

VERIFIED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2017–18

Melbourne — 2 June 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 Robin Scott, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and

Mr Matt Lowe, Executive Director, Social Policy, Family Violence and Service Delivery Reform, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

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 Multicultural Affairs, the Honourable Robin Scott, MP, and Mr Matt Lowe, Executive Director, Social Policy, Family Violence and Service Delivery Reform, from the Department of Premier and Cabinet. In the gallery is Mr Hakan Akyol, director, Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, and Mr David Burns, Director, Communications, Corporate and Community Grants, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division.

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

Mr SCOTT — Thank you, and I would remind all members that they are nearly done — this is the last hearing.

Visual presentation.

Mr SCOTT — I would like to share the government initiatives in the multicultural affairs portfolio. As I am sure members are aware, Victoria is a diverse state. According to the 2011 census just under a quarter of our population is born overseas. Our strong international migration is a testament to our economic strength and the opportunities and appeal that our multicultural society offers. Nearly 50 per cent of Victorians are born or have at least one parent born overseas, and the government expects these numbers to increase in the upcoming census. So it is clear that for many of us cultural diversity starts at home and is the norm.

In 2016–17 the Andrews Labor government continued its hard work in supporting multiculturalism and culturally diverse communities across Victoria. Some of our key achievements include the launch of the *Victorian. And Proud of It* multicultural policy, the campaign and the launch of the *Victorian Values Statement*, which were aimed at building a more socially cohesive and harmonious society with the key objective unifying Victorians around our shared values of a peaceful, prosperous society with a shared sense of belonging, respect, acceptance and contribution.

Early results of the campaign show there has been an increase in support for the sense of belonging amongst Victorians. The launch of the first ever multicultural sports fund, which is a \$4 million investment supporting culturally diverse communities to participate in sport, is part of a whole-of-government sports sector multicultural participation strategy.

A further \$2 million investment from the multicultural portfolio into Jobs Victoria is to assist disadvantaged jobseekers from culturally diverse backgrounds. Initial results from the Jobs Victoria Employment Network, as of 7 April this year, indicate that 49 per cent of Jobs Victoria Employment Network participants were born in a country other than Australia, 31 per cent of Jobs Victoria Employment Network participants speak a language

other than English at home and 47 per cent of Jobs Victoria Employment Network participants are identified as culturally and linguistically diverse in some way.

The 2017–18 budget will deliver a \$51.8 million investment over four years to build on one of the state's great assets — our cultural diversity. This budget delivers a \$21.8 million investment to improve the state's language services and meet the needs of our multicultural communities. This is the largest single increase in funding for interpreters in Victoria's history. The boost will help new migrants get access to education and training, find employment and understand important healthcare information. It will also make interpreting services more accessible in regional Victoria.

There will be a \$2 million investment to establish Victoria's first migrant worker centre to prevent workers being exploited through underpayment and poor working conditions. The centre will provide workers with information on their rights, wages and contracts and reduce worker exploitation. The budget will deliver a \$19 million boost over three years to deliver *Victorian. And Proud of It*, our new multicultural policy, to support our plan to strengthen social cohesion and respond to the need of all Victorians to have a strong sense of belonging. *Victorian. And Proud of It* initiatives include \$2.3 million for a rights and responsibilities community education program, \$1 million for an anti-racism action plan to address discrimination and \$1.8 million for digital literacy and digital citizenship programs to help young people recognise when they are being manipulated online or confronted with online extremism. In addition, the government has committed \$9 million over four years to build capacity to deliver family violence services for culturally diverse communities.

The \$51.1 million committed in the 2017–18 financial year represents a record investment in multicultural affairs, which is more than double the investment in the portfolio when we came into office. We know that diversity delivers positive economic and social benefits. That is why the Andrews Labor government will continue to invest in the needs of diverse communities, building on the great tradition of support for multiculturalism, which is extended across governments, I might say, of different political persuasions here in Victoria.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. That was a very efficient delivery of your presentation. The budget paper reference is budget paper 3, page 102, 'multicultural policy statement'. At the outset I should declare that I am a member of the African ministerial working group, and I am very fortunate in having such a large and diverse African-Australian community in my electorate. Minister, just in relation to the policy — and I was very pleased to be at the launch of that — can you talk a bit about how you anticipate this policy is going to support multiculturalism in Victoria?

