

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2005–06

Melbourne — 9 June 2005

Members

Mr W. R. Baxter

Ms C. M. Campbell

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Chair: Ms C. M. Campbell

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Witnesses

Ms M. Thomson, Minister for Consumer Affairs;

Ms P. Armytage, secretary; and

Dr D. Cousins, executive director, Consumer Affairs Victoria , Department of Justice.

The CHAIR — I welcome Ms Penny Armytage, secretary, Department of Justice, and Dr David Cousins, executive director, Consumer Affairs Victoria, departmental officers, members of the public and media. For those who have just joined us, could you please turn your mobile phones off. Minister, you have the opportunity to give us your overhead presentation.

Ms THOMSON — Thank you very much. Unlike the other presentation, I am the new person for this one.

Overheads shown.

Ms THOMSON — I will just go briefly through some of these things which are really remnants of what I said when I was Minister for Consumer Affairs the last time. However, in all seriousness, there is still a real issue about providing and targeting a lot of what we do towards vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers. It is very important that not only do those people in our community have access to legal redress and our ensuring that we have the proper and appropriate legislative arms in place but that we have effective and efficient means to intervene with dispute resolution, compliance and enforcement and the way we target our information and education programs — it is crucially important that we meet the target audience at the right time with the right information and in a way they can easily take on board — as well as policy and legislation. An issue on which I think Victoria has always taken a proactive approach irrespective of who has been in government is playing a very active role in the national agenda and national policy settings, and of course customer-focused service delivery.

This slide shows the legislative framework. These are the major acts that underpin what we do in consumer affairs. I will spend a little bit of time on the budget. I will go through the differences between 2004 and 2005. There has been an increase of \$6.4 million in expected expenditure for the output. This is attributable to an increase in programs and services to be funded from the Victorian property fund of \$2.9 million. This relates to the implementation of reviews around bodies corporate, retirement villages and a larger grants program we have put in place. It also relates to the implementation of the trade measurement utility-related initiatives which commenced in 2004–05 of \$800 000, and the carryover of wage and related matters of \$2.6 million.

The next slide shows the difference between 2004 and 2005 in expected outcomes and the 2004 target. There is a drop in this figure of \$1.6 million which is attributable to the structural changes in the department. This saw a number of activities that were done in Consumer Affairs Victoria now being moved across to the Department of Justice. Then there is a carryover of \$500 000 for projects that are to be completed in 2005–06. The difference between 2003–04 actuals and the 2004–05 targets — I know that there was a bit of interest in that last year with Minister Lenders — there was a smaller amount taken up in grants and claims from that which was expected, which accounts for a deal of that. There was a carryover and increase in the base funding from salaries and public service-wide increases, and the newly funded initiatives in 2004–05, which I have already mentioned.

I noted the issues you wanted some figures on at the hearing last year, so we thought we would provide them for you up front. I might be wrong about what you wanted. The face-to-face target, inspection, compliance and enforcement activities, registration and licensing transactions are increasing. Telephone advice provided is down, and I will go into that. The face-to-face advice is also down, and I will talk to that as well. The written advice provided is up. In relation to that, on the face-to-face and the registrations, this is probably a good story. We are talking about greater use of online services, which means people are feeling there is less need to actually come in and see someone. They really are around the business licensing area and liquor licensing, so more of that licence renewal and business names is actually being done online. That is what we want to see happening. It is showing that the technology which has been put in place is actually working.

The CHAIR — Minister, before you move off that slide, you said face-to-face is down.

Ms THOMSON — That is the target for 2004–05.

The CHAIR — They are identical.

Ms THOMSON — The targets are the same. But the actual, what we are seeing coming in, is less. So we have set the same target. I guess what I am flagging is that we can anticipate that the actual figure will be — we would like the figure to actually demonstrate that it is coming down a bit, which would indicate that more and more is being done online.

The CHAIR — Okay, you have about 2½ minutes.

Ms ROMANES — Can I just ask where you pick up the online figure?

Ms THOMSON — The Web — —

Ms ROMANES — Web hits?

Ms THOMSON — Yes, you will get it through there. There were 600 000-odd Web hits.

Mr FORWOOD — Where is that?

Ms THOMSON — It will be in the annual report. That figure appears in the annual report.

