

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne – Tuesday 21 November 2023

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Ellen Sandell

Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Ryan Phillips, Associate Secretary,

Jenni Rigby, Chief Executive Officer, Emergency Management Victoria,

Rick Nugent, Emergency Management Commissioner,

Larissa Strong, Commissioner, Corrections Victoria,

Andrea Davidson, Commissioner, Youth Justice,

Diab Harb, Executive Director, Justice System Reform,

Josh Smith, Deputy Secretary, Youth Justice,

Bill Kyriakopoulos, Deputy Secretary, Police, Racing, Victims and Coordination,

Toby Hemming, Deputy Secretary, Integrity, Regulation and Legal Services,

Adrian Sculthorpe, Acting Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Justice,

Emma Catford, Acting Deputy Secretary, Corrections and Justice Services,

Corinne Cadilhac, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services and Infrastructure,

Mariela Diaz, Chief Executive Officer, Emergency Recovery Victoria,

Cameron Rapmund, Executive Director, Civil and Enforcement Services, and

Samuel Ho, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Justice and Community Safety; and

Shane Patton, Chief Commissioner of Police, and

Susan Middleditch, Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Regulatory Services, Victoria Police.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I ask that mobile telephones now be turned to silent.

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 elders past, present and future and elders from other communities who may be joining us here today.

On behalf of the Parliament the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes. Its aim is to gauge what the government achieved in both years compared to what the government planned to achieve.

All evidence taken by the 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 Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining us via the live stream and other committee members.

I welcome the Associate Secretary from the Department of Justice and Community Safety Mr Ryan Phillips – welcome – and Mr Shane Patton, the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. Welcome, and welcome to other officials. Associate Secretary, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement and presentation of no more than 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Your time starts now.

Ryan PHILLIPS: Thank you, Chair. As the Chair mentioned, this hearing is being held on the lands of the Wurundjeri people, and I wish to acknowledge them as the traditional owners of the land. I would also like to pay my respects to elders past and present and to all Aboriginal people in the room today.

Visual presentation.

Ryan PHILLIPS: As you would all know, 2021–22 and 2022–23 brought unprecedented challenges to the Victorian community. We were faced with multiple significant emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic, storms and floods. I am proud of the department's efforts throughout this time to provide critical justice and emergency services and support to the community, to ensure the men, women and children in custody were kept safe throughout the pandemic and to provide high-quality advice and support to government and to deliver their reform priorities. As a department DJCS remains committed to high-quality service delivery across our diverse functions and helping to ensure a stronger, safer and fairer Victoria.

I would also like to provide the apologies of the secretary of the department of justice, who unfortunately is unable to attend today because she is unwell.

Moving into the substance of the presentation, I would like to provide a financial and operational overview as at 30 June 2023. The department is both large and diverse. We have an operating budget of \$5.1 billion and over 9700 staff. The department leads the delivery of justice and community safety services in Victoria by providing policy and operational management. Our extensive service delivery responsibilities range from managing the state's prison system, to enforcing court warrants, to providing services to victims of crime. We also manage the development and implementation of a range of laws, regulations and policy in areas across the portfolio. Also, our emergency management sector works together to strengthen the capacity of individuals, communities, government, agencies and business to achieve our shared vision of a safer and more resilient community and to rebuild and recover after a disaster.

The department also delivered an extensive infrastructure program over the last two financial years. We completed 25 infrastructure projects valued at more than \$1.7 billion. This included the state-of-the-art Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre, 106 new beds and supporting infrastructure and a new Aboriginal healing unit at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and seven VICSES facilities across Victoria. Of course Victoria Police also delivers critical services to the Victorian community, with an operating budget of \$4.1 billion and more than 16,000 sworn police and 1435 PSOs.

Moving on, I would like to talk about Aboriginal justice and the key achievements of the department in the relevant period. Aboriginal justice, including improving outcomes for Aboriginal people in custody, is a key priority for the department. Earlier this year I gave evidence at the Yoorrook Justice Commission, alongside the secretary and other departmental executives. At the hearing we acknowledged the historic and ongoing systemic racism and mistreatment of Aboriginal people in the Victorian justice system. We stand by our commitment to do better, and the government is currently considering its response to the Yoorrook justice report.

Developed by and for Aboriginal people, the stolen generations reparations package seeks to address the lasting social, economic and emotional impact caused by the forced removal of Aboriginal children. The package aims to provide affected persons with an opportunity for healing through financial reparations and access to intensive supports. As at 30 June 2023, 655 applications have been received for the stolen generations reparations package, with payments made to 376 applicants. 100 advance payments have been made for terminally or critically ill applicants. Over the last two financial years a total of \$74.9 million in grants were provided as part of the Aboriginal justice agreement community grants program. Most of these grants were provided to Aboriginal community controlled organisations to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system. The department also continued to facilitate the Aboriginal Justice Forum. This forum brings together senior government representatives and Aboriginal community leadership under the nation's longest and most enduring formal partnership between a state government and First Peoples.

Moving now onto emergency management, in emergency management we continue to work towards building strong systems and processes to prevent and respond to emergencies. Over the last two years this has included the development of a six-year emergency management strategic roadmap and outcomes framework – this work will guide long-term reform of the sector and help ensure that we all work together to improve outcomes; the

establishment of Emergency Recovery Victoria as a dedicated all-emergencies entity responsible for state and regional recovery and relief coordination; the development of the *Victorian Water Safety Strategy 2021–25* with the water safety taskforce; increased support and capacity for ESTA; and \$125 million invested into VICSES infrastructure, delivering vital projects across Victoria. And of course we responded to the significant flood event in October 2022, which included the activation of the State Control Centre until January 2023.

In the corrections portfolio, corrections staff, alongside their youth justice colleagues, have continued to display dedication to their jobs, working hard to ensure that those in detention, and the broader community, stay safe. In corrections key achievements have included the practical completion of the Western Plains Correctional Centre in November 2022. The *Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System* was also completed, with the report and government response to it published earlier this year. Delivery of the mental health transition support service remains a priority, as does the oversight of high-risk offenders on community correction orders.

In youth justice, we have continued to work with our partners to deliver a youth justice system that supports young people who come into contact with the justice system. A key part of this was the development of the *Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020–2030*, which outlines a 10-year vision for the delivery of a leading youth justice system in Victoria. As part of this we have progressed a number of key initiatives. Notably, Victoria's first Aboriginal youth justice strategy, *Wirikara Kulpa*, was launched with a vision that no Aboriginal children or young people be in contact with the youth justice system. Youth justice's commitment to prevention, early intervention and diversion as the most effective and fiscally responsible ways of reducing youth crime was demonstrated by the launch of the youth diversion statement in April 2022. Other key achievements included the establishment of the South Sudanese Australian youth justice expert working group to help address the over-representation of young South Sudanese Australians, and the establishment of the youth justice bail after-hours service and the weekend online remand Children's Court.

In policing, the VIPER taskforce was launched in July 2022, focusing on preventing, detecting and dismantling the criminal activities of gangs such as outlaw motorcycle gangs, organised crime networks and street gangs. The 2021–22 financial year also saw the introduction of neighbourhood policing – Victoria Police's model for community engagement. Victoria Police also played a significant role for the Victorian community during the pandemic and in response to the flood events.

In victim support, the landmark financial assistance scheme established by the victims of crime Act in 2022 will next year enable victims to access a trauma-informed model administrative scheme through the department. Meanwhile Victoria's first victims legal service launched in March 2023 to provide free legal advice and support to victims to access assistance through the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal.

Moving on to casino, gaming, liquor and racing, in racing key achievements included the 213 Victorian Racing Industry Fund grants valued at \$30.9 million to improve participant and animal welfare, economic growth, community cohesion and integrity in the racing industry. In liquor and gaming significant work has occurred to implement a more effective regulatory regime.

Moving on to our response to COVID-19, the department played a critical role in responding to COVID-19, protecting the community and maintaining critical justice services. Key elements included the establishment of COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria, which delivered the international arrivals and emergency accommodation programs, which ceased in April and October 2022 respectively. The State Control Centre was also pivotal to the COVID-19 response, as were the programs implemented across corrections, youth justice and by Victoria Police to keep the community safe.

The department has also delivered a significant legislative program over the past two years. This covered critical areas from sex work discrimination to the prohibition of the Nazi symbol. Vital community protections have also been implemented, including legislation relating to terrorism, firearms and sexual offences.

In closing, in the face of significant and unprecedented challenges, the department has continued to lead, to innovate and to put community safety first. I thank the committee.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for that. I am going to throw first of all to Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Associate Secretary and other witnesses. Associate Secretary, the *Age* reported on 5 November about misrouted 000 calls on the Victoria–New South Wales

border. How many times over the two years in question were emergency calls from Victorian border towns inadvertently handled by both Victorian and New South Wales call centres before an ambulance was dispatched?

Ryan PHILLIPS: We know that ensuring timely receipt and dispatch of emergency calls is absolutely critical to ensuring community confidence in the system and ensuring the safety of Victorians, and the issues identified in that article are obviously of concern. I will hand to our Acting Deputy Secretary in emergency management, who may be able to provide further details about the dispatch and response times.

Jenni RIGBY: Thanks, Ryan. Sorry, just so that I am clear on the question, you are asking specifically about misdirected 000 calls?

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes. Do you have data on how many times that occurred in the two years in question?

Jenni RIGBY: I would need to take that on notice. They came through the federated Telstra 000 system, but I am assuming you mean they were mistakenly patched through to New South Wales rather than Victoria?

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, the article in the *Age* highlights the issue with border towns in particular where there have been a number of times where they have been inadvertently diverted to the wrong state's call centre, and that has resulted in delays. So yes, if you can take that figure on notice.

Jenni RIGBY: I will need to take that on notice, thank you.

Danny O'BRIEN: Can I perhaps continue, and again you may need to take this on notice, but how many times have Victorian patients in border communities experienced delays in response by not being routed to the nearest ambulance?

Jenni RIGBY: Delays in response times due to delays in ambulance?

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, again, it is the issue of where they have, via 000, been directed to the wrong state and therefore there has been a delay. The ambulance union says that there have been four deaths directly attributable to this issue.

Jenni RIGBY: I do not have any data on those cross-border issues, so again I would need to take that one on notice.

Ryan PHILLIPS: And indeed, Chair, that may require us to discuss with the Commonwealth, given the role of the Commonwealth entity in the delivery of those services.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Has the department been aware of these complaints – that calls have not been directed to the nearest ambulance to respond?

Jenni RIGBY: Have we received complaints about that? We have not received any complaints. I have not –

Danny O'BRIEN: Sorry, I cannot hear you.

Jenni RIGBY: I am not aware of any complaints being received about that.

Danny O'BRIEN: You are aware of the article that I have referred to and the issue – that there is an issue with calls being directed to the wrong state?

Jenni RIGBY: I do recall that article. I do not have any information about that today.

Danny O'BRIEN: As I said, the Victorian Ambulance Union secretary Danny Hill told the *Age* that:

... four Victorian patients had died from cardiac arrest in the past year following delays in dispatching the closest ambulances.

Is the department aware of those deaths and indeed any others that have occurred as a result of or in relation to the wrong 000 destination being used?

Jenni RIGBY: Certainly the department is aware of the article, and any adverse events as a result of ESTA call taking and dispatch are reported and are then sort of followed up and investigated in conjunction with the

inspector-general for emergency management. In terms of the specific cases that you are referring to, I would need to take that on notice, for any sort of further information on them. We do not have information on those specific cases.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. I do not know if we have got anyone from Ambulance Victoria here, but an Ambulance Victoria spokesman said in that article:

... it was aware of the concerns regarding call routing and dispatch on the NSW border and a resolution would be implemented in the coming days.

That was 5 November. What is the department doing to address this issue?

Jenni RIGBY: Again, specifically relating to the cross-border issue, we will need to take that on notice and come back to you.

Danny O'BRIEN: Is it a concern, Associate Secretary, that the department does not really seem to be aware of this issue that has been around for at least a year, if not longer?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Obviously, it is a matter of concern to the department, but it is something we will provide further information to you on notice.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. I note that in the period, and you mentioned in your presentation on the performance of ESTA, I think it was a figure of \$333 million was added to address many of the call-taking issues. What performance measures are now being experienced by ESTA as a result? Have we improved on the poor call-taking and dispatch issues that were occurring then?

Ryan PHILLIPS: We have, Chair, and Jenni will be able to take you through the detail of that. But can I say that in both 2021–22 and 2022–23, ESTA met or exceeded the majority of its emergency call-taking and dispatch performance benchmarks and over time has continued to improve, so you see a progressive improvement across the range of benchmarks over the two financial years, which has been really positive, and we are very happy to see that those improvements have occurred, given the significant investment the government has made to support that service.

Danny O'BRIEN: So there were reports at the time, in the two-year period, of people calling 000 and literally getting a message that said, 'We can't take your call right now – call back.' Can I ask what percentage of calls in the period received that message? Do you have that data?

Jenni RIGBY: Sorry, I am having trouble hearing you.

Danny O'BRIEN: People called 000 and they were getting a message that literally said, 'We're too busy. We can't take your call. Call back.' Do you have data on how many calls to 000 got that message?

Jenni RIGBY: We do not have that data today. We would need to take that on notice. But I do understand that that was implemented for a short period of time to ensure that people understood the demand on the system, and it also pointed them through to alternative options where they were appropriate.

Danny O'BRIEN: Understanding that, and this is where I am going with the question, literally on the weekend I had a constituent in my electorate who rang 000 twice and twice got that message – 'We're too busy. Call back.' He tried then to ring the local police station. Just by coincidence, at a quarter to 1 in the morning there was an officer there doing some catch-up work so he could have a weekend off, and he responded to the call. But twice he could not get through to 000. That is this weekend. Is it a surprise to you that that message is still being provided by 000?

Ryan PHILLIPS: That is a surprise but certainly something we would have to discuss with ESTA to understand the context in which that occurred.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Well, I literally spoke to the business owner this morning, and he confirmed that is what happened. I would be interested, again, in any data you had from the period as to how often that was occurring and perhaps, Associate Secretary, if we could get an update on what is happening to ensure that that does not continue to happen. Thank you.

Can I move on to some casino, gaming and liquor issues. I will maybe wait for Mr Hemming to find a seat. Good morning, Mr Hemming.

Toby HEMMING: Good morning, Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: For the performance measure 'Audits of casino operations undertaken' in the budget papers last year the target is 1260, and in the 2021 and 2022 financial years the figures were 634 and 791. Obviously they were COVID years, and the casino was closed for large periods. What was the figure for 2022–23?

Toby HEMMING: I am sorry, can you repeat the question?

Danny O'BRIEN: 'Audits of casino operations undertaken' is the performance measure. I am wanting to know what the actual figure was for 2022–23.

Toby HEMMING: I do not have the figure. In relation to the VGCCC, it is obviously an independent entity. The department has involvement with it to the extent that it provides a pathway in terms of budget requests and the like. The department does of course have a role as well in terms of monitoring performance. But that specific piece of information – if I could take it on notice, please. I do note that there were some performance measures that were not met, principally because of the COVID shutdowns.

Danny O'BRIEN: And that is understood, but given everything that has happened with the casino in recent years, I would hope that in 2022–23 the department would actually be meeting its performance measure targets. All right, if I can get that on notice –

Toby HEMMING: Yes, I will come back to you on that. Thank you.

Danny O'BRIEN: I might continue on that. The questionnaire from the department indicates a \$3 million Treasurer's advance in 2021–22 for a total spend of \$4.7 million to support the transition to new arrangements, including the new regulators. Then there was another \$16.4 million from central contingency. The VGCCC and the liquor commission in Victoria simply replaced VCGLR and undid what that was. What was all that money needed for? It is \$21.3 million to establish new authorities. Was it new branding? Was it new merchandise?

