

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations**

Melbourne—Tuesday, 9 March 2021

*(via videoconference)*

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

**WITNESSES**

Ms Natasha Palich, Executive Officer, Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment;

Ms Jane Keddie, Vice-President, Planning Institute of Australia, Victorian division;

Ms Rebecca Casson, Chief Executive Officer, Master Builders Association of Victoria;

Mr Mike Hermon, Executive Director, Planning and Development, Housing Industry Association;

Mr Heath Gledhill, Victorian Chapter President,

Ms Ella Gauci-Seddon, Victorian Chapter Vice-President, and

Dr Meredith Dobbie, Chair, AILA Victorian Environment Committee, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects;

Ms Martine Letts, Chief Executive Officer, Committee for Melbourne,

Mr Nicholas McVey, Head of Commercial Revenue, Yarra Trams, Committee for Melbourne, and

Ms Antara Mascarenhas, Group Manager, Stakeholder Relations, Australian Energy Market Operator, Committee for Melbourne; and

Mr Greg Bursill, General Manager, Lovely Banks Development Group, Urban Development Institute of Australia.

**The CHAIR:** I advise that the sessions today are being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Rebroadcast of the hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234.

Thank you for joining us today at this public hearing for the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations. On behalf of the committee, I acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of this land. We pay our respects to them, their culture and their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be joining us here today. I also extend a welcome to any members of the public and media watching us today.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee will be conducting to inform itself about the issues relevant to the inquiry. Before I begin, I need to point out to you that all evidence today will be recorded by Hansard and it is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, it is important to note that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside this hearing, even if you are restating what you said during the hearing. You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be noted from in our final report.

Thank you to everyone for taking the time to meet with us today. I am sure we are all aware after many, many months of doing Zoom meetings: can we just make sure that members and witnesses mute their microphones when not speaking, to minimise interference. I think what we will do to start is go around and, members of Parliament, if you could introduce yourselves.

My name is Sarah Connolly; I am the Member for Tarneit and the Chair of this committee.

**Mr MORRIS:** I am David Morris, the Deputy Chair and Member for Mornington.

**Mr HAMER:** I am Paul Hamer. I am the Member for Box Hill.

**Ms GREEN:** I am Danielle Green, just trying to finish my lunch because I had another meeting during our lunchbreak. I am the Member for Yan Yean, and I have represented a growth area since 2002, so I am really interested in this inquiry. Thanks to all the witnesses that are going to present to us today.

**The CHAIR:** I just want to say that the Member for Burwood, Will Fowles, will also be joining us around about 2.30. You will see him just pop in and his name come up.

I think, because we are such a big group, if we can just quickly go around, you can introduce yourself to us—and your position—and then, based on some feedback from some of you about when you need to leave us today, I think we will have two presentations. So there will be a 10-minute opportunity for presentations.

We are going to go for the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment—Natasha, if we could hear from you—and then we are sort of going to jump ahead and hear from Rebecca Casson from Master Builders Victoria. You two ladies need to leave us a little bit earlier today, so we will hear from you first and then jump to some questions. And then we will proceed with the other groups and hear your presentations, at the end of which the members of the committee will start asking you some questions.

So Natasha, did you want to introduce yourself?

**Ms PALICH:** Yes. Hi. Natasha Palich, Executive Officer, Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment, working through the MAV, the Municipal Association of Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Meredith.

**Dr DOBBIE:** Hi. I am Meredith Dobbie. I am representing the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, the Victorian chapter, and I am the Chair of the environment committee.

**The CHAIR:** Rebecca.

**Ms CASSON:** Good afternoon, everyone. I am Rebecca Casson. I am the CEO of Master Builders Victoria. I have also got two of my team members joining us this afternoon, and to save time I will introduce them. They are Michaela and Matthew, and we are all delighted to be here with you this afternoon. Thank you very much for the invitation.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Jane.

**Ms KEDDIE:** My name is Jane Keddie. I am the director of a town planning and design consultancy, but I am here today as Vice-President of the Planning Institute of Australia's Victorian division.

**The CHAIR:** Ella.

**Ms GAUCI-SEDDON:** Hi. My name is Ella Gauci-Seddon. I am here with AILA as well, the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects. I am the current Vice-President of the Victorian chapter and the chair of the advocacy committee. So yes, thanks for having us.

**The CHAIR:** Martine.

**Ms LETTS:** Thank you, Sarah. Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Martine Letts, and I am the CEO of the Committee for Melbourne. With me today also are two other members of our future focus group, who will be making a presentation on a specific project proposal later on in the session. So I will introduce them then, Sarah, if that is okay. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Mike?

**Mr HERMON:** Mike Hermon, representing the Housing Industry Association, the HIA. I am the Executive Director of Planning and Development. I will just speak today reiterating our written submission, I guess, but thank you for the opportunity.

**The CHAIR:** Nicholas—I like your background.

**Mr McVEY:** Thank you. Nicholas McVey. I am Head of Commercial Revenue at Yarra Trams, but here today I am one of the people referred to by Martine on behalf of the Committee for Melbourne to present the results of our focus project in this area.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, and then we have got Antara.

**Ms MASCARENHAS:** Hi, I am the GM of Stakeholder Relations at the Australian Energy Market Operator, and I am here to join Martine and Nick today in my capacity as a recent Future Focus Group member to talk about the same project.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you. I think we have got everyone. Let us jump in. Natasha, did you want to kick off with a 5- to 10-minute presentation? And then we will go straight to Rebecca and then we will open up to questions, just because I am mindful of your time.

**Ms PALICH:** Great. Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to also start by respectfully acknowledging the ancestors, elders and families of the Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin nation as the traditional owners of the land from which I am joining this forum today.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the inquiry. As I said before, I am the Executive Officer of the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment, known as CASBE, and I am here today on behalf of our member councils. CASBE is an unincorporated alliance of 30 Victorian councils. It is auspiced by the Municipal Association of Victoria. Our focus is on applying widely accepted environmentally sustainable development, or ESD, principles to the build environment through the Victorian statutory planning system. One of our core projects we have developed is the sustainable design assessment in the planning process framework. That is known as the SDAPP framework, and it is a framework for councils to seek consistent ESD outcomes in lot-scale developments across Victoria from the planning system.

To complement this work and address current sustainability gaps in greenfield subdivisions, CASBE, in partnership with 16 Victorian councils and the Victorian Planning Authority, recently launched the sustainable subdivisions framework, so while our written submission to the inquiry covered a range of issues, I will be talking today to a very specific on-the-ground project that is focused on delivering sustainable outcomes for residential subdivisions, which is the sustainable subdivisions framework. I would be happy to take any questions about the other aspects of our submission on notice.

The sustainable subdivisions framework—or the SSF, which is what I will call it for this presentation—offers a significant and practical way to deliver environmental infrastructure for new communities. Before I go any further, I would like to acknowledge the 16 councils who led this project and also the contribution made by the Victorian government. The project was part funded by the Collaborative Council—Sustainability Fund Partnership program. I would also like to note that there are now 29 councils trialling the SSF in their planning system across Victoria, and while I am here today speaking to the project the project is actually being run by the officers in those councils, who are working directly with their development communities.

The project evolved from two main goals. Firstly, for many councils greenfield development is the primary development typology in their municipality. However, in most instances the houses themselves that are constructed in these developments sit outside the planning process. So this project was an attempt to provide a better and more environmental base for these dwellings. The second goal is resilient and sustainable communities—so communities that have great amenity, they are comfortable, they provide green space and facilitate social interaction between occupants. So the SSF provides a methodology specifically designed for this task. It can be used for all sizes and types of development, from small-scale subdivisions through to the larger residential greenfield development. The framework standardises the information required from the developer, which means a consistent approach can be applied to different-scale developments in different locations.

To give you a brief history of the project, in 2017 Wodonga City Council led a government-funded feasibility study into best practice ESD subdivisions in regional Victoria in partnership with seven other regional councils. What this work highlighted was that there was a lack of data at subdivision level, which made it difficult to test the business-as-usual versus best practice sustainability outcomes. They then went on, in 2019, to lead a second Victorian government-funded feasibility study into a statewide assessment framework for sustainable subdivisions, which could be tested through a pilot phase. That project was run in partnership with 15 other councils, CASBE and the Victorian Planning Authority, and the result of that project was the sustainable subdivisions framework. That has now moved into an 18-month trial, which commenced in October 2020, and it is going until March 2022—and it has expanded now to include 29 councils across Victoria.

So what are sustainable subdivisions? Sustainable subdivisions are located and designed to improve quality of life and use resources more effectively. The aim is to use resources in a way that enables the needs of today's communities to be met while also ensuring that these same resources remain available to meet the needs of future generations. The goal is also to create safe, healthy and resilient communities, and planning can have a significant impact on these goals.

The framework sets out a series of sustainable built environment opportunities which can be influenced through the development planning and the subdivision planning processes. It identifies seven environmental categories where action can be taken: site layout and livability; streets and public realm; energy; ecology; integrated water management; urban heat; and circular economy, covering materials and waste. A number of these relate directly to environmental infrastructure, including site layout and livability. This recognises the importance of access to open space and encourages a site-responsive subdivision design which retains natural features such as canopy vegetation for incorporation into public open space and streetscapes. The streets and public realm category recognises the critical role of designing a people-focused local street network and public realm, to encourage walking and recreation while also increasing biodiversity and mitigating the urban heat island. The ecology category encourages subdivision design to retain and enhance ecology to provide key ecosystem services such as habitat for wildlife, urban temperature regulation, run-off mitigation and food supply. Then the integrated water management category acknowledges that all aspects of the water cycle, including reduced water consumption, the beneficial use of recycled stormwater and water-sensitive urban design can be integrated and collaboratively managed in subdivisions. And then the urban heat category recognises the need to design urban heat mitigation strategies into subdivisions to cool the landscape so that future residents can move comfortably through the community.

The framework is designed to assist council planners in providing a more holistic evaluation of environmental outcomes of subdivision applications. There are clear quantitative metrics and requirements to improve those outcomes. It also acknowledges that councils across Victoria are at different stages in their journey towards sustainable design—so this project provides a flexible approach to accommodate those differences. And it responds specifically to the subdivision stage, but it also recognises that precinct structure planning is the foundation of good subdivisions. The project has also produced a range of supporting materials, including communication resources such as videos and fact sheets—both internal and external-facing resources to facilitate the 18-month trial.

