

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Melbourne – Tuesday 25 November 2025

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Roma Britnell – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

Richard Welch

WITNESSES

Jeremi Moule, Secretary,

Jason Loos, Deputy Secretary, Economic Policy and State Productivity,

Dannii de Kretser, Acting Deputy Secretary, Social Policy,

Joshua Puls, Deputy Secretary, Public Administration,

Terry Garwood, Deputy Secretary, First Peoples–State Relations, and

Brigid Sunderland, Deputy Secretary, Children’s Portfolio Coordination, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting, and we pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be joining us here today.

On behalf of the Parliament the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes. Its aim is to gauge what the government, the courts and Parliament achieved in 2024 and 2025 compared to what they planned to achieve.

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.

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

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

I welcome the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet Mr Jeremi Moule as well as other officials here today. Secretary, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 10 minutes, after which time the committee will ask you some questions. Your time starts now.

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you, Chair, and good morning to committee members. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee today with my colleagues and present on behalf of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. I join the Chair in acknowledging the traditional owners of this land and I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

Visual presentation.

Jeremi MOULE: DPC’s strategic direction continues to focus on providing strong whole-of-government leadership and support to the Premier and the cabinet, the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to deliver for Victorians. Our focus is on driving collaboration across departments, maintaining the highest standards of public administration and integrity and ensuring government decisions are informed by robust, evidence-based policy advice. We have been continuing to strengthen the capability and culture of the Victorian public sector throughout the past financial year, promoting inclusion, innovation and responsiveness so that the public sector remains trusted and effective in delivering on the priorities of the Victorian government and the needs of Victorians. This slide reflects the department’s structure and deputy secretary leaders as at 30 June this year. I will note that since then Emma Cassar was appointed Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Dannii de Kretser is with us today as Acting Deputy Secretary for Social Policy.

Turning to DPC’s performance measure results for 2024–25, which are published in our annual report, the department achieved strong outcomes across its published output measures. We met 48 of 54 targets, or 89 per

cent within a 5 per cent variance. This reflects our continued focus on delivery of high-quality advice and meeting our service delivery commitments.

In 2024–25 DPC continued to support the delivery of major economic, transport, industry, energy, environment and infrastructure projects. DPC worked closely with departments to support whole-of-government cooperation with international partners to promote trade, investment, cultural and educational ties; delivery of the government's fiscal strategy and key economic policy priorities, including supporting the development of the *Economic Growth Statement* released in December 2024; implementation of the government's infrastructure agenda; and delivery of renewable energy transition and emission reduction, environmental and agricultural priorities, including the *2025 Victorian Transmission Plan* and the establishment of the Premier's Drought Response Taskforce.

DPC continued to ensure decision-makers were supported to undertake key reforms to the health, mental health and justice systems in 2024–25. In the health and mental health portfolio, DPC worked closely with the departments to establish Hospitals Victoria within the Department of Health to oversee and support the sustainability of Victoria's hospital sector, support the expansion of the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department and implementation of the timely emergency care collaborative to support best practice across the system. In September 2024 DPC supported the Premier to announce the Victorian Redress Scheme for victims of historical abuse and neglect in institutional settings. DPC also continued to regularly engage with Commonwealth and state agencies to advance the state's resilience on foreign interference, and mis- and disinformation, particularly in the lead-up to the 2024 local government elections. In June 2025 Ms Angela Connors was appointed as chair, Forum for Truth and Recognition, a key recommendation of the board of inquiry into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools. DPC also supported planning for the establishment of 50 government owned and operated early learning and childcare centres.

DPC supports people of all cultures and faiths to participate fully in life in Victoria by facilitating grants and programs that promote inclusion and respect in our communities. In November 2024 DPC supported the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples to launch Victoria's first anti-racism strategy. Four million dollars was provided throughout the 2024–25 state budget to support implementation of the strategy, including the local anti-racism initiatives grant, a new campaign to address racism in community sport, development of an anti-racism tick accreditation scheme and funding to reduce discrimination in policing.

Throughout 2024–25 DPC also administered the multicultural festivals and events program, helping multicultural organisations deliver 577 festivals and events; \$2 million of support to 1000 seniors organisations across 141 ethnic groups to foster social connection, reduce isolation and pass on heritage to future generations; \$13.3 million of multicultural community infrastructure grants, helping 83 organisations to build, maintain or upgrade infrastructure; and the Victorian African Communities Committee, which continues to inform government on how it can improve social, economic and wellbeing outcomes for Victorians of African communities.

DPC has continued to provide advice to support robust public administration, including updating whole-of-Victorian-government guidance to support efficient public administration across the service. This includes updating the appointment and remuneration guidelines and public entity remuneration policy and completing stakeholder engagement on the review of the standard public sector executive employment contract; support for the *Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Act*, which established the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission on the 31 December 2024; and continuing to support administration of the Ministerial Code of Conduct, including the quarterly publication of ministerial diaries.

In 2024–25 DPC continued to focus on improving outcomes for Victoria's First Peoples. We prioritised actions to enable self-determination – that is Aboriginal decision-making over matters affecting Aboriginal people – and to advance treaty, protect and promote cultural rights and support the Yoorrook Justice Commission truth-telling process. DPC played a central role in coordinating whole-of-government engagement with and responding to the Yoorrook Justice Commission. During the year DPC also continued to support Victoria's commitment to closing the gap to build the foundations of shared decision-making and support a thriving Aboriginal community controlled organisation sector in collaboration with our implementation partner, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo.

DPC continues to support the protection and management of Victoria's Aboriginal cultural heritage. We administer the regulatory, enforcement and approval processes of the cultural heritage system under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act*. We have also continued supporting self-governance and self-determination at the Lake Tyers and Framlingham Aboriginal trusts through the government's investment of \$10.2 million to provide essential services. In 2024–25, 21 grants valued at over \$11 million were made to First Nations organisations to build, repair, refurbish or expand community infrastructure via the Aboriginal community infrastructure program. We also continued work to implement four existing recognition and settlement agreements under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* and continued negotiations for an agreement with the Eastern Maar people and preparatory work to commence negotiations with the Gunditjmara people.

DPC continues to lead Victoria's treaty process. In 2024–25 DPC led the whole-of-government negotiations and authorisation structure across all government departments and Victoria Police to progress treaty negotiations and ensure robust input into the state's negotiating positions. DPC supported Victorian public service employees to participate in treaty education programs to embed an understanding of principles that underpin treaty. DPC has played a key role in keeping Victorians informed about treaty and supported the development of public communications material, including a new treaty website. DPC also supported delivery of treaty information sessions with approximately 800 local leaders across the state to build understanding and awareness of treaty. Statewide treaty negotiations commenced in 2024 with a ceremony at Darebin Parklands on Wurundjeri country, jointly hosted by the state and First Peoples' Assembly. Negotiations continued throughout 2025, culminating in the delivery of the Statewide Treaty Bill, which was ultimately introduced into Parliament in September. In January 2025 DPC established the Children's Portfolio Coordination function. This provides strategic policy and project coordination for initiatives for children aged zero to 12 and their families. DPC also chaired the children's interdepartmental committee. The IDC brings together six different departments to support cross-government collaboration.

Finally, to DPC's people matter survey results: these results in 2025 give a clear picture of how our workforce is feeling and where our culture is strongest. With 86 per cent of staff completing the survey, well above the state average, it is clear our staff are invested in shaping DPC's culture. Result highlights include DPC's engagement index of 71 and job satisfaction of 72 per cent, showing our workplace remains motivated and connected to its purpose. The 84 per cent inclusion score highlights that our staff feel respected, valued and able to contribute fully. Strong results to responsiveness at 93 per cent and integrity at 84 per cent confirm that the public sector values are embedded in the way that we work. Ninety-two per cent of staff reported strong leadership at DPC and that they demonstrate honesty and integrity. These results reflect our department's strong sense of purpose and pride, and we will continue to build on that through our focus on staff wellbeing and having a respectful workplace culture.

Thank you, Chair, and thank you too, committee, for your time. That concludes my presentation. I look forward to responding to your questions. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Secretary. I am going to throw to the Deputy Chair.

Roma BRITNELL: Good morning, Secretary and officials. I have got some questions this morning. The first ones I will start off with are just numbers, so if you do not have the number ready, just on notice is absolutely fine. What is the current full-time equivalent of ministerial staff broken down by the Premier's office staff and the ministerial office staff?

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you, Deputy Chair. I do have that information at hand. As at 30 June 2025 the expenditure on ministerial staff was \$61.3 million for 309 staff – that is FTE, which is consistent with the way that we usually present that material here at PAEC. For the Premier's office specifically, total salary and on-costs were \$18.7 million for 83 FTE. This FTE count includes media advisers that are employed on behalf of all ministers but are in the Premier's office. The other ministerial offices' total salary and on-costs were \$39.8 million for 209 FTE. For completeness, this line item in our budget, Deputy Chair, includes costs for the Leader of the Opposition's office. Total salary and on-costs for that office were \$2.9 million for 17 FTE as at 30 June 2025.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you. And how many redundancies were there in 2024–25 in the Premier's office and the ministerial offices, please?

