

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2025–26 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Thursday 12 June 2025

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Colin Brooks MP, Minister for Creative Industries; and

Matt Carrick, Secretary,

Claire Febey, Chief Executive, Creative Victoria, and

Max Coffman, Deputy Chief Executive, Creative Victoria, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2025–26 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard, and it is broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The broadcast includes automated captioning. Members and witnesses should be aware that all microphones are live during the hearings, and anything you say may be picked up and captioned, even if you say it quietly.

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream and other committee members.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome the Minister for Creative Industries, the Honourable Colin Brooks, as well as officials from DJSIR. Minister, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Your time starts now.

Visual presentation.

Colin BROOKS: Thank you, Chair. I will try to get through this in 5 minutes. Firstly, I want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we are meeting on today, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation, and pay my respects to elders past and present. Not only is Victoria the cultural capital of the country, the creative industries are at the forefront of innovation and industry development, as evidenced by the international success of the Victorian digital games businesses. That is why the Victorian government is committed to supporting our thriving creative industries and ensuring they continue to benefit Victoria into the future. Before I move on to the next slide, I just want to also acknowledge that with me today is the Secretary of DJSIR Matt Carrick – I think you have had him with the committee a number of times this week – and Claire Febey, the CEO of Creative Victoria. I thank them both for attending.

Our achievements: Victoria's arts and cultural institutions continue to report very strong attendances, welcoming over 11.2 million people in the 2023–24 year. Of interest, we have recorded more than 570,000 visitors to the incredible Yayoi Kusama exhibition at the NGV. That makes it the most visited ticketed art exhibition in our country's history, so a fantastic effort from the team at the NGV and the generosity of the Yayoi Kusama team as well. Interestingly, at that exhibition more than 24 per cent of attendees were from outside Victoria, so that is great also for jobs and economic development here in Victoria. These are people from interstate and overseas coming to that exhibition and spending their money when they are here in Victoria. We have had more than 2.65 million visitors in that same financial year to the State Library of Victoria, one of the great public libraries of the world. In fact it is the third-most visited public library in the world. And we have had an attendance of nearly 1.1 million people across 1120 performances at Arts Centre Melbourne, which includes of course the wonderful Sidney Myer Music Bowl. Since July 2024 the Victorian Gig Fund has

supported 144 Victorian music venues to stage almost 3000 gigs by paid local artists. The Live Music Festivals Fund has also supported 22 festivals, with almost two-thirds of those festivals held in regional Victoria.

The third slide: in February the landmark Victorian First Peoples Art and Design Fair showcase exhibition opened at the 2025 Melbourne Art Fair. This was a fantastic showcase of 37 First Peoples artists alongside four arts centres and really was an opportunity for those people coming to Melbourne to visit that incredible art fair, which is held every year, to experience an incredible art fair by our First Peoples, and hopefully that grows in the future into its own standalone art fair. More than \$3 million of creative sector investment has funded Victorian First Nations artists and companies this financial year. Our government has invested \$3.6 million in the GameChanger Academy, developing in-demand skills in visual effects and game development.

In our screen industry strategy, VicScreen continues to secure Victoria's reputation as a global destination for screen and games production, creating over 40,000 jobs and generating some \$1.7 billion of direct economic expenditure in Victoria. The creative industries are big business for Victoria, contributing \$41.4 billion to the economy and employing more than 327,000 Victorians, which accounts for just over 8 per cent of the total workforce. Film, television and digital games projects backed by the Victorian government generated some \$331 million for the state economy and generated 6970 local jobs in the 2023–24 year. We continue to advance the Melbourne arts precinct transformation, an incredible project. It is Australia's biggest cultural infrastructure project, which is also creating 11,000 new jobs during construction.

