

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2020–21 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne—Thursday, 11 November 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O’Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

WITNESSES

Mr Jeremi Moule, Secretary,

Ms Kate Houghton, Deputy Secretary, Social Policy and Intergovernmental Relations,

Mr Tim Ada, Deputy Secretary, Economic Policy and State Productivity,

Ms Vivien Allimonos, Deputy Secretary, Cabinet, Communications and Corporate,

Mr Toby Hemming, Deputy Secretary and General Counsel, Legal, Legislation and Governance,

Mr Matt O'Connor, Deputy Secretary, Industrial Relations Victoria,

Ms Elly Patira, Deputy Secretary, First Peoples–State Relations, and

Mr Michael McNamara, Chief Executive Officer, Digital Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be here today.

On behalf of the Parliament the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2020–21 Financial and Performance Outcomes. Its aim is to gauge what the government achieved compared to what the government planned to achieve.

Please note that witnesses and members may remove their masks when speaking to the committee but must replace them afterwards.

I ask that mobile telephones be turned to silent now.

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

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

We welcome the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and associated officers. We invite you to make an opening statement of 10 minutes, which will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon, committee. The Department of Premier and Cabinet works for the people of Victoria by leading the public service and supporting the government of the day to achieve its strategic objectives. As a central agency our leadership aims to improve the effectiveness of the public sector and promote collaboration across government departments to drive performance and improve outcomes. The work that we do at DPC upholds the core public sector values as outlined in the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

As I noted in my foreword to the annual report for 2021, it was a demanding year for all Victorians. The response to the impact of COVID-19 was and will remain a major focus for government as the state moves through recovery and new ways of living and working. The demands of work while also navigating the impacts of public health directions on our personal lives has been an enormous challenge for our workforce as it has been for all Victorians. I am extremely proud to lead a department and a public service that has shown tremendous resilience and the utmost dedication to improving outcomes for our citizens, business and each other.

In addition to adapting and responding to COVID-19 challenges, the department has also changed to reflect the priorities of government. In 2021 DPC established two new groups: Digital Victoria, which advises and supports the Minister for Government Services to streamline and accelerate digital transformation across government, and the First Peoples–State Relations group, which advises and supports the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to promote Victorian First Peoples’ cultural rights, self-determination, treaty and truth. The department structure was realigned in April 2021 into seven groups to better support our ministers and our core role as a central agency, as shown in this slide.

Appearing with me today as witnesses at the table are Elly Patira, Deputy Secretary, First Peoples–State Relations; Toby Hemming, Deputy Secretary, Legal, Legislation and Governance, and DPC’s General Counsel; Kate Houghton, Deputy Secretary, Social Policy and Intergovernmental Relations; Tim Ada, Deputy Secretary, Economic Policy and State Productivity; Vivien Allimonos, Deputy Secretary, Communications and Corporate. Witnesses in the gallery are Michael McNamara, Chief Executive of Digital Victoria; and Matt O’Connor, the Deputy Secretary of Industrial Relations Victoria.

DPC’s contribution to the government’s aspirations for Victoria are described through its four objectives: strong policy outcomes, engaged citizens, public and professional administration and a high-performing DPC. In 2021 we grouped our major activities through 11 outputs focused on strategic advice and public administration. Due to machinery-of-government changes in February 2021, the Fairer Victoria group and associated outputs—equality, multicultural affairs, veterans, women’s and youth—moved to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

Turning to performance, our key financial indicators for 2021 are depicted on this slide. The department ended the year with a \$43.7 million surplus, largely due to a managerial re-evaluation of land and buildings at Government House and the Public Record Office Victoria, which increased in total value to \$30.6 million. The decrease in 2021 income and expenditure is mainly due to the transfer out of the Fairer Victoria portfolios as well as the transfer out of Bushfire Recovery Victoria on 1 July last year to the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Over the year DPC met or exceeded 82 per cent of its performance measure targets with a 5 per cent variance. Of the 17 performance measures where DPC missed targets by more than 5 per cent variance, nine were impacted by the effects of COVID-19, particularly where in-person consultations, activities or visitations were required; two were due to delays in project initiation or procurement activity, which impacted overall delivery timing. New funding or changed scope of activity during the year also meant that some targets, in fact four, were no longer well aligned. They were largely variants as related to total output costs. One related to fewer than expected by-elections and countbacks following the local government elections in 2020, and one related to a new function which did not achieve performance levels.

I would now like to turn to some highlights from DPC’s performance in 2021. As I noted earlier, the First Peoples–State Relations group was established in DPC to lead the delivery of lasting change and strengthen self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians and traditional owners by prioritising work on treaty and truth. DPC has led the state’s negotiations with the assembly, the first statewide democratically elected representative body for traditional owners and Aboriginal Victorians in the state’s history, to progress Victoria’s path towards treaty. Alongside phase 2 of the treaty process, the state and the assembly also worked together to establish the Yoo-rook Justice Commission, which was announced on 12 May 2021—the nation’s first truth-telling process into systematic injustices experienced by Aboriginal people since colonisation.

The Deadly & Proud public communications campaign was launched in collaboration with the assembly to further build collective understanding among all Victorians of the importance of the treaty process. Throughout 2021 DPC has continued to progress whole-of-Victorian-government self-determination reforms in line with the *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018–2023*. DPC also delivered a \$10 million COVID-19 Aboriginal Community Response and Recovery Fund as part of a \$23 million whole-of-Victorian-government Aboriginal-specific COVID-19 package. The fund was established to support Aboriginal Victorians in delivering community-led initiatives to respond to the impacts of COVID-19.

In 2021 DPC’s work on digital transformation across government continued, with a focus on enabling rapid response to COVID-19 and better services for citizens. In April 2021 DPC established Digital Victoria as a group to lead and accelerate digital reform from the centre of government. Digital Victoria coordinated

development of the government's QR code system, which allows people to check in to workplaces and venues through the Service Victoria mobile app. More than 156 million customers used the service to check in, and the Service Victoria mobile app was downloaded 3.6 million times. Service Victoria has played an important role in other parts of government's COVID-19 response this year, allowing rapid deployment of critical new digital services such as the border entry permit service, which processed 3.3 million applications to enter Victoria. Digital Victoria also finished implementing the *Victorian Government Cyber Security Strategy 2016–20* to improve cyber resilience in governance, in government and in major infrastructure and service providers. This work included support for more than 140 organisations in responding to 900 cyber incidents.

In 2021 DPC helped keep Victorians informed and connected throughout COVID-19. The central communications campaigns team led whole-of-government communications which reviewed and delivered over 2000 communication materials. Major advertising campaigns were delivered at rapid pace to support the Victorian community to engage with public health orders. There was a significant focus on reaching culturally and linguistically diverse audiences, with most campaigns translated into at least 57 different languages, complemented by community engagement efforts and strong partnerships with community and religious leaders. DPC managed both the Staying Apart Keeps Us Together and Stay Safe Stay Open campaigns. DPC, through Digital Victoria, also launched and operated the Coronavirus Victoria hub website, which had more than 50 million visits in 2021.

In March 2021 DPC supported the establishment of Breakthrough Victoria Pty Ltd to oversee the Breakthrough Victoria Fund. The \$2 billion fund was announced in the 2021 Victorian budget to drive investment in research and innovation in Victoria and support Victoria's economic recovery. The fund will increase the rates at which Victorian research and innovation are converted into real-world applications and commercialised within Victoria, which in turn will support business growth and job creation. Since establishment, Breakthrough Victoria has engaged with almost 200 stakeholders across industry, finance and research sectors to develop the company's inaugural investment plan.

Two years after its establishment the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System handed down its final report on 2 March 2021. Before the release of the final report DPC supported the government's engagement with the royal commission in partnership with the former Department of Health and Human Services and Mental Health Reform Victoria. Following the government's acceptance of the commission's 65 recommendations DPC has worked closely with the Department of Health to provide strategic advice and support to the planning and delivery of reforms to Victoria's mental health system and services. This is a landmark reform, one that we know will take a decade to see through and will require ongoing whole-of-government coordination to ensure effective implementation of all of the royal commission's recommendations. DPC will continue to work with the Department of Health to support and monitor the government's implementation of the reforms and delivery of the \$13.8 billion investment package contained in the 2020–21 Victorian budget.

Chair, that concludes my opening presentation.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Secretary. Deputy Chair.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Secretary and all your officials. Secretary, could I ask, to you or Mr Hemming, did the department pay for any legal representation of any ministers during the Coate inquiry last year?

Mr MOULE: I will ask Mr Hemming to answer that question.

Mr HEMMING: No, the department did not.

Mr D O'BRIEN: There is an FOI to the department—and I think we might have actually covered this at previous hearings as well—about the Premier's legal fees for the Coate inquiry, and there was no invoice to DPC. Do you know who did pay for the Premier's legal coverage at the Coate inquiry?

Mr HEMMING: Other than the fact that the Department of Premier and Cabinet did not pay for it, I do not know who paid for it. It was not the Department of Premier and Cabinet, though.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Was there any request at any stage for DPC to pay for the Premier's legal costs?

Mr HEMMING: Not that I am aware of.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Is that unusual? Perhaps I should go back a question. What are the circumstances where a department will pay for a minister's legal costs? Presumably it is when it directly relates to their portfolio business.

Mr HEMMING: Well, in relation to the Coate inquiry, departments were separately represented and ministers, I understand, were separately represented. On that basis ministers were responsible for the engagement and the payment of any external legal advice.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Did the department pay for any staff's legal representation in the Coate inquiry, as in ministerial or parliamentary staff?

Mr HEMMING: No. Sorry, I might just ask you to clarify. Did the department pay for ministerial staff—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Legal advice.

Mr HEMMING: No, we did not.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Or legal representation?

Mr HEMMING: No, no.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, okay. Sorry, just to go back to my previous question, though, would it not be standard practice for the department to pay for the legal representation of a minister in an inquiry such as the Coate inquiry?

Mr HEMMING: If I can answer the question this way, in the circumstances where the Coate inquiry specifically identified particular parties, in those circumstances it was considered appropriate for each of those parties to be separately represented and in this instance not represented or paid for by the Department of Premier and Cabinet. In circumstances where government as a whole or a department and ministers as a whole are required to participate in an inquiry or something similar, in those circumstances it would be dependent on the facts of the particular inquiry. But in those circumstances it may well be appropriate for the department to cover the costs associated with any legal representation.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. If I can maybe jump forward a bit then to the current Operation Watts at IBAC—that is the red shirts inquiry effectively, which has been ongoing for some time—could I ask you, Mr Hemming, whether you have provided either Victoria Police or IBAC with advice that either the Premier or any ministers would not provide any further statements to inquiries in that respect?

Mr HEMMING: Look, I want to be very careful in relation to anything that is related to a current IBAC inquiry, and I would like to take that on notice.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Of course. I ask in the context—and I am sure you are aware—of the email that was provided I think last week dating from June 2019 where a police officer advises that they have just heard from general counsel at DPC, who represents the Premier, Deputy Premier and Minister Neville:

I am advised they appreciate the offer to provide a statement but decline to do so for these matters. That is in relation to the red shirts, which is now currently under Operation Watts.

Mr HEMMING: That is not an email I am aware of. It may be an email from general counsel in the Premier's office as opposed to the General Counsel in the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Mr D O'BRIEN: This is from a police officer, and it does say 'general counsel at DPC'. Are you saying that was not you, Mr Hemming?

Mr HEMMING: I certainly do not recall it. I am happy—

Mr D O'BRIEN: You being referred to, I mean. Not the email, obviously; the email is not from or to you.

Mr HEMMING: What is the question, I am sorry?

Mr D O'BRIEN: They had received a call from general counsel saying that the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the police minister did not want to provide a statement in relation to the red shirts matter to police. That is not you is what you are saying?

Mr HEMMING: Not to my recollection, no. I am happy to check and come back to the committee with an answer, but I do not recall, no.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I would appreciate it if you would do that. The reason I have jumped forward to that is that in this situation police are specifically saying 'general counsel at DPC, who represents the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the police minister'. So I am a bit perplexed as to why DPC represents them in that instance but not in others.

Mr HEMMING: Well, as I said, I do not recall that email. From time to time—and I am not saying in this instance—there is some confusion about the distinction between the Premier's office and the Department of Premier and Cabinet. I am happy to come back to the committee with clarification about that particular email.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Is there legal counsel in the Premier's office?

Mr HEMMING: There is, yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: All right. Okay. Continuing on Operation Watts at IBAC, has the department provided any documents to assist with the inquiry?

Mr HEMMING: Look, I just refer back to my previous answer. I want to be very careful about any ongoing IBAC investigation. If I can please take that question on notice and if there is information I can provide to the committee, I will do that.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I am happy to do so. Secretary, would you be giving me the same answer if I ask you? I am not asking what it was, I am just asking whether you provided any documents. I cannot see that is going to be prejudicial to any outcome.

Mr MOULE: We completely understand that, but given the circumstances, we prefer to provide that material or that advice to you in writing.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Has the department paid for any legal fees for any ministers with relation to Operation Watts?

Mr MOULE: No.

Mr D O'BRIEN: No former ministers?

Mr MOULE: No.

Mr D O'BRIEN: And no ministerial staff or parliamentary staff?

Mr MOULE: No.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Has the department Secretary conducted any of its own investigations into the misuse of ministerial staff positions?

Mr MOULE: No, we have not.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Given the evidence that has come out over the last 18 months or more, particularly the last 12 months, that has resulted in Operation Watts happening, have you seen any need to undertake a review of what ministerial staff are doing?

Mr MOULE: No, we have not. We will allow IBAC investigations to run their course and consider the outcomes once those hearings have concluded.