Members interjecting.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you, Secretary. I am asking the question.

Jeremi MOULE: Deputy Chair, I may need to take that on notice. I do not have the specific number in front of me.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you. What was the average salary for senior staff in the Premier's office and ministerial offices in 2024–25 – chiefs of staff, for example?

Jeremi MOULE: I am not sure that we hold that data within DPC. The amounts that are paid to the Premier's office staff, ministerial staff and Leader of the Opposition staff we are not privy to.

Roma BRITNELL: Are you able to access that information and provide it on notice?

Jeremi MOULE: No. The data is held within the payroll system, which is actually a shared service that is currently provided by the Department of Education. We do not have access to payroll information. We have aggregate numbers in terms of the total budget that is at the disposal of those offices, but we are not privy to individual salary information.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. How many WorkCover claims were made by staff in the Premier's office and ministerial offices in 2024–25?

Jeremi MOULE: We are not aware of any. There are not any in our data. I am prepared to check that for you, Deputy Chair, but we are not aware of any.

Roma BRITNELL: And across the Premier's office and all ministerial offices, how many complaints were made by staff in 2024–25? I am not asking for names, obviously, just numbers of cases.

Jeremi MOULE: Deputy Chair, unless it reached the stage of being a WorkCover claim –

Roma BRITNELL: No, just complaints that were received, yes.

Jeremi MOULE: Sorry, from staff or from the public, if I can clarify?

Roma BRITNELL: Involving staff and senior staff – for example, complaints against ministers.

Jeremi MOULE: Yes. In relation to staff, Deputy Chair, we would not receive those complaints if staff had concerns.

Roma BRITNELL: So no complaints come into the Premier's office about staff that they are raising with the Premier and bringing to her attention – such as bullying, sexual abuse, any complaints that are brought to the Premier's –

Jeremi MOULE: I will be very clear. In the 2024–25 reporting period, no matters were reported to DPC, and further to that, routinely staff management matters are dealt with by the Premier's office or ministerial staff or the Leader of the Opposition's office. They would not come to us directly unless it was an exceptional –

Roma BRITNELL: So are you able to supply us with any of those that came into the Premier's office?

Jeremi MOULE: My answer to your question is that there were none in 2024–25 that were reported to the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Roma BRITNELL: Right. Just moving on, what was the total expenditure by government on advertising and content development for the Premier's Facebook and other social media accounts in 2024–25?

Jeremi MOULE: Deputy Chair, the information that we have available relates to the cost of advertising on the Meta platform, which is largely, as we understand it, Facebook. The reason that DPC has access to this information is that the Premier's office does not have a credit card, so the department pays those invoices and then the amounts for those are then journalled out of the Premier's office budget to us.

Roma BRITNELL: There are other platforms other than Meta, so –

Jeremi MOULE: This is the only data that we have visibility of. I can give you the figure. For 2024–25 the expenditure, which is the purchasing of advertising space on Meta platforms, was \$220,794.

Roma BRITNELL: Has DPC ever provided advice about this expenditure in the context of reducing total government expenditure?

Jeremi MOULE: No, we have not. The manner in which the Premier's office, ministerial offices and the Leader of the Opposition's office expend the budgets that are allocated to them is a matter for those offices, not for us.

Roma BRITNELL: Does DPC ever develop content for the Premier's social media accounts?

Jeremi MOULE: No, we do not. I am aware that across government some content that might have been developed for the purpose of an advertising campaign is reused, but no material is prepared by departments specifically for use on the Premier's social media pages.

Roma BRITNELL: Do you second any staff to the Premier's private office to manage social media?

Jeremi MOULE: Does my department second staff for that purpose?

Roma BRITNELL: Yes.

Jeremi MOULE: No, we do not.

Roma BRITNELL: How many DPC staff are employed in the capacity of any social media, and what is their total remuneration?

Jeremi MOULE: DPC staff who work on social media matters?

Roma BRITNELL: Yes.

Jeremi MOULE: We do not have staff in the department who are dedicated solely to social media. From time to time we might run campaigns or specific activities that might mean that we engage resources to do that for us, but we do not have dedicated resources in the way that you framed the question, Deputy Chair.

Roma BRITNELL: So how much have you spent on that?

Jeremi MOULE: Like I said, we do not have dedicated resources for social media

Richard WELCH: But from other sources – if you do not mind, Mr Moule. You do not have direct employees, but if you are contracting services to do it on your behalf, how much are you spending on that?

Jeremi MOULE: The way that we would engage those staff, Mr Welch, is that if we were running a campaign on a subject matter, as part of the entire spend – it might be across several mediums of advertising – we might need some social media expertise, but we do not have dedicated social media resources in that context.

Roma BRITNELL: Can you give us the amount you spent on your total digital media? Like outside of Meta there are other platforms – can you give us that figure?

Jeremi MOULE: Which the department has?

Richard WELCH: You must know.

Jeremi MOULE: What I would do to provide you with that information is look at any campaigns that have been run out of DPC, which is very few – we do not actually run many – and then try to work out from that what our buy was across all of the mediums –

Roma BRITNELL: What about the Premier's office?

Jeremi MOULE: I think I made clear we do not do any social media work for the Premier's office.

Roma BRITNELL: Yes, I know, but you have just given us a figure for the Meta advertising. That does not include Google, YouTube – any of those platforms. Can I have the total figure for digital advertising, please?

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, we do not have visibility of all of the expenditure lines for the Premier's office, ministerial offices or the Leader of the Opposition's office. The only reason we have visibility of that particular number that relates to Meta is because the only way to pay a Meta account is using a credit card. The Premier's office does not have one, so they use the department's and then the cost of that is journaled back to the department.

Jade BENHAM: How does it pay for Google and YouTube advertising?

Jeremi MOULE: I do not know the answer to that question.

Jade BENHAM: So you do not have any oversight.

Jeremi MOULE: You are assuming that they do advertising. I do not know the answer to that question.

Roma BRITNELL: That is what we would like you to ask and come back with.

Jeremi MOULE: I do not have that data. That is not data that I would have access to that. That is a question that you would need to ask the Premier at her hearing.

Jade BENHAM: So the only social media advertising that you have oversight of is on the Meta platforms, that is it.

Jeremi MOULE: We have no oversight. We have visibility of the expense simply because of that transaction mechanism, otherwise we would not look into what the Leader of the Opposition or the Premier's office does in that regard.

Richard WELCH: I think that is the point of confusion. If you have got the credit card for Meta, you must also have the credit card for all the other platforms as well.

Jeremi MOULE: My answer to your question, Mr Welch, is I think you are assuming that they do advertising. I do not know that they do.

Jade BENHAM: Not assuming; we see it.

Jeremi MOULE: Well, I do not know that they do. The only question that I can answer is what I have visibility of, and that is that financial transaction, which we routinely report here and at the Premier's hearings, twice a year.

The CHAIR: We will move on. Richard.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Mr Moule, on the growth statement, on page 1 it says DPC leads the whole-of-government economic policy delivery, and on page 1 of the growth statement it says the policy is the 'result of collaboration across government, business and industry'. What businesses were consulted with in the growth statement?

Jeremi MOULE: In the development of the *Economic Growth Statement*? I might ask Mr Loos to go to the details of that, although I would say from the outset that the bulk of that engagement, although we may have been involved, would have been led by the by the department of jobs and industries. While we might have had some visibility, they would have led on that work. I will ask Mr Loos to answer.

Jason LOOS: Thanks, Secretary. DPC played a coordination role in pulling together the *Economic Growth Statement*, so that included across a number of departments given the broad nature.

Richard WELCH: What businesses were consulted with?

Jason LOOS: In terms of businesses, it was predominantly, as the Secretary said, through other departments talking to their business units.

Richard WELCH: So you are not aware of which businesses?

Jason LOOS: No.

Richard WELCH: Which industries were consulted with?

Jason LOOS: Traditionally we would do a range of business sectors to pull together a statement like that.

Richard WELCH: What form would that take?

Jason LOOS: As part of that you might know that the Premier had her Premier's Business Council, and that was a range of businesses, and discussions through that mechanism came through. We have got a few parallel forums where we get information from business.

Richard WELCH: So a bit of consultation, a bit of feedback. Can we have a copy of that consultation?

Roma BRITNELL: A list of the industries and the businesses.

Jason LOOS: Yes, we can provide some information in terms of the types of businesses.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you.

Richard WELCH: One of the best standards, Secretary, of living standards is GSP per capita – economic output per person. Why has the government chosen to omit per capita metrics from the statement, given that they are actually the primary indicator of prosperity?

Jeremi MOULE: Please, Jason.

Jason LOOS: The nature of the *Economic Growth Statement* is to focus on particular sectors that we wanted to –

Richard WELCH: But the question is about GSP per capita. Why did you omit it?

Jason LOOS: The *Economic Growth Statement* is more around a forward-looking 'How are we going to increase productivity in the state of Victoria?'

Richard WELCH: Do you have targets for GSP per capita? Have you got an economic target for GSP per capita?

Jason LOOS: I think you had the Department of Treasury and Finance here yesterday. As part of their monitoring of the economy and budget papers, they provide updates on all the economic indicators.