Mr SCOTT — There are a number of elements to *Victorian. And Proud of It*. If I might ask, how long I have, because I could go at great length.

The CHAIR — Until 1.55 p.m.

Mr SCOTT — At the heart of the *Victorian. And Proud of It* multicultural policy statement and campaign is the Victorian values statement of the values: one law for all; freedom to be yourself; discrimination is never acceptable; a fair go for all; and it is up to all of us to contribute to a Victoria we can be proud of. This is about setting out shared values and promoting a sense of belonging and respect, acceptance and contribution. These are values that Victorians expect of each other, and there is strong support, we find, in the community for these values. This was launched by the Premier and me in February this year. An important aspect of the program is the telling of personal stories of contribution. What we believe is that the real, lived experience of ordinary Victorians in our diverse multicultural community, their stories of contribution and how that contribution creates a stronger social cohesion and a sense of belonging within and across Victorian society is a very important way to support social cohesion and diversity within our community, which has been such a hallmark of multiculturalism here in Victoria over an extended period of time, and as I indicated, across different governments of different political persuasions.

One of the aspects of the policy, which may be subject to questioning, I am sure, is Vicky, the social cohesion truck, which will take the message out to all Victorians, help facilitate community conversations and allow Victorians to engage with the Victorian values statement and the key themes of contribution and belonging in a personal and interactive way. Vicky will attend a balance of regional and metropolitan events, including large, mainstream events and small community events, and I think we have already had interest from a range of community organisations and educational institutions in being engaged with Vicky the Truck.

Also, there are initiatives such as the \$2.3 million education program co-designed with communities so that every Victorian is aware of their rights and responsibilities under the law. That is the community engagement education program. There is \$825 000 over three years towards the implementation of regional community hubs. Effective regional community engagement is required to support regional cultural diversity, and I would say a range of our regional cities are fantastic examples of support for multiculturalism and diversity. I will not single out too many at this point, but there is a really strong focus, particularly in leadership in a range of regional communities, on the need to support diversity and the strength that it brings to regional communities.

There is \$1 million over three years towards tackling discrimination and ensuring every Victorian has legal protection under the law, which is the anti-racism action plan. This program includes providing members of the community with tools to respond to racism. I have to say my view is that most Victorians are fundamentally decent and most Victorians are not bigoted, but every example of bigotry or racism is one example too many, and for those who suffer from bigotry and racism, it can leave an indelible impression on their lives and cause great harm. So it is a very strong view of this government — and it is in fact one of the values we announce — that no discrimination is acceptable and discrimination in any form is a violation not just of the person who is being discriminated against but against all Victorians of goodwill.

There is also \$1.8 million over three years to help young people recognise when they are being manipulated online or confronted with online extremism. Digital Literacy and Digital Citizenship program is the title of that initiative. It is a very important to understand one of the shifts that has taken place is that those who seek to spread extremist messages are obviously particularly focused on utilising digital forms of communication. We are keen as a government to ensure that particularly young people have the ability to recognise when they are being manipulated online and have greater, in effect, resilience and ability to resist extremist messaging online. One of the concerns that we have is to ensure that there is more effective understanding of the siloed communications and bubbles that people can find themselves trapped in within the social media context.

There are also initiatives to ensure greater access to job opportunities, which I outlined previously. I did not mention Recruit Smarter, a multisectoral cooperative initiative to find ways to address unconscious bias which has been trialled in a range of agencies across government, including the departments of Premier and Cabinet, and Treasury and Finance and a range of other government agencies, private sector organisations and not-for-profit organisations as well as those who are for profit. There has been an evaluation of the work undertaken, because obviously there has been a communication program associated with this campaign and an advertising program — both television and radio, digital advertising as well. There is also print advertising?

Mr LOWE — Yes.

Mr SCOTT — The sense of belonging in Victorian society had increased by over 20 per cent from the baseline. There was a significant improvement in the sense of belonging, which speaks to me of an optimistic undercurrent within our society — that when provided with positive messages that reinforce the values which have so strongly been shared not just by this government but, as I said earlier, by former governments support for diversity and multiculturalism, the people in the Victorian community respond very favourably.

