulate him for the good work that he has done in terms of multiculturalism, which I think is appropriate. We can mouth bipartisanship and non-partisanship, but it actually has to be put into practice, and I was lucky enough. It also delivered the Multifaith and Interfaith grants program, which supports local organisations to promote understanding and respect about religious diversity through Victoria. The phrase I always use about Victorian multiculturalism in these areas is that we do not just tolerate diversity; we respect it, We honour it. It is our strength. It is not a stone in our shoe which we tolerate until we can find a seat to sit down and remove the stone. It is something we respect and we honour, and it has been a great part of Victoria.

Those multifaith, interfaith processes are important in bringing about cultural understanding. There is also a range of faith and cultural community organisations supported to engage with the wider community beyond that interface into cultural activities, which are important. There is mentoring, leadership and capacity building initiatives for young people, including those from regional Victoria. I really want to say that one of the things that is going to be a challenge, but an important challenge, is engaging younger members of our diverse community going forward. There has been good work done in the past, but it really is the focus of multiculturalism under this government. We have to make sure that people are included and that young people are afforded the opportunities to participate, because sometimes gatherings of well-meaning, good people in the multicultural and diverse communities and interfaith and things can involve — I am starting to go grey — lots of grey hairs and good people, but it is important to engage young people.

Examples of multicultural festivals that will be funded under these areas include the Antipodes festival, the Greek Glendi festival in Oakleigh, Celebrate India in Melbourne’s CBD, the Diwali in Wyndham, the Holi festival in Melbourne’s CBD, the Holi Festival in the south-east, the Pan Macedonian Glendi festival. These sorts of festivals showcase the vibrancy of Victoria’s multiculturalism, promote education and awareness of racial and religious diversity, and strengthen cultural and religious cohesion. Multiculturalism is not about there just being a fractured series of identities. It is about seeing the common humanity in all people, where you can celebrate difference because it represents just different expressions of fundamental common humanity. That underpins multiculturalism in Victoria. Frankly, I hope it underpins the views that people around this table would have.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. I would like to thank all witnesses for their attendance today: the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Honourable Robin Scott; Mr Mark Duckworth, chief resilience officer, community resilience unit; and Mr Hakan Akyol, director, Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship.

Mr Smith interjected.

The CHAIR — There were actually two items on notice, Mr Smith. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing. A written response should be provided within 21 days of that request. They related to a question raised by Mr Smith in relation to the task force and a question raised by Ms Pennicuik.

Witnesses withdrew.