Mr D O'BRIEN: As a result of the allegations that were raised against, in particular, former minister Somyurek last year, Labor sources told the *Herald Sun* in I think July last year that Mr Mat Hilakari was using

his position as a ministerial adviser in Mr Foley's office for Socialist Left factional work. Did the department undertake any investigation into that instance?

Mr MOULE: No, it did not.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Is there any reason why you would not be asking a question as to whether ministerial staff are actually undertaking government work rather than party-political work?

Mr MOULE: I think that the operation of ministerial offices is absolutely a matter for ministers to be accountable for. Other than the administration of budget and associated matters, the responsibility and accountability for those things rests with ministers.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Do ministerial staff, though, sign up to public service standards and codes of practice?

Mr MOULE: They are not subject to the Victorian public sector code of conduct. Mr Hemming?

Mr HEMMING: That is correct. There are ministerial guidelines, but they are not subject to the *Public Administration Act* code that public sector employees are subject to.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. They sign up to guidelines, then. Presumably those guidelines make it clear that they are not there to do party-political work.

Mr HEMMING: I am not familiar enough with the detail of the guidelines, but they are available online and I understand they are part of the general employment arrangements.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, okay. Secretary, I get that the staff are under the purview of the minister directly, but very clearly they are also public servants, paid for by the Victorian taxpayer. As the head of the VPS, what action have you taken to satisfy yourself that ministerial officers and ministerial staff working on taxpayers time are not abusing that time to in fact undertake party political work, whether for branch stacking or other activities?

Mr MOULE: Mr O'Brien, I appreciate that they are funded ultimately by the taxpayer, as all our roles are, but they are not public servants in the definition of the *Public Administration Act*. As a result, they do not come directly under my purview. They are the responsibility of the individual ministers in those offices. It would not be my role to investigate those officers. It may be a matter for the Victorian public sector commissioner. I am not even sure whether it would be within his purview.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Presumably it is not, if they are not—

Mr MOULE: But other than matters that—

Sorry, if I take a step back: the guidelines that Mr Hemming referred to earlier are available on the VPSC website. Other than the department considering the outcomes of any investigations, be they police investigations or IBAC investigations, and any implication of issues that relate to the operation of the department that are relevant, certainly they are matters that we would pursue, but not in the way that you have characterised those things, Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: In general terms, in the last couple of years we have had both the red shirts affair and Operation Watts and the issues with branch stacking, with evidence obviously this week being delivered. It is both your role and certainly this committee's role—I mean, this committee's aim as in the legislation is to promote public sector accountability and deliver reports to promote improvements to public administration and financial management of the state. In the context of those two issues that have been going for a few years, have you provided any advice or recommendations to the Premier or ministers about how they should be overseeing their staff in ministerial offices?

Mr MOULE: Not directly, other than certainly through induction and other interactions with ministerial officers. Awareness regarding the guidelines that Mr Hemming referred to would certainly be part of that. We would have some visibility, I think, of the standard employment contracts and the requirements there, but as I said earlier, that class of staff, if you like, are not subject to anything related to the *Public Administration Act*.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I am specifically asking, though, about advice to ministers about their role in making sure that their staff are doing the right thing by taxpayers.

Mr MOULE: I think, other than general induction material, certainly nothing that would have been outside of the ordinary in providing that advice.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Has the department conducted an audit into all multicultural grants awarded by the government to ensure that funds have not been siphoned back to the Labor Party for branch memberships?

Mr MOULE: Some time ago—I am going to say about 18 months ago—there was some media reporting regarding the use of some multicultural affairs grants at that time, which was the time at which multicultural affairs was a portfolio of DPC. We did review the small number; I think it was two or three that were mentioned in that article. The documentation that we had in relation to the fulfillment of the obligations under the grant and the awarding of the grant appeared to us to be all in order. So as far as the visibility that we had of those matters, we did review those, yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Was there a report provided to the minister at the time as a result of that review?

Mr MOULE: I would need to check whether that was the case, Mr O'Brien. We would have conducted it of our own volition and for our own purposes. I am not sure what, if any, advice would have been provided at the time to the minister.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Do you recall if that was a written review, or just an internal chat?

Mr MOULE: It was an internal review of existing documentation related to those grants which had both been awarded and closed out, so it was, yes, a review to make sure that the material was in order.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. Following on from that, then, I can assume that you have not had need to recall any funds that have been previously allocated to grants through multicultural grants.

Mr MOULE: No, we have not.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Continuing on, the Auditor-General reported in February on the investigation into the grants to the Migrant Workers Centre. There is a long backstory here, but if I can summarise it, basically through freedom of information we have seen briefs to the then minister about that proposed Migrant Workers Centre which consistently recommended that the centre be established in the south-east of Melbourne in 2017; in 2018, similar. But it was ultimately co-located with Trades Hall, and then, as we know from the Auditor-General's report, that money was erroneously or wrongly used to campaign against the Liberal Party. Can you explain why that department recommendation for it to be established in the south-east did not continue as opposed to the ultimate outcome, which was for it to be established at Trades Hall?

Mr MOULE: We did canvass some of these matters in February when I was here, and you may recall that the deputy secretary, Brigid Monagle, who is now part of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, appeared with us, but in fact that function had been transferred to that department, which I understand is yet to appear before this committee. For that much detail I would need to defer to her knowledge of those circumstances.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Could I ask perhaps for the department to come back to us on notice with an answer? On Friday the Parliamentary Budget Office released what was a fairly damning report on budget processes. Has the department seen and have you read that report?

Mr MOULE: I have not read it in its entirety. I have read the summary of the recommendations, obviously saw the media reporting on the weekend and watched Mr Martine's appearance here before the committee on Monday.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Did the department prepare a brief for the Premier about that report?

Mr MOULE: No, it has not.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Has the Premier asked for a briefing on that report?

Mr MOULE: Not that I am aware of.

Mr D O'BRIEN: It is probably no surprise seeing he might not have time to read it. Secretary, can I move on to other matters then, and we have asked for this before. Can I get the 2020–21 actual figure for ministerial staff costs and what the budget was for the same year, so as at 30 June? If you have got it, it would be useful.

Mr MOULE: I do, Mr O'Brien. The 2020–21 budget for ministerial staff across the Premier's office and all ministers was \$50.5 million. Actual expenditure for the 2020–21 year was \$49.7 million.

Mr D O'BRIEN: \$49.7 million. Are you able to give me a headcount and full-time equivalent?

Mr MOULE: That is 279 staff across all offices—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, but is that FTE or a headcount?

Mr MOULE: I would need to clarify that for you. Sorry, the direct comparison number that I have for the previous year was that it was 287. It is 279. I am happy to provide advice—

Mr D O'BRIEN: The 287 was FTE, so could you take on notice a headcount?

Mr MOULE: I will.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I assume probably also on notice, are you able to provide the breakdown by ministerial office?

Mr MOULE: I only have available to me that there were 195 staff across—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, Secretary, that was a very unfortunate motorbike. Can you say that again?

Mr MOULE: I have available here, Mr O'Brien, that there were 195 staff in ministerial offices, 84 staff assigned to the Premier's office.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. And again, that will be FTE?

Mr MOULE: Yes. I will clarify that for you. My apologies.

Mr NEWBURY: Eighty-four?

Mr D O'BRIEN: Eighty-four—84 staff in the Premier's office.

Mr NEWBURY: That is more than the Prime Minister.

Mr D O'BRIEN: That is almost twice as many as the Prime Minister; but anyway. So yes, if you could take on notice the headcount for ministerial officers if possible. And do you have a forecast for 2021–22, both budget and numbers?

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mr O'Brien, your time has expired.

Mr D O'BRIEN: If you could take that on notice as well, Secretary, if possible.

The CHAIR: I will pass the call to Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Chair. Before I begin, Chair, and I am completely conscious that I am using my time allocation here, I would just like to raise that this is actually an inquiry into the 2020–21 financial and performance outcomes. We have prepared a questionnaire, we have approved questionnaires in quite some detail that have gone out to the department—

Mr NEWBURY: Did you say 'we'?

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, you do not have the call.

Mr NEWBURY: Well, no. He just said 'we'—the departments do the questionnaires, not MPs.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, could you please stop interrupting.

Mr NEWBURY: That is an outrageous confirmation.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury!

Mr NEWBURY: Labor staffers are approving departmental questionnaires.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury. I think if you listened, what you would understand is that Mr Maas made the point that this committee—you and all the other members of this committee—considered the draft questionnaire, which was passed to departments and voted to approve it and circulate it to the departments. And the departments have taken the opportunity—

Mr NEWBURY: I understand your fixing it if it was a mistake.

The CHAIR: And the department have taken the opportunity to complete their questionnaires.

Mr MAAS: I do not think Mr Newbury was at the meeting, from memory, but we do prepare these questionnaires and we do put them to the departments. We then receive responses from them, which we consider, and then we are supposed to try and elicit responses in relation to the actual scope of the hearing. Again, happy to use my time on this, but I just want to make the point that there have been questions throughout these hearings, but particularly today, that have really fallen outside the scope of this hearing. We have to prepare a report on this, and I am just putting it out there that—

Mr NEWBURY: You do not like corruption hearings.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: That is what you are saying: you do not like corruption hearings. Well, do not be corrupt.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, would you refrain from interrupting other members of this committee, please.

Mr MAAS: And it is behaviour like that, while you are fighting for your own seat within your own party, right?

Mr NEWBURY: I am not in IBAC.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury!

Mr D O'BRIEN: Who is talking about scope now?

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury and Deputy Chair! The call is with Mr Maas, and the clock is with Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. I will begin and move to matters of substance. Thank you, Secretary, and thank you to your team for your appearance today. I would like to go to your presentation, where you spoke to the treaty process and how that is going. You have also made mention within the questionnaire of I think it is some \$28.4 million which has been spent on that process. It is a very important process and something that is incredibly significant, and I was hoping that you would be able to provide the committee with an update on the work the DPC state negotiation team has done and its progress towards completion of phase 2 of the treaty negotiations.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Maas. I will defer to Deputy Secretary Patira to substantively answer that question, but I will just make this remark to start with: I am really proud that we have established the group that we have in DPC to focus on these matters. I am also particularly proud that we have been able to convince Elly to undertake that role. She is an incredibly talented public servant, a proud Aboriginal woman and I think a great leader for what is a really substantive piece of work for Victoria.

Mr MAAS: Thank you.

Ms PATIRA: Thanks for the question. In 2020–21 we really continued the work with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria to progress Victoria's pathway to treaty. The Secretary noted that the First Peoples'

Assembly is the first democratically elected statewide representative body for Aboriginal people in this state's history. So it is an incredible feat in its own right, the establishment of that particular assembly, which happened in December of 2019.

In 2020 we commenced substantive negotiations in August of that year, and we are really focused on making sure that we agree the treaty elements that are set out in the *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act*. So that sets out some really clear elements: a treaty authority, a treaty negotiation framework and a self-determination fund as the key elements for agreement with the assembly.

In 2020–21 we did reach agreement on treaty conduct protocols, which really set out the relationship between the assembly and the state as we progress and really try and build a level of trust and understanding about how we will progress negotiations in a manner that suits both parties. We also agreed a dispute resolution process, again to guide this particular period of negotiation.

In addition to that, alongside those treaty elements, the state and the assembly also worked together to establish the Yoo-rook Justice Commission. That is the nation's first truth-telling process, which is focused on systemic injustices experienced by Aboriginal Victorians since colonisation. That particular piece of work is in line with the broader state commitment under the treaty legislation that I spoke to you about, which is a commitment to address historic wrongs and ongoing injustices through the treaty process—and so they are inherently tied to each other. And that is really the crux of the work we have done to progress treaty over 2020–21.

Mr MAAS: That is excellent work and very inspiring to hear all of that is taking place, too. Thank you. Back to the questionnaire. At question 1 it refers to funding provided to support the establishment and operations of the Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission and VTAC's transition into the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. Would you be able to update the committee on the work that DPC has done to support the operations of the First Peoples' Assembly too?

Ms PATIRA: Sure. That particular funding table relates to budget allocations from the self-determination and treaty initiative from the 2017–18 state budget. As I said previously, the establishment of the assembly was really quite a feat in its own right, and that work really commenced in 2017 with the work of the Victorian treaty advancement commissioner, which was led by Jill Gallagher, AO. That really enabled work to take place to engage with all Victorians and Aboriginal Victorians in particular about what a representative body should look like for Aboriginal Victorians as we move through treaty.

The assembly has now been established. It has 31 members, and it really does reflect I think the diversity of Aboriginal voices across Victoria. There is a reserved seat for each of our 11 formally recognised traditional owner groups, but in addition to that there are also 21 general seats, which are elected on by the broader Aboriginal Victorian community. The assembly obviously operates independent of government, and it represents the views and ambitions of the Aboriginal community as we move on this pathway to treaty. But when it comes to our support for that process and the work of the assembly we continue to do the grant funding agreements with the assembly and ensure that they have the resourcing made available to them through the state budget to continue their work. The assembly itself actually does produce an annual report every year where they talk to some of their own work that they have been able to move forward. It includes really important work that I have already spoken to but also the establishment of an interim elders voice and a range of other internal working groups and committees that are progressing work in accordance with the Aboriginal community's views.

Mr MAAS: Excellent. Thank you very much. If I could take you to question 2 of the questionnaire, and in particular there at item 5 in the table it refers to the Deadly & Proud campaign. I was hoping you would be able to update the committee on the progress of that campaign, why it is important and its success in developing a sense of that collective pride and understanding around the treaty process.

