

VERIFIED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2017–18

Melbourne — 23 May 2017

Members

Mr Danny Pearson — Chair

Mr David Morris — Deputy Chair

Mr Steve Dimopoulos

Ms Fiona Patten

Ms Sue Pennicuik

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Tim Smith

Ms Louise Staley

Ms Vicki Ward

Witnesses

Mr John Eren, Minister for Sport,

Ms Kym Peake, Secretary,

Mr Greg Stenton, Chief Financial Officer,

Mr Nick Foa, Deputy Secretary, Finance and Infrastructure, and Director of Housing, and

Ms Anne Congleton, Deputy Secretary, Community Participation, Sport and Recreation, and Health and Wellbeing, Department of Health and Human Services.

The CHAIR — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2017–18 budget estimates. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome the Minister for Sport, the Honourable John Eren, MP; Ms Kym Peake, Secretary; Mr Greg Stenton, Chief Finance Officer; Mr Nick Foa, Deputy Secretary, Finance and Infrastructure, and Director of Housing; and Ms Anne Congleton, Deputy Secretary, Community Participation, Sport and Recreation, and Health and Wellbeing, Department of Health and Human Services.

All evidence is taken by the committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege.

Witnesses will not be sworn but are requested to answer all questions succinctly, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty. All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard, and you will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

All written communication to witnesses must be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way and cannot photograph, audiorecord or videorecord any part of these proceedings.

Members of the media must remain focused only on the persons speaking. Any filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I invite the witness to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 5 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

Visual presentation.

Mr EREN — I have got a fair few matters to get through here, and I will power through the presentation. The Andrews Labor government's 2017–18 budget solidifies Victoria as the sport and recreation capital of the nation. Three point nine million Victorians play sport or are engaged in active recreation at least once a week. Five hundred and eighty thousand Victorians volunteer their time to bring our sporting clubs and communities to life. Our network of sport and recreation infrastructure includes 9500 community sports facilities, leisure and recreation centres, a network of more than 2000 trails, and thousands of playgrounds, parks and sport reserves — all of which underpin our state's sport and active recreation sectors.

Combined with our previous and new investments across our events, stadia, elite, community, grassroots sport and recreation sectors, our 17–18 budget will grow the opportunities for all Victorians to get inspired and get active. An active Victoria is a stronger, healthier, wealthier and more livable Victoria. The 17–18 budget invests \$332.8 million to improve sport and recreation facilities from grassroots to elite. Since 2014 I am proud to report that the Andrews Labor government has invested over \$700 million into sport and recreation across Victoria. This includes investing \$175 million in community sport and recreation facilities, programs and events. We are investing \$85 million to improve sport and recreation facilities and programs across the Latrobe Valley as well.

A key investment of the budget is a \$271.55 million boost to complete the third stage of Melbourne Park. It will guarantee that the Australian Open stays in Melbourne until at least 2036. A total of \$4.9 million was allocated to plan for stage 5 of Simonds Stadium in Geelong and to commence planning towards the redevelopment of the State Netball and Hockey Centre to transform this facility into a centre for women's sporting excellence; \$10 million was provided to deliver our election commitment for the Victorian Home of Golf and National High Performance Centre, which will provide a state-of-the-art training and treatment facility for elite golfers near Melbourne's world-famous sand-belt golf courses; and \$9.6 million was provided for the State Sport Centres Trust to encourage more people to be active and healthy at the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre, State Netball and Hockey Centre, and Lakeside Stadium.

We are very proud of our commitment to provide new and upgraded community sport and recreation infrastructure to meet the growing demand across Victoria. Accordingly the budget includes \$20 million for the

Community Sports Infrastructure Fund to upgrade and build new facilities for grassroots sports clubs; an additional \$6 million for Victoria's parks, including new netball courts in Yarra Bend Park; a further \$4 million to assist shooting clubs; and \$1.9 million for new safety standards for public swimming pools.

We also provide funding for a range of programs to increase and enhance sport and recreation around Victoria. The supporting Victorian sport and recreation program continues to provide funding totalling \$6.9 million per year to state and regional level sport and recreation organisations to help them increase participation and inclusion. Our sporting club grants program and athlete pathway travel grants continue to assist hundreds of clubs and athletes every year.

The government is continuing its groundbreaking initiatives to improve gender equality in sport, both on and off the field. We have committed over \$6.2 million in the budget to implement the nine recommendations from the game plan Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation to deliver further change to our game initiatives to increase participation and enhance leadership opportunities.

