

CORRECTED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2003–04 budget estimates

Melbourne–14 May 2003

Members

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Witnesses

Ms M. Delahunty, Minister for Women's Affairs;

Mr T. Healy, Deputy Secretary, People and Community Advocacy;

Ms P. Thurgood, Acting Director, Office of Women's Policy; and

Mr S. Mather, Senior Finance Officer, Department for Victorian Communities.

The CHAIR — I now welcome the Minister for Women's Affairs; Mr Terry Healy, deputy secretary, people and community advocacy; and Ms Patricia Thurgood, acting director, Office of Women's Policy. Stephen Mather is sitting in bay 13 over there; he is from corporate finance, Department for Victorian Communities. I now call on the minister to give a 5 to 6-minute presentation on her portfolio.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Thank you very much, Chair. Let us put the Office of Women's Policy into a context which is the new Department for Victorian Communities. As we know, women are the glue of all communities so it is appropriate that the Office of Women's Policy be in the new department centrally. The Department for Victorian Communities is focused on important work central to the government's vision — as defined in Growing Victoria Together — and working with all Victorians to deliver and build a fair, sustainable and prosperous future.

The new Department for Victorian Communities will focus on strengthening community resilience and connectedness. It is about understanding and supporting collaborative relationships between individuals and grounds. It is about encouraging people to participate in the civic and social life of our communities. You have just heard me outline how important the arts are to that social cohesiveness; we certainly want to support partnerships with local government and community organisations of all types. It is about developing joined-up services — planning and delivering the services as though the administrative boundaries between departments and programs do not exist — and designing these programs from the perspective of the recipient rather than the government. The Office of Women's Policy sits perfectly into this scenario: women are the connectors in their families, their communities, their clubs and their organisations. The Office of Women's Policy is a major influence in ensuring accountability to women in the community. I think probably the role of the Office of Women's Policy is not terribly well understood. It is not a service delivery unit. It is a tiny group of about 14 wonderful people.

Mr FORWOOD — Fourteen?

Ms DELAHUNTY — Yes.

Mr FORWOOD — Sorry, I thought you said 40.

The CHAIR — They do the work of 40.

Ms DELAHUNTY — It is a powerful unit which has influence beyond its numbers. However, it is not a service deliverer — it is a strategic policy development unit and its job is to influence other government departments, create partnerships both within and beyond government, and particularly to create partnerships with the portfolios that will deliver the money provided by government for women's policy. It provides strong policy advice, it works collaboratively with departments and organisations, it ensures the government is kept informed of key developments, it maintains our continuous conversation with women right across the state.

Achievements in 2002–03, I think we can say modestly, have been substantial. The women's safety strategy was launched in October 2002. It is an important strategy; \$5.6 million for implementing programs that will try to assist women, deal with what is still the great scourge in our modern society — that is, domestic violence. I am happy to talk about that in detail. It has also delivered on our consultation and engagement program. It delivered the first tranche of the women's community leadership grants and it has begun work on and led the way in the work and family strategy. It is clear last year the Bracks government took the lead on the national paid maternity leave scheme debate. We fully support the recommendation of the federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner's report. The Premier's annual women's summit last year was based around this theme. As you know, we have just passed legislation dealing with payroll tax deductions for companies offering paid maternity leave. Other achievements in 2002–03 — —

The CHAIR — Excuse me, Minister, just before you go down those important initiatives, I will give a timely warning: you are running out of time. Perhaps you may want to refer to one or two of those initiatives in particular rather than the lot of them.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Thank you. The Victorian honour roll, the indigenous women going places and our refurbishment and revitalisation of the Queen Victoria Women's Centre. Priorities for the coming year: continuing to implement the women's safety strategy, more community leadership grants, increasing the appointments of women to government boards and committees, finalising and implementing the work family strategy in particular. Our priorities include not forgetting indigenous women, the gender portrayal guidelines and the forward plan for women, the next chapter in our accountability framework to the women of Victoria.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, and thank you for providing us with those overheads. The first question relates to the status of the strategy to improve the representation of women on boards and committees. Minister, can you tell us a little of any specific initiatives which are planned for 2003–04 and what level of funding has been allocated to those?