At the moment councils are currently testing the framework through a voluntary 18-month trial of live subdivision applications. Participating councils are working with developers to assess real applications under the framework. The developer may choose to voluntarily implement some or all of the suggestions to improve the sustainability of their project, and through this process the framework is intended to be tested. The direct engagement with the development community will enable further input into the SSF, highlighting potential improvements to the function, the content and the process. We are gathering data at six-monthly intervals to analyse the impact of applying the framework, and we will also be seeking direct feedback from both development applicants and the planners involved in assessing the projects to inform the way forward. A governance board oversees the implementation of the trial on behalf of the 29 participating councils, and a technical reference panel of industry experts is due to be established to provide advice on the data received and the feedback gathered.

Early feedback from the trial suggests that this approach to seeking sustainable communities is not without its challenges. For example, when applying the framework to sequenced or staged permits, a substantial amount of the information required to enable a project to be assessed under the framework is typically not provided at that early stage. It is usually provided later in the development. Councils are finding that, in the first instance as they learn about the framework, the time required to undertake the assessment is longer than was originally anticipated. It appears that while some of the strategies in the framework would be supported by the developers, there are issues to resolve in terms of long-term maintenance of assets which can and often do fall to councils.

However, the goal of the project is to test the concept, gather evidence, adjust accordingly and move forward. We will be sharing the findings of the trial with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, and to support the knowledge transfer of the project the SSF governance board includes a DELWP observer. I would like to refer you to the recommendations in our submission specific to the sustainable subdivisions framework; I will not read them out now.

In conclusion, the creation of a subdivision is a creation of a community. It commences with a relatively blank canvas, setting up the life of the community that will extend over hundreds of years. So that initial subdivision design presents an enormous opportunity to get the fundamentals right, and planning provides an opportunity for councils to connect with the development industry at that early design stage to encourage and support safe, healthy and resilient communities as the outcome. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Natasha. We will jump straight to Rebecca.

**Ms CASSON:** Thank you very much, Sarah. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here today. Firstly, Master Builders Victoria acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia, and we pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging as we embrace our shared future. As I said before, I am the CEO of Master Builders Victoria, and on behalf of our organisation I thank you, Sarah, as the Chair and the other committee members for the opportunity to appear at this important inquiry today.

For those of you that may not be aware, the vision of Master Builders Victoria is to lead a future-ready industry that builds a better world. That we can pursue this vision in one of the most livable cities and states in the world is due to many factors, and these include the contributions of each of the organisations represented here today. I just take a moment to acknowledge their work as well, the important work that each of them do, and that we appreciate the collegiality, particularly over the course of the last 12 months.

Master Builders Victoria's members past and present also play a major part in this, and it is an absolute privilege and honour to represent them here today. For those of you that do not know, Master Builders Victoria's membership ranges from mum-and-dad builders and tradespeople to tier 1 companies together with subcontractors and suppliers working right across the building and construction industry, and our sector is a core feature of the Victorian economy. In fact it is the largest full-time employer and the biggest industry in terms of its number of businesses, of which well over 90 per cent are small businesses. This figure might surprise you, but our industry contributes more than 45 per cent of our state's tax revenue, and every \$1 invested in housing develops nearly \$3 in economic activity. Put simply, our industry's contribution to the fabric of our community is measured in far more than simply bricks and mortar.

I note that this inquiry has highlighted the importance of environmental infrastructure in helping our communities navigate the challenges of COVID-19, and it is therefore worthwhile acknowledging that our members and indeed our entire industry continues to play a vital role in helping Victoria and indeed Australia to address the COVID-19 pandemic in a way that is frankly envied across the world. As we move beyond the pandemic Master Builders Victoria is going to continue to pursue leading a future-ready industry that builds a better world. That includes engagement with inquiries such as this and being part of a conversation about managing and improving our environmental infrastructure. This is a vital conversation for that livability of our cities and the lives of our communities. Indeed, we all wish to see standards improve over time, and fantastic environmental infrastructure and vibrant open spaces are a key part of that.

However, it is important to recognise that this conversation simply cannot be held in isolation, and the affordability of housing, viability of private investment and functionality of our cities are also paramount. Only by considering all of these at times, we acknowledge, conflicting priorities, can communities be built for the enjoyment by the many and not just a privilege for the few. Master Builders Victoria believes that this conversation should not only be about how more parks and open spaces can be provided but should also include discussions on ways in which affordable housing for our communities can be sustainably provided to meet the demands of a growing population. This is particularly important given Victoria has been Australia's fastest growing state, and despite the effects of COVID-19 on overseas immigration, we are sure that the experience of that strong population growth will come to the fore again into the future.

Indeed it is important that the provision of environmental infrastructure and housing is not presented as a binary choice, but rather as related issues that are part of a wider objective—that being to ensure that our cities remain sustainable and livable for a growing population. As such, further planning reform is required to enable greater choice for housing types that promote good density. That is certainly what Master Builders Victoria believes, and it is essential to avoid pressure on land availability whilst also providing both environmental infrastructure and the housing that our communities need.

We acknowledge that both *Plan Melbourne 2017—2050* and Infrastructure Victoria's 30-year strategy plan discuss the importance of reviewing planning settings to ensure more housing in established neighbourhoods to promote good density. Master Builders Victoria certainly supports this, with recent developments such as the introduction of a pilot program to establish a code for secondary dwellings being, in our opinion, a very positive step. *Plan Melbourne* also supports the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods, which involves people having the ability to meet most of their daily needs within a 20-minute return walk from home. This is indeed an admirable aspiration and can only be achieved if good urban densification is part of the discussion.

In referencing that holistic approach to planning for the future it is important to highlight some of the wider policy agenda items that Master Builders Victoria considers may have an impact on this conversation that is part of this inquiry today. As I have already stated, Master Builders Victoria is a strong advocate for changes that will improve the built environment, and we certainly encourage widespread collaboration on ways to achieve this. This includes our conversations with the Victorian government as part of their building system review, together with ways to improve the energy efficiency standards of new and existing buildings.

Master Builders Victoria has also been a very strong advocate for more social and affordable housing. This is not only because it is a strong stimulus measure to stave off the COVID-19-induced economic downturn, but just as important for the social legacy it will leave by addressing a real need in our community. We therefore commend the state government's Big Housing Build program for enabling this particular situation to occur.

Master Builders Victoria is also a prominent proponent for urban densification. Indeed we believe that good densification is important to sustainably house a growing population and certainly consider that livability and densification are not mutually exclusive. Undeniably, dense cities can indeed be thriving cities, with good quality urban planning the deciding factor for whether a city remains livable or not. This is particularly important in the current context, where our state is currently experiencing a shortage of land. To that end, Master Builders Victoria recently wrote to the state Treasurer and the planning minister and also the Minister for Housing, and in our letter we highlighted the difficulties currently being faced by Victorians throughout our state in finding available land on which to build their future homes. This is the challenge that today's inquiry faces to some extent—to take account of the complexity of these apparently conflicting factors and deliver a pathway for vibrant environmental infrastructure that can be enjoyed by many long into the future.

Thank you so much for your time today. As the Chair has mentioned, unfortunately due to other conflicting commitments I cannot stay for the rest of the afternoon, but I am very happy to take any questions that members might have. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Rebecca, and thanks, Natasha. Just based on time we might purely jump in for the next 5 to 10 minutes of questions from members. I might kick off. Rebecca, your submission suggests that planning reform is needed to enable wider housing choice and promote that good urban density you just briefly spoke about. Can you expand on the type of reforms that you would like to see and how they might impact the provision of environmental infrastructure?

**Ms CASSON:** Yes, indeed. And in actual fact, given the time constraints, I would be very happy for us to provide more information to the inquiry in written form, if that would be suitable, simply because things have actually moved on even since last September. I am sure that you will have all experienced the very rapidly changing environment that we are living in. Through some of the work that we have been doing with the building systems review that I have mentioned, we are very, very keen to make sure that there is a whole range of reforms. We would be very happy to provide some of the feedback that we have given to the building systems review as part of a written submission in terms of taking that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. David?

**Mr MORRIS:** Thanks, Chair. In view of Rebecca's answer to your question, I think it would probably be better to get that information and have a look at it. The submission we have in front of us is five months old now, and given that things are moving that quickly, it is probably more appropriate to have a look at the most recent information and then perhaps come back to Rebecca if we have further queries on that.

**Ms CASSON:** I would be very happy to provide that information and certainly answer any follow-up questions. Of course I have already mentioned secondary dwellings, we have already seen the better apartments design standards coming through and there are many others as well in terms of other reforms, particularly in our

industry, that would be beneficial in the area that you are seeking, so I would be very happy to provide supplementary information.

**Mr MORRIS:** That would be good. Thanks for that.

**The CHAIR:** Danielle and Paul, did you have any questions for Rebecca and Natasha?

**Mr HAMER:** Yes, I did. You can answer now or you can come back to me if time is an issue. I obviously represent a middle suburban seat. I know there was a bit of discussion in your presentation particularly in terms of development and having access to regional open space. In some council areas, and particularly in the growth areas, that can be planned into the development, but in a lot of areas, a lot of those middle suburban areas, that parkland does not necessarily exist. I was just wondering, particularly given that a lot of focus on the urban density is within the middle suburbs, how you see that the environmental infrastructure of those areas can be improved, given that basically the land is entirely built out. It is obviously not a particularly easy question, but it is about whether you have any initial thoughts or whether you can come back to us on that.

**Ms CASSON:** Thanks very much for the question, Paul, really appreciate it. And it is a fantastic question and a big quandary, I think, as things progress. We would always encourage the use of existing open space in established areas, even though some of those might be compromised, as you had mentioned, so opening up publicly owned land to public access. In fact one of the comments that we have made is that there can potentially be a lot of landholding, particularly by water authorities, that could be made accessible in terms of that public access. And it is certainly important before considering adding new spaces, you know. You mentioned that you are in a highly populated area that might not have access to, for example, waterways and lakes, but if there are areas around those sorts of places, then that would obviously certainly ensure that improvement to environmental infrastructure is value-add.

The other aspect that we would mention is also consideration towards the greening of streets to provide shading benefits. I point to, for example, what is happening in Geelong as a regional area, and the work that they are doing on the green spine is really important to expand all of that, even though it has also been a little bit controversial because it is a traffic road, it is a through road, and cyclists' lanes have also been added. They have done some great work there, and that has been backed by the state government and really pushed through in terms of the planning. So that has made a huge difference to lots of people, but I also acknowledge that perhaps it might have adversely affected some of the others. These things always have to be taken with equal measure, so I hope that that addresses your question in some way, shape or form, but I am also happy to provide further advice if you see fit.

