

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections

Melbourne—Thursday, 28 May 2020

MEMBERS

Ms Natalie Suleyman—Chair

Ms Michaela Settle

Mr James Newbury—Deputy Chair

Mr David Southwick

Ms Christine Couzens

Mr Meng Heang Tak

Ms Emma Kealy

WITNESSES

Ms Rowan McRae, Executive Director, Civil Justice, Access and Equity, and

Ms Melanie Schleiger, Program Manager, Equity Law Program, Victoria Legal Aid;

Ms Rachel Gleeson, Solicitor, Civil and Human Rights Practice, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, and

Ms Charmaine Clarke, Senior Practitioner, Aboriginal Family Violence Primary Prevention Innovation Project (*all via videoconference*).

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections. Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their elders past and present and to the Aboriginal elders of our communities who may be here today.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Assembly standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. However, any comments repeated outside the hearing may not be protected. Also, any deliberate false evidence or misleading evidence to the committee may be considered a contempt of the Parliament. All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and all transcripts will be made public and posted on the committee's website.

I would now like to introduce members from Victoria Legal Aid and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, beginning with Rowan McRae, Executive Director, Civil Justice, Access and Equity, and Melanie Schleiger, Program Manager, Victoria Legal Aid; Rachel Gleeson, Solicitor, Civil and Human Rights Practice at the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service; and of course Charmaine Clarke. You have up to 10 minutes to provide a brief presentation followed by questions from the committee members. We will begin with Rowan. Thank you.

Ms McRAE: I think the intention was to begin with Charmaine, if that is possible.

The CHAIR: Okay. That is fine. For the record, we will begin with Charmaine.

Ms CLARKE: Thank you. I am reading off my script; I apologise. My name is Charmaine Clarke. I am a 53-year-old Gunditjmara woman, a member of the stolen generation, and I live in Warrnambool on my father's country. As an Indigenous person, the experience of racism in Australia is effectively a lifelong burden. Australians would like to think this is an egalitarian society, but the reality is racism is so deeply woven into its social fabric. A research report from VicHealth published in 2007 that interviewed 775 Indigenous Victorians about their experiences of racism found that 97 per cent had experienced racism in the last 12 months. The various experiences of racism were name-calling or racist remarks, ignored in service, spat at or had objects thrown at them or hit or threatened to be hit because of their race, told they did not belong here or had their property vandalised because of their race. Some of these accounts reflect my own personal experiences where I was spat on, almost run over by a car, refused service on numerous occasions and exposed to predatory behaviour and sexual assault due to my gender and race.

Systemic racism and our relentless exposure to it has lifelong mental health impacts. Anxiety disorders, depression, substance abuse, chronic PTSD, self-harm or suicide are among the known mental health outcomes associated with exposure to systemic racism. Racism and its historical practices do fuel contemporary attitudes. Like many Indigenous Australians, I live in rural Victoria where the history of unresolved race relations still bubbles under the surface. Many long-term residents, including farming families, share our history, a legacy of these racialised practices and attitudes. In my town, curfews for Indigenous people were in place up until the 1940s. Blacks, as we were at times referred to by locals, were to be out of town and out of sight. Many of my elders remember well being chased by police or yelled at by the locals to get back to the mission. There is a palpable wound that festers in these places, and it is the generations who are raised here that inherit its attitudes and scars. Australia is a country with a long history of indifference towards Indigenous Australians. Indeed it is un-Australian for a person to not be racist towards us or at least to hold some racist views about us in the course of their lifetime. My racist incident: in December last year I was having lunch at my favourite bistro.

I heard a young man at a table near me making a litany of racist remarks about Indigenous people. It was partially fuelled by the closing of Uluru to climbing. He was a teenager and was in the company of his adult brother, mother and two other adults and their son. It was not hard to hear him, as most of the service had finished and I and another lone individual were the only other diners in the lounge area. In my community I am considered an elder, and I actively advocate for reconciliation in my town, giving talks and welcome ceremonies, and I participate on a number of committees as an Indigenous voice. I therefore felt compelled to approach the table and politely educate the young man and his company on the misconceptions he was saying about Indigenous people. I simply conveyed the connection to country that we feel, how we have lived here for thousands of years as nations and that some places are sacred to us, like churches or your memorials.