Richard WELCH: No, but my question is: why have you not set out any standards of GSP per capita? What are your targets? Why is that omitted?

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Welch, they are not matters that the department is directly responsible for. They fit far more squarely into Treasury and Finance, who you had with you yesterday.

Richard WELCH: But you are leading the whole-of-government economic policy delivery, so surely you have a say in what gets included and excluded.

Jeremi MOULE: We do support the Premier with advice on those matters, and we also play the whole-of-government coordination role that is referred to in I think the same document that you are reading from. They are the roles that we play, but we are not responsible for all of the delivery and all of the metric setting and why some metrics are included in some documents and not in others.

Richard WELCH: So you do not have a view on whether GSP per capita is a relevant measure?

Jeremi MOULE: It is not my role here at the committee to express my personal views about things.

Jade BENHAM: Who does set those metrics, Secretary?

Jeremi MOULE: The Department of Treasury and Finance is responsible for setting and monitoring the financial metrics that are objectives of the government.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you.

Richard WELCH: Now, we have seen in the last year that actually the state went backwards by 0.8 per cent GSP per capita. Has the department conducted any modelling of how this will affect wages or living standards in Victoria?

Jeremi MOULE: I think that is a question best directed to the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Richard WELCH: So you have not done any modelling?

Jeremi MOULE: The Department of Premier and Cabinet has not done any modelling on that matter.

Richard WELCH: Any modelling on it? No. Has the Premier been briefed on this pretty concerning outcome? Have you briefed the Premier?

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Welch, on major data releases, including from the ABS and including that single data point that you are referring to, that would have been part of routine briefing that we provide on major dataset releases.

Richard WELCH: So the Premier has been briefed on this? Yes?

Jeremi MOULE: The extent to which we went to that specific single data point that you are referring to, as important as that is –

Richard WELCH: Well, it is not a trivial point, Secretary.

Jeremi MOULE: Please allow me to finish my sentence – what we included in a briefing to the Premier on the full release of that dataset, which included a lot of other important data as well, I would need to go back and have a look and see whether we can provide that advice.

Roma BRITNELL: Can you provide that on notice, if you are going to go back and have a look?

The CHAIR: Excuse me, Secretary. Mr Galea, Deputy Chair and Mr Welsh, one of you at a time to ask the questions, and please allow the Secretary the opportunity to answer your question. You do not have to like his answers, but he is genuinely trying to answer your question.

Richard WELCH: So negative state growth per capita is just a minor data point?

Jeremi MOULE: I did not say that, Mr Welch. In fact I made quite the contrary point.

Richard WELCH: So is there a major point? Is there a major issue?

Jeremi MOULE: It is an important data point in what was a large set of data that was released.

Richard WELCH: Have you provided any advice to the Premier on how to reverse this trend in negative growth per capita?

Jeremi MOULE: The advice and support that we provide is in accordance with the government's stated fiscal strategy, which of course includes growing the economy, and it is in that context that we continue to advise the government.

Richard WELCH: How many quarters of negative growth would we be in before we are in a recession?

Jeremi MOULE: I think that is a question that you should ask the Department of Treasury and Finance, Mr Welch.

Jade BENHAM: Can I just sneak in with a question? Would you support and advise the inclusion of GSP per capita targets as a key metric?

Jeremi MOULE: I understand the question that you are asking. Ms Benham, the advice that we provide to the government of the day is not a matter that I am able to discuss here at the committee today.

Jade BENHAM: So you are not able to advise whether you would advise supporting that key metric?

Jeremi MOULE: No, I am not.

Jade BENHAM: Why not?

Jeremi MOULE: Because that would be contrary to the Victorian public sector code of conduct. It would disclose deliberations of government and jeopardise the relationship of the apolitical public service with the government of the day. It is very clear in the code of conduct that I am not in a position to be able to do that, I am sorry.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you.

Richard WELCH: Action one in the *Economic Growth Statement* is to ‘Open doors – Backing business to invest, expand and innovate’. You said you have consulted. Did that include consultations with the Business Council of Australia, or the Victorian chamber, who have consistently called out Victoria as one of the hardest places in Australia to do business?

Jeremi MOULE: In relation to the chamber, we are meeting with them very regularly and have done. They are a major stakeholder in the Victorian government context. They were consulted and engaged leading into the release of the *Economic Growth Statement* and have continued to be since then. Like every other representative group, they perform an important advocacy role on behalf of their constituency. In terms of the Business Council of Australia, I am not as certain.

Jason LOOS: They were also.

Richard WELCH: Would you support the inclusion of GSP per capita within economic targets?

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Welch, I am sorry, I will need to use the answer that I did earlier – that if we were to provide advice in that space to the government of the day, I would not be in a position to be able to reveal that advice here.

Richard WELCH: Does the fiscal strategy, the *Economic Growth Statement*, include targets for economic growth per capita?

Jeremi MOULE: I think the metrics in the five-step fiscal strategy are fairly clear in what it is seeking to achieve.

Richard WELCH: Well, you can give me a clear answer then.

Jeremi MOULE: The answer is that that is not one of the specific metrics.

Richard WELCH: It is not?

Jeremi MOULE: It is not a specific metric, but when you bundle that up with many others, the objective of growing the economy is clearly an objective under the government strategy.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Secretary. In November last year, addressing the committee, you said DPC and DTF have regular interdepartmental meetings in relation to the SRL and other matters. Have these meetings continued?

Jeremi MOULE: Yes, they have.

Richard WELCH: Can a copy of the minutes be provided to this committee?

Jeremi MOULE: I can take that question on notice, Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Is there a reason why it could not?

Jeremi MOULE: Aspects of the minutes which are periodically FOI-ed by a few sources, including the opposition, are subject to some FOI-related exemptions, particularly some of the material that is considered at that IDC that is on a pathway to cabinet or committee consideration. It is almost certainly the case that we will be able to provide those to you, but with some redactions.

Richard WELCH: Okay. Thank you, I appreciate that. Mr Loos, are you still chair of the SRL interdepartmental committee?

Jason LOOS: Yes, I am.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Welch. We are going straight to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Secretary and officials. Thank you for joining us today. Secretary, I do want to ask about the DPC's role in international engagement, but before I do, just to clarify perhaps for some members of the committee, can you clarify for the committee what the DPC's role is in relation to the *Economic Growth Statement*?

Jeremi MOULE: Certainly. In the lead-up to the publication of the *Economic Growth Statement* the Department of Premier and Cabinet played a coordination role, which we often do, as well as providing advice directly to the Premier in support of her contribution to the *Economic Growth Statement*. Then the statement itself includes several actions, some of which we are deeply involved in, others where we have more of a traditional DPC oversight role.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Going on to international engagement then and referencing page 24 of your department's annual report: what is the role that you undertake with relation to this important area, and what has been achieved in the 2024–25 financial year?

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you. I will ask Mr Loos to answer this question in more detail, but the key role that DPC plays is a coordination and strategic leadership role, as well as leading on the publication of key country-related strategies which are relevant to the countries that are essentially our largest trading partners. But I will ask Mr Loos to expand on those remarks, thank you.

Jason LOOS: Thanks, Secretary. As the Secretary mentioned, we implement the Victorian government international engagement approach, coordinating with other departments and agencies to maximise the value of the international partners to achieve government strategy and priorities. The advice we provide is carefully considered, looking at a range of factors on a case-by-case basis. The types of things we look at are the value of Victorian exports and foreign direct investment in the Victorian economy by international partners and two-way policy alignment of Victoria's priority sectors, such as a number of those identified through the *Economic Growth Statement* – things like advanced manufacturing, defence, health technologies and medical research, circular economy, digital technologies and agribusiness, so all sectors where we really want Victoria to attract that investment but then also to form strategic international partners where we can also get some learnings from what is happening internationally.

There is also the potential to leverage international expertise to support the delivery of government policies of the day, whether that is housing or climate targets. A lot is happening around the world, so we are trying to open up the doors. Victoria's diasporic community and the depth and breadth of cultural, diplomatic and institutional connections are also part of the considerations. We are then supporting the delivery of the Victorian government's engagement through various avenues, working with all the relevant departments and agencies, including the Premier, at ministerial meetings and events with foreign dignitaries, diplomats and international businesses. We support overseas travel briefings, trade and investment missions, education and cultural initiatives and engagement more broadly throughout the community.

We also have a number of sister state partnerships and MOUs that we provide strategic advice to and information on. We work regularly with the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions in trade and investment activities facilitated by Global Vic and Invest Vic. Global Vic is the state's trade facilitation arm, as

you know, which supports Victorian exporters and businesses to connect into global markets. Invest Vic primarily focuses on how to attract investment back into Victoria, and that is around enhancing the state's business investment environment, delivering whole-of-government capabilities and government investment attraction. It is very much a role that we are playing to coordinate and pinpoint what sectors we should focus on, what countries we should target and then also the business lens: 'What business should we focus on? How do we try and attract investment to Victoria?'

Michael GALEA: Wonderful. Thank you. I assume from that role, as well, that includes the 23 trade and investment offices around the world.