**Mr HAMER:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Danielle, did you have a question?

**Ms GREEN:** Yes, I do. Thanks, Chair, and thanks, Bec. I would expect nothing less of you than to refer to Geelong, your old stamping ground, where I first knew you, and well done on the work you are doing at the MBA.

In that connection between affordable housing and environmental infrastructure, that is something I am very familiar with in my area. I had one of the developers who does a lot of development in my electorate in the Whittlesea area come to me and he sought my assistance in trying to progress something that is in a middle suburban area. It was a bit of a conundrum that he had. It was in a flood plain area. They had a solution that would deliver better drainage, would mean more land use and a very nice retarding basin that would be for passive recreation et cetera, but they were hitting logjams with getting caught between the council and the water authorities. Did you have an idea on who should be the arbiter around those things so we could progress them quickly? Because I really felt that with this developer it was a real barrier to getting the project going and would have added costs.

**Ms CASSON:** Look, firstly, Danielle, thank you for your very kind comments, and certainly I have missed seeing you and others like David in my old stamping ground in Geelong. In fact I spoke to one of our members this morning who was making comments about the fact that Master Builders is very Melbourne-centric, and he was totally shocked when I told him that I had been running Master Builders from Geelong for the last year and a bit, and he had no idea. So it can be done. We can run organisations and use technology to be together and

stay safe, even though we are apart, so I look forward to seeing you and David and others down in Geelong and in Melbourne the next time.

I would be happy to talk with you about that offline and talk to you about the developer. One of the things that is really important we think for these opportunities for development, particularly as the Big Housing Build comes through, is that no barriers are left up. So it is not to say that things should be rushed through at the expense of communities or good planning, but we think that it is important to understand the consequences as well that the expansion of environmental infrastructure might have on the supply of houses. And of course each time there is an increase in any requirements, whether it be housing, like for example in the Big Housing Build, or an increase in environmental infrastructure, there are always going to be costs and there are always going to be questions around, you know, who might be the arbiter or who might not be.

For us, we have seen a really, really good and swift uplift in applications and confidence, and a lot of this in recovery from a COVID perspective is about confidence—confidence from businesses, from consumers and from our community not just in ourselves but in everything that we do—and about how we can actually get things to market as quickly as possible. An initial view without taking any advice—and I might get told off for it—is that we would always say that those sorts of things should be called in and the arbiter should definitely be the planning minister, but it would be actively assessed and triaged first. We certainly want to make sure that we are behind promoting very different housing opportunities for all of our community to ensure that everybody in our community has access to that. Danielle, I am happy to talk about that offline and see also if there is anything that we can do from a Master Builders perspective with your constituent.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Rebecca. Natasha, I am just conscious of time. I think you need to say farewell. Just before you go, because we have not asked you a question, could you advocate some specific steps the Victorian government could undertake to improve the provision of environmental infrastructure? Can you just very briefly, in 60 seconds, outline the role you see for state government? What do you need to tell us?

**Ms PALICH:** As I said, I will limit my comments to the project that I have spoken about, the sustainable subdivisions framework. Currently the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning are considering a review of ESD in the state planning system, and this considers both buildings and subdivisions. We believe that this project is almost testing options for that state project, so we welcome the involvement of the state government officers in our governance board and we will be sharing the information that we gather from this trial. Thank you for the question about how the state government can help. In terms of help it would be of great benefit if the state government might be able to help us in resourcing parts of the trial in terms of gathering data and analysing that data so that we can learn from the outcomes of this fairly significant project in which local government has invested quite a lot of resources to date—that is probably one of the key areas—and then to seriously and carefully consider the outcomes of the trial to see the applicability of any successes that might be applied across the state.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms PALICH:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Rebecca and Natasha, I think you need to head off, so unless there was anything else you wanted to say to us, thank you for your time today.

**Ms PALICH:** Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak and share our views. It is very welcome indeed.

**Ms CASSON:** I echo what Natasha said. It has been great to be here. I am just very sad that I cannot get to see everybody else live, but I certainly will look up and check in later on.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, thank you.

**Ms CASSON:** Thanks very much, everyone. Have a good afternoon. Bye.

**The CHAIR:** Moving forward, we might go straight over to you, Jane, if you want to jump into a 5-minute presentation.

**Ms KEDDIE:** Sure, thanks. I very much appreciate, as the others have said, the opportunity to talk here today. Just first up, this is not my particular area of expertise, but I do want to emphasise that it is an area that is of real significant interest to our members and to PIA more generally. Environmental infrastructure is really critical to the livability and sustainability of the places we create, and also I would like to note that PIA has declared a climate and biodiversity emergency, and obviously environmental infrastructure is a fundamental part of any response to that. We outlined a number of, I guess, issues and the like and opportunities within our submission. I am not going to go into the benefits of environmental infrastructure; I am sure lots of people have given you lots of background and information on that. There are just a couple of key points I think are worth making around how we deliver environmental infrastructure. The first of these I think is probably implicit in the terms of reference and some of the commentary that we had around the terms of reference, and that goes to the definition of environmental infrastructure and the fact that there is not, I guess, a consistent definition out there around green infrastructure, living infrastructure, environmental infrastructure and what that comprises. So with, I guess, primarily commenting on environmental infrastructure in the form of parks, we would very much encourage thinking that looks to streets and other public places as part of that environmental infrastructure and part of the conversation around that and also importantly recognising the role that the private realm plays as well, and particularly that is the case in canopy vegetation. There is a lot of research that has been done particularly in metropolitan Melbourne [Zoom dropout] is important for that.

Alongside the issues around definition, which play into how we plan for environmental structure and how we deliver it, there are a couple of other overarching gaps or things that you may want to consider. One of those is around how we value environmental infrastructure, the value placed on it and in particular also the valuation not just of individual elements but the recognition that the benefits of environmental infrastructure are often part of their systemic nature and the relationship between the different individual parts. So a park may provide open space benefits but it may also provide biodiversity or stormwater management benefits. It is very important to consider that, because one of the other issues that we have in planning for environmental infrastructure and delivering it is that there are silos that exist and how we plan and deliver for environmental infrastructure, which can have significant impacts on the efficiency of that delivery.

We have various bodies, and I think some of the issues that have even come up already probably indicate that. You have bodies that are governed by the *Water Act* or the *Planning and Environment Act* or different Acts and legislation which perhaps do not necessarily have the same emphasis. So when you get to an issue like environmental infrastructure, which sees an overlapping of a lot of those, there can be barriers to the effective [Zoom dropout]. I think if we look at a more narrow focus in terms of open spaces as the key component of environmental infrastructure, there are two kind of systems that operate at the moment. One is how they are delivered in growth areas, and that is generally through the precinct structure planning process or subdivision frameworks, which were touched on previously. I think it is generally acknowledged that those processes have improved vastly over the past decade or so. There is certainly still room for improvement, and I can touch on those if you want. But I really just draw your attention to, I guess, the elephant in the room in terms of providing environmental infrastructure, and that is how we provide environmental infrastructure which is commensurate with not just local community expectations but also broader societal expectations of what open space will do in areas which are already developed but which are subject to increasing densities.

There are a lot of very good planning reasons and a lot of very good policy behind why we want to increase the density of our existing urban places, but there are really significant challenges in terms of delivering environmental infrastructure in those places. A lot of those are linked back to how the delivery of open space and public open space is framed and referenced within the relevant Acts, but the fundamental issue for a lot of the environmental infrastructure is funding and the mechanisms around funding. At the moment local councils bear much of the responsibility for the delivery of open space. In existing urban areas there are really significant costs associated with the acquisition of land, which makes it very difficult for them to deliver that open space. I think it is fair to say that even if we see an increase in the open space levy from the standard 5 per cent to 10 per cent, which is what we are seeing in the growth areas, there is still likely to be a significant shortfall in what is needed to deliver open space.

So I think funding is obviously a fundamental issue, but importantly as well, the frameworks that exists around open space and planning for open space are also areas that I would encourage some further investigation of. There is no real, consistent approach to how open space is measured and delivered, so you get a significant variation. There is obviously the issue around quantity, which is often a per capita calculation, if you like: 'I've got to have this many people, and they should have this many square metres of open space and therefore I need

to acquire this much land or deliver this much land'. There is the issue of proximity—whether people have access to open space within a certain, I guess, spatial measurement. That is not consistent: sometimes it is 500 metres, sometimes it is 600 metres, sometimes it is 800 metres. It varies across the spaces that we plan for.

Really importantly though as well, the quality of open space is not really integrated into any framework, and one of the other gaps in current funding mechanisms is also around maintenance—and that does go to the quality issue and it goes to the reluctance sometimes of land managers or councils to take on ownership of land that might have ongoing maintenance implications. So I think there is a framework that we are missing in terms of how we deliver open space. There are also some significant funding shortfalls which I think realistically cannot be met by local government and cannot be met by the development industry either. So there is a significant role as a state to increase funding in terms of environmental infrastructure.

That also goes to some of the other issues around how environmental infrastructure is delivered at a regional scale. Waterways are really a logical and current example, but as we move forward things like habitat corridors which exist on a regional scale as well are very difficult for individual councils and municipalities to deliver without a kind of state-level framework, if you like, for how those are going to be delivered.

The other key point probably I would like to make harks back to those differing Acts and layers that exist in the area of open space planning—and the discussion previously around flooding is another one—but where we can develop a system which actually brings together all of the players and land managers et cetera who operate within that complex space and we can get them all working together to recognise that open spaces do not necessarily, and I think in the future cannot, just do one thing. We have to look at how we can make those spaces work better for our communities as we go forward; that would also be I think a valid area or avenue of investigation. There is obviously a lot more in it; it is a very complex area. We represent planners who work in a very wide spectrum of areas and we work obviously closely with architects and urban designers. I am happy to talk to or provide responses on a range of questions, but I think those are some of the key points that I would like to make.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. All right. Thanks, Jane. Mike, I will hand over to you.

**Mr HERMON:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much. The Housing Industry Association, as a starting point, because the terms of reference of the inquiry are quite broad in their nature, took the opportunity in our written submission to focus on the methods used for the collection of funds that support the provision of infrastructure—that includes environmental infrastructure of course. I guess the premise for that, or as we said in our written submission, the overarching position, was that HIA considers that the timely delivery of infrastructure drives regional growth, employment and housing development opportunities, and naturally productivity-enhancing infrastructure is a good policy. So that was the starting point in responding to the inquiry.