I felt that I had dutifully shared my knowledge in a respectful manner, but as I was leaving their table his mother said to him, 'Don't listen to those people'. The young man then became aggressive towards me, calling me an Abo—'A stupid Abo'—and told others that he wished the Abo would just shut up. The group reacted in various ways, including smirks and scoffing, and some sat in silence. I was alone. There were four adults and two teenagers. I felt fear, humiliation, I was shaking, embarrassed and deeply ashamed—a proud, proactive and university-educated Gunditjmara woman reduced to just being 'a stupid Abo'.

My decision to pursue a case of racial vilification was not an easy choice. I live in a country town whose population is predominantly non-Indigenous. I am in a minority. But I thought of all the other Indigenous people who have suffered from racism, like my parents, sisters, brothers, uncles, aunties, cousins, nieces and nephews. When is it going to stop if it is left unchallenged, especially in places like my town?

A local Aboriginal liaison officer recommended I speak with a senior sergeant who has close ties with the Indigenous community. Like me, he had never undertaken an application under the Act before. I provided him with my statement of the incident and CCTV footage from the bistro. I made a formal complaint to the management of the bistro and was satisfied with their prompt and sincere response. They apologised and worked collaboratively with both myself and Victoria Police in gathering information around the incident. When I discussed legal representation with the Aboriginal legal service I learned that very few cases have met the standards set out under this Act. To my understanding the Act currently requires the victim to prove that racial vilification incited another person to engage in conduct that incites hatred, serious contempt for or revulsion or severe ridicule of the other person or class of persons. The word 'incite' has more weight than the act of racial vilification.

This was a shock to me and a great disappointment and immense source of frustration. What is the point of a piece of legislation that is not interested in either you, the victim, or the offender but focuses only on the behaviour of bystanders? Why call it racial vilification when it is so lightly weighted? I put myself through the effort to pursue justice, to call racism to account in my small town, but like many other cases it was to no avail. I was told by the police in March this year I did not meet the threshold in their opinion. I was gutted, disappointed, angry and felt betrayed. I have experienced racism all of my life, from primary school with the chants of 'Abos, Abos' following me at recess, lunch and play, all the way through to my adulthood. It occurs everywhere and at any time. I now walk the streets of my home town even more wary and vigilant, because the people who choose to practice racism are walking those streets too, and when I tried to do something about it they got away with it again.

I hope the committee here understands the prevalence of racial vilification against Indigenous Victorians. It is insidious, utterly damaging and life changing. If we are to commit to laws that facilitate change and reflect our values and conduct in society, then they need to be accessible to those like me who seek their protection. Unfortunately, like many others, I did try and failed. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Charmaine. Is there any further presentation? We move on to Rowan.

Ms McRAE: Certainly. My name is Rowan McRae, and I am the Executive Director of Civil Justice, Access and Equity at Victoria Legal Aid. Victoria Legal Aid is a statutory agency responsible for providing legal information, advice and representation to people in need of legal assistance who cannot afford a lawyer. In the last financial year we provided assistance to over 100 000 unique clients through our 14 offices in Victoria, including over 67 000 criminal duty lawyer services and more than 1300 legal advices on discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation and vilification.

Our lawyers frequently advise people who have been targeted by hateful, derogatory speech on the basis of their race, nationality, colour and ethnicity, or their gender identity or sexual orientation. This harmful speech takes place in the workplace, in public spaces, online and in the provision of goods and services. We often see hate speech accompanied by other forms of discriminatory treatment in workplaces and service settings. Hate speech takes a significant psychological and emotional toll on our clients and their feeling of safety in the community. It can have lifelong consequences which rob them of opportunities because of another person's hatred and prejudice about who they are. Informed by our day-to-day practice experience, we believe that addressing hate speech goes to the heart of promoting a welcoming, harmonious society and ensuring individuals do not experience fear or exclusion because of who they are. Strong and effective protections from hate speech benefit individuals and the Victorian community as a whole by promoting inclusion and fostering diversity. Victorian laws should address different types of harmful hate speech, from online vilification to harmful workplace vilification.