Mr FORWOOD — If you are trying to do the measurements this way — —

The CHAIR — We are on output measures now?

Ms THOMSON — That really demonstrates for people that our liquor licensing — it shows the amount that is now being lodged online. It demonstrates the change in the way the regime is working. It is a great outcome.

Additional output costs: there is an intention to increase those in relation to inspections, compliance, monitoring and enforcement activities and for registration and licensing transactions to ensure that we develop and enhance the capability to pay online and to transact online, and in the areas of education and information products we must always look at what is going to be the information that hits the appropriate target. Can I say on enforcement and compliance, because I think we are trying to tackle this in a different way too — I will spend a little bit of time on it because we can cover it in questions as well — that there is a change to the mix a bit. The changes to the Fair Trading Act and the other things we have done have given us more opportunities to use different ways of tackling different issues out there — whether we use the actual dispute resolution processes in place or whether we use the civil, criminal or infringement notices — and to be more proactive out there. As you can see, we have 60 CAV inspectors who are able to be out there and inspecting in various areas. There is a greater regional focus in what we are doing to make sure that both the educative program and the compliance issues are being tackled. We are certainly ensuring that we do reach out across Victoria as well as within metropolitan Melbourne. As you can see there, the total number of premises visited is 9902.

I will not go through that; you can look at it on your terms. There are a few things here that I do want to just mention quickly. Liquor control reform enhanced enforcement is one of our achievements. There is the retirement villages legislation, which you, Chair, will be well and truly aware of since you started that process. It has now finally been enacted and passed through the Parliament. There is also the Fair Trading Act. Hopefully I will get an opportunity to talk about some of the things that have happened with the changes there.

Let us now look to the future and see the opportunities and priorities. In relation to unfair contract terms, changes have been made to the Fair Trading Act. It is important for us as part of the national agenda to ensure that we are actively working in that area in a number of industries. The credit review, which James Merlino is heading up on my behalf, is very important. It is the largest, most comprehensive review on credit that has been undertaken in this state. In relation to product safety, again, we are also pursuing a national agenda. In relation to the Commonwealth Games — anyway they are there and people can ask questions about them if they want to. I can tell you want to move on.

The CHAIR — Yes, we do. I want to go to trust funds. They were not covered in the overheads, but they have been an area of great interest to our committee. In the PAEC questionnaire we also asked about the use of the trust funds. Can you explain how they are used and in particular how the grants are administered?

Mr FORWOOD — And how much is in each one?

The CHAIR — And how much is in each one — that will be a supplementary from Mr Forwood, but if you want to add it you can cover it all in one, and we can move right along.

Ms THOMSON — In relation to the grants around the trust funds there are two areas: the Victorian Property Fund and the Consumer Credit Fund. They are by application. There has been an increase in the

oversighting of the actual submissions and a greater emphasis on accountability for those so the actual targets and the outcomes in relation to what is expected are being met for those grant projects. An example of a recent one in relation to the property fund, which I think is a good one, is around bodies corporate. We have now funded the REIV to conduct a number of sessions out in the community to make people aware of body corporate legislation and what it means to them. So there will be 12 free forums run over a three-month period, 5 within the CBD. So that really is looking at the larger developments and the issues around bodies corporate. The funding will be allocated over three tranches rather than in one lot to ensure that they are meeting their obligations. I know from the review that a number of the administrative requirements that the federal government utilise have been picked up and utilised in the assessment process. The Victorian Property Fund grants are vetted by the Estate Agents Council and by Consumer Affairs Victoria before they come to me for sign off and approval.

In the credit fund area, I think a fantastic example is the money that was given to the Brotherhood of St Laurence to research and evaluate an advanced personal loan program which it had been running to enable small loans to be paid out at a reasonable interest rate rather than people going to some of the more extreme areas where very high interest rates are being paid. Our major target group are the most vulnerable consumers, and one area, which I know James is going to take particular interest in and I personally have a great deal of interest in, is how we can look at ways in which people can get access to more reasonable rates when they need to go and get smaller loans rather than their going to the ones which play around the fringes and charge exorbitant rates. This will come out with some real learnings for us so we are able to look at what the opportunities may be.

The CHAIR — And the breakdown of the trust funds? I can see you have a significant list there, so rather than read them — —

Ms THOMSON — Do you want me to table that?