I have a very optimistic view of the ability of Victorian society to resist some of the international trends away from diversity and to resist some of the negative trends that exist in other jurisdictions. It is not to say that we are without challenges — of course we are, like all other societies — but I think Victoria is well placed because we can draw upon a very strong tradition of support for multiculturalism, both within the political process but also in civil society. I have been encouraged significantly about the desire for civil society actors as well to engage with the *Victorian. And Proud of It* campaign and to be engaged with the programs that we are running as a government, because I think it reflects not just the longstanding political support but also the longstanding support across the society for multiculturalism in our community.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. I am very conscious of time. I know Mr Dimopoulos is very keen to get in some questions in the brief time we have got left for this session.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — Minister, language services is not one of those most exciting parts of the portfolio — you do not get too many ribbon-cutting opportunities out of them — but they are fundamentally probably the most profound facilitator of access to services for migrant communities. You said in your presentation there is a historic investment. Can I just get a bit of a nuance about what is not working as optimally as it could be and what this investment is going to actually do to improve services?

Mr SCOTT — Over a period of time there has been a series of reviews about language services in Victoria — I think seven reviews in the last 10 years — because there have been identified issues in relation to both the unmet need for interpreting services but also workforce sustainability issues. If I would be fair to previous responses to reviews, they have principally focused on responding to the unmet need, whereas this is a more comprehensive response that is looking at the sustainability of the workforce.

There are already existing initiatives which have been attempting to deal with the difficulties that exist in securing suitably qualified interpreters and translators for particularly newly arrived language groups but also in some of the more established communities, because the provision of interpreting and translation services, particularly interpreting services, is absolutely critical to ensure equality of access to important government services. There are particular issues that arise, particularly in the healthcare setting and also in the justice setting, where there is a critical need to ensure properly qualified interpreters. This is not just focused on improving the quantum of services that are available, so to speak —

Mr DIMOPOULOS — The workforce as well.

Mr SCOTT — but also the quality and the sustainability of the workforce. It has been identified that it is an ageing workforce, and there are difficulties in attracting — —

The CHAIR — Order! Mr Smith until 2.05 p.m.

Mr T. SMITH — Welcome, Minister. Following on from the Chair's question and further to the multicultural policy statement *Victorian. And Proud of It* campaign, can you provide a breakdown of the \$19 million allocated for this campaign over its three years?

Mr SCOTT — I can provide that information. I can go through in detail in fact. There is one matter I might seek clarification on, but for the multicultural summit, which is a leading the nation debate about emerging risks and challenges to maintaining a cohesive and successful multicultural society, the government is looking at hosting a multicultural summit. There is \$200 000 allocated for that particular item. There is a whole-of-government outcomes framework to establish culturally diverse outcomes within a focus on real outcomes for culturally diverse communities which were measured across government to improve services to multicultural communities, \$200 000.

As I previously outlined, there is the rights and responsibilities community engagement education program, which is \$2.3 million. There is regional and communities hubs, which is \$1.075 million. There is the digital engagement platform, which is \$1.8 million. There is the anti-racism action plan, which is \$1 million. There is the *Victorian. And Proud of It* campaign itself, which is \$4.45 million. There is the *Victorian. And Proud of It* museum exhibitions and community engagement for local community events, which will include presence in the immigration and ethnic museums, which is \$900 000. There is \$950 000 for the physical operation for three years and layout and the information associated with Vicky the Truck. There are other initiatives. I will probably provide some information on notice because I want to make sure it all adds up. I have some information here, but I want to ensure that we are correctly allocating all of the money. I have got information on me but not an exhaustive list, so I am happy to provide some further information.

Mr T. SMITH — We are very happy with that response, Minister. So going to this truck thing — —

Ms SHING — 'This truck thing'?

The CHAIR — Vicky the Truck.

Ms SHING — Very supportive tone there!

Mr SCOTT — I note your enthusiasm in the questioning there.

Mr T. SMITH — I mean, honestly, Minister, seriously, this is out of *Utopia* or something. Nine-hundred and fifty grand for Vicky the Truck — that is almost a million dollars. What on earth are you spending that money on?

