

ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Questions on Notice

Mr D O'BRIEN: Minister, moving on, budget paper 3, on page 174, indicates a \$6 million cut to the 'Management of Public Land and Forests' output. What programs or services are being cut to achieve this reduction?

Mr D O'BRIEN: It is BP3, page 174. It is the 'Management of Public Land and Forests'. It is a 1.9 per cent cut to that budget. It is actually a \$7.8 million cut this year. I am just wanting to know—happy for you to take it on notice—how that cut will be achieved, what programs and services will be cut?

Answer:

There have been no cuts to programs or services in the Management of Public Land and Forests output in 2021-22.

The Management of Public Land and Forests output supports both ongoing and fixed-term initiatives to manage the natural, built and historic assets on public land responsibly, and incorporates management of public land in partnership with statutory agencies, committees of management and local government.

Management of Public Land and Forests output initiatives that lapsed at the end of 2020-21 include:

1. Upgrading Botanic Gardens

- Funding of \$5 million (\$3 million in 2019-20 and \$2 million in 2020-21) was provided to recreate the Australian Garden exhibit from the Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show in London at the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden.
- No further funding was required due to this program being completed.

2. Mansfield Police Stables

- Funding of \$0.22 million was provided in 2020-21 to rehabilitate the historic Mansfield Police Stables, restoring the heritage-listed site.
- No further funding was required due to this program being completed.

The Management of Public Land and Forests output in 2020-21 also reflected an increase in funding for one-off measures in response to COVID-19, such as financial support for Committees of Management as well as on-ground projects that supported local jobs while improving World and National Heritage sites.

Mr RIORDAN: So moving on, Minister, the next question is: I want to deal with budget paper 5, page 212, about contaminated soil. Minister, in budget paper 5 reference is made to 'certain other properties' and sites as having been identified as being potentially contaminated and requiring remediation. Can you provide a list, and I am happy to take it on notice, of the properties that that refers to?

Ms D'AMBROSIO: Look, I am happy to seek that information. The only caveat I would put on that is that the EPA is an independent regulator. If there are matters that may inhibit their regulatory functions then that is the only caveat I would put on that, but if it is able to be provided and released publicly, I am happy to do that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you. Mr Miezis, the minister I think may have said she did investigate the question before about contaminated soil and land remediation, which is referenced on page 212 of budget paper 5 in contingent liabilities, and it refers to a list of identified sites. Do you have a list of those sites? Does the EPA control that?

Answer:

The Budget Paper reference provided (Budget Paper No. 5, page 212) refers to the 'land remediation – environmental concerns' contingent liability for the general government sector. This relates to properties which have been identified as potentially contaminated sites where remedial expenditure may be incurred to restore sites to an acceptable environmental standard in the event contamination risk has been identified.

There are no properties identified within the Energy, Environment and Climate Change portfolio that fall within this category.

The EPA does not control the list of contaminated sites referred to in the 'land remediation – environmental concerns' contingent liability.

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. Thanks, Minister. Now, moving on, in last year's budget you had allocated \$7 million for contractors on the major projects like Melbourne Metro and the West Gate Tunnel to remediate their toxic soil. Is that \$7 million still available or has it been spent?

Ms D'AMBROSIO: Sorry, can you just refer to the item in which budget paper?

Mr RIORDAN: In last year's budget you had allocated \$7 million. You had allocated it for this financial year and that was for the major projects—for remediation on the Metro and West Gate Tunnel projects to remediate their toxic soil. What I am wanting to know is: is that \$7 million still available or has it been withdrawn?

Mr RIORDAN: All right. Is that money being funded out of the landfill levy?

Answer:

As part of the 2020-21 Budget (Budget Paper No. 3, page 49) \$10 million was provided towards the Facilitating Innovative Remediation Solutions Initiative, which will fund innovative and cost-effective remediation solutions and technologies through competitive grants. This initiative is funded from the Municipal and Industrial Landfill Levy.

Funding remains available for this initiative, as comprehensive planning work is currently underway.

Mr RIORDAN: Lee Miezis, just a question for him: budget paper 3, page 181, refers to statutory activities and environmental protection and lists performance measures. One performance measure refers to quality relating to successful EPA prosecutions. Do these performance measures include the legal action taken by the Moorabool Environment Group at Bacchus Marsh Grammar?

Mr MIEZIS: That measure would refer to prosecution action taken by the EPA.

Mr RIORDAN: Right. With Bacchus Marsh Grammar, it was found that the EPA had acted unlawfully in approving environmental management plans to dump toxic soil in these communities. So you have had no expense to do with that case?