I will now hand over to Rachel Gleeson from Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, who acted for Charmaine in the matter she spoke about earlier.

Ms GLEESON: Thanks, Rowan. My name is Rachel Gleeson. I am a solicitor in the civil law and human rights division of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service. We provide legal advice and representation on issues of civil law to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Victoria. As Rowan said, we provided support to Charmaine with her recent experience of reporting racial vilification to the police. We were disappointed but not surprised at the outcome of the police investigation, which ultimately found that the threshold had not been met to enable charges to be laid against the alleged offenders. Unfortunately this sort of outcome is a common experience for our clients. We hear many, many similar stories to Charmaine's from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community about these sorts of experiences of being subjected to racial vilification and discrimination. And it is likely more common than we are aware of because it is also likely that many Aboriginal Victorians are discouraged by their prior experiences of racist treatment by individuals and public institutions and they then choose not to put themselves through the heartbreak of being disbelieved or not having their experiences vindicated by police or the legal system.

We frequently advise individuals who have been victims of hateful, derogatory speech on the basis of their race. For example, I recently represented a community member who was repeatedly referred to as a petrol sniffer in his workplace by his colleagues. Another well-respected community elder was presumed to be a shoplifter purely based on her appearance as an Aboriginal person and was refused service. This happens in metropolitan Melbourne, in the regions and in your suburbs. These experiences can be emotionally and psychologically devastating for our clients, and doubly so when they learn that the justice system does not support them in their fight against racism.

Our clients sometimes find that they have recourse to address discriminatory treatment in certain settings by making a complaint to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission or under the *Racial Discrimination Act* to the Australian Human Rights Commission. However, many, like Charmaine, find that they do not fit the legal criteria to proceed through those forums. Then they also find that they fall short of the very high thresholds of the incitement test in the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act*. So if we as a community do not stand for this racist conduct, our laws should not permit it.

My colleague from Victoria Legal Aid will now talk you through some of the detail of our joint recommendations for reform to these laws so that we can provide better legal protection and responses to Charmaine and others in our diverse community. I will pass over to Melanie now.

Ms SCHLEIGER: Hi. I am Melanie Schleiger, and I am the Program Manager of the Equality Law Program at Victoria Legal Aid, which provides advice and representation to people who have experienced vilification. Based on our casework we believe that Victoria's anti-vilification laws must be broadened, modernised and strengthened. I was intending to briefly outline our five priority recommendations, but I am conscious of time and wanting to give the committee plenty of time to ask questions. So I will finish my opening statement there unless asked to do otherwise.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Melanie. Before I open up to questions from the committee members, I would just like to thank Charmaine for her presentation, in particular for your honesty. It has really moved me, and I

am sure all my committee members, in sharing your experience with us today, so thank you so much. On that note, I would like to open it up to the committee members for questions.

Ms COUZENS: Firstly, can I acknowledge the original owners of the land and pay my respects to elders past, present and future. But also I acknowledge we are in National Reconciliation Week and of course had National Sorry Day on Tuesday. I want to show my respect to the stolen generation survivors, and of course Charmaine you have given a very powerful presentation today, so thank you for that. My question is probably more around generational trauma and the connection to the very points we are talking about today. I am just wondering if you have a view on that connection. I do not know if, Charmaine, you want to answer that, but I think it is really pertinent to the issues we are talking about today.

Ms CLARKE: Yes. Being stolen generation myself—it is not just myself; my entire siblings, we are all stolen generation, and I have met many others. It is. It is all connected, and I work in mental health as well. As I said, it is systemic. So as I told you, you experience it from childhood all the way through to adulthood. Being stolen generation as well, there were also experiences of it in foster families as well, these predominantly non-Indigenous people who had fairly clear views and probably not very open-minded views on Indigenous people and felt that they were saving you. So, you know, I was raised in this sort of environment that basically said I was a bad person, I was an incomplete human being and that I somehow had to aspire to these other sorts of aspirations that actually really did not fit me. And then when I was walking to school and even getting abused by people but then coming home to the foster family to try and get some support, there was none. They could not connect with it. They just said, ‘Just ignore them’. That was their only advice, and that was very unhelpful as well.