We made some fairly pointed comments around levy mechanisms that are used. I guess in many instances, where there is a lack of an established nexus between the charge and then the user, they can in effect be seen as just a tax on homebuyers. Over the last decade our development members in particular have told us that the charges being applied for these infrastructure development levy schemes have become increasingly significant, and when we say 'increasingly significant' we mean they need to feed that into their overall calculations. The person that ends up paying for those is the purchaser of that land or house and land, however they might be happy packaging up their product.

Just as a point of interest—this is also in the written submission—in 2019 HIA commissioned a report from the Centre for International Economics, CIE. It was found that, in terms of regulatory costs, statutory taxes and other charges, to acquire a new house and land package in Melbourne it is made up of 37 per cent of those charges I just mentioned. I mean, sometimes percentages roll off the tongue a little bit too easily, and I think it is important to put in some figures just to give us some context. So if you are a first home buyer, and let us say you are able to purchase a dwelling or a house and land package for \$350 000, 37 per cent or \$129 500 of that is those levies and charges that I just mentioned, and a component of those will go towards environmental infrastructure. Should you be moving up the housing tree a little bit and let us say you are spending \$650 000 for your dwelling—sorry to do the maths for you, but it is interesting just to hear it in figures as opposed to a percentage—then you are paying \$240 500 in those charges that I just mentioned. That is the basis and an interesting way to look at it. Then I guess we have to consider how much of that the dollar figure goes towards

environmental infrastructure and whether it has come about the right way—whether it should have come through developer charges and taxes and things like that or should have come out of maybe a broader tax system, where maybe we all pay, not just the developer, and then the developer passes it on to the consumer.

HIA has a policy regarding infrastructure charges, that essentially looks at infrastructure charges in what we call two types—just to keep it simple. The first type is a development-specific infrastructure, which provides the essential access and service provision. If this is not provided, then the development could not proceed. We are reasonably accepting that that is a reasonable charge for the developer to pay. Then we look at other infrastructure components, and that is the broader community, social and regional infrastructure, which we state in our policy should be borne by the whole community. That is the type of infrastructure where we would reasonably assume that environmental infrastructure would come from. So we are saying that environmental infrastructure serves the broadest community—we all seem to use it—yet the funding for it, and I will get to this later, seems to be heavily reliant on developer contributions. That is an issue that we have.

I am fairly certain that the committee would be familiar with HIA's position on structure and implementation, whether it be DCPs or ICPs. As I say, I am sure the government and the various government agencies are fairly familiar with that.

Our big concern at the moment is with the current ICPs that are being rolled out. Now, we have not actually seen an ICP come to fruition yet, so start its life as an ICP and continue on. But the concern is, as you are probably well aware and I am sorry if I am repeating things that you know, the ICP structure has a standard levy and a supplementary levy. Now, when the concept of ICPs was first floated, industry was assured that, 'It's okay. The supplementary levy will only come in', I think the words used were, 'in the most exceptional of circumstances'. Now I think it is fair to say that it would be rare to find an ICP that does not have a supplementary levy, and it is the supplementary levy items, which you would consider to be environmental infrastructure, that generally seem to fall into that bucket as opposed to the standard levy bucket, which covers standard items. So our concern is that the supplementary levy, as I say, was only going to be used in those exceptional circumstances where there was a large bridge or something or some culverts that needed to be built to open up some land, that that is when it might—'might' in inverted commas—be appropriate for the supplementary levy to be used. But now it seems that it is quite commonplace, the supplementary levy, and that is something that HIA continues to question.

Other concerns that HIA has with the way in which infrastructure is funded and the way it has been proposed to fund other development settings is that we are hearing now—it is out in the open I guess—the road maps are out there for this infrastructure funding to cover other settings such as strategic development areas in regional Victoria. Look, I have to say HIA is on record as having a real concern with ICPs being applied in a regional setting in regional Victoria. Quite often people make the choice to stay in or relocate to regional Victoria for a better natural environment, say, compared to what they might get in metro Melbourne, yet if you start imposing ICPs—you might not get somewhere close to 37 per cent, which I referred to earlier—if you start getting housing costs, housing affordability getting equal or close to equal with metropolitan Melbourne, then it becomes far less appealing for the population to go to the regional areas. It just really brings into question what it would actually achieve if you did change ICPs in regional Victoria, even if it did go towards environmental infrastructure. I guess what we are saying is there should be other broader tax bases considered and looked at for funding that, and that is our concern regarding that.

We also raise some concerns around GAIC, the growth areas infrastructure contribution. We have for a long time queried GAIC. We have queried the fact that what seems to happen with GAIC—and it is not very transparent, that is why we are so concerned about it; the lack of transparency is just amazing—is it seems to be that a lot of money goes into the GAIC bucket and not a lot of money comes out of the GAIC bucket. Now, I would be happy to see some figures around that, but that is certainly what it looks like on the surface—that that is what is occurring. Our question is: could some of that GAIC money be used to offset the items that seem to trigger the supplementary levy and ICPs, which can be environmental infrastructure? So we are trying to make that connection there between using GAIC to offset some of the supplementary levies in that way.

There has been some discussion today about the public open space levy, and I have to say developers are very concerned about the public open space levy. In the *Subdivision Act* and in the planning schemes it has a default of 5 per cent, yet it seems to be almost like a given that as soon as a local council floats a planning scheme amendment, floats the idea that they should raise the levy to 8 or 10 per cent or whatever it might be, Planning

Panels Victoria do not seem to push the councils. They do not seem to force them to provide enough rigour as to why that should be raised from 5 per cent up to something else—8 or 10, whatever it might be—and that is a real concern to us. It almost seems that once it gets to the stage of a planning scheme amendment and it gets to Planning Panels Victoria it is almost a given, and I think sometimes councils need to be smarter, work harder, look deeper—whatever you might want to call it—for other funding mechanisms for that, because once again, what is used by many is paid for by few, and that is our concern. The public open space levy typically does go towards environmental infrastructure. So a big concern for HIA—I mean, the public open space levy is there, and we accept that to a degree, the 5 per cent. And it seems like almost every council has done it now. I think there would be very few that are sitting just with the 5 per cent. I do not want to be too casual about it, but it almost seems too easy to raise that public open space levy up from 5 per cent.

Something that is not in our written submission but also something I would question is the Melbourne Water drainage scheme levy as well that is charged. Many, many years ago that was a levy that was devised by the Dandenong Valley Authority and then the Dandenong Valley and Westernport Authority, and it was essentially to get hydrology and engineering into areas to help with flooding of those areas. But once again I sort of question the transparency of the Melbourne Water drainage scheme levy. It seems to go up and up, and new areas and new levies are created. I just question the rigour that goes around that. And once again it is a classic case of: paid for by few, used by many. I just think maybe it needs a little bit more of a spotlight shone on that, the Melbourne Water drainage scheme levy.

I guess what HIA is heading towards in its submission is that there is almost the need—sorry, not ‘almost’; I will not soften my words—there is absolutely a need for an audit of, in this case because we are talking about environmental infrastructure, all the funds that contribute towards environmental infrastructure. I think you will find there are a lot of big buckets of money that go into environmental infrastructure, but we need to know what it provides and we need to then take a look in retrospect and say, ‘Well, could that have been funded by some other broader tax base or something? Did it have to be developer funded?’. Because it seems like all the environmental infrastructure—sorry, a large portion of environmental infrastructure—is developer funded. So I think that really needs a good hard look and for alternatives to be seriously considered.

**The CHAIR:** Mike, sorry to interrupt. I am mindful of time, and I want to make sure there is going to be enough time for members to ask questions, because I know they have a lot of questions to ask of you. Would you mind, unless there is anything that you just want to hit us with in 60 seconds, that we go on to the next group—

**Mr HERMON:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** because at 3.30 we are going to break for 15 minutes—I would like to say a toilet break, but let us call it a quick morning tea and toilet break—and then come back. I think we will have to spend a couple of minutes with another presentation because we have got a couple more groups to go.

**Mr HERMON:** The last thing that we had—and we made this as a suggestion, I guess, for the committee to consider, and I will cover this off in 60 seconds—was about the MSA program, so the Melbourne strategic assessment and the grasslands that are being created on the western side of Melbourne there. I think it is reasonable as part of this inquiry to ask, ‘How’s that going? Is it at capacity yet? If it’s not at capacity, when will it be at capacity? And when it is at capacity, what’s next?’. I think those are reasonable questions to ask in this inquiry. But I was actually just at the end. That was the end of my verbal submission. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Sorry, I do not mean to be rude.

**Mr HERMON:** No, no, that is fine. No dramas.

**The CHAIR:** Can we jump straight in, Ella, to your presentation?

**Ms GAUCI-SEDDON:** Hi. Meredith is actually going to present on behalf of AILA, so I will hand over to Meredith.

**Dr DOBBIE:** Hi. So we have prepared a short presentation. I will share my screen with you, and I will just go through the points that we want to emphasise from our written submission. I think the thing to keep in mind are the striking parallels with peers’ concerns and areas of interest.

## Visual presentation.

**Dr DOBBIE:** So I am making this presentation on behalf of AILA, the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects. So our concerns are with the landscape, the landscape in which Victorians build their lives, and our ideal is to have that optimal, sustainable environment that optimises—maximises—the potential of everyone's lives. There is Ella and me, and we thank you for the opportunity to present today. We think that our submission really can be distilled down into five main points: as Jane commented upon, the need for a definition of the term 'environmental infrastructure'; why environmental infrastructure is important; our recommendations, which are really just a snapshot of the submission itself; and key issues around funding and access equity and ownership.

On the definition of environmental infrastructure, I must say, when I first saw this call for submissions I was unclear quite what environmental infrastructure is. Within landscape architecture and probably a number of disciplines working in landscapes we have the term 'green infrastructure', and that seems to encompass this notion of an environmental infrastructure. But what I think is quite important is that green infrastructure suggests function, which perhaps environmental infrastructure does not quite capture. This is AILA's definition of 'green infrastructure':

... strategically planned networks of natural—  
so already existing—  
and semi-natural'—  
that is, constructed—

areas in urban and regional settlements that provide environmental, social and economic benefits to society.

So it is all encompassing; it is not simply environmental benefits but also social and economic benefits. The definition that this inquiry seems to use, which is 'parks, open space, sporting fields, bushland and waterways' but with an emphasis on open space, does not really capture the potential that green infrastructure offers. We draw attention to the importance of living streets, which fall within the concept of green infrastructure but do not really fall within this concept of environmental infrastructure. Living streets are particularly important, or their potential is particularly important, when we are looking at the situation of existing residential areas where the potential to create new parks, for example, is somewhat limited. Streets that can be redesigned to provide the benefits of green infrastructure while still serving for the purpose of transport can make a substantial contribution as green infrastructure.

