

PAEC Inquiry into the 2024-25 Financial and Performance Outcomes Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

Questions taken on notice

Wednesday, 26 November 2025

Question 1: (page 5) (Energy)

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. That \$15.7 million that was spent to – well, I am not really sure. Can you give me a breakdown of what that was spent on, please?

Elizabeth MOLYNEUX: I can give you a breakdown of the legs of that program that it was spent on. It was spent on the procurement approach, which is the auction design. It was spent on the –

Roma BRITNELL: In figures. Will you be able to provide the figures for me?

Elizabeth MOLYNEUX: I might have to take that on notice. I am sorry.

DEECA response:

\$10.5 million was allocated to establish Offshore Wind Energy Victoria's (OWEV's) resourcing and to procure professional services providing technical, legal, and commercial advice necessary for delivering the offshore wind program. The funding was required to ensure milestone delivery of Victoria's offshore wind program which includes auction and support package design, coordinating enabling infrastructure and creating an offshore wind regulatory framework.

\$5.2 million was allocated to establish OWEV's resourcing and professional services providing technical, legal and commercial advice to develop and deliver an alternative ports strategy. This strategy was a separate workstream investigating the feasibility of alternative deepwater ports operating as offshore wind construction and assembly ports prior to the Port of Hastings' successful EPBC Act referral decision.

Question 2: (pages 5 and 6) (Energy)

Roma BRITNELL: That is great. Thank you. In addition to offshore wind, there are other projects that the government has funded or otherwise supported to meet its renewable energy targets that have been delayed. What are the reasons for some of those delays?

Elizabeth MOLYNEUX: Could you give me an example of –

Roma BRITNELL: Yes. Examples are the delayed Derby solar farm, Kiamal, stage 2, Frasers solar farm and the Horsham solar farm. Can you explain why each of these has been delayed and by how long?

Elizabeth MOLYNEUX: I will not be able to give specifics on those specific farms that you have mentioned.

Roma BRITNELL: I am happy for you to take that on notice if you wish.

Elizabeth MOLYNEUX: I –

Roma BRITNELL: I think it is important for Victorians to understand whether we are going to meet these timelines. I am happy for you to provide that on notice if you would prefer.

Elizabeth MOLYNEUX: No, no. What I am unable to do is go into the specifics of each individual wind or solar farm's timeframes and the commercial decisions that they may or may not have met in coming to financial close. What I can certainly talk about is what is needed for renewable energy to enter the system, which are clear investment incentives, which are being currently supplied under the Commonwealth capacity investment scheme and will be supported by the NEM review, which is also on foot at the moment. Planning approvals have been a big one for renewable energy projects, and there has been significant movement in –

Roma BRITNELL: I am actually quite interested in these specific projects. You asked me, for example, so I did provide some. I would really be interested in what those delays are. I am sure you are able to explain this – probably the auctions.

Elizabeth MOLYNEUX: If I can just grab those names again. It was Kiamal?

Roma BRITNELL: Yes.

Elizabeth MOLYNEUX: And Derby.

Roma BRITNELL: Yes. And Frasers solar farm and any others that have been delayed.

Kate HOUGHTON: We can provide that detail if it is not commercial in confidence. We can provide an overview of key areas of delay. That is fine.

DEECA response:

Information related to the status of individual projects is commercial-in-confidence.

Question 3: (page 9) (AgVic)

Jade BENHAM: Thank you. Was the minister formally briefed before the downgrade occurred?

Beth JONES: The minister was briefed in relation to our progress on BP3 targets, and we routinely briefed the minister in terms of the resourcing needs and implications of different emergencies but not specifically on –

Jade BENHAM: So was she briefed in this case?

Beth JONES: I would need to check exactly how she was briefed in relation to that, in terms of the specifics of that particular measure.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. Great. So you will get back to us on that?

Beth JONES: I would need to get back to you on that.

DEECA response:

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's (DEECA) briefed the Hon. Ros Spence, Minister for Agriculture, regarding the Department Performance Statement (DPS) output performance measures for the 2025-26 Budget Papers through standard departmental briefing processes.

Question 4: (page 15) (RECAFP)

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Just rabbits, very quickly: how many rabbit control programs were undertaken by the department in the last financial year?

