

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2023-24 Budget Estimates Hearings

Portfolio:	Emergency Services
Witness:	Kate Fitzgerald Deputy Secretary - Emergency Management
Committee Member:	Nicholas McGowan
Page of Transcript:	Pages 2-3

Relevant text (from transcript):

Nicholas McGOWAN: Thank you very much. Thanks, Attorney-General. I saw recently there was a government decision in respect to advertising. Obviously it would be an important part right across your portfolio. As it pertains to the budget, it is obviously informing the public about emergencies that are impending but also trying to educate and so forth. This new ban on the two daily papers in Melbourne: did you have any input into that decision?

Jaelyn SYMES: I can give you some comments in relation to that decision as it impacts on the emergency services portfolio. It is appropriate for you to ask me that question. As you would appreciate, the government is recalibrating its advertising spending, involving different methods, particularly television and digital channels, as the advice is that that is where the greatest community impact is, and that is what also provides value for money. All Victorian print advertising will continue in regional papers, which is obviously a big audience in relation to emergency services needs, and that is where a lot of our impact in relation to disasters unfortunately occurs.

In relation to the decision to reduce advertising in the metro papers down to the legal requirements, my advice is that that will not have a significant impact on bushfire or flood awareness campaigns. In an emergency, for preparedness, there are a range of other means that agencies use to communicate advice, such as radio, TV,

warnings issued by the BOM and the VicEmergency app, websites, social media. I certainly follow the Broadford CFA Facebook page for local updates, for example. There are a range of community events, which is a way to engage with people in their local towns about the risks that they should be aware of. We have several open days at our volunteer organisations, and in high-risk areas dedicated awareness activities are undertaken, such as doorknocking, for example.

Kate Fitzgerald, who is sitting next to me, is the Deputy Secretary for emergency services, and I think one of the issues that has come up and people have asked about is whether there is going to be an impact on the communication with senior Victorians. I certainly took from her meeting with the commissioner for senior Victorians some comfort in some of the discussions that she had with how we can target our warnings and campaigns to that cohort of the community. Are you happy to elaborate on that?

Kate FITZGERALD: Yes.

Jaelyn SYMES: I might just ask Kate to talk to you about that because I know that –

Nicholas McGOWAN: Happy for Kate to talk to me about it, but I am particularly obviously concerned that more people, particularly in this state – we have one of the largest distributing papers in the country, if not the largest on a particular day in the week, so I am concerned. Governments of all persuasions have generally engaged with it because they know it can disseminate a message and, as the Attorney-General has said, particularly an older cohort who still rely very heavily on that kind of medium as opposed to digital.

Kate FITZGERALD: As the minister said, I did meet with the commissioner for senior Victorians Gerard Mansour. During 2022, as a result of COVID, the commissioner undertook an online survey, and that received 47,000 responses from older Victorians. Through that survey, during COVID 50 per cent of respondents developed new skills in relation to technology, 62 per cent wanted to do more online specifically in relation to –

Nicholas McGOWAN: Ms Fitzgerald, I do not mean to be rude. If you could just put that information to me on notice, that would be wonderful. I have just got very limited time. Without being rude, if I can move on. Attorney-General –

Jaelyn SYMES: We can add to that, yes.

Answer:

During 2022, the Commissioner for Senior Victorians undertook a survey of older Victorians experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey generated more than 47,000 responses. The survey found that during the pandemic, 50 per cent of older Victorians developed new ICT skills, and 62 per cent wanted to do more online. This specifically included accessing government services and information.

The survey also found that 87% wanted to participate more in community events. This is relevant to our emergency services, such as the Country Fire Authority and Victoria State Emergency Service, who run local community education programs and engagement. Victoria's emergency services sector will continue to encourage senior Victorians to take part in these community events as an important means of delivering emergency warnings and information.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2023-24 Budget Estimates Hearings

Portfolio:	Emergency Services
Witness:	Jaclyn Symes Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Services Kate Fitzgerald Deputy Secretary - Emergency Management
Committee Member:	Bev McArthur
Page of Transcript:	Page 9

Relevant text (from transcript):

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Ms Fitzgerald, the 2022 FRV annual report shows in note 3.2.1 on page 121 that the employee benefits amount for WorkCover payments has increased by 63.2 per cent to \$34.2 million. How many FRV employees are on WorkCover, and why is this the case?