Ms PATIRA: Sure. I think the assembly has been particularly clear that when we are talking about treaty, treaty is very much seen as not just an outcome for Aboriginal Victorians but it is for all Victorians. It really goes to the heart of setting and establishing new relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and in that sense I think there is a huge amount of pride that all Victorians can feel in a treaty process that really tries to set that new relationship. The Deadly & Proud campaign, I think, has played a really important role in engaging Victorians on what treaty is about but also who Aboriginal Victorians are, where we come from and

what our feelings are on a whole range of issues, and the Deadly & Proud campaign was really designed to build that awareness amongst Victorians about treaty, about truth, about our communities. The campaign—I think one of its successes is that it is really focused on First Nations’ voices in its delivery. So it is firsthand accounts from Aboriginal people on a range of issues, but it really does try to highlight, I think, historic and contemporary moments of pride as well as really touching on some of those truth-telling elements. So things like discrimination that has been experienced or historic issues that have arisen and really providing a space for that.

The campaign was launched in a number of different mediums. There was advertising and partnerships over a 10-week period, and that received widespread, positive coverage but I think importantly a huge amount of engagement, with 200 000 views on the website and over 7 million combined social reach, which was incredibly important. In addition to that, it has helped us to achieve some of our National Agreement on Closing the Gap targets. There are commitments in there around how we build understanding, both within government and outside of government, around Aboriginal experience, Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal history. So that is another mechanism that Deadly & Proud has really been able to use to drive some of those obligations we have under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap as well.

Mr MAAS: Terrific. Thank you very much. You mentioned self-determination before. I would like to now move to that. As Victoria does progress towards treaty and self-determination, providing support to Aboriginal community controlled organisations becomes key to building capacity in the Aboriginal community and ensuring that the community is on a level playing field with the state in the negotiations. I will take you to the table at question 1 of the questionnaire, which refers to \$21.7 million for 60 Aboriginal community infrastructure projects. Would you be able to give the committee some examples of those projects that were supported and how they have supported self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians?

Ms PATIRA: Sure. I think you sort of spoke to it, but improving Aboriginal community infrastructure is such a fundamental part of the pursuit of self-determination, because it really does help organisations, I think, to have that strong not only economic but a sort of social and cultural place that is a really important base on which to build Aboriginal futures. In particular we have the Aboriginal community infrastructure program; as you said, 60 projects. There are so many good examples, I think, of how that infrastructure program has been rolled out. But to give you an example, Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place is a community controlled organisation in the metro region. It received capital funding under that program of almost \$4.5 million, which allowed that organisation to purchase the building that it is housed in and also to carry out some critical repairs. Ownership of that building and the property really has allowed Mullum Mullum to build its gathering place capacity, which is one of its fundamental purposes, as a place of social connection for Aboriginal Victorians.

Perhaps another good example is Bubup Wilam, an Aboriginal community controlled organisation focused on child care, but a wraparound service that includes a point for education and health and a range of other services for Aboriginal families. It received \$0.7 million through the program to build a community space and training facilities for Aboriginal students and for the families and communities more broadly to be able to use those spaces that have not necessarily been available to them. The project supported also the creation of a library, a dining room and breakaway spaces for specialist learning. Those are, I suppose, two good examples of that particular program and some of the outcomes it has been able to achieve for the community.

Mr MAAS: Terrific. Thank you very much. At question 1 in the questionnaire there is reference to the COVID-19 Aboriginal Community Response and Recovery Fund, and you have responded that that received 81 successful applications. Can you update the committee on the work of the fund and the work of some of the groups that benefited from the funding?

Ms PATIRA: Certainly. The COVID-19 Aboriginal Community Response and Recovery Fund was a \$10 million fund and part of a broader \$23 million package. The fund was really established to support Aboriginal organisations to drive culturally safe and place-based initiatives to respond to the impacts of COVID both in terms of response but in terms of broader recovery as well. It did focus on four key areas. They were emergency relief, outreach and brokerage, social and emotional wellbeing, and cultural strengthening. One of the sort of differences, I suppose, with this fund is that prior to decisions being made on funded organisations an assessment panel was put together of Aboriginal community controlled organisations from the COVID-19 Aboriginal community response task force, so that meant that Aboriginal organisations were able to be involved in a really self-determined way with recommending particular initiatives for support.

Overall, again, it supported a range of Aboriginal organisations and traditional owner groups, but I can pull out a couple as an example. Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative worked in partnership with Federation University Australia. It was allocated \$170 000 in funding in February of this year for an initiative that was entitled Growing Capacity Through Education. It will cover tuition for 20 Aboriginal community members to complete their graduate certificate in social and community services. That has been incredibly important for Ballarat, where there really is a huge need to fill that social and community services space and where really we want to drive more Aboriginal community members into that particular workforce in the response to and recovery from COVID-19. Another good example is the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation being allocated \$127 000 for their initiative, which was all around staying connected with community and country and water. The project includes the development of an online cultural resourcing portal, educational resources that promote Wadawurrung culture and history, particularly for traditional owners, many of whom have not been able to go on country over the last year and a half. It is an opportunity to strengthen those community connections in a different way, and it focuses on the Werribee River area. And, if you will allow me one more, VAHS is another good example. They had a Launch Housing service allocated \$100 000, and they were able to provide support for families experiencing housing and financial distress through that particular program as well.

Mr MAAS: Excellent. Thank you very much. It has been really terrific hearing the work that is taking place. I might leave it there, Chair, with just a few seconds to go. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Maas. Mr Hibbins.

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Secretary and your team, for appearing today. I want to continue on with Aboriginal affairs and ask regarding the development of the stolen generations redress scheme. Obviously the consultation concluded about six months ago, in May 2021, and obviously there is a real sense of urgency out there amongst many members of the stolen generations and their families. Would you be able to outline when the response to that, or the report, is expected to be released and when members of the stolen generations and their families can expect those funds to be delivered?

Ms PATIRA: Absolutely. In short, it is intended to be released and responded to in the first half of next year at the latest. The stolen generations reparations package, as you may be aware, was put out to a Stolen Generations Reparations Steering Committee, so it is made up entirely of stolen generations organisations and members, again really trying to make sure that it has got stolen generations at its centre. They have produced a report, and that report is being considered. I think what we want to be able to do in putting out a report is make sure that we have a strong, robust, culturally safe response that sits hand in hand with that and that we do not leave it sitting in community without that kind of response, because we know it is incredibly important to not continue any of the trauma of stolen generations members.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. I want to now move to the traditional owner nation-building support package and the funding, specifically the funding for traditional owner groups without formal recognition by the government. Can I just ask: how many groups have been recognised or are working towards recognition by the government as a result of this process?

Ms PATIRA: Sure. There are a couple of different ways in which support is provided through the nation-building model, so I might break those down. They are at different stages, I think, as a result of that. One of the ways in which funding is provided through that model is to First Nations Legal & Research Services, the service provider providing that legal and research expertise that is necessary for formal recognition—\$0.3 million dollars is provided directly to that legal service, and they engage with groups directly. There are a number of groups currently engaged with First Nations Legal & Research Services with a view to hitting formal recognition. Obviously a number of these groups are not necessarily established as corporate entities and do not necessarily have clear governance in decision-making, so we are not always able to fund directly because there is often a little bit of work to do with those groups to determine who the right people are to hold money, to expend money, to make decisions and those sorts of things. In addition to that, there is also money provided to engagement officers who sit in those regions, and they are there to support traditional owner groups without formal recognition. Sitting slightly outside the package but worth noting also is the Strong Roots for Our Futures program, because again that is entirely focused on groups seeking foundational support and there was direct funding of family gatherings to four different families from groups without formal recognition.

Again, the focus there is trying to build relationships, understanding to build those governance structures to be able to move to the sort of corporate entities you need to engage.

Mr HIBBINS: I was just wondering, are you able to indicate to the committee just how many groups are being supported through this funding?

Ms PATIRA: So four families from groups without formal recognition have been supported. There have been 20 training workshops. Now, they are attended by individuals who will identify with different groups but not necessarily on a group-wide basis. When it comes to First Nations Legal & Research, I might take that on notice. Certainly I can say off the top of my head I know that there are three groups that they are engaged with, but I would—

Mr HIBBINS: Sure. Thank you. There was an announcement recently around an \$11 million package to support traditional owner groups without formal recognition. How much of that has been expended, if any has any been expended to date?

Ms PATIRA: Sure. That funding is in this year's state budget and it is a continuation of the nation-building package.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes.

Ms PATIRA: The nation-building project itself, there was a real desire, as you sort of noted, to increase the focus on groups without formal recognition and make a bit of a delineation between those groups who already have formal recognition and will want nation-building support and those without. That required a reshaping of the package, which we have undertaken following some feedback from the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria but also traditional owners more broadly. We have taken our time to get that right, really with an interest in making sure non formally recognised groups see themselves in that package, so what we have done is brought in essentially that foundational Strong Roots for Our Futures focus into the program with the view to engaging more families and individuals.

In terms of the money going out the door, it has not yet. We have taken our time with traditional owners to get that right, but all of the necessary funding agreements are now in draft form. The partnership agreements are in place and we will be ready in the new year, I think, to jump into that but in a really considered way.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. Can I ask now about the Yoo-rook truth and justice commission? I understand there was \$58 million allocated towards that. Are you able to break it down in terms of just where the \$58 million has gone? There are a few areas that I would like to know about: one, to the commission itself to operate; two, to Aboriginal organisations who would provide support to participants in the process; three, to community members to support them to participate in the process; and then four, if any funding has gone to government departments and/or agencies.

Ms PATIRA: Sure. So as you said, a \$58 million package in the most recent state budget. \$44 million is to support the establishment and operation of the Yoo-rook Justice Commission. That money is obviously provided to the commission operating independently of government and in control of its own resourcing. That package was fairly substantial in acknowledgement of the fact that there is a need to get the social and emotional wellbeing supports and supports through our Aboriginal community controlled organisations right. So that particular budget is intended to also support those community channels that you have talked about. \$13 million is for the coordination and response within government. That funding is being administered by DPC and within the First Peoples–State Relations group there is a response and engagement branch. We are coordinating a whole-of-Victorian-government response, so it will all be coordinated back through DPC, and the money will support that as well as cultural safety training for all government participants, really doing some considered work around how we take a unified approach that focuses on disclosure, I suppose, and truth telling as the ultimate aim, and then \$0.9 million is to support the First Peoples' Assembly so that they can actively contribute, and that really goes back to my earlier statement about the fact that there are really close links between the recommendations out of the truth-telling process and the opportunity to realise those through treaty commitments.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes, okay. Thank you. Can I ask now—there is just a question as to whether this comes under the auspices of DPC—in regard to responding to the *Our Youth, Our Way* inquiry to the over-

representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Victorian youth justice system, which came out in June 2021, is that under the auspices of DPC?

Ms PATIRA: No, I think it is either DFFH or DJCS. I am not entirely sure.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. All right. Thank you. I would just like to move on and ask just a final question. I note within the 2020–21 budget there was an item, and I think again this came under the department of justice, about maintaining initiatives to counter violent extremism. Overall is it a whole-of-government initiative at all coordinated by DPC to combat the rise of right-wing extremism and conspiracy groups within Victoria?

Mr MOULE: Sorry, Mr Hibbins, I might ask Deputy Secretary Houghton to answer that question.

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks.

Ms HOUGHTON: We work in partnership with the Department of Justice and Community Safety. The Department of Premier and Cabinet is a member of ANZCTC, the Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee, which is both DPC and Victoria Police. Through that strategic and operational view of counterterrorism and preventing terrorism we then work, again, both with VicPol and DJCS as to how to operationalise that in Victoria.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes, okay. Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Hibbins. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Mr Hemming, I think I misheard you earlier when we were talking about legal fees. I think I heard you say that there was no departmental support provided to any departmental staff—is that right?—throughout the IBAC process. I understood that one of the early witnesses did have departmental support. Did I mishear you?

Mr HEMMING: Mr Newbury, I understood the question was about whether the department had supported any ministerial staff.

Mr NEWBURY: Okay, sorry—departmental staff. Sorry, then I did mishear you.

Mr HEMMING: Yes, sorry.

Mr NEWBURY: I understood that there was departmental support, and I do not want you to think that I am saying it is inappropriate to support staff. In fact if you said to me you did not even provide mental health support for staff, I would say that was probably wrong. Was there any—

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, I would ask you to relate your questions to the financial and performance outcomes, please.

Mr NEWBURY: Yes, of course. Was there support provided?

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, could you relate your questions to the financial and performance—

Mr NEWBURY: Of course. Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Well, could you please—

Mr NEWBURY: I do not need to say it in every sentence.

The CHAIR: Well, you need to be clear that your question refers to the financial period and outcomes in question.

Mr NEWBURY: Was support provided in the financial period?

Mr HEMMING: Can I just clarify: in relation to which inquiry, I am sorry?

Mr NEWBURY: IBAC. The current one.

Mr HEMMING: Look, again, I am not trying to be evasive at all; I just want to be very careful in what I say in this forum in relation—

Mr NEWBURY: I am not asking for a number. I am just saying—yes or no; that is all I am asking. My understanding—my quite strong understanding—is support was provided. I am not in any way having a go about that. I am just asking if support was provided, that is all.

Mr HEMMING: In the event that any departmental staff were required—

Mr NEWBURY: Of course. Absolutely.

Mr HEMMING: Yes, then departmental support would have been provided.

Mr NEWBURY: Yes, and I would—

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, could you please allow the witness the opportunity to answer your question free of interruption.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you.

Mr HEMMING: Yes, so my answer to the question is in the event that—

Mr NEWBURY: I understand.

Mr HEMMING: a departmental officer was required to participate in that inquiry, then support would have been provided, yes.

Mr NEWBURY: I understand, because they were seconded into a ministerial office. I mean, one witnesses has given evidence that they were a departmental staff member and that they were seconded into a ministerial office. They were not a political staffer, as we would call them; they were a departmental staffer. They may have changed their employment status at a different time, but as they were a departmental staffer for a period of time on secondment they would receive support from the department. I completely understand that.