Toby HEMMING: You will be aware, of course, that the VCGLR ceased to exist from 1 January 2022 and that the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission was established on 1 January, and then on 1 July last year Liquor Control Victoria, which incorporates the Victorian Liquor Commission, was formally established as standalone. Essentially there was a split of the two organisations. The two organisations combined are larger than the single organisation that existed beforehand, and so there are some additional –

Danny O'BRIEN: Larger in –

Toby HEMMING: Larger in terms of workforce and larger in terms of having dual premises as well, so there are additional costs that would have been incurred by virtue of the fact that there are now two organisations with a significantly expanded workforce. As I said, they have separate – well, they are located both in Shelley Street, Richmond, but they have separate leases. They also have separate systems and the like as well, so additional money was provided to support the establishment of those two organisations.

Danny O'BRIEN: So the cost of splitting them was at least \$21.3 million?

Toby HEMMING: I would have to confirm the figure, but yes, in that order. That is right.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. In 2022–23 there was an additional \$21.4 million in a Treasurer's advance to the VGCCC in addition to the \$23.4 million that was in the budget, so there was an advance. So there was \$44.8 million for the VGCCC, and it was explained as enabling the VGCCC to support oversight of gambling and gaming activities and establishing the Office of the Special Manager, which we understand. It is a very important role to hold the casino to account. What was the Treasurer's advance of \$21.4 million for in 2022–23?

Toby HEMMING: The Treasurer's advance was part of, if I could just describe it as, a bucket of money that supported the general activities of the VGCCC, the Office of the Special Manager and I will have to

confirm but I think also in relation to Liquor Control Victoria as well. I think the annual report was just released last week or the week before, but the VGCCC's total revenue for 2022–23 was in the order of \$37 million or \$38 million and a significant portion of that, around \$15.5 million, was derived through the casino supervision charge. So other amounts were –

Danny O'BRIEN: Right. So that was actually my next question: so the money is cost-recovered from the casino?

Toby HEMMING: Some of it is, yes. Out of a total –

Danny O'BRIEN: What was that figure again? Sorry, I missed it.

Toby HEMMING: \$15,374,150.

Danny O'BRIEN: So \$15.3 million out of \$37 million.

Toby HEMMING: Yes, that is right.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Page 72 of the questionnaire again refers to the \$16.4 million that was taken out of central contingency for establishing the new agencies. It describes it as being spent on:

appointing a new VGCCC Chair and dedicated casino commissioners to strengthen oversight over casino operations.

How much are we paying these new casino commissioners?

Toby HEMMING: I do not know the figure off the top of my head. I would have to take it on notice and come back to the committee.

Danny O'BRIEN: Perhaps the more detailed question is: could I get a breakdown of what that \$16.4 million was spent on?

Toby HEMMING: Yes, of course.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you. Turning to liquor now, the questionnaire at pages 295 and 296 indicates that the 'Liquor inspections completed' performance measure last year, 2022–23, was 22 per cent down on target for metro areas and 54.1 per cent down for regional areas, and the explanation given is:

The actual is lower than target as LCV is a new entity established at the start of the reporting period and has therefore had to undertake significant recruitment to fill key roles.

There was a liquor commission or a liquor authority, the VCGLR, before this new one was established. It is not like it is a new idea. There were staff there that were doing inspections and the like. Why is the performance so bad just because there is a new name on the organisation?

Toby HEMMING: When the split occurred, certain staff went to the gambling regulator and some staff went across to the new liquor regulator. I think it is fair to say that more staff went to the gambling regulator than went to the liquor regulator, so there has been a significant recruitment exercise required by the liquor regulator in order to build up that particular workforce. In the inspection area now – in the enforcement area, I should say with LCV – there are 34 roles who are undertaking inspections and investigations, as well as some analysts as well. That is an increase in the number of staff in that enforcement area compared to the reported period we are talking about now. But there has been –

Danny O'BRIEN: Sorry, it is an increase of how many, did you say?

Toby HEMMING: Thirty-four.

Danny O'BRIEN: The increase is 34.

Toby HEMMING: There are currently 34 in enforcement at Liquor Control Victoria. And so I was saying the performance issues relating to regional and metropolitan inspections as is stated in the questionnaire principally relate to workforce shortages at the time. Those shortages, by and large, have been or continue to be addressed.

Danny O'BRIEN: Just to clarify, though, is it 34 new roles or 34 total?

Toby HEMMING: No, there is a total of 34.

Danny O'BRIEN: How many new since the reporting period?

Toby HEMMING: I would have to come back to you. I am sorry.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Thank you. Likewise, still on liquor, we have got some data on liquor licences finalised from the last couple of years. Can you tell me how many liquor licence applications were finalised in 2022–23?

Toby HEMMING: It was about 15,000, so 14,897.

Danny O'BRIEN: 14,897. That is in –

Toby HEMMING: I can break that down for you if you would like.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes.

Toby HEMMING: 1100 new permanent applications, about 3600 transfers, about 2500 variations and approximately 7500 temporary and major events licences.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. That is what I wanted to get to. So 14,897 is still less than the reported figures for 2018–19, 2019–20 and 2020–21. Only in a COVID year, 2021–22, was it lower than that, and yet, as you might recall – we asked about this in estimates – we are still getting extraordinarily long periods of time of people waiting for a licence, particularly temporary licences. I had a local organisation contact me the other day who applied for a temporary licence for an event on 1 December back in August. They had not even had a response or acknowledgement yet from LCV. I think I was told that by October we had more people onboarded. When are we actually going to see improvements in the processing times for these applications?

Toby HEMMING: Perhaps separate to the hearing, if you can provide me with the details of that individual, I can have that matter looked into.

Danny O'BRIEN: I have actually already provided them to the minister's office, and I am very grateful that they have followed up.

Toby HEMMING: Okay. Thank you. Temporary and major events licences are in effect currently being processed in accordance with the relevant BP3 measure, so they have improved –

Danny O'BRIEN: Temporary licences.

Toby HEMMING: Temporary and major events licences, that category of licences – they are currently being processed in accordance with the BP3 measures.

Danny O'BRIEN: That being, what, 85 per cent on time?

Toby HEMMING: Within 11 weeks is the measure.

Danny O'BRIEN: Right.

Toby HEMMING: But having said that, as the committee has heard before – I think as I said it at the last committee hearing – there have been some issues in terms of the time limits of the processing of applications. I come back again to a couple of issues, principally around the workforce issues and the really significant job that LCV has had to undertake in order to recruit. There is actually currently a surge workforce in place, which has just been put in place at LCV over the last month or six weeks or so. So there are 16 surge – temporary – agency staff whose job it is to ensure that licence applications can be processed in a more timely way, and they are supporting LCV more broadly in those efforts. So there are improvements in terms of when compliance will be achieved. The advice I have received just in the last couple of days from LCV is that into the new year it is likely that in respect of all of the major licence categories the processing times will have returned to compliance in terms of BP3.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. So that surge workforce will be kept on until the new year – is that what you are saying?

Toby HEMMING: Yes, that is right. So the purpose of the surge workforce is to do some of the really admin-heavy work that LCV staff would otherwise have to do themselves, and they will remain there into the new year, depending on when the backlog is addressed and processing times are reduced. They will stay there until that work has been done.

Danny O'BRIEN: And in terms of permanent workforce increase, could perhaps – I am going to run out of time.

Toby HEMMING: Yes. There is a continuing operation to increase the permanent workforce as well.

Danny O'BRIEN: Can I get the data on what the current levels are?

Toby HEMMING: Yes, I can take that on notice.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: We will go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Associate Secretary, commissioners and officials for joining us today. Associate Secretary, I would like to start with fines management. I note specifically in 2022–23, budget paper 3, page 94 talks about the implementation of a COVID fines concessional scheme. How has the delivery of this particular scheme gone in the last budget period, and how did it support the collection of COVID-related fines?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Thank you very much, Mr Galea, for the question. The department has fully implemented the COVID-19 fines concession scheme, which commenced in August 2022. The funding supported the necessary changes to the Fines Victoria IT system and the development of an online application process. The scheme supported applicants to have the value of their fines significantly reduced, helping fine recipients who experienced financial disadvantage. Most applications have been successful, and the scheme will continue to remain available into the future as people deal with their COVID-19 fines.

Michael GALEA: Do you have any data on how many fines have been dealt with through this process?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Mr Galea, we do. My colleague Cameron Rapmund, who has been acting in the fines executive director role, is at the table and will be able to provide you with that detail.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

Cameron RAPMUND: Thank you. We have received 224 applications to that scheme; 209 of those were successful, so the concession was granted in those cases.

Michael GALEA: Sure. Thank you, Mr Rapmund. So 209 out of 224 – quite a low number, yes. How many outstanding COVID fines are there?

Cameron RAPMUND: As at 31 October 2023 there were 28,356 outstanding COVID-19 fines, including ones that might be partly paid or subject to review and ones that have not been dealt with.

Michael GALEA: Yes. Thank you. I think you said, Mr Phillips, that the fines concessional scheme is still available. Is there a cessation date earmarked for that scheme or is that indefinite?

Ryan PHILLIPS: I believe it will continue to remain available into the future to support people to deal with their fines.

Michael GALEA: Sure. Thank you. And how is that scheme managed? Is it directly through Fines Victoria or as another subset of the department?

Cameron RAPMUND: Fines Victoria manages the scheme. People make application through Fines Victoria, through our website or in person or through the mail, and applications are dealt with in one or two days.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Therefore I take it that Fines Victoria is the authority that ultimately has discretion as to the outcome of fines and if they are varied or waived. Is that correct?

Cameron RAPMUND: The scheme is established through the legislation, so the legislation sets out the eligibility criteria. But, yes, the decision is made.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. More broadly on technology, and I might –

Ryan PHILLIPS: Sorry, can I just clarify a point.

Michael GALEA: Yes, please.

Ryan PHILLIPS: Decisions to withdraw fines – they were made by the enforcement agency, which is not Fines Victoria. In most cases that would be Victoria Police. However, it could also be the Department of Health and other agencies who issued COVID-19 fines. So we administer those fines in accordance with the legislation, but we are not the enforcement agency who makes the decision whether or not they proceed.

Mathew HILAKARI: While we are on fines for the moment, is there a certain cut-off point or part of the process where that can no longer be withdrawn?

Cameron RAPMUND: Are we talking about the concession scheme or –

Mathew HILAKARI: Both the concessions but fines in general as well.

Cameron RAPMUND: The fine will progress through what we call an infringement life cycle, and the options available to the fine recipient, Fines Victoria and the enforcement agency vary through that life cycle. Ultimately, in terms of an enforcement agency deciding to withdraw the fine, that can occur at almost any point up to I guess the final stages of enforcement, where a sheriff has executed a warrant in relation to the fine and issued a seven-day notice, which is a very final warning, and that seven-day period has expired. That is the point at which the person may be brought before a court to deal with the fine and the enforcement agency will no longer have the option to withdraw the fine.

Mathew HILAKARI: The COVID-19 concessions – at what point?

Cameron RAPMUND: It is the same point. It is available all throughout the life cycle up until that expiry with seven-day notice, where the options reduce.

Michael GALEA: You mentioned the approximately 28,000 fines still outstanding to be processed, to be finalised by people. How many have actually been paid?

Cameron RAPMUND: So those 28,000 fines outstanding – I do have the number of fines that have been paid. As at 30 June 2023, 5807 fines had been paid in full, and a further 3283 fines were on a payment arrangement – being paid off over time.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. More broadly again now, not just COVID-related fines but fines as a whole – how has your use of technology changed over the period which we are looking at, and have you been able to make any improvements to the way fines are processed and collected through these new technologies?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Technology is a key part of our fine collection system and has been a key focus for Fines Victoria over many years. The technology is something that will continue to be a priority into the future as we identify new ways and improved ways to ensure the effective collection of debt. It is extremely complex. It requires the system to interface with many other justice system partners – so with Victoria Police, with VicRoads and with courts. As a result of that, over the years we have developed a significant capability in-house. Cameron will be able to talk to you a bit about the work on the fines system – both the VIEW system, which is the system currently in place, and also on the system that we are working on to deliver even more improved services into the future, the NextGen IT system.

Cameron RAPMUND: Yes. The IT system currently used is the VIEW IT system. It is now fully operational and supports the entire fines system from end to end, supporting both Fines Victoria in enforcing and collecting fines and the Sheriff's Office Victoria in executing warrants. We have also begun the Next-Gen IT project, which is a new IT project to deliver additional functionality to augment that IT system with a view to enhancing the collection of revenue and also supporting Fines Victoria in its delivery of schemes that assist vulnerable Victorians through using technology to reduce the administrative burden.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Tied in with that is the support for vulnerable Victorians. We are obviously in a difficult period for cost of living for many Victorians. How is Fines Victoria adapting and providing support for people who are in genuine hardship and struggling to pay their fines?

Ryan PHILLIPS: There are a range of supports that are in place, and these seek to address the particular needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged fine recipients. A key example of this is the work and development permit scheme. I will ask Cameron to talk you through the detail of that scheme and how it can support vulnerable people, and then we can take you through some other mechanisms as well.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

Cameron RAPMUND: We operate what is called the work and development permit scheme, where people with significant financial hardship can apply to work off their fine in a non-financial way. Now, that could be through education, counselling or training, particularly where that training or counselling might address the cause of the offending behaviour. People might undertake financial counselling with an accredited sponsor, and the time spent doing that then works off their fine. We also make available payment arrangements where people can pay off their fine at a rate that is affordable to them. People experiencing hardship can also seek a review of their fine with Fines Victoria where they believe they have been fined unfairly or if they have certain circumstances, such as disability or mental illness, which has resulted in them receiving a fine.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Obviously, that sounds like one key part of it. Are there any other parts of the picture that the department provides in support?

Ryan PHILLIPS: It is probably also worth noting the partnerships that we have with community providers in the work and development permit scheme. Cameron, can you take the committee through some of those partnerships? I know there are a number of community legal centres who are deeply interested in the work of the work and development permit scheme, and we have been engaging with those community providers over many years to ensure that the requisite supports are in place.

Cameron RAPMUND: We are reliant on work and development permit sponsors as part of the scheme, which will be financial counsellors, healthcare providers and addiction counsellors. We have worked very hard to increase the numbers of those sponsors over the years. We work closely with them to respond to their feedback about how to make the scheme more accessible. We have recently undertaken a review to look at reducing the administrative burden of the scheme on the providers, which has been very well received by the providers.

Ryan PHILLIPS: There are also particular arrangements in place with family violence victims. Cameron, can you take the committee through that scheme as well?

Cameron RAPMUND: We have a particular scheme available to victim-survivors of family violence. This was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence for people who have received a fine and are victim-survivors of family violence where either that experience led to them receiving the fine or their experience stops them from nominating the driver of the fine. If a speeding fine has been received and it was not them driving, they do not have to nominate the driver if it would increase their risk of family violence. They can apply directly to Fines Victoria. This is one of the circumstances where, if the application is successful and meets the criteria, Fines Victoria can then cancel the fine and no further enforcement action will take place. Again, we are working to increase the efficiency of that scheme to allow us to serve more applicants through the use of technology.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

Ryan PHILLIPS: Certainly. You can see that there are a range of supports in place, and this is an area of key priority for the department. Fine recipients are encouraged to call us early. That is certainly something that is really important. People should get on the phone, call Fines Victoria and talk to us about what their options are. I think one of the things we do not want to see is vulnerable people getting too far down the path when it becomes difficult for us to act and to support them, so certainly they can visit the Fines Victoria website for more information or call us, and we can see what support we can help with.

Michael GALEA: Yes. Thank you, Associate Secretary. And thank you, Mr Rapmund, as well. It is good to know there are a lot of supports in place. Associate Secretary, I would like to turn your attention to the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, specifically in the same budget paper, 3, page 298; an output of \$64.8 million is shown as the target for the year. Can you update us on what was met and what was delivered as part of that output measure?