Ms COUZENS: We know that First Nations people have experienced racism, discrimination, all sorts of vilification since white settlement really. I do not want to put you on the spot, but are there any things that you think are really significant to the work that we are doing that you would like to input or see changed?

Ms CLARKE: Without being besmirching, the police officer I worked with, the senior sergeant—I felt that it was absolutely new for him. In all honesty, we both looked at the legislation and scratched our heads collectively. We did not understand—what is the approach? Does this statement counter that? Does it meet the certain standards? One of the things that I would like to see is that police are actually trained around race discrimination, around the Act and around the gathering of information. Without saying anything too inflammatory, I felt that he, being a non-Indigenous person, was somehow biased—there was a certain bias there as well, and how can I sort of counter that? That also added to my distress and my frustration as well, trying to convey to him, because this is a small community. They all know each other. They all grew up together at primary school. They are generationally connected, and I am trying to point at that one particular individual in their family. And it is really difficult to navigate that with local police when they have their own social connections to each other, particularly to this family as well. And their lack of understanding of the Act as well is really quite a challenge. I will be honest; I was not satisfied with the explanation as to why it did not meet the threshold, because they gave none, really.

Mr TAK: Thank you all. Thank you very much, Charmaine, for sharing your story. To the organisation: your submission recommends giving the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission greater power to deal with this issue of vilification; can you elaborate on what is required?

Ms SCHLEIGER: I can take that question. We think it is essential that the Victorian commission is given greater powers to deal with vilification and specifically to enforce the law. Unfortunately as the law is currently formulated it is up to the individual to pursue a complaint and hold perpetrators to account, and we have seen that be incredibly ineffective in promoting equality and dealing with these issues. We know that the conduct of both perpetrators and victims is influenced by the ineffectiveness of laws and the lack of enforcement. Perpetrators become bolder and victims are disinclined to complain because nothing will be done about it. There are many barriers—I am sure the committee has heard about a number of these: the emotional effort, time and energy involved in bringing a complaint—Charmaine’s experience, that you heard about, being a further humiliation on top of the original incident; evidentiary challenges; challenges identifying the perpetrator; and other legal challenges we have outlined in our submission.

So we say it is essential that the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission have increased enforcement powers and functions to prevent vilification and respond in an agile way, including in high-risk

situations such as the coronavirus pandemic that we are experiencing now. So these powers should include the power to investigate potential breaches of the law on its own motion, without the additional procedural requirements that are currently present under section 127 of the *Equal Opportunity Act*. They should have the ability to enter into enforceable undertakings, issue compliance notices and prosecute breaches. These strong enforcement powers are especially important to support the effectiveness of the commission's softer functions, such as public education. We have talked in our submission about the regulatory pyramid and the importance of having a whole range of tools that the commission can use, including the softer education functions at the bottom of the pyramid, up to the pointy end of the pyramid, which is the prosecutorial powers. Those pointy-end powers are really important for garnering compliance with the softer functions of the commission. So it is a fallback that can be used to encourage better compliance. So yes, they are the functions in general terms that we want the commission to have.

Mr SOUTHWICK: Thank you, everybody, and thank you, Charmaine, for sharing your experience with us. What a horrific story you were able to tell. Hopefully we can get some changes to help those kinds of things not happen again. Could I ask you, in terms of looking at, say, some of the penalties and potentially changing the law, and particularly with the case that you had, Charmaine, of that man and potentially the people that were with him, about having a penalty which included some kind of—I do not know whether you can have compulsory education, but some kind of understanding to try and change the understanding of people from different backgrounds and to give them a bit of a history lesson and whatever else. I know there have been situations in other groups where people have visited museums and have gone with different people to learn and understand. I suppose what I am looking for is: obviously there are criminal actions and civil actions that we can look at, but are there ways in which we can look at responding that ultimately build some education and understanding about these people to stop these kinds of things happening again?

Ms CLARKE: Thank you, David. I will just answer not on the legal aspects, because I am not a lawyer, but for me personally. What I actually wanted myself really was not so much a criminal charge; I actually wanted an apology, and I wanted that education. I wanted acknowledgement that this is not an appropriate way to behave to people, that it is offensive and the damage that it causes individuals and also our community at large. For me, that would have satisfied me, to have some recourse or some response to that and some responsibility around that behaviour as well. I will let the other lawyers speak as well.