Mr HEMMING: Can I just be very clear on that point. I am not aware in my role of anyone who was anything other than a departmental officer. I am not aware of anyone who was seconded into a ministerial office. I am talking purely about departmental officers who were working as departmental officers.

Mr NEWBURY: I understand. So if there was a departmental staffer who was seconded into a ministerial office, they would come under your purview, wouldn't they, Secretary? They would be subject to the *Public Administration Act*, you would have responsibilities to them as a public servant et cetera?

Mr MOULE: Yes. So in the first instance there would be a duty of care and responsibility vested in the secretary of the department that was their home department.

Mr NEWBURY: But you are the boss at the end of the day.

Mr MOULE: Absolutely.

Mr NEWBURY: Right.

Mr MOULE: I was going to say I am not familiar with the example that I think you are citing or alluding to, so I could not speak to the detail.

Mr NEWBURY: I think Ms Schreiber was a departmental staffer.

Mr MOULE: I may not have paid as close attention to all of the aspects of that operation.

Mr NEWBURY: Yes, yes. I believe she was a departmental staffer. So if that was the case you would have responsibility to make sure that if that staffer was doing something and if it were political, you would have a responsibility to ensure that was not the case. That clearly did not happen. Can I actually get confirmation of

that? If a person was seconded into a ministerial office, you would have some duty of care to ensure they were doing appropriate work.

Mr MOULE: Well, the same rules would apply for any secondment when an individual goes to work at another department or a government entity or into a ministerial office, including our department liaison officers, who essentially work inside ministerial offices. You know, the first level of accountability for the welfare, a port of call for any issues of concern, would of course be the home department, but I absolutely accept my responsibility as the head of the public service in relation to individuals.

Mr NEWBURY: I am just saying, you know, I think that if there was behaviour that was a concern and you are aware of it now—you mentioned earlier you had not done anything as a result of any of the evidence. If I am putting to you that potentially seconded departmental staff were behaving inappropriately, I would also put it to you that—

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, I remind you this committee is here to consider the financial performance outcomes for the financial year 2020–21—

Mr NEWBURY: Absolutely. We are all paying for this. Victorians are paying for this.

The CHAIR: and not evidence that has been given in recent weeks to IBAC.

Mr NEWBURY: Well, if you want to cover up IBAC—

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, I ask you to keep your role on this committee in mind, which is to participate in the financial year outcomes in question.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Secretary, you mentioned earlier that you have a responsibility for induction of staff. Is that correct?

Mr MOULE: No. What I said was that ministers and their officers have induction—

Mr NEWBURY: No, I am talking about departmental staff.

Mr MOULE: Departmental staff?

Mr NEWBURY: Yes.

Mr MOULE: Yes, for each of our departments we are responsible for their arrival and induction, and there are processes that—

Mr NEWBURY: The only reason I raise it is one of the witnesses at IBAC who was a departmental staffer said that she felt that the induction processes were lacklustre—that is not the word she used, but that is what I would say—and they were not strong enough.

Mr MOULE: In her substantive role or in her seconded role in the minister's office?

Mr NEWBURY: Well, she just said the word 'induction'. So I just wonder, hearing that feedback about induction, whether you had taken that on board.

Mr MOULE: Well, I had not heard that feedback, as I said to you, in its entirety. Day to day I am not able to watch the entirety of those hearings. However, I did indicate earlier that once the IBAC processes have concluded there will absolutely be a role for department heads, including myself, to consider evidence that was given, determinations made by IBAC and anything that is directly relevant to the administration of departments.

Mr NEWBURY: I mean, you know, just the issues that I raised, if departmental staff are doing things that are found to be inappropriate, that might be an issue for you to consider. If induction is lacklustre, that might be an issue to consider. If 30 staff walk down to Labor headquarters and spend the afternoon doing factional work, that might be an issue to consider. If contracts are lodged that change Mat Hilakari's employment from one office to another as soon as it is made public that he could be doing factional work, that might be an issue to consider. All these things might be issues to consider.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, you are out of order and abusing your role on this committee.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I would ask that you keep your questions to the financial and performance outcomes for the financial year 2020–21—

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you, Labor Chair.

The CHAIR: without being rude about it, please.

Mr NEWBURY: I'm not being rude.

Secretary, may I ask about Jon Faine's advertising campaign, the health/COVID advertising campaign. I understand he came to the department with an idea. How did that process work?

Mr MOULE: Mr Newbury, I do not have the detail—

I am aware of the issue—

Mr NEWBURY: I think it was the biggest campaign in the financial year, wasn't it?

Mr MOULE: No, it certainly was not. My recollection—

Mr NEWBURY: Just the most high profile.

Mr MOULE: I am happy to provide any detail that you might require.

Mr NEWBURY: I am just trying to understand how it works.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, if you are trying to understand how it works, it might pay to listen to the Secretary's answer rather than interrupt.

Mr NEWBURY: Just being political does not do you any—

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, please refrain from being rude, and listen—

Mr NEWBURY: I am not being rude, you are being political.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, you are asking a question and then not giving the witness the opportunity to answer it.

Mr NEWBURY: No, you are talking over the respondent.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury—

Mr NEWBURY: Yes, Secretary.

The CHAIR: would you please listen to the Secretary's answer.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Chair. So my recollection, because I am aware of the campaign or the aspect of that campaign that you are talking about, is that Mr Faine operating as a private vendor of media services, which is I think his primary employment now, did pitch to government the idea of doing some very personable vignettes, if I could call them that, to encourage Victorians to adhere to public health orders. You might appreciate that we—

Mr NEWBURY: Who did the pitch go to?

Mr MOULE: I am happy to provide details. I am not certain. I understood that it came into the department, but I would need to clarify that.

Mr NEWBURY: No, that is okay. So he gave a pitch, you know, to provide a service. I understand that all of the celebrities involved were non-fee based. That is my understanding. Is that your understanding as well?

Mr MOULE: That is my recollection, Mr Newbury, but I would need to check that.

Mr NEWBURY: You mentioned that Mr Faine is providing a service—I think you used the word ‘service’—in his new private capacity. So there was a fee involved, I take it?

Mr MOULE: I am not certain. I am happy to provide that information on notice.

Mr NEWBURY: Do you believe there was a fee?

Mr MOULE: I am not certain.

Mr NEWBURY: Okay. I know that lots of people have been asking the question, and I do not believe there has been an answer yet from anybody. So if I could get an answer on whether there was a fee paid and how much, I think that is fair and reasonable. If you could take that on notice.

One of the reasons—and I do not want to put words in your mouth, Deputy Chair—that the Deputy Chair was talking about legal fees and the Premier earlier is, I understand, that a number of FOIs went in to the government in the last financial year about who paid for certain legal fees for various ministers and the Premier. The only person who no-one could work out who paid their legal fees for was in relation to the Premier. Is that a fair comment? No-one could work out who paid those fees. You mentioned earlier that no fees had been paid specifically. Could hypothetically work relating to legal representation fall under a global fee that was paid to any particular law firm? Perhaps that is a question for Mr—

Mr HEMMING: I am happy to answer. I can confidently assert that the Department of Premier and Cabinet did not pay any of those legal fees that I referred to in my answer to Mr O’Brien.

Mr NEWBURY: Okay. So you are not saying that no other department paid any—

Mr HEMMING: I have no knowledge. I can only answer on behalf of DPC, and DPC most certainly did not pay any of those legal fees in relation to the board of inquiry or Operation Watts.

Mr NEWBURY: Okay. And—

Mr MOULE: But, Mr Newbury, I would add nor would any other department. We are not attempting to suggest that any other department did pay.

Mr NEWBURY: I am not in any way saying he may not have paid for it. He may have used internal services—actually I should ask that. Did he seek any internal advice?

Mr MOULE: No. Mr Newbury, not wanting to put words in Mr Hemming’s mouth, but it was very clear that separate representation was in place for departments and ministers. We had no interaction whatsoever in relation to those matters as it pertains to the Premier.

Mr NEWBURY: And I am not in any way suggesting that anything nefarious is the case. I am just saying that lots of legal fees were paid for ministers and other people. There is no suggestion that the Premier charged the state for anything. He may well have paid for it himself. But, you know, it does stand out that there appears to be a missing fee. But you are not aware of any fees being paid by anybody?

Mr MOULE: No, Mr Newbury, we are certainly happy to take your substantive question on notice, but we had no visibility or interaction with legal representation for the Premier.

Mr NEWBURY: Okay. Can I ask: do you have any details with you on how much was spent by the department on the Premier’s Facebook page in the 2020–21 financial year?

Mr MOULE: Thank you for the question. The department does not spend any money on the Premier’s Facebook page. There is a financial transaction that takes place whereby, as the holders of the credit card for the Premier’s office, the department’s credit card is used to pay those fees. That money is then journaled and

reimbursed from the Premier's office substantive budget to the department. So there is an administrative transaction that takes place, but it is purely because we hold the credit card.

Mr NEWBURY: How much was the transaction reported on the department's credit card which was reimbursed?

Mr MOULE: For the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 the Premier's office spent \$112 094.

Mr NEWBURY: On Facebook?

Mr MOULE: In Facebook-related invoices, noting that Facebook and Instagram are integrated—invoiced by the same company and then integrated invoicing. So that would be for both of those.

Mr NEWBURY: That was for advertising, or just anything to do with both of those companies?

Mr MOULE: Well, from our visibility of the invoice, because it is just a financial transaction as far as we are concerned, that is the total amount transacted for that purpose. It compares to sort of \$158 000 the year before.

Mr NEWBURY: What about other social media accounts?

Mr MOULE: We are not aware that any payments are made to any other social media accounts. They are certainly not transacted through the department's credit card. But otherwise a question best asked of the Premier.

Mr NEWBURY: So you are saying that the single social media Premier-related transaction on the department's credit card, for want of a better term, is that amount?

Mr MOULE: Yes, it is. It is the Facebook invoices, which relate to both Facebook and Instagram.

Mr NEWBURY: That could be advertising, it could be buying—whatever it is. Okay.

Mr MOULE: We, the department, would not be able to distinguish whether that is 100 per cent Instagram, 100 per cent Facebook or a combination of both.

Mr NEWBURY: Can I ask: the Premier's digital unit—I think that is what it is called—do departmental staff work with the Premier's digital unit, sometimes go and work in the digital unit? Do any of the comms department work in conjunction with the Premier's digital unit? Is there departmental time spent working with the Premier's digital unit?

Mr MOULE: I am actually not specifically aware of what you are referring to when you say the Premier's digital unit.

Mr NEWBURY: I think that in his office he has something called a digital unit, which is people doing social media stuff.

Mr MOULE: I do not doubt that to be true, but I—

Mr NEWBURY: I am actually reporting from the Premier's former digital manager, who describes her previous work as managing the Premier's digital unit. I am just wondering if there are any departmental staff over the period of time in question who would have—I mean, are you aware of departmental staff working with the Premier's digital unit?

Mr MOULE: Not that I am aware of, unless there was—actually I cannot even think of a circumstance, and particularly not knowing specifically the work that those people do. I am happy to take that question on notice, Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: The only reason I ask is because the Premier's former digital manager has talked about their role, and in talking about their role over the period in question they have talked about how they see social media as getting inside people's homes to persuade them in terms of how they vote. What I am trying to, I guess, ascertain is whether there is any departmental time spent. I mean, clearly in my view that is a breach, and

I take it that the Premier's office staff, if they are in breach, are not under your purview, but what I am trying to understand is are there any, for example, in the comms unit, in your comms unit—what interaction that your comms unit may have with his office in terms of social media and whether there are any issues there.

Mr MOULE: It is very clear now, Mr Newbury. The department has no role to play in the Premier's social media pages. That is work that is completely conducted inside the Premier's office. The only other thing that I would add to that is that from time to time, of their own volition, they make re-use of existing campaign material that might be part of any department's campaign. Sometimes they use some of that collateral, but that is—

Mr NEWBURY: Do you mean sharing, or do you mean actually taking something and—

Mr MOULE: No. If there were images available through a campaign of an infrastructure project or something, sometimes they would, again of their own volition, make use of those, but that is not a contribution that departments are making towards social media.

Mr NEWBURY: I am sure you can understand why I am raising it, because there are clear concerns about blurred lines at the moment in political activity.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Newbury. Your time has expired. As we are halfway through this afternoon's proceedings, we will take a 10-minute break and resume at 2.55.

I declare back open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and the call is with Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you again, Secretary and departmental officials and everyone, who I know have been working extraordinarily hard over this past period. I would like to just spend a quick moment back where Mr Maas was and just go slightly deeper in the topic of self-determination, if you are willing, and note again question 1 of the questionnaire, where there is a discussion of the Aboriginal heritage officer and compliance officer—I think it is Aboriginal heritage officer/compliance officer—and the provision of \$17.8 million to employ somebody at each registered Aboriginal party. I am hoping that you can update the committee on the work of these compliance officers in supporting Aboriginal cultural heritage and strengthening culture.

Ms PATIRA: Sure. Thank you for your question. There has been really I suppose increased investment in the enforcement and compliance aspects of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act*. That is as a result of legislative amendments in 2016 that really bolstered the need and the capacity to do compliance work. So in response to that money that you stepped out in question 1 of the questionnaire, it really focuses on funding Aboriginal heritage officers. There are 13 officers employed across our registered Aboriginal parties. They are responsible for those compliance activities under the Act, and actually page 151 of the annual report sets out the enormous amount of activity that they are able to do.

To give you a bit of a sense of what that impact is with that increased resourcing: between 2007 and 2016 there were an average of 25 investigations concluded every year. Since 2016 and since bringing on the Aboriginal heritage officers this has increased to 100 investigations concluded each year. The structure of the Aboriginal heritage officer system is that they are trained to a standard that really is comparable to any other authorised officer under any other statutory regime that we have in Victoria. All of the appointees successfully completed a certificate IV in government investigation and receive ongoing training around the Aboriginal cultural heritage Act. Specifically, Aboriginal heritage officers have powers to gather relevant information to assist in the investigation of offences and prosecutions, particularly as they relate to harm to cultural heritage. They also have powers around stop orders.