Ryan PHILLIPS: The Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine provides a critical service to the Victorian community. I know that many people have been surprised that it sits with the department of justice, noting that it provides services that are also deeply connected into our health system and the partnership that that institute has with both the department of justice and the Department of Health is absolutely key to the effective operation of the justice system. It is a key input into our court processes. Its key services include providing the justice system with evidence to support the criminal justice system process. That can include investigating deaths reported to the coroner, examining alleged offenders, medically assessing and supporting victims of crime and the provision of clinical forensic medicine services for victim-survivors of violence and sexual crime. It also undertakes research that directly contributes to public health and safety and the just working of the legal system. By contributing to the professional development and education of forensic pathologists, physicians and scientists, VIFM ensures a high standard of forensic medical services for Victoria and provides critical support for the state's health and justice systems.

Another aspect of VIFM that you may not be aware of is the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria. This tissue bank supports patients and their families, providing safe tissues to medical specialists and Victorian hospitals for transplantation and medical research. My colleague Diab Harb has come to the table and will be able to take any more detailed questions about VIFM.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. It sounds quite interesting. Can you actually tell us about the donor tissue bank – that sounds quite interesting as well – and how they can support our health system?

Diab HARB: Thank you for the question. Briefly, the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria supports patients and their families by providing safe tissues to medical specialists and Victorian hospitals for transplantation and medical research. It is really crucial, in particular in disaster situations. They had a really strong function and role to play during the Black Saturday bushfires, where they provided skin tissue to support victims of the fires.

Michael GALEA: All right. Thank you, Mr Harb. The key performance measures for VIFM, this institute, how have they changed over the period at which we are looking – those previous two financial years?

Ryan PHILLIPS: I will just pause for one second to find the relevant performance measures. VIFM reports against eight performance measures as part of the annual budget process. These indicators measure VIFM's output, quality and timeliness of services. VIFM has been meeting the BP3 targets relating to quality audits and the timely provision of medico-legal death investigations and reports consistently since 2017–18. In 2022–23, two new performance measures were introduced. These measures include peer-reviewed research articles published and the number of inquiries in relation to non-reportable deaths that are resolved by the coronial admissions and inquiries office.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. And how have these investments, such as through this budget output, supported the courts and justice system?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Investments support VIFM to continue to provide timely and comprehensive services to support the coronial and criminal justice process, including timely provision of expert evidence to support criminal prosecutions in sexual assault cases and helping to solve long-term missing cases. Investing in VIFM also enables it to continue to collect and analyse information as part of its statutory functions to reveal insights into the social and health issues that impact the Victorian community, such as contributing directly to detecting new and dangerous drugs in the community.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. In the field of casino, gaming and liquor regulation, obviously I understand we have had some significant reforms announced, which another PAEC inquiry has been looking at, which is quite an exciting space at the moment it seems in terms of some of the changes that are already happening in that space. One thing, though, that is out of the scope of that inquiry that we have been looking at is the casino and of course the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, which is discussed quite heavily in those same budget papers in 2022–23. Associate Secretary, can you please update us on how the department is tracking in implementation of the recommendations of that Royal Commission?

Ryan PHILLIPS: I can. Mr Hemming is here. I will commence the response to the question. The department has progressed the implementation of all 33 recommendations made by the Royal Commission. They are now either fully acquitted or legislated and awaiting commencement.

Toby HEMMING: Thanks, Mr Galea. There was an immediate response back in October 2021 when the government took action to deliver nine priority recommendations through the passage of an initial Bill, which was the *Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Act*. That was introduced into Parliament within two weeks of receiving the Royal Commission findings. That particular piece of legislation established the role of the Special Manager, which was referred to earlier, as well as the new standalone regulator the VGCCC. The government, through that Bill, also went beyond the recommendations of the Royal Commission in a couple of key respects, including providing for the automatic cancellation of Crown's licence at the end of the period of the Special Manager's oversight, which is a two-year period, unless the VGCCC decides otherwise. The Act also increased the maximum fine that the VGCCC can impose for disciplinary action from \$1 million to \$100 million to ensure there are meaningful consequences for any breaches of the law.

There were three further Acts subsequently passed which delivered an additional 15 Royal Commission recommendations – for example, there was the *Casino and Liquor Legislation Amendment Act* in June 2022, which strengthened the powers and functions of inspectors. In particular, it gave them unfettered access to security and surveillance material and all books and records as well. It also embedded harm minimisation as a core function of the VGCCC.

There was a further Bill, the *Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Act*, which delivered 12 additional recommendations including introducing some really significant gambling harm minimisation and anti-money-laundering requirements for the casino in particular. That Act came into effect on 1 August 2023, and it paved the way, for example, for mandatory carded play and identity verification and mandatory precommitment on EGMs at the casino and also for cashless gaming throughout the casino. It also strengthened provisions to ensure a smooth transition of casino operations in the event that the casino licence is either cancelled, suspended or surrendered. It also included new requirements to better regulate the ownership and governance of the casino and its holding companies, including preventing outside interference in the running of the casino by a dominant stakeholder.

Lastly, the *Gambling Taxation Act*, which I should say was led by the Treasurer, implemented recommendations on unpaid casino tax by transferring casino taxation provisions to a new legislative framework. All this of course was in response to findings by the Royal Commission that Crown Melbourne had improperly claimed deductions from gaming revenue over a number of years to reduce its tax bill and as a result it was found to have underpaid millions of dollars in the casino tax to the state.

Then there were a remaining nine recommendations which have been acquitted through a range of administrative mechanisms or directions which have been made by the regulator. They include, for example, the establishment of a data committee in December 2022 to improve research into problem gambling as well as new information-sharing arrangements between Crown and the state and also federal law enforcement agencies to reduce the incidence of money laundering and other criminal behaviour. So as I said, all 33 recommendations have either now been fully acquitted or legislated and awaiting commencement.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Mr Hemming. Thank you, Associate Secretary.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Galea. We are going to go to the Deputy Chair.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you very much. Good morning to everyone. Good morning, commissioners. Good to see you again. How is everything going at Cherry Creek?

Andrea DAVIDSON: Yes, we are progressing well, Mr McGowan, thank you.

Nick McGOWAN: A couple of incidents there – that was a bit disturbing to hear, obviously. Not too many details, but is there anything you can share with us specifically around – I suppose what I am more interested in is how we can avoid them happening in the future and what you have maybe learned from those incidents.

Andrea DAVIDSON: Absolutely, and thank you for your question and your interest in how Cherry Creek is progressing. We are very happy with how the facility is progressing and I think it is important to note that the vast majority of days on which we have been open since 20 August have been incident free. As with all incidents in youth justice custody, we look at those incidents, and the more serious incidents we take through a process of operational review and take the learnings that we can from those incidents. I cannot comment specifically on the nature of those incidents, but certainly we are very satisfied with the staffing response to those incidents. In particular it has demonstrated that all the work that was put in prior to opening, in terms of stepping ourselves through scenario testing not only with our own staff but with our other emergency management service colleagues has been very beneficial in terms of readying our staff for young people coming into the facility.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you. Commissioner, forgive me, I have got a couple of quick questions if that is okay – as quick as I can ask them.

Shane PATTON: That is what I am here for.

Nick McGOWAN: It does not mean you will be quick in answering them of course. Are you able to tell me how many times VicPol have been called out, in the periods we are talking about, to either Malmsbury and/or Cherry Creek, realising that Cherry Creek is latter in terms of the period we are looking at?

Shane PATTON: No, I do not. I do not have those figures, no.

Nick McGOWAN: Would you mind providing those to us later? For the years that are under review.

Shane PATTON: If they are able to be provided, I will.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay.

Shane PATTON: We will explore whether we can provide them. I mean, often it will just be a call-out via a communication centre to us and our members will attend, so there may be records kept locally, but we will chase that up and if we can, we will.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. I do not have a great understanding of the database. But as Commissioner can you ask – if I want to know how many times VicPol have been called to Malmsbury, is it as simple as asking for a report on a time period and call-outs, and then you sort of go through what the call-outs are for? It could be that somebody is locked out through to there has been a crime committed.

Shane PATTON: I will certainly ask the question. I do not know whether we will get the level of detail you need, but I will try to provide it for sure.

Nick McGOWAN: Awesome, that would be great. In terms of your FTE, 16 133 I think was the figure I saw there. There are still obviously a number of unfilled vacancies. What are you hoping, trajectory wise? Is that an ongoing struggle, like for everyone in the workforce at the moment, trying to get people?

Shane PATTON: Yes. For Victoria Police, like every other policing jurisdiction and like every working environment really, it has been a challenge in terms of attrition, if you like, and filling that. During COVID – during those couple of, if you like, lockdown years – we did not have anyone retire or go, because there was nowhere for them to go. And then at the finish of that we had a very large exodus. Predominantly they were people who were at retirement age, but we also had some people who were reassessing life and career and all of those things. So we do have a significant number of vacancies. We have done a real lot of work to address that, and currently our attrition rate I think is 3.53 per cent, which is one of the lowest attrition rates across the jurisdictions within Australia – when I talk to my counterparts, the other commissioners in those areas.

We have been, since 10 April, recruiting double squads of people – so 48 coming in – and they are now coming out in double squads. We have, I think, around 700 to 800 people in our academy at the moment, so it is really chock-a-block, but it is not easy to continue that. We are having to do a whole range of things. We have gone back to warm leads where we had around 40,000 people who had previously expressed interest in joining but had dropped off for whatever reason. Yes, we have a lot of vacancies at the moment. The members are under a lot of pressure because of that, and it takes time to turn it back around, but we are very, very comfortable with what we are doing in the recruiting world at the moment, as well as looking at our whole recruitment pipeline and how we can streamline matters, which we have done a whole lot of work on. So yes, the academy is full – but to your point, it is an ongoing challenge, absolutely.

Nick McGOWAN: Could you answer this question for me. Daytime running lights – are your officers all required to operate those during the daytime, do you know? Across the fleet?

Shane PATTON: Sorry, what is that again?

Nick McGOWAN: Daytime running lights, so having your headlights on during the daytime for safety purposes.

Shane PATTON: No, we do not.

Nick McGOWAN: There is no policy in that respect?

Shane PATTON: No, we have not got a policy in that respect.

Nick McGOWAN: Is VicPol open to looking at that as a policy in terms of safety?

Shane PATTON: Yes. I will actually ask my assistant commissioner of road policing to have a look at that. He will be pleased that he got a task out of this meeting that I attended, but yes, it is a good point. We do not have a firm policy on that. We will certainly look at it because the carnage we are seeing on the roads is amazing. We are at 41 more lives lost this year than last year, and we have had – sorry, if you want me to speak to –

Nick McGOWAN: No, please, that segues nicely, because one of the questions I was going to ask you is: what can we do as the opposition? I know you do not advise the opposition per se – you advise everyone, the government included – but what should we be screaming for given the road toll, as you point out, is a tragedy? What are we not doing, or what should we be doing?

Bev McARTHUR: We are not fixing the roads, Mr McGowan.

Shane PATTON: That is not for me to comment on. What we have seen this year and from the start of the year has been quite extraordinary in terms of the number of multiple fatalities we have had. We have had 13 double fatalities, we have had four quadruple fatalities and we have two fatalities where five people have been tragically killed. In my math that is around 52 deaths from multiple fatalities, and for the entirety of last year, or up until around this time, we had only had two double fatalities, so that is an extraordinary situation for us. We saw the carnage that has been happening on the roads and the trauma that has been happening on the roads, and the projections are, I think, that we will be looking at potentially around 295 deaths this year if something does not happen to stop this.

We continue to work with all of our road safety partners and everything. About two months ago we held a forum at the MCG where we brought everyone from around the nation together – experts and non-policing experts as well – to try and work through if there is any silver bullet. The outcome of that is we are seeing a lot of people tragically killed in multiple fatalities in vehicles, travelling together. Now, the reasoning behind that, whether that is an economic reason for petrol or whatever or it is just a tragic coincidence, we are working through that. For us it was about the low-level compliance; that was the key – people just not taking care, going through stop signs, low-level drink driving impairment, low-level speeding, all of these sorts of things. But predominantly a lot of the carnage that we are seeing, the death, is occurring up in the rural areas. We have had multiple, multiple operations, which I can step you through, but if you take my assurance, we have had Operation Scoreboard and Operation Furlong, and these things run over key critical weekends. We are all about visibility and that theatre of policing and that presence of policing being there so that people think ‘This could

happen to me' in terms of being detected, and so they drive more carefully. But we will again continue to focus with target operations over the next six to eight weeks as well. We are coming into a high-risk area, if we can say that given the carnage we have had.

Nick McGOWAN: Do we do double demerits yet or not?

Shane PATTON: We do not do double demerits here.

Nick McGOWAN: Are you looking at that? I mean, I lived in New South Wales for a while. Does it make an impact?

Shane PATTON: We have looked at it in the past, and we continue to look at it. It continues to get brought up, but it is not something that we have seen any validation for in terms of evidence that it provides a road safety deterrence. If it did, we would look at introducing it. You never rule anything out totally, but at this stage we are not looking at it. We continue to consult with our road safety partners and try and work out what is, if you like, the next circuit breaker. The reality is we have seen some really terrible, terrible, reckless driving since people have been back out on the roads post COVID.

Nick McGOWAN: On a separate issue – I am going to run through these things because I have got limited time – are you able to provide some sort of update in terms of how much we would have spent on overtime to man protests in the period under review? Protests of any kind – I do not care what they are protesting.

Shane PATTON: Yes, hang on. I will see if I can come up with them. I know that on average – when you say 'time', that will be difficult to work out.

Nick McGOWAN: I am only talking about overtime that was –

Shane PATTON: Yes. On average we would do in the city area, which is the predominant area where the protests occur, over 400 protests each year. I often describe Melbourne as the protest capital of the world, because we do have them happening all the time. In recent times, since we have seen the tension in the community through the conflict that is occurring in the Middle East, we have had 126 rallies occur since 7 October. Measuring actual time – that would I think be virtually impossible to us. As I said, I have given you the broad numbers, because it depends – I mean, the other weekend, not last weekend but the weekend before, we had 45,000 people protest in the city – and it is subject to how long a protest goes for and all of that.

Nick McGOWAN: I notice there were two advances here, one in 2021–22 then in 2022–23, of \$200 million-plus and then \$205 million respectively, and they were to provide support to VicPol's operations. They were Treasurer's advances. Do you know what they were used for specifically or what the purposes of those were broadly?

Shane PATTON: In terms of protests, are you talking about?

Nick McGOWAN: Well, I do not know that they were protest specific, but they could have been. I am not quite sure what they were used for.

Shane PATTON: For protests, during the whole COVID period, if we recollect and look back, we were tied up significantly with protest activity, and a lot of overtime was taken up in deployment of members from that, moving them away from their relevant areas, and allowances associated with that and a whole range of different things.

Danny O'BRIEN: Can I just perhaps ask, Commissioner, if you can take this on notice? I am not sure it is a question for you or the department. Those two figures that the Deputy Chair referred to of Treasurer's advances in 2021–22, 2022–23 – what was that money actually for?

Shane PATTON: Hang on, I think I might have that here.

Danny O'BRIEN: So it was \$219.7 million in 2021–22 and \$205.3 million last year.

Shane PATTON: Treasurer's advance in 2022–23, is that what –

Nick McGOWAN: Yes, 2022–23. I think it was \$205 million.

Shane PATTON: It was supporting our police operations and resources, so that range of things I have just spoken through, and also increasing the police capacity to meet current and future demand as well as a five-year asset revaluation impact to depreciation expenditure and, significantly, the 2022 floods response as well. We had a lot of members that were deployed, taken away, pushed into the country areas where we have significant allowances and the like. It also supported enhancements to our systems and resources, and those were enabling systems such as our Oracle system; our electronic penalty infringement notice that we are trying to get up; our service delivery transformation command, supporting the transformation of our service delivery and our operating model; interim custody management at Bendigo Law Courts, where we assisted in the custody management of a range of things there; public intoxication reforms, a Treasurer's advance there, for funding –

Danny O'BRIEN: How much was that? Is that broken down?

