

PAEC Inquiry into the 2026-27 Budget Estimates

Environment portfolio

Questions taken on notice

Tuesday 19 May 2026

Question 1: (page 2)

Richard RIORDAN: Thank you, Chair. Minister, you have mentioned quite a bit there about the Great Ocean Road, and of course that is entirely in my electorate and something we are very proud of down our way. A couple of quick questions, please. In budget paper 4, page 50, there is 'Supporting nature-based tourism and the environment along the Great Ocean Road', \$2.3 million of which \$1.5 million is supposed to have been spent by the end of this financial year and \$768,000 for next year. What is that bucket of money for?

Enver ERDOGAN: In relation to those specific investments I might hand over to the CEO of Parks Victoria, Lee Miezis.

Lee MIEZIS: I will have to take that one on notice, given the transition arrangements currently in place between Parks Victoria and GORCAPA, the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, at this time.

Response:

'Supporting nature-based tourism and the environment along the Great Ocean Road' is a 2025-26 State Budget initiative. The \$2.3 million in asset funding is allocated to complete the fit out of the new Twelve Apostles Visitor Centre.

Question 2: (page 3)

Richard RIORDAN: With the transition from Parks Victoria of all those various sites to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, last year they needed an end of financial year top-up. Are you expecting to have to provide a letter of comfort and/or a top-up to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks?

Enver ERDOGAN: In terms of a letter of comfort, yes, I will be providing a letter of comfort for the organisation.

Richard RIORDAN: Can you tell the committee how far short of balancing the books they are?

Enver ERDOGAN: I will be providing a letter of comfort. I was briefed on this matter, as you would appreciate, in the four weeks in the role. But in the longer term I feel that there are opportunities to make sure that there is greater sustainability there, as you would appreciate, with our announcement under the previous minister to have visitor entry fees to the Twelve Apostles visitor centre, the \$126 million investment.

Richard RIORDAN: So you are expecting the visitor fees to the Twelve Apostles to help prop up the GORCAPA budget?

Enver ERDOGAN: I think a lot of the plan is to make sure that it is sustainable into the long term. So yes, a lot of those visitor fees will be –

Richard RIORDAN: So are you able to tell us what the shortfall is this year?

Enver ERDOGAN: In terms of the budget figure for this year, Ms Jackson, our Deputy Secretary, might have more.

Carolyn JACKSON: We would need to take that on notice. The minister is correct. GORCAPA does have a letter of comfort for this financial year.

Response:

In 2025, the Victorian Government issued a letter of comfort to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (GORCAPA).

This year there will be costs associated with the unforeseen flood and fire impacts on GORCAPA's estate and lower revenue from caravan parks due to the impact of these events. While a shortfall is expected this year, the exact figure will not be known until the accounts are settled at the end of June and audited by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office. This financial information will be available in GORCAPA's Annual Report which will be publicly available later this year.

Question 3: (page 4)

Richard RIORDAN: Final question: when does RDV hand over the \$130 million visitor centre to Parks, and will that fall under you, Minister, responsible for –

Enver ERDOGAN: In terms of –

Richard RIORDAN: The visitor centre that is being built at the Twelve Apostles.

Enver ERDOGAN: Yes. We are obviously still working on the opening.

Lee MIEZIS: Yes. Sorry, Minister – that will go to GORCAPA when construction is completed. Obviously the project is being led by Development Victoria at this point.

Richard RIORDAN: When do you expect the handover?

Lee MIEZIS: I think it is in the second half of this year. I would have to confirm, though.

Richard RIORDAN: Could we have that on notice too, please?

Enver ERDOGAN: Yes. The second half of this year.

Response:

Regional Development Victoria (RDV) is delivering the Twelve Apostles Visitor Centre which is on track for completion later this year, ready for the 2026-27 peak summer season.

A date for the handover from RDV to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority is contingent upon the completion of construction, fit-out and final commissioning. Although the project is on track there are still a number of things that could impact this, including weather.

Question 4: (page 6)

Carolyn JACKSON: I am happy to talk about the performance measure. I think the first thing to point out is that that particular performance measure and the others also do not pick up the full suite of works that the department undertakes. The performance measure is in relation to priority locations. It does not pick up all of the works that we do. The priority locations are determined by the department using a strategic management prospectus tool. That looks at thousands of biodiversity values, and it looks at, I guess, how to make the biggest impact, to put it simply. That looks at it from a threatened species perspective as well. So it will not necessarily pick up the full suite of actions.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. Have you got a quantified breakdown of the reduction in herbivore pest control activity, including the number of hectares not treated due to bushfire impacts and the number of hectares not treated due to other factors, including funding levels, workforce, contractor capacity constraints et cetera?

Carolyn JACKSON: I can confirm that there has not been a funding impact, but I can take on notice to see whether we have got a breakdown in terms of fire or contractor availability.

Response:

Estimates for pest herbivore control for 2025-26 are based on information available at the time regarding on-ground delivery, including likely impact of emergency events including bushfires, where the event itself may directly impact a project, or Agency resources may be diverted to emergency management. Both DEECA and Parks Victoria participate in emergency management response effort.

There are some 25 projects delivering on-ground herbivore control across Victoria, many of which are led by DEECA and Parks Victoria. Of these, four projects have reported that on-ground delivery is likely to be impacted by the January 2026 bushfires. These four projects alone planned to deliver approximately 350,000 hectares of control, some of which is likely to be delayed into 2026-27.