I think to give a sense in real terms of where there has been impact, people may have heard of the Talbot maternity tree recently in the north-west of Victoria and a fire impacting that tree. Traditional compliance officers from the registered Aboriginal parties that I talked about, funded through the resourcing you mentioned, were actually the first experienced heritage officers on scene, so they were able to immediately direct the protection of that Aboriginal cultural heritage and that particular tree was saved in the course of that work. So that really gives you a sense I think of the Aboriginal heritage officers and the incredible work they have been doing through our registered Aboriginal parties.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks for that. It gives a really deep understanding as well as that more nuanced example, so I am grateful. I think I would like to move on and explore the Service Victoria investment and particularly, Secretary, refer to page 8 of the questionnaire and note that the government is continuing to build on the investment of \$195 million in Digital Victoria with an additional \$67 million in funding for Service Victoria. Aside from the QR codes, which we have all become very familiar with, I am interested in perhaps gaining some evidence for the committee on how this investment will benefit Victorians.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Ms Richards. I will pass to the CEO of Digital Victoria, Michael McNamara, to respond to that question.

Mr McNAMARA: Hi, committee. Michael McNamara, CEO of Digital Victoria. Service Victoria brings together key government digital transactions in one place, and it has actually played really important role in the Victorian government's COVID-19 response over the last 18 months. It is a scalable whole-of-government service capability created to improve the way government transactions are delivered to Victorians via channels. Service Victoria has built a modern enterprise-grade platform that leverages cloud technology and a suite of re-usable components—this is an important point. This includes digital identity verification accounts, bank-rate payments, an AI chatbot, a mobile app with a wallet, and touchless technology. These utilities have been used through the COVID period but actually, and importantly, can be applied to any context more broadly into the future.

The 2021–22 budget provided \$67 million in funding over two years towards enhancing the customer experience with more digital services for Victorians. This investment supports Service Victoria to continue its operations and improve public access to services by creating new channels for simple, faster, high-volume transactions such as grant applications and permit approvals. Digital Victoria actually has a role in supporting Service Victoria across government into departments and agencies to look for opportunities to leverage the platform and the technology within Service Victoria to modernise the citizen experience interaction with government. And that is one of our primary roles here at Digital Victoria—to uplift digital uptake of services back into government and improve the experience for citizens. The funding will keep 48 existing online services operating, which includes working with children checks, solar panel rebates and a range of COVID-safe initiatives such as the border entry permit and the QR check-in scheme, which we are all aware of.

The benefits and value of Service Victoria for the community and businesses is demonstrated by the growing number of transactions on the platform, and the platform has had consistent positive feedback provided from customers in the range of 96 per cent satisfaction. More Victorians are engaging with Service Victoria than ever before. As of the end of September, customers completed almost half a billion transactions with Service Victoria and downloaded the app more than 4.3 million times. These are incredible volumes. Service Victoria has cut the time it takes for people to do many of the common online tasks by around a quarter. For example, you can pay your car rego now in less than 40 seconds. It is a re-usable common platform that can be used across government to modernise citizen interactions, in summary.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks for that evidence. I would like to have some sort of understanding of how the funding has supported compliance with the public health directions during the pandemic.

Mr McNAMARA: Through Service Victoria the government has access to scalable, agile, modern digital and IT capabilities such as software engineers and developers, solution architects and customer experience designers. The importance of these capabilities was highlighted when Service Victoria was able to very quickly roll out new transactions to support the government's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. In 2021 Service Victoria rapidly delivered new digital solutions to enable QR check-ins, the border permits, tourism vouchers and, most recently, the application process for grants for outdoor dining so that businesses could get back on track quickly. In 2021 more than 146 million customers used the service to check in, and the Service Victoria mobile app was downloaded over 4 million times. The border entry permit service launched on 21 November, about a year ago, processed 3.3 million applications to enter Victoria, and the travel voucher service issued 160 000 travel vouchers, worth over \$32 million, starting from 14 December last year.

On 11 October this year Victoria became the first jurisdiction in Australia to integrate with the commonwealth systems to support the download of COVID-19 digital certificates to the Service Victoria app. That gives Victorians the option to store and display digital vaccination certificates using a reliable app that they trust, and it is an easy way for Victorians to check in and demonstrate their vaccination status. Since the launch more than

3.5 million certificates have been added to the Service Victoria app, demonstrating the scalability, reliability and robustness of that platform as a service provider back to citizens. The early launch of this capability ensured that many Victorians were able to download their certificate ahead of the easing of restrictions, which of course meant that we did not have a day one rush that may have caused us some concerns.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you again for your evidence. You would be aware of the Auditor-General's report into Service Victoria, and I am interested in understanding what government is doing to get more value out of Service Victoria.

Mr McNAMARA: Thank you for the question. In March 2021 the Victorian Auditor-General's Office tabled the report *Service Victoria: Digital Delivery of Government Services*. The report examined the implementation of Service Victoria, the DPC oversight of it and the benefits Service Victoria is delivering to government and the Victorian community. VAGO made recommendations to address a range of issues, including measurement of customer satisfaction, stakeholder engagement and the cost of transactions. DPC and Service Victoria have accepted all of the VAGO recommendations and are working together to implement the agreed management response to each recommendation. An action plan has been agreed by DPC and Service Victoria, including steps such as surveys of Service Victoria's agency partners and a commissioned review of Service Victoria's benefits measurement methodologies.

VAGO found that Service Victoria had demonstrated its ability to build and utilise its technology in a successful way and acknowledged the benefit to government of Service Victoria's repeatable and scalable digital platform. Some of the key findings of the report covered areas such as stakeholder engagement; annual financial benefit of the platform back to government; reporting and oversight; customer satisfaction metrics, as you would expect; government regulation—I will come back to that one in a second; and customer satisfaction baselining year on year.

There is a review at the moment of the *Service Victoria Act 2018* to look at how, post COVID, we can actually derive significant benefit from the investment in that platform through COVID going into the future years and look at amending the *Service Victoria Act* to support some of those broader contexts in the community, and we expect that in the coming months.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks again. For most of us the main interface or experience we have with the app is the QR codes, so I am interested in perhaps going into a little bit more detail about the Service Victoria app and the development of that QR code and how that has assisted in this pandemic response.

Mr McNAMARA: The 2020–21 state budget provided \$8.58 million over three years for DPC to deliver the digital visitation registration—which is a mouthful, but in short the QR code system—project design and implement the Victorian government QR code service for businesses to record and share attendance records for the purposes of contact tracing. DPC managed the delivery phase of the budget and on 28 January this year transitioned services to the Department of Health as the operating entity. As at 30 June 2021, \$5.6 million of the project funds had been expended. The government's Victorian QR code service supports government contact tracers to notify close contacts of positive cases to test and isolate. The service includes a number of things: the Service Victoria check-in app, which allows people to check in to participating venues by using their mobile phones to scan a QR code, which I am sure we are all very familiar with; the Service Victoria kiosk, which enables venue-assisted check-in; a business registration portal for business operators to access the service and manage their QR code posters; and the DVR visitation API that securely shares data between the service and health contact-tracing teams.

As at 18 October this year over 290 000 business operators had registered to use the service at over 600 000 locations, so it is proving very popular. Over 42 000 CPV operators, as an extension of the capability, registered to use this system, and well over half a billion successful check-ins have taken place to date.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you. In the short time I have left—not that short; the little bit of time I have left—I would like to understand a little bit more about the communications campaign that was undertaken during 2020–21 as part of the government's response to COVID-19, so I am interested in exploring the role that DPC had in relation to communications and what those focused on.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Ms Richards. I will ask Ms Allimonos to respond to that question, at least in part. You will appreciate the substantive comms works. In the time remaining perhaps just a summary, thank you, Vivien.

Ms ALLIMONOS: Thank you, Secretary. Thank you for your question. There were two phases of the advertising campaign undertaken by the Department of Premier and Cabinet in 2020–21 as part of a broader Victorian government response to COVID-19. The two phases were: phase 1, Staying Apart Keeps Us Together—and you might have recall of that messaging, which was a campaign that informed Victorians of physical distancing and other public health rules across Victoria. The campaign included television, digital, radio and print advertising, and materials were translated into 57 languages for Victoria’s culturally and linguistically diverse communities. This campaign ran between July and October 2020.

The second phase was a campaign that, again, you might recall titled Stay Safe Stay Open. This campaign focused on encouraging Victorians to stay safe by adhering to the COVID normal public health behaviours to help slow the spread of the virus as well as to promote ongoing adherence to restrictions in place, which varied across various stages of the campaign period. The campaign included messaging around the use of QR codes, which we just heard about, to support check-in at hospitality and other venues to assist our contact tracers. The campaign included radio; digital display and video; social media; print and out-of-home advertising, including posters and electronic signage. This paid advertising was supported by in-language assets, in the same number of languages as previously described, to support a culturally and linguistically diverse network of about 600 individuals, organisations and community bodies who did a lot of that interface contact and communications and used our materials via email and social media as well, and the Victorian Multicultural Commission contributed to that. So that campaign ran from November 2020 to June 2021.

Ms RICHARDS: Okay. Thank you very much. Thanks for your evidence, Deputy Secretary. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Richards. Mr Limbrick.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Secretary and team, for appearing today. My first question I think goes to Ms Houghton with regard to intergovernmental relations and the budget line item output on securing Victoria’s international interests. Would that be correct?

Ms HOUGHTON: That would be actually Mr Tim Ada.

Mr LIMBRICK: Sorry, I got that confused. So my understanding is that one of the memberships that we have is with the Australia India Institute. Yes? And that is part of what you oversee. I would like to try and clarify something that I was asking the Department of Health about on Monday. On 3 May this year the Australia India Institute wrote a blog entry about the dire situation in India and how they had been talking to the Australian government about sending medical equipment to India. Then on 6 May the *Hindustan Times* reported that the previous day a flight of equipment had been sent from Australia to India from the federal government. I think it was 1056 ventilators and 43 oxygen concentrators that had been sent and had arrived in Delhi, and that was very much appreciated. Also on that same day the Acting Premier made an announcement that Victoria would be sending ventilators to the stockpile, working with DFAT, but when I asked the health department about this on Monday they said that no ventilators had left the stockpile. So what actually happened there?

Mr ADA: Thanks for the question, Mr Limbrick. I can confirm, as you say, that the state did commit 1000 ventilators. The state was in the process of working with the commonwealth to transport those ventilators to India. They are reasonably delicate equipment. It took some time to work through, and indeed it was in the process of working through the best logistical arrangements when the Indian High Commission in early June confirmed that those ventilators were no longer required in India.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay. So India said they did not want them?

Mr ADA: Essentially the circumstances in India were improving and the Indian High Commission, which is based in Canberra, as you know, had alerted DFAT that no further medical consumables, including Victoria’s offer of ventilators, were required, so they were not sent.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay. All right. That solves that mystery. Fine. Thank you very much. Another question, and I think this might go to Mr Hemming, is a very simple question—I think we asked this at one of the other hearings—about whether parliamentary counsel had been assisting in drafting pandemic legislation during the current financial year. I was wondering, for the current bill before Parliament, had any of this work happened during the 2020–21 financial year?

Mr HEMMING: I would have to check, Mr Limbrick. I do not believe so.

Mr LIMBRICK: So work had not begun on it?

Mr HEMMING: Well, look, I would have to check. It is possible that some preliminary work might have commenced in the previous financial year—that is, before 1 July this year. But I would have to come back—and take that on notice.

Mr LIMBRICK: Would it be possible—yes. If I could get that on notice—

Mr HEMMING: Of course, yes, certainly.

Mr LIMBRICK: I would just be interested in when that work actually started and what sort of quantum it was.

Mr HEMMING: Yes, that is fine.

Mr LIMBRICK: That would be very helpful. Thank you. My next question—I am going all over the place today—I think would go back to Mr McNamara, Digital Victoria. One of the things in the questionnaire was around Victoria Together, and one of the outputs here talks about how Victoria Together each week reaches over a million people on social media. How is that actually measured? I went through Victoria Together's social media assets, and for the life of me I cannot figure out how it reaches a million people a week.

Mr McNAMARA: Victoria Together is an initiative that was put together by the government, or DPC on behalf of the government, to deliver digital content to Victorians through lockdown. It provides top digital content from leading cultural institutions, programs and organisations through a variety of channels: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and of course the websites. I do not actually know how that is measured. I will have to take that on notice if that is okay.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes, because if I go through Facebook, which is the biggest digital asset they have got, that I can see, it has got 32 000 followers. If I go through the last few posts, there is a video here about drinks; it has got 700 views. There is something about pies; it has got 30 views. I mean, I do not see how that can add up to a million people a week. I have quite a lot to do with social media, and reaching a million people is quite difficult. And I went through the YouTube channel as well. Most of the videos there were only getting a few hundred views. I cannot understand that. So if you could take that on notice, that would be great.

Mr MOULE: Mr Limbrick, we can certainly take that on notice. I might just add that, particularly in a live-viewing circumstance, you do not have the same sort of legacy data that allows you to see how many people liked or participated. So most of that will be where we have delivered a live event: people have watched either on Facebook at that time or particularly through YouTube, and you can see that data in real time.

Mr LIMBRICK: Is that a million a week? A million—that is a lot.

Mr MOULE: It is a lot, but it was actually a really well received initiative.

Mr LIMBRICK: The objective of this was, wasn't it, though, to keep people together during lockdown? If that is the case, I do not understand why it was not wound up at the end—or is it geared to wind up, because lockdown is finished now? My understanding is there was \$2.5 million budget allocated in the current financial year. Is that like an ongoing funding thing or is that going to end sometime this financial year?