Shane PATTON: Yes, \$653,000 for public intoxication reform.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay.

Shane PATTON: Information sharing in the family violence space, release of funding in terms of assets for new police station infrastructure – yes.

Nick McGOWAN: Commissioner, family violence – I was talking about this in the Parliament the other week, and it just seems that women are being killed with some regularity such that it is just beyond disturbing. And we all talk about it – it is like we are all part of the problem, actually. What are we not doing? What should we be doing? The Attorney talks about a proportionate response; I am over the proportionate response. I am more interested in the disproportionate response, because it seems that women and girls are fair game to men, and at some point we just get sick of it of it – or we do not. Is there anything in your advice repertoire over these periods where you can say, 'This is what we ought to be doing to protect more women'?

Shane PATTON: We are doing everything we can in family violence. I agree, it is an absolute epidemic, and the tragic amount of deaths we see, where women are predominantly being killed by men, is just totally unacceptable. We have probably one of the most mature responses to family violence in the nation if not the world. We have 31 family violence investigation units that are staffed with over 415 people, specific officers specifically dedicated to responding to those. We have a specific family violence command that is headed up by an assistant commissioner who engages with the entire sector to leverage off them and do whatever we can. I think in 2022–23 it dropped slightly, the number of family violence incidents, to around 90,000. That is nothing to brag about if we are dropping down to 90,000 incidents. It went back up again slightly –

Nick McGOWAN: Do we have to get tougher with the men? Is that the bottom line here? Are we too tolerant, the whole system?

Shane PATTON: No, for me it is a whole range of things. It is about us doing what we should be doing and targeting those real high-risk offenders, and we have a specific unit that does that within our family violence command who target those high-risk offenders. We recently saw one of them who had been involved in a span of family violence offending over many, many years – I am talking over 15 to 20 years. They stepped back through his life and investigated all of that, and he received one of the largest sentences in terms of family violence that we have seen. We regularly undertake a commitment and engagement with high-risk victims. We visit regularly, we support and we take those interventions and really affirmative enforcement actions when we are required to. It is not just family violence, though; it is violence against women as well that is occurring sometimes not in a family violence space, and we have seen that through stalking and harassment. We have conducted a number of trials, including a recent one for screening and assessment for stalking and harassment, so that we can better educate our members. We have –

Nick McGOWAN: Is there a place for electronic monitoring?

Shane PATTON: I beg your pardon?

Nick McGOWAN: Is there a place for electronic monitoring at some point?

Shane PATTON: Look, they are matters for government to consider. They are quite –

Nick McGOWAN: That is not a no.

Shane PATTON: Well, we are open to anything that will make women safer.

Nick McGOWAN: On that, I remember back when I worked for Ted before he was Premier – then he became Premier – and Les Twentymen went banging on about the same issue: knives, knives, knives, youth, machetes. Can we not just ban machetes? I do not know why in Victoria we need machetes. Do you have any advice you would give in that respect?

Shane PATTON: Yes, we have certainly been talking with government about that. A young person cannot be carrying a machete around in public. They should not be.

Nick McGOWAN: Not easily.

Shane PATTON: Well, no.

Nick McGOWAN: Not concealed.

Shane PATTON: Certainly there is no reason for having them, and they should not be carrying them around. It carries up to a year imprisonment and I think around a \$23,000 fine. So there is a significant penalty for them if and when we apprehend them, and we do apprehend a lot of people. We have conducted over 30-odd what we call omni operations – that is just the name we give them – under the *Control of Weapons Act*. We are very cognisant of the spate of knife crime that we have seen, and we deal with it through a range of issues. We have got Operation Alliance, which is targeting youth gangs, and we know that we have got 40-odd youth gangs or whatever – the number fluctuates – involving about 600 youth gang members. We target them, we lock them up and we have been successful as well. We have diverted 150 of them away. It is not just the big stick. That is a key component, but we use our youth support officers and our youth resource officers to go back to the family to make sure that the youth who was involved with that offender does not get pulled into the same vacuum, into the same areas. So yes, knife crime is a significant issue for us. It is one that we continue to talk with the government about in terms of whether there are areas where we can enhance that. But really, the law or the legislation we have in place at the moment is quite adequate, and we use it a lot.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you very much, Commissioner. Associate Secretary, have we got any update on the OPCAT, the optional protocol? The minister said, I think back at PAEC this year, that we would look to have the full implementation. I am not quite sure if that has progressed, but has it?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Those discussions around OPCAT remain subject to reaching agreement with the Commonwealth –

Nick McGOWAN: So it is about money.

Ryan PHILLIPS: so those discussions remain ongoing.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. That does not sound great to me. Commissioner Davidson, just on the dual-track system, are you able to give us any insight or any figures that actually show us whether we think it is working or not, objectively, after two years? Are they coming back to the system? Are we managing to divert them away? Is there any information you could provide or share with us on that?

Andrea DAVIDSON: Thank you for your question, Mr McGowan, and interest in dual track. It is a really important part of our system. Acknowledging that we have seen a decline and a trend down in the numbers of young people in the dual-track system in recent years, I think it is important to note that a critical part of the system reconfiguration to move dual-track young men from Malmsbury to Parkville will be a very considered look at how we can enhance the offerings within that system. One of the critical elements of that is the metro-based location and the opportunity that it affords us to be able to ensure that those dual-track young men are able to move into employment and training and to be able to do that in a sustainable way that sets them up for the really critical rehabilitative process and reintegration back into community.

Nick McGOWAN: Anything you would be able to provide us, because I know I am about to run out of time, but any information – I know we asked the minister this question. He came back with a general, ‘the

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare publishes data'. It did not help us. If you can provide any data, that would be awesome.

Just on Malmsbury, what is the latest? Has that shut down yet, or are we almost out?

Andrea DAVIDSON: We have to 31 December to move young people out of the Malmsbury facility. We continue –

Nick McGOWAN: Take it on notice, perhaps.

Andrea DAVIDSON: Taken on notice.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We will go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair. I would like to ask a question about casino, gambling and liquor regulation. Can you please outline the steps the department has taken to strengthen the regulatory framework to improve oversight of the casino, including through the establishment of the Special Manager and dedicated casino division within the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission?

Toby HEMMING: Thank you, Mr Tak. There has been significant strengthening of the regulatory framework to improve oversight of the casino. This has been in response to a couple of things – firstly, the 2021 independent review into casino regulation, which was led by Ms Deborah Cope. It has also been in response to the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, which was chaired by Justice Finkelstein. On 3 August 2021 the government announced a major overhaul of the regulation of gambling in Victoria by establishing the new casino and gambling regulator, and I think as you said, that includes a dedicated casino regulation division. It also has specialist leadership and staff who are focused solely on holding the casino operator to account. The separation of the gambling and liquor regulatory functions has enabled the VGCCC to provide stronger, more focused regulation of the casino but also of the broader gambling industry across Victoria. To support the stronger focus on the casino, the new legislative arrangements also enshrine a harm minimisation focus and enhanced compliance tools to bolster the regulatory power of the VGCCC, as I mentioned earlier, including the ability to issue fines of up to \$100 million, which is an increase from the previous \$1 million.

For 2021–22 and 2022–23 the VGCCC has used new powers to fine Crown Melbourne a total \$250 million for unlawful behaviour. There were five separate matters. In May 2022 there was a fine of \$80 million. This related to the illegal transfer of funds through the China UnionPay scheme, which was identified by the Royal Commission, which let patrons use their credit cards to access money to gamble. There were two matters in November 2022, with fines of \$100 million and \$20 million respectively. The first was for breaches of the code of conduct for the responsible service of gambling over many years by consistently failing to intervene to prevent gambling harm, and the second was for failing to comply with a statutory direction by the regulator to take all reasonable steps to prevent patrons from using small plastic picks and other devices that would simulate automatic play on the EGMs. Then in April 2023 there was a \$30 million fine to Crown Melbourne for allowing patrons to gamble at the casino by depositing bank cheques made out to themselves and not to Crown. And then finally, in June 2023 there was a \$20 million fine for failing to pay the proper amounts of casino tax over an extended period of time.

The second element relates to the strengthened funding arrangements for the VGCCC. There was legislation passed in 2022 which established the casino supervision charge, which requires the Melbourne casino to cover the reasonable costs of its regulation by the commission, in line with other gambling licences. As I mentioned earlier, that charge for 2022–23, I think it was, was \$15.9 million approximately. This allows the commission to ensure the ongoing integrity, safety and fairness of the casino, in line with its regulatory mandate.

Then finally to mention the Special Manager, you will be aware that at the beginning of last year the former IBAC Commissioner Stephen O'Bryan KC was appointed as Special Manager for the Melbourne casino operator. In that role Mr O'Bryan is tasked with independently advising the VGCCC as well as the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation about Crown's reform program as well as its efforts to return to suitability to hold the Melbourne casino operator licence after the end of December this year. The Special

Manager's costs are also funded by Crown Melbourne. The Special Manager has been given extensive legislative powers to monitor, assess and report on the casino operator's progress in terms of its reform program and to oversee and, if necessary, direct its current operations. The powers of the Special Manager are unprecedented in terms of Australian corporate oversight. For example, they include a right to direct the board of Crown Melbourne to take or to refrain from taking action if he considers it is in the best interests of the casino operator. He also has unfettered access to all areas of the casino as well as its books and records. The Special Manager prepares six-monthly reports – interim reports – and the final report is due in December this year. Those reports will inform the independent regulator's decision on whether it is satisfied that Crown Melbourne is suitable to hold the Melbourne casino licence.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Supplemental funding was provided to establish the VGCCC and to support its oversight of all gaming and gaming activities in Victoria. Can you please outline the steps taken by the department to regulate the gaming sector more broadly?

Toby HEMMING: Certainly. Thank you. The design of the VGCCC regulatory arrangements was informed by best practice regulatory arrangements from around the world. While there has rightfully been a strong focus on the casino operator, particularly in light of the Royal Commission and other inquiries, the department has also supported the government improving the regulatory environment for all gambling providers who operate in Victoria. Legislation, I think as I mentioned earlier, has embedded a greater focus on harm minimisation across the industry, and we have also seen an increase in the regulatory activities that hold venues that break the rules to account; for example, where there has been money laundering or allowing under-age people to gamble or not having the precommitment system equipment installed on gaming machines.

The department has also supported the minister in the delivery of the national consumer protection framework for online wagering. And ministerial directions are in place that mean that wagering providers must, for example, provide monthly activity statements to all customers, which is an important initiative which allows customers to understand what they are actually spending, so it is a harm minimisation component. They must also use new gambling harm messages, which you would have seen, spoken in a consistent tone – so evidence-based messages, for example, such as 'You win some, you lose more'. They must also ensure that all wagering provider staff have responsible service of gambling training.

Meng Heang TAK: I am more interested in the harm minimisation. Can you expand on that a bit more, please?

Toby HEMMING: Harm minimisation has been embedded into the approach that the regulator is required to take, and it informs all of its activities. Harm minimisation was one of the principal responses to the Finkelstein Royal Commission, which found that Crown Melbourne in particular had not been adhering to its responsible service of gambling obligations. We announced that through legislation, through ministerial directions and through directions that are issued by the independent regulator itself. The need to minimise harm or reduce the harm that can potentially flow from gambling activities is embedded in all aspects of this work.

Meng Heang TAK: Okay.

Mathew HILAKARI: Just in regard to that, I understand the previous option for people who self-excluded or were excluded from venues with electronic gaming machines was to try and identify a person with a photo. How is that changing in the period ahead, or is that changing in the period ahead, particularly with registered card playing?

Toby HEMMING: When there is mandatory precommitment and carded play, there will be opportunities, which I think the government is giving consideration to the moment, in terms of self-exclusion programs. Under the codes of conduct which exist for venues and for the Melbourne casino as well they are required as part of the ministerial direction to have self-exclusion programs, and there are particular criteria which those programs are required to meet. I do not have the details, I am sorry, in terms of exactly how those individual programs are working and what changes would occur, but certainly there is potential for them to be improved as part of the strengthened regulatory arrangements that will follow this year and beyond.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. With the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence recommendations now either implemented or awaiting commencement, what is the focus of the department when it comes to protecting Victorians from gambling harm?

Toby HEMMING: Thank you. The department is currently undertaking work which aims to address gambling harm kind of more broadly, and that is through improved service delivery models as well as legislative and regulatory reforms. The department has undertaken lots of work to support the development of the government's fairly recently announced suite of major gambling reforms. You may be aware that on 16 July this year the now former Premier and the minister announced reforms, including the introduction of mandatory closure periods from 4 am to 10 am for all gaming machine areas in pubs and clubs; the implementation of mandatory precommitment limits and carded play on all gaming machines; the reduction of cash load-up limits on gaming machines from \$1000 back to \$100; and also a decrease in what is known as the spin rates for new gaming machines back to 3 seconds, reducing, obviously, the speed at which money can be lost or laundered and providing an opportunity to slow down play, which we know from research has an important harm minimisation impact. There was a further Bill that passed the Parliament just recently, on 31 October, which supports some of those reforms, in particular the mandatory closure periods.

Following the announcement of those reforms in July, the department has been engaged in extensive consultation with industry and community stakeholders, and the purpose of that consultation is principally around ensuring the smooth transition and implementation of those reforms. It has involved, for example, consultation through Engage Victoria, which received 103 submissions, as well as the establishment of some formal stakeholder groups, which include some of the peak industry groups as well as some of the big industry players and community groups and researchers. That consultation is ongoing and in effect is ramping up at the moment.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. Two corrections, Associate Secretary – I refer to the 2022–23 financial report, table 3.5. I understand that the expenses from transactions in 2022–23 include the beginnings of \$43 million of new funding invested into primary health services in women's custodial facilities. Can you please outline how this funding has been implemented and what changes have been made to health services inside women's correctional facilities as a result of these investments?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Thank you very much. Can I say at the outset that the health services to men and women in custody are absolutely key to the effective running of our correctional system. In the department we have a business unit – justice health – that is responsible for the delivery of health services. We are unique in the sense that whereas the Department of Health is responsible for most health services in Victoria, we play a particular role, and ensuring the effective provision of health services throughout the pandemic, ensuring that men and women in custody are kept safe, has been a key priority for the department and something we are really proud of. I have the Acting Deputy Secretary for Corrections and Justice Services here at the table with me, Emma Catford. Emma is responsible for the justice health business unit and will be able to take you through some of the key reforms that we have implemented to improve our service delivery.

Meng Heang TAK: Yes, please.

Emma CATFORD: Yes. Thank you. Thank you for the question. As Ryan noted, some of the people in our care have really complex needs. They often present to us with increased comorbidities, more than other members of the community, particularly with mental health, alcohol and other drugs, so the role that our health providers play within the system is integral. We work with a number of providers, but as you have noted, on 1 July this year we implemented a range of changes within the women's system. We have two prisons, being the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, which is now supported by Western Health, and Tarrengower Prison, which is supported by Dhelkaya Health, and then we have made other changes within the men's system as well.

Meng Heang TAK: If possible, can you expand on the men's services?

Emma CATFORD: Sure, of course – sorry. At the same period, so from 1 July this year, we now have GEO, which is the provider for all of our public men's prisons, so they are operating as sort of intended. And commensurate with both the changes across the whole prison system, we also have a new quality healthcare framework that is now in place, which contains a range of sort of service uplifts as well that we expect all of our primary health service providers to have, so that includes some additional Aboriginal health workers to ensure that we have culturally responsive care. We have an expanded multidisciplinary team within the mix with tailored health assessments and just generally a greater focus on improving health outcomes and continuity of care – and not just for Aboriginal persons in our custody but also women and other vulnerable groups.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you so much. I just would like to touch more on Aboriginal people in custody. How has this budget supported better health outcomes for Aboriginal health?

