

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Inquiry into the 2023–24 Budget Estimates
7 June 2023

PORTFOLIO: MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

Witnesses:

- The Hon. Colin Brooks MP
- Ms. Louise Perry
- Ms. Kate Berry
- Ms. Rachel Cecilio

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION 1

a) Provide information on why there has been a reduction in departmental output funding from 2021-21 to 2023-24.

Mr McGOWAN: Thank you, Minister, for that. I am just looking and following up from your presentation too on the \$69.7 million. When I look at page 174, I can see the \$61.6 million for 2023–24. Where has the remainder come from?

Mr BROOKS: Page 174 of budget paper –

Mr McGOWAN: Page 174, yes. It says: 2023–24 budget – \$61.6 million, but the figure we have got up there is \$69.7 million. It might be contained elsewhere, but I am just trying to understand the difference.

Mr BROOKS: Yes. We will get that for you.

Ms BERRY: Is this the departmental output budget for 2023–24?

Mr McGOWAN: Correct.

Ms BERRY: So that is the department's budget for 2023–24 but not the investment made in the 2023–24 budget, which is \$77.5 million.

Mr McGOWAN: That is a different figure again, so 77 –

Mr BROOKS: \$77.5 million, and then the \$120 million that I mentioned – in the form of accountability, that \$120 million is multicultural-specific projects that are funded in other department's budgets. For example, with the business precincts, there is \$10 million for those multicultural business precincts that are delivered under the small business portfolio.

Mr McGOWAN: So the \$69.7 million is not necessarily just your portfolio; that might also include initiatives from other portfolios. Am I following that correctly?

Ms PERRY: No. The \$69.7 million is for the election commitments in the multicultural affairs portfolio, the \$77.5 million is the budget for multicultural affairs over four years and the output for 2023–24 is \$61.6 million.

Mr McGOWAN: Right. Okay. In respect to 2020–21 we are coming off a base of \$105.4 million. Why is there a reduction from then to now, because obviously that is a significant reduction when we take the \$77.5 million compared to the \$105.4 million.

Ms PERRY: Sorry, can you repeat the question? It is a lot of numbers.

Mr McGOWAN: Sure. In 2020–21 the revised output budget for multicultural affairs policy programs amounted to \$105.4 million for Victoria's multicultural communities.

Mr BROOKS: Sorry, where is that figure at, Mr McGowan?

Ms PERRY: Where is that figure?

Mr BROOKS: Where is that figure?

Mr McGOWAN: That is from the previous budget figures. I am happy for you to take that on notice.
Mr BROOKS: Yes, we might take that one on notice.

Hearing Transcript, p. 3-4

Name of Committee members asking question: Mr Nicholas McGowan

RESPONSE

Answer:

The Multicultural Affairs portfolio played an important role in supporting the government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting other emergency responses for multicultural communities. The portfolio received additional output funding during these responses to deliver key supports and programs for multicultural communities, which means outputs over recent financial years are higher than initially budgeted.

The Multicultural Affairs budget in 2020-21 was revised upward to \$105.4 million (Source: 2021-22 BP3, p. 201). This output is higher than the target of \$90.6 million due to funding provided for government policy commitments primarily related to the COVID-19 response (Source: 2021-22 BP3, p. 222).

The Multicultural Affairs budget in 2021-22 was revised upward to \$103.3 million (Source: 2022-23 BP3, p. 197). This output is higher than the target of \$54.7 million due to funding provided for government policy commitments related to the COVID-19 response (Source: 2022-23 BP3, p. 213).

The Multicultural Affairs budget in 2022-23 was revised upward to \$63.3 million (Source: 2023-24 BP3, p. 174). This is higher than the target of \$51.2 million (Source: 2023-24 BP3, p. 197) due to additional funding provided to support multicultural communities through the Government’s Flood Relief Package, and the extension of key COVID-19 related supports.

The Multicultural Affairs 2023-24 output is \$61.6 million (Source: 2023-24 BP3, p. 174), which continues the Government’s investment in multicultural communities, including through funding for 2022 election commitments.

QUESTION 2

2. Breakdown of which festivals received funding

Mr McGOWAN: Budget paper 2, page 17 – just in respect to the \$17 million that has been provided for multicultural traders associations, I am wondering whether you can advise which associations will receive some funding from that initiative.

Ms PERRY: Sorry, I did not hear the question.

Mr BROOKS: Traders associations.

Mr McGOWAN: The multicultural traders associations, yes.

Mr BROOKS: That sits within the small business portfolio, not the multicultural budget.

Mr McGOWAN: Right, okay. So you do not have any oversight or make recommendations in respect to which ones merit those?

Mr BROOKS: No. I am not sure if we will be consulted, but it is not our portfolio area.