In terms of budget initiatives, the 2025–26 state budget delivers \$552 million, predominantly over four years, to back our creative industries. It includes \$475.3 million to support our state-owned creative agencies, enabling them to continue delivering world-class programs, services and opportunities for Victorians; \$17.1 million to support Victorian creative organisations, invest in First Peoples creative events and initiatives, deliver the Melbourne International Games Week and back touring and creative activity in regional and outer suburban communities – which is a really important aspect of the portfolio for me, to make sure that people in all parts of Victoria have access to our wonderful creative industries; \$50.2 million to further develop our screen industry, delivering more economic and employment benefits for Victorians; and, importantly again for me, it was good to see \$9.6 million funded in the budget to protect and conserve our beautiful Royal Exhibition Building, which is of course a UNESCO World Heritage-listed icon.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are going to go to the Deputy Chair, Mr McGowan.

Nick McGOWAN: I have dressed especially for this minister. Minister, the Melbourne arts precinct transformation cost has blown out somewhat, I think you and I would agree, by I think it was \$160 million, to \$1.57 billion. I think it was originally \$1.41 billion, but I could be corrected on that. The Auditor-General did a little case study in February, I noticed. There were a lot of amber lights, a bit of a sea of amber really, and I think they referred to no significant scope, time, cost or benefit changes to what had been publicly reported. Can you give us an update or explain what is going on there? Because it seems to be a bit of a black hole for money at the moment.

Colin BROOKS: I thank Mr McGowan for the question, Chair. I beg to differ in terms of his description of this project. I will come to the financials in a second in answering that question, but can I just say that the project itself is an incredible project that I think will change the way Victorians think about the arts and creative industries. The arts precinct is already a wonderful part of Melbourne's identity and Victorians' identity, just sitting off the edge of the CBD, but I do not think that most Victorians think about that precinct in the same way they think about the sports precinct – the fantastic MCG, the tennis centre, AAMI Park and so on, just on the edge of the city. People will often come to Victoria for concerts or sporting events and comment on how incredible it is to have a global city and be able to stay in world-class hotels, attend great restaurants and then just be able to –

Nick McGOWAN: Minister, I am loving the sales pitch, but it is clashing with my jumper. Could you just please try and explain for the public what they are getting for their \$1.57 billion?

Colin BROOKS: Yes. What they will get, Mr McGowan, is a refurbished State Theatre, an incredible icon for the Victorian arts sector. That will be opened next year.

Claire FEBEY: Yes, 2026–27.

Colin BROOKS: 2026–27.

Nick McGOWAN: 2026 or 27? Because they are two separate years.

Claire FEBEY: Financial year, my apologies.

Nick McGOWAN: Do we have a date or a month, like next August?

Claire FEBEY: The stated date is 2027.

Nick McGOWAN: August 2026?

Claire FEBEY: It is early 2027.

Nick McGOWAN: After the next state election.

Colin BROOKS: On top of the State Theatre, Mr McGowan, there is the development of the new NGVC, The Fox: NGV Contemporary gallery, an incredible new contemporary gallery for Melbourne – it sits just behind the existing NGV International – and a public realm that links those creative institutions together, called Laak Boordap, the Indigenous name that was gifted from the Wurundjeri people. It is a public realm, effectively a public garden, that will link that. So this will be a great drawcard.

Nick McGOWAN: Talking of gifts, the philanthropic targets – are we on scale or schedule to meet those? Because there is some concern I know that that may not be the case. Can you update us on how much you have received thus far?

Colin BROOKS: There has been an incredible level of generosity for this project from Melbourne's philanthropic community. The targets that the project has set for philanthropy have been exceeded, and just in terms of the figures that Mr McGowan was looking for, the overall mapped Melbourne arts precinct transformation commitment totals some \$1.705 billion. It includes \$1.574 billion in capital and \$133.2 million in output funding. There were some different allocations over a couple of different budgets, just so that the member is not confusing different allocations that have been made. The 2021–22 state budget committed \$1.409 billion, and the 2022–23 state budget committed a further \$162.2 million to that project.

Jade BENHAM: Minister, do we have any funding streams through creative industries for community infrastructure? I have got three theatre groups in Mildura that do not have a home and are sick of travelling around to different packing sheds and whatnot. What can we do about that?