Emma CATFORD: Could you just – sorry –

Meng Heang TAK: Basically just to follow on with your –

Emma CATFORD: Further on – yes. We have a range of new things within the health system, and there may be some other things broadly in custody as well. As I noted, as part of our changes, embedded within the service requirements –

Mathew HILAKARI: Particularly for Aboriginal people is really helpful, thank you.

Emma CATFORD: Yes, sorry, that is right. For GEO Healthcare there is a requirement to have – I think it will be 12 – Aboriginal health workers. They have already recruited a large number of those, and they are spread across the prison system. So when a new person that identifies as Aboriginal comes in, they will have the opportunity to meet with that Aboriginal health worker and start to work with them from the get-go and develop an integrated care plan as well.

Ryan PHILLIPS: We know that Aboriginal people are some of the most vulnerable people in our prison population. We have certainly heard loud and clear from our Aboriginal stakeholders. The Aboriginal Justice Forum have provided advice to us over many years about how we should do better and must do better to improve outcomes for vulnerable people, and we have also heard recommendations from the coronial processes and also evidence given at the Yoorrook Justice Commission about how key health services are delivering the right outcomes for people in our care. So the work Emma is talking to you about and the services that we are providing under the new health contract with GEO and then also under the health services provided by Western Health really seek to ensure that we do the right thing by people who rely on us for all elements of their care.

Mathew HILAKARI: And is that starting pre imprisonment? Are we getting into those phases quite early on or is it just at the point of imprisonment?

Emma CATFORD: It is upon reception. So regardless of whether the person is sentenced or unsentenced, that work starts immediately once they come into our care.

Mathew HILAKARI: Do you have any views around people coming out of prison – regardless of their charging situation or their conviction situation – whether their health comes are improving by the end of that period?

Ryan PHILLIPS: That is certainly something we have a very firm eye to. The new contract with GEO Healthcare provides an increased emphasis on the path for people exiting custody, so that is whether they are on remand or under sentence. So the transition, whether that is health services, housing, drug and alcohol – all the different elements of transition are key to system success. We know that there is more work to do to improve that. I do not know, Commissioner, whether there is anything you wanted to add about transition supports in your perspective?

Larissa STRONG: I think the other relevant budget outcomes are also to do with the investment in Aboriginal healing units, so taking a really holistic view of health and wellbeing, as we have heard from our Aboriginal stakeholders – so supporting people in terms of their connection to their culture and their community. That facility was I think finished in April 2023, this year. We have contracted Elizabeth Morgan House, which is an Aboriginal community controlled organisation, to provide the cultural programs to the Aboriginal women at DPFC through that healing unit. So I think that is a really important complement to the more clinical health care. We have also had an investment in expanding the number of Aboriginal wellbeing officers across the prison system, so we now have 27 funded Aboriginal wellbeing officers, which was an expansion of nine, plus also four Aboriginal engagement advisers, which really support coordination with community organisations and bringing inside cultural programs delivered by Aboriginal organisations as well. So I think it is really an important complement to also the focus on health care.

Mathew HILAKARI: That is really great. Usually it is judged about two years after a person leaves prison. About half of Victorians leaving prison are returning to prison. So we hope to see those improvements coming

through the system, and we will have that to judge over the term of the next two PAEC estimates. I just thought I would pick up on your presentation on the implementation of the prison disability support initiative. Could you just outline a little bit more in detail that one if possible?

Ryan PHILLIPS: No problem at all. I will hand to the Commissioner to take you through that initiative.

Larissa STRONG: It is a service across the prison system, the prison disability support initiative. It provides a multidisciplinary team that works with custodial staff, so if someone has concerns about someone's presentation, that it might be a sign of cognitive impairment, they can refer to the prison disability service, who can arrange assessments to further understand the disability or diagnose: do they have a cognitive impairment, and what does that mean? They also do behavioural management and behavioural support plans to really help the time in custody be understood by that person's disability – how it presents in their behaviour and what that means in terms of how you engage and relate to the person with the disability. It is really quite important to understand someone's behaviour might come from a particular cognitive impairment. The other big component of the prison disability support initiative is the link to the NDIS, so that team also links back into the NDIS.

Mathew HILAKARI: Is that available in the prison system, the NDIS?

Larissa STRONG: The focus is on linking outside, but, yes, it can come inside too.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. The committee is going to take a really short break now – really short, apologies – before resuming consideration of the Department of Justice and Community Safety at 11:15 am sharp. I declare this hearing adjourned.

The committee will now resume its consideration of the Department of Justice and Community Safety. The next 21 minutes are going to Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. Thank you, Chair. My first question is to Emma Catford, the Acting Deputy Secretary. Emma, in these last financial periods, can you tell me how many prisoners have been transferred from Barwon Prison, Beechworth Correctional Centre, Dhurringile Prison, Fulham Correctional Centre, Hopkins Correctional Centre, Langi Kal Kal Prison, Loddon Prison, Marmgoneet Correctional Centre, Melbourne Assessment Prison, Metropolitan Remand Centre, Port Phillip Prison and Ravenhall Correctional Centre to the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre or Tarrengower Prison?

Emma CATFORD: If okay, I might defer to my colleague Larissa Strong.

Larissa STRONG: Thanks for the question. Can you just remind me of the time frame that you are asking about?

Bev McARTHUR: In these financial periods.

Larissa STRONG: The information that I do have – I do not have the full financial year, but I have January 2023 to 15 June 2023, so six months of the financial year. We had six prisoners transferred from a men's prison to a women's prison location.

Bev McARTHUR: And what was the criteria for that?

Larissa STRONG: It is about, I guess – we are required to not discriminate, so about gender identification and identification as a woman, and so they were transferred on that basis. Currently we have three trans women in the women's system at the moment, as of October this year.

Bev McARTHUR: So are they biological men?

Larissa STRONG: They were born as biological men, correct.

Bev McARTHUR: And remaining biological men?

Larissa STRONG: The individuals will be in various stages of the transition process.

Bev McARTHUR: Also, Emma, perhaps you can enlighten me. You mentioned the Indigenous population, when they come into your system identifying as Aboriginal. What is the criteria for that identification?

Ryan PHILLIPS: I might just jump in on that question, because certainly the approach the department adopts is consistent with whole-of-government practice. I could ask my Aboriginal Justice colleague Adrian Sculthorpe to come to the table, who will be able to talk to you about the extensive work the department –

Bev McARTHUR: No, I just want to know: what is the criteria for identification?

Ryan PHILLIPS: The current criteria for identification is when a person self-identifies.

Bev McARTHUR: Self-identifies, okay.

Ryan PHILLIPS: That is right, yes.

Bev McARTHUR: That will do. Thank you. Associate Secretary, who made the decision to disband the Volunteer Consultative Forum?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Could I ask for clarification – in what portfolio?

Bev McARTHUR: The CFA.

Ryan PHILLIPS: CFA – thank you. I will need to hand to Jenni Rigby or the commissioner, who may be able to provide more information about that committee.

Jenni RIGBY: Thank you. The previous Volunteer Consultative Forum, which had been in place for approximately 10 years – that was disbanded, and a review is now taking place in trying to identify a contemporary, appropriate and inclusive consultative and engagement forum for volunteers. As you would all be well aware, our volunteering is something that across a number of sectors is challenged and in decline, so it was deemed to be timely to undertake that review and disband the previous committee.

Bev McARTHUR: So did you consult with the volunteer organisations individually before disbanding the forum?

Jenni RIGBY: No. That has been disbanded and the review is commencing.

Bev McARTHUR: So you never consulted with any of the people involved?

Jenni RIGBY: No. That will be part of the review.

Bev McARTHUR: No – okay. So does the department have any plans to create another centralised body that allows for consultation with volunteers across the great variety of organisations?

Jenni RIGBY: Yes, and that is what the review is shaping up and leading toward.

Bev McARTHUR: What has been the change in the volunteer numbers since the Volunteer Consultative Forum was disbanded?

Jenni RIGBY: I am not sure that we have got the numbers for that specific period. I have got the volunteer numbers annually but not since –

Bev McARTHUR: Since you have disbanded it – have you got them? Those numbers?

Jenni RIGBY: Not from that time to now.

Bev McARTHUR: Wouldn't it be important to know how many people have left the system that you have disbanded?

Ryan PHILLIPS: We do have data for the relevant financial years that we could provide to you in relation to the number of volunteers.

Rick NUGENT: Thank you. I can talk a little bit to the volunteers and the numbers. I have the past five years worth of numbers there. Currently for SES and CFA there is a total of 56,052 volunteers; that is broken up with CFA at 51,807 and SES at 4245. There has been a gradual decline over that five-year period, and more

particularly post-COVID had an impact. Both agencies are actively working to recruit more volunteers, so there are a range of programs that are actually underway to support them, but it is important to note that neither agency – SES nor CFA – have needed to call on all volunteers. They have never actually run out of volunteers to respond to emergencies.

Bev McARTHUR: Can you give us the figures for the drop in the numbers of volunteers in the CFA and the SES?

Rick NUGENT: Certainly. In the 2016–17 period CFA were at – I will round it off – 56,100, then 55,000, 54,000, 54,000, 54,000, 52,800 and now 51,800.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay, so from 56,100 to –

Rick NUGENT: 51,800. So it has been a gradual decline.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, it is. Also, you have still got a vaccine mandate effectively on CFA volunteers. When are you going to lift that?

Rick NUGENT: No, the only vaccine mandate remaining is with Fire Rescue Victoria.

Bev McARTHUR: But as I understand it, CFA volunteers cannot go on the truck to do their training unless they have got their vaccine certificate. That is not correct? Have you changed it?

Rick NUGENT: My understanding is that is not in place.

Bev McARTHUR: So nobody is required to have a vaccine certificate to be a CFA volunteer or an SES volunteer?

Rick NUGENT: My understanding is that that is not the case. My understanding is that the only vaccine mandate still in place is FRV, but I can take that on notice just to confirm that.

Bev McARTHUR: Why would you have it remaining on FRV?

Ryan PHILLIPS: That is ultimately an operational matter for FRV, not the department, so that is something that that organisation has decided. Mrs McArthur, can we just clarify one other point that we have noted –

Bev McARTHUR: Aren't you the department responsible?

Ryan PHILLIPS: We are the department, but ultimately entities are responsible for their own –

Bev McARTHUR: But aren't you responsible for the entities?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Yes, but we are not responsible for their internal policies in relation to vaccines.

Bev McARTHUR: Really? They randomly go off and do what they like?

Ryan PHILLIPS: That is certainly a matter for them so long as they comply with broad policy and legislative settings. Commissioner, are you able to clarify the other point?

Larissa STRONG: Apologies, but there was a mistake in my brief. The number of men transferred to the women's system is six, but it is from 1 January 2003 to 15 June 2023, not January 2023 to June 2023. Apologies.

Bev McARTHUR: Great. Thank you very much, Commissioner, for that. Now, still on the CFA, on 13 January 2023 the CFA announced it would deliver 48 new heavy tankers to brigades across Victoria. CFA chief officer Jason Heffernan said tankers are a vital part of the CFA's fleet. With the deadline for delivery of 23 September passed, how many of these tankers have been completed and delivered?

Rick NUGENT: I will need to take that on notice. I have some information here on their vehicles. The CFA fleet consists of 2181 vehicles, including 1925 tankers, 218 pumpers and 38 pumper tankers. The CFA is

currently in the process of rolling out 48 heavy tankers and two light tankers to replace appliances within its existing fleet as part of the Victorian government's CFA capability package.

Bev McARTHUR: And have they been rolled out?

Rick NUGENT: I do not have the data of what is currently outstanding and what is not outstanding, so I can take that on notice.

Bev McARTHUR: Do you know?

Ryan PHILLIPS: No, but we will take that on notice.

Bev McARTHUR: Take it on notice, okay. I mean, if they have not been rolled out, why haven't they? What is the delay? What is the problem?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Well, this is something that we will need to take on notice to provide you with that further detail.

Bev McARTHUR: While you are on the job, can you find out when they are going to be delivered?

Rick NUGENT: So each agency in preparation for this upcoming season needs to provide me with an attestation around their preparedness. The attestation from Country Fire Authority is that they have all of the equipment they need to respond this season and their vehicles are serviced and prepared and ready for the current season and they are at capacity with the vehicles they need.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. So why has Victoria's water-bombing capacity fallen so significantly?

Rick NUGENT: The aviation fleet for this upcoming season consists of 51 aircraft available solely for Victoria. There are also another 100 aircraft on call nationally that we can draw upon. There are national sharing arrangements. Victoria can access a national large air tanker as required. The 51 in the fleet are a mixture of aircraft for a variety of purposes.

Bev McARTHUR: But you have reduced the number.

Rick NUGENT: No.

Bev McARTHUR: No?

Rick NUGENT: That is one more than last year.

Bev McARTHUR: One more than last year.

Rick NUGENT: So it is one more than last year. It is a mixture of firebombing aircraft, air attack supervision, information-gathering aircraft, two large air tankers, two high-volume air cranes and a Super Puma that is assigned for night fire aviation. So they all provide different purposes: there is fixed wing, there is rotary, there is surveillance. So the surveillance plane, for example, at the recent fires back in October in Gippsland, identified that after around 160 mil of rain on the fireground, fire was actually still burning underneath, and then the other agencies came in, and it took two weeks to extinguish it.

Nick McGOWAN: Would it be possible to get a breakdown of those different aircraft types? I know a lot of this discussion we go back and forth on, because obviously the surveillance aircraft is very different from a tanker. It would be very helpful if we could just have the list of the 51, what category they fall in – whether they are rotary, whether they are fixed wing et cetera et cetera – and just what they do.

Rick NUGENT: We can provide that.

Nick McGOWAN: And I presume they are also required by hours. I guess that is the measure, is it, in terms of how many hours you require them for over and above – or not?

Rick NUGENT: They are required over the season, because a lot of these contracts return to the Northern Hemisphere during their summer and then back here. So we can certainly provide a breakdown of what those

aircraft do. So as an example, 17 of the 51 were utilised during the October fires and floods. So they are used for different purposes.

Nick McGOWAN: If you could do that also with their registration, because obviously these days we can all track all of them on flight radar and all the other things –

Bev McARTHUR: And why you ditched the Chinook helicopter. We will find out.

Rick NUGENT: Because they got a better one.

Bev McARTHUR: Oh, you got a better one?

Nick McGOWAN: It is a Puma, is it?

Bev McARTHUR: That is a good answer, very good answer.

Rick NUGENT: Yes.

Bev McARTHUR: Excellent. Now, I just want to go to perhaps Commissioner Patton. Victoria Police wants to take officers from one-person police stations in 98 small towns. And I have got to tell you, in my electorate that includes Apsley, Avoca, Balmoral, Beeac, Birchip, Birregurra, Branxholme, Clunes, Dartmoor, Dunkeld, Dunolly, Gordon, Lake Bolac, Lavers Hill, Learmonth, Lexton, Linton, Skipton, Lismore, Merino, Meredith, Newstead, Peshurst, Natimuk, Rokewood, Smythesdale and Timboon. Now, you are doing this supposedly because you have got a shortage of 800 police and you have got to man your 24-hour police stations, but how are these communities going to be left when these single police officers are taken away from those stations in those vitally important small communities?

Shane PATTON: We are not removing anyone from any single-officer police stations.

Bev McARTHUR: But you are if you need them because you have got to man a 24-hour police station, and they can be moved. I mean, you have asked for a change to clause 84 to increase the mobility for deployment and rostering of one-person police employees. That is what you have asked for: to remove these police officers permanently located in one-man police stations to be deployed to bigger centres to accommodate your 24-hour service because you have not got enough police officers.