Ms PERRY: No. I mean, we are in lens portfolio, so we engage really heavily across government. They seek our advice, and we give it to them, on how best to disburse funds like that.

Mr McGOWAN: Okay. Did you provide advice in respect to that program, do you recall?

Ms PERRY: I do not recall, no. But I can go and have a look at what information is available.

Mr McGOWAN: If you would not mind, that would be great. Thank you. In respect to the multicultural festivals, are you able to provide a breakdown of which festivals received funding? I know there is quite a large volume; I would not expect you to go through them now, particularly given the time I have got.

Mr BROOKS: There are a number festivals that have been explicitly funded because they are large, significant festivals.

Mr McGOWAN: Do you mind if you take that on notice to provide it to me later? Because obviously it is way too large.

Hearing Transcript, p. 5

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr McGowan

RESPONSE

Answer:

The 2023-24 State Budget invests \$12 million over four years to support the delivery of multicultural festivals and events through funding for significant festivals and a competitive grants program (Source: 2023-24 BP3, pp. 40, 46). The following festivals are funded through the program:

- Lonsdale Street Greek Festival
- Pako Festival
- Turkish Centenary Celebration
- Melbourne Italian Festa
- Langar Celebration
- Whitehorse Lunar New Year Festival
- Tet Festival
- Victoria Street Lunar Festival
- Oakleigh Glendi
- Victorian Open Mosque Day
- Chanukah, Pillars of Light Festival
- Tamil Festival Australia
- Multicultural Soccer Festival
- Springvale Lunar New Year
- Hispanic Latin American Festival
- Polish Festival at Federation Square
- African Music and Cultural Festival
- Bachar Houli Cup
- Newroz Festival
- Peace and Friendship Festival
- Alevi Festival
- Chaldean Akitu Festival
- Macedonian Food Festival
- Pakistan Welfare Organisation Multicultural Grade Eid Celebration
- Itika Sporting Club Pasifika Festival
- Debre Genet Saint Michael Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in Melbourne Australia Inc for their Meskel Celebration
- Tigrian Community Association New Year Festival
- Chinatown Lunar New Year's Festival
- Melbourne Bangladeshi Community Foundation International Mother Language Day

(Source: Premier media release, 'Bigger and better multicultural festivals', 26 November 2022).

The Multicultural Affairs portfolio continues to provide advice across government departments to support the delivery of programs and initiatives to support multicultural communities. The portfolio has advised and will continue to provide advice, as needed, to the Small Business portfolio to support the Government's \$17 million

investment to upgrade and revitalise business and cultural hubs in Victoria's multicultural precincts (Source: 2023-24 BP2, p. 17).

QUESTION 3

3. Spread of multicultural community infrastructure projects

Mr McGOWAN: And likewise, in respect to multicultural community infrastructure projects, I know there are 33 of those. I am trying to understand the geographic spread of those. Are you able to go through that with me at the moment?

Ms PERRY: The spread of the multicultural infrastructure?

Mr McGOWAN: Yes. I just want to know where they are and what they actually specifically funded.

Ms PERRY: Yes. So we have got –

Mr McGOWAN: And if we run out of time, please take it on notice.

Hearing Transcript, p. 6

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr Nicholas McGowan

RESPONSE

Answer:

The 2022-23 State Budget invested \$6.4 million in the Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund (Source: 2022-23 BP3, p. 39). This funded:

- Polish Sporting Recreation and Community Association Inc. in the Brimbank local government area (LGA) for external stage performance pergola
- Sikh Community of Western Victoria in Wyndham LGA for infrastructure upgrade to community facility
- Kali Mata Mandir in Hume LGA for upgrading temple conditions to improve safety
- Shree Swaminarayan Temple Melbourne Inc in Knox LGA for renovations and upgrades
- Museum of Chinese Australian History in Melbourne LGA for redevelopment of the museum
- Nepali Community Centre in the Hume LGA for community centre
- Eritrean Orthodox Association in Australia in Brimbank LGA for toilet facility and upgrades
- AIDA Victoria in Hobsons Bay LGA for community facility extension
- Eastern Districts Polish Association in Knox LGA for alfresco and storage room community centre expansion and improvement
- Free to Feed in Yarra LGA for venue upgrade
- Philippine Fiesta of Victoria Inc in Hobsons Bay LGA for community centre upgrades
- North Cyprus Turkish Community of Victoria in Brimbank LGA for building and car park renovation project
- Daarul Arqam Australia in Casey LGA for energy efficiency, security and workplace utility upgrade
- Russian House Melbourne Inc. in Yarra LGA for the Russian House Greeves St restoration project
- Melbourne Karen Buddhist Association Inc. in Moorabool LGA for pre-construction works for a community hall, carpark and site services
- North Victorian Buddhist Association in Hume LGA for building refurbishment
- Nafsika Stamoulis Hellenic Museum Limited in Melbourne LGA for electricity upgrade for museum rear garden and courtyard
- Greek Orthodox Parish of St Constantine and Helen in Stonnington LGA for community hall kitchen upgrade
- Asian Business Association of Wyndham in Wyndham LGA for museum feasibility study