Ms GLEESON: I might add to that and say that where our clients are able to bring discrimination complaints to forums like VEOHRC—the human rights commission—or the Australian Human Rights Commission they first go to a conciliation conference. Whilst those conciliation conferences are voluntary for the respondent, where the respondent does choose to attend that does provide an opportunity for some of those other discussions to be had. Part of the agreement might be that the respondent participate in a course or program about cultural awareness. The issue with Charmaine's particular situation was that she was not eligible to bring a complaint through those forums. If the civil test were lower for racial vilification, that might facilitate some of those responses, and if it did get to the point of a criminal proceeding, there are conditions that a magistrate can impose as well for offenders to participate in programs and make some actual personal effort to address the harm that they have caused. At the moment it is not always possible or accessible, that sort of response.

Ms CLARKE: Also they are not compelled, either, to attend any of these reconciliation meetings, are they?

Ms GLEESON: No. If it were something like a conciliation conference at VEOHRC, it would be dependent on the respondent participating. You can then go to VCAT for a hearing afterwards, but that is not something that a VCAT member would be able to impose. But where you have got someone who is willing, often when that is a company or a business they will send their representative along and they will give undertakings on behalf of all of their staff. It might be a token gesture, but you have got to be optimistic in these things and do what you can, I suppose.

Ms SCHLEIGER: Can I add to the answer to David's question. I think there is a really important connection between encouraging people to undertake training and education and increased awareness—and again referring to that as, I guess, the softer powers of the commission, if that is the agency encouraging these activities—and the prosecutorial powers that we are recommending, because efforts to persuade compliance with the law and increase one's understanding of what they have done and education about other groups and multiculturalism are much more effective if there is the threat of punishment for non-compliance. A second

point that we have made in our submission is around prioritising prevention and undertaking research to better understand the drivers of vilification and systemic ways to address attitudes in the community that lead to racial attacks and other forms of vilification.

The CHAIR: Committee members, any further questions? James?

Mr NEWBURY: No, I do not have any further questions other than just to reiterate the comments that have been made by a number of members about the story that you put forward and shared with us, Charmaine, and can I say, for myself, it is something, going away from this process, that is going to stick with me. We hear from a lot of people, and I want you to know—I cannot speak for the other members, but I can actually see in their faces—that it is something that has really touched us. It must have been a difficult thing to talk about, but we really do appreciate it. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, James. I think you have spoken on behalf of all committee members. Before we conclude I just had a couple of questions in line with the issue of online vilification. Could you just expand on the recommendation to extend liability to corporations, and do you have a view on how Victoria could effectively regulate this space—knowing that it is very complex and deals with other jurisdictions, as well, that are involved. Anyone?

Ms McRAE: Chair, perhaps I can take that question. Unfortunately the lights have gone out where I am, but I can still see my notes here and see all of you. Yes, this is a really complex area, regulation of corporations in this space, and we are really conscious of that complexity. Our submission recommends that social media platforms need to play a bigger role as intermediaries in monitoring and responding to online hate speech, including trolling. Clearly there need to be considerations around making sure that that moderation is reasonable, the expectations we place on social media companies, but they can be prioritising particular complaints—for example, where they have received a high number of complaints or where they are dealing with complaints about accounts with really high levels of influence.

Our view is that social media platforms should be expected to respond promptly to complaints, particularly where you have got a lawyer or a regulator or an enforcement agency flagging that there is a post potentially in breach of relevant Victorian laws that are intended to safeguard the community. So that is the social media platform side of things, and we think that corporations generally should also be monitoring their online platforms to make sure that customers, for example, accessing their sites are not being subjected to online vilification. We appreciate again that you have got to have a ‘reasonable’ component to what is expected of companies and corporations, but it is reasonable, we think, to expect that corporations should also bear some responsibility for ensuring that individuals and the Victorian community at large are protected from vilification.

The CHAIR: Just on a final question, I think we have spoken about prevention, education and the support for further research in relation to funding of support services. My question is: are the current support services adequate, or is this an area that needs further funding? What are the gaps in relation to support services for individuals who have experienced any form of vilification or hate conduct?