We are also investing \$14 million towards the female-friendly facilities program, including a \$4 million boost to this very important program in this budget and \$9.6 million to address the shortage of netball courts in inner Melbourne, and we are also developing a new strategic framework for sport and recreation in Victoria.

A key theme of the new framework is the need to support active recreation options while investing in sport. We have made a strong start on this through our investment in aquatic centres, pools, trails, Premier's Active April, Ride to School and outdoor sector plan. Other themes of the new framework are, if I can just go through them, meeting future demand for sport as Victoria's population grows; achieving inclusive participation; building the capacity of sport and recreation organisations; and getting the best from our high-performance system, state facilities and events. Also a review of the Victorian Institute of Sport is being considered by the government. This found that the VIS achieves the highest number of medals per athlete in Australia.

Integrity and governance continue to be challenges in sport, and we are investing \$200 000 to continue our work in this space. Our defibrillator program is being rolled out to sport and recreation organisations across Victoria to help save lives.

That is the end of my presentation. I am happy to take questions.

Ms WARD — Good afternoon, everyone. I am sure some of you are delighted to be back and some of you are happy to be here for your first appearance. It is sure to be lots of fun.

Mr EREN — I have got some lollies for you, if you want, Tim.

Ms WARD — They are making their way around.

The CHAIR — Sorry, they got stuck with me.

Mr T. SMITH — Thank you very much, Minister.

Ms WARD — And can I say thank you very much for bringing the lollies. So far you are our favourite minister if you are bringing lollies. Minister, I do want to commend you for the work that you have done in promoting women in sport. I know that as the father of a daughter this is very important you — as it is to me from my own interest in sport as well as my having daughters — we all do want to encourage women and girls to participate in sport as much as possible. There are so many different benefits that it brings.

In your presentation you spoke to the 6.2 million to boost female participation, and you talked about the 14 million towards female-friendly change rooms. You have got communities like mine where sports like football, for example, are just exploding when it comes to girls' and women's participation. Eltham Junior Football Club has something like 110 girls playing at the moment. My own daughter's under 12s team has got 21 girls playing in their side alone. In terms of the growth in girls needing to have their own facilities or at least shared facilities, it is extraordinary and it is going to be very difficult to keep up with. How is this going at the moment?

Mr EREN — Thank you; it is a very important question that you ask. Of course 51 per cent of our population are female, and accordingly we need to make sure that we are inclusive not only in the sports

programs that we provide but also in terms of making sure that we have facilities to accommodate 51 per cent of the population. You have touched on a couple of very important issues. Leading up to the election it was a centrepiece of our policy position as an opposition, and clearly it has become very popular.

We have allocated the largest amount of moneys ever dedicated to female participation anywhere in the country — \$10 million dedicated to female-friendly change rooms. That went down a treat, of course. I am very pleased to report that there has been a fair bit of progress in that area, but before I just get onto that progress, of course I am also proud to say that South Australia has followed our lead. Only a few months ago the Premier and the sports minister in South Australia actually stood up and acknowledged that this was a great policy, and they have dedicated, identically, \$10 million for female participation in terms of making female change rooms and clubs more family and female friendly. So we are very proud to lead the way.

Today I am pleased to say that we have approved some 56 grants totalling over \$5.3 million for projects under the female-friendly facilities. It has gone a long way to making those clubs a lot more attractive, and because they feel more comfortable going to a club that accommodates them, they want to participate in sport. But it is not just about the participation side of it; it is also officiating. There are a lot of referees now that are female referees that are coming on board, and they go to different sporting clubs and they find that they have not got a change room. This is why it is so important, and clearly we are leading the way nationally in terms of all of the things that we are doing for female participation.

I am really pleased also about the further investments that we have made — \$6.2 million into the Change our Game campaign. Of course this is a very important part of how we change the culture in our state to make Victoria a more inclusive place for females. This will go a long way. It is such an intense program to get us to accept collectively in some of those male-dominated areas particularly — and there is a big change. I can see it. There are now 350 female — —

Ms WARD — I can see it in my own region. On the Northern Football League, for example, four of eight of them are women.

Mr EREN — Yes, absolutely, and we pride ourselves, again, on making sure we lead the way in terms of administration, not just participation, and that is why we are asking our state sporting organisations to make sure that they accommodate more females as part of the administration of their structure and organisation — 40 per cent at least must be females with a view over the next few years to increase it to 50 per cent.

Ms WARD — Are you encountering resistance among the sporting community to this, this cultural change and the Change our Game program?