Colin BROOKS: Yes. So this is a good question. One of the things that we are keen to do in the run-up to the next Creative State strategy – I am sure you are aware that we are in the process of developing our next big statewide creative strategy, so under legislation we have to create one; this is the third iteration we are developing, and it will be out later this year. I am not sure if members of this committee have made submissions to that process. It has been a wideranging consultation process. One of the things –

Jade BENHAM: I have not. I was going to say, it must be –

Nick McGOWAN: I made my key submission; I hope you take it up.

Colin BROOKS: Oh, good. One of the things that has come through really clearly is people want access, as I said before, both in terms of outer suburbs and regions. The other thing that came through in the consultation was access for young people, so creative industries and arts programs for young people in particular, so our policy direction will be focused towards that cohort. We run a number of grants programs at the moment. Creative projects is a grant program that we run that is very close to being announced at the moment for –

Jade BENHAM: An announcement to give the theatre groups in Mildura a home?

Nick McGOWAN: You could do that now; we welcome it now.

Colin BROOKS: community-based arts organisations and artists.

Jade BENHAM: Great.

Nick McGOWAN: \$2 million or \$3 million, Minister?

Colin BROOKS: The total pool?

Nick McGOWAN: For Mildura.

Jade BENHAM: For Mildura, yes.

Colin BROOKS: I could not possibly say at this point in time.

Jade BENHAM: I could build it for \$2 million, no problem.

Nick McGOWAN: Two would be fine.

Colin BROOKS: But I can talk further to some of the programs we are funding. Creative Projects, for example, as I mentioned, has supported things like the 3CR community radio initiative and a range of programs that they run with multicultural communities; BAM Arts Inc, a short film initiative for students with disabilities; and Black Hole Theatre was also funded and runs work with Karen communities in regional areas.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you, Minister. Talking of investigations, IBAC investigated Museums Victoria over allegations of corruption, alleging that:

... it appointed staff who had personal connections with senior executives.

Have you had an opportunity to investigate this as minister, and what are your findings?

Colin BROOKS: Yes. So I saw those reports in the media roughly a month ago or so, a short time ago, and asked the Secretary of the department to look into the matter and report back to me. I might ask the Secretary to add to that.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you.

Matt CARRICK: Thanks for the question, Mr McGowan. Obviously we take matters of governance really, really seriously in terms of the agencies that we have. So I have spoken to the CEO of Museums Victoria and written to her about it. We are awaiting a response. I can say that the CEO takes these matters really seriously. I think one of the important things to note about all of this is that the Ombudsman indeed investigated these claims and was satisfied that the museum had undertaken appropriate actions to address the concerns raised. As I say, I am awaiting a more formal response back so I can satisfy myself that the appropriate steps have been taken in relation to the matters that have been raised.

Nick McGOWAN: Have any people been removed as a consequence, because obviously IBAC have a very different threshold in terms of your own internal thresholds?

Matt CARRICK: I cannot directly answer that question as yet, Mr McGowan, but what I can say is that if you look at, in a sense, what you might call the cascade of seriousness, you have what was originally a referral to IBAC that was then referred on to the Ombudsman's office. The Ombudsman's office have then undertaken their work on this, and they have got to a position where they are satisfied with the conclusions and the response from Museums Victoria. That said, I am keen to ascertain from a department point of view that we are satisfied with the actions that have been –

Nick McGOWAN: Their response. So when will the public know what has occurred? What is the deadline for that?

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr McGowan. We are going to go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Minister and officials. I would like to draw your attention to page 62 of BP3. We can see there funding for First Peoples creative events and initiatives. Minister, can you please explain how this is building on the work of government around empowerment of First Peoples cultural organisations?