Carolyn JACKSON: I would need to take that question on notice. I do not have that information to hand.

DEECA response:

In 2024–25, DEECA invested more than \$2 million for more than 40 projects delivering targeted rabbit control initiatives across Victoria.

On public land, this investment is delivered through programs including the Protecting Biodiversity Program, Weeds and Pests on Public Land Program, Good Neighbour Program and the Roadside Weed and Pest Program.

Examples include the long-running Mallee Bounceback project — more than 15 years of sustained effort restoring threatened semi-arid woodlands in the Mallee, and the successful eradication of rabbits from the culturally significant Deen Maar Island.

Agriculture Victoria also supports community-led rabbit control through practical advice, training and coordination — helping landholders apply strategic, best-practice methods for long-term impact.

Agriculture Victoria is delivering the Partnerships Against Pests community grants program aimed at delivering place-based solutions for local groups to manage established pests. In 2024-25, 15 community projects were funded totalling a value of \$589,364.

In 2024-25, Agriculture Victoria initiated an integrated vertebrate pest management program targeting rabbits, foxes, feral pigs and feral goats, delivered through the appointment of two Vertebrate Pest Engagement Officers.

These Vertebrate Pest Engagement Officers have encouraged strategic cross-tenure management of pest animals, built the capacity of the Victorian community to better manage pest animals, connected researchers with on-ground practitioners for better research outcomes and developed greater understanding of pest distribution to enhance emergency animal disease preparedness.

As of 28 November 2025, the Engagement Officers have attended 61 meetings, participated in 40 workshops and 2 field days and engaged with 1,366 private and public land managers regarding management of established invasive animals, including rabbits.

In 2024-25, Agriculture Victoria provided funding of \$82,500 to the Victorian Rabbit Action Network to support their work, which includes providing mentoring, training and educational materials to help communities to deliver coordinated rabbit management.

This was in addition to funding of \$88,297 awarded via the Partnerships Against Pests grants program.

Question 5: (page 16) (BFS)

Jade BENHAM: So can we just have the comparative figures for what the level of funding was to the external plant panel contractors in 2024–25 and 2023–24 and the year previous?

Kelly CROSTHWAITE: Yes. I have to take those figures and take that on notice.

DEECA response:

The expenditure through the external plant panel contractors in 2023-24 was \$34,014,127.

The expenditure through the external plant panel contractors in 2024-25 was \$38,347,245.

Question 6: (pages 16 and 17) (BFS)

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you. Can you also provide actual work volumes and hours delivered in 2023–24 and 2024–25? By ‘actual work volumes’ I mean from the FCP contractors and the external plant panel contractors, so we can have a look at the volumes.

Kelly CROSTHWAITE: 2024–25 was the first year of the forest contractor program, so we cannot compare it to the year before, 2023–24.

Jade BENHAM: That is okay. We just want to have a look at the volumes of work that were being supplied before the program and now in the reporting period. That would be great.

Kate HOUGHTON: If we have that level of detail, we will provide it; absolutely. But if we do not, we just do not.

Jade BENHAM: Well, you know how much work is being done.

Kate HOUGHTON: But did you say hourly?

Jade BENHAM: No, no.

Kate HOUGHTON: Sorry.

Jade BENHAM: Just the work volumes. Hours delivered if you can, but just the work volumes.

Kate HOUGHTON: Work volumes – I just wanted to clarify that.

Jade BENHAM: You will take that on notice?

Kate HOUGHTON: Yes. Absolutely.

DEECA response:

The best available measure of volume of work for the external plant panel is expenditure. The total expenditure through the external plant contractor panel in 2024-25 was \$38,347,245.

The hours worked by the other component of the forest contractor program (the former VicForests contractors) for 2024-25 was 19,421 hours.

Question 7: (pages 19 and 20) (RECAFP – Parks Vic)

Jade BENHAM: So the supplementation was \$186 million. Okay. I am just going to, quickly in the last few minutes that I have left, talk about outdoor rec and the governance of climbing in public land. Can the department provide a full, itemised breakdown of the \$100,000 in public funds that was given to Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation pre June 2025 for further assessments, how that will be spent and explain what specific outcomes taxpayers can expect in return?

Kate HOUGHTON: Can you just clarify ‘further assessments’? What are you meaning there?