Mr EREN — No. I think they have embraced it because they understand that it is good for their organisation. Why would you not be inclusive? Why would you not have representation on behalf of 51 per cent of the population? I think it is bringing a different vibrancy and different methods of operations for those clubs and organisations that are actually being more inclusive. So you are getting a lot more people through the door and a lot more foot traffic, and you are getting a lot more memberships — they are increasing — and that is all great for sporting clubs and organisations. They understand that. We are really proud of the advances that we have made, and to see the AFL embrace now the women's league, of course that has just gone tremendously well. All of the other AFL clubs are eagerly awaiting their teams to have female — —

Ms WARD — Yes, I wish Essendon would hurry up.

Mr EREN — Yes, and Geelong; they are ready, but they are just waiting for their turn in terms of licences. It is great to see that there are over 350 female teams now, and more are coming on board. It is great for the AFL. The A-League, of course, the women's league — the W-League — has been in place for a long, long time, and soccer has really led the way in that respect, so I am really glad that other codes are now adopting this very important policy position.

Ms WARD — So to talk about that, Minister — the State Netball and Hockey Centre and the State Sports Centre Trust that you also mentioned in your presentation — can you talk us through that?

Mr EREN — Sure.

Ms WARD — How is the redevelopment going? I will make a declaration: I am an ambassador for the Vixens. How is this going to roll out? It is fantastic that we are supporting football so much and the growth of women in football, but how are we supporting more traditional sports, like netball, for women?

Mr EREN — I was at the Vixens game on Sunday. Of course it was a fantastic victory for the Vixens over the Thunderbirds, and now they find themselves on top of the ladder. They have got one more game to go, and if they win that game, they actually will have a home grand final, and I really hope that happens.

Ms WARD — It is just fantastic.

Mr EREN — So netball is a huge sport in our state — 111 000 members and growing — and clearly there are a lot of pressures on government to accommodate not only trying to build more netball facilities across the state but particularly around Melbourne and surrounds where it is landlocked. Clearly land is very precious, and that is why the State Netball and Hockey Centre is a bit of infrastructure that we need to enhance and improve. Over 500 000 people every year attend that centre for one reason or another, whether they participate in sport or watch sport. I know the Chair was there when we made the announcement of a million dollars towards a feasibility study to ensure that we enhance that very important facility and develop it going forward. There are a number of master plans of course that we will be looking at in terms of how we develop that very important centre. Clearly that is such an important part of our infrastructure that needs to accommodate females in sport. More than 80 per cent of the people who use that centre are female, so we are very intent as a government to ensure that that million dollars goes a long way to providing a business case for us to develop that very important —

Ms WARD — Just quickly before Mr Dimopoulos takes over, going along that thread, I suspect that is where your female sports symposium is coming along to in the next few weeks. It is that whole conversation around women in sport.

Mr EREN — It is. It is about continuation of the conversation to make sure that we keep the pressure on, if I can call it that — the analogy of keeping the pressure on the culture, the change that is required. That is why these symposiums are so important. It is really valuable for us as a government, it is valuable for departments, it is valuable for the stakeholders and it is valuable for the industry to understand where sport is headed in Victoria. We pride ourselves on being the sporting capital, and clearly to be truly the sporting capital of the world you need to accommodate and include women, and these symposiums go a long way to convincing organisations and codes that women are a very important part of our landscape going forward for sport.

Ms WARD — Did you want to carry on, Steve? Did you want to get started?

Mr DIMOPOULOS — I can start one now, Minister, and pick it up in the next round if appropriate. Budget paper 3, page 78, talks about the Sports Infrastructure Fund. I just want to get a bit of a sense of whether this is a larger amount of money than last year and get a sense of what drives the growth. Obviously female participation drives the growth, but there must be more than that —

The CHAIR — Order! The Deputy Chair until 2.29 p.m.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Think about that for the next session. Thank you, Minister.

Mr MORRIS — BP3, page 78, Minister, the Access for All Abilities area. Your government made a commitment in the state disability plan 2017–20 that between January 2016 and June 2019 you would provide around 10 million to 50 organisations through the Access for All Abilities component of the Supporting Victorian Sport and Recreation program. Do you stand by that commitment?

Mr EREN — I stand by the fact that we need to be inclusive in making sure that we make sport accessible. Of course as the sporting capital we need to ensure that we accommodate, as I just said in responding to an earlier question, and include our general population, and of course the all-abilities program is one that is very important to us. That is why it is so important to make sure that, as a government, that is front and centre, because I think the moneys that we provide — of course there is always more to be done, there is no question of that — are going a long way to ensuring that all of the people in Victoria, whether able-bodied or not, if they want to, have access to good programs and good facilities to accommodate their needs.