The CHAIR — It would be terrific if they were tabled.

Mr FORWOOD — Minister, I refer you to page 165 of budget paper 3, which is headed 'Protecting consumers', and in particular the total output cost of \$66.7 million. Your slide 10 talks about the additional outputs for \$6.4 million output cost increase. It says:

Increased funding facilitating higher targets for 2004-05 ...

I presume you mean 2005-06?

Ms THOMSON — Hasn't that been corrected? Yes, that is right.

Mr FORWOOD — If that is the case, perhaps you could tell the committee what are the sources of the \$66.7 million shown as the total output cost — that is, where does the money come from? Also, the bottom sentence says:

Some activity not counted in measures are growing —

and it includes programs. Perhaps you could tell us which programs are growing as well as part of the allocation of those funds?

Ms THOMSON — In relation to where the funds are actually coming from, from this year 55.9 per cent was from the trust funds.

Mr FORWOOD — Can you divide that between the various trust funds?

Ms THOMSON — Victorian Property Fund is 23.7 per cent; residential tenancies, 18.3 per cent; motor car traders, 5.1 per cent; domestic building, 6.5 per cent; prostitution, 1.4 per cent; and Consumer Credit Fund, 0.9 per cent.

Mr FORWOOD — And the other 45 per cent comes from appropriation or does it come from fees and charges or — —

Ms THOMSON — From appropriations, 44.1 per cent.

Mr FORWOOD — Okay. And 0.1 per cent comes from charges?

Ms THOMSON — When you round it, that is it.

Mr FORWOOD — So you do not charge anything for your services?

Ms THOMSON — Yes, but in relation to the actual fees associated, they are built into the appropriations money so it is considered in appropriations.

Mr FORWOOD — Section 29s?

The CHAIR — If the minister wants someone else to answer she can direct them to.

Ms THOMSON — I will ask the secretary of the department to answer.

Ms ARMYTAGE — They are built into the appropriations, so the fees that are generated will go into consolidated revenue and then they are allocated to the programs.

Ms THOMSON — They are allocated back out.

Mr FORWOOD — Of the 44.1 per cent that you classify as appropriations, perhaps you could divide that into funds that are earned from revenue and those that are actually appropriated out of the consolidated fund?

Ms THOMSON — Yes.

Ms ROMANES — Minister, the presentation you gave the committee mentioned the new legislation on retirement villages I am aware that this will see CAV's dispute resolution services expanding into a new area. Can you tell the committee more about how residents will benefit from this?

Ms THOMSON — Yes. I have actually been spending a little bit of time going around retirement villages, probably a little bit earlier than I was hoping actually. There are a number of real issues that arise in retirement villages that you hope could be resolved internally within the villages, and what we will be requiring under the new legislation is that in fact each retirement village has a proper dispute resolution mechanism internally that is identified and made available to the residents for them to be able to make use of and that there be reporting of those disputes, but not in a way which identifies the resident who has lodged the dispute.

In relation to consumer affairs, we want to have in place a mechanism which gives, when the dispute goes beyond the retirement village, an opportunity for Consumer Affairs Victoria to help facilitate and resolve, so from September there will be the capacity for those complaints to come to CAV and be dealt with through CAV and give them an avenue and a voice. I think that is very important. Ultimately, of course, there is the opportunity to go to VCAT with a dispute. I might add that when and if there appear to be practices occurring that would require CAV to think that it is only proper that CAV take that matter up and take whatever legal recourse it sees fit, then that would be done by CAV.

Mr CLARK — My question relates to domestic building complaints and disputes, which, of course, is a responsibility divided between yourselves and the Building Commission. Can you tell the committee what numbers of complaints are coming into your service and what numbers of those complaints are being resolved in various ways — for example, how many are being resolved at conciliation, how many are going to VCAT and how many are going to the Building Commission et cetera? Secondly, how well are the mechanisms working to take action against builders whose work appears to be so badly below standards that they ought to be struck off? Do you have mechanisms in place that will take that up with the Building Commission and pick up from adverse findings at VCAT about what particular builders have been doing?