Mr MIEZIS: Sorry, the case ultimately did not go ahead. The environmental management plan was rescinded.

Mr RIORDAN: So there were no costs expended?

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mr Riordan, your time has expired.

Mr MIEZIS: I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Just continuing on the EPA again, Mr Miezis, just following up Mr Riordan's question, he asked about the Moorabool Environment Group and Bacchus Marsh legal actions. You said that did not go ahead. Did the EPA pay any of the costs of those two entities legalwise?

Mr MIEZIS: I would have to take that one on notice.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. And likewise did the EPA have any legal costs, and how much were they?

Mr MIEZIS: Again, I would have to take that one on notice.

Answer:

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) will pay costs accrued by the Moorabool Environment Group and Bacchus Marsh Grammar in relation to their applications.

This totals \$1,350.30 for the Moorabool Environment Group. Costs are still being negotiated with Bacchus Marsh Grammar.

EPA has paid \$26,824 in legal costs in relation to these proceedings.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you. You can provide this on notice, but you have indicated that you need to be strategic around the funding. Can you—take this on notice if you will—outline the funding that has been made available and the future funding and relate that specifically back to the goals and priorities of the biodiversity strategy?

Answer:

The Victorian Government has continued to invest in biodiversity. In the most recent 2021-22 Budget, \$86.6 million was allocated to support specific biodiversity programs including investment into key programs like the Port Phillip Bay Fund, Environmental Volunteering and the Victorian Landcare program, Peri-urban Weed Management Partnerships and the Icon Species Grants Program.

This investment builds on the investment into biodiversity in previous budgets, including over \$200 million in last year's State Budget. For example, the \$92.3 million for Growing jobs in land restoration and carbon storage, the \$19.3 million and \$4.4 million per annum ongoing to fund deer control and the \$29 million for further biodiversity bushfire recovery that was in addition to the \$22.5 million allocated to this program during 2020. These investments in turn build on the \$20 million per annum ongoing for Biodiversity 2037.

Collectively, this investment provides the opportunity to implement longer term biodiversity planning and action in partnership with Traditional Owners, agencies, stakeholders and the community to ensure that this investment is aligned to the goals and targets of Biodiversity 2037 to the maximum extent possible.

Together this investment will help deliver on the goals and targets in Biodiversity 2037 including:

- increased targeting of Biodiversity 2037 on ground funding to priority areas of action;
- the contribution of BushBank to revegetation in priority areas;
- the contribution of the investment into bushfire biodiversity recovery and response to pest predator, herbivore and weed targets;
- increased targeting of weeds and pests on public land to pest predator, herbivore and weed priority areas;
- the investment in deer control contributing to pest herbivore control in priority areas;
- the investment in environmental volunteering and Landcare contributing to the goals of Victorians Valuing Nature; and
- Trust for Nature supporting increased permanent protection of areas on private land.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Just continuing on leases, there is another performance measure relating to Crown land leases managed by the department. How many of these leases are pending renewal, and can you provide a list of those that are pending? And likewise, why has the government refused to renew the lease for the Cape Otway lighthouse and the Lorne Pier restaurant?

Answer:

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and its entities manage leases on Crown land including parks and reserves. There are 94 Crown land leases that are due to expire in 2021-22.

Crown land leases are managed to ensure statutory requirements are met and in accordance with the Leasing Policy for Victorian Crown Land 2018. As with the granting of a new lease, lease renewals require a competitive selection process.

Cape Otway lighthouse

Discussions with Tourism Great Ocean Road (TGOR) about its future commercial interest in the site are being conducted in accordance with the Crown Land Leasing Policy.

The government provided 12 months rent relief to TGOR, totalling more than \$76,000, as part of its \$1.7 billion Economic Survival Package to support Victorian businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parks Victoria will continue to work with TGOR on options for managing the lightstation as a tourism asset.

Lorne Pier restaurant

The Lorne Pier restaurant is located in the Lorne Pier precinct, on the southern entry to Lorne along the Great Ocean Road. The precinct is due to be redeveloped through the Great Ocean Road Infrastructure Projects funded under the Geelong City Deal; the project is known as the Point Grey development.

The Lorne Pier restaurant operates under a licence arrangement as opposed to a lease arrangement. From 2013 onwards the licence has been issued on a 12-monthly basis. A new 12-month licence for the period 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022 is currently being finalised. The licence fee was reduced by 50 per cent for the licence period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 due to the uncertainty of tenure associated with the nearing commencement of the Point Grey development. This discount will be extended to the new licence.