At least \$3.3 million per year over the next four years will be provided to the Access for All Abilities program as a key part of our integrated Supporting Victorian Sport and Recreation program, which will streamline planning and reporting across funded sports and embed inclusion across all of their business practices. We value that. We value the fact that we need to be as a government very mindful of the fact that we have — the NDIA, for example — a number of key government bodies that now are thinking front and centre in terms of how we accommodate the disabled communities that we have across all of the portfolios, not just sport. To that end I am very proud of course of the investments that we are making, and we will look further into what else we can do to assist this very important part of our community in making sure that they do not miss out, in making sure that we can accommodate, as the sporting capital of the world, to ensure that they are included in our thinking and programs as well going forward.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, can I address a question to Ms Peake or whomever she may care to delegate it to. Just to reconcile, the minister referred to 3.3 million a year, and under the initiatives there is 4.9 million for the state disability plan under DHHS. Presumably some of that goes into the 3.3. If we are spending 3.3 million a year, that is 13.2 over the forward estimates, but we have only got 4.9 in the forward estimates, so I am just wondering how we can reconcile those two figures.

Ms PEAKE — Certainly. I might ask Ms Congleton to provide more detail to you, but as the minister outlined, this 3.3 million is actually part of our Supporting Victorian Sport and Recreation program as opposed to the funds that are specifically set aside for the state disability plan. But I will just ask Ms Congleton to step you through.

Ms CONGLETON — The item that is identified in the budget papers is related to the state disability plan, as you mentioned, and that has some components that sit across accessing employment. So it is a broader level of coverage rather than sport. The \$3.3 million that the minister talked about is really focused on sport and recreation. The \$4.9 million comes out of the state disability plan, and that covers employment and other things as well, and that is related to the recently released state disability plan.

Mr MORRIS — So is any component of that 4.9 applicable to the sport portfolio, or is it all outside the sport portfolio?

Ms CONGLETON — I think it would be largely outside, but there are opportunities in there for employment for young people. Those young people might be going on to access scholarships and leadership in the sport and recreation field, so there would probably be some component that would relate to sport and recreation. But Access for All Abilities is really focused 100 per cent on sport and recreation.

Mr MORRIS — Okay. So the 3.3 a year, is that for three years to make up the 10 million that is the government commitment, and where is that funded?

Ms CONGLETON — The \$3.3 million is in the base of sport and recreation, so it is largely through what we call 'Supporting Victorian sport and recreation', and they are ongoing grants that are provided to a range of organisations.

Mr MORRIS — There is a government commitment for 10, so that is three lots of 3.3 effectively.

Ms PEAKE — I just might just clarify, Mr Morris, that it is 3.3 over four years, so in fact the \$10 million commitment is surpassed over the forward estimates.

Mr MORRIS — Yes. So it is the 13.2 that I referred to, and it is in the base.

Ms PEAKE — Yes.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, can I move on to a different matter but one you were just talking to Ms Ward about earlier: women in sport, in this context BP3, page 78. There is 1.5 million in this year's budget; next year, 1.5; and the two output years, 1.6 each year. I am just wondering whether, given the importance you attach to this issue, the participation of females in sport — and I do not think you would get any argument from anyone on this side of the table either — and given that there is \$10 million going into one golf centre, is 1.5 million a year adequate for the importance of this program?

Mr EREN — No. As I indicated earlier, Mr Morris, there is always more that governments can do. There is no question of that. We are proud of our record of investment into female participation. It has never been done by any previous governments. It has not been done by any other government that I know of in the nation, so the base point that we start off on is actually exceeding any expectations. I think that we as government are very focused on it, and that is why we have made some huge announcements in relation to the future investments that we will make into it. But this is about making sure that we bring along the whole of the sector with us to ensure that the communities are embracing of this.

For what it is worth, we thought it would be a little bit more difficult in terms of the acceptance of it because of the inherent culture of certain sports. We are very pleasantly surprised at the welcome that these policies have had. So we are actually very proud of the investments that we are making. Am I saying that in the future we will not be looking at increasing any funding? These are record investments that we are making because no other government has done this. No other previous governments have done this. We are the only government at this point in time that is investing this amount of money into female participation, administration, media and all of the other associated industries related to females in sport. So we are very proud of our record, and we will continue to look at what further investments we can make going forward. When you think about some of the investments that we are making, it is — —

Mr MORRIS — Can I ask about that, because the budget papers indicate that, obviously, the money from this program is intended to increase the number of women on boards and expand the number of female sporting projects. Can you expand a bit on those female sporting projects? Do they exist at the moment? If they do, how are they currently funded? What is proposed for them?