Jason LOOS: Absolutely.

Michael GALEA: Victoria posits itself to the world and draws in that business.

Jason LOOS: Yes. We have got, as you say, the VGTI network, which is one of, I think, Victoria's comparative advantages. It is used very strategically around the world. We have got offices in a number of different regions. It is really important for the VGTI offices, and the commissioners in particular, to be in constant communication with what the current government policies, priorities and objectives are so they can take that in country and make the right partnering and positioning so we can open up the right doors at the right time. That has been a very effective model. When there are international engagements, the roles of those commissioners and the VGTI offices are extremely useful in helping to assist in targeting the types of discussions we should be having.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Indeed I note the work of your department as well recently in the visit of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the democratically elected president of Belarus in exile, whose visit I believe was supported by your department. So it was good to see that work and her message of spreading democracy as well.

If I can dive into a little bit more specifics, though, and some of our key trading partners – China, for example – what is the work that DPC has been doing to facilitate engagement with China in the 2024–25 period?

Jason LOOS: A large part of that 2024–25 period was structuring the development of the China strategy, which was actually launched by the Premier during her trip on 15 September this year. That was the launch of *Victoria's China Strategy: For a New Golden Era* in Beijing. That replaces the 10-year 2016 Victorian China strategy, which was a partnership for prosperity. DPC led again the development of the China strategy, but it was in significant consultation with more than 200 Victorian, Australian, Chinese and global organisations, including industry, government, community, culture and academic stakeholders. The strategy itself has three objectives, with goals across nine sectors.

There is the reach objective, which centres around providing government, Victorian businesses and community with support for targeted economic engagement with China to drive growth and prosperity. Its focused sectors for this objectives are agribusiness, health and life sciences and creative industries and sport. In the agribusiness sector some of the goals include greater market penetration in China for Victoria's value-added agriculture goods exports and better capability and understanding of China's markets, regulations and consumer trends. That is a really important point – actually understanding China and their broader objective and what they are doing as a nation is extremely important. China have got a 100-year vision on what they are looking to achieve, so it is how we can play a role in actually promoting Victoria in that, because especially in the agrifood sector there is significant opportunity for Victoria and Victorian businesses. But it is quite delicate, obviously, doing business in China and understanding the setting. There are a number of issues that come with that, and you need to understand them. This agribusiness sector is a really important one. Health and life sciences is another very important sector. Creative industries and the sport sector are significant.

Then we have the attract objective, and that is focusing on strengthening Victoria's reputation as a global destination for Chinese visitors, students, researchers and investors. Again, we have our educational structures and institutions. We have got a real comparative advantage, where if we make the right connections we really can attract that activity into Victoria. I think part of this is understanding where our strengths are – playing to our strengths – and then making sure we have the right in-country connections overseas. A lot of it is opening doors, making sure those who need it understand where the opportunities are. There are a lot of people-to-people discussions that are needed in these types of things to be effective.

Michael GALEA: That is again where those trade offices come into play as well, I imagine –

Jason LOOS: Yes.

Michael GALEA: and with a booming middle class in places like China attracted to Australian produce and agricultural products as well as other health and life sciences, as you mentioned.

Jason LOOS: Absolutely. As I said, they are very interested in our food and fibre industry – how we start from where we do. China is looking to be as self-sufficient as possible. They are taking learnings from around the world, and we are a key destination for them to take some of those learnings from. So with that we can really leverage off our smarts.

Michael GALEA: Wonderful. And in a similar vein as well with India – obviously a number of us in the committee are very proud to have large Indian communities in our electorates, but they are Indian Australians. You are focused on the work dealing with trading relationships with the nation of India and, I imagine, in a very similar vein to what we just discussed with China. Can you talk to me about that work?

Jason LOOS: Absolutely. DPC led the development of the Indian strategy, again in consultation with the Australian government and other government departments, industry, community leaders and cultural and academic institutions. The India strategy has 10 key sectors to focus on in engagement, under three categories. There are sectors to strengthen, and they are in food and agribusiness, education, digital technology and innovation, and tourism and the visitor economy – again, similar to China but a different focus. Then there are sectors to grow, which are creative industries, sport, and environment, sustainability and energy. This is a particular sector that we have focused on given Indian culture. Again, they look to Victoria in particular for how we have gone about creating the ecosystems around some of these sectors and how we actually develop and grow in these areas. Again, they want to learn a lot from us, but then it is also vice versa where there are things that we can learn from them, and attracting their various businesses into Victoria is a key part of our strategy that we launched. We have also got sectors to explore, which are health and life sciences and beauty, wellness and personal care. Beauty, wellness and personal care are themes that are again emerging very rapidly in India, and again we have a lot to offer in those areas.

Following the release of the India strategy, time-sensitive opportunities have been activated to ensure that momentum has been maintained and short-term outcomes have been achieved. Since the strategy's launch the sport, education, creative industries and tourism and the visitor economy sectors have generated particular interest. Activities relating to sport aim to utilise Melbourne's competitive sports advantage and promote community sport participation and sports, tech and industry collaboration. We leveraged quite significantly off the back of the 2024 Boxing Day test where we had a significant Indian representation at the MCG, and off the back of that there were a number of events to really zone in on Indian businesses in particular, because that was a natural drawcard to Victoria, so it was a really well-timed opportunity to leverage off that, so that was good. We have worked with the Australia India Institute to support Victorian sporting bodies to capitalise on that. Again, like the China strategy, with the India strategy we have the opportunity now to implement some of the outcomes across some of the sectors, and we are happy with how it is all going.

Michael GALEA: Just lastly on this, Mr Loos, you mentioned the competitive advantage that the Global Victoria trade investment offices give our state. Just from a quick count, it looks like New South Wales has 17, which is six fewer than we have. To the best of your knowledge, does Victoria have more of these investment outreach offices around the world than any other state?

Jason LOOS: Yes, we do. And having them strategically placed across the areas we do, as we know, with issues in the world changing rapidly, the sectors that we need to target and the jurisdictions where we need to be in country and to be effective in change rapidly. So one of the benefits of having a significant reach is we can actually pivot quite quickly. I cannot stress enough how that connection between what Victoria's key objectives are and what we are focusing on and being able to pivot and get those messages out to the commissioners and their teams in country really helps with making sure that the right types of discussions are happening and the right opportunities are being discussed. That is the start of opening the door. A whole lot of other stuff has to happen, and, as I said, the people-to-people ties are significant in making sure that happens in an effective way. But the starting point is that introduction in country and being able to pivot depending on where the world is going and what is in supply. If you look at four years ago, five years ago, we were not

talking about AI and data centres like we are now. Some countries are doing that exceptionally well, and our ability to use the network to get the right businesses and the right government structures so we can take learnings from that and bring it back here is really important to how we are going to hopefully develop and be successful in those sectors.

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Galea, I would just add that in terms of the network itself, when the Premier or the Governor travel overseas – and from time to time people at this table accompany them on that overseas travel – one of the things that the countries that we visit reflect on is the enduring nature of the relationship, so the presence that Victoria has had now in some places for many decades. It is not that we have recently become a large network; we have actually maintained that, and we have we have grown it and moved it from time to time as need has arisen. But it is a really significant thing to have an enduring relationship in country, and it is highly regarded, particularly in key markets like China and India and certainly in Europe and the US as well. Being able to have that corporate knowledge, the presence and be known and be part of the environment of decision-makers in those countries is incredibly important, because it is not just how many you have but also if you can foster that really constructive working relationship. Particularly because of the quality of the people that we have had in those roles and the enduring nature of the relationship that Victoria has invested in, that is really highly regarded by those countries where we have a presence.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Secretary. Secretary, changing gears a little bit now into infrastructure delivery and planning: what role has DPC played in the 2024–25 financial year and, referencing your annual report, page 23, in any particular reforms to improve these processes?

Jeremi MOULE: Thanks, Mr Galea. I might ask Mr Loos to continue as this is his area of expertise. Thank you.

Michael GALEA: Very good.

Jason LOOS: Thank you. In terms of infrastructure delivery, there are obviously a number of projects and infrastructure policies that are happening at any time across government. There is the infrastructure coordination IDC that I chair as part of DPC. That meets monthly, and it looks at a number of issues and procurements, and we discuss a range of items. Each department is represented on that. My team coordinates the agenda and, depending on the type of issues that need to be discussed, we bring them through for discussion. It also looks at a number of the reform activities that government is focusing at the moment, so things like the *Planning and Environment Act* that is currently being debated in Parliament. That will streamline and improve the planning system and increase the number of outcomes. You have got the environment effects statement reforms, which was part of the *Economic Growth Statement*, to really try and reduce the timing of some of these approvals. A lot of these things are discussed at the committee that I chair.

Precinct delivery powers, so following amendments that were made to the *Planning and Environment Act* guidelines have been created for the declaration of projects, and again that facilitates the fast approval of projects. We have looked at various delivery mechanisms and we have done a review of the program delivery approach, working very closely with VIDA on that. There have been floodplain management reforms in relation to floodplain management to ensure the best access to information is available at any point in time, and there is a risk-based approach to that now. Building regulations have been a big thing over the last few years, and the establishment of the Building and Plumbing Commission as the integrated regulator, bringing together regulation, insurance and dispute resolution – a lot of work has been done on that, and a lot of those things now will set us up well for making sure that that industry is well regulated and will provide confidence to consumers.