Ms GLEESON: I can speak first for the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, and perhaps Rowan and Mel can speak to legal aid. We are chronically underfunded and under-resourced, so we are always appreciative of more resources in this area. Currently within the civil team at VALS we have got five lawyers that service the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Victoria. We are just not in a position to represent all the clients who come to us with these sorts of issues, although fortunately we have got Victoria Legal Aid and other community legal centres who can help fill those gaps. But our clients prefer to come to their own Aboriginal legal service for reasons of cultural safety and appropriateness.

When considering any of these laws, adequate funding to allow us to support our clients in the community is vital. Then the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, if their powers and functions are to be expanded, need to be funded as well. One of the great things about VEOHRC is that it is a forum where people can be self-represented, but at the moment it is quite a slow process, and I think that comes down to a lack of funding and resources there.

I think in our submission we also touch on the fact that additional support and funding needs to be holistic, so the culturally safe counselling and support services as well as the legal response.

Ms McRAE: And, Chair, just to add to what Rachel has said, obviously we consider legal assistance to be critical to a system that functions properly to protect individuals and to make that broader contribution to the Victorian community. Legal assistance may come in various forms, whether it is from Victoria Legal Aid, from community legal centres or from the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, and we support self-determination and the option for Aboriginal clients to go to VALS where they choose to do that.

So resourcing for legal assistance is important, but what I would emphasise is the importance of investing in the cultural change that is required to achieve the prevention aspect of what we have been talking about today. That means going to some of those comments that Charmaine made earlier about ensuring that Victoria Police understand the criminal provisions here, that small businesses and employers understand what their obligations are. Those obligations exist at the moment, but it is frequently the case that people are not aware of the RRTA, and I think some investment needs to be made in that cultural shift that needs to occur if these laws are to be meaningful for the Victorian community.

Ms SCHLEIGER: May I just add to the answers as well with a slightly different point, which is that it is very hard to assess the success of various measures without accurate data about the prevalence of hate crimes and where and how they are occurring. We do have some of that data from research by VicHealth and other organisations, but because of the extremely low rate of reporting to police and human rights commissions we really do not have a complete picture. One way to redress that would be to undertake a large-scale survey, for example, as has occurred federally in relation to sexual harassment rates and rates of pregnancy discrimination, and that has been invaluable in providing a baseline against which we can measure the success of any action taken to improve equality in the community.

The CHAIR: Just to follow up on a final question: with COVID-19 has there been any increase in reports of racial incidents during this period that you may know of?

Ms SCHLEIGER: We know from media reports that there have been increased rates of or a spike in vilification against people in relation to COVID-19—vilification of Asian Australians—but unfortunately we have not seen an increase in people seeking our advice on the vilification that they have experienced. Again, that is not surprising, given the multiple barriers that prevent individuals from bringing a complaint. So whether, as Charmaine and Rachel have said, it is because the experience is so frequent and unrelenting that it becomes just a part of normal life and people see little point in taking on an individual complaint because it is one of many and will continue to be so or because people are not aware of their legal options—that is another significant problem—also there is a real emotional effort in making a legal complaint about vilification. It can cost money and time as well as the many legal barriers, so it might be difficult to identify the perpetrator—or impossible in some cases. There may be evidentiary challenges and of course we have heard as well, and we have noted in our submission, that the law is incredibly complex; very, very few cases succeed. So they are the reasons why we believe we have not had those complaints come through to us at Victoria Legal Aid yet.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for that. I believe there are no further questions. On behalf of the committee can I thank you very much, in particular Victoria Legal Aid and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, for your evidence today. Importantly, I would again like to thank Charmaine Clarke for your strong, honest, moving evidence that you provided to us. As my colleague and the Deputy Chair indicated, I think this is one that will be highlighted and something that we will remember today at the conclusion of this meeting. So thank you again. I am really moved by your evidence, Charmaine, and I can assure you on behalf of the committee that at the conclusion of this process we will be deliberating on all evidence and providing strong evidence and a strong recommendation back to government in a report on this issue and addressing a lot of the issues that you have raised today. So thank you again, and I am wishing you all the very best.

Ms CLARKE: Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.