- The Lefcadian Brotherhood 'Lefcada' in Moreland LGA for hall upgrade
- Società Isole Eolie in Melbourne LGA for facility upgrades
- St Kilda Hebrew Congregation in Port Phillip LGA for facility upgrades
- Newport Islamic Society in Hobsons Bay LGA for facilities upgrades
- The Benevolent Association of Nafpaktians in Kingston LGA for facility upgrades
- Sikh Volunteers Australia Incorporated in Frankston LGA for facility upgrades
- Australia Ceylon Fellowship Inc in Greater Dandenong LGA for facility upgrades
- City of Greater Dandenong in Greater Dandenong LGA for Feasibility Study Afghan Community Centre Dandenong
- Hume City Council in Hume LGA for Feasibility Study Northern Suburbs Multicultural Hub
- Maltese Association Hobsons Bay Inc. in Hobsons Bay LGA for facilities upgrades
- Cambodian Buddhist Association of Victoria Inc in Greater Dandenong LGA for facilities upgrades
- South East Metro Multicultural Services Hub Feasibility Study (not LGA specific)
- Indian Community Association of Geelong in Geelong LGA for community centre feasibility study
- Vietnamese Museum Australia in Footscray LGA.

QUESTION 4

4. Provide details on the timeline for programs to combat the rise of far-right extremism

Ms SANDELL: One of the greatest threats to our multicultural community at the moment is the rise of the far right and that form of extremism. Can you talk a bit about any programs the government is implementing to combat the rise of that far-right extremism?

Mr BROOKS: The most immediate request from many people who are concerned about the rise of the extreme right and the sort of issues we had with Nazis parading around the front steps of this very building obviously is to work further than the ban on the Nazi Hakenkreuz and ban the Nazi salute. There are those antisemitism and anti-Islamophobia campaigns that I mentioned before – \$3 million in each – and now that the funding is provided in this budget that allows us to kick that work off. They will all have, I think, a lens on the very issue that you are referring to. And then of course as the work on the ban of the Nazi salute is underway, so too is the work that builds on that, which is the review of the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act, so the broader reform to our anti-vilification protections. Both the Premier and I am sure the Attorney-General have indicated publicly that that will be looking at both broadening the attributes under that Act – broadening it from racial and religious but also looking at other attributes, but also something that has been raised with me by many members of our multicultural communities is to give the Act more teeth so that when people are vilifying others there is recourse and sanction involved in the Act.

Ms SANDELL: What is the time line on that, because there is not specific funding in the budget for that, is there?

Mr BROOKS: If I can take that on notice. The Attorney-General is in control of that process, but I know that work has definitely started on that. We have certainly assisted with some funding from our department for the consultation that is so important, and consultation is critical. We found that out through the banning of the Nazi salute, which is a much more narrow piece of work than, for example, broader anti-vilification protections. In making sure that there are not unintended consequences, we have properly consulted with a range of different groups. And just that issue I mentioned before around the use of the Nazi symbol in a peaceful sense by the Jain, Buddhist and Hindu communities highlights that need to be really careful and step through this in a careful way.

Hearing Transcript, p. 8-9

Name of Committee member asking question: Ms Ellen Sandell

RESPONSE

Answer:

Nazi salute ban

The Victorian Government is committed to better protecting Victorians from hatred and vilification. Nazi ideology and all forms of hate conduct have no place in our community. The Victorian Government has made a commitment to ban the Nazi salute in Victoria.

The government is considering how this can be done carefully, with considered consultation already underway with a variety of groups, aiming to introduce this legislation as quickly as possible. The Attorney-General, who is leading this work, will have more to say on the details of this legislation, including timelines, as it progresses.

Anti-vilification reforms

The government remains committed to strengthening vilification protections and supported or supported-in-principle 34 out of 36 of the recommendations from the Inquiry into Anti-vilification protections in Victoria (Inquiry).

In December 2022, the ban on the Hakenkreuz commenced in Victoria, acquitting the government's commitment to implement recommendation 24 from the Inquiry.

The remaining recommendations from the Inquiry and proposed reform to the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* are complex and require considered consultation and work with the Victorian community to implement. The government has been working closely with multicultural and faith communities, members of the LGBTIQ+ community and advocates to determine the best way to implement and progress the reforms while ensuring that the risk of harmful public debate is minimised.