Shane PATTON: Not correct – we are not moving them. I do not know what else I can tell you. Occasionally we will use officers from different locations anywhere around the state when we need to deploy them for a range of things, basically related to community safety. So I can give you an absolute assurance: they are not being moved.

Bev McARTHUR: So you have not asked for that amendment?

Shane PATTON: We talk to a range of different clauses. I cannot speak to the specific one, where we are sitting with that. But if I could just –

Bev McARTHUR: Well, the police association have asked for the amendment to clause 184. Is that not correct?

Shane PATTON: If I can just finish. We are working through an EB at the moment where we are very focused on flexibility so we can get the maximum out of our members for public safety and deliver the best conditions for the members. So the reality is, for us, no community is going to be any worse off, and we are not moving those members. I can give you that assurance.

Bev McARTHUR: So they will never be taken away from their single-man police stations – that is your assurance?

Shane PATTON: They will be always stationed and gazetted to their single-officer police stations. There may be an occasion, like with every other jurisdiction in Victoria, that we use them for an emergency, for a flood, if there was urgency of backfill. Flexibility in deployment is so vital for us, so there will be occasions where police officers work from different locations. That has happened forever, and it will continue to happen.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. Just moving on to the *Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy*, your bailiwick. It was launched in February 2022. The strategy lists 80 specific actions it will complete. How many of those actions have been completed since the strategy's launch?

Andrea DAVIDSON: Thank you for your question around *Wirkara Kulpa*, a critical strategy within youth justice and certainly more broadly within the *Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020–2030*. As you have noted, we are in the early stages of rolling out that strategy and working very closely, as in the inception of this strategy, with our Aboriginal stakeholders, inclusive of the Aboriginal Justice Caucus as well as our Aboriginal youth collaborative working group, which is a sub-working group of caucus that is specifically responsible for oversighting those recommendations. Each of those recommendations require a power of work across a number of areas, and we are continuing to progress with all of them.

Bev McARTHUR: We are a bit short of time – so none have been completed?

Andrea DAVIDSON: No, because they are all long-term strategies in accordance with *Wirkara Kulpa* being a long-term strategy overall. Government investment has certainly been progressed around a number of key areas – for example, the additional funding specifically to respond to 10- to 14-year-olds. That work is well progressed in terms of identifying the strategies that will be funded through that initiative and is currently with justice caucus for final consideration before implementation. That is an example of one of the strategies in terms of the work that has been done, particularly through a self-determination lens, and the importance of ensuring that Aboriginal people walk with us on every element of the journey of implementing those strategies.

I also note that the 56 strategies of the *Our Youth, Our Way* report that are targeted through *Wirkara Kulpa* are also independently reviewed by the children's commission, and the process of work since the implementation of *Wirkara Kulpa* has included working with the children's commission to understand and work with the development of their own framework that will look to the specific acquittal against those 56 recommendations.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay, thank you. Associate Secretary, the department's target for timely completion of freedom of information requests for the 2023 financial year was only 60 per cent. The average time to finalise a freedom of information request during 2022–23 was 88 days. Of requests finalised, the average number of days over the statutory time period to determine a request was 55.4 days. Do you think these results are good enough?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Mrs McArthur, we acknowledge that there have been challenges with the department's timeliness in responding to FOI requests.

Bev McARTHUR: Because of COVID or –

Ryan PHILLIPS: No, Mrs McArthur, I will not say that it is due to COVID. I think that one of the experiences across the whole of government is that there has been increased complexity in freedom of information requests. Certainly there is, when a request comes in, an extensive amount of work undertaken within the department to respond. We are very aware of our statutory obligations –

Bev McARTHUR: Of your failings in this area.

Ryan PHILLIPS: Well, certainly of the need to continue to improve our model. There is work in the department at the moment looking for ways to streamline our processing time and identify additional resources to enable us to improve our performance.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you very much. In the time left, can you give an update on what work has gone on in the last two years to implement the recommendations from former Victoria Police chief commissioner Neil Comrie's review into the 2017 riot and mass escape at Malmsbury, in which keys were snatched by troublemakers?

Ryan PHILLIPS: I can say that there has been a significant amount of work over many years to look carefully at the Comrie review and to implement those recommendations. I will hand to our Youth Justice Commissioner to take you through the details.

Andrea DAVIDSON: Thank you, Associate Secretary. Acknowledging that the Comrie reviews were in fact a series of reviews that were –

Nick McGOWAN: Sorry, Commissioner, do you mind taking that on notice for us? We are going to run out of time.

Andrea DAVIDSON: Sure.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs McArthur. We are going to go to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you so much. I might actually move us to flood recovery, and I am looking at budget paper 3, page 282, in the 2022–23 budget and just going through some of the funding of emergency management capability output. I am just hoping we could talk a little about – and Associate Secretary, we might start with you, but I expect you are going to throw onwards and that is entirely appropriate – how the government is responding to large-scale emergencies and disasters and how that compares really to a decade ago. What are some of those changes that are going over time?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Thanks very much, Mr Hilakari. We know that responding to emergencies, given the unprecedented challenges facing Victoria in the context of climate change, means that our focus needs to be greater than ever before, and the reforms that have occurred in recent years have put us well on that path. The emergency management sector has undergone significant reforms over the past 10 years. This has been prompted by several major reviews following significant incidents. You would no doubt remember the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, the *Review of the 2010–11 Flood Warnings and Response* and the Hazelwood mine fire inquiry. Following that, we have seen the introduction of an all-communities, all-emergencies approach to emergency management. This approach emphasises that emergency management is a shared responsibility across the whole of the public sector. No single agency can address all impacts of a particular emergency. Instead, effective mitigation response and recovery require multiple agencies to work together. Mariela Diaz, who is the CEO of Emergency Recovery Victoria, which sits within the department of justice, has joined us, and I will hand to Mariela, who will be able to take you through the details of some of those reforms and the new emergency management arrangements in the department.

Mariela DIAZ: There are a couple, and the Commissioner may also want to add to those. We start with last year. Emergency Recovery Victoria is Victoria's first dedicated recovery agency. It continues to work along with councils and communities impacted by the last three major emergencies in Victoria, being the 2019–20 bushfires, the June storms of 2021 and the floods of last year, which were specifically devastating in many communities across many municipalities. ERV has a dedicated place-based workforce at the state level and in communities to work directly to prepare for and during emergencies as well as after emergencies, and we work closely with the emergency services sector to ensure that there is close alignment between what the response agencies do and then what we do afterwards. It also helps us to ensure that our priorities are set and that we are focusing on the right things with communities and councils.

As the coordinating agency for state and regional recovery and state relief, ERV works together with all recovery leads across government to ensure that community needs are met. We coordinate information from councils and recovery partners and identify and analyse this information to ensure that we are focusing on the right things. ERV also regularly provides capability-building tools and resources to communities, and we work directly with community recovery committees to ensure that they have the support that they need. A lot of these communities are made up of mum-and-dad agencies, or mum-and-dad community members that do not necessarily have a lot of experience in grants and have not necessarily experienced an emergency before, so we walk alongside them to ensure that they have the assistance that they need to deliver good outcomes for their communities. Do you want to add more, Rick?

Rick NUGENT: Yes. Thank you. Thanks for your question. Just following on from the Associate Secretary, a significant amount of reform has occurred over the past 10 years as a result of what we have experienced here in Victoria. We have a well-established now and integrated arrangement with clear roles and responsibilities for all agencies. There is an overarching state emergency management plan that outlines those arrangements and the accountabilities, and there are a dozen or so subplans – subplans relate to the pandemic, a tsunami, cyber attacks and so on – with specific agencies that have roles and responsibilities, and every year the emergency management commissioner is provided with attestations from the relevant agencies and their preparedness and activities that have been undertaken. The introduction of the *Emergency Management Act* in 2013 was a pivotal

piece of legislation that provides a statutory basis for today's emergency management arrangements essentially. It established Emergency Management Victoria and the emergency management commissioner. We have a State Control Centre now that operates 24/7. That provides an immediate response to any emergency that may occur or in planning for an extreme event based on weather and other factors. The arrangements have found the sectors much more integrated and clear interoperability between all of those agencies.

In addition to the state emergency management plan, there are regional emergency management plans, so it cascades down, and then at the municipal level there are municipal emergency management plans. Even more importantly are then township plans, because towns differ from one to another, so Mallacoota is a very different plan than Lakes Entrance would be. We need to understand fire and risk – not just fire, it might be flood risks – where relief centres would be stood up, where the incident control centre would be run from, what agencies, so really good work that is going on across –

Mathew HILAKARI: These town by town plans – how widespread is that already? Is it based on risk or –

Rick NUGENT: It is predominantly based on risk. I was in Mallacoota recently with the minister, and they have a really strong plan, clearly on the back of the issues and risks. The Great Ocean Road, for example, is a risk. If evacuations need to occur, you need to be really clear about what are the risks with that. Is it one road in and out? Is it too late to go onto those roads? That planning is critical, and this has all matured over the past 10 years.

Mathew HILAKARI: Yes, fantastic. I might just go to housing. I am not sure if that is going to be best in your area, which is just as people come out of an emergency particularly we have seen widespread issues around housing – I think about the floods in northern Victoria – how are we supporting people to find accommodation and secure housing in those circumstances? It is a pretty primary need of course.

Mariela DIAZ: Thank you. The floods for 2022 displaced the most significant number of people since Black Saturday. There were over 2000 people that were displaced from various places across Victoria. So one of the benefits of having Emergency Recovery Victoria embedded with the emergency services is that we are able to ascertain the intel of where the most impacted people are. We set up a trauma-informed process. We work on the premise that people have experienced significant trauma and stress either through the event or through being directly impacted or seeing family members and community members impacted. The temporary accommodation suites that we established were focused, wherever possible, close to people's homes. So, for example, the Elmore village that was established for the Rochester community housed over 250 people at its peak. The Mickleham centre, or the CNR, was established at a point in time in Melbourne when we did not know how many people were going to be displaced so we needed to provide a facility that was able to expand according to the needs that we may have been faced with. We also established hotels and motels for people to access for a temporary period of time. We currently have about 140 people still in temporary accommodation and supported through ERV and our partner agencies that we are working one-on-one with to ensure that they have permanent, long-term options available to them as government support starts to wind back its service delivery.

Mathew HILAKARI: Do we have some estimates on when we think those 140 people will be back in permanent accommodation?

Mariela DIAZ: At its peak, as I said, there were 2000 people that were displaced. We worked through our recovery support program, and each plan is developed individually with people. There are varying degrees of need within that cohort. Some people have quite significant needs, either through comorbidities, mental health disability or age. The rental market cannot easily accommodate a lot of those people, so we are working with our partners at the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing through a public housing stream or private rentals. There are a variety of different options. The program has no wind-up date, as such. As I said, we are working to make sure that those individuals are supported over the coming months.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. Thank you. At last year's PAEC hearings Bushfire Recovery Victoria was transitioning to Emergency Recovery Victoria. What are those changes meaning, and how is that transition going?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Well, a significant amount of work led by Mariela and her colleagues in emergency management has been on integrating and transitioning to Emergency Recovery Victoria. So, Mariela, you may wish to talk further about your wide-spanning role.

Mariela DIAZ: Yes. When Bushfire Recovery Victoria was established, its footprint was only the fires from the 2019–20 fires, the Black Summer fires, so the important transition to ERV – it was the recommendation of the inspector-general for emergency management – and that important change mean that ERV now has a permanent footprint in all parts of Victoria and can work with all municipalities to both prepare for emergencies as well as embed. Fortuitously, that transition occurred just before the floods, so we were able to support all of those communities that were impacted that were outside of the footprint of the 2019–20 fires.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. And just in terms of community capacity, the phrase ‘Build back better’ is used very often when we talk about emergencies and recovery. In terms of support specifically for councils, how are we seeing that rolled out?

Mariela DIAZ: Community resilience is at the heart of all of the work that we do, and we work very closely with councils to do that, because they obviously play a critical role in the immediate aftermath of the emergency as well as the long-term recovery. Victoria has arrangements both with the Commonwealth and with councils of course, which are cost-sharing arrangements called the disaster recovery funding arrangements, the DRFA. Through those arrangements councils are able to claim back many of the eligible costs of the emergency arrangements, and one of the critical elements that we have included for the floods of this year is a \$10 million package that allows councils to build back better for public infrastructure, ensuring that that infrastructure is more resilient to future emergencies.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. I am just actually going to move to ESTA now, if that is okay. I reference budget paper 3 from 2022–23, table 1.14 on page 89. Will you please explain how the investment into ESTA is improving the performance? You have talked a little bit about it so far, but I would like to talk about how we are actually going forward.

Ryan PHILLIPS: Indeed. The reform program across our 000 service is focused on the delivery of recommendations arising from two independent reviews that were completed back in 2022. The first of those being the capability and service review led by Mr Graham Ashton and the *Review of Victoria’s Emergency Ambulance Call Answer Performance* that was conducted by IGEM. The government accepted in principle the recommendations from both reviews, and the implementation of them is now well underway. IGEM is monitoring progress against the recommendations and will provide government with its first annual report in December this year.

We know that strengthening governance and accountability is a critical area of importance, and new legislation is expected to commence later this year through the *Triple Zero Victoria Act 2023*. This is a major component of Victoria’s reforms in improving the 000 service. This reform is critical to ensuring that significant investment into improving the capability of Victoria’s 000 service is sustainable and enduring.

To support implementation of the reforms, the 2023–24 budget has provided \$2.04 million over two years for the implementation and oversight of reforms to ESTA, building on the previous investment. This funding is supporting the implementation of the recommendations arising from the two independent reviews and will ensure that wholesale reform is realised. The funded capacity uplift has already had an impact, enabling the recruitment of additional frontline call-taking and dispatch staff and enhancing workforce capability. As a result, ESTA’s performance has improved, with emergency ambulance call-taking performance standards being met since August 2022.

Mathew HILAKARI: Can you just talk through meeting some of those benchmarks and how they have changed over time, particularly from the 2020–21 period onwards?

Ryan PHILLIPS: We do have details of that, and I will be able to hand over to Jenni to take you through the detail.

Jenni RIGBY: Thanks, Ryan. As Ryan just talked about, the reform is responding to two very critical reviews that were undertaken and it has been supported by a significant investment in the uplift of the capability of ESTA. Since October 2021 the Victorian government has provided \$361.2 million in funding to

ESTA for capability uplift. That also included \$27.5 million for further support for ESTA call-taking and dispatch services that was announced in the 2021–22 budget update and \$333.5 million announced in the 2022–23 budget. These targeted investments have provided additional support for ESTA to address specifically its performance targets in the face of unprecedented call-taking demand and workforce challenges that came about during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To give a bit of flavour to that, in 2022–23 ESTA answered just under 2.7 million calls for assistance and that represents a call every 11.72 seconds, or almost 7400 calls a day. The highest priority for ESTA is that every call to ESTA is answered and the responder agency assistant is dispatched in line with the standards, and those standards are currently being set by the inspector-general for emergency management. In both 2021–22 and 2022–23 ESTA met or exceeded the majority of its call-taking and dispatch performance benchmarks, but of course there were some exceptions to this. In particular there was a sudden surge in storm-related calls in activity back from October 2021 which impacted on ESTA's ability to meet the call answer performance standards relating to emergency VICSES calls in that 2021–22 period. That is because the performance data is recorded on a cumulative basis, so for the VICSES storm-related calls ESTA met the benchmark every month except for the significant storm activity in October 2021. There was a similar instance with VICSES in 2022–23 where the cumulative 12-month total came to 83.6 per cent rather than the target of 90 per cent, again due to the significant storm and flood activity throughout October and November. Previously having met the benchmarks, that sort of blew out the cumulative total in terms of the storm-related calls.