Colin BROOKS: Yes. Thank you very much for that question. As you will have seen in the budget for 2025–26, \$17.1 million has been allocated for Creative State initiatives, including dedicated funding for First Peoples programs. It will be used to deliver First Peoples creative initiatives and, importantly, delivered under the leadership of the First Peoples Directions Circle. Creative Victoria has a group of First Peoples who provide guidance and make decisions around allocation of funding for First Peoples initiatives – a fantastic group of people. Of course for tens of thousands of years art, culture and creativity have been at the heart of First Peoples of Victoria – we recognise that and we value it. It is a rich, diverse creative practice. Cultural knowledge continues to thrive; it is resilient, and it has survived to this day. Embedding Aboriginal self-determination into our work in the creative industries has been long-term policy work, and I acknowledge the work of previous ministers and the work of Creative Victoria in this respect. It has meant putting First Peoples at the forefront of decision-making and forging strong partnerships with First Peoples communities. The funding in this budget will be important in terms of the development of the Creative State strategy. It was important in the development of the Creative State strategy for 2016–2020 and a First Peoples action plan. The First Peoples Direction Circle leads on all First Peoples actions, strategic initiatives, policy development and delivery to ensure a thriving First Peoples creative industry now and into the future. Putting First Peoples knowledge, practice, protocols and cultural authority at the heart of their creative industries and forging stronger and enduring partnerships with First Peoples creative communities continues – I can assure you, Ms Kathage – to be a guiding principle for me and the team at Creative Victoria.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. These First Peoples organisations, can you tell us a bit about them and how we are supporting them?

Colin BROOKS: Yes. Thank you. We have seen, as I said, the hard work of the First Peoples Directions Circle. They have delivered significant success for First Peoples artists and organisations across the state. Some of the examples that you have asked about – the Birrarangga Film Festival returned this year. I was really pleased to be able to get there for the opening part of that festival. It screened over 150 films in just six days, sharing stories and artistry of First Peoples and filmmaker professionals from Victoria but also from across the country and around the world. There is the Blak & Bright literary festival – a biennial First Peoples led literary festival celebrating First Peoples writers and storytelling. There were panels, workshops, performances and book launches. It also included professional and business development events for First Peoples writers and storytellers to help in a professional development sense as well. The First Peoples creative industry statewide forum of First Peoples artists, leaders and creative entrepreneurs from across regional Victoria was designed to influence policy, strengthen cultural networks and drive investment and self-determined creative futures. There is input into First Peoples' Assembly's expert panel on the arts, providing cultural leadership and guidance to embed arts and creativity within treaty processes, ensuring First Peoples creatives shape arts governance and sector reform. The Yoorrook Justice Commission maintain ongoing communication with the First Peoples Directions Circle and offer support in the commission's principles of justice, healing and accountability.

I mentioned before in relation to the question on the Melbourne arts precinct transformation Laak Boorndap, the garden that links those incredible institutions in the arts precinct, which is a place of ceremony, rest and cultural storytelling – again, the name gifted from the Wurundjeri people. There is the Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter statue, which is now a permanent feature in the Atherton Gardens not far from here. The cultural competency framework is designed to lead, encourage and inspire culturally grounded change and influence across the Victorian creative industries. Our First Peoples led outcomes logic model details a range of self-determined initiatives, priorities and outcomes as decided by the First Peoples Directions Circle. In addition, you have seen First Peoples led creative organisations that we have supported over a long period of time through the creative enterprises program, which is the broader program of multiyear funding. That funds groups like ILBIJERRI; the Koorie Heritage Trust; Baluk Arts; Kaiela Arts up in Shepparton; the Torch, which does amazing work; and many others.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. And I think that Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter statue must be one of the best statues in Melbourne, easily. I think it makes statues modern. It is really important history that we remember. This funding is not a new thing. This support is not a new thing. I think the government's overarching self-determination focus is a really strong foundation. But then how is this Creative State strategy drawing on that focus of the government around self-determination?