Everyone understands, or it is assumed, that environmental infrastructure or green infrastructure is important, and of course it is and has been for centuries really, since cities were established. There is recognition that people, humans need nature and, even more importantly in cities, they need urban nature, and there are countless studies that have demonstrated the benefit to the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of people derived from nature—many empirical studies, so there can be little doubt about it. But we would encourage the Victorian government to consider environmental infrastructure and green infrastructure as delivering ecosystem services. Green infrastructure is part of a system and it cannot be constrained by municipal boundaries or maybe even regional boundaries. Waterways, for example, with their tributaries can often extend throughout the state. So they need to be understood as systems delivering ecosystem services, which can be provisioning, regulating, supporting and, very importantly, cultural ecosystem services, and we encourage the understanding of green infrastructure or environmental infrastructure as being available through multifunctional landscapes. For example, as Jane commented, you have a park—well, it is available for passive and active recreation, but it can also provide services for stormwater management. It can provide services for carbon sequestration. There are countless functions that a piece of green infrastructure can supply when designed well.

So our recommendations really revolve around how the state government can facilitate the implementation of green infrastructure, environmental infrastructure right through the hierarchy of government to where it is largely implemented at local government level. We encourage an ecosystems management approach to urban planning and design, and landscape management. We believe that environmental infrastructure and green infrastructure need to be formally positioned in state policies and strategies, explicitly with ideally ecosystems services targets, which can then be evaluated and responded to post-occupancy assessment to see if in fact these targets are being reached, and if not, why not, and then future development can be improved as a consequence. We would need explicit environmental infrastructure, green infrastructure legislation, presumably through the

planning scheme. Certainly there are precinct structure plan requirements, but they apply only to greenfield developments, so the problem then presents itself about implementing green infrastructure as infill within already existing suburbs. This is where the challenge really lies we think, hence the suggestion around living streets.

Equally important, though, is to ensure equity of access to environmental infrastructure by growing populations. The most simple thing can act as a barrier. For example, the unavailability of a bridge across a valley. Very simple measures can be taken to improve equity of access, importantly in those areas where there are more socially disadvantaged residents, because studies have shown that in fact it is those people, usually in high-density areas with some degree of social and economic disadvantage, that benefit greatly or in fact benefit more from the provision of green infrastructure than perhaps residents in more affluent areas. Very importantly for green infrastructure, environmental infrastructure to drive the full range of benefits of them as ecosystems is to have connectivity for the humans but also for the fauna that might also share this environmental infrastructure and that they are safe so that people feel able and confident to use them.

Again as Jane commented, funding is a major issue to be addressed in the provision of environmental infrastructure. We suggest undertaking a triple bottom line cost-benefit analysis which, as is demonstrated in various studies, would show the advantages of certainly green infrastructure over conventional grey infrastructure. Such cost-benefit analysis must include economic, environmental and social dimensions, which then raises the challenge of evaluating in monetary terms the social benefits, those cultural ecosystem services that environmental infrastructure and green infrastructure provide to growing populations. But these things have been done in the past and are able to be done, but of course it does take time and effort and planning and even funding to undertake those cost-benefit analyses themselves. Then, as a consequence, to ensure adequate funding for the implementation and, importantly, the maintenance of the environmental infrastructure and green infrastructure, including funding for education programs for their design and management and maintenance and for engagement activities with communities.

Issues around management and maintenance are very important because some of these pieces of green infrastructure are relatively newly developed and some require a new way of thinking about their maintenance, and the skills of some council employees, who are generally responsible for the maintenance, will certainly need to be upgraded. And engagement activities with the communities are important, even to the extent of co-production where members of the community are involved in the design of environmental infrastructure or green infrastructure to encourage a sense of ownership, which in turn is likely to be expressed later on in care for the places.

Issues around access, equity and ownership—COVID-19 has demonstrated that equity of access to open spaces across Victoria is not balanced. We support the idea of public open space, for example, being accessible within 400 metres of every Victorian resident. The social and mental impact of inadequate access to green space on an individual can be devastating, and there is much empirical evidence to demonstrate the benefits of that easy access to urban nature. And, as I mentioned previously, the opportunities for co-production of environmental and green infrastructure with a range of stakeholders, including community members, ensures buy-in, ownership and ultimately success in ensuring that the various functions that the place has been designed to provide are those which the local community desire, and by having a sense of ownership the local community is then much more inclined to use it but also to help take care of it. And especially when we are talking about green infrastructure, which is designed to fulfil specific technical functions often reliant on ecological functions of that landscape, a sense of ownership is likely to enhance a responsibility, a care towards the landscape, and if people care for it, they will value it, and if they value it, they are much more likely to ensure its survival. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Meredith. We have one more group with us that is going to do a presentation, Committee for Melbourne. Can I suggest that we break now for afternoon tea? So, Martine, instead of interrupting your presentation, we will come back and go to your presentation. And then, as members, I know that we have many questions that we would like to ask you as part of that last session. So the way in which we do this, because we are doing it virtually and on Zoom, is if you switch off your camera, go on mute, and we will see you in 15 minutes.

**Mr MORRIS:** Chair, can I just interrupt for 1 second? As you know, I will not be able to join you after the break unfortunately—I have got local commitments I need to get to. But I just wanted to say thank you all for

your presentations this afternoon. Martine, I am sorry I will not be able to hear yours, but I have got the submission, so at least I am equipped, but I just want to say thank you for your contributions. Meredith highlighted the difficulty of defining environmental infrastructure, and that is certainly something the committee has grappled with as well, so it is an interesting subject. All the contributions I have heard this afternoon have been helpful in our deliberations, so thank you very much.

**Ms GREEN:** Chair, can I just say in response to David: David, in the interests of cross-party cooperation, if you have any particular questions that the secretariat has prepared that you want me or Paul to ask on your behalf, or Sarah, or if there are others that you want to ask, if you have got time to send any of the other committee members a quick email, I will take on board to ensure that those questions get asked if that is what you want to do.

**Mr MORRIS:** All right. Thanks, Danielle. I appreciate the offer.

**Ms GREEN:** Otherwise, we will see everyone else after the break.

**The CHAIR:** We will pause the live broadcast now, and we will see you in 15 minutes.

Thanks, Martine. We will hand over to you.

**Ms LETTS:** Thank you very much, Chair, and I would also like to thank the committee very warmly for inviting us to come and make a presentation, and we also of course very warmly welcome this Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations.

I thought I might just provide a couple of introductory remarks to not only introduce the committee but some of the submissions the committee has submitted that are relevant to this topic, and then move to a very specific presentation on a new and exciting idea that was developed by the cohort of our Future Focus Group, which is our civic leadership development program for the Committee of Melbourne. A very important part of that program is the development of specific project ideas for the benefit of Melbourne and to leave a lasting legacy for Melbourne. It just so happens that this particular group has come up with something that is highly relevant to the theme of this inquiry.

The committee recognises that environmental infrastructure, including parks, gardens and open space, will be increasingly important as Melbourne's population grows and the city grapples with rising local temperatures. We have 140 members. We are unique to the extent that we have probably the most cross-sectoral membership of any of the peak bodies in Melbourne, which include architecture firms, engineering firms, professional services groups, universities, some with environmental expertise, major providers like Melbourne Water and Yarra Valley Water—some of the key actors that are actually heavily involved in the development of Melbourne's environmental infrastructure.

In June 2020 the committee published *Transporting Melbourne*, calling on the Victorian government to design and publish an integrated transport plan which considers land use and economic development. A comprehensive integrated transport plan would need to consider the need for environmental infrastructure. We also recently made a submission on behalf of our members to Infrastructure Victoria in response to their draft 30-year infrastructure strategy, where we expressed support for two draft recommendations related to environmental infrastructure: one, develop an interconnected open space network, which was recommendation 37; and recommendation 71, which called for a target of 30 per cent tree canopy coverage in new growth areas. Planners and policymakers will need to consider the impact of the adjustments we have made to our lives during the COVID-19 health crisis—this obviously has been referred to by a number of the speakers today—and what impact this will have on how Melbourne functions in the future. COVID-19 has seen many professionals working from home, with organisations now considering incorporating more flexible working arrangements in their long-term strategies. This may increase demand for local neighbourhood amenity, including obviously environmental infrastructure. Infrastructure Victoria are conducting further research on the impacts COVID-19 will have on behavioural patterns, and we will continue to expose that thinking to our members and get feedback from our members on these kinds of policy papers that Infrastructure Victoria, among others, prepare.

I would now like to introduce Antara Mascarenhas and Nicholas McVey. They would like to explain that there is an opportunity to further develop green spaces just within Melbourne CBD and other high-density precincts

across Melbourne. This is an example of a very specific project that could actually be implemented very quickly and with minimal outlays. There have obviously been a lot of presentations you have heard today about a strategic approach to the relevant environment infrastructure, but this particular project offers us a fantastic idea for a test case that could be rolled out relatively quickly and provide some inspiration for other such programs. With that, I would like to invite Antara and Nicholas to put up their presentation and continue the Committee for Melbourne's presentation.

**Ms MASCARENHAS:** Thanks, Martine. I am just sharing my screen, which I hope has brought up a presentation now.

### **Visual presentation.**

**Ms MASCARENHAS:** Thank you for the opportunity to present today. As Martine said, Nick and I are representing the Grey to Green project team, which also involved working with four others across a multidisciplinary team of emerging leaders across Melbourne. What we will do today is briefly highlight what we think the problem, the opportunity, the data and the recommendations are for you to consider.

The problem that we tackle is that many office workers and residents in the CBD have limited access to green space within proximity to their homes and workplaces. This is due to a lack of publicly accessible green space within the CBD. Many of the large parks are located on the perimeter of the city, and there is a shortage of publicly owned sites available that are suitable for green space redevelopment. We worked closely with the City of Melbourne. We had already done prior analysis and mapping through their open spaces program, and this informed the Grey to Green project. So we see an opportunity here, particularly during COVID recovery—an opportunity to rejuvenate the city and to attract workers and residents. With work-from-home arrangements, we feel the CBD needs some quick, early wins to bring workers back to the city and entice them and also create opportunities for business owners. So we see an opportunity for the development of public outdoor green spaces and greening private land through arrangements with the council.

We conducted a survey of office workers, building owners and managers in September 2020 and received around 200 responses. 95 per cent of these were from office workers, 5 per cent were from building owners and managers—and this was something that we found challenging due to COVID, to get that engagement from the building officers and managers, who had other challenges at the time. Nick, I am going to hand over to you to talk about the data and the recommendations.

