

ENVIRONMENT

Questions on Notice

Question 1, Transcript page 8 and 9

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. This being PAEC, we are going to go a little bit forensically into some of the transactions. There has been over \$1 million put through on government credit cards within the department. We have not got time to go through all the interesting transactions – just a couple I would like to ask you about and you can take on notice if necessary. We have, for instance, a period where there were 12 different payments to locksmiths in the quarter across 2024, each for a fairly small amount, but there were a number of them. Do you know what the purpose was of needing so many different locksmith appointments?

Steve DIMOPOULOS: I will throw to the Secretary. I would be disappointed if the Secretary had that level of knowledge, because he provides me with advice on very strategic and big issues. But can I just tell you one little example. We have hundreds of sites across Victoria where DEECA, Parks Victoria and FFMVic operate. I would be surprised if a lock or two did not need to be changed.

Richard WELCH: That is a lot of keys to lose.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: There are hundreds of sites across Victoria where the Chief Fire Officer's team does work, DEECA officers do work, Parks Victoria –

Richard WELCH: Can you provide that, on notice?

Steve DIMOPOULOS: What was your exact question?

Richard WELCH: What was the nature of the reason for 12 different locksmiths? Is it so –

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Sure. We will try and provide that information.

Response:

Parks Victoria corporate credit cards are issued to staff pursuant to the Standing Directions under the *Financial Management Act 1994*, which recognises that purchasing cards are an efficient procurement method and can lead to reduced administrative costs.

Like all Victorian Public Service organisations, Parks Victoria has very strict requirements for credit card use. Every credit card transaction is audited to ensure a receipt is provided and it was a verified business-related expense.

Parks Victoria operates across a 4-million-hectare estate, with more than 100 separate work centres, and many work vehicles and equipment. Rangers frequently travel between locations and have work-related travel costs like meals and accommodation. Work centres also incur costs for repairs and maintenance, which may include the services of a locksmith.

Transactions for locksmiths included access keys for work centres and depots at Apollo Bay, Mallacoota, Swan Hill and Yarrawonga, a replacement key for a vehicle fuel cap, the replacement of a faulty keysafe for a gunsafe and the replacement of broken locks in toilets located in parks across Victoria.

Question 2, Transcript page 9

Richard WELCH: *Another one that stood out is a purchase at Maria's Bridal Studio. Were you aware of that?*

Steve DIMOPOULOS: *No, but I am sure there is a sound reason for it.*

John BRADLEY: *Sorry, I cannot answer the question either. I would have to take it on notice to explain it.*

Response:

Parks Victoria corporate credit cards are issued to staff pursuant to the Standing Directions under the *Financial Management Act 1994*, which recognises that purchasing cards are an efficient procurement method and can lead to reduced administrative costs.

The Maria's Bridal Studios transaction on 8 February 2023 for \$25 was for repairs to leather strapping on a pair of chainsaw chaps for the Leongatha work centre

Question 3, Transcript page 9

Richard WELCH: *Thank you. There were also a number of payments at bars and restaurants. Out of many of them, there were three that were at golf clubs. One was for over \$1000 at Rosebud Country Club.*

Response:

The Rosebud Country Club transaction on 12 May 2023 for \$1,076.72 was to support a National Emergency Medal presentation. More than 40 regional staff received awards for their service fighting fires and keeping people safe. Some family members were also in attendance to recognise the significant contribution made by their loved ones.

Question 4, Transcript page 9 and 10

Richard WELCH: *I believe there was one also from the previous CEO at a place called – I will probably get this wrong – Kisakallio Saati, a \$233 purchase there. But this was at a time when we understood that the CEO was in Finland.*

Steve DIMOPOULOS: *Which CEO?*

Richard WELCH: *I am not sure.*

John BRADLEY: *I am just not sure which CEO you are referring to.*

Richard WELCH: *This was on 4 July 2024.*

Steve DIMOPOULOS: *Do you know the CEO of what organisation or –*

Richard WELCH: *I do not know who the previous one was, no.*

Steve DIMOPOULOS: *Where is that from, Mr Welch?*

Richard WELCH: *This is from the freedom of information –*

Steve DIMOPOULOS: *No, from what document, sorry?*

Richard WELCH: *From the freedom-of-information documents released of the credit card payments.*

Steve DIMOPOULOS: *Credit cards of –*

Richard WELCH: *Parks Victoria.*

Steve DIMOPOULOS: *Oh, Parks Victoria. Apologies. So sorry, I thought you were talking about DEECA. Right. Parks Victoria. Yes. I will have to come back to you on that.*

Response:

The Kisakalliosaati transaction on 4 July 2024 for \$233.25 was for accommodation for one night at the Hotel Omenatarha in Kisakallio, Finland. It was made by the then CEO to support their attendance at the World Protected Area Leaders Forum.