Mr DIMOPOULOS — I can go through a list of things that we are making investments in in terms of women's sport, Mr Morris. Can I also say you had a bit of a swipe at golf. But the Vic open — —

Mr MORRIS — No, I am just contrasting 1.5 million in this program compared with 8 million going to — —

Mr EREN — I am just saying women also play golf. We are proud of the investments we are making into sport generally, particularly for women. Whether it is golf, the Vic open — —

Mr MORRIS — Can I bring you back to the expanded number of female sporting projects this output is supposed to fund — —

Mr EREN — Equal prize money for men and women in golf, and that is why — —

Mr MORRIS — Can we have — —

Mr EREN — You asked a question, and you made the comment, so — —

Mr MORRIS — I asked about projects; I did not ask about golf. I asked you about the expansion of a number of female sporting projects, which is what the budget says you are doing with the money, and I am wondering if we can have a list of those projects and an indication of whether they are existing projects, because that is the inference — an expansion. The inference is that these are existing projects, and I am also interested in how they are currently funded. Perhaps the department may be able to help us on that.

Mr EREN — I would need an hour to go through that list, but I am happy to pass over to — —

Ms PEAKE — I might just ask Ms Congleton to step you through.

Ms CONGLETON — The report that was alluded to earlier had nine recommendations, so there is action across all of those nine recommendations of the review. There was \$1 million that the minister talked about that started our work here, so the additional funding through this budget is going to help us. Things like the champions program — we have enlisted the support of people like Peggy O'Neal and others who will be champions of change, and that is something that will then drive participation at a leadership level. We have commissioned Vicsport to work with our sporting organisations around the identification of women who can join boards and who can also train and support board members. So there is a lot going on in that space — —

The CHAIR — Order! We might come back to that. Mr Dimopoulos until 2.39 p.m.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Minister, do you want me to repeat the question?

Mr EREN — If you can, that would be great.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Yes, of course. You were responding to Ms Ward in relation to female participation and as a subset of sports users or consumers. That subset is growing, but overall I imagine there is a growth in users of community sporting facilities. I just wanted to draw your attention to page 78 of BP3 regarding the Sports Infrastructure Fund and get a sense. Is that an expanded program, and if so, what are the drivers for that expansion? Why do you make that additional investment, if that is an additional investment?

Mr EREN — Another great question. Again, we pride ourselves on being the sporting capital, and we want to ensure we have some great, elite stadiums around the place, and what we want to do is have these fantastic facilities right across the state. That is why again we are a first in dedicating moneys directly to the CSIF for sports infrastructure. The CSIF is \$100 million, and we have added to that of course, and that money goes towards making sure that facilities right across the state are brought up to scratch and up to standard to ensure that people have access to the best quality sporting clubs that they can be at.

So from our side of government of course we are extremely happy and excited about the prospect of so many applications coming in and so much interest from right across regional Victoria particularly, which I am so happy about, and we know how important sport is to particularly regional and rural areas. The money that we have allocated is going quite well in terms of expending that money to improve sporting grounds across the state, so from our perspective there is always that the applications we are going through are at a rate which is exceeding our expectations in terms of the councils across the regions really wanting to take advantage of this very important program.

The \$20 million of additional moneys will go a long way into making sure that we keep on building those very important bits of infrastructure across the state. It is very much about making sporting clubs not only for the young but for the young at heart. There are a lot of people that are coming back to sport at a later stage of their life, which is fantastic to see, whether it is men or women, and that is exactly what we intend to do. What we want to do is make people feel more comfortable at sporting clubs. Having travelled a fair bit around regional and rural Victoria, I have seen a lot of run-down sporting clubs with change rooms that have existed since the 20s, 30s and 40s, and it is a really bad, negative environment, but that is changing. With this investment we are making that is all changing and it is all positive.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Just a last one before I hand over to Ms Shing. Mr Morris asked a question about different abilities and participation in sport. Just in terms of disadvantaged Victorians and communities from low socio-economic areas, what investments are made in relation to their ability to access community sport? Is that part of the same funds you are referring to, or is it additional?

Mr EREN — This is about trying to make inclusive all of Victoria. I have got a very special saying that I must admit I saw on one of the social media outlets and it was relating to education. It said: what if the cure for cancer was in the mind of a child that could not afford education, for example?

Mr DIMOPOULOS — That is very powerful.