Ms THOMSON — In relation to actions against the extremely shoddy builders, that is a matter for the Building Commission to take up. Certainly CAV, where it comes across one, would want and request that action be taken. On shoddy building, that work is done in combination between CAV using the Building Commission and access to expertise to actually go out and investigate property, so it is collaborative. There have been 99 investigations, 70 prosecutions, 102 proactive performance audits of registered domestic builders and 35 site audit inspections occurring during that same period.

The CHAIR — Thirty-five site audits and?

Ms THOMSON — And proactive performance audits, 102.

Mr CLARK — What period does that cover, how many complaints in total have there been and what has happened to the rest of them?

Ms THOMSON — I will put it in context. There were 92 000 domestic building permits issued in 2003-04. They are our latest stats which we are working from. Building Advice and Conciliation Victoria, which is housed in CAV but which has a joint Building Commission and consumer affairs responsibility, received 20 000 inquiries. There were 1630 written complaints, most of which I would have to say were resolved through dispute resolution services, and 77 technical reports were provided, which helped to assist in the resolution of those disputes. Can I also say that in that same year we distributed 300 000 free issues of publications alerting people to the things they need to look out for when they build or renovate, so we are being very proactive in that space.

The CHAIR — Minister, I want a supplementary on that. It relates to 72 prosecutions out of 92 000 permits, 1630 complaints and did you say 20 000 inquiries?

Ms THOMSON — Yes.

The CHAIR — That seems to me to be a very low number of prosecutions, given anecdotal experience and stories with builders. And you did say various things were referred to the Building Commission. Why are those figures so low?

Ms THOMSON — I am probably not in a position to give you an in-depth answer, except to say that where we are using alternative dispute resolution mechanisms they are appearing to work. The ability to use qualified experts to inspect properties and get undertakings for repairs is appearing to work, and that supports the — —

The CHAIR — Could you please move closer to the microphone?

Ms THOMSON — I will speak louder. The fact that we are able to use independent, expert advice to inspect — and give impartial advice — means that in the area of dispute resolution you are more likely to get an outcome, a commitment from people to accept the report's findings and therefore take the appropriate action.

In relation to prosecution generally, if David Cousins, the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria, has more he wishes to add I am happy for him to contribute, but we would hope — and I would want to see — that the dispute resolution mechanism is being used to its full extent and that the Building Commission is taking action on recalcitrant builders.

The CHAIR — Did you give us a figure on the Building Commission? I know it is not your portfolio.

Ms THOMSON — I do not think I have that figure with me.

The CHAIR — We might follow that up with the Building Commission.

Ms THOMSON — Yes, I think that would be appropriate.

Dr COUSINS — That figure is for the BACV service, so it would include prosecutions from the Building Commission as well as consumer affairs.

The additional point I would make is that prosecution is not the only method of enforcement, of course; and we do pursue a range of others. In relation to our total number of prosecutions, that is a very high figure. We are very active in building. We obviously cannot take every case to prosecution, so it is important that the cases we take have a demonstration effect. You will note from last year's annual report that at one stage we undertook a blitz on building where we had over 30 prosecutions in one hit. That was entirely to make the point to the building industry that practices needed to improve.

The CHAIR — It is instructive, is it not, that when there is a blitz there is that level of prosecution. That might be something our committee might take up later.

Ms THOMSON — On the issue of blitzes, which you will have seen from my presentation, we are actually increasing and doing more of in a number of areas. This really has a great impact, even just in an educative role — people who inadvertently might be doing the wrong thing being able to get them on the right path. But more importantly it sends a signal to the industry that we are out there. You do not know when your turn will come, but we are out there, so do the right thing and not the wrong thing.

Mr MERLINO — Further on the issue of dispute resolution, could we go into that in a bit more detail? Can you advise the committee what results have been achieved under CAV's model of dispute resolution, and also the targets going forward?

Ms THOMSON — I am happy to do that. I think this is an area that the Chair might also be a bit interested in because I know she has an interest in the way dispute resolution is used and the outcomes from that. One of the things we are now able to do better, through legislative changes and other means, is to get money back to consumers. It is one thing to take an action and get money that ends up in consolidated revenue; it is another to take action that gets the money back to the consumer.