Jade BENHAM: Well, there was \$100,000 in public funds received by Barengi Gadjin Land Council for ‘further assessments’. That is what we are asking about, because they are the only words associated with that.

Mathew HILAKARI: You could assist the committee by pointing to the budget paper.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. ‘Service Delivery’, DEECA ‘Management of public land and forests’, page 109.

Kate HOUGHTON: We will check the specifics and take it on notice.

Jade BENHAM: Yes. And if we can have an itemised breakdown of that, that would be very handy.

Kate HOUGHTON: If we have that, we can provide that.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you very much. What was the source of the \$100,000 allocation? And what was the program, if it was a contingency appropriation, and which authority?

Kate HOUGHTON: Sure. We can provide that.

DEECA response:

Parks Victoria provided \$100,000 to the Barengi Gadjin Land Council to continue cultural heritage assessments and explore ways to improve access to climbing areas, especially for children and people with disabilities.

The funding was provided from Parks Victoria’s base appropriations within the 2024-25 Parks Victoria output.

Question 8: (page 24) (RECAFP)

Carolyn JACKSON: There was funding for alpine resorts, and that is a separate Treasurer's advance. That was in relation to those southern alpine resorts and the snow conditions that were experienced by those resorts, and that is a historical problem. In terms of the Great Ocean Road, there was as well funding supplementation provided to GORCAPA, the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority. That was for them to continue some of their operations and also the works that they have been doing in relation to assets and things like that along the Great Ocean Road.

Richard WELCH: How much went to each organisation?

Carolyn JACKSON: I will need to take that on notice for you.

DEECA response:

Funding supplementation of \$6.100 million in 2024-25 was provided to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority. Alpine Resorts Victoria received \$14.238 million.

Question 9: (page 25) (RECAFP)

Richard WELCH: Okay. That is fine. Thank you. Can you tell me, Secretary or Deputy, if the cost of running ARV is greater than the sum costs of running the standalone resorts?

Carolyn JACKSON: If I understand your question, it is whether the operation of ARV –

Richard WELCH: If the establishment of ARV has saved money.

Carolyn JACKSON: The creation and the reform of the alpine resorts and the creation of ARV were to generate efficiencies. Previously the resorts were run separately or independently, so you had, for example, separate corporate services and things like that. There have certainly been efficiencies that have been generated by ARV.

Richard WELCH: Is the total quantum now less?

Carolyn JACKSON: It would depend. I cannot give you a definitive answer because there will be a number of factors. For example, the snow season in a particular year may mean that the funding supplementation might be higher.

Richard WELCH: Yes. Controlling for that – have we –

Carolyn JACKSON: My understanding is that there have certainly been efficiencies that have been generated through the creation of Alpine Resorts Victoria, ARV, and there is a lot of really great work going on in relation to strategic planning, for example, by ARV.

Richard WELCH: Would we be able to get some document or some summary of costs before – separate costs – now combined, to break out the seasonal aspects?

Carolyn JACKSON: We could possibly. I am not sure we will be able to break out the seasonal aspects of it. We can see what we can provide. We can certainly review annual reports historically and do a comparison of total expenditure, total costs as separate entities versus now, and we can look to overlay the Treasurer's advance for those snow conditions that I have mentioned. We can certainly try and do that.

DEECA response:

It is difficult to compare Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV) against the former Alpine Resort Management Boards' (ARMBs) operations in the short period that the reform has been in effect (since 2022). Factors include:

- Initial establishment costs occurring in this period
- The periods are pre- and post-COVID-19
- Snow season conditions have varied significantly in recent years
- Differing report periods for ARV and ARMBs during the transition to ARV (i.e. ARMBs reported 9 months of 2022 in their annual reports, while ARV reported 15 months in its 2023 report)
- Difference in the scale of operations between former ARMBs and ARV
- Additional work undertaken by ARV which historically was undertaken by the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council (ARCC), not the ARMBs.

ARV has undertaken organisational-wide organisational efficiencies through the centralisation and standardisation of business practices, and workforce planning around a new amalgamated model.

ARV has also focused on commercialising and streamlining operations at Lake Mountain and Mt Baw Baw. This has reduced the deficit by increasing revenue opportunities, reducing costs and changing the workforce profile.