And again, it is working with each of the departments and agencies and making sure that we have clear links into issues that need quick responses. We are always bringing the whole-of-government lens to things. The departments and agencies have the procurement teams, the structures in place, and they are actually doing all the delivery. We are trying to bring everyone together, talk about common themes, making sure that different parts of government are learning from other bits of government so we are not reinventing the wheel. It is a forum to try and share ideas and learnings and really make sure that we just keep getting better and more efficient in how we do things.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Thanks, Mr Loos. Thanks, Secretary.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Galea. We are going to go to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. A couple of questions going back to the Premier's advisory council. How many meetings were there with the Premier's advisory committee?

Jeremi MOULE: We think about six, but we could check that figure for you. In the 2024–25 period – they have obviously continued to meet throughout this financial year, but in the reporting period we would say about half a dozen.

Jade BENHAM: Okay, great. If you could provide that, that would be great. On the *Economic Growth Statement*, could you please provide some consultation, feedback or correspondence regarding the *Economic Growth Statement* from the Business Council of Australia and VCCI? Do you have any of that consultation feedback from BCA and VCCI?

Jason LOOS: In terms of the *Economic Growth Statement*?

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, I am not precisely sure what product you are asking for.

Jade BENHAM: Have the Business Council of Australia or VCCI –

Jeremi MOULE: Have they written to us?

Jade BENHAM: Yes. Has there been any feedback on the consultation that your department has done on the *Economic Growth Statement*?

Jeremi MOULE: Feedback in terms of content that they wanted to feed into the *Economic Growth Statement*?

Jade BENHAM: Yes.

Jeremi MOULE: We can see what they provided us, yes.

Jade BENHAM: Then you will provide that to us?

Jeremi MOULE: If we are able to, yes.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you. Could you please provide a list of businesses with whom the department consulted in relation to the *Economic Growth Statement*?

Jason LOOS: Yes, I can provide that.

Jade BENHAM: Are you doing that? Okay. The government's economic dashboard that I have beside me shows that business investment is down year on year by 1.5 per cent. Has the department briefed the Premier on this decline in business investment?

Jeremi MOULE: I think I am going to answer that question the way that I answered some previous ones. Firstly, the lead department for economic data is the Department of Treasury and Finance, who I know that you had before you yesterday. In terms of the nature of the advice that we provide the Premier, on major data releases we would provide briefing information on those matters as they are published.

Jade BENHAM: So you have not advised the Premier on the decline in business investment, as the economic dashboard shows?

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, I am satisfied with the way that I answered your question.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Thank you. The Premier recently said that Victoria is attracting more business investment than any other state. Given the government's own dashboard indicates otherwise, has there been any discussion within the department with the Premier around this at all?

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, I do not have the dashboard in front of me, so I take at face value the point you are making. All I would say is that if there is a decline in a data point year to year, that does not mean that

Victoria still does not have strong business investment activity and business investment in the state of Victoria. Is that the point? Is that the question that you were asking?

Richard WELCH: No, we are not asking for a qualitative statement. We are asking for a point of fact: have you have you briefed the Premier on this?

Jeremi MOULE: I think if the questions are going to continue to be whether or not we have briefed the Premier on a matter, I am going to repeatedly need to give a very similar answer to those questions.

Jade BENHAM: No.

Jeremi MOULE: No, that is not the answer I gave. We periodically advise the Premier in relation to data releases and data that is reported. The specifics of that material I am not in a position to be able to go to.

Richard WELCH: Could you confirm on notice whether you have or not?

Jeremi MOULE: I am satisfied with the answer that I just gave, Mr Welch.

Jade BENHAM: We would just like to know, and I think the public has a right to know, whether the Premier is being briefed on the economic state of Victoria and the downward turn.

Jeremi MOULE: I have answered that question. We brief the Premier routinely on economic and other data releases in their totality so that the Premier is aware of those matters.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. Mr Loos, as chair of the interdepartmental committee: the Commonwealth government's federation funding agreement schedule on land transport infrastructure projects forecasts providing \$400 million in 2025–26 to the Suburban Rail Loop East. Has that money been received by the Victorian government?

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Welch, that is absolutely a question for the Department of Treasury and Finance. The money has been committed.

Richard WELCH: But we have the chair right here.

Jeremi MOULE: The interdepartmental committee does not deal with whether or not the Commonwealth government has yet transferred that money, but commitments from the Commonwealth –

Jade BENHAM: You do not know? How does that make for a functional executive?

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, that matter is absolutely known. It is a question best directed to the Department of Treasury and Finance. When money is paid by the Commonwealth to us into our accounts is a level of detail that that they would have available to them that we do not have in front of us. That is that –

Richard WELCH: That is \$400 million. You would be aware, surely, on a critical infrastructure project that needs money.

Jeremi MOULE: When the Commonwealth commits funds to any activity, it is usually accompanied by a schedule of when payments are made. And despite that, yes, being a large amount of money, that is a fairly routine transaction between the Commonwealth and any state, that those moneys would arrive against the schedule that the Commonwealth has committed to provide them. There is no mystery to that.

Richard WELCH: Okay. Thank you, Secretary. Mr Loos, have you – or actually anyone in the department – received an updated cost for the SRL projects, updating from the 2021 costs?

Jeremi MOULE: As each of the packages have been awarded, the costs of those packages have been made public. If you are asking whether or not there has been any revision to the total estimated cost of the project SRL East as a whole, the \$30 million to \$34 million figure, no, there has not.

Richard WELCH: Have you requested one, given that it is four to five years out of date?

Jeremi MOULE: Requested an update –

Richard WELCH: An update on the costs?

Jeremi MOULE: No, we have visibility of the costs of the packages that have been awarded. We obviously have internal visibility of the procurement processes, and some of those are at shortlist stage. So we understand the costs that are coming in from those that are bidding for those remaining packages of work. We have no reason, given that level of visibility, to be seeking to change the cost of the overall project.

Richard WELCH: Mr Loos, the minister presented at the SRL IDC meeting on 21 June 2024, outlining the importance of keeping the program on track while resolving cost issues. What were the cost issues?

Jason LOOS: In any infrastructure project there are always going to be issues that arise. Back at that time –

Richard WELCH: But it was important, and we are not talking trivial line items. We are talking you bringing this up at the committee level – or the chair. It must have been a material cost issue.

Jason LOOS: Yes, but –

Richard WELCH: You would not bring up a trivial one.

Jason LOOS: Across infrastructure projects there are always cost issues that need to –

Richard WELCH: Well, what were they?

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Welch, could you repeat the date of those minutes for me, please?

Richard WELCH: 21 June 2024.

Jeremi MOULE: I think that is outside the reporting period.

Richard WELCH: Well, I will accept that. No, that is fine. We will avoid these questions. That is absolutely fine.

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

Michael GALEA: The hint is in the title of the inquiry: it is the 2024–25 financial and performance outcomes.

Richard WELCH: Yes, I understand, Mr Galea. I am happy to move on.

The CHAIR: I am going to rule on the point of order, Mr Welch. I repeatedly had to say to you yesterday and the colleagues to my left: the terms of reference for this inquiry fit within a particular time period. Could you please ask your questions within the terms of reference?

Richard WELCH: Absolutely. I apologise. Mr Loos, have the total costs of the SRL risen?

Jason LOOS: Still within the 30 to 34 –

Richard WELCH: You have received no documents that would suggest there will be additional cost?

Jason LOOS: No. As the Secretary referred to, we are through some of the trade packages, and they are coming through. And we are –

Richard WELCH: So there have been no internal department meetings where the fact that the cost may be greater than the 2021 estimates – may be greater than those?

Jason LOOS: No.

Richard WELCH: In the DTF submission to the 17 July 2024 SRL interdepartmental committee, concerns about the value capture approach were expressed. It is a common theme across all initiatives in relation to stakeholder and community acceptance of the proposed changes – a common theme across all the initiatives in relation to the stakeholder and community acceptance. What were the proposed initiatives?

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Welch, the government has not yet announced what its approach will be to value capture. The minutes that you are referring to reflect the discussion of developing what is a very complex piece of policy to support this project. It should not come as any surprise that there would be a diversity of views externally and internally about the best way to present options to government.

Richard WELCH: Granted, totally. Granted, but I am asking what the initiatives were.

Jeremi MOULE: I am not sure that we are in a position to be able to answer that question, because the deliberations in terms of that policy development are a matter for government decision-making and would likely go to the detailed optionality that the Department of Treasury and Finance and other departments, including our own –

Richard WELCH: How many years has this been in consideration? Five years? After five years you are still considering – you are saying it is still amorphous, we still do not have any clarity? You are not in the final channel of what the policy is going to be after five years?

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Welch, I think that the minutes make clear to you that we are at that point. I think that was almost a year ago. We are in the final stages of developing advice to government in relation to that. The answer I gave to your –

Richard WELCH: When will you be providing that information to the government?