Mr EREN — What if there is a sporting talent out there that cannot afford to play sport? That is why we need to make sure that particularly certain areas of disadvantage need to be catered for, and we need to be as a government mindful of the fact that there could be so many communities out there that are in need.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — And often that is not just about infrastructure; that is actually about support to get to events, to get to sports clubs, to have uniforms and those things.

Mr EREN — Absolutely, and all of those grants are available for clubs to make use of. I know in Geelong in my area there are lots of clubs that are taking advantage of those programs, whether it be for 1000, 2000 or 5000 — any of those programs that assist sporting clubs to be more inclusive of particularly those kids that cannot afford sport.

Ms SHING — I might pick up there in relation to your presentation and the reference to the \$85 million for Latrobe Valley sport and recreational facilities and programs. Not only have we had some very outdated and ill-equipped facilities and infrastructure in and around the valley area, but we have also had a number of health

challenges, whether that is higher incidences of chronic disease, higher rates of smoking, lower rates of physical exercise and activity. The \$85 million is something that I would like to get a further sense from you on around how that will deliver improved health outcomes for the communities right across the greater Latrobe Valley region and also how that will increase and contribute to economic development and prosperity across the area, because whilst these announcements have been met with a large degree of positivity, there are obviously still people in the community who see the \$85 million investment and say, ‘Why are you trying to give Hazelwood workers jobs as lifeguards?’, just to get to the lowest common denominator. The 300 construction jobs and 275 ongoing jobs are about lifting the game all round, but on the economic front and the health front what sort of improvements do we anticipate will be delivered as a consequence of this investment?

Mr EREN — A dramatic improvement. On 10 March — I will not forget that date; it was a very, very good date for me — —

Ms SHING — It was the day I committed to barracking for Collingwood, just to put that on the record. Mr McGuire convinced me with his own commitment to the valley that it was something that I should also do in return.

Mr EREN — Again I say this, and I know that I am surrounded by people who make these determinations on funding sport, but for every dollar that we invest in sport we save \$3 to \$4 in health bills, and prevention is always better than cure. That is why I am proud to say that as a government in the three budgets that we have had some over \$700 million have been invested into sport — record amounts. So particularly around the Latrobe Valley, the Gippsland area, it is those areas. We identify areas of need, so we are very proud of that \$85 million package that we have put together, which is a whole package to ensure that that area does not miss out going forward on its ability to play sport, its ability to have events in sport, and it is also its ability to be fit, healthy and happy.

Ms SHING — One of the challenges that we do face, though, in an area which has had a sustained lack of investment across successive governments is making sure that people are aware of the benefits that flow from that to local economies and to economic activity. Could I ask you perhaps also, with the assistance of the secretary — if, Ms Peake, you are inclined to add anything — to talk about the way in which this will assist in realising greater economic returns for the greater Latrobe Valley region.

Mr EREN — I think you touched on it earlier, but the package creates some 300 jobs through construction phase and 275 ongoing jobs in construction in relation to some of the work that is being done in that area. I would like to just take you through some of the investments that we have announced: \$46 million for a new Gippsland regional aquatic and leisure centre in Traralgon; \$17 million to redevelop the Gippsland regional indoor sports and entertainment complex in Traralgon; \$4 million to upgrade Morwell Recreation Reserve; \$1.7 million to upgrade the Latrobe sports and entertainment complex in Morwell; \$3 million to upgrade the Ted Summerton Reserve in Moe — that is where Collingwood played.

Ms SHING — It is one of the best footy grounds in regional Victoria — absolutely stunning.

Mr EREN — Absolutely. I wish I had more time to talk about that exact subject, but I might pick up on it later. There is \$1.4 million for the Sale and Traralgon tennis centres; and \$5 million for nine local reserves to be upgraded. As part of the package the government will also invest \$6.9 million over five years to grow sport participation opportunities across the valley, and this will include the delivery of an extensive program of major events to engage the community in sporting programs that activate young people, disadvantaged communities, women and girls, Aboriginal Victorians and other underrepresented groups. So it is a total package. This is about construction work through the period that that will be developed. It is about events which will bring tourism to the area, and that is very important for the economy, particularly regional Victoria.

Ms SHING — Will that calendar be spread across the entire Latrobe Valley region, or is it concentrated into one area?

Mr EREN — It will be across. We will take every opportunity that we get to advance the economies across that region. I want to make that very clear: it is about the whole region. We are very proud of the investments that we have made.

Mr T. SMITH — I refer to the budget paper, pages 226 to 228, which is the output for DHHS, particularly sports. I note, Minister, that you have conducted a number of ministerial trips, to Singapore and South Korea in particular. Can you explain to the taxpayer what specific programs in this budget are a result of your overseas travel?