In addition, ARV has been able to reduce operating costs when compared to historic ARMB costs adjusted for CPI. When 2019 ARMB expenditure is considered – which was the last normal, full year of ARMB operations pre-COVID and amalgamation – and adjusted for CPI, expenditure has reduced.

Item	RMB Model				ARV Model		
	2019 Actuals	CPI Adjusted	2022 Actuals	CPI Adjusted	2024 Actuals	CPI Adjusted	2025 Budget
Total Expenditure	\$59,539,135	\$73,522,651	\$ 57,610,000	\$ 63,132,984	\$61,092,490	\$63,230,727	\$59,263,319

Question 10: (page 25) (RECAFP)

Carolyn JACKSON: Thank you. In terms of the container deposit scheme, it was touched on by the Secretary. It has obviously been incredibly successful since it commenced. There is a range of conversations that are happening across environment ministers, for example, and you can see the communiques of those meetings where they are looking at some aspects, and that includes looking at potential changes to the container deposit scheme.

Richard WELCH: Have you done modelling as to if you increase the return, what that would do on the numbers of containers returned?

Carolyn JACKSON: I will need to take that on notice about what we have done and what we are able to provide.

DEECA response:

Before Victoria's Container Deposit Scheme commenced, the Victorian Government undertook preliminary modelling as part of the May 2022 Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) for consultation. This modelling assessed the potential impact of setting the initial refund amount at either 10 cents or 20 cents.

The RIS projected that starting the scheme with a 20-cent refund would increase container return rates by around 10 percentage points compared to a 10-cent refund (from about 71.7% to 81.7% at maturity). At full scheme maturity in year 10, this higher refund was estimated to divert an additional 96 million containers from landfill each year, reducing landfill disposal from 740 million containers under a 10-cent refund to 644 million under a 20-cent refund.

These projections were informed by South Australia's experience, where the return rate increased from 69.9% to 80.1% after the refund amount doubled from 5 cents to 10 cents (excluding the transition year).

The 10-cent refund was implemented in Victoria to align with all other container deposit schemes across Australia. This nationally consistent approach helps reduce confusion, limit administrative burden for industry, and minimise the risk of interstate transference of containers.

Question 11: (page 26) (BFS)

Jade BENHAM: What has the cost been through 2024–25 to maintain the operation of those Unimogs and G-Wagens?

Chris HARDMAN: I do not actually have the total costs for those specific bits of plant and equipment at this stage, so we would have to take that on notice and come back to you, if that is okay.

DEECA response:

The expenditure on leasing, registration and tolls, insurance, repairs, maintenance and fuel for G-Wagens in 2024-25 was \$10.3 million.

The expenditure on registration and tolls, insurance, repairs, maintenance and fuel for Unimogs in 2024-25 was \$1.4 million.

Question 12: (page 26) (WCG)

Jade BENHAM: I am going to move on from that question because without being able to establish how many of those vehicles are currently online and how many are being borrowed from interstate – they are the figures that are actually important, and I keep getting ruled out of order. I will move on to Greater Western Water again, because we did not get to the end of that. Secretary, you said that you did not have the number of complaints received during the billing fiasco. Are you aware of how many privacy complaints were received?

Kate HOUGHTON: No, I am not, offhand. If we have that information, we can provide it. We did try to get the complaint number in the interim, and we do not have that, so no, but we can take it on notice. If we have that, we can provide it.

DEECA response:

Greater Western Water manage their complaints handling process and have not provided DEECA with the number of total complaints.

Data on complaints received by each water corporation is published by the Essential Services Commission in their annual performance reports.

Question 13: (page 28) (Energy – VicGrid)

Jade BENHAM: No, but depending on what kind of farmland it is, you are not going to be able to farm on those parts anyway.

Alistair PARKER: With careful planning you can maximise the area that can still be farmed. But when we looked at the state level, about 0.04 per cent of the state would be given over to that physical infrastructure, so the roads and the other things.

Jade BENHAM: The state or farmland in productive –

Alistair PARKER: That was at the state level. I think it was a higher number, which I will give you on notice.

Jade BENHAM: Well, renewable energy zones will take up 7.8 per cent, so 0.4 per cent – I would love some numbers on how much farmland is going to be taken out, particularly for those transmission line projects and the renewable projects –

Alistair PARKER: Yes. We can provide that on notice.