Mr SCOTT — Okay. I am happy to provide some information about what the estimated reach of the truck will be. The truck is estimated to reach events with up to 1.5 million people in attendance, and the truck is

designed in fact to be a visual advertisement for diversity, so there is a visual element to it. It will welcome up to 75 000 people on board. The reach, because it is a mobile engagement — and there has been of course engagement around multicultural affairs on a number of occasions previously — we believe we will reach a very large number of Victorians.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — That is 66 cents a head, Minister — 1.5 million people, 66 cents. That is a very good deal, Minister. Well done.

Mr SCOTT — I would also — and I am happy to provide further information, but I detect another question incoming, so I will respond to perhaps the question — —

Mr T. SMITH — No, no, you keep going. I always enjoy your commentaries at these hearings, Minister.

Mr SCOTT — We expect the truck to spend on average at least 160 days on the road visiting 100 metropolitan and 60 regional sites a year. This is very much about bringing the message around diversity and the benefits of diversity. In fact I would note the Multicultural Victoria Act 2011, which includes the principles of multiculturalism and which was an act obviously under the former Liberal government — I have to say, I think, of former Minister Kotsiras, who was responsible for that act, that we might disagree on many things but his strong support for both the principles and the work in multiculturalism is something that I would acknowledge and respect as the current minister. One of those principles of multiculturalism, 3(b), is:

all individuals and institutions in Victoria —

so this is legislated —

should promote and preserve diversity within the context of shared laws, values, aspirations and responsibilities ...

So Vicky the Truck and the campaign work that has been undertaken fit squarely within the concepts of both the Victorian multicultural act but specifically the provisions which were enacted by the former government.

Mr T. SMITH — So what about the schedule of visits for Vicky? Can you provide that to the committee, please?

Mr SCOTT — There is some information I will provide. There is work going on currently, but my understanding is that the truck will be starting in metropolitan Melbourne — I can get Executive Director Lowe to provide some supplementary information — but then will be heading to regional areas subsequently. Do you want to provide some further information?

Mr LOWE — The broad schedule is to head to various parts of metropolitan Melbourne in the first instance, then we will target various areas of regional Victoria, and then I think the plan is to then come back to — —

Mr T. SMITH — If you could provide a list to the committee on notice, that would be greatly appreciated.

Mr LOWE — Yes, and the detailed schedule is still in development, I would say. We are just understanding all of the different — —

Mr SCOTT — We have certainly had a significant number of approaches of community organisations and schools, for example, who want to engage around diversity and multiculturalism and see this as a fabulous opportunity to do so.

Mr LOWE — And we expect it to be something that will evolve as well, that schedule, as we respond to different requests as well.

Ms STALEY — Thank you very much. Minister, I turn to BP3, page 299, which is the DPC output summary table. 'Multicultural affairs policy and programs' indicates the total budget allocation for multicultural affairs within DPC. Given that the VMC annual report 16–17 is yet to be tabled and there is no reference to the VMC in the 17–18 budget, could you indicate what the total budget allocated for the VMC in 16–17 and 17–18 is?

Mr SCOTT — There has obviously been a restructure in terms of how the VMC relates, and that has, I think, been discussed previously, but we can provide on notice some material in terms of the support. But it

would be important to note that the operations of the VMC, for example, extend to engagement in both the process determination of all the major grant programs and also includes a ratification of those grants, so there has been some restructuring. But both the independence and the importance of the VMC, in my view, have been enhanced.

Ms STALEY — Great, so we will get that on notice.

Mr SCOTT — We will provide some further information on notice.

Ms STALEY — And could we within that have the allocated funding for salaries and on costs, which is usually provided in the annual report but that has not been provided?

Mr SCOTT — There has been a restructure, so I am happy to provide some further information but this is a little bit apples and oranges. We will look at what information can reasonably be provided.

Ms STALEY — Thank you. How does the VMC strategic plan align with the strategic plan of the government in relation to multicultural affairs?

Mr SCOTT — The Victorian Multicultural Commission exists under the Victorian multicultural act and has a function to provide independent advice to the Victorian government. The Victorian Multicultural Commission and the commissioners are independent of government, so their strategic plan is something that they develop themselves and sits outside of my direct approval, for example. So in terms of its relationship, they develop their own strategic plan with administrative support but it is not something that I believe I have approved, for example. It sits within their independent role.