In 2002–03 there were 12 480 complaints, but \$1.28 million was able to be returned to consumers. In the year to date, 2004–05, there have been 11 898 complaints, and already \$1.41 million has been returned to consumers. We anticipate that that will get up around \$1.8 million before we have concluded the financial year. We are getting significantly more money back to consumers and there is a greater emphasis now within consumer affairs to try and look at ways in which we can achieve those outcomes.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask you about the credit advisory service that the CAV provides, which I understand was brought in-house this year following the Scheffer review last year. Can you tell the committee what costs are associated with providing that service in-house — in terms of the set-up costs, the staffing costs and the general ongoing operating costs. Also, given that the service replaced the Credit Helpline which provided, effectively, a community legal service, what are the qualifications of the people within CAV who are providing the service now? Are they legal practitioners? What are they?

Ms THOMSON — Firstly, the Credit Helpline had a close association with the Consumer Credit Legal Service. We still have a Consumer Credit Legal Service in operation and that is functioning. We have put in place an appropriate training regime for those who answer the phones in respect of those first inquiries relating to credit, and qualified staff are being employed to undertake that complex work in and around credit. There are also existing staff with qualifications to do that task.

I will certainly take a very active interest in pursuing the outcomes that come from bringing this service in-house. Hopefully it will also provide us with some actual case studies and evidence of some of the practices that might be occurring out there that we might otherwise not be getting full knowledge of in relation to the way in which they are operating. So I hope there will be some learning experiences as well for us out of bringing it in-house, as well as the actual resolution of disputes for individuals and assistance being given in that regard. In relation to the actual costings, we would need to take that on notice and come back to you, but we are happy to provide them.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — On the issue of the transition, I understand the funding for the Credit Helpline ended in December last year, and you are obviously still training your people. Is there a gap in service provision as a consequence?

Ms THOMSON — No, there is enough to continue and what we have done is give additional funding to the Consumer Credit Legal Service to enable it to continue operating a phone service. Even though it will not be to the full extent of the Credit Helpline, there will be some funds to continue that process in the interim period. This will allow for people who would still be using the consumer Credit Helpline while people learn that they can go to consumer affairs during the transition. We have given some additional funding to the legal service to ensure we do not have a gap.

The CHAIR — In relation to the question that touched on qualifications, what are the qualifications you would expect of people who are staffing that service, and were any of those who were previously employed in the community agencies actually employed by consumer affairs?

Ms THOMSON — Yes. The answer to that is that we have taken on additional staff from the agencies into consumer affairs for exactly that reason — they are already experienced and trained in the task. And, of course,

for the managerial roles and for where there are legal issues, the appropriate qualifications and legal qualifications will be —

The CHAIR — Have you got a number of how many you have employed from the community agencies?

Ms THOMSON — I will take that on notice and we will provide that to you, but yes, we can give you that.

Ms GREEN — Minister, also on the ongoing implementation of the new service-delivery model, could you advise if this has led to better services in the regional pilot areas?

Ms THOMSON — Thank you for the question. This is a difficult one and I know it will have been one that ministers of consumer affairs have dealt with before. Prior to 1992 consumer affairs actually had offices out in the regions. They were closed down with the election of the Kennett government and community agencies were funded as an alternative way of providing the services.

I have to say in my experience, and no doubt in the Chair's experience, some agencies did do this better than others — there is no doubt about that. But I think what we are attempting to do with The Way Forward, the new model, is to get a blend, have the advocacy role being conducted by the community and community agencies, but having a face and a focus for consumer affairs out in the regions so that people know where to go and have access to it. We have some great examples of what we have been able to gain that we would not have gained if we were not there.

One of the first offices opened was the Wangaratta office. Out of the Wangaratta office, which I have been out and visited, I launched a paper that was developed on how the residential tenancies legislation affects rural and country areas. Being a Melbourne person, I do not think I had even tried to think about whether there was a difference in the way that works. We would never have had this discussion paper, we would never have gone out there and done this body of work if it had not been for the fact that the Wangaratta office was out there. They became alerted to the issues and decided maybe we should do something about this.

The review identified 20 specific issues that apply to rural tenancies. I will give you an example. For instance, while many rural rental properties rely on tanks, bores and wells to supply drinking water, the Residential Tenancies Act does not specifically mention those forms of water supply; therefore, who is responsible for the provision of the services? On the issue of pets, there were some really great stories about what rural farmers think about pets and dogs and the issue about the farmers' ability to protect their livestock, and somewhere along the line the issue of whether the rifle comes out and does the job — things that we would not even think to consider if we were a tenant on a rural property. But when you read it, it becomes so obvious that these are basic issues that need to be addressed.