Further information is not available at this time regarding the breakdown of fire or contractor availability across projects.

Actual results will be verified once all spatial activity data is submitted and analysed in Q2 of 2026-27.

There has not been a reduction in funding for on-ground herbivore control. In October 2025, it was announced that \$44 million was being allocated to over 50 on-ground projects, including projects undertaking herbivore control.

Question 5: (page 10)

John PESUTTO: Thank you. In relation to another issue, the state government applied for and was awarded \$3.3 million from the federal government in November 2022 under the federal government's coastal and estuarine risk mitigation program. The state government finally released their plan, which included this funding, on Christmas Eve last year. Minister, can I ask, either for you or your officials: what has been the hold-up with releasing these funds, and where have these funds been sitting for three years?

Enver ERDOGAN: In relation to those resources, Mr Pesutto, I might have to ask my department officials.

Carolyn JACKSON: I will need to take that specific question on notice.

Response:

DEECA was awarded \$3.3 million under the Federal Government's Coastal and Estuarine Risk Mitigation grants program to deliver actions under the Cape to Cape Resilience Plan (the Plan) to address the regional issue of coastal erosion and other hazards.

These funds are delivering actions under the Plan which provides strategic adaptation pathways to manage the coast between Cape Paterson and Cape Liptrap, including Inverloch Surf Beach, from now to 2100. The delivery of the on-ground works at Inverloch are a key initial action in the Plan, and in 2023 the development of reports and detailed design commenced to enable this significant project to proceed. These on-ground works are now in construction phase and due for completion in July 2026.

Question 6: (page 10, 11)

John PESUTTO: Thank you for that. Further to that, when coming back to the committee, in relation, Minister, to this question, which I do not expect you to answer now given what the Deputy Secretary said: is it true that the government has said previously that 'the works were a priority and needed to begin as soon as possible, with a two-year completion window'. If you would come back addressing that question, that would be appreciated.

Enver ERDOGAN: Sure. We will take that on notice.

Response:

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action has undertaken priority works at Inverloch including repairs and extension to the geotextile seawall protecting the Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club and progressing adaptation actions to address erosion and maintain significant values. These works have been funded by the Victorian Government.

Question 7: (page 11, 12)

Jade BENHAM: Okay. What about Flinders Pier, in the last 30 seconds we have got? There is no specific capital funding identified for Flinders Pier, so what funding source is the government going to rely on to complete that project?

Lee MIEZIS: It is important to note that there is 347 metres of pier at Flinders that was constructed in 2011.

Jade BENHAM: Can you take that on notice?

The CHAIR: I am mindful of time.

Enver ERDOGAN: It might be a matter for the Minister for Ports and Freight.

Jade BENHAM: Is it?

Enver ERDOGAN: It might be.

Jade BENHAM: I thought it was Parks Vic?

The CHAIR: Ms Benham, we are out of time. We are going to Mr Tak.

Jade BENHAM: All right. Thank you.

Response:

The management of Flinders Pier is not an Environment portfolio matter and any questions on Flinders Pier should be directed to the Minister for Ports and Freight.

Question 8: (page 13, 14)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Well, I was going to come to this, because I understand from the annual report there are 80 FTE positions being consolidated through Parks Victoria. Is that correct?

Lee MIEZIS: No, that is not correct. What I can tell you is we have, with a new board, a new strategy really focused on getting back to basics as an organisation – good land management, good conservation program delivery. Core to that has been really strengthening our front line. We have managed to do that within our existing budget by, in effect, reducing executive positions and removing management layers and as a result have been able to invest significantly in growing our front line. So since June last year we have put an additional 90 rangers across the state. In the most recent recruitment, which was for 65 rangers, in fact we had 1700 applications. So it is really pleasing to see that people want to come and work at Parks Victoria and deliver really good outcomes to enable people to get out and enjoy our outdoors and protect the things that really make these areas so special. So –

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Can I query the roles that are not continuing? You said there were some executive positions. Could you provide us a list of the positions that will not be continuing at Parks Victoria?

Lee MIEZIS: I would have to take that one on notice.

Response:

Parks Victoria is focussed on getting back to basics – delivering good land management and conservation outcomes, and building stronger partnerships with volunteers, park users and the community across Victoria.

To support this focus, a new operating model was put in place in late 2025. This new operating model involved structural and role changes across the organisation that have resulted in (relative to 30 June 2025 baseline):

- Stronger placed-based delivery capacity
- An increase in the total number of positions
- An increase in ongoing positions, with a focus on core land, conservation and asset management
- More Rangers and Senior Rangers on the ground
- Fewer executive roles, a flatter structure and improved spans of control, meaning clearer accountabilities and faster decisions by empowered teams
- Increased community information, engagement and education capacity in the regions
- Greater integration of land management, conservation and commercial functions, as well as decentralised delivery of asset and infrastructure projects by regional teams
- A streamlined delivery model for conservation ensuring more funds go to on-ground action and less to administration

- An elevated focus on partnerships with Traditional Owners.

These changes were achieved within Parks Victoria's current operating budget.

The final staffing numbers will be published in Parks Victoria's 2025-26 Annual Report which will be tabled in Parliament later in the year.