Ms STALEY — So having said that, it is within this area, though, so can we have that strategic plan made available to the committee?

Mr LOWE — I believe we can. I think it is a matter for the chair.

Mr SCOTT — I can make a request on behalf of the committee if that is your desire. But, as I said, the VMC is independent in their decision-making, so I can convey that request on behalf of the committee.

Ms STALEY — Thank you. How many staff are dedicated to the VMC in fulfilling its role as an independent statutory body as defined in the Multicultural Victoria Act 2011?

Mr SCOTT — I might refer that to Mr Lowe for some further information.

Mr LOWE — Sure. I am not in a position to provide specifics in terms of exact staff numbers just off the top of my head — —

Ms STALEY — You can take that on notice?

Mr LOWE — I am happy to take that on notice. If I can, I could potentially elaborate on the broader operation of the VMC and the bureaucracy's position to support the VMC just to provide some context.

Ms STALEY — I think I might just ask what role did the VMC play in the development of the new multicultural policy statement, which might go to what you are saying. What role did it play in that?

Mr LOWE — I guess the VMC, we would say, as it always has, has an advisory function in relation to the multicultural policy statement.

The CHAIR — Order! We might come back to that. Ms Patten until 2.09 p.m.

Ms PATTEN — Just turning to budget paper 3 page 309, and the funding for community projects in cultural precincts, I noted your press release announcing \$4.2 million to be spent on over 30 culturally diverse groups to support places where they celebrate. One of these projects included St Paul's Cathedral in Bendigo to be repaired and restored. I think we noted in your last portfolio that these organisations are relieved from a lot of taxation, and in fact I would say that the Anglican Church is a very wealthy organisation in Victoria. I was wondering how these projects are selected, and what selection process does the department go through?

Mr SCOTT — I am very happy to provide some further information. Could I make some introductory comments? I will try to keep it relatively brief if you have further questions beyond this question.

Ms PATTEN — I do, but I have got a second spot.

Mr SCOTT — Okay. So in terms of the grants assessment process, which in part goes to some of the issues that were raised previously, the administration of grants takes place from the multicultural affairs and social cohesion division of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. There is then an assessment process though comprising the Victorian Multicultural Commission commissioners, multicultural affairs and social cohesion division staff and independent experts or external representatives as required. It varies a bit from program to program exactly who is engaged in that last element. Then there is a process where the Victorian Multicultural Commission ratifies the decisions, and then those decisions come to me for review and approval. So I ultimately of course sign off on it, but it goes through a process of ratification, engaging the Victorian Multicultural Commission after an independent panel process to assess the applications.

I would say about the Anglican Church in Bendigo, that I particularly participated in some of the activities that have occurred in Bendigo around the Believe in Bendigo campaign. I think we may differ on some of our views on church and state in some areas, not in others, but they have been very forceful advocates and positive advocates for the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism.

Ms PATTEN — I appreciate that, and I have certainly been looking at their websites and things, so I do appreciate that. This is an asset restoration.

Mr SCOTT — And the usual practice is not to fund the religious activities though per se. It is more the community and cultural activities. I know it may seem an obscure sort of analysis, but it is important to say we are not generally funding the normal religious activities. It is really the social and cultural activities undertaken. Religious organisations can have a very important role in supporting multiculturalism.

Ms PATTEN — Minister, I support that statement entirely. However, this is actually about the restoration of the cathedral itself. If it was actually furthering some of what I think is the great multicultural work that the cathedral is doing, I think that is one thing. Maybe you could let me know what — —

Mr SCOTT — We can provide some further information on notice on that, but I would say as a comment — —

Ms PATTEN — I think you have explained the process very well for me. More would be great. Thank you.

Ms SHING — Thanks, Minister, for your opening remarks and presentation and for your unwavering commitment to making sure that multicultural affairs remains at the forefront of policy-making and of whole-of-government initiatives that go to improving the lives of people all over the state. One of the things that has come out very clearly in relation to culturally and linguistically diverse communities in response to and as part of the Royal Commission into Family Violence has been the challenges associated with accessing services, assistance and support in communities that are often a combination of geographically remote and very small. Therefore, often the access to services is difficult to do whilst privacy, dignity and safety are maintained. I note that there is provision for \$9 million over four years to build capacity in family violence services for culturally diverse communities. How will this in fact enable us to deliver on the recommendations of the commission and to make sure that we preserve cultural integrity at the same time as creating better access to services?