Mr McNAMARA: Thanks for the question, Mr Limbrick. I think if we look at some of the examples that we used in that platform, and this may actually go to your earlier question, the Big Night In on behalf of the Arts Centre, the State of Music, both of those delivered live, and grants provided to content providers, I think it has actually proved to be a very popular platform for citizens and it is something potentially we might look at

continuing. It does promote content from operators within Victoria, supporting the Victorian economy. You have got the stand-up sessions, *Celebrity Sandwich*. There are a number of quite popular shows in there that have actually prove quite popular through lockdown and potentially citizens may want to see that continue post lockdown. In terms of where we host the platform or whether we administer that out of DPC, that remains to be seen. But I think we will take some citizen feedback as to what they would like to do with that platform or what they would like to do post lockdown.

Mr MOULE: And certainly, Mr Limbrick, when decisions were required in a state budget context for future funding the future was unknown.

Mr LIMBRICK: Yes.

Mr MOULE: We felt fairly confident that even if we progressed to a steady reopening the fillip that it had provided to many artists and performers, both through some grants that were part of the program but also through the content creation, would be a well worthwhile investment for the small amount of money throughout the course of this financial year.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. One of the other outcomes on the questionnaire was, as you mentioned, and I am just quoting from the questionnaire, it:

Created an income stream for Victorian content creators, including the provision of \$1.45 million in grants to 29 grassroots organisations.

What is the process through which these organisations get connected with Victoria Together and get access to these grants? How does that process actually work, and who are these organisations that we are talking about?

Mr McNAMARA: So there was \$1.4 million, as you say, in grants provided to content providers—local content providers I might add—just to support them through the lockdown period and keep them in active employment. The administration of those grants—I will have to actually take that on notice. I do not know how the actual process worked, but I do know it did support the local economy through a very difficult period for many providers of media and that type of entertainment.

Mr LIMBRICK: And are those grants going forward into the 2021–22 financial year? I am just wondering why there is a big difference between the budgets. The expenditure through the last financial year was \$4.3 million. The allocated budget for the current financial year is \$2.5 million. Is that because there are no grants associated with this now? I am just trying to figure out how much of that \$4.3 million is grants and how much of it is generating content and social media assets and things like that.

Mr McNAMARA: I will have to take on notice the breakdown of those costs, but having said that, the \$4.3 million will probably be representative of the program at the height of the lockdown. Going into this year, obviously tapering things out, we wanted to make sure that we have the ability, in case we have to go into any snap lockdowns or anything like that, to keep that platform active—

Mr LIMBRICK: God forbid.

Mr McNAMARA: and just make sure that we do not just drop it off the side of a cliff, because then we would not have it available to us if we had to go back into a lockdown situation for whatever reason.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay. You are saying it is like in a standby sort of mode?

Mr McNAMARA: Oh, no. It is continuing to be utilised and we are using that funding, as you would expect, appropriately. The future of that asset obviously is under review now, assuming we come out of lockdown now for good, in a permanent capacity, but we will have to look at what we do with that asset going forward. As I said, it was incredibly popular through the lockdown experience, and the establishment and distribution of digital content actually is now a mainstream way of interacting with citizens. Not everyone wants to go out to see a concert. Sometimes they might stay at home, so we will look at how we can use that asset more effectively going forward.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. Another thing which was touched on before was the Service Victoria app and how it started with widespread use due to the contact tracing. I think the app was around before the contact tracing, but it was not as widely used obviously. Now everyone has to use it in a way. At what point was

development started on integration of immunisation details into that app, because that is a relatively new function but clearly it could not have just been pulled out of thin air? It must have taken some time to develop that, or is this something that was planned? What I am getting at is: when was planning started to integrate that functionality into the application?

Mr McNAMARA: So actually, in my previous role at Services Australia we did administer the AIR database, which now underpins the majority of the vaccination data for government. So that work was done federally, and the federal government looks after the AIR database. The integration of the vaccination certificate into the app was I believe done this year. It was off the back of trying to find the simplest possible way for citizens to demonstrate their vaccination status, and the app was then decided as the most appropriate way to do that, through their QR code check-in and of course the appropriate security and data security that underpins that in an asset of that class for government.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you, and your—

Mr MOULE: Mr Limbrick—sorry to interrupt. Essentially the development of the technology, whether it is border permits or vaccination, followed the health directions. So once we were aware the health directions were moving in a certain direction, in a lot of circumstances there was quite rapid development required to then have those things available to citizens to use to fulfil the obligations under the directions.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. And your history with AIR would be very helpful for my next question. I note that there was a very big difference between what New South Wales did and what Victoria did with regard to integration with the federal database. New South Wales looked at an API to basically integrate in real time with the federal database; Victoria did something completely different—just to get an image of it, I think, or confirm that it is actually there and then put it into the app. What is the reasoning behind this difference in architecture? Is this, like, due to legal risk through accessing the AIR database? Because I am aware that the feds are pretty nervous about allowing states access to this database, for all sorts of reasons.

Mr McNAMARA: Actually, having been on both sides of the fence, I think the Victorian experience in terms of integration back into the AIR database was significantly simpler than the New South Wales experience, simply because of the extent of legacy architecture that sits in that NSW context. So the Service Victoria set-up is a far more modern capability. That application does not have the extent of that legacy, so the integration was actually significantly simpler and actually was completed quicker than the New South Wales instance.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank you. And as you would be aware, under the federal *Australian Immunisation Register Act* there are very serious consequences for using the protected data without authorisation. The Service Victoria app uses protected data. Is that legal protection dependent on the current emergency powers? Because it is using derivative data that is derived from the registry, is that dependent on the emergency powers at the moment?

Mr McNAMARA: No.

Mr LIMBRICK: Because there is no other legislation that would authorise that, as far as I am aware.

Mr McNAMARA: No, no. Service Victoria operates under some of the strictest privacy rules in the Victorian public sector. There are a number of them. The *Service Victoria Act 2018*, as you mentioned, introduced strong penalties for unauthorised access, use or disclosure of data or information, including up to two years imprisonment. Service Victoria only collects the minimum amount of information required of app users to support contact tracing and proof of vaccination, and Service Victoria undertakes regular assessments to make sure privacy requirements, including those under the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and the *Service Victoria Act*, are followed. And Service Victoria collects, stores and disposes of customer data in line with the *Victorian Protective Data Security Standards*. So we take it pretty seriously.

Mr LIMBRICK: What about the AIR Act 2015, I think it is? Because, from memory, section 22 outlines the authorisations under which you can use derived protected data from the registry, and I cannot see the authorisation that we could use Service Victoria's app other than through emergency mandates, is that right: like, through emergency orders, is that what is giving it the legal authority to incorporate into the Service Victoria app at the moment?

Mr McNAMARA: Mr Limbrick, I think the key point here is that the individual is completely in control of the data that is extracted from AIR. In fact they essentially, through the transaction with the database, download it to their phone. It is not stored by Service Victoria. The user can remove it from their phone and therefore its representation in the app at any time, but the data itself is owned and held by the individual on the device that they are using for that.

Mr LIMBRICK: So you have intentionally not stored it anywhere—to avoid that problem?

Mr MOULE: And there are multiple good reasons for that, one being data security, so you are not putting everyone's vaccination certificates in another database that is not AIR—you would avoid doing that—but also in order to make sure that the control of that piece of health information, as it is, is completely with the individual and their use of their device.

Mr LIMBRICK: And just quickly, how do you ensure that the people that are verifying this, like at a shop or an event or something—they are effectively using data derived from AIR—are not breaching these regulations by using that protected data?

Mr MOULE: In the 2 seconds remaining: we can provide you with that advice, Mr Limbrick.

Mr LIMBRICK: Okay. I would be very interested in that. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Limbrick. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Yes, Secretary and department officials. So I think it would be useful to explore the COVID-19 communications campaign a little further. I know we got to the focus of it, but I think it would be useful to know the actual impact of these campaigns and the response from audiences and how this was evaluated as well.

Ms ALLIMONOS: Thank you for your question. The advertising campaigns were part of a broader suite of communications from the Victorian government and have been essential throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to keep Victorians informed about how to protect themselves and their community, to promote resilience and social cohesion, and to keep the public up to date about a rapidly changing public health situation. The impact of these campaigns as well as the broader government communications is evident in the widespread adoption of COVID-safe behaviours—so this is a very broadly compliant state—by Victorians throughout the pandemic period. Victorians in general have worn masks when they have needed to, including today, have observed the varying health orders that have been in place and are regularly checking in at public venues and events to help contact tracing efforts.

One example I can give you, and it relates to check-ins, is that we saw an impact of the campaign. So in May 2021 the Service Vic app was seeing about 390 000 check-ins a week. We started the campaign messaging that focused on check-ins as part of that Stay Safe Stay Open campaign, and we saw a really sharp uptick to more than 1.4 million check-ins in the first week of June. So you can see there you can track the impact of those communications, and that is just one example in influencing Victorians to adopt COVID-safe behaviours.

In terms of its evaluation, the evaluation is ongoing, in that the campaigns are still active, so there will be a significant end-of-project evaluation. But what we are doing is we are using very rapid various data points—for example, if there is an outbreak in a particular community, we would use that data to help us support ongoing adjustments and adaptations of campaigns. So overall the compliance and adherence to the advice provided by campaigns has been the point of evaluation for us.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. And if I can just take this a little further still, does the DPC have evidence about the public health impacts of these campaigns in controlling the spread of COVID-19 in Victoria?

Ms ALLIMONOS: It is very hard to extricate the campaign component from the wider measures, so it is just one of the methods that contribute to the outcome.

Ms TAYLOR: Okay, so difficult to extrapolate because there is so much to it; is that what you are saying?

Ms ALLIMONOS: Exactly right.

Ms TAYLOR: Okay. Now, I think it would be also helpful for the committee to have some further detail on some of the key aspects of the campaign as well.

Ms ALLIMONOS: What do you mean by key aspects—in terms of what it focused on or—

Ms TAYLOR: Yes. But perhaps a little further than that, because I know it was a pretty far reaching sort of campaign because of the serious nature of the issues.

Ms ALLIMONOS: Indeed. So public health communications are one of the really important measures in terms of managing any public health situation. So DPC was responsible for the broader messaging to start building people's awareness. So if you think about the journey that we have all been on as a state, initial parts of the campaigns were: what do we do, what does social distancing mean, what does that 1.5 metre rule look like? So we started at a very basic understanding of what those public health measures needed to be and built up a very deep community understanding of those public health requirements and behaviours that were needed. As that happened, we needed to move to other parts of communication: what it meant to stay at home, which was very socially challenging in terms of many celebrations that people would be missing out on. So there were campaigns often, for Mother's Day or a religious high holiday where people would want to gather, where we would focus on particular reasons for not doing that and adhering to public health orders—very hard to do socially but important to sort of support the management of the public health initiative.

So they are the kinds of things that we were doing, but I think it had very many variations. It was one of those big campaigns where the situation was so fast-moving and dynamic that there were very many iterations. The campaign really adapted to the requirements of the week—whether it was updates to the public health directions, so if there were restrictions in place and there was a 9.00 pm curfew order or any of those things—so that we would very quickly be able to update the public information so people had access to that information. So they are the key things. I think it is also important to note that we also had a strong regional focus as well. So we very much looked at regional media outlets to support that message across the state.

Mr MOULE: Ms Taylor, I think that there are some really enduring learnings for us from a government communications perspective in relation to all of the activity that has been necessary during COVID. Pre COVID, government had a pretty sophisticated approach to promote material in various languages and engagement with communities, but what was required with COVID was that we were perhaps talking to 50 people at a time or in some circumstances even going to door to door with engagement, alongside the communications that we would all have seen. I think that has helped all departments who are involved in that, and it really was all of them. Whether it was public transport, a business issue or more that was specifically in the health domain, it has really helped government to understand in a very granular way so many more channels and methods of engagement and communication. No campaigns previously had needed to get to that level. So I think there are some really enduring things across the board, and comms campaigning is one of those, that will be useful for government going forward in support of communicating to all Victorians essential messaging from government.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. Very helpful. Now, if I can refer you to page 49 of the questionnaire and relating to the establishment of the Breakthrough Victoria Fund 'to drive investment in translational research, innovation and commercialisation', can you please provide the committee with an update on the establishment of Breakthrough Victoria Pty Ltd.

Mr MOULE: Thanks, Ms Taylor. I will ask Mr Ada to respond to that question.

Mr ADA: Thank you for the question, Ms Taylor. Further to the Secretary's remarks in his presentation, Breakthrough Victoria was a \$2 billion commitment over 10 years in the 2020–21 budget that was handed down last year. It has a focus on five key sectors, including health and life sciences, agrifood, advanced manufacturing, clean economy and digital technologies. So the intention is the fund will focus in those areas. There is also an expectation that the funds investments—or most of them at least—will be anchored in key innovation and employment precincts to drive those agglomeration benefits that come from academic and industry interactions at place, and Melbourne and Victoria, and indeed parts of regional Victoria, have a number of those precincts that would be a focus for the fund's investments.

That is a little bit about the fund. I am happy to answer any more questions you might have about that, but as to the activities that DPC led during 2020–21, it first and foremost coordinated a process to support the

government to identify the optimum legal and commercial structure to deliver on the fund's objectives. That resulted, as the Secretary said, in Breakthrough Victoria Pty Ltd being established as a proprietary limited company under the commonwealth *Corporations Act*. It was also declared as a state-owned company under the *State Owned Enterprises Act*, and indeed the company constitution was tabled in Parliament earlier this year. An interim board chaired by former Premier the Honourable John Brumby, MP, with three other highly qualified candidates in the innovation, technology and commercialisation space was established, and indeed there is work afoot, following a public process, to recruit further qualified members to the Breakthrough Victoria board. Mr Grant Dooley was recruited following a global search to be the permanent CEO of Breakthrough Victoria. Mr Dooley is a former trade official and diplomat with significant recent experience as a fund manager based in Singapore, so we believe he is highly qualified to lead the operational aspects of the Breakthrough Victoria Fund moving forward.