Colin BROOKS: It is a good question. As I mentioned, the first Creative State strategy included an action to develop a First Peoples action plan. The establishment of the First Peoples Directions Circle following a

statewide expression of interest process back in 2019 led to the inaugural First Peoples Directions Circle. It appointed a panel of peers comprising 11 First Peoples members formed to grow and promote First Peoples arts, culture and creativity in Victoria. The First Peoples Directions Circle embeds Aboriginal self-determination and community voice in the development and delivery of Creative Victoria programs and initiatives. The First Peoples Directions Circle leads on all First Peoples actions, policy development and delivery to ensure thriving First Peoples creative industries now and into the future, and importantly, provides advice on sometimes day-to-day issues where we need advice from the First Peoples' perspective as well. First Peoples' knowledge, practice, protocols and cultural authority need to be at the heart of creative industries here in Victoria, and we are forging much stronger links through the work of the First Peoples Directions Circle.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. Now, Minister, I do not know if you are a gamer, but I did see on page 62 of BP3 funding there for Melbourne International Games Week. What is the significance of that?

Colin BROOKS: Well, I have to admit until I became Minister for Creative Industries I had no idea how big international games week was here in Melbourne and how big the industry is here in Victoria and the value to Victoria and the opportunity there is to grow this industry for the benefit of all Victorians. One of the first things I would say is we have the largest video games workforce in the country, so just an incredible natural advantage we have here in Victoria. Last October more than 126,000 people attended more than 60 events across nine days in October at Melbourne International Games Week – so massive. It includes support for PAX Australia, which some of you may know. I am not sure if anyone here goes to these events, but it is a massive three-day gaming culture convention held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. It involves tabletop, arcade and video gaming, and tabletop games is probably the last time I was really into gaming, when I was a teenager at the local pizza place putting coins into a machine.

PAX Australia is the only PAX held outside of the Americas and it is the largest gaming convention in the Southern Hemisphere, so it is serious business. While that is great for visitation and tourism, games week obviously does much more to support our industry as well, and our initiatives in that period such as the games education symposium encourage collaboration between government, business, the gaming businesses and the education sector so that we can support the skills that people need to work in that sector.

Play Now Melbourne is Australia's first games market, where Australian developers can showcase their work to international publishers and platforms and effectively seek investment in their product. They held over 165 meetings in a single day. The Games Connect Asia Pacific – GCAP – is Asia Pacific's leading games developer conference, and it is a key networking and professional development event for the Victorian games industry. It is in its 19th year, produced by the industry peak body IGEA, which is the Interactive Games & Entertainment Association, and it attracts stakeholders to Melbourne, drawing industry, interstate and international visitation. I am pleased to inform the committee that planning for this year's event is well underway, and I would encourage members to get to one of those gaming events if they get the chance.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister. I know Zoe in my electorate, a constituent who is involved in video game production, will I am sure be keenly interested. As a paid-up Gubbins subscriber I probably should get across it a bit more. There are some great games coming out of Melbourne. So how is the Victorian government then supporting our local digital games sector? I know we have had an ACMI exhibition, which I do not think is under your portfolio, but what other ways are we supporting what is a significant sector in our economy?

Colin BROOKS: The government has been a long-term investor in digital games, backing developers and people who want to work in the sector to push boundaries and create some of Australia's most exciting and well-known games. Our suite of games programs supports projects, business and talent to grow their capability and their capacity, to effectively build globally competitive businesses and ultimately secure investment for their product to grow their business here and create jobs.

Over the life of our VicScreen strategy here in Victoria, which was announced back in May 2021, the value of games expenditure leveraged by the Victorian government has increased by 1000 per cent compared to the baseline in 2018–19. As an example, in 2024–25 VicScreen invested \$3.6 million in digital games projects, which generated \$13.6 million in Victorian production spend and 229 project jobs for Victorians or 194 full-time equivalent – so a great investment, \$3.6 million for \$13.6 million and 194 full-time jobs; supported six

projects, which received mentoring and professional development support through Originate Games; and supported eight company placements and two internships.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Apologies, Ms Kathage. We are going to go to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Good afternoon. On budget paper 3, pages 61 and 62, just looking at the Creative State initiatives and the creative industries access, development and innovation funding items, can I ask: is any of that money for the creative enterprises program? And just as a follow on, do you expect the total amount available for the creative enterprises program to be the same as it was over the previous four-year cycles?