Mr SCOTT — Firstly, there is a \$9 million investment in the multicultural portfolio to build on capacity, special family violence service providers, providers of universal service and communities to respond to the needs of culturally diverse communities relation to family violence. I am sure — I hope — that has the support of all members of not just the committee but the Parliament. That includes continued support for the expanded specialist services of inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence from 2018–19, because there had been funding under previous budgets. The responses build upon work in the 2016–17 budget and respond to recommendations 11 — to go to the substance of the question — 182, 139 142, 163 and 165. It also includes — and this was certainly picked up in the royal commission's support for faith leaders and communities for review and improved practices in responding to family violence, including training packages — community grants to build community capacity with respect to gender equality, women's leadership, family violence prevention and service access, which will support targeted culturally and linguistically diverse youth initiatives.

And I would say as a general matter of principle — we talked about the multicultural policy statement — discrimination is never acceptable. Discrimination against women — it is not just racism we are discussing — but discrimination on the basis of gender is never acceptable. So there is not a carve out, there is not an acceptance by the government, nor should there be across society, that any person has a right to discriminate against others within the community. So we have a fundamental principle and approach in response to family violence that at the heart of family violence are attitudes of discrimination towards women. And we will be working in a multicultural context to ensure that our policies support a view — and grant programs and others, our work with communities — that discrimination against women or in fact against any other Victorian is never acceptable.

Ms SHING — In relation to the discrimination which migrant workers often face, there is also the migrant workers centre that you referred to, to prevent the exploitation that often occurs with underpayment and poor working conditions. How will this build upon safety and security in employment for these vulnerable workers?

Mr SCOTT — There is \$2 million over two years to support the migrant workers centre to be established in Melbourne and advocate for workers who are exploited in the workplace. There are a number of media reports, which I am sure members would be familiar with, about issues that have existed. I note the ABC, for example, had a story about the intimidation and shocking working conditions of international students — —

Ms SHING — I am happy to get the rest of this on notice, given that time is nearly out.

Mr SCOTT — I understand.

Ms STALEY — Thank you, Minister. Just one final question on the VMC: could you advise why the chair of the VMC is not here to answer questions?

Mr SCOTT — That was not the practice last year, so there has been the practice — —

Mr MORRIS — It is traditionally the practice, though.

Mr SCOTT — It has not been the practice for some time.

Ms STALEY — For one year.

Mr SCOTT — In fact Mr Lowe attended the last session, so there has not been a change in policy from my position in the previous year.

Mr MORRIS — Will we have the chair here next year?

Mr SCOTT — I will certainly give consideration to who the witnesses are, but this has been the practice.

Mr MORRIS — I think that you owe the committee the courtesy of at least having the chair here and available to answer questions.

Mr SCOTT — I will give consideration to the witnesses that appear here.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — On a point of order, Chair, just to make it clear, it is not a formal request by the committee; it is a request by a couple of members of the committee.

Mr SCOTT — No, I understand that.

Mr MORRIS — It has been standard practice, which has apparently been set aside.

Mr SCOTT — Well, there has not been a change at this hearing from the previous hearing, so — —

Mr MORRIS — You do wonder why the chair has been excluded from the hearings.

Ms SHING — The minister said that he will look at it.

Mr SCOTT — I will give consideration to the request that has been made by members.

Mr MORRIS — I will remember that next year. Thank you.

Ms SHING — There is no conspiracy here.

Ms STALEY — Thank you. Just also finally on the multicultural policy statement we have been discussing, can you provide a list of faith communities that were consulted and what dates consultation with these faith communities occurred?

Mr LOWE — We did conduct a number of consultations and would be happy to provide those.

Ms STALEY — Great. So you will take that on notice?

Mr LOWE — Yes.

Mr SCOTT — Yes. There were a number of consultations with different faith communities.

Ms STALEY — Great. Thank you very much.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, can I just come back to the performance measures and what is reported, BP3, page 309, under the ‘Multicultural affairs policy and programs’ output, noting that the budget papers no longer contain information on the total number of grants which are approved under the multicultural affairs policy and programs as a performance measure. I understand it was dropped last year, I think — —

Mr SCOTT — Yes.