DEECA response:

The area covered by proposed renewable energy zones in the 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan is approximately 1.8 million hectares, which equates to 7.9% of Victorian land.

The proposed zones cover about 12.7% of the total area of agricultural land in Victoria.

However, not all of that land is required to host physical infrastructure. Using figures consistent with studies on renewable energy land impacts in Australia and overseas, only about 0.04% of Victoria's total land area is required for physical infrastructure based on the forecast future demand for electricity.

After undertaking a strategic land-use assessment and considering feedback from landholders and peak agriculture bodies, VicGrid has tried to position zones in areas where the typical farming activity is most suited to co-existing with renewable projects (noting that every farm operates under its own unique set of conditions).

Wherever possible, VicGrid has attempted to avoid areas with a high concentration of dairy farming, irrigated farming and other farming types that are deemed less compatible with renewable energy projects.

VicGrid estimates the land required to host the physical infrastructure needed for major transmission projects in development, and projects outlined in the Victorian Transmission Plan, to be at levels consistent with the calculation of land required by typical onshore wind energy projects.

VicGrid acknowledges there are impacts on landholders and is looking to design projects to minimise those impacts wherever possible. Victorian law requires that landholders are fully compensated for any impacts from transmission lines on the value of their land and their farming operations.

Question 14: (page 34) (Resources Vic)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I might move on to another matter. In February volunteer beach cleaners started finding bits of plastic pipes on Logans Beach. Woodside later admitted to spilling 200 kilograms of plastic into the ocean as part of decommissioning operations but told the Age that those operations only started in March. When did this department first become aware of Woodside's spill, and did Resources Victoria play any role in that response?

Kate HOUGHTON: Matt Vincent will come up and talk to our involvement and, if we do know, when we knew.

Matt VINCENT: I could not be specific about the date, but my understanding is that it was community that first found them and alerted us to it. The regulation of that comes under NOPSEMA, the Commonwealth government. NOPSEMA has suspended activity that was due to take place there, and it will not be allowed to recommence until such time as they have satisfied NOPSEMA that they can do it safely. My understanding is that NOPSEMA is investigating this incident, as is the Victorian EPA, and Resources Victoria is assisting EPA in terms of that investigation. Because it is an ongoing investigation, of course neither of us will be able to make comment on it. My understanding is that it is likely that that activity will not resume until next year and will be done safely.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. With respect to a specific date, are you able to come back to the committee with something specific?

Matt VINCENT: Absolutely, no problem.

DEECA response:

Resources Victoria first became aware of the loss of plastic pieces on 28 April 2025.

Question 15: (pages 34 and 35) (Resources Vic)

Matt VINCENT: Not in the sense of it, no, because the activity itself is happening beyond 3 nautical miles off the coast, which belongs under their jurisdiction.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: If it were on the other side of the border, in state jurisdiction, it would sit with Resources Victoria?

Matt VINCENT: I would have to check, but there may be a shared regulatory agreement for some activities. But either way, what is worth saying is that we work incredibly closely together as regulatory agencies to make sure that the activity is done safely and that the operator is held to account.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: If you can come back to the committee with a bit more clarity there, that would be much appreciated

DEECA response:

In the event of a petroleum pollution incident in Victorian state waters, Victoria leads the regulatory and response actions. The Commonwealth provides coordination and technical support, if needed, through the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Authority.

Resources Victoria is responsible for administering the *Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010* and associated regulations, which outline the permissions required for any offshore petroleum activities. Resources Victoria also has powers to take enforcement actions where a licence holder fails to meet their obligations. These can include issuing directions, withdrawing the acceptance of the environment plan, and cancelling the licence.

The Environment Protection Authority is responsible for administering the *Environment Protection Act 2017* and associated regulations, which place a general environmental duty on the licence holder. The EPA is responsible for determining what enforcement action is appropriate when operators fail to comply with their general environmental duty.

Question 16: (page 35) (RECAFP)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: ... I might move on to another matter. Since 2022 has the government initiated or undertaken marine spatial planning anywhere in Victoria?

Kate HOUGHTON: I will hand that to Carolyn – if you are aware, Carolyn?