Jeremi MOULE: The government is yet to make its decision or make public its decision.

Richard WELCH: Have you provided your advice on this to government on what the model should be?

Jeremi MOULE: Yes. We have provided ongoing and iterative advice. It has been a –

Richard WELCH: But not final advice?

Jeremi MOULE: No.

Richard WELCH: And the iterations are continuing, are they?

Jeremi MOULE: I think, to use your turn of phrase, I feel like we are in the home stretch. But this is a piece of work that, at a point in time, is going to be necessary for the government to announce, and we have been working towards that timeframe.

Richard WELCH: It is still not finalised after five years.

Jeremi MOULE: The government has not yet announced its decision.

Richard WELCH: No. But has it concluded its position?

Jeremi MOULE: I am satisfied with the answer that I gave you, Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: I am not, though. I am not at all satisfied.

Jade BENHAM: I have just got some questions about the Victorian Multicultural Commission. Can the Secretary outline the internal processes within DPC and the Victorian Multicultural Commission that were followed in preparation for the 2024–25 annual report and explain how those processes failed to identify the inaccurate and offensive depiction of the map of India before it was published?

Jeremi MOULE: I will ask Ms de Kretser to respond to that question.

Dannii de KRETSE: Thank you. I do recognise the incorrect map that was published. The VMC greatly regrets that inclusion in that report and has actually issued a sector-wide apology for that issue. In terms of what we have done about it, we have learned from it, and we will be putting in place processes to absolutely improve and make sure such a very regrettable incident does not happen again. I would also say the VMC has taken immediate steps to rectify and reissue the report.

Jade BENHAM: What work has been done to identify the breakdown in communication that allowed it to occur in the first place?

Dannii de KRETSEER: I have reflected on the role that I play in making sure that that standard is adhered to going forward. It was a regrettable incident, and mistakes do happen. I will be doing my utmost to make sure they do not happen again, as will the VMC chair.

Jade BENHAM: Has the department engaged with the affected communities to apologise?

Dannii de KRETSEER: The VMC has, yes.

Jade BENHAM: Okay.

Dannii de KRETSEER: Thank you.

Jade BENHAM: Moving on to quality assurance, what quality assurance steps, including cultural and geopolitical accuracy checks, were expected to be undertaken prior to sign off of the report, and at what point did the breakdown in review or approval occur?

Jeremi MOULE: The material that you are referring to went through a standard set of approvals before publication, and as Ms de Kretser reflected, an error was made that no-one picked up.

Jade BENHAM: How many how many steps did it go through? How many sets of approvals?

Dannii de KRETSEER: Multiple steps of approvals.

Jade BENHAM: Do you have a number?

Dannii de KRETSEER: I would say six levels of approvals.

Jade BENHAM: Six levels of approvals and no-one picked it up?

Dannii de KRETSEER: It was an iconic map. It was very small in the report, and unfortunately my attention was –

Jade BENHAM: But very significant.

Dannii de KRETSEER: Very significant. We have absolutely learned from it, and we will be making sure that is not repeated, including with additional checks going forward.

Jade BENHAM: Apart from additional checks, are there other processes in place? Are there any massive process changes to make sure this does not happen again?

Jeremi MOULE: Overall, the approval processes for material, particularly public-facing material, within the department are sound. This instance clearly shows that in relation to a map that was published in that document that there was an error. There was an oversight. It was a human error; those that were responsible for checking that on the way through did not notice the error in the map. As Ms de Kretser made clear, the VMC has apologised for that. As the department head, we are apologetic for that as well. But it was an error that we will seek to not replicate.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Thank you. Moving on to the Premier's Diwali event, which was 8 October this year, what was the total cost? And there was also the event at the Melbourne exhibition centre last year, so this has been going on for several years. What was the total cost of the event last year, including the venue hire and catering, which was the centrepiece at Melbourne Park?

Dannii de KRETSEER: I do not have the figures for last year's Diwali. I have the attendance rate of this year's Diwali, but we are happy to take that on notice.

Jeremi MOULE: We are happy to take that question on notice, Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Okay, great. So the attendance rate, and can I also get the cost per head, please.

Jeremi MOULE: Yes. We will tell you how many people came and how much it cost.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you.

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: I understand that the government members of this committee think this line of questioning is a joke, and that probably illustrates why Victoria is in the state that it is in. Can the Secretary outline the internal processes that led to the decision to restrict the parliamentary invitations for the Premier's Diwali reception to Labor government MPs and their guests, while providing only one invitation to the opposition, and who approved that approach?

Dannii de KRETZER: We can absolutely provide something on notice around how the process was orchestrated. Sorry, I was not in the chair at the time, but I am happy to do so on notice.

Jade BENHAM: So there was no obvious process that was gone through to make sure that Labor MPs had tables available to them while the opposition had one?

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, we are happy to take that question on notice. Neither of us are immediately familiar with the process for developing the guest list for last year's Diwali.

Jade BENHAM: Okay, thank you. Assessment of appropriateness and impartiality – did the department undertake any assessment of whether using taxpayer funds for an event with such an uneven and politically selective invitation list was appropriate? And what, if any, advice was prepared warning of the risk of the event being perceived as partisan?

Jeremi MOULE: We will also take that question on notice.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you. I am going to move on, because I do not know that I am going to get a question for that one as well. Let us talk about the Premier's multicultural gala dinner. What was the total cost of the event, of the Premier's multicultural gala dinner, including venue hire and catering?

Dannii de KRETZER: Are you referring to the Victorian Multicultural Commission's gala dinner? Is that the one?

Jade BENHAM: It is called the Premier's now. Yes, the Victorian multicultural gala.

Dannii de KRETZER: For 2024–25? I will have to take that on notice and come back to you.

Jade BENHAM: You do not have the figure in front of you?

Dannii de KRETZER: I do not have the figure in front of me, sorry.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. For the first time ever this year the longstanding event was renamed from 'the Victorian multicultural gala dinner' to 'the Premier's multicultural gala dinner'. Who made that decision?

Dannii de KRETZER: As you can tell from my questioning, I will have to take that on notice and let you know who made that decision.

Jade BENHAM: Great, thank you. Were there any concerns within the department about renaming from 'the VMC' to 'the Premier's multicultural gala dinner'?

Dannii de KRETZER: I cannot comment on that. I will take it on notice, though, and answer both your questions.

Jade BENHAM: We can add to that. The opposition was afforded the equivalent of one table at that dinner also, whereas correspondence received via FOI found that every Labor government MP and minister was invited and afforded to bring guests. Why?

Dannii de KRETZER: Again, I will be able to advise and will take it on notice. I will have a look at what the decision-making process was.

Jade BENHAM: So you are not concerned about the politicisation of these events? And is the department offering advice to government that these events, using taxpayer money, could be perceived as politicised – completely politicised?

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, I absolutely understand your question. Ms de Kretser and I are not immediately familiar with the detail, and we are very happy to answer those questions on notice.

Jade BENHAM: That sort of advice is surely not cabinet in confidence.

Jeremi MOULE: I have acknowledged that we are happy to answer those questions. There is no issue. We are happy to answer those questions on notice; we just do not have that information immediately available to either of us.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. No worries. I want to just move on quickly. In the time that we have got left I have got a few questions around treaty and the total cost of legal advice to establish treaty negotiation. It remains unclear at this point –

The CHAIR: Apologies, Ms Benham. We are going to go to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you so much, Chair. And thank you very much, Secretary and officials. I also want to focus on support for multicultural communities and specifically the information that is in the 2024–25 DPC annual report around support for rural and regional multicultural communities, beyond just the borders of Melbourne. Are you able to speak, please, a bit to what support is being targeted to those rural and regional areas?

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you. I will ask Ms de Kretser to respond to that question. Thank you.

Dannii de KRETSE: Thank you; and thank you for the question. I think it is super important that the events and the programs that we run through multicultural affairs absolutely reach the regions. I am very happy to also report that as part of the annual report you will see we actually exceeded the BP3 target for the distribution of all grants going to regional and rural areas. We did achieve 22 per cent of all those grants into regional areas against a target of 20 per cent, and it is a huge focus of our team in DPC to be targeting regional communities in the way that they need.

What I can report is in 2024–25 over \$5 million was invested in programs in regional Victoria. It helped regional Victorians from multicultural and interfaith backgrounds celebrate their strengths, their cultures, their traditions. I am pleased it was over a range of programs that the multicultural affairs program runs, including the Regional Multicultural Festivals and Events Fund, delivering commitments to Victorian multicultural communities, the local anti-racism initiatives grants program, support for newly arrived migrant communities and the strategic partnerships program.

In relation to festivals and events I am pleased to say \$1.2 million went into regional and rural areas, and that has supported 85 regional festivals and events, reaching around 140,000 attendees. Key funded events – I am just going to raise three main ones that stood out as you go through the myriad of achievements among those events. In Benalla there was \$50,000 for Diwali. It was a spectacular celebration of light featuring Sri Lankan, Indian, Nepalese and Bangladeshi dance performances, cultural food and art installations. There was \$25,000 in Shepparton for the Segmento Tarantella Festival, which absolutely showcased Greek and Italian culture through workshops, exhibitions, music and dance. Finally I will just comment on the Karen New Year \$35,000 event in Corio – so just getting around different parts of the state – with traditional dance, music, food stalls and cultural sporting competitions that brought the community together. As you can see, there are a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds that we aim to target through the festivals and events program.