Mr MORRIS — Obviously the regional-rural split is still there, which is 20 per cent. Can you indicate to the committee, perhaps on notice, the total number of grants approved, depending on category, including those which make up the remaining 80 per cent; who is responsible for the grant allocation, whether it is the VFMC as well as OMAC — or is there some other decision-maker; the dates the applications open; and the dates the announcements are anticipated?

Mr SCOTT — I am happy to provide some information. In fact I went through the process that exists in terms of the grant application process. I think that is important to clarify, because within the assumptions underpinning the question there was an assumption that it is an and/or, but in fact I know the renamed multicultural affairs and social cohesion division provides administrative support in terms of the grant program. Then there is an assessment panel, which actually comprises the Victorian Multicultural Commission, staff from the multicultural affairs social cohesion division, independent experts and/or external representatives, and then there is a ratification process — —

Mr MORRIS — Can we have the proportions of those?

Mr SCOTT — I am just unpacking, because there are assumptions within the — —

Mr MORRIS — I am just wondering how that panel is populated.

Mr SCOTT — As I said, it is populated by the Victorian multicultural commissioners — —

Mr MORRIS — The proportions.

Mr SCOTT — It depends on the grant program.

Mr LOWE — I think it varies.

Mr SCOTT — It varies, but there is certainly commission representation, and then there is a ratification process. It is worth noting —

Mr MORRIS — Can we have that as part of the question on notice?

Mr SCOTT — and I would put on record that one of the people involved in that ratification process and who I think has participated in panels — Tsebin Tchen — in fact is a former Liberal senator. So one of the participants in the grant process, and who has anticipated in the panel process, is a former Liberal senator and a respected member of the community who, I would say, has worked diligently and effectively during his period as a multicultural commissioner in line with service to the Victorian community — —

Mr MORRIS — I would still be interested to get the detail of the composition of those panels if we could.

Mr LOWE — For example, we generally strive for at least two commissioners to be on those panels, subject to availability. Commissioners are obviously very busy.

Mr SCOTT — And then there is a ratification process where the commission, as I said, including appointments under the former government of people who traditionally have been associated with — —

Mr MORRIS — Can I just clarify that I am going to get that detail?

Mr SCOTT — I will provide some further information to you, but — —

Mr MORRIS — Will you provide the breakup of each panel so we can get an idea of who is making the decisions?

Mr SCOTT — No, I think implicit in the question there is a misunderstanding of the process. The panels then provide recommendations — —

Mr MORRIS — No, I am seeking the detail of the process — who does it? That is what I am seeking. I do not want a narrative—

Mr SCOTT — I am just providing — —

Mr MORRIS — I want the details.

The CHAIR — Order! Ms Patten until 2.22 p.m.

Ms PATTEN — Thank you, Minister. Again in budget paper 3, page 309, I noted on your website that there is a Multicultural Business Ministerial Council — —

Mr SCOTT — That actually sits under Minister Dalidakis.

Ms PATTEN — Does it? Okay.

Mr SCOTT — But I am happy to provide information, because Mr Lowe can provide some information.

Ms PATTEN — It is on the multicultural commission's website.

Mr SCOTT — I am happy to take the question and provide some information that is helpful.

Ms PATTEN — What I am interested in is has it met, because the last report was 2014–15, and then it had only met twice. It seemed like a good idea, because it was to leverage our multicultural connections to increase international exports. It was also to look at increasing cultural diversity, especially at senior levels.

Mr SCOTT — While that principally relates to the activities in Minister Dalidakis's area, we also have established work led by the deputy chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the chamber of commerce — the various chambers of commerce. Within Victoria there is a range of chambers of commerce that relate to multicultural communities. That body has been established and has had its inaugural meeting. So additional to the group you are describing, within the areas of my own responsibility — and I attended the inaugural meeting — there are chambers of commerce. There is a range of chambers of commerce. There is a Victorian Greek chamber of commerce, for example; there is a whole series of them.

Ms PATTEN — Yes, this seems like it was different from that.