Ms DELAHUNTY — One of our commitments is to increase the number of women on boards and committees. It was pretty abysmal and is still not good enough, but we now have targets and resources to try and improve that. Currently it is just under 40 per cent of membership of all Victorian boards and committees, which is an increase of about 9 per cent since the election of the Bracks government. We have a target to improve that, including a longer-term goal of 50 per cent, which seems perfectly reasonable — in fact some could say we could possibly push it up to 51 per cent, which I think is the percentage of women in the community. How are we doing that? A resource that supports particularly cabinet appointments to boards and committees and departments seeking experienced and well-credentialed women for our boards, the women's register is an important tool in delivering that. We have decided to retender the women's register. It is a terrific resource, but I think we can do better.

Contrary to some misunderstanding or misleading statements by the Leader of the Opposition, this Victorian women's directory was outsourced in, I think it was 1999, with the successful tenderer, the Waite group introducing the Victorian women's directory. In fact it was tendered out in 1998 and the Waite group won the tender in 1999. Clearly that is a contract with an a private company. We have decided to retender it. We think we can do better. We think we can draw on a broader selection of women right across the state. There are some extremely experienced, talented, well-educated, purposeful and effective women around the state. We simply need to have their names drawn to the government's attention. That process is under way. I think it would be inappropriate for me to go into any further detail about that, but certainly once the department has assessed the tenderers a positive announcement will be made which will contribute to improving the numbers of women on our boards and committees.

Mr FORWOOD — Minister, I refer you to page 288 in last year's budget paper 3; and Terry to page 408 of this year's budget paper 3, which are the output groups for the Office of Women's Policy. You will see in last year's budget papers that the 2002–03 target cost is \$1.8 million. If you look at this year's 2002–03 target, it is \$1 million. So last year's budget papers state that the target cost would be \$1.8 million; this year's budget papers state that last year's target is only 1 million, so in other words \$800 000 has been lost between then and now. I make the point — Terry would understand this point — that if last year's budget papers show \$1.8 million then this year's column should also show \$1.8 million. So the first issue is how come that has happened in a technical sense? The second point is how have you survived without \$800 000 out of a \$1.8 million budget?

Ms DELAHUNTY — The short answer is we are talking about half-year funding, but let me take you through the way we have managed, as you put it, Bill. Overall the Office of Women's Policy continues to meet all output performance measures and targets. There has been a significant increase — you can see that in this year's papers — in the number of briefings and correspondence relating to the level of program and policy information being prepared for both government and women in the community. This increase in briefings and correspondence is now properly reflected in the budget papers. The new target is now set at 700, an increase from about 250. So the budget management is on target. The 2003–04 budget papers identify the Office of Women's Policy with a targeted output cost of \$1 million in 2002–03.

Mr FORWOOD — That is \$800 000 less than last year's target.

Ms DELAHUNTY — That is right, but the full year — this is correctly stated in the budget papers — is \$1.8 million. We are talking about half-year funding. Budget papers 2002–03 have correctly stated that the office budget for the full year was \$1.8 million. Terry, you might like to go into a bit more detail.

Mr HEALY — Minister, with your permission, I will ask Stephen Mather, who is our senior finance officer, to explain it to the Committee. It is half-year funding which is shown because of the funded DVC. The \$1 million is half-year — —

Ms DELAHUNTY — The new Department for Victorian Communities.

Mr MATHER — The figures for 2002–03 are adjusted figures. They reflect half a year from 1 January to 30 June for DVC, plus the full year for units that were in Tourism, Sport and the Commonwealth Games.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — So presumably we will find the first half of the year under DVC?

Mr MATHER — That is right.

Mr FORWOOD — But for all the output measures you have given a full year and here you have given a half-year — and there is no note to explain that in the accounts?

Mr MATHER — I understand — there is a mention of it in the DVC section of budget paper 3.

Mr FORWOOD — Allowing for the fact that you switch from one department to another department, the total amount that the Office of Women's Policy had for 2002–03 is going to be \$1.8 million?

Mr MATHER — Yes.

Mr HEALY — That is correct. It is not changed. It is just the way in which it is presented in the budget papers between the two departments.

Mr FORWOOD — Thank you for the answer which clarifies that. I am very critical of the way the budget papers have been structured if they do that.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Can you point out where in DPC it is? Is it in the first half-year?