In terms of other initiatives I do want to call out a couple of infrastructure ones that we have invested in. There has been \$392,000-odd to prepare the schematic design and function brief for the redevelopment of the existing Golden Dragon Museum facility in Bendigo. A rich culture exists in Bendigo. We have had \$50,000 towards the construction of the pre-burial preparation facility at the existing Islamic Society of Geelong mosque, and then there has been \$900,000 towards the construction of the Hindu temple and cultural centre in Ballarat. All of these initiatives go through a proper process in terms of assessing them for their efficacy against a set of criteria, and then we manage the delivery of those with the organisation that is given that money.

I do want to talk a little bit about the work that is going on to address racism that is also reaching into regional and rural areas. The state budget allocated \$2.44 million over two years to deliver what we are calling local anti-racism programs of work or projects. Basically there are about 30 of those grants that are being distributed statewide, but a significant portion of those is going into regional and rural areas. The program also cuts across First Peoples communities; we have six First Peoples communities in regional areas that are recipients of those anti-racism grants. I can also say a further \$169,000 is allocated to multifaith and multicultural initiatives under that anti-racism program in regional and rural areas, which will continue into 2025–26 as well. Those projects are running in Wodonga, Ballarat, Shepparton and Warrnambool. They range from the community being able to report things, which is really important to communities. Through the racism taskforce we really heard that people need a mechanism to raise these issues somewhere, and there are some community-led approaches to doing that across many multifaith and multicultural communities that are going through the LARI program. They are developing educational resources, and I do have to say those educational resources are not just for the multicultural community, they are for the broader community, because we all own addressing racism and delivering capacity building and cultural awareness training. Then we also have the First People's cultural exchange programs, which Terry might also wish to comment on.

I will briefly touch on, if it is okay, the support for the newly arrived migrant communities initiative. This is something that is statewide, but there is a particular focus on newly arrived communities in regional Victoria. We do have pockets where there are newly arrived communities that we need to reach. There is \$4.4 million that has been made available for a couple of things. One is the Community Hubs Australia program of work. There are hubs in Geelong and also in Shepparton. I think there are about six in total. Those hubs sit on a school site, and they are where a newly arrived family can go and access the things they need that really wrap around them and help make their lives as rich as possible – things like early childhood supports, access to the stuff that actually makes a difference. It is on a school site. Families generally will access things when they are on a school site quite well, and they will engage quite well. We also have funding to – and I have to say that initiative, the Community Hubs one, has helped about 6000 families across the state.

Lauren KATHAGE: I know the Member for Lara speaks very highly of it.

Dannii de KRETZER: Yes. And the beauty of it is, I think, when we say 'Geelong', it is not just in one primary school in Geelong, it is in three, so it actually saturates the LGA rather than just one school in an LGA. It is actually quite successful. It is used Australia-wide as well. The last one is about free specialist legal assistance to over 2400 people seeking asylum – refugees and disadvantaged migrants. That program operates in metro and regional areas. I think I mentioned there are 2400 people that have received assistance so far.

Lauren KATHAGE: That was some good detail on the regional programs under the anti-racism strategy. I saw in the annual report that DPC had a role supporting your ministers in the development of that strategy. Can we zoom out just a little bit to hear a bit about what that strategy is aiming for statewide and what that implementation looks like?

Dannii de KRETZER: Yes, absolutely. I will go into that, and I will ask my colleague Terry to join us. The beauty of this strategy is that it looks at all forms of racism, including strong engagement with First Peoples in its design. But I will –

Terry GARWOOD: While Dannii is finding the points of information there, I will just comment on the racism directed towards Aboriginal people as a specific issue and just call out that the work of the strategy had extensive engagement with First Nations communities in its development. Obviously Sheena Watt MP was the Aboriginal co-chair and through her and extensive involvement with the Aboriginal community we made sure that we tried to come to grips in the strategy with racism, which has particularly spiked over the last couple of years for various reasons, and also to acknowledge that Aboriginal people, First Nations people, who appear before Yoorrook called out racism, their own personal experiences and what it has meant to them. That was highlighted in the Yoorrook Justice Commission reports. They had countless witnesses' stories of past and ongoing racism in all sorts of forums, whether it was the justice system, child protection or police. I think all members of the committee would be aware that racism causes profound harm in all its forms. It has had a significant impact on First Peoples over the decades, and it is something that we really all should feel compelled to address and take action on. I have been really pleased to support Dannii and other members through the multicultural community about that particular racism directed at First Nations people, which has a

whole lot of colonial historical baggage that is quite unique in terms of dispossession of land and ongoing racism over many decades. That is why the strategy is really so important.

Dannii de KRETZER: Thank you. To add to that context about the unique experience of First Peoples racism, the state is experiencing rising antisemitic behaviour and also growth in Islamophobia as well. So there is a context around the anti-racism work that is very important, and it is very important that we do the work and lean into this issue for social cohesion.

I would say the strategy was launched in November 2024. It is a culmination of a taskforce that has been quite dedicated over a couple of years to produce this strategy. It is a five-year plan of how we prevent and address racism and faith-based discrimination, and it includes, as Terry pointed out, First Peoples, multicultural and multifaith Victorians. There is \$4 million dedicated and behind this strategy, so it does have some investment that we are working through allocating. I am going to separate it into two buckets. There is \$2.44 million, which I spoke about previously, which is where we have got local community organisations leaning into this issue. As I said, there are 30 projects or 30 organisations receiving that funding, of which 35 per cent are First Peoples organisations. Those projects, and I have got a full list of them: if I summarise them, we have got education campaigns – we are trying to strengthen that impact of racism that Terry really talked about – and youth leadership programs, getting into younger people, which is super important and also empowering young people to be the leaders of the future. We have got anti-racism initiatives in the arts to harness creativity in building a coalition against racism and community reporting projects, which I mentioned later. Some of those are in quite dedicated communities, and some of them are broader, where people can report more broad forms, whereas some actually relate to particular groups.

Then there are three projects which are the balance of the investment that the department is partnering with other agencies on. The first one is this one that we are working closely with our DJSIR colleagues on, and that is about a campaign in community sport. That is in its early phase of design. We are actually using the taskforce to test the design of that before it rolls out, but DJSIR are very much leaning into that one being able to roll out in the coming months. We have got almost an anti-racism tick program of work, which VEOHRC are running. That is also in its early design, again going through the Anti-Racism Taskforce to make sure we get it right. What it will do is trial an approach in workplaces where you can almost accredit a workplace in terms of its processes to deal with racism. They are currently looking at the selection of workplaces that might be in the first round of work, and we hope to see that one rolling out in the coming period.

And then finally there is a program of work with Victoria Police as well about taking an approach to the treatment of First Peoples and multicultural communities. That will be designed very carefully by Victoria Police, and that is to lead efforts around often the over-representation of multicultural communities in policing incidents and justice activities.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. That is a really diverse range of activities, so it sounds like a lot of thought has gone into making sure that it is hitting all the spots where racism can rear its ugly head, and I wish you well with the implementation of that. It is very important.

Secretary, I would like to draw your attention to the 2024–25 annual report on page 24, where it speaks about Beaumaris Primary School and the board of inquiry there into historical child abuse, and also establishing the forum for truth and recognition. Can you tell the committee, please, about this work and then how that is supporting victim-survivors?

Jeremi MOULE: Yes, thank you. Just as some opening remarks before I hand to Ms de Kretzer, the department plays an important role when it comes to the establishment of various inquiries in advising the Premier and then ensuring that those inquiries under the *Inquiries Act* are set up in a suitable and appropriate way and also making sure that an appointment is made for someone to lead the inquiry and that they are supported with the resources that they need to undertake their work. In terms of the detail for this inquiry, I will ask Ms de Kretzer to answer that question. Thank you.

Dannii de KRETZER: Thanks, Secretary. Thanks for the question. This is super important work, and I do acknowledge the absolute abhorrence and devastating impact of sexual abuse on victim-survivors and on any person. As the Secretary said, the response to the board of inquiry was published in June 2024. All nine recommendations were accepted in full or in principle, and implementation is well underway. What we have

done is establish a webpage where interested parties can keep abreast of the progress of those nine recommendations. That is very important to victim-survivors. So there is a webpage that was last updated in late October that actually goes through recommendation by recommendation to keep the public abreast of progress.

But what I will probably talk about is the Forum for Truth and Recognition, which the government established on 9 June. It is a formal review, as the Secretary noted, and Ms Angela Connors was appointed as the chair in August 2025. Basically, that program of work, what it is about, Ms Connors is aiming to listen to victim-survivors and learn from their experiences to absolutely recognise the harm and impact of sexual abuse in schools on them, and that will culminate in a report to government in May next year. With the forum's work and its report, the aim is to support healing and contribute to a shared understanding of the significant and far-reaching impacts of child sexual abuse. It is also to help us learn how to prevent it going forward.