Colin BROOKS: Yes. Without finding the budget paper reference, I can indicate that the funding for creative enterprises predominately comes through base appropriation. We are currently working through the process for creative enterprises, which will run through the end of this year, when we will make determinations. So that is I suppose yet to come in terms of a process where organisations apply for multiyear funding.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I am just trying to get expectations from you, though, Minister. For that program, for organisations that are successful, should they expect that the funding they receive will be an increase on what they received previously?

Colin BROOKS: I do not want to get locked into organisations assuming they will get more or less funding. We are yet to determine the process for that rollout of creative enterprises later in the year. Obviously lots of organisations do great work, and I hope that they continue to be funded, but we just need to see exactly how many organisations apply, and they are judged on their merits.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Totally. Just to follow on, can I get a confirmation of the timeline that we are working with here – just the whole picture?

Colin BROOKS: I know it is the next few months.

Claire FEBEY: At this point we are expecting to open for applications in July, with decisions made by the end of the year.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I am just going to go through a few different initiatives, and if you can just give me a sense of whether they are lapsing or still receiving funding in this budget, that would be great. The Victorian Music Development Office and Music Market – are they continuing under this budget?

Colin BROOKS: Yes. In terms of the Victorian Music Development Office, the way it was funded in the budget papers shows a reduction in funding, but that will continue to be funded.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: How about the Always Live program?

Colin BROOKS: It does not sit with this portfolio.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: It does not; okay. Just following on, how about the Music Works program?

Colin BROOKS: We have allocated significant funds to a range of music programs. The new 10,000 Gigs live music fund, which you would be aware of, which I think was a \$7.5 million allocation over four years – we have funded 144 gigs there. There is the Live Music Festivals Fund. We have stood up a music industry advisory council and are rolling out \$2 million for SongMakers in schools. So there are a whole range of music initiatives, and we need to consider Music Works in the totality of that package.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: But for this budget is Music Works itself still in there or has it lapsed?

Colin BROOKS: What I should say is there is a round of Music Works, which will be announced shortly, and for the rest of that music package that I am talking about we will have to make some decisions around what that broader music package looks like later in the year.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I appreciate that. And Music Works specifically, does that continue over the estimates or is that yet to be determined?

Colin BROOKS: Yet to be determined.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Can I get a sense as to why?

Colin BROOKS: As I said, it is around the large investment we are making in a range of music programs and us making decisions around the best way to support music, particularly contemporary and live music. We have seen significant investment rolling out, and it will continue to roll out into live music performances, giving venues support to host gigs but also therefore creating opportunities for musicians and performers to create audience and to get experience performing in a live sense.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We are coming back to Ms Benham for the next 5 minutes.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Minister. Budget paper 3, page 149, shows that funding for portfolio agencies is dropping by \$97.5 million, or 17 per cent, compared to the revised figure for last year. What has been cut?

Colin BROOKS: I am just trying to look at the budget paper reference.

Jade BENHAM: Budget paper 3, page 149.

Colin BROOKS: There is actually more base funding for our creative agencies this year. We recognised that coming out of COVID agencies were operating in a complex environment. Some of them were operating above their budget, so we have set their base budgets this year at a slightly higher level to provide adequate funding for them to do their job. I think you will find –

Jade BENHAM: But the revised figure for 2024–25 is \$569 million.

Colin BROOKS: I will hand over to the Secretary.

Claire FEBEY: Thank you. I am happy to take the job of Secretary, thank you! Well, maybe not. I think that you are comparing the actual for this year versus the target for next year. Is that right?

Jade BENHAM: Yes, correct.

Claire FEBEY: It would be more accurate to compare the target for this year with the target for next, because the actual will include obviously things that come up throughout the course of a financial year, but also, where the agencies have positive and perhaps higher than expected revenue outcomes, that would also be captured in that figure.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. So what is exactly the reason then for the higher actual figure than the 2024–25 budget? The 2024–25 budget was \$410 million and the actuals are \$569 million.