Kate FITZGERALD: Mrs McArthur, I do not have that annual report in front of me, and I do not have that data in front of me.

Bev McARTHUR: Can you take it on notice then?

Jaclyn SYMES: I would be interested in the Chair's view of how that relates to the budget papers for this year.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Attorney. Mrs McArthur, if you are going to ask those kinds of questions, can you show how that is relevant to the inquiry before us, please, and also the minister and the Attorney in front of us.

Jaclyn SYMES: I did not bring the annual report, sorry.

Danny O'BRIEN: I can assist you, Chair. Annual reports have always been part of the process, and given that the 2022 annual report is not tabled until October of the current financial year, which is in the budget papers, that is exactly why it is relevant. We repeatedly ask about annual reports, questionnaires, budget papers – all of the above.

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: There we are. Can we answer it or not?

Danny O'BRIEN: I think they said they would take it on notice – didn't you?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes. We do not have the data on us. FRV is the relevant employer, but we can see what information we can obtain for you.

Answer:

Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) considers its people to be its greatest asset. In response to key reform initiatives and in acknowledgment of the inherent danger FRV's staff face in protecting the Victorian community, FRV have made transformational improvements to the betterment of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of all its employees. As part of this FRV has introduced a bold, Australian and industry-first, state-wide Health, Safety & Wellbeing Model, inclusive of a new medical services provider. This is available throughout the state of Victoria, 24 hours, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, to all FRV's employees and focuses on all facets of Health, Safety and Wellbeing.

FRV has robust operating practices in which its people are rigorously, and continuously trained. FRV always seeks to review and optimise these practices to ensure that it is providing the best services to the Victorian community, whilst protecting the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of its employees. This is not an easy task and FRV's operational personnel, in executing their duties often face dynamic, high-risk environments. Some of FRV's

employees may succumb to acute or long-term chronic injuries, such as occupational cancers, psychological injuries, or physical injuries.

As at 14 June 2023 the current number of **active** Workcover claims is **260**, which is consistent with year-on-year trends since FRV's establishment. This is a live and ever-changing figure, with the return to work average at approximately 85 per cent.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2023-24 Budget Estimates Hearings

Portfolio:	Emergency Services
Witness:	Jaclyn Symes Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Services
Committee Member:	Bev McArthur
Page of Transcript:	Page 11

Relevant text (from transcript):

Jaclyn SYMES ... There is significant investment for assets that CFA brigades ask for. I have been travelling around the state in relation to the rollout of additional vehicles, for example, and there is a program that is continuing to roll out to deliver more trucks to more areas – a lot in your area actually, Mrs McArthur. I can get you some of the details in relation to that.

Bev McARTHUR: That would be good. Thank you, Minister.

Answer:***Government's investment in CFA appliances***

CFA is currently in the process of rolling out more than 50 Heavy tankers to replace appliances within its existing fleet as part of the Victorian Government's CFA Capability Package as part of Fire Services Reform. This is in addition to CFA's ongoing rolling program for fleet replacement of approximately \$12 million per annum.

Since 2015, the Victorian Government has invested \$179.3 million in firefighting appliances to support CFA.

In addition to the CFA Capability Package and CFA's own base capital program, the Victorian Government also invests in CFA through the Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP) which has seen 225 appliances including Tankers, Forward Command, Multi-Purpose and Breathing Apparatus (BA) Support Vehicles, co-funded and delivered into CFA within the last five years (since and including the 2018-19 FY).

In respect to Government's investment in appliances to CFA in the Western Victoria Region, over 180 brigade and group appliances have been manufactured since 2018 (in Districts 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 16, and 17), funded through VESEP, CFA's base capital, and other government grants.