Ms SHING — Sorry, which trip? In which period were the trips undertaken? What are you talking about?

The CHAIR — Through the Chair.

Mr T. SMITH — Departmental outputs. He has undertaken a number of trips during the current financial year.

Ms WARD — Budget paper 3?

Mr MORRIS — BP3, page 228.

Mr T. SMITH — We want to know what you learnt from these overseas trips.

Mr EREN — You might want to save this question for the tourism part of the hearings.

Mr T. SMITH — I am sure we can ask it some more. I will ask it a few times if you like.

Members interjecting.

Mr EREN — If you have run out of questions for sport, I pity you. But if you want to get on to the subject — —

Mr T. SMITH — You pity me?

Mr EREN — Yes, I do, because there are so many questions that need to be genuinely asked about sport. Why do you not ask them about sport?

Mr T. SMITH — I want to know what you learned on your overseas trip.

The CHAIR — Order!

Mr EREN — I can certainly talk about — —

Mr T. SMITH — Do not get all touchy. Just answer the question.

Mr EREN — No, I am not getting touchy. I am just saying that in relation to that particular trip that you are talking about, which was I think more than 18 months ago — —

Ms SHING — Oh, not in the budget period.

Mr EREN — It was outside of this budget period, I can tell you that.

Ms WARD — You might want to do your homework, Mr Smith.

The CHAIR — Order! Through the Chair.

Mr T. SMITH — You have been overseas. We would like to know what you have learnt and how that has made a contribution to a line item in this budget.

Mr EREN — The trip that you are talking about happened in 2015.

Mr T. SMITH — I am not disputing the trip happened, Minister.

Ms WARD — Well, you should have asked this question last year perhaps, Mr Smith. You are 12 months late.

The CHAIR — Order, Ms Ward! So the period in question is 1 July 2016 to now and potentially prospectively; that is the focus of the budget hearings we are currently in.

Mr MORRIS — On a point of order, Chair, the Singapore travel that Mr Smith referred to occurred from 17 to 21 September 2015. The first budget period after that is the 2016–17 budget, which is part of the discussions today. We were asking about the impact of that trip on the budget and the forward estimates.

The CHAIR — No, I think we should be focusing on the current financial year that we are in.

Mr MORRIS — But we are, because this trip occurred — —

Mr EREN — In 2015.

Mr MORRIS — That is right, after the 2015 budget. We are now in the year for the 2016 budget; we are asking what impact that trip had on the 2016 budget.

Ms WARD — What? We are in 17–18.

Mr EREN — I think you are confusing your years.

Mr MORRIS — Chair, if we are going to have this battle again, let us be very clear. The question is about the impact of a trip which occurred in the lead-up to the 2016–17 budget, which is part of the discussion. It says clearly in the report that the minister visited the Singapore Sports Hub, and we are asking about sport. Now, if you are saying we can only go to actions in the 16–17 year when we are talking about the 16–17 budget, that is completely ridiculous.

The CHAIR — No, I think when talking about the 17–18 budget, we are talking about the 16–17 targets and outcomes.

Mr MORRIS — That is right. And we are asking about the impact of this trip in the context of the 16–17 budget.

The CHAIR — Okay. So if the question relates to the 16–17 year and the activities that the minister undertook in the 16–17 year, I am happy for that period — —

Mr MORRIS — It is the impact of that trip on the 16–17 year and the ensuing years.

Ms SHING — What about the impact of the former government on this government? You hate those questions, don't you?

The CHAIR — Order, Ms Shing! I am happy for the question to stand as it relates to the 16–17 year in terms of the activities the minister engaged in in the context of an earlier trip. But if the question is going to expenditure that occurred in the — —

Mr MORRIS — No, it is not.

The CHAIR — Hang on. Can I just finish my point? If the line of questioning that Mr Smith is going to embark upon relates to expenditure that occurred in the 15–16 year, then it is out.

Mr T. SMITH — No, the question pertains to the 16–17 financial year and indeed the forward estimates: what was learnt that made a contribution to that financial year and indeed over the forward estimates in terms of government programs?

Ms SHING — What did you learn when you were the captain of the year 12 cricket team at Scotch College, Mr Smith?

Mr T. SMITH — I was not actually; I captained the boats.

Mr EREN — Can I just ask in terms of the budget papers that you referred to, where is this trip in the budget papers?

Mr T. SMITH — It is not.

Mr EREN — It is not in the budget paper? So you are asking me about a 2015–16 budget paper.