The other thing I would just note is that in 2022–23 –

Mathew HILAKARI: I am interested in particularly the ambulance data as well. I will let you finish of course.

Jenni RIGBY: Was that, sorry, about the ambulance data?

Mathew HILAKARI: Yes.

Jenni RIGBY: Great. Just getting to that. So there has been a continued improvement in the ambulance call-taking data, the exception being the ambulance call-taking dispatch data. In 2022–23 that was registered at 79.9 per cent of code 1 ambulance events across the state within the benchmark time of 150 seconds, whereas the target is 90 per cent. So I think what is important to understand here and was actually drawn out specifically in the capability review undertaken by Graham Ashton – he specifically questioned this particular metric around the call taking, the dispatch metric, because effectively the factors that contribute to that are outside of ESTA's control in most instances. So that is the performance benchmark that has not seen the uplift as a result of the investment.

Mathew HILAKARI: What you mean by 'outside of control'? What factors are you talking about?

Jenni RIGBY: Their performance is the 'ready to dispatch'; however, it then goes through to Ambulance Victoria, and it is dependent on the availability of ambulance, but it is also then dependent on the secondary triage that Ambulance Victoria undertake. So for example, the performance benchmark is focused on a code 1 priority. The call may come in as a code 2 or a code 3, which means it is sort of not as serious. That then goes through to Ambulance Victoria, who undertake a triage assessment to effectively identify whether that is the appropriate category.

Mathew HILAKARI: So it might be changed to a code 1 later on –

Jenni RIGBY: Yes, it elevates.

Mathew HILAKARI: and that longer time period gets there.

Jenni RIGBY: And that can be due to the triage process, which has become much more robust due to the additional ways that that can be undertaken that have come in – telehealth and other things – during COVID-19, but it can also be that a person's condition deteriorates as they sort of go through that triage process. But effectively the time starts from when the call is initially taken by ESTA. So largely it is that re-evaluation from code 2 or 3 to code 1, which then sees it assessed as part of the performance target, but it is sort of at a –

Ryan PHILLIPS: Can I just supplement that by noting that certainly the call-taking performance of ESTA in the ambulance context has improved significantly. In 2020–21, 87.7 per cent of calls were answered within 5 seconds, and that has improved to 96.4 per cent in 2022–23. So we have seen a significant performance improvement due to government investment.

Mathew HILAKARI: So those ESTA changes are having some really positive effects.

Ryan PHILLIPS: They are.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. I will go to Ms Sandell.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you, Chair, and good morning, everybody. My first question is to the emergency services commissioner. Regarding aerial water-bombing capacity – following on from previous questioning – I understand that New South Wales owns several of the vehicles in their fleet whereas Victoria leases theirs. With fire seasons here and overseas becoming longer and now starting to overlap, has this meant that we have had any issues with access to vehicles?

Rick NUGENT: No, we have not had any with access to vehicles. The benefit of contract arrangements is you can continue to source the most capable and modern vehicles available. There is a risk that if you purchase them, in a shorter period of time they will –

Ellen SANDELL: Have we ever had any issues in terms of not being able to access vehicles because they are needed elsewhere?

Rick NUGENT: No. The 51 we have are specific for Victoria. They are moved around the state based on risk and need, based on weather forecasting and so on. There is a state aviation desk at the State Control Centre, which is managed by the State Control Centre and Emergency Management Victoria. We have never had an issue with that. There is the national fleet we can also draw on, so there have been no issues or risk so far.

Ellen SANDELL: And have you done any contingency planning? Just given what we know about fire seasons now overlapping, with the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Hemisphere, has there been any contingency planning about what we would do if we did not have access to those contract vehicles?

Rick NUGENT: Well, for this season we have the contracts in place. The procurement process has been undertaken, so they are there. As I said, there are 100 national aviation – there is the fleet present, which we can also draw upon. There are ongoing national sharing arrangements that we work through, so to date over 500 Victorians have been deployed to New South Wales – and Queensland predominantly – since their fires started there. They traditionally are earlier in the season than we are, and then we source those resources later on. There are also arrangements internationally as well, particularly with Canada. So that sort of continuity and planning has been well undertaken so far.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. A question for the Chief Commissioner of Police. Good morning. Victoria Police uses sniffer dogs at various places to detect if people are carrying illegal drugs – music festivals and other places. If the dog detects a substance, VicPol can then strip search or search someone, but recent data out of New South Wales shows that sniffer dogs were incorrect 75 per cent of the time – that is, 75 per cent of the time a sniffer dog detects that they are carrying a substance a subsequent search determines that they actually were not carrying a substance. Do we have that data for Victoria about how many searches are taking place and how many actually positively detect a substance?

Shane PATTON: I do not have data with me, but certainly at music festivals and the like where we use our PAD dogs we have the details of the amount of people that we search and if drugs are located on them.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. So that data does exist? It is kept by VicPol?

Shane PATTON: I am sure it exists, yes. We would be retaining that. If you are seeking that data, if we can provide it, we will of course. But whether that is recorded centrally or whether you have to trawl back through each separate music festival or each separate search to get it – but if it is achievable, we would certainly provide it.

Ellen SANDELL: You are happy to take that and provide that if possible?

Shane PATTON: Yes.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. In New South Wales I know they collect that data by, for example, the number of children searched, the number of Aboriginal people searched. Do we disaggregate our data that way?

Shane PATTON: Yes. We differentiate it.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thank you. I look forward to hopefully seeing that data. A question perhaps to the Associate Secretary – feel free to pass it on to whoever is relevant: the Parliament recently reformed bail laws, and those changes will take effect in March next year. We certainly very much welcome those reforms. Obviously the lion's share of service delivery spending in the justice portfolio is prison costs, at just over \$1.5 billion a year. What modelling has the department done for the expected decrease in people who are on remand because of these changes, and how much of a reduction do you expect to see because of the bail laws – a reduction in spending on prisons, that is?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Certainly whenever we do legislative reform there is a significant amount of work in the department to make sure we understand the impacts across the whole of the justice system. There has been work undertaken in the department about the impact on prison numbers, so that is certainly something that we do have. Commissioner, do you have any of the detail available? Otherwise we can take that on notice if you do not.

Larissa STRONG: My understanding is the evidence and insights team that actually prepare the projections do not actually bank, I guess, legislative change until it has actually gone through and started to happen, and then there is the work-through about what that means from a bed component. So I think we just need to check the cabinet-in-confidence status of that information. What we have probably seen though – we have seen a reduction in people on remand already, so there has actually been some practice change already, even before the laws actually become the law.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. That reduction in the number of people on remand, do we have that by category – so, for example, women, First Nations people – and could you provide that if it is available?

Larissa STRONG: By men and women – that is how it is broken down, not further than that.

Ellen SANDELL: Not further disaggregated in terms of, say, First Nations people or other categories?

Larissa STRONG: No. The projections do not do that, they just divide by the men's system and the women's system.

Ellen SANDELL: Sure. No problem. I cannot remember if this was already asked, but we understand Malmsbury will be closed at the end of this year. Is that still correct?

Andrea DAVIDSON: That is correct. So we will have fully vacated Malmsbury – or young people will have fully vacated Malmsbury – by 31 December at the latest.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. A question about parole: the adult parole board's annual report revealed that a lack of suitable accommodation and insufficient time remaining on sentences to find alternative housing were both cited as reasons to deny parole for 116 prisoners. So 32 per cent of all rejections in 2021–22 were for that reason. Could you provide the number of people incarcerated in Victoria beyond non-parole periods of sentence who have been denied parole due to insufficient housing in 2022–23?

Ryan PHILLIPS: We know that housing is a significant issue for men and women leaving custody – so that is people leaving from both parole or on straight sentence – and it is something that we are working on very closely with our colleagues in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Ultimately, housing is a matter for that department and something that we are keen to continue to work with them on because community safety we know is supported by having vulnerable people leaving custody be somewhere safe. And I am sure the Chief Commissioner would agree with that – that when people do not have safe housing they are more likely to reoffend. So that is something we are very aware of and keen to work on. We know that the

effectiveness of the parole system depends as well on making sure that people have access to safe housing. Ultimately decision-making about parole is a matter for the independent parole board. We can see what information they have about that, and if it is available, we can share that with you.

Ellen SANDELL: Yes. That would be great. We have the number for 2021–22. We are interested in the number for 2022–23 if you could provide that on notice. Thank you. In terms of reoffending rates – the output ‘Rate of return to prison within two years’ – the target for 2022–23 is 39 per cent. I imagine you would have the final figure by now against that target. Do you have that?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Commissioner, can I hand that to you, please?

Larissa STRONG: I do not think it is yet published, but I understand the actual is 39.5 per cent.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thank you. The budget papers do not disaggregate that cohort. Do we have it disaggregated by, again, say, women, First Nations people?

Larissa STRONG: That is not, I do not think, in the ROGS data, but certainly the department can do that analysis to disaggregate it by women, men, First Nations people, longer sentences versus people discharged on bail. That is work that can be done.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. I would appreciate that. Is that able to be provided to the committee?

Larissa STRONG: I think we will need to follow up with evidence and insights, who do that work, in terms of it being a special request for them to do that analysis. We do do it more as a special request when we are wanting to dive down further.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. I would appreciate that if it is possible to be provided to the committee. What is the department doing in terms of reducing the rate of returns? For example, they obviously vary across states. Victoria is about in the middle but still relatively high.

Larissa STRONG: We are better than the national average – not to say that we do not want to be a lot better than where we are at. There is significant investment in program delivery across the prison system. We have over recent years focused on cohorts that need special attention, primarily people with a disability. There has also been an investment in Aboriginal programs and services and in the women’s system.

More broadly, in relation to your question about housing, we did invest in Maribyrnong community residential facility, which was a justice initiative which has housed over 200 people, including a lot of parolees in that time frame. Probably the biggest strategy we have had recently is also focusing on employment post release. You know, a lot of the evidence is now suggesting a really important component is protective factors, replacing the role that criminal offending plays in someone’s life with something really positive. We have gone from risk–need responsiveness, focusing on, I guess, risk factors to also wanting to focus on protective factors and resilience. So we have had a big focus on employment, starting with jobs on the inside – so how do we use TAFE in prisons and how do we use work in prisons through prison industries? We have over 92 per cent of prisoners who engage in prison industries across the state. We have very high participation in TAFE – over 8500 people in custody were enrolled in at least one TAFE unit in 2022–23.

How do we build on those soft skills and those actual qualifications people are gaining to get a job? There was investment in employment hubs across the prison system, really connecting people with employers on the outside. We have also used social procurement frameworks – our contracts – to say, ‘If we’re going to buy food to supply prisons from you, what could you do by actually hiring people who we’ve trained in warehousing across the system?’ We have had over 200 job pledges through using social procurement frameworks. We have also had centres of excellence. We have six centres of excellence in civil construction, and we are about to stand up more in welding as well, and the employment specialist hubs in the prisons link people to both those jobs. We have employment expos in prisons, where the employers come out and they look at the training that people get in the prison industries. They get to meet prospective candidates. The hubs help people with their resumes, and they can also link people to employment support services if they do not have a job on release as well. So that has been a big focus.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thank you. You mentioned disability, and I want to ask about prisoners with intellectual disability or acquired brain injury. There was a VAGO report, *Correctional Services for People with Intellectual Disability or an Acquired Brain Injury*, from June 2023. It said that DJCS does not know how many prisoners have intellectual disability or acquired brain injury and of those how many require specialised support. Can you speak to your response to that report?

Larissa STRONG: Absolutely. I think we have accepted many of the recommendations from that report – 13 recommendations: four were accepted and nine were accepted in principle subject to funding and resourcing. There is an intellectual disability flag in our prisoner information system. It probably reflects the world pre NDIS where for intellectual disability an IQ of, I think, less than 70 was the definition. As we have moved to, I guess, more of a functional impairment and broader view of cognitive impairment, the process to understand that, especially when it is more in the grey area of how you diagnose it, is not so obvious. That is where the prison disability complex needs program comes in in that we can refer for a proper assessment, but there is no screen that we can cover off and go looking for cognitive impairment when people first come into us. And it is probably not the best time to really be applying that screen anyway. We do also ask people within four weeks if they are on remand if they have an NDIA package. That also gives us a good indication of whether people have a functional impairment to the extent that they have an NDIA package, and we can then follow up for those assessments and what is involved. Part of our issue is our database systems. We do have multiple different applications where different data is stored, and some of it is also on the files. That goes to part of the difficulty in being able to give an aggregated level. As well as that, we do not screen everyone. It does come through by referral based on indicators through behaviour.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thank you. We know that Dame Phyllis Frost undertook a project to pilot a model for women prisoners who have disability and complex needs. Did that pilot include monitoring in terms of ID or ABI?

Larissa STRONG: Dame Phyllis Frost has the disability complex needs service. Is that the one you mean?

Ellen SANDELL: Yes. I understand it was a pilot.

Larissa STRONG: We do have funding and that funding is continuing; I think the funding is fixed term though. That program is the multidisciplinary team. It is quite similar to the prison disability support initiative in that the team is based at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre in a specialist unit, the Rosewood unit, which tends to house the women with more complexity related to disability. It does do work on linking people to the NDIS but also behavioural support plans. So it is the women's response primarily to disability. It works at Tarrengower too.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thank you. Just returning to the Chief Commissioner of Police, following up from my question before, I have just been informed that that data, in terms of whether sniffer dogs actually result in detection of illegal substances, in Victoria is not collected centrally. An FOI apparently said that we do not have centralised data here in Victoria in the same way they do in New South Wales. What is the reason for that?

Shane PATTON: Well, it would be systems-related. It would be that when people are searched there are use-of-force forms put in, but it would be entirely systems related. If you have been informed – which is great; you have got it hot off the press. But as I said, I can only undertake to explore it, and if we have the data that we can provide, we will.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. So you are not aware of any move to keep that data centrally in the same way that New South Wales does.

Shane PATTON: No.

Ellen SANDELL: I would like to talk about training of bail decision makers. Following on with the theme of bail reform, given the bail law changes and the fact that many of the people making our bail decisions are volunteers, obviously they will need some refresher training. Do you provide regular refresher training to volunteer bail decision makers?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Give me one second. Certainly there has been and continues to be training for bail decision makers. Diab Harb will be able to provide some further detail about the work that is being undertaken to ensure that we meet the needs of vulnerable people in particular who are appearing before bail justices.

Diab HARB: Thank you, Associate Secretary, and thank you for that question. We are speaking specifically in the context of our volunteer bail decision makers, who are the bail justices. We continually communicate with our bail justice cohort to update them and inform them of changes in laws and in practice, and we have a process of continual improvement based upon our monitoring of the hearings that they conduct. Specifically, though, we also have a training program that delivers specialised training for bail justices, and we are undertaking some work as we speak to reconsider that training in order to ensure that it is fit for purpose for the new bail laws. We also deliver Aboriginal cultural awareness and unconscious bias training for bail justices, and we recently completed a round of that training, really to ensure that our bail justices have the tools and the knowledge of the particular circumstances that they are facing in making those bail decisions.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. So with that training that you referred to, you referred to the fact that you regularly communicate with them and then you mentioned that there was some cultural competency training. How was that training provided? Was it just a communication or was it an actual requirement to do a course, whether that be online or in person?

Diab HARB: The Aboriginal cultural awareness training was a requirement under the *Honorary Justices Act* – to participate in that training. That was delivered over a one-day course. We are still, as I said, considering our training program for the new bail laws, as they come into effect next year, to ensure justices are up to date with the law.

Ellen SANDELL: Okay. Thank you.

Ryan PHILLIPS: I should also note that there was funding provided in the 2021–22 budget that supported the training programs that Diab mentioned.

Ellen SANDELL: But are you saying that has not been spent yet? Because you were saying that actually the training needs are still being determined.