Claire FEBEY: As I have just described, if there are allocations made throughout the financial year for operational reasons or purposes and then also because that figure captures own-earned revenue, and there were some really positive revenue outcomes that the minister has talked about in this financial year – for example, the exhibitions that were very successful would contribute to that total amount.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. Can we guarantee that there are no essential services or programs being cut – nothing being cut from the portfolios?

Colin BROOKS: Our agencies do a fantastic job. They will continue to do a fantastic job – sorry, I found the reference you were talking about – and as the CEO has just said, the base funding for the creative agencies is going from \$410 million to \$471 million, so there is an increase in their base funding. It is important as well, in terms of the increase in base funding, to understand that it gives them certainty over the forward years to understand what that funding level is so they can plan to run programs into the future.

Nick McGOWAN: Can we get a breakdown of the unanticipated additional revenue and/or other funding that you received that is causing that blip? Is that possible?

Claire FEBEY: Yes. Let me take it on notice and see what we can provide.

Nick McGOWAN: That would be great. Minister, what do you expect to come from the Silver review? Are there any consequences for your department? Have you been advised?

Colin BROOKS: I have not seen the Silver review yet. I understand that is going to the Premier at a later date. I do not know if the Secretary has got any further information on that.

Nick McGOWAN: Is there an expectation, Secretary, of a figure that the review is seeking in terms of – there are lots of words we use for these things – efficiency, target, goal, whatever?

Matt CARRICK: There is lots of speculation about what the Silver review might come back with, but my understanding is that the Silver review is anticipated to report back basically I think end of June, maybe into July – please do not hold me to a precise timeframe about when it is – and then government will consider what the recommendations are, and no doubt departments will understand further from there.

Jade BENHAM: You have not seen an interim report?

Matt CARRICK: No, I have not seen an interim report. If you have, Ms Benham, and you have it, please share it with me.

Jade BENHAM: No, no, I am trying to get a copy. I am just trying to find out who exactly has seen this report and who has not. It would be very handy if the –

Matt CARRICK: I think it is literally still being written as we speak.

Jade BENHAM: Right.

Nick McGOWAN: Can I just go back to the earlier question too that I asked about Museums Victoria. Have there been any staffing changes as a consequence of the investigations, plural?

Matt CARRICK: Not that I am aware of. As I say, I have spoken to the CEO in advance of writing to her, which I have done. She will come back to me with a formal response, and so then I will have more information at hand.

Nick McGOWAN: I was asking before I was cut off by the bell, unfortunately, but will there be a public report or public account then of what has actually occurred? So either everyone has been cleared – happy days – but let us know that, as opposed to not.

Matt CARRICK: It is a good question, Mr McGowan. Without actually seeing the information at hand, I am not in a position to say whether that is required. I do come back to the point that the Ombudsman's office have taken a look at this, and as you are aware, there are a number of options they have in terms of what they can do, but they basically did not get to a point of –

Nick McGOWAN: I am very conscious of the threshold for IBAC and the Ombudsman.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr McGowan. Going back to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I want to follow up on Ms Benham's questions around the creative agencies and that increase in funding that is spelled out on page 149 and then some information about the initiative on page 62. Can you explain how that increase in funding is setting them up for longer term success?

Colin BROOKS: Yes. As I was just saying, I think one of the key things is that the increase in base funding for our creative agencies gives those agencies the certainty around the base level of funding that is sufficient to meet their needs into the future, so this is really a good outcome in this budget. And of course when we talk about our agencies, we are talking about places like the State Library, like the national gallery, like Arts Centre Melbourne, like ACMI – what have I left; I always leave one off the list – great institutions. A really good example is the Geelong performing arts centre, a new facility that was built by this government – activated beautifully – a really important cultural institution in the Geelong area. Those agencies have brought a really

strong cultural ecosystem in Victoria, and it has led to a really thriving local sector worth about \$40 billion – so a really important economic impact as well, those agencies have.