Mr SCOTT — So within my own areas of my responsibility, that has been established, and it has had its inaugural meeting, which I attended. That was organised particularly, I would say, by Mr Ross Alatsas and also with the cooperation of Helen Kapalos, the chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission. Matt, can you provide any further information on that?

Mr LOWE — I do not have — —

Ms PATTEN — So how does that differentiate, I guess, from the business ministerial council, because it is certainly — —

Mr SCOTT — One reports to Minister Dalidakis — —

Ms PATTEN — On the website it is under your ministry.

Mr SCOTT — And I accept that that is how it is presented, so I am just trying to be as useful as possible in responding.

Ms PATTEN — Yes, thank you, Minister.

Mr SCOTT — So the business council responds in relation to the responsibilities particularly, as I understand it, around small business and trade as well, I think, that Minister Dalidakis has. While it has some similar goals, the work that I have been involved in has been about encouraging the chambers of commerce to come together for similar purposes but that has not been an official advisory body that has been established by the Victorian Multicultural Commission and particularly led by Mr Ross Alatsas.

Ms PATTEN — Are you aware whether this ministerial council actually still exists? There is no reporting on it.

Mr SCOTT — We can follow up on that.

Mr LOWE — We can follow up on that and provide you with further information on that. More generally, I guess that is an area of government that we work really closely with.

Ms PATTEN — Yes, well, it is on your website.

Mr LOWE — One of the reasons is with the international engagement side. Having such a significant diaspora in Victoria gives us opportunities to leverage that diaspora, build on those cross-cultural connections, connections from family and those sorts of things.

Ms PATTEN — That is right. This looked quite good, but it only said it met twice in 14–15 and there was no further information on your website. Now it might be that there is other — —

Mr LOWE — Yes, it is a really good question, and we will follow up on that.

Ms PATTEN — Thank you.

The CHAIR — I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance: the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Honourable Robin Scott, MP: Mr Lowe, Mr Akyol and Mr Burns. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing. I believe Ms Pennicuik, who is ill today, has supplied the secretariat with some questions. The response, answering the questions in full, should be provided in writing within 10 working days of the committee's request.

I am conscious this is our last hearing. I do want to thank my fellow members for their fortitude and their stamina and their cheerful disposition over the course of the last three weeks. To the secretariat, for their help and assistance in terms of making these hearings become a reality and supporting the members, I would like to thank you all — Caroline, Mel, Alejandro, Bill, Amber and Leah — as well as the attendants for their assistance.

Mr DIMOPOULOS — The Hansard reporters.

The CHAIR — And the Hansard reporters as well. Deputy Chair?

Mr MORRIS — Thanks, Chair. Can I just say first of all that I am not sure that actually doing these hearings once the Assembly has passed the budget is in the best traditions of the Westminster system. Hopefully at least the members of the Legislative Council will find that the debates in here and the questions in here inform to some extent their considerations in the coming week.

That aside, can I also acknowledge the work of all of our colleagues on the committee. We had a couple of points where we thought we might not all get through in one piece, but we got there. I do want to also acknowledge Danny O'Brien of course, who started with us but unfortunately did not make the distance. I hope he is about and perhaps less interested in Australia's accounting standards when he returns.

Ms SHING — He will be faring better than we are at this stage, Mr Morris.

Mr MORRIS — Can I also acknowledge particularly the Hansard reporters. I know we can sometimes make it rather difficult, but when you look at what comes out at the end of the day, I think it is very much an accurate reflection of what happens.

Also the secretariat — it is Caroline's first season of estimates in that chair, so congratulations on that. Of course you named the staff, Chair. All conducted the hearings, and the considerable logistical exercise this is I know for the secretariat, with their usual efficiency. Of course we know that in terms of the estimates the process for the secretariat is not complete — the real work has really just begun.

Also can I acknowledge the parliamentary staff. There are a lot more people going in and out. Obviously this room is in operation, and Patrick does a great job keeping it lined up for us. All in all, this is a very big exercise, so can I thank everyone who has had a part in contributing to what I think is still, despite the timing, a very valuable exercise and part of our state budget tradition.

Mr SCOTT — With the indulgence of the committee, as the last minister can I just thank the committee for what is an important part of our democratic process, and the committee staff.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. As they say in the classics: you do not have to go home, but you cannot stay here.

Committee adjourned.