Ryan PHILLIPS: That funding from the budget cycle was over five years as part of the supporting vulnerable Victorians initiative. So that funding has been used to undertake the Aboriginal cultural awareness and unconscious bias training to date. Now, with the bail reforms that have recently passed Parliament there will be further training that will be required to support delivery of that.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. Of all the bail decisions made in Victoria across the two years that this inquiry is looking at, proportionately how many of those were made by volunteers? Do we have that data?

Diab HARB: We do not have the data here, but we are happy to provide it on notice.

Ellen SANDELL: Thank you. I appreciate that. Okay. There has been a lot of talk in the community recently about extremism and social cohesion, and given everything that is happening at the world and the rising tensions, obviously social cohesion is more important than ever. We also had a parliamentary inquiry into far-right extremism that found there has been a resurgence of that type of extremism and a neo-Nazi presence growing in Victoria, which is obviously quite terrifying. The government earmarked \$1.8 million for early intervention initiatives to counter violent extremism in the 2022–23 budget, and then there was the \$3 million towards antisemitism and a further \$3 million towards anti-Islamophobia campaigns. How much money has been distributed in relation to the initiatives countering extremism to date? And my second question is: how much is specifically distributed towards countering far-right extremism?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Thank you for the question. I will hand over to Bill Kyriakopoulos, who is the Deputy Secretary responsible for this area.

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: G'day. Thanks. So the \$4.8 million over four years for CVE was through a unit within our department and included, as you said, \$1.5 million specifically to the northern community support group.

Ellen SANDELL: Could you perhaps provide that on notice – and the programs that were funded through that?

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: Yes. You bet. Thank you.

The CHAIR: I am just going to take a moment to remind members: if you have questions that you would like to ask, the intention of this hearing is not to ask them at the end when you know your time is up and then ask for them to be taken on notice. I have let a couple go, and we will take that on notice, but I am just saying. I am sorry, Mr O'Brien. I said that to you before, and you have been around long enough to know. Okay. We will go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Associate Secretary. Thank you, officials. I want to ask about crime prevention and particularly youth crime prevention. The 2022–23 budget had an investment of \$4.5 million for early intervention, but what programs was that invested in, and whereabouts?

Ryan PHILLIPS: The \$4.5 million allocated in the 2022–23 budget was invested in continuing the youth crime prevention program in 15 LGAs. These LGAs were Broadmeadows, Ballarat, Greater Geelong, Latrobe, Wyndham, Casey, Greater Dandenong, Frankston, Horsham, Bendigo, Mildura, Brimbank, Melton, Shepparton and East Gippsland. The youth crime prevention program delivers community-led initiatives to address offending and recidivism among young people aged 10 to 24 in areas with higher rates of youth offending. Since the program commenced back in 2016 it has provided more than 2100 young people with intensive case management support and engaged more than 3800 young people in prosocial activities. We think the program is delivering real results, and that is supported by an evaluation published in 2022 that showed a 29 per cent reduction in offending and a 24 per cent reduction in the severity of offending for participants.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. So it is 2100 young people, that intensive case management support – who is providing that?

Ryan PHILLIPS: Who is providing the case management support?

Lauren KATHAGE: Who is providing the case management support – which agency?

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: It is provided by a variety of programs across Victoria. What we know is that different communities and different cohorts have different needs, so these are very much programs that will differ in the various areas where they are being provided. I have got a couple of examples. In the Melton local government area, for example, the U-turn 193 project is led by the Melton City Council. It is fair to say in recent times that the crime prevention portfolio has focused intensely on young people and preventing youth crime, and that means working with our partners at Victoria Police, working with local councils and working with local communities and local service providers. That Melton City Council partnership is a good example of that, and that provides intensive case management and prosocial support group activities to young people from multicultural backgrounds who live or go to school in the Melton local government area.

For example, we also have the Pivot program, which is in the Frankston local government area. That it is led by YSAS, the Youth Support and Advocacy Service, and they provide intensive case management and a strong family-inclusive practice. A lot of times we find that we need wraparound services for whole families, not just individuals, so that is a focus there. Young people are supported through the establishment of a care team tailored to their particular needs to meet the needs, as I said, of both individuals and their families – sometimes siblings, sometimes extended families, depending on need. But we often see that where there are ingrained challenges and problems they are widespread, so if we can reach it early it leads to better outcomes.

Lauren KATHAGE: I think the LGAs listed – there are lots of differences between Broadmeadows and Mildura, for example, so that place-based approach to crime prevention, how does that play out then in the programs or in the design of the programs and delivery of the programs? How does it match the location?

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: As I said, each cohort will have different needs, and we engage with local communities. We engage with local community groups and understand their needs, and oftentimes we have local site exec committees that will have various representatives of, say, Victoria Police, the Department of Health, the Department of Education or our department. We work together with those groups to understand what the particular needs of the groups are, and we decide to target particular groups. Applications are made for

grants, and that is how we go about it. We know place-based responses are the best approach to tackling drivers of crime. The department generally undertake a range of analyses to inform where we direct crime prevention investment, and we obviously have a very thorough evaluation process of all our programs and projects. They are posted online, so they are there for everyone to see as well. They also inform future government investment. The recent investment in the youth crime prevention fund that Ryan spoke of earlier is a good example of us doing an evaluation, knowing it works and being able to reinvest in that.

We analyse crime statistics, socio-economic data and wellbeing and safety data as well as the aforementioned community consultations. Using that data and analysis allows us to take both a place-based focus but also a cohort-based focus on how we invest and identify where and who should be the focus of our support. The youth crime prevention program aforementioned was designed using that place-based approach, which recognises that risk and protective factors for crime extend beyond the justice system and differ depending on where you live and what challenges any particular community has. The initial design process for that prevention program in particular included facilitated workshops at local levels to support a collaborative partnership model of project delivery. Local organisations and groups then use the evidence and community knowledge to develop strategies and activities that influence the factors which contribute to crime in the area. As a result, as you mentioned as well, project design would then vary across sites and projects depending on the cohort and the number and types of activities they are engaged in with young people.

Lauren KATHAGE: It is good to hear that the consultative committees are involved in I guess designing the program and what it looks like. Do they have a matching role in helping to drive the focus of the evaluation, rather than just being consulted as part of the evaluation, and what is important for them to understand about the outcomes of the program et cetera?

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: Absolutely. The evaluations are independent and comprehensive, so they both engage with recipients of support, impacted communities and community groups as well as the local area that we have consulted with and obviously look at outcomes of crime in the area, anecdotal evidence from Victoria Police and others.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. The performance measures in the 2022–23 budget related to these sorts of programs – it looks like they have been discontinued. Are you able to explain why?

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: Yes. The BP3 performance measures are pretty high level and monitor specific departmental outputs. Our focus is on our projects and program outcomes, so we have undertaken to refine those performance measures to better reflect and capture outputs across the wide variety of crime prevention initiatives and grant projects that we have. As we said, they are all very different. They all have very different objectives and very different outcomes, so we are trying to make sure the BP3 measures actually reflect the kind of work that we are doing. The two crime prevention performance measures that were discontinued in 2022–23 are in BP3 on page 401: community crime prevention grant payments being properly acquitted, and the percentage of funded initiatives that support local communities to deliver innovative crime and community safety solutions in local areas. We have updated those. They were replaced with two new measures in 2022–23, and they are: proportion of crime prevention grant applications using crime prevention resources, and then the number of crime prevention projects to improve the quality of partnerships and deliver effective projects. Just as a reminder, the measures are only one way of monitoring the effectiveness of those programs. We review and evaluate and build an evidence base for future investment, and obviously, as I said earlier, all those evaluations are published online for everyone to see.

Lauren KATHAGE: Those are transparent evaluations. Have you had much interest from local councils? I think local councils are involved in building and delivering a lot of general youth programs that would probably benefit from an understanding of what you have learned in the crime prevention space.

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: There is a lot of crossover in the work that we do. Councils are often the local service providers. They sit on our consultative committees and so on, so absolutely there is a shared knowledge. We consult with them; they consult with us. We fund a lot of their projects. We jointly fund a lot of projects as well, so that is a really close relationship that we have with a lot of councils both metropolitan and regional.

Lauren KATHAGE: Great, thank you. I would like to move now to victim support, and in particular in your questionnaire response you spoke about the new victims legal service. So I want to ask about how it is going since the launch, how many clients have been assisted since it was launched and what the uptake is.

Ryan PHILLIPS: Bill will be able to continue to assist you.

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: Yes, that falls within my portfolio as well. There was \$7.32 million in 2021–22 over three years for the victims legal service, and it is ultimately going to be a key part of the service offering of the new financial assistance scheme. It launched on 14 May – the legal service, that is. Up until 31 October, which is our latest data, the service provided information and legal advice in response to 1463 inquiries which came through the victims legal service helpline, and we then referred 355 victims to providers for ongoing casework. It is obviously a free service. It is modelled to deliver over 3000 services of legal advice and assistance, including casework, in its first full year of operation, and it is currently on track to meet that target.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. You spoke about ongoing case management, but what other supports can it provide to clients?

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: Obviously the legal service was established to ultimately service the people that are using the financial assistance scheme or intending to, but at the moment the service currently provides legal information and assistance to victims of crime that have applications in the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal and with restitution and compensation order matters. As I said, once the financial assistance scheme – or the FAS, as we like to call it – starts, the service will also support victims with legal advice and assistance with their applications in applying for funding in the new scheme. Victims can call the helpline, which is a primary entry point into the legal service, and that is a nine-to-five, Monday to Friday operation at this stage. We recently have partnered with Victorian Legal Aid, Women’s Legal Service Victoria and Djirra to expand the victims legal service under some federal funding, so we have got a pilot program which will focus on victim-survivors of sexual violence. The focus is to protect their confidential communications and health information and support Aboriginal women in reporting sexual offences to police. That program should be operational in the new year, and that is through federal funding.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. When talking about the youth crime prevention programs, you spoke about the design of those being driven by people with experience. So with this service, was the design informed by lived experience of people who have been victims of crime?

Bill KYRIAKOPOULOS: Absolutely. I think it is fair to say that the whole justice system in recent times has tried to take a trauma-informed, victim-focused lens when both establishing new things and improving our services. The legal service was co-designed over an 18-month period with legal service providers and importantly, as you said, with victims with lived experience, so that was an extensive co-design process that ensured that victim-survivor-centric practice is at the centre of all policies and practices of the legal service. We have got a victims of crime consultative committee, where we run the secretariat out of the department, so victims reps, who change over every few years, help with and influence the design of the service to improve accessibility to a diverse range of people. As part of a working group our victims reps inform development of operational guidelines that outline the service delivery standards of all the legal service providers, requiring provision as always of safe, inclusive, victim-centric, trauma-informed services. So we have five victims reps in particular from our consultative committee, who provide a lived experience. For interest, two of those victims were involved in all aspects of the service design process both from referral protocols and comms and then service guidelines. Another two victims reps were involved in sub working groups that focused on inclusive practice that informed the service guidelines. We also had the full victims of crime committee, which provided feedback on both the legal service as well as providing written updates on what they thought of progress and where they thought there could be greater improvement.

It is worth pointing out that ultimately the legal service will provide assistance to people applying for the new financial assistance scheme. You might recall that the financial assistance scheme Act was passed on 7 June 2022, and that will replace the courts-based VOCAT, or the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal, which will greatly improve the experiences of victims of crime. Going to the Magistrates’ Court, which runs the VOCAT, can be a retraumatising experience for a lot of victims. They can always also be questioned about the validity of their claims, and that can obviously be a highly traumatic experience. It also leads to people simply hearing about the experience or having to go through that experience in not applying for funding or choosing to not

seek support. So we are very focused on building an admin system where people can enter and start the process online we run through the Department of Justice and Community Safety. They will be able to deal online and enter their information, and hopefully we will be able to process their claims a lot quicker and certainly without the trauma.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. I want to return to a topic that was discussed earlier in the hearing, around police and police recruitment. The previous budget had over \$300 million over a number of years to increase the number of police. We heard yesterday evidence that unemployment is at record lows in Victoria. It is a very tight labour market, and earlier you spoke about one of the methods of recruitment being around warm leads. Can you tell us what other initiatives you are implementing to increase police and PSO numbers?

Shane PATTON: Sure. Thanks for that. We obviously launched our Made for More recruitment campaign on I think 16 October et cetera. It has had a total of 6197 police applications submitted since then.

Lauren KATHAGE: Sorry, since 16 October this year?

Shane PATTON: No, 16 October last year. If it was this year I would say – I wish, but no. That has been a fantastic campaign for us. It has really generated a lot of interest. We have had the warm leads project, which I spoke of before, which was commencing in February. Our talent attraction, recruitment and programs team contacted, if you like, 40,000 people who had previously expressed an interest in joining Victoria Police but for whatever reason had not continued on through the pipeline. They had dropped off, so we chased up with them and just said, ‘Are you still interested?’ People’s circumstances change. We have had over a thousand of those, 1240, who submitted a new application, so that was a really positive scenario for us. We have had a range of forums at the convention centre and a range of – we hit all the local shows, if you like, and everything. Even on the weekend we were at the African Music and Cultural Festival. I was present there and had someone just walking past sign up.

It is not just any singular thing that is going to do it for us, but the funding for it has enabled us to look at all of those things as well as streamlining our recruitment process. We are in a situation now where we have got, if you like, online medical booklets and a whole range of things. We have trimmed back where we can and everything so that people are able to much more quickly go through our pipeline. Some are doing it in a very short period of time, you know, a number of months – three months, I think, or something like that. Others it can take quite some time, subject to different circumstances peculiar to them. But we have got in a position where now you can complete multiple areas at the same time, so the funding has been excellent in that respect. As I said earlier, 3.53 is our attrition rate at the moment, but it is not just about our attrition rate. We are about retention, but it is about getting new people in. We have got some fantastic applicants, and as I said, we are now full at the academy. We have got 48 people graduating each Thursday – each fortnight, sorry, I should say – where I go out to.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. You spoke about being at the local African festival. Diversity in police is important. I think about our local Mernda station and our local population, with lots of people that were born overseas, in the surrounding area. In what other ways are you ensuring diversity then in your recruitment?

Shane PATTON: We obviously have our diversity inclusion frameworks. We have a whole range of action plans and things, and we have the overarching plans you would expect us to have in place. But at its core it is about us engaging with the community. As I said, I had the privilege to go to the African Music and Cultural Festival, although I probably should not have gone, because I was photographed dancing on the stage. Nonetheless, it is that type of engagement, I think, and we do it locally as well. We have programs that are established with a university as well and Jesuit services, who are making it easier for people with bridging programs, so that when they come to the academy they understand what they are getting into and all of that. We are doing everything we can to make sure that we are reflective of and representative of the communities we serve.

Lauren KATHAGE: Great. Thank you. I think the Mernda police station, the Point Cook police station –

A member: South Melbourne refurb.

Lauren KATHAGE: South Melbourne refurb – some of these are probably important for ensuring –

Shane PATTON: And do not forget Benalla.

Lauren KATHAGE: And Benalla. I will never forget Benalla, because that is where Macca's is when you are driving to the north.

Michael GALEA: At the risk of contravening the Chair's order, can we get that photo on notice?

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Kathage. That brings today's session to an end. Mr Phillips, thank you for filling in for the secretary. I hope it was not too short a notice. Commissioners and other officials, thank you very much for your time. The committee is going to follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

There have been a number of sensitive things discussed as part of this public hearing today. I want to remind anyone listening today and anyone here in the room that 1800 RESPECT is the national domestic, family and sexual violence counselling service, and they can be contacted on 1800 737 732. 13 YARN is specifically available to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and they can be contacted on 13 9276. Remember to please call 000 if you are at immediate risk of violence or in danger.

The committee is now going to take a lunchbreak before beginning its consideration of the Department of Government Services at 1:30 pm.

Witnesses withdrew.