Mr T. SMITH — No, I am asking you about a visit abroad you have conducted at taxpayers expense. Look, we had this last week, Chair, when you asked me to specifically relate a question about an overseas trip to how it was going to impact the forward estimates. I am asking: what did the minister learn on this trip that has made an impact on a new government program or existing government program, as existing in this budget period? Is it that difficult?

Mr EREN — No, it is not that difficult.

The CHAIR — I think it comes down to the wording of the question, Mr Smith.

Mr EREN — You are just scraping the bottom of the barrel. You have not got a decent question, so you have referred back to 2014–15–16. Anyway, that is fine. That trip was conducted obviously at a time when there was a lot of contention about the Formula One grand prix. As you may recall, Mr Smith, the then Premier Mike Baird came out just before the state election and basically said that he would take the grand prix off Melbourne. We knew that that was not going to happen. My comment to him was, ‘On your bike, Mike. You’re not getting our major event. We’re John West. What we reject, you get’. Those were my comments to him.

It was very important to make sure — the Singapore Grand Prix was one of those very important events — that we attended to secure the Melbourne race for the long term. One of the reasons why we actually went to that very important race was the fact that Singapore is renowned for its major events, tourism, conventions and sporting arenas as well. So we announced at that very important event, and I think at 11.30 p.m. there was a news media article that I did with a number of media outlets to proudly announce that we would extend for the first time our Formula One grand prix for the next 10 years. We have locked that in until at least 2023. It was a very intense trip actually, and added to that trip was a number of visitations that we did. We met with the relevant minister. We spoke about trade opportunities potentially. We spoke about — —

Mr MORRIS — How are the discussions between Sport and Rec Victoria and the Singapore Sports Hub going?

Mr EREN — Sorry?

Mr MORRIS — How are those discussions going?

Mr EREN — The discussion for me was about making sure that I — —

Mr MORRIS — No. On your report it says, ‘Next steps and follow up. Discussions between Sport and Rec Victoria and the Singapore Sports Hub’. How is that going?

Mr EREN — You may or not be aware that we have — —

Ms WARD — On a point of order, Mr Smith was at pains to talk about how it has influenced the future planning and what the government is doing.

Mr MORRIS — That is right.

Ms WARD — Now you are referring to his report.

Mr MORRIS — I am referring to proposed discussions.

Ms WARD — So we are widening the scope of the reference to which we are — —

Mr T. SMITH — He is narrowing it actually.

The CHAIR — There is no point of order.

Mr MORRIS — So how are those discussions going? Have they occurred? Has there been any discussion?

Mr EREN — You asked me about the trip that happened in 2015. Right?

Mr MORRIS — You disclosed this on 20 July 2016. I am asking about those discussions.

Mr EREN — And I am answering the question about the importance of that trip on a number of different fronts.

Mr MORRIS — So can you answer the question about the discussions between Sport and Recreation Victoria and the Singapore Sports Hub?

Mr EREN — I do not think you are interested in the answer. You are more interested in the question that you are asking.

Mr MORRIS — I am interested in hearing the answer.

Mr EREN — I am answering your question. I have been answering your question about this trip that you asked me about. You asked me the question about this trip.

Mr MORRIS — I am asking you about those discussions. How are those discussions progressing? They were a direct outcome allegedly of this trip. How are they going?

Mr EREN — The discussions that we had in relation to — —

Mr MORRIS — No. These were discussions that were going to occur as a follow-up action.

Mr EREN — You are not going to force me to answer in the way that you want me to answer the question.

Mr MORRIS — As a follow-up action to your trip, on your website — —

Mr EREN — You can try to bully an answer out of me all you like, but you are not going to get — —

Mr MORRIS — I am asking you to answer a question about discussions that you said were going to occur. Have they happened or not?

Mr EREN — Okay. Why do you not tell me what the answer is. If you want to — —

Mr MORRIS — I am asking you whether those discussions occurred. You are the minister. You apparently do not know.

Mr EREN — Mr Morris, you asked the question. I am answering the question. You do not want to listen to it.

Mr MORRIS — I asked you about discussions. You have not gone anywhere near it. Have they occurred, yes or no?

Mr EREN — I am telling you. I am answering it in this way. There were a number of — —

The CHAIR — Order! I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance, the Minister for Sport, the Honourable John Eren, MP, Ms Peake, Mr Stenton, Mr Foa and Ms Congleton. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing. I believe Ms Pennicuik and possibly Ms Patten have some questions on notice. The response answering the questions in full should be provided in writing within 10 working days of the committee's request.

Witnesses withdrew.