Mr MATHER — If I can take that on notice I will get back to you.

The CHAIR — You can take that on notice. People have followed up with other questions and taken matters on notice.

Mr FORWOOD — Does that mean that every other agency that has gone into the Department for Victorian Communities has been treated the same way?

Mr MATHER — Yes.

Mr FORWOOD — Thank you.

Ms ROMANES — Also referring to page 408 of budget paper 3, under the women's policy output, can the minister explain what is being done by the Office of Women's Policy in relation to the important issue of work, family and community life balance?

Ms DELAHUNTY — Glenyys, you have gone right to the heart of our work plan for the year. This is the biggest area of work the Office of Women's Policy is doing. You will recall that it was referred to, but not in those terms, in the Premier's campaign launch before the last election. We came into government committed to a work, family and community life balance strategy. Last year we assigned, directed, commissioned — 'commissioned' I think is the word — some detailed research from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology to look at what were the levers that were available to governments to try to make it a little easier for parents to manage the impossible balance between work, family and community commitments.

We do not pretend that governments can change the balance, that they can make a huge difference. We understand though, based on this research, that both federal and state governments can pull some levers to try to make it a bit easier. There are two areas of that work, two components to that canvas. Firstly, the work and family strategy and delivering on the return-to-work grants, which were announced in the budget, of \$11 million. The return-to-work grants are for parents who are seeking to return to the work force after two years of full-time care of their children — that is mostly, but not exclusively, women. The money will be made available to help them with their educational expenses — say, retraining to upgrade their skills — or it might be for child-care expenses, or schoolbook costs. We are flexible around that. Secondly, we have been lobbying hard the federal government in leading the national paid maternity leave scheme debate. We think Australia should hang its head in shame. We are only one of five countries in the world that are signatories to the CEDAW Convention, that does not have a national paid maternity leave scheme.

Mr FORWOOD — The world?

Ms DELAHUNTY — Ghana has one, for example.

Ms GREEN — And Iraq.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Iraq had one. I know you have a lot of interest in this topic, Bill, but we are often compared to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries. Australia is one of only two OECD countries that does not have a national paid maternity leave scheme. The other one is America. We do not think that it is the whole package, but it certainly is a critical part of the package that if we want to care for young children the best person to care for young children is their mother. A national paid maternity leave scheme would cost less than the flawed program of the federal government's baby bonus. They are the two areas that we are working on. As you know, we signed a charter for work and family balance and there is finalisation of the work and family strategy and other commitments to be made within that.

Mr CLARK — My question follows on from Ms Romanes. My understanding is that the work, family and community life strategy is the same strategy that the Premier announced in a speech of 17 July, or thereabouts, last year at the third annual women's summit at which he said that the government would develop a work life strategy by the end of this year — that is, the end of 2002. As you would recall, Minister, I have raised this issue in the Parliament and you have produced the charter, which I gather is basically a one-page document. Is this strategy that you are now talking about the same one as the Premier promised by the end of 2002, and when is it now set to be completed?

Ms DELAHUNTY — As I said, this has been an important part of the Office of Women's Policy's work. It is built on rigorous empirical evidence. It began with the work that we commissioned through RMIT and it was certainly built on at the Premier's women's summit where the workshops contributed to that strategy. You will, of course, remember that the work of government was interrupted briefly with the historic election, which delivered both houses of Parliament to the Bracks government. Post that election and the changes to the departments with the Office of Women's Policy moving into the new Department for Victorian Communities, that work was quite properly and appropriately interrupted. It has continued this year and the first, I suppose, baby of that family was delivered at the budget last week when the promised return-to-work grants, which are part of this strategy was presented. This strategy is being delivered, as promised, and being worked on and enhanced, as promised.

We were expecting, quite rightly, that the federal government would agree with its own appointed Sex Discrimination Commissioner that the national paid maternity leave scheme would be a huge contributor to the work, family and community life strategy. I notice not only has it turned its back on its own report and scuttled away from a national paid maternity leave scheme, but it has abandoned a work, family and community life strategy. We thought we had the potential for a partnership, quite rightly, between the federal government and the state government. Clearly the federal government has no interest whatsoever in families. The Bracks government will not turn its back on families and will not turn its back on women.