Carolyn JACKSON: Thank you. I might have to take the substantive question on notice. There is definitely work that is happening in relation to marine and spatial planning. We have done lots of work particularly recently in relation to renewable energy and biodiversity, and that was looking at mapping and things like that, so there is a lot of work happening in the marine and spatial arena, but in terms of whether there has been a particular area, I will need to take that on notice.

DEECA response:

Since 2022, DEECA has partnered with a range of stakeholders and Traditional Owners to develop key documents to provide guidance and tools to support marine spatial planning in Victoria.

- Victoria's Marine Planning Areas, released in 2023, divides the marine environment into marine planning areas for future marine spatial planning processes and identifies areas that could benefit from marine spatial planning.
- Marine Spatial Planning Guidelines, released in 2023, provide detailed instructions and guidance on how to undertake marine spatial planning in Victoria.
- Overview of values, uses and activities in Gippsland's marine environment, released in 2024, is a high-level synthesis of available information relevant to the marine environment of Gippsland, to support planning for offshore wind.

Further information on the values, uses and activities in the southwest marine environment is due for release in early 2026.

Question 17: (page 35) (BFS)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. You mentioned seeds. Can I go to that one? Regarding collection and storage of tree seeds to restore forests, to what degree is that still active? I understand some contractors have complained of funding drying up.

Kelly CROSTHWAITE: That program is established now as a DEECA program. The facilities have transferred from VicForests to us. There are physical seeding facilities, as well as the program, and we have set up a panel of providers that we are actively using now to do seed collection. Last year was a quiet year seasonally. It is a seasonal activity; it is affected by climatic conditions. But that panel exists now, and former providers are on that panel, and the work is occurring when seeds are there to collect.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. How many providers are on that panel?

Kelly CROSTHWAITE: I would have to take that on notice.

DEECA response:

DEECA currently has 7 suppliers on the Seed Collection and Services Panel. Some of these suppliers are new and 3 were previously contracted to VicForests. DEECA also has one seed extraction contractor, who was previously contracted to VicForests.

Additional information about the 7 suppliers:

- Five suppliers have tree climbing capabilities.
- Two suppliers currently only do ground seed collection activities.
- One supplier is a Traditional Owner Corporation.

Question 18: (page 36) (BFS)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: It is under the dot points for the Future Forests program. I think it is page 32 of budget paper 3 where it says ‘targeted on-ground biodiversity actions’ – that dot point there. What activities is that referring to?

Kelly CROSTHWAITE: There was \$4.8 million within that budget dedicated to pest and predator control, and there are activities around weeds in state forests and protection of reforestation from predators such as deer.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: In terms of pests other than deer, were there any others included?

Kelly CROSTHWAITE: I will have to check, but that is the primary activity funded through this part of the program. We integrate with the broader pest programs that Carolyn was referring to.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: If you can come back to me with some more specifics there, that would be great.

DEECA response:

On-ground biodiversity actions under the Future Forests Program include control of invasive animals including deer, goats, pigs and foxes, and invasive weeds.

This funding is also enabling Traditional Owner groups to deliver self-determined actions to support healthy Country.

Question 19: (pages 36 and 37) (WCG)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Can I ask: did the federal government provide any additional and ongoing funding for those projects?

Kirsten SHELLY: There is funding for those projects, for the three that are going forward. For the four that have the regulatory process to undergo next year, there is funding for those as well.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Can you provide the committee with a breakdown of where that funding is coming from federally?

Kirsten SHELLY: I can take that on notice and provide that.

DEECA response:

The Commonwealth fund source is the Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program.

Question 20: (page 37) (Energy)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. That is much appreciated. I might actually move on. Another matter: apartment owners often raise with MPs that there are barriers they are facing, including financial costs, to update the switchboards of their buildings, ensuring that there is enough power supplied to their homes as they get off gas. Can I ask: who is responsible for the cost of those switchboard upgrades? Is it solely the owners corporations?

Kate HOUGHTON: I do not think we can answer that question in its specifics. It is something that is probably for the Department of Government Services as well as ourselves. I am more than happy to take that on notice so I do not waste your time.

DEECA response:

Switchboards and electrical infrastructure internal to private properties are the responsibility of building owners. In an apartment building, this is the responsibility of the owners corporation.