Lastly, the Secretary also referred to the interim board overseeing the development of an investment plan that will guide the fund's operations, and indeed that was one of the BP3 measures in the 2020–21 budget that was acquitted. Government, under the company constitution, has had the chance to see and endorse that plan, and that is guiding the fund's operations moving forward.

Ms TAYLOR: . Excellent. And in relation to the Breakthrough Victoria Fund, has DPC conducted any analysis of the projected outcomes from the fund for the state?

Mr ADA: Yes. DPC did do some work during 2020-21 to model the projected economic impact and job creation outcomes from an investment of this type. We engaged a specialist professional services firm with modelling experience to do that work for us. That modelling was based on a range of assumptions, and that modelling showed that the fund with the likely investment profile, as I spoke to earlier, would likely deliver about 15 000 new FTEs here in Victoria over the 10 years of the investment. A number of those assumptions were also based on previous longitudinal evaluations of similar science, technology and commercialisation investments that the state has made over the last two decades. So we have a level of confidence in the assumptions underpinning that modelling.

Ms TAYLOR: Okay. Very good. And are you able to profile some of the investments that the Breakthrough Victoria Fund will be spent on?

Mr ADA: Ms Taylor, it is probably a matter for the board and the company, which operates at arm's length to government. I would expect that the company will have more to say about its first investments in the near future.

Ms TAYLOR: Right. Fair enough. If I can refer you to page 20 of the questionnaire, can you explain how VPS workforce hubs assist with creating a flexible and inclusive workplace—jumping around there a bit, sorry about that.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Ms Taylor. During the last year, so during 2020–21, a lot of work was done to consider what our workforce might look like as we emerged from aspects of the pandemic, so essentially return to office, for both public sector workers and also in the private sector. In Victoria at least I think there has been a fairly dramatic shift in both employer and employee attitudes to attendance at the office. From a public service perspective we still consider it to be an essential part of being a public servant, but the opportunity to really capture and embed some of the benefits of flexible working arrangements I think is a really significant opportunity that we should grab hold of.

One of those measures related to the trialling of some regional suburban hubs for VPS staff to work from. Essentially there are a lot of public servants who travel past many other government offices to make their way to the CBD every day to be in their offices, and it may well be convenient, and in order to deliver flexibility, that on one or two days a week it might be useful for them to work from an office that is in fact nearby and easier for them to access, noting that not everyone has the type of environment at home that is conducive to working. We have all had to make do, but some people have been making do sitting at the dining table with their kids and their partner and all sorts of things trying to get that work done. So the notion that a person in that circumstance could still be able to operate very locally—whether that supports picking up the kids or doing some other things that help to achieve a work-life balance—and not have to travel every day for an hour to get to the office but in fact go 15 minutes down the road to a hub and make that part of their flexible working

arrangement may well mean that over the course of any given week they spend all five days in an office, but what you have afforded them is the opportunity to do some of that at a very local level rather than their needing to commute to their substantive office all of the time. So sites are being established. Money is set aside for that. It is a program that we are going to need to evaluate again as we emerge from current restrictions, but in the brief glimpse that we had of usage earlier in the year we did find that those hubs had good patronage. There were strong bookings for them; people were making use of them. We are optimistic about what any review might find for them, and they may well become a key feature of government operations going forward.

Ms TAYLOR: And when you talk about a review, I think in the questionnaire it mentioned that there was a trial of VPS staff using the government hubs. Is that what you are referring to?

Mr MOULE: Yes. The leases in the facilities that we are using for these gov hubs are reasonably short term, so they tend to be just a couple of years. That will allow us to evaluate usage: make sure they are fit for purpose from both the employer's and the employee's perspective. As I said, we had a short period earlier in this calendar year where there was a six- or eight-week period when there were very few restrictions. People were able to attend the office. Even during that short period we did see pretty good demand for those things, but I think we will not have a full appreciation and a full understanding of their utility until we move now beyond this 90 per cent mark, potentially not being required to wear masks in offices going forward. So subject to those types of health directions I think we will be in a much better place to understand what the more permanent usage of those facilities will be.

Ms TAYLOR: Okay. Very good. On pages 7 and 8 of the questionnaire it states that 2569 jobs have been created from the Victorian Jobs and Investment Fund. Can you tell the committee about the investment in this initiative?

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Ms Taylor. I will defer to Mr Ada.

Mr ADA: Thank you again for the question. The Victorian Jobs and Investment Fund is essentially a framework made up of a number of funding streams that invest in footloose private sector investment projects that deliver capital investment here in Victoria and jobs that might not have otherwise come to Victoria and/or as quickly. That is its central purpose. DPC has responsibility for administering the Victorian Jobs and Investment Fund. It has guidelines that have been approved by government, but the individual streams are administered by a number of relevant departments and agencies across government., most noticeably DPC; the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions; and Invest Victoria, which is in the Treasury portfolio. As you said, DPC exceeded both BP3 measures in 2020–21. Those measures relate to job creation arising from investments from the fund, and also in new capital investment that BP3 measure was also exceeded in the 2020–21 financial year.

Ms TAYLOR: Thank you. And with 25 seconds, I might leave it there.

Mr ADA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Taylor. Mrs McArthur.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Secretary and team. Secretary, in your opening mission statement you refer to supporting the people of Victoria and that your core values involve responsiveness, integrity, impartiality, accountability and leadership. Under the Victorian public service code of conduct your role is to ensure that your department and the broader public service remains impartial and makes decisions free of prejudice or favouritism. So what actions have you personally taken in the last financial year in the pursuit of this aim?

Mr MOULE: Thanks, Mrs McArthur. I appreciate your question. I think what you have just reflected on from my presentation and in your other remarks is absolutely at the core of responsibilities vested in me but in all public servants—to apply those standards in the work that we do every day. I know at a personal level within DPC during my time as Secretary, which accounted for about seven months of the period of time in question, at regular, pretty much monthly, meetings that we have had I am not sure how many times I might have referred to the code of conduct, the importance of adherence to standards. And in fact if I had it in front of me, I would read you the first message I sent as Secretary of the department, which really talked about the bedrock of good public service, the importance of that and even how in what was a difficult period last year it

was all the more important for us to make sure that we were cognisant of those things, and not just cognisant but apply those things in our everyday work. So I would say to you, Mrs McArthur, that that has been a very strong theme of mine in the time that I have been Secretary of DPC.

Mrs McARTHUR: Have you reprimanded anyone in your department for undertaking explicit political activity?

Mr MOULE: No, I have not. And I am not aware of that having occurred at other levels within the department either.

Mrs McARTHUR: And are you aware of any of those activities occurring before your time as Secretary?

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur, I would remind you we are talking about the financial and performance outcomes for the 2020–21 year, so perhaps you would like to relate your questions to the relevant period, please.

Mrs McARTHUR: Well, it is relevant, because if public servants are doing political activity in this financial period we are talking about—

The CHAIR: So that everyone at the table understands that your questions are relevant to the period, I would ask you to specify that, please.

Mrs McARTHUR: The period before Mr Moule took over, which was still in the financial period we are talking about, Chair. Thank you very much.

Mr MOULE: No. I am not aware of that having occurred.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you. How does the department draw the line between activities, programs and initiatives that help the government achieve its objectives and lead the politically neutral public service versus those that help the Premier in a political sense?

Mr MOULE: Again this is an issue that I think goes to the heart of the performance of the public service. Clearly any government of the day comes to office, and while it is in office it has commitments that it may have made during an election cycle or announcements that it makes throughout the course of its term to deliver projects and programs. One of the functions of the public service is to analyse those, consider the implementation of them and provide any advice to government which might point to challenges or difficulties in delivering those. Government then considers the advice that the service has provided. Either they change the nature of the project or the program based on the advice that has been provided, and then final decisions are made by ministers or the Premier appropriately about implementation. Once you cross the threshold of those processes having been concluded and the task is to implement that decision, then it is the public service role then to get on with delivering those things.

Mrs McARTHUR: Your predecessor, Mr Eccles, resigned four months into the financial year after misleading an inquiry. Apart from the monthly briefings you referred to or whatever they were, what measures have you put in place to ensure you do not repeat the same misconduct?

Mr MOULE: Mrs McArthur, I would start by saying that Mr Eccles made statements at the time of his resignation which I do not think would be consistent with the narrative that you just provided in your question. Notwithstanding that, I think that one of the key outcomes of the Coate inquiry that was directed to the VPSC commissioner was in fact to issue further guidance to public service heads, secretaries in particular, about aspects that had been canvassed throughout the course of the inquiry. There was a commitment by the commissioner to do that in the third quarter of this calendar year, which is obviously beyond the term of this inquiry, but that guidance has now been issued by the VPSC. The commissioner has presented to secretaries on that material and, as I understand it—again, it is in this financial year—is undertaking a concerted effort to communicate that material, because it is obviously relevant to secretaries in how they perform their jobs. But the fundamental principles that are part of that guidance in fact guide the work that public servants do every day.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you. A career public servant told the *Age*, of all papers, that the Victorian public service has, quote:

... gotten markedly more political and more blatantly so over the last eight to 10 years ...

and that would include the financial period we are looking at. So although you are new to this position—and we wish you well—would you say this view is reflective of many Victorians' view across your department and the broader public service?

Mr MOULE: Mrs McArthur, as you would be aware, I was interviewed by the journalist as part of that article, and very little of the 45-minute conversation that I had with him is reflected in the final article. As I conveyed to him—

Mrs McARTHUR: Join our world.

Mr MOULE: Yes. It is a reality of the worlds we live in. What I said to him, and what I absolutely believe to be true, is that the culture of the public service in Victoria is very strong. And I think that that is a really significant and enduring feature of good government in Victoria. The assertions that were made by unnamed sources within those stories—people will have different perspectives on these things. But in my experience both in this role and in previous roles—and I have been in and out of the Victorian public service for about 20-odd years; I have also worked in the South Australian public service—I have a very strong view that the service performs its duties in the way that it should.

Mrs McARTHUR: Okay. So you would reject the view that many Victorians think the public service has been politicised over this period?

Mr MOULE: I cannot speak for many Victorians, but I certainly know that from my perspective the culture of the Victorian public service, particularly as it relates to the code of conduct and the values that you referenced earlier, is very, very strong.

Mrs McARTHUR: Good. Could you describe the relationship that your department has had with the Premier's private office over the last financial year?

Mr MOULE: In what sense, Mrs McArthur?

Mrs McARTHUR: Has it been good, bad, indifferent, perfect, imperfect?

Mr MOULE: It has been not out of the ordinary. I am not sure how to answer that. There have been no specific issues or outstanding—

Mrs McARTHUR: It is a cooperative relationship?

Mr MOULE: Well, it is a functional relationship, and that is the way it should be. I think that we have our role to play; premiers and ministers' officers have their role to play in the system. I would certainly say in my experience it is a respectful relationship, and I think regardless of our circumstances we would all prefer to work in a positive environment with those we work with and for and around. So in that respect I would say it is a respectful relationship and both parties are very cognisant of the differences in the roles that they fulfil.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you. Under the initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic the Victorian public service responded using a system which was apparently called the Mission Coordination Committee, chaired by your predecessor, comprised of departmental secretaries and other senior bureaucrats. Did this forum remain in existence during the remainder of the financial year, whether or not under another name or a different form, and if not, when did it cease to operate?

Mr MOULE: I would need to get the specific date, if that is what you would like, Mrs McArthur, but as we concluded the second wave and at the time that I commenced as Secretary—those things were at about the same time—the Mission Coordination Committee ceased to operate, as did the crisis coordination cabinet subcommittee, which had been operating at that time. So both of those meeting forums that had been in place during the height of the outbreak during 2020 concluded at about the time that I commenced.

Mrs McARTHUR: Mr Moule, the Premier stated that a conclusion of the Coate inquiry was that it revealed the need for bureaucrats to brief their ultimate boss. For the remainder of the financial year after the Coate inquiry, as the department that leads the public service, what specific actions have you and your department

taken to ensure that public servants are responsible to the minister under which they work and not bureaucrats from other departments or the Premier?

Mr MOULE: Sorry, could you repeat that question? I am not sure what that—

Mrs McARTHUR: Sure. For the remainder of the financial year after the Coate inquiry you are the department that leads the public service. What specific actions have you and your department taken to ensure that public servants are responsible to the minister under which they work and not the bureaucrats from other departments or the Premier?

Mr MOULE: Specifically as it relates to the Coate inquiry, as I referenced earlier, the recommendation from the inquiry that deals with the matters that I think you are referring to was directed to the public service commissioner and was a recommendation which he and the government accepted that he undertake a piece of work to provide guidance material to secretaries on their engagement with ministers and advising ministers. The commissioner, in undertaking that work, both sought external-to-government former public servants and former government representatives as well as engaged with the secretaries before independently, as is his role, concluding that work and issuing that guidance. That has really been the mainstay product that has emerged from the Coate inquiry. Obviously, having had periods of engagement with the commissioner, both with my secretary colleagues but also in the relationship that DPC has with the commission, we have been very cognisant of the direction that that work was heading in.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you. Can you tell me what contact the Premier has had with the Chinese consulate or a representative from the Chinese communist government regarding the federal government's termination of the two Belt and Road agreements that Victoria signed?

The CHAIR: Do you mean, Mrs McArthur, in reference to the financial year 2020–21?

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes.

Mr MOULE: We may need to take that question on notice. I might just defer to Mr Ada.