Also in this budget, delivering on this strategy, which I know Robert is very interested in, we will be setting up a work-family unit in government. There are funds available for that — that is, the \$2 million allocated in this budget — which will then deliver on the pilot programs that will be a partnership with Victorian businesses and the government to further demonstrate where you can have flexibility in the work force, where you can have flexibility in the workplace, which contributes to good outcomes for families — parents caring for children — and outstanding outcomes for the businesses where you have dedicated and loyal employees. I am happy to take you through some of the examples, but I do not know whether the rest of the committee would be as interested at this time.

Mr CLARK — If you could simply indicate when you expect the strategy development now to be completed, that would be useful.

Ms DELAHUNTY — It depends on how you want to define it. I do not think that a strategy that is being refined and supported by money in the budget will be ever completed. I think we will continue to refine it. The strategy has been outlined. It is clear to all the women's groups. If your party had bothered to take a women's policy to the election you might have explored this strategy. I certainly know that your spokesperson for women's affairs in the upper house has shown a terrific interest and indeed I think support for it. I know Jeanette Powell, the National Party women's affairs spokesperson, has publicly indicated support for this work, family and life strategy. It is an outstanding piece of work. It is a work in progress, and I hope we continue to refine that strategy throughout our time in government.

Mr CLARK — I look forward to seeing it.

Ms GREEN — I am pleased to be the third woman government member to ask a question about women's affairs. In your presentation you referred to the women's safety strategy. I note page 169 of last year's budget

paper 2 lists \$3.3 million of funding over three years towards this strategy. Can you tell the committee what the key features of the strategy are and how it is being implemented?

Ms DELAHUNTY — Yes. This is important money again to tackle the big issues in a way that government can. The figure of \$3.3 million was mentioned in the 2002–03 budget paper, as you said. We have since secured a total of \$5.6 million. The amount of \$1.8 million has been allocated to the Office of Housing for a new private rental brokerage scheme to increase housing options for women and children who are fleeing family violence; \$1.6 million has been allocated to the Department of Justice for a pilot program — and I am a big fan of this one — in which men on family violence intervention orders can be directed by magistrates to attend behavioural change programs. I call them anger management courses, but I think the correct title is behavioural change programs. This is clearly directed to trying to stop the cycle. Domestic violence is an intergenerational problem. Children witness their parents, often their fathers or others, bashing their mother, and it is unfortunately repeated as they grow older, so we are trying to punctuate that cycle. The amount of \$1.5 million has been allocated to the Department of Human Services to add to the regional family violence networks so that local communities can respond at the local level. That illustrates very careful targeting of public money where we think it can make a difference. It also illustrates how the Office of Women’s Policy works. As I said earlier, we are not a service deliverer, we are a policy unit. We engage in a partnership with the Department of Justice, the Department of Human Services, the Office of Housing and sometimes the Department of Education and Training to implement our policies. Beyond, if you like, the immediate government departments, we are also working very closely on the women’s safety strategy with Victoria Police. The outstanding Chief Commissioner of Police, Christine Nixon, is spending time and money on training programs to ensure that often the first people who are there to attend a domestic violence incident are the police, and to ensure they do not see it as ‘just a domestic’ but as a criminal assault, so there is a lot of work being done there.

There is also education and training on violence against women for judges and magistrates through the wonderful initiative established by the Attorney-General, the judicial college. We have also seen improvements in services for victims of crime, and women who are the subject of domestic violence are victims of crime. This includes the formation of a new victims support agency. I guess there again is another example of how the philosophy that supports the Department for Victorian Communities of a joined-up approach to making a difference is reflected in the women’s safety strategy.

Mr FORWOOD — Minister, last year in response to a question from David Davis relating to the Queen Victoria Women’s Centre, which I note is listed in this year’s slides as both a priority and an achievement, you started by saying:

God, this has been a saga! It is a good question.

But in answer to Mr Davis’s question:

Is there a copy of that strategy available by any chance?

You said:

No, there would not be a copy available publicly yet, but we are about to announce that in the very near future. It certainly will be made available to the public and to this committee.

I am not sure that there has yet been a strategy for the Queen Victoria Women’s Centre released, has there? It follows on from work this committee did in the 2001–02 budget estimates; we made a recommendation in relation to that.