The new building electrification regulations and minimum energy efficiency standards for rental homes announced by the Government earlier this year include exemptions where replacement of existing gas hot water systems require a switchboard upgrade or where hot water is supplied by a centralised system. These exemptions are intended to ease immediate cost pressures on owners corporations.

The Minister for Consumer Affairs, Nick Staikos, has also recently appointed an independent expert panel to review the *Owners Corporation Act 2006* to ensure it is working fairly and efficiently, and in the interests of lot owners and residents in strata developments. The expert panel is due to deliver its report to the Government in December 2025.

Question 21: (page 37) (Energy)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. Thank you. That is much appreciated. It would be good to get some clarity – potentially this will also be on notice – on if there are any existing grant or funding streams within this budget period that would support those upgrades.

Kate HOUGHTON: For the switches, yes, can do.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Switchboards, I should just be clearer.

Kate HOUGHTON: Sorry, switchboards

DEECA response:

Neither the Victorian Energy Upgrades (VEU) or Solar Homes Program support switchboard upgrades. However, Owner corporations can access rebates and discounts that reduce the upfront installation costs of renewable energy systems and energy efficient electrical appliances. For example, the Solar for Apartments program provides rebates for the installation of rooftop solar PV systems to apartment buildings, offering grants of up to \$2,800 per apartment – or up to \$140,000 total for an apartment building.

Clarification on Code of Practice for Forest Management (page 35) (BFS)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you; that is much appreciated. I will move on. As part of the transition from native forest logging, the government committed \$115.7 million, I believe it is, over four years for the Future Forests program. When I look at budget paper 3, page 31, and look at some of those dot points there, my first question is: the code of practice for forest management – where is that up to?

Kate HOUGHTON: I will hand to the deputies – code of practice?

Kelly CROSTHWAITE: Sorry, what was the question?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Where is the code of practice for forest management up to?

Kelly CROSTHWAITE: The code of practice for forest management is still in place, but it does not apply to native timber harvesting anymore because that activity does not occur on public land since it was closed down. It just applies now to private plantations.

DEECA response:

Mr Aiv Puglielli asked about the status of the Code of Practice for Forest Management. To more fully respond to Mr Puglielli's question, we wish to clarify the response provided by Kelly Crosthwaite, which related to the Code of Practice for Timber Production.

The Future Forests Program included funding for a 'Code of Practice for Forest Management' as part of the \$115.7 million to provide an overarching direction for the management of Victorian forests statewide.

As there are several components to the Future Forests program, different projects have been sequenced over the four years that funding has been provided, with current focus on developing strategic policy direction for DEECA's management of state forests now that native timber harvesting is no longer one of the uses of Victoria's State Forests. The final policy product may not be termed a 'Code of Practice'. However, the work includes development of clear objectives for forest management and guidance for specific forest management activities, including forest regeneration. Development of this guidance is still in progress.

Question 22: (page 37) (Resources Vic/Energy)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. On another matter, according to the most recent Earth Resources Regulator annual statistical report, coal production in Victoria was just over 39 million tonnes for the period, being 2023– 24. That is just 3 per cent lower than it was the four years prior, despite our state’s share of renewables going up nearly 20 per cent over the same period. In that sense, can I clarify: why has coal consumption barely changed given that our share of renewables also went up over that same time?

Kate HOUGHTON: That is probably a question for Matt and Liz, to work through the comparison of usage to then the share of the energy mix. Matt, can you provide any assistance?

Matt VINCENT: I would need to take that on notice unless Liz can answer it.

DEECA response:

Coal power generation fluctuates year to year in response to market events. However, these events are occurring against a general trend of falling coal generation as renewable generation grows. For example, Victoria’s total coal power generation in 2024-25 was almost 10% lower than in 2019-20. Over the same period, Victoria’s share of renewable electricity generation increased from 24.4% in 2019-20 to 42.4% in 2024-25.

The small increase of 1.1% during 2023-24 to 39.0 million tonnes was associated with low wind conditions particularly through winter 2024 which led to higher coal power generation at that time.

Brown coal production will continue to decrease over time, reflecting the impact of increasing renewable energy sources for electricity generation, as part of the transition of the economy to net zero by 2045 and the planned closure of coal-fired power stations. Yallourn Power Station and Loy Yang A Power Station are scheduled to close in mid-2028 and 2035 respectively.