Mr ADA: Thank you for your question. Victoria was advised of the invalidation of the two agreements you spoke about by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade just before that invalidation was made public. Victoria took steps to then advise the relevant parties to those four agreements, as it were, which in the case of the agreements you mentioned involves the Chinese government. As to who had those conversations and what role the Premier had, if any, we will have to take that on notice if that is okay.

Mrs McARTHUR: Please take it on notice. You do not have any idea who might have advised the Chinese government of the termination of those two agreements?

Mr ADA: At risk of misleading you, I just need to confirm with the committee back in writing what role, if any, the department played and what role the Premier or his office played.

Mrs McARTHUR: Did the department have any role in advising the Chinese government?

Mr ADA: Can we commit to coming back to you in writing? We will take that question on notice.

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes. We will look forward to your response. Thank you very much. Did you perhaps brief the Premier of any contact with the Chinese government consulate or a representative from the Chinese government relating to that decision of the termination?

Mr ADA: Sorry, can you repeat your question, Mrs McArthur?

Mrs McARTHUR: Did the Department of Premier and Cabinet have any role in briefing the Premier or have any contact with the Chinese government or a consular representative from the Chinese government regarding that decision? Did you provide any brief to the Premier?

Mr ADA: I just do not recall a specific sequence of events around that time, Mrs McArthur, and we can include that in our response back to the committee.

Mrs McARTHUR: If you can provide that, we would be most grateful.

Secretary, if I can ask about the Victorian government Cyber Incident Response Service. Obviously Eastern Health suffered a major cyber attack during the reporting period. Can you detail which other departments or agencies were also subject to a cyber attack which shut down their network during the reporting period?

Mr MOULE: I think that we can, Mrs McArthur, where any of that material is not commercially sensitive. As I alluded to in my opening presentation, there were about 900 cyber incidents that that team supported broad public sector entities in response to. Obviously the ones that are far more dramatic, like the one that you have referenced, would be known. Many others do not become known, and some are serious and some are detected before they become significant issues. But I would be happy to provide that detail that we have.

Mrs McARTHUR: So kind. I would be grateful. For these serious cyber attacks, what was the country of origin for the attack at Eastern Health?

Mr MOULE: I need to take that on notice.

Mrs McARTHUR: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr MOULE: Noting that in this environment there are state actors. There are also individual or other group actors that are not necessarily nation-states that are involved in such activities. For some people, it is a way that they seek to extort money.

Mrs McARTHUR: Okay. Thank you. Excuse me if I mispronounce a word here. With reference to the Taungurung Land and Waters Council—I may have mispronounced it—native title claim approved by the Victorian government and overturned in the courts, how much has the government spent on legal fees to defend its now overturned position on that council's native title claim?

Ms PATIRA: Native title is a unit that sits within the Department of Justice and Community Safety, so that would be appropriately addressed to them.

Mrs McARTHUR: Has your department been tasked with reviewing any of these processes supporting native title claims and ensuring natural justice for the Aboriginal clans?

Ms PATIRA: When it comes to the Taungurung matter, it is worth noting that the particular decision was a review of the native title registration process rather than a question of correct group or correct process.

Mrs McARTHUR: And would you perhaps in the essence of time be able to provide us with a costing of that review?

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs McArthur. Your time has expired. Mr Richardson.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Secretary and department officials, for joining us today. Can I take you back, Secretary, just to pages 7 and 8 of the questionnaire and the discussion with Ms Taylor around the Victorian Jobs and Investment Fund. I am wondering for the committee's benefit if you could please provide further information about the types of roles and the types of industries these jobs were created in.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Richardson. I would defer to Mr Ada.

Mr ADA: Thanks, Mr Richardson. Just to give you some examples, many of the investments through the Victorian Jobs and Investment Fund in 2020–21 were for businesses in the broader technology, ICT, advanced manufacturing space. Indeed a number of funds were made available to attract film and related gaming endeavours. It is a highly competitive space and Victoria obviously has a great competitive advantage, but sometimes incentives are required to secure those projects, that investment and those jobs in Victoria. That gives you just some examples of the sorts of industries which were a focus for the funding in 2020–21. As to a more specific breakdown, we could provide that on notice.

Mr RICHARDSON: Yes. That is fantastic. Obviously acknowledging as well the COVID recovery space, would those areas be quite significant into the forward estimates as well in terms of that support, if that is provided on notice, or have you got any further comments there?

Mr ADA: Yes. So investment attraction has been a pursuit of the state of Victoria for many, many years. It has continued at pace through the pandemic. Indeed, as I said to Ms Taylor's question, exceeding those BP3 measures in 2020–21 was a great outcome for Victoria, recognising that many businesses were not in a position to invest to the extent that they would have. It, though, has just been one plank of the state's broader support for the business community. Indeed I imagine the committee talked at some length with Mr Phemister and his department the other day about all of the various business support that has been provided specifically for supporting businesses during this very challenging time. Again, if it was of interest, we could provide more information about that, Mr Richardson.

Mr RICHARDSON: Fantastic. I might turn now, Secretary, to the landmark and very important mental health royal commission, and I have got just a couple of questions in this space in relation to the work of the department. In your presentation you referenced the role of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, implying the ongoing coordination of those reforms—the important 65 recommendations and their subparts. I am wondering for the committee's benefit if you could describe what the Department of Premier and Cabinet's role is in delivering these reforms.

Mr MOULE: Thank you, Mr Richardson. I will ask Deputy Secretary Houghton, who leads that work for us at DPC, to respond to your question.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you.

Ms HOUGHTON: Thank you. Yes, so on 2 March 2021 the final report of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System was tabled. Before that there was an interim report, and in the lead-up to that interim report the Department of Premier and Cabinet was the chair of an IDC, which was whole of government, to really bring knowledge of how mental health impacted and wellbeing impacted various different portfolios. So we were bringing in and renewing our portfolio interests whilst the royal commission was doing its role.

When the interim report was handed down, we did a government response, knowing that the government has committed to implementing all the recommendations of the royal commission, and then there was a budgetary process. That budget was \$868.6 million in the 2020–21 state budget, which was allocated to the interim report findings—so through our traditional role advising into budget and ERC processes with the Department of Treasury and Finance, really working through with the Department of Health, which is the lead department in most of the recommendations, how to sculpt our response in a budgetary sense to those recommendations.

When the royal commission report was then handed down—again through a lead role but now definitely partnering with the Department of Health as the lead department in the portfolio, really working with them on the various recommendations for how to build a system that was broken but also provide outcomes for people who were suffering at the same time, creating that dynamic of building the system and co-designing with lived experience and really picking up the very strong theme of that through the royal commission. So it is multiple different ways that the Department of Health is leading that implementation, and through that, again through a budgetary process, designing the mechanism of the mental health levy into budget and then creating the \$3.8 billion of investment over the forwards to start to implement the recommendations of the royal commission.

Mr RICHARDSON: And obviously these landmark reforms and the support they will provide to the Victorian community will be delivered over a long period of time. You are talking about that systemic reform piece. I am wondering if you can provide further information on what this investment includes and what are the outcomes Victorians can expect.

Ms HOUGHTON: Yes, happy to. So I will start with the interim findings—as I have said, \$868.6 million to implement the interim findings. Of that there is \$492 million for 120 acute mental health beds in Geelong, Epping, Sunshine and Melbourne; \$21 million for suicide prevention and follow-up care through the HOPE engagement service; \$19 million for 35 acute treatment beds for public mental health patients in private health

services; and then, as I alluded to before, \$16 million to support Victorians with lived experience of mental illness to use their expertise in building the new system.

So the key outcomes from this investment to 30 June 2021 include workforce initiatives, so building the pipeline of workers, including funding for 124 postgrad mental health nurse scholarships, 29 junior medical officer positions and 110 full-time equivalent graduate mental health nurse positions in 2020–21. The capital build for the 120 beds, as I mentioned before, is underway, with construction having commenced on four sites, and then six of the nine new HOPE—the hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement—sites commenced operations. Those operations have commenced in Shepparton, Epping, Heidelberg, Melbourne Health, Mildura and Broadmeadows, with planning for the remaining sites underway.

It is important to note that while that outcome was happening through the interim report findings, obviously the pandemic was happening at the same time, so to the impacts of mental health through the pandemic the government also allocated \$245 million for the immediate needs. So whilst building a system to improve it we were actually investing and responding to action, particularly to help students. I think there was \$28.5 million for students struggling with their mental health. And in the business support package it included \$26 million for mental health support for businesses who had the compounding impacts of business on pause and having to pay their bills. So that was a really important point through the pandemic, whilst we have this historic and very enduring reform to implement.

Mr RICHARDSON: I am just interested in the measurables of that as well. I think one significant hallmark of the recommendations is not only the investment in the structural forms but the accountability each year. What role is the Department of Premier and Cabinet playing in that yearly audit to ensure—a bit like the bushfires royal commission—that we are on track and meeting those expectations into the future?

Ms HOUGHTON: The royal commission was really clear, I think, in the governance set-up of how does government set itself up to be accountable, how does it set it up to know what parts of government are doing what. So from the royal commission we are setting up the governance as recommended by the royal commission in terms of a cabinet committee, in terms of—Jeremi leads the Victorian secretaries board on mental health and wellbeing support. We have two committees which I co-chair with the Department of Health: one with the mental health and wellbeing IDC as well as a suicide prevention IDC—again co-chaired. So we are building that architecture of governance within government, and the Department of Health is leading the framework, the outcomes framework and performance framework, that will be enduring across the reforms.

The royal commission has created a commission role that will then make government accountable for delivering the recommendations of the royal commission, and that will come I think through legislation once that is ready for Parliament to consider. So all the architecture and the foundations of setting ourselves up as well as setting out the accountabilities and making government accountable to them are in train.

Mr RICHARDSON: Just finally on this section, have there been any approaches—learning from the Victorian experience and the work that has been done in this financial period and the outcomes more broadly—with the commonwealth or other states and jurisdictions, given how significant the mental health royal commission reform piece is?

Ms HOUGHTON: Yes. It is a constant conversation on multiple fronts—so obviously through the pandemic our conversations across other governments in terms of their experience and what they are seeing in terms of particularly young people and how they are dealing with that. There was a national pandemic plan which the Department of Health co-led with the commonwealth that was released for mental health. We are at the moment working through with the commonwealth national funding agreements and bilateral funding agreements. I think the key learning is: in those conversations we have a plan. We are sort of leading the country in the sense of this is a plan to create a system, and a lot of the conversations across jurisdictions are learning from where we are at at the moment.

Mr RICHARDSON: I think not reinventing the wheel as well—where Victoria stands and then what could benefit all Australians from the lived experience of the Victorian royal commission, and then the keenness of the commonwealth to be in that space and what that funding looks like into the future.

Ms HOUGHTON: Yes, absolutely. And I think the number of social reforms that the government is undertaking at the moment have so many interconnections with mental health. The housing and the big build

housing reform is such an underpinning and foundation for improved mental health for all people in Victoria. That is also a conversation across governments, in the conversations that I have from an intergovernmental perspective, of a stable house that you know you can go into—that you can then go to your appointments, you can travel to and from and you can get a job because you have a house and a home. They are all so fundamental to the reforms we are undertaking.

Mr RICHARDSON: I appreciate that evidence. It must be a really rewarding part of the work that is done for such a critical area of Victoria's mental health and wellbeing journey. So thanks very much for that.

Secretary, just in the final question I have got before we wrap up I want to take you to the 2020–21 budget paper—page 83 of budget paper 3, if you followed that, Secretary.

Mr MOULE: Page 83.

Mr RICHARDSON: Budget paper 3 of 83—all the threes—provides a significant investment towards 'Melbourne Arts Precinct Transformation', and I am wondering for the committee's benefit if you could update the committee on what stage the project is in.

Mr MOULE: I might defer to Mr Ada on that.

Mr ADA: Sorry, Mr Richardson, could you just—

Mr MOULE: Eighty-three.

Mr RICHARDSON: I am really sorry about that. So we are in 2020–21—I know I am in that year—budget paper 3, page 83. In that section it provided a significant investment towards the Melbourne arts precinct transformation. I am just wondering, for the committee's benefit, if you could provide an update on what stage the project is in.

Mr ADA: Bear with me.

Mr MOULE: Mr Ada may be able to provide an update. It is a project that is being led by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, but we may have a perspective on that.

Mr ADA: Thank you, Mr Richardson. Sorry for the confusion and the time that I took to come to your question. The Victorian government did make a commitment in the budget of November last year, the 2020–21 budget, of \$1.46 billion in phase one of the Melbourne arts precinct transformation. It will be Australia's largest cultural infrastructure project and will reinforce Melbourne and the state's reputation as Australia's arts and cultural capital. Phase one of the project does a number of different things, and it is intended over time to be the first phase of subsequent phases. Phase one includes a new 18 000-square-metre immersive public garden, including space for outdoor art and performance; the NGV Contemporary, which will be a new gallery dedicated to contemporary art and design and said to be the largest of its kind in Australia; and the third pillar of phase one relates to new connections and shared underground service infrastructure for the precinct, critical maintenance work for the Arts Centre Melbourne and planning work for phase two, which I indicated will be a subsequent phase to build on phase one. Hopefully that answers your question.

Mr RICHARDSON: Yes, fantastic. I might leave it there, Chair. That is my section of questions done. Thank you very much for presenting today.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Richardson. That concludes the questions and the time we have set aside for consideration with your department today. So we thank you very much for appearing before the committee. The committee will follow up on any questions which were taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request. Thank you to everyone who has appeared before the committee today, as well to Hansard and the secretariat and the cleaning, security and catering staff that continue to support us. The committee will resume consideration tomorrow. Thank you for your time. I declare the committee adjourned.

Committee adjourned.