**Mr McVEY:** Thanks, Antara. Just following on from what Antara was saying about leveraging the work that the City of Melbourne had already done, the City of Melbourne had already gone through a sort of desktop mapping analysis of the green space available in the CBD, and essentially the outcome that they had come to was there really is a very limited amount of greening opportunities available in public space in Melbourne's Hoddle grid in particular. They mapped out all of the green space that was available and found several gaps, and ultimately what they found was that the only way these gaps could be plugged was through the transformation of privately owned space into publicly available green space. They had about 250 potential greening sites. There were about 46 gaps that they found where there was insufficient access—and there is further detail that we can provide around what this means, and there were particular criteria that they referred to. We have only got some of that, but more in depth will be available through the City of Melbourne. And then there were 10 particular sites—and these particular sites were office building areas and the sort of areas within them or around them—that could be accessed by the public but were not greening.

Ultimately, we have sent this survey through. Before we did the survey we did engage with a lot of building owners and a lot of building managers that may not necessarily have done the survey. But in the survey results what we found was there were two very specific responses—one from office workers and one from building owners. For office workers what we found was that almost half of the office workers in the CBD were only visiting a green space once a week or less, and for those that made up the other 54 per cent a lot of them were really only two times a week, and it was a very small proportion that was more than that. Only 31 per cent of those people that were surveyed said their office building had a green space available. When we asked them, 'Okay, well, what are the things that really appeal to you about green space?', the three major things they talked about were trees and shade, grass—clearly what green space is—but also proximity too; they really talked about it. And in the report, in our more formal report, we talk about the idea that 400 metres walk is an

acceptable walking distance to green space. A lot of office workers did find that prohibitive and preferred a shorter walking distance.

From the building owners' perspective we found that there was a large percentage of the building owners that had actually already considered creating publicly available green spaces and paying for them, but for 60 per cent—the other side—the things that really came forward from them as barriers were: it was perceived as too costly; a lot of them felt that they did not have the space to do that; and also they had either encountered or just perceived that there would be permit issues associated with applying for green spaces. However, out of the 50 per cent surveyed, 50 per cent were very interested—very interested in pursuing it. The other half were still interested, but not very, and still had some barriers to overcome, in particular those ones we have talked about. And so what building owners really said would assist them to really go forward with these initiatives were essentially to understand that space and to have assistance with funding and to understand and have a very painless permit process should they choose to move forward with a privately funded green space that they would open to the public. Funnily enough, things like legal issues, their public liability, they did not necessarily rate very highly, which was surprising. So I mean, look, there is a lot of data behind this, but ultimately this is really a summary putting forward what the findings are in a succinct manner—but of course I am happy to take any questions.

One thing when we talk about recommendations—the survey that we undertook was in Melbourne's CBD; however, I think that when we were talking to building owners and especially managers, they managed properties not necessarily just in the CBD but in a lot of highly dense areas. So some of the feedback that they provided was not necessarily related specifically to the Melbourne CBD but to other areas, and I think that these recommendations are not necessarily stuck in the CBD—but certainly this was the focus of our survey.

So the recommendations out of it that we have are three. Assist: so really, promote small green spaces to building owners and managers. A lot of them did not really know—or they kind of had a bit of you might say a traditional view, I do not know; I am sure there are words for it—but essentially they thought of a green space as grass on the ground with trees. So if they felt they were not able to provide that space, then they were not really confident that they could provide a green space. As we know, there are a lot of different ways to provide a green space that are not necessarily on the ground, and there are ways to provide green space in very small areas. So being able to promote what those alternatives might be to the traditional view of a lawn and trees certainly would help to change perceptions of what building owners and managers see as green space.

Funding: clearly while there were 40 per cent that had said that they were willing to fund these initiatives, they all of course said that funding would assist them to bring these initiatives up the priority tree a little bit more in their initiative tree. Ultimately, they were saying if there were funding grants and incentives for them to go forward with these initiatives, then it would make it a lot more interesting.

And the last one being support: so they talked about the administrative burden or perceived administrative burden. Clearly we really want to promote private building owners to be able to pay for these initiatives either by themselves or with assistance, and we know there are already grant opportunities and things available. So it is about informing these building owners and managers of what is available and then ensuring that should they choose to go forward, the administrative burden really is minimised as much as possible and there is a clear path to implementation.

So in a nutshell, that was the outcome of our survey, and also a lot of the discussions that we had were very much along these lines. I am happy to take any questions. Antara, did I miss anything there?

**Ms MASCARENHAS:** No. Nothing further to add, Nick.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Nick, Antara and Martine. Sorry, Martine, did you have something to add on the back of that?

**Ms LETTS:** No. I just wanted to wrap up by saying that this is a great example of the COVID-19 emphasis on creating more safe outdoor spaces and utility—this is a great little practical idea, which provided certain conditions are fulfilled, could be implemented quickly—but also to say that from the committee's perspective one of the things that we found with a lot of these good ideas is that what is actually lacking is the collaboration and certain agencies speaking to one another and coming up with a joint solution. So one of the things that I think also some of the other contributors have said in terms of the importance of building environmental

infrastructure is that the kind of regulatory regime, as well as other incentives, need to be talking to one another and need to be well aligned to actually make it happen.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I think I will kick off with the first question, just on the presentation that you have done. The data research, Nick, that you did, those workers that said that they would like green space and that kind of thing, were those workers from particular suburbs or areas within Melbourne? So, say, they may have been workers that do not have much green space and open space where they live, and people spend a lot of time at work and would like to see it and be out there in the open space in their lunchbreak and things like that.

**Mr McVEY:** We did not capture their origin. All we captured was whether they were CBD workers. The survey was undertaken a little bit before we kind of knew the extent of the working from home and how that might impact CBD work. Yes, it would have been great, in hindsight, to capture that data, but we really only captured whether or not they worked within the CBD but not necessarily where they were travelling from.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you. I will throw over to Danielle. We might come back to Danielle. Will?

**Mr FOWLES:** Thanks, Chair. My question relates to Nick's part of the presentation. When you talk about funding, it is the perennial thing—everyone always says it is a good course to get money put into whatever it is that they are advocating for—but tell me: what do you need in a funding sense to make these sorts of pocket parks realistic, and why do you say that should be a state matter, not a local government matter?

**Mr McVEY:** I guess we are not necessarily advocating for either. What we are saying is that the advice we received from the managers and the owners that we spoke to and surveyed, they essentially said that if there was funding—and where that comes from, they were quite agnostic—then it would certainly give them more incentive to progress these initiatives, whether or not the funding is a full funding or a part funding or a top-up to the project that they were already willing to progress.

**Mr FOWLES:** But is that sort of self-evident?

**Mr McVEY:** It was not necessarily self-evident. Well, actually, self-evident? It depends. I mean in general terms yes, it is self-evident that if you are going to do a project, then having some money to help you along is going to make you more likely to do it. So, yes, that is absolutely self-evident. I think it went a little bit hand in hand with the perceived red tape. If the building owners and managers felt like they were involved in a grant or a funding source that the government had already bought into, I think that the perception that they would run into roadblocks along the way would decrease sometimes.

**Mr FOWLES:** So what change to the regulatory arrangement would you like to see made there to decrease the red tape?

**Mr McVEY:** We have done a general survey amongst building owners and managers to see what they would like. We have not necessarily gone to that next step in this particular piece of work.

**Ms MASCARENHAS:** Some kind of sandbox environment could be appropriate in this instance. When, as Martine said, there is opportunity to act on this and move it quite quickly, a regulatory sandbox could be appropriate.

**Mr FOWLES:** And for the benefit of viewers at home, what do you mean by a 'regulatory sandbox'?

**Ms MASCARENHAS:** Apologies. It is a term we use in the energy sector when we are testing out changes to the regulatory framework but we are not necessarily sure whether they would be long-term changes. So it is to trial and test regulatory arrangements.

**Mr FOWLES:** Thanks.

**Ms LETTS:** May I just add one point to Will's question about the responsibility between the councils and the state government. There is another example of a committee proposal that we have been flagging for a while now, which is to utilise the Yarra River better for both commuter and tourist traffic, and one of the big impediments that has stood in the way of this happening is that there is a kind of whole spaghetti bowl of regulation. Different authorities have different responsibilities for things that need to be harmonised, but there is also a requirement of the state government to look at ways in which it might be able to provide some funding

support for the kind of infrastructure that would need to be built. So there is an opportunity there, I guess. Given the fact that Melbourne's CBD in particular is kind of the engine room of the Victorian economy, is this the kind of project where the council and the state government could collaborate together to accelerate the implementation of such a project and also to showcase Melbourne as a great place to come and not only to work but also to live and to play? So it could be seen as one of those great incentives for revitalisation of the main engine of Victoria's economy, which is greater Melbourne.

**Mr FOWLES:** Chair, can I just have one follow-up on that? Thank you. Sorry, just to be perhaps a bit pointy about it, if there was something specifically you wanted to do tomorrow, rather than look at potential opportunities—we get a clean sheet of paper and you had to actually do something—what would it be?

**Ms MASCARENHAS:** It would be to facilitate connections between councils and private landowners, because that was one of the gaps.

**Mr FOWLES:** Facilitation.

**Ms MASCARENHAS:** Yes. As a start.

**Mr McVEY:** I think one of the things that was really sort of a bit gappy was communication. It was landowners wanting to do the work and wanting to implement and then not understanding and then saying that the perception was that it is all too hard. So it is about putting these building owners and landowners in touch with councils directly and saying, 'This is what we want to do', and then having a very clear path to implementation. So whether that is via a work group or some form of facilitating body, that is really what is required. In a nutshell, that is what they were asking for, and that will really be what drives these outcomes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Paul, did you have a question?

**Mr HAMER:** I did. My question is to Mike. You talked quite a lot about infrastructure contributions plans and where those contributions should lie, being, I guess, a community asset for the whole community. Now, I think it depends on the circumstances and the location, but particularly in, I would say, the growth areas, the way I understand it is that most of the environmental infrastructure that is being put in place and the contributions for that are relatively localised and will largely be utilised by the individuals who have already paid for those contributions to date. I see an equity issue in terms of (a) going back to those people and saying, 'Well, now we are paying for it as part of our rates and as part of our general community and people coming into that will no longer need to pay that'. Also, for the users who are actually going to probably derive the most benefit, how will that work if you are saying, 'We are spreading that across the broader community'? I would think that that principle potentially applies where you have open space levies in a built-up area. For example, in my area in Box Hill there is an open space levy that is charged on developers for those who are developing in central Box Hill, and not all of those areas that are developed from that levy would necessarily solely be used by the new residents. But I am just wondering about those implications. We are trying to understand what your thoughts are about the implications of what you are proposing.