I think the key thing is that government's investment – whether it be through base funding or particular projects – has been critical to see those agencies grow. We have invested significantly in those institutions that I have just talked about, and as I said, this budget sees the base funding to those organisations grow to \$430 million over the forward estimates to support them into the future and support their vital role. And as I said before in my early presentation, we have seen the attendances at those agencies grow from strength to strength – I think three years in a row over 10 million attendances, now at 11.2 million people – so an incredible, incredible performance.

Lauren KATHAGE: Are there some outcomes of that longer term support that you are able to talk us through, beyond attendance numbers?

Colin BROOKS: Yes. I mentioned in the presentation – I am not sure how many people on the committee got to see Yayoi Kusama's exhibition at the NGV, but it was an incredible exhibition. As I said, more than 570,000 people and literally being talked about in art circles around the world, the fact that the NGV held such an incredible exhibition – I stand to be corrected on this but the largest collection ever of Yayoi Kusama's work in the one place. As I said before, 24 per cent of the people who came to that exhibition were from outside of Victoria – so really good for the economy as well. If you were working in a restaurant or a bar in Melbourne, or a hotel, that visitation over the period of that exhibition played a really important role in generating economic activity.

There were more than 2.65 million visitors to the State Library in the previous financial year, as I mentioned, so that is another organisation that does a fantastic job – as I said before, the third most popular library in the world, most visited library – so a really great cultural institution there. And as I said before, for the third consecutive year we have had more than 10,000 people at our cultural institutions, so there is a real hunger for cultural work. The NGV has just kicked off their next exhibition *French Impressionism*, which I am sure will be another great success.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. I am looking forward to the Melbourne Arts Precinct transformation project. I would especially like to look at the garden. Is that strange? I think the garden will be fantastic. At page 177 in BP 4, for people playing at home – can you tell us a bit about how that is going to build up the ecosystem of creative agencies?

Colin BROOKS: Yes. There are a lot of different components to this project. It is a complex project, and I think that goes to the questions that Mr McGowan asked earlier on. There are complexities in this project, and I want to congratulate the team that are working on this – MAP Co, Creative Victoria, Development Victoria – because they are doing a great job of keeping downward pressure on cost escalations. It is a big project, and I think they are doing a great job. As I said, it is a \$1.7 billion overall investment. You are going to see a brand new contemporary gallery there, the like of which I do not think exists in Australia. I hope to be able to say with some confidence that it will eclipse the Sydney contemporary gallery. It will be magnificent. Laak Boorndap, the public realm, the garden, will be spectacular, linking that up, so it will be a great place for people to own, to be able to go with families and to visit the different cultural institutions but also to just dwell in the garden. There will be plenty of areas for seating and people to enjoy public art in that realm as well. There is a small test garden for Laak Boorndap down the end of Russell Street next to the NGV Australia. Where you go to the car park, there is a dead end before you get down to Federation Square. There is a little garden there that is a test garden. It is worth having a look at.

Lauren KATHAGE: Okay. Thanks for the tip.

Colin BROOKS: I do thank the Wurundjeri people for their involvement in the project, particularly the gifting of the name, which is great. It means 'heaven's beauty' in the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung language, gifted by Aunty Gail Smith.

The other part of the project, which I think is really important, might not be something that people notice when they return to the State Theatre, because it is being refurbished in its heritage condition. It is not going to be a completely new visual experience for people; it is all about providing modern facilities in a building that was built in around about 1980 or 1981 – proper air conditioning, emergency exits, better sound and, in particular,

better disabled access. I remember I went to the last performance of the Australian Ballet at the theatre before it closed for refurbishment and I looked up and there was someone in a wheelchair in one of the corners in the upper level, and I realised that at the lower level there were no spaces for people in wheelchairs. Obviously our understanding of access and inclusion has changed a lot even since 1980, so that will be a really great aspect of the project as well.

Lauren KATHAGE: Minister, it sounds like, with all of those things combined, it is a worthwhile investment and will end up being the cultural capital of the nation. There is a very clear reason why it is not by accident, so thank you, Minister, for your work.

Colin BROOKS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Kathage. Minister and officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee will take a short break before beginning its consideration of the industry and advanced manufacturing portfolio at 1:30 pm. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.