Ms DELAHUNTY — I will probably repeat what I said last year, ‘God, what a saga!’. As you understand, Bill, because you are of a similar vintage, this has been an iconic site for the women of Victoria; I think it is fair to say an iconic site for women of a certain age in Victoria. The great challenge was to revitalise it in a way that made it relevant to women of all ages. The first thing we did — and I am not sure if I went through this last year so forgive me if I am repeating myself — was to appoint effectively a new board to manage the Queen Victoria centre and to brainstorm about how it could be relevant in the way I have just described. That new board was established under Helen Hewett and its strategy put to government goes this way: the appointment of a new CEO, which occurred in late January, Kerry Erler; the appointment of five new trust members to strengthen the capacity and the vision which occurred in March and April; a commitment from Grocon which, of course, is the developer of the urban space which surrounds the Queen Victoria building; and discussions with Grocon about when it would vacate the premises that it was using, and how much it would need to vacate, so that a commercial plan for tenancies could be prepared.

We were very successful in receiving an allocation from the Community Support Fund to develop the centre as a capacity builder and an information hub. The new board has come up with a stunning vision for the Queen Victoria centre. In a nutshell, once it is implemented I think the Queen Victoria will be the centre for all information for women on whatever subject they need from wherever they need to access that information. So if you are up in Mildura, Boort, Myrtleford, Wodonga or in Mount Waverley you will be able to access online any information you need not just about women's affairs, but women's interests, and that includes information about women's health, women's jobs, education opportunities et cetera. It is a great idea. It is a stunning vision and it has now been supported by government with the Community Support Fund grant to establish it.

Mr FORWOOD — Is the vision or the strategy a public document?

Ms DELAHUNTY — It is not yet public.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It is a secret vision.

Ms DELAHUNTY — It is not secret women's business. It is respecting the expertise and the capabilities of a new board. We have invited the new board to rewrite the strategy as it sees it, which I think is the respectful way to operate with any board. We do it in the arts, we do it in women's affairs, and certainly that strategy is being finalised by the trust, the new board, and it is working at the moment on a strategic communication plan to publicly share this vision with the people of Victoria.

Mr FORWOOD — So it should be later this year some time?

Ms DELAHUNTY — Very soon, I anticipate.

Mr FORWOOD — I hope we do not do this again next year.

Ms DELAHUNTY — I hope so too. We will happily provide that to the committee as I undertook that I would last year.

Mr MERLINO — My question is in relation to advertising. What is the status of the government's implementation of the Portrayal of Women Advisory Committee's recommendations relating to outdoor advertising, and the impact on community perceptions of women and what initiatives are planned for 2003–4, and what level of funding has been allocated for those?

Ms DELAHUNTY — The ways women are portrayed in the media continues to be a significant concern to women and men, I might say, particularly the way women are portrayed in advertising. As you know, we have spent substantial time discussing the portrayal of women in advertising and creating gender portrayal guidelines, which will be instituted as a basis for all government departments, statutory authorities and agencies advertising media and public relations campaigns. The Office of Women's Policy consulted across government via an interdepartmental committee comprising senior communications officers across all departments and agencies. That committee has been pivotal in drafting these guidelines for government. The other aspect of that has been the work we have done with the industry. It has been very pleasing that the government has had support from the advertising industry for these gender portrayal guidelines. The Outdoor Advertising Association of Australia has backed our plans saying they are sensible, and the association has committed to work with us. It has commented in its response that it:

... congratulated the committee for its generally sensitive and reasonable approach.

The Advertising Federation of Australia is also keen to work with government on promoting the guidelines and ensuring that their existing code of ethics reflects the government's position. Turning to the money that is there to support that position, clearly if you sign up to a set of guidelines it is an agreement, but we are discussing complementary strategies, with industry in particular, which are being progressed through a working group established jointly with industry, and I know they are very keen, for example, to sponsor an award that demonstrates excellence in the positive portrayal of women; and certainly that is being worked upon at the moment as another way of showcasing best practice, and saluting those who are still managing to sell their product without demeaning women.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. I thank, on the committee's behalf, Mr Healy, Ms Thurgood, and Mr Mather.

Witnesses withdrew.