**Mr HERMON:** I hope I have understood the question correctly, but our thoughts are that as part of any development, to get it up and running, you need to finance it, and in order to get the development across the line and approved you need to get a statement from clients or some sort of development approval—usually a statement from clients if there is a subdivision involved. That requires a developer to pay those contributions up-front and get them back as the sale of their product occurs. So they put that onto the sale of their product. As I said, in greenfield areas we have seen it is 37 per cent, not just in ICP but in other charges as well, and that makes housing very expensive. It means there is 37 per cent that you are paying for in taxes, which is not for anything tangible, that you can touch or anything like that.

I think the short answer to your question is: when the VPA or the like, or the councils they are working with, come up with ideas like an ICP and a standard levy and a supplementary levy, before they arrive at that point, have they considered things like special rate schemes or other charges and taxes or taxing the community in other ways? It just seems to be that it is too easy to default to an ICP- or a DCP-type system without considering other options. There will always be a bit of a throwaway line in the documents or whatever—you know, 'We considered other options' or 'This was the preferred option' or something—but it never goes any deeper. It never actually provides an explanation of what they have done to look at other funding mechanisms, and I think that is what is frustrating developers the most—that it is an easy default now to go to an ICP system.

And it seems like they are going to roll it out in special development areas—so that might work in areas such as Boroondara—and then in some of the regions as well. It seems like they have found this easy thing to roll out called an ICP and now they are going to start applying it virtually throughout the state. Is that the best system? Possibly not. But we seem to default to it anyway. I hope that has answered your question. Has it?

**Mr HAMER:** I sort of liken it to the purchase of a car. There is obviously an up-front expense, but it depends then on what your ongoing charge is. The models that you are talking about seem to suggest reducing the initial up-front cost, which I agree could assist in terms of people actually being able to buy a house or a property, but equally you would not want to then be burdening house owners with that significant level of—if you are talking about a special rates scheme—that they buy into something and then they cannot afford to pay it on an ongoing basis, many of whom will not even probably be aware of that. People might not be aware of the 37 per cent, but people are actually aware that if they are going to buy this house and land package or apartment or whatever it is that that is the cost that they are paying for. There might be in the documents that a certain amount is paid for in lieu, but they can work out with the bank that that is going to be the cost. Whereas I think for individuals to be able to factor in that they are going to be paying these additional rates year on year, that becomes a lot more challenging for many people. I was just really interested to see if you had any particular thoughts, but I guess it is more about you pushing it back onto the committee and the government about saying to explore other options than simply the infrastructure contributions plan.

**Mr HERMON:** Yes, exactly. Or another way of looking at it could be you are taking the burden of developers that are providing for this growing population. So probably more a glass half full way of looking at it would be that, yes, you are taking the burden off developers.

**The CHAIR:** Danielle, you had a question?

**Ms GREEN:** Yes. Martine, and Mike first: you will be happy to know, given I represent a growth area, I am not big on additional taxes. Anyway, I will just let you know that. Martine, when you talked about the Yarra I wondered whether you had looked at the new Great Ocean Road authority, which is dealing with that very matter that you have said around the Yarra in trying to consolidate into one authority rather than a whole host of them. I have been on trips along the Yarra River with the Yarra Riverkeeper and others, and they have pointed out to me the number of authorities there. Anyway, would a GOR-type agency work?

**Ms LETTS:** Thanks for the question. I do not know the answer to that. It is not something that has been flagged in our discussions so far with the people with whom we have been talking about the possibility of reigniting this proposal. You might know, Danielle, that there is a master plan that Paul Little's company has put forward that would also have some discussion about administration authorities, but we have not actually sighted that. But I would certainly think that we could look at the Great Ocean Road authority as a possible model, so thank you for bringing that to our attention. As we go forward in our discussions with the City of Melbourne and others we will take a look at that.

**The CHAIR:** I have got a question for Meredith. Meredith, your submission recommends that streets be conceptualised as part of environmental infrastructure.

**Dr DOBBIE:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I thought that was pretty interesting, particularly as I hold the seat of Tarneit and our sorts of streets look very different to, say, to those in Member for Burwood Will Fowles's seat and your patch. So it is quite diverse in what you get in that streetscape. Can you elaborate on what you mean by 'living streets' and how this conception might help meet Victoria's environmental infrastructure needs?

**Dr DOBBIE:** Well, I suppose an interesting example would be—well, there are a couple that come to mind. There is the Arden Street redevelopment in North Melbourne, where a road intersection was redesigned. The actual width of the road dedicated to traffic was reduced while still meeting the needs of the traffic in the area, and the other space was then reworked as public open space. It has been very well received by the local community.

Another example is the green spine down in Geelong. That is an ongoing project—indeed controversial—where a section of Malop Street was redesigned, still enabling road transport but providing opportunities for cyclists and pedestrians. There are sections of what is called water-sensitive urban design, so it contributes to

stormwater management in Malop Street. Water-sensitive urban design uses nature-based systems to treat the run-off from the roads, and then that water is often used to irrigate the roadside vegetation as well, so that in time Malop Street will change from a treeless, car-dominated space to a shady road that provides comfort to its pedestrian users while still enabling use by motor cars and cyclists. Each instance has to be very much context based with a great deal of research so that you understand the needs of the local community.

Certainly there are increasingly examples of where this is possible. The streets are no longer just dominated by bitumen, but there is this balance between the needs of the motorists and the needs of the residents, the pedestrians and the cyclists, ideally creating a multifunctional landscape, as in the instance with Malop Street, contributing also to water management. But out in Tarneit you do have particular challenges given the fact you are out on the Western Volcanic Plains. Originally that was a largely treeless landscape in contrast to, say, Burwood, which had quite a different ecological starting point. But these challenges can nevertheless be met. It just, I believe, requires a determination to achieve a particular outcome, and inevitably you can find a means of getting to that outcome.

**The CHAIR:** Meredith, just on the back of that, what I am really keen to hear from you, in just a couple of words, is: what do you think state government can do to improve, for example, streetscapes like that—major roads, no trees, very little tree coverage? What do we need to do as a state government to fix that? Is it about engagement with stakeholders, linking people like you to contractors, say, like Netflow, on western roads? I mean, do you have the opportunity to speak to these sorts of major stakeholders when it comes to their maintenance of the roads? Do you have any input? Is it a matter of a siloed approaches?

**Dr DOBBIE:** Yes, certainly siloed approaches are a major impediment and just the ways that people are used to doing things and also certainly, in the instance of roads, the dominance of traffic engineers in these projects. For example, there was a recent situation in an inner Melbourne council: a road was redesigned and landscape architects, urban planners and horticulturalists within the council were not consulted at all. The traffic engineers decided to go ahead and rework a particular stretch of a residential street, and they just did it—and the residents were not pleased. Large, shady canopy trees were removed in the process. The available space in the newly created carriageway is insufficient to support any vegetation that appears, let alone a large canopy tree, and when the council was approached by AILA about this we have had enormous trouble making any progress at all. So I think there needs to be an acceptance of a multidisciplinary approach to what might previously have been undertaken by a single discipline. That is very important. But the other thing that we noticed in this particular situation was that the state government had policies—admirable policies—that local government just for whatever reason was not implementing. There is this kind of real block between the policy at state level and its implementation at local government level, because often it is at local government level that state government policy is implemented.

**The CHAIR:** That is very interesting. Thank you. Will?

**Mr FOWLES:** Thanks, Sarah. I might ask Jane a question, if I can. Jane, lots of discussion around environmental infrastructure tends to focus on what you need and how you fund it. Are there any levers purely in the planning and decision-making universe, as opposed to the public open space contributions or the sort of financial elements of planning? Are there any levers that we ought to consider changing to better facilitate, more broadly speaking, better environmental outcomes in buildings?

**Ms KEDDIE:** Certainly. Look, the funding is obviously a really important part of it, but I think we have heard today that, I guess, some streamlining of processes and a better understanding of the framework within which environmental infrastructure is actually delivered and also of its benefit more broadly will certainly assist. I think understanding the different levels at which environmental infrastructure can be delivered—because certainly environmental infrastructure does operate at different scales. You do have regional-level environmental infrastructure, which is extremely difficult to deliver at a local level, and there are countless examples of local councils trying to acquire a parcel of land along a waterway when in actual fact the benefit is a much broader benefit than just the water. I think a framework that sets in place a clear understanding of what environmental infrastructure is and who has a clear responsibility for those different levels—there is, for Melbourne at least, a metropolitan open space strategy that is yet to be released, which hopefully might do that. I also think some clearer guidance around how we provide and how we plan for open space and what the base level expectations are in terms of what we are delivering in terms of open space, whether that is to do with the

proximity, whether it is to do with the quality, whether it is to do with building in considerations on maintenance—

**Mr FOWLES:** And is it your submission that those expectations are not adequately spelt out in the dozens of municipal open space strategies that exist?

**Ms KEDDIE:** Well, I think that the fact that you are referring to dozens of open space strategies probably points to some of the problems, because the diversity of those and the diversity of different approaches is part of what is leading to the inequality and the lack of consistency, I think, too. And there is the difficulty that a lot of councils face in playing catch-up. Some are clearly understood. Some areas are disadvantaged in terms of the amount of open space that they have versus other areas, and there are real challenges that a lot of those councils face in actually finding the land. Some of the examples you have been pointing to today—the City of Melbourne’s Grey to Green, some of the living streets initiatives—are fantastic and they certainly offer opportunities, but all of those come with funding implications as well, and for council there are numerous layers of funding that they need to consider. I think again, it has come up before and it is another really clear area, there is a lot that could be done in terms of actually integrating decision-making. A lot of the reasons you do not get trees in streets, for instance, if you are trying to create a living street, is because you have got various utilities, all of whom need to have their own little individual patch of the street, and you have got VicRoads, who do not want trees blocking sightlines. So there are numerous barriers that I think the state could certainly play a role in, I guess, streamlining. That valuation of environmental infrastructure within the decision-making around those spaces would help.

**Mr FOWLES:** You were talking about the streamlining there. You know, if you want to get the NBN and VicRoads and the utility companies—we might even bring Antara in on this part of this conversation—and the water guys and all the other guys on the same page, presumably it is better to do that at a policy level than trying to negotiate all the stuff on the ground in any individual project. So my question is: to what extent is there currently state-based policy, if any, around that very specific streetscape staff? And if there is not any, what recommendation would you write to government to get that sorted?