There are issues now that we have become aware of just because we are out there, issues that we would never have been aware of otherwise. So from my point of view I believe that what we are doing will be a success. I will be certainly ensuring that we are doing everything we can to make them a success. I think it is important that we are back in the regions. It will help us with our policy direction and focus to ensure that as we do this, we are conscious that there may be things that we have not taken into account that affect country and regional Victorians. I think, too, it makes country Victorians feel that their government is there and able to assist them. That is an important message for them, too, that there is a service available that they can use and utilise; there is a public face and an ability to have some confidence in what consumer affairs can do.

Mr CLARK — To follow up on that, are you saying, Minister, that you believe the previous community-based agencies were not doing their job properly on issues such as those you have just described, or was it a problem with the previous arrangement that the department was not listening to the agencies when they were raising these rural-based issues that you have referred to?

Ms THOMSON — In some areas you will actively go out and consult, and you will get real feedback on an issue-by-issue basis. The notion though is, are you just listening to the odd one here and there and is that being fed back? In a lot of instances that might not be the case. I think there was a lot of dialogue between the community agencies and CAV, and there certainly continues to be a lot of dialogue. From my point of view it is very important that the relationship between the community agencies and CAV is strong. This is a collaborative effort, not a sole effort. But having people out there who can identify immediately a potential policy implication and then try to do

something with it is the benefit of having an office there with a person who may have had a policy background, not a practical background — and that is the difference, and it can be different from region to region. This way we will get a greater perspective from across country Victoria, and I think that is a good thing.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask you about the increased output group. You said in your slide that part of it is for new funding for consumer protection initiatives related to the Commonwealth Games. Can you outline, please, what those initiatives are, how much they are costing and whether they are included in the government's whole-of-games budget?

Ms THOMSON — We deliberately put this on the list for you, Gordon, because we knew you would be interested.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Thank you, Marsha.

Ms THOMSON — I do not know if we have a copy here, but you might be interested in getting a copy, Gordon. I will hand you a copy of the consumer protection strategy for the Commonwealth Games. I can give it to PAEC if it wants it, or any other individual PAEC members who might be interested. The reason this was done was because we want everyone to walk away from the Commonwealth Games with a good feeling. We all know that Sydney was a fantastic experience for anyone who went to Sydney, but we also know that when you have people coming in who do not know the legislative framework of a country or a state — in some instances they might not know the language, might not understand what is endorsed product and not endorsed product, and what that should cost and what it does not cost — they become vulnerable.

We do not want to see that occur during the Commonwealth Games, so what we have done is develop a strategy for how we will handle the Commonwealth Games that deals with education, in the first place, in the lead-up to the Commonwealth Games, around what are the appropriate practices and the legislative framework that they have to operate in, as well as inspections during the Commonwealth Games. These have been worked out with the varying agencies that we would also have to work with in that process, so M2006 has been involved, the Victoria Police is aware of the strategy, as have the retail associations — the various bodies that you would expect us to have consulted with and spoken to. We will give you a copy of that.

In relation to the funding of that, \$50 000 has been allocated for 2004–05 and \$210 000 for 2005–06. We can give you a breakdown of that, if you like, in relation to the funding.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Thank you. Is that included in the government's whole-of-games budget?

Ms THOMSON — I think the answer to that is, yes, as I understand it, it is.

Ms ROMANES — Minister, can you tell us a little more about whom you are targeting that information at?

Ms THOMSON — The framework is really geared around the government agencies that need to be involved in this and their awareness of it, but we are targeting anyone who is coming along as a spectator or to enjoy the Commonwealth Games, or just coming interstate for the atmosphere. There are special provisions there to ensure that we are looking after tourists as well as our own residents, so we are covering people coming in from interstate and overseas as well.

Ms ROMANES — So what you have is a framework document?

Ms THOMSON — Yes.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Minister. To you and to our other witnesses here this morning, to those in the departments who have prepared extensively for today, we place on record our appreciation. There are a couple of issues we will be following up with you on top of the matters that you have taken on notice, Minister.

Witnesses withdrew.