Question 5, Transcript page 10

Richard WELCH: Lastly, in this vein, there are also quite a number of transactions through PayPal. Some of those have vendor names but a number do not. How have you reconciled those transactions if there is no vendor reference?

Michael GALEA: Point of order.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Just for clarity: this is still Parks Victoria? Can I just –

Richard WELCH: Yes.

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Minister. Mr Galea has raised a point of order.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: So sorry.

Michael GALEA: Apologies for interrupting, Mr Welch, but is there a budget paper reference for this in relation to the estimates for the following financial year, which we are actually looking at in these hearings –

Richard WELCH: Yes, there is.

Michael GALEA: or is it an outcomes question? Is it an outcomes question or an estimates question?

Richard WELCH: Budget paper 3, page 112 – this is the financial outputs. There is a lack of detail in there. These are transactions that relate to those figures, so asking for a little bit of detail within them is appropriate.

The CHAIR: On the point of order, Mr Welch, please proceed.

Richard WELCH: Thank you.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Mr Welch, can I just –

Richard WELCH: No, I am okay.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: I appreciate it, but I just wanted to just clarify: for half of that conversation I thought you were talking about DEECA. Now that I know it is Parks Victoria, can I just say Parks Victoria has a board that reports to me, not DEECA. So I will take it up with the board of Parks Victoria.

Response:

Some merchants use PayPal as their preferred credit card payment system. While PayPal may appear on the credit card statement, every transaction is audited to ensure it is supported by a receipt that makes clear what was purchased and that it is a verified business-related expense. This is in accordance with Parks Victoria's very strict requirements for credit card use.

Question 6, Transcript page 12

Aiv PUGLIELLI: *Okay. Thank you. Now, I understand Landcare put in a budget proposal for \$12 million a year and that they actually need an increase in their core funding just to keep the current facilitator program alive. Can I ask: did DEECA recommend an increase in funding in its submission to Treasury, or did DEECA recommend more of a business-as-usual funding approach?*

Steve DIMOPOULOS: *Mr Puglielli, this is not unusual. DEECA briefs me on a bunch of different things every day and I can throw to them, but it is not unusual that there is an ask from anyone in civil society or outside of government and that ask is not met in its entirety. I mean, that is probably reasonable when you are putting a budget together. But what I am really proud of is that we have continued the Landcare coordinator funding for effectively three years, until 2028. Given these are all conversations that come within budget purview and the budget is a cabinet document, signed off by cabinet, if I can get you any information on that, I will, but it is probably covered by executive privilege.*

Response:

Budget bids are prepared for consideration by the Victorian Government Cabinet and as such information contained in these documents is subject to Cabinet-in-Confidence provisions.

Question 7, Transcript page 13

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I appreciate those comments. Just moving on to page 112 of the same budget paper, can we get a breakdown of Parks Victoria's total expected funding for this year as opposed to last year, including how much it is expected to get from the parks and reserves trust or any other grants?

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Just to clarify your question, the total expenses or revenue?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Expected funding revenue.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Sorry. So expected revenue for Parks Vic for 2024–25 compared to 2025–26?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Yes. From memory it has gone up. It is going up by about \$6 million, or it is a small increase, from memory.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: How much from the parks and reserves trust, if you can tell me?

Steve DIMOPOULOS: Right. Give me a second, Mr Puglielli, if that is okay. For 2024–25 Parks Victoria received \$94.9 million from the Parks and Reserves Trust. And you want to know how much it will receive in 2025–26?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, and the total expected funding if you can. But it can be on notice if that is required.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: I will come back to you on that. If I can just illuminate something quickly: Parks Victoria – some of the lumpy funding is because of infrastructure delivery. When they deliver and they pay out a milestone payment, then there is a – the tourism portfolio is one example. It will fund Parks Victoria X million to do a trail walk funded under the tourism portfolio. They will hold that money and they will pay it out in milestone payments. That might give you some clarity around some of the lumpiness in the budget. But I will give you the figures when I have them for 2025–26 from the Parks and Reserves Trust and overall revenue.

Response:

The total expected output funding for Parks Victoria for 2025-26 is \$187.3 million, as stated in State Budget Paper No. 3. Of this figure, \$90.2 million is earmarked to be sourced through the Parks and Reserves Trust Account.