**Ms KEDDIE:** I think there is some policy around it. I think perhaps the main barrier at the moment is the different obligations that those authorities all have in terms of what they need to do to meet their own obligations. Those obligations in most cases do not necessarily include the delivery of environmental infrastructure or even the consideration of environmental infrastructure. So, you know, the utility providers are just doing their job in terms of making sure that their own individual utilities are provided in the safest, most efficient and most cost-effective way possible, but when everyone is trying to do the same thing under different obligations, it becomes very difficult to get kind of a holistic or a multidisciplinary outcome.

**Mr FOWLES:** But state government is the logical place to provide the holistic set of rules or whatever. Should we be making a recommendation back to government saying that we should establish a forum under which we set rules for the management of all these competing interests in streetscapes and new developments? Would that be useful?

**Ms KEDDIE:** I think it would be extremely useful. I do not think it is just new developments, I think it is also the renewal of existing urban areas as well, but certainly I think if there was a state-level direction about the coordination and the recognition of environmental infrastructure within the streetscapes, that would be very useful.

**Mr FOWLES:** Great, thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Nick, did you have something to say? I saw you—

**Mr McVEY:** No, I think that was just fantastic. I was just going to offer from a practical level—and this is sort of a little bit Committee for Melbourne hat and a little bit Yarra Trams hat—that you have also got some very major project pipelines underway, and one thing I was going to suggest was that if there was the ability to provide a direction from a policy level as to making infrastructure more environmental, then certainly there are very practical ways to do that. One of the ways is there is a lot of sort of state-directed design, infrastructure design, that filters down into works. We roll out new tram stops. There is a large tram stop and train stop upgrade program. In that program there is no requirement in the design for there to be an environmental aspect.

So we have put forward submissions around what a tram stop of the future might look like, incorporating environmental aspects, but when push comes to shove we are plonking down new pieces of concrete without really any requirement for there to be an environmental factor. An example that just quickly came to mind was the local hire requirement, or the local sourcing requirements, in contracts that was passed on. That is a practical way of implementing a requirement into a contract for a state department or a transport operator whereby we now have to have a certain percentage of locally sourced contractors and materials. I will not say simply, but in a similar way you could dictate an environmental standard or requirement. It just came to mind when I was listening to Jane. From a practical perspective there are real pipelines that can be tapped into where these policy decisions could be practically implemented, and that goes for VicRoads as well.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. We have got a new face that has joined us; it is Greg Bursill. Greg is from the Urban Development Institute of Australia. Greg, welcome. Would you like to talk for just a couple of minutes? I am conscious of time; we have got about 20 minutes to go.

**Mr BURSILL:** Sure. We did provide a written submission; it is just a couple of pages and just makes some key points. Our primary focus in that document was around the outer urban greenfield development fronts around Melbourne and the key areas of growth in regional Victoria. We just wanted to explain that there is a good amount of open space, broadly defined, and environmental infrastructure that comes across from farm door to front door for the development process. Probably about a third of the raw land comes into different forms of public land—parkland, including drainage, waterways, larger parks, smaller parks and similar types of land—and about another third comes across as public streets, which some people see as key public space infrastructure as well. That is about two-thirds of land that comes over, so there is not a land quantity problem, I think, coming over in the greenfield outer urban areas.

There are heavily articulated, regulated standards about how developers hand that land over. Where 20 years ago it might have been a more barren handover, now it is quite a very well developed handover of land and a quite elaborate amount of infrastructure. Developers, though, would go even further, generally speaking, in the extent that they would embellish that land. The asset owner is aware of the obligations of ongoing maintenance and pushes back on the extent of embellishment. So that is the first point—that in the greenfield areas it is quite a high standard, and it would be good to get some acknowledgement of that. It is a lot better than what it was probably prior to the Growth Areas Authority being established by the state government, which has taken a more holistic approach and updated the guidelines and made it a more consistent approach. That is the first point.

However, similar to the previous submission I just heard then for a few minutes, there is a frustration from the industry around dealing with the different arms and subsets of government around different pieces of legislation and different silos or sub-units within organisations that legitimately have a separate, clearly defined agenda and have a purpose in life that is quite fixed, especially too when it comes to the ongoing operational maintenance and in-perpetuity issues about long-term management. It is very difficult then to get any kind of truly integrated design and ongoing delivery as asset outcomes—quite frustrating. The industry would be more innovative than what it is currently expressing if it was able to cut through and get some more integrated responses from the different forms of government—and I am talking right across government: local, state government and, I guess in some limited cases, the commonwealth. So they are some of the frustrations.

We did note in the document just briefly that frustration in terms of the environmental infrastructure in the Melbourne strategic assessment. There are two there. There are vast areas that have been earmarked as potential growling grass frog areas inside the urban footprint in Melbourne. They are very, very extensive areas, and there is not enough funding or vision around what would happen with those areas. Our view would be that a more strategic approach would be to protect areas outside Melbourne and allow more development inside Melbourne by amending that document but still protecting the core areas within Melbourne where the growling grass frog habitat exists and the key movement corridors. In our view the MSA went too far in that regard, and it does not give us the integrated results that we are after in terms of multi-use of that land. It is quite sterile, the way it is written up as a regulation at the moment.

The biggest opportunity we saw is more integrated thinking around waterways. Waterways might be between 10 or 20 per cent, depending on the area of the urban mass in a development area, and land value is now very high. So land is into \$2 million to \$3 million a hectare as a value generally, depending on which area you are in. There is not enough pressure on that land that is coming over to make better use of the edges. Like, outside the

hydraulic requirements there are buffers and other areas that are not always steep. They can be quite shallow and flat. Those areas could be much more heavily utilised for public open space purposes if there was more integration in government on the use of that land.

They are probably the key things. Probably the biggest stand-outs are greenfield areas: the standards of development in terms of open space and environmental infrastructure are vastly improved on what they were over recent decades—probably in the last 10 to 15 years—and it just keeps getting to a higher standard, which is good. It has industry support. The maintenance problems driven from sub-silos within government are probably the biggest barrier to better outcomes for the community and just the ongoing operational expenditure problem of the asset owners and how they source that money. Trying to minimise costs is a huge issue associated with that. I think that is kind of a good summary of our letter.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thanks, Greg. Will?

**Mr FOWLES:** Thanks, Chair. Greg, this question is really boring. The regulatory model for managing wetlands and waterways—you say there should be a more integrated approach. I completely agree. You have outlined that there are 10 stakeholders in just about any given wetland or waterway. What do you think is the best regulatory model for those areas? Who would you like to see the power vested in, would it be one entity or two and what powers would you like to vest in them?

**Mr BURSILL:** I think that the least possible entities that you can have the more integrated the outcome, just logically, and the broader view that entity would take about community benefit and community value in those spaces. If you think of it that way—that the more you can integrate it down to a single or few entities the better the outcome will be, and government can—

**Mr FOWLES:** If I could make it a bit pointier, I have just handed you the blank sheet of paper and the ministerial pen. You get to decide by fiat exactly what the relevant authority looks like. Who is it and do they control the lot, including planning and development, for example, or is it some other mix?

**Mr BURSILL:** I would probably need to go back to the UDIA policy position rather than my personal opinion on that one—

**Mr FOWLES:** Can I ask for your personal views, since you are here?

**Mr BURSILL:** but I believe the position would be a metropolitan-wide or Victoria-wide authority that incorporates many functions that are currently disparate within government. So that would be across development and into these waterway areas as an example and many other parts integrating, and also drawing in some of the functions and powers that rest currently within local government but are not well resourced. They do not have the tax-raising power to really vastly improve the outcomes.

**Mr FOWLES:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Will. Paul?

**Mr HAMER:** No, I have no further questions.

**The CHAIR:** Greg, I have got a question following on from Will: you suggest that the funding arrangements for the acquisition of the future western plains grassland reserve on the western edge of Melbourne be reviewed. I am the Member for Tarneit and I most certainly know that grassland. It is quite few and far between. Can you outline the changes to the funding arrangements that UDIA would like to see and how such changes would assist in the provision of environmental infrastructure in the area?

**Mr BURSILL:** Yes. I think that the MSA—implementation of the MSA—as you know, applied the public acquisition overlay across that 15 000-hectare area, and then the levies on the development industry through the development of those growth areas, the relevant areas, as you know, provide a cash flow into government that ultimately is meant to equalise those payments. However, the system built does not allow for forward funding to bring forward the acquisitions so they happen earlier, and the opportunity would be for government to invest to help facilitate and fast-track the acquisitions so that the benefits and the rehabilitation of that land that is subject to the PAO for nature conservation can be delivered a lot earlier rather than over a much longer period of time, like 30 years to 40 years. It could be acquired earlier, would be our view.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Will, did you have any other questions?

**Mr FOWLES:** No, I am good. Thanks, Sarah. Thank you, everyone, for your presentations.

**The CHAIR:** Is there anything else you would like to leave with us today—some final thoughts—or want to throw anything else out there in the mix for us to consider?

**Dr DOBBIE:** Yes, actually—I just want to draw to your attention that New South Wales is doing something similar to this, so that is very encouraging that there is sort of this move maybe across Australia to recognise the importance of environmental infrastructure, or green infrastructure. The other thing I would just draw to your attention is that there is work in the pipeline to develop an Australian standard for green infrastructure, which is still very much in the initial stages but would no doubt be a helpful document in matters such as these.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Meredith. We will definitely take a look at that.

**Ms KEDDIE:** Thanks, Sarah. I was just going to also perhaps echo Meredith's thoughts and the fact that the New South Wales model really does look at green infrastructure and, this is obviously talking about a metropolitan context, sets a metropolitan context for that green infrastructure and allows the articulation of some of those regional priorities—for instance, the grasslands—and puts in place a strategy for how those are managed, whether that is the urban canopy, whether that is those waterway corridors, and it really kind of sets a framework that I think has potential to make the delivery a lot smoother and more streamlined. I think that is very important, and I am glad to see that this inquiry is taking place. Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Okay, I just want to thank you all for giving us your time this afternoon. It has been a fantastic discussion. I know I speak on behalf of the committee that there is a lot of information, a lot of insights and experience here for us to take away and consider, so thank you. I thank all the viewers out there, people that may be watching us today. Thank you for dialling in. That will be the end of our live broadcast for today. Thanks to you all. It was really good.

**Committee adjourned.**