The website is live. I know Ms Connors may have had hearings on the 5th and the 6th or early November. Ms Connors is also making herself available to meet with victim-survivors one to one, because it is very, very important that people have the right forum to share their truths about what are abhorrent acts essentially. We also make sure that victim-survivors are able to present anonymously should they wish, and counselling and other supports are wrapped around all victim-survivors in the lead-up and after any of those hearings or interactions with the truth-telling forum. So it is well underway, and I am sure it will reveal significant impacts on victim-survivors as the process unfolds.

Lauren KATHAGE: How long will they have access to the counselling et cetera following the hearings?

Dannii de KRETZER: The truth-telling commission is slated to run into this financial year, so I would assume we would be quite flexible with that. But I am absolutely happy to take that on notice to give you more specifics if that would be helpful.

Lauren KATHAGE: Great, thank you. I would like to ask now about national work on gender-based violence. Still in the annual report, there is information there around DPC co-leading national work with South Australia to address gender-based violence. What was that work involving that we were leading?

Dannii de KRETZER: Thank you. I might take this one as well. It is interesting. One of the things that happened post national cabinet, which really looked at issues of gender-based violence in May 2024, is that it was agreed by first ministers that states and territories would look at opportunities to strengthen national consistency and best practice approaches across jurisdictions. The main focus of this was risk assessment and responses to family violence and sexual assault. What we have learned in Victoria, and really since the royal commission, and the seminal royal commission in particular, is the importance of all the different aspects of risk sharing and information coming together. So we are talking about a victim-survivor, a perpetrator and a child sometimes, or more often than not. It is really important that that information is shared between agencies and parties that are involved in not only keeping them safe but helping them to thrive, because if a piece is out of alignment, it can cause irreparable harm and safety risks for that victim-survivor.

Victoria has very much led the way with what we call the MARAM, which is the multi-agency risk assessment and management framework. The MARAM is also backed by some IT stuff that is a central information point that helps us to share information across agencies. What has really come of the work from national cabinet is us helping other jurisdictions understand what is going on in Victoria and, vice versa, learning from them as well to make sure there is a more nationally consistent approach or best practice across different jurisdictions in that risk sharing information, because of the absolute essence of that. When information is not shared, it can really be a massive problem for a victim-survivor.

The other part of this that is probably also really important, and why a national lens is super helpful, is that often the Family Court aspects of information sit with a federal sort of overlay. When we can bring that into the picture of understanding what is going on in a Family Court sense, it can really make a difference as well, because that piece of information about when a perpetrator might be heightened because they are in a court and in a proceeding that might actually be triggering something that causes risk not only to the victim-survivor but to the child – if we do not have that piece of information when we are delivering state-based services, that can be a real risk to women and children. So we are looking forward to that work continuing. It is really important

that we understand the myriad of decisions that go across different jurisdictions, but we are hoping for that to be completed in 2026 as well.

Lauren KATHAGE: And is part of that back-end IT solution to that –

Dannii de KRETSEK: It is not pre-empting that. I think different jurisdictions have different arrangements in place – like in Victoria we have what we call the central information point that is already an IT solution, but we will share that with our practice with other jurisdictions.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms de Kretser. The committee is going to take a short break before resuming its consideration of Department of Premier and Cabinet at 11:15 am.

The committee will now resume its consideration of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. I am going to throw to Ms Benham.

Jade BENHAM: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to go back to the VMC and talk about the regional events that you mentioned in the last session. Can you give me perhaps any details on how many government MPs were invited to those events and how many opposition MPs may have been invited as well?

Dannii de KRETSEK: I would be happy to take on notice the guest list. I do not have that information and they are run by organisations, so I will have to check what we hold. But I absolutely can do that.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Thank you very much. Moving on to treaty and the total amount that the department did spend on legal advice relating to establishing treaty –

Jeremi MOULE: Yes, Ms Benham. I should have that here. Sorry, it is a subset of our totals. Let me just –

Jade BENHAM: That is okay.

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you. So the legal expenditure for the 2024–25 financial year was \$1.22 million. Just to be very clear about that figure, there may be a small lag in some invoices that we have received. So that is the expenditure figure. My advice is that it will not change significantly, but it might be like tens of thousands more.

Jade BENHAM: That is fine. Which law firms provided this advice?

Jeremi MOULE: Primarily that advice has been sought from the solicitor-general.

Jade BENHAM: From the solicitor-general.

Jeremi MOULE: You will appreciate the complexity and novel nature of the work that is being done here, and the intersection with the Victorian constitution, and also making sure that the work that is done here protects the eminence of the Parliament. So it has been necessary to make sure we had legal advice of the highest order.

Jade BENHAM: So there is a cost associated with that?

Jeremi MOULE: With the legal advice? That is the figure that I just –

Jade BENHAM: That is all to the solicitor-general? There has been no outside legal advice?

Jeremi MOULE: I would have to check that. But if there was other legal advice, it would be a small amount relative to the VGSO and the solicitor-general.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. What about external consultants with advice to advancing treaty? What is the total figure spent there for the reporting period?

Jeremi MOULE: I do not think we have had any, have we, Terry?

Terry GARWOOD: No.

Jeremi MOULE: I am not I am not aware that we have engaged any external consultants to support treaty work for the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Terry GARWOOD: Sorry, Secretary. The consultancy expenditure for the department is listed on page 60, and there is nothing there related to treaty.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. So no external consultants at all?

Jeremi MOULE: No.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. Great. Thank you.

Roma BRITNELL: If I may ask a question next, I want to go now to non-disclosure agreements. Secretary, in 2024 DPC entered into 427 non-disclosure confidentiality deeds – 407 of those were non-government entities. What is the government trying to keep secret?

Jeremi MOULE: I think you are referring to an FOI that we received during the reporting period. The department enters into a large number of both vendor agreements and also grant recipient agreements. Of the large number – 427 I think was the number that you just used – there is a standard confidentiality clause in those vendor and grant contracts that is captured by the FOI request, and that is why that figure was reported in the way that it was.

Roma BRITNELL: So what exactly were you trying to keep secret? Because it is not just for grants, but for people who are part of those organisations that are not allowed to speak out – not only about the grants. Is that right?

Jeremi MOULE: I am using that as an anecdote. The nature of the grants that we provide, which are largely to multicultural organisations and some through our First Peoples portfolio as well, would relate to managing those things. It does not relate to expressing a view about the government of the day, for example, which I think is the nature of your question, Ms Britnell.

Roma BRITNELL: Why did a single employee have to enter a non-disclosure agreement with DPC?

Jeremi MOULE: In terms of the single individual, I am not certain. I do not have that at hand. I am also not certain whether, even if I did, I would be legally allowed to disclose that. But I think also as part of that FOI response, which was to the opposition, we made it clear that the department did not enter into any non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements related to sexual or other harassment, so that was clear in the response to the FOI.

Roma BRITNELL: Okay. Are you able to provide on notice the reason for that individual?

Jeremi MOULE: If I am legally permitted to. Given that is a non-disclosure agreement, there may be some limitations, Ms Britnell.

Roma BRITNELL: I am sure you can give us an understanding of the theme, like you said before – not sexual, but perhaps something else.

Jeremi MOULE: I am happy to respond in the way that we are able to, yes.

Roma BRITNELL: How many non-disclosure/confidentiality deeds have been entered into by DPC to date in 2025?

Jeremi MOULE: I think the reporting period of 2024–25 is complete in terms of the – no, that is the FOI number, sorry. I can provide that answer on notice.

Roma BRITNELL: Thank you. That would be great. Can you also take on notice and provide a list of names of all the organisations that have this agreement with DPC, please? Just the organisations.

Jeremi MOULE: That will be every single grant recipient, because it is a very standard clause in our contracts.

Roma BRITNELL: A lot of the community are telling me they are having to keep very quiet about things, so I would really appreciate if you could provide all those organisations.

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Britnell, that material is published. It is in the annual report additional information, isn't it?

Dannii de KRETZER: From page 160.

Jeremi MOULE: Yes.

Roma BRITNELL: All right.

Jade BENHAM: Can we discuss Lake Mountain and Mount Baw Baw privatisation. Earlier this year the government opened up an expression-of-interest process for Lake Mountain and Mount Baw Baw seeking qualified commercial operators interested in taking on a long-term lease over one or both of those resorts. The application window closed in January 2025. How many EOIs came through?

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, that is not a matter that we manage. I think that might be DEECA that manages those parks. To the best of our knowledge, obviously those locations have commercial operators and from time to time they need to be tendered for. Perhaps it is a question for Ms Houghton when she appears as DEECA Secretary.

Jade BENHAM: That is okay. I will refer them to that. Can we just go back to treaty for a moment and talk about the external consultation that went on. Is DPC aware of what polling surveys or market research, if no external consultants were used, the department undertook during the reporting period to measure public awareness in support of treaty?

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, I am not aware that we did any market research in the way that you have characterised it to get public sentiment or views on treaty. I am happy to take that on notice to make sure that that is correct, but neither the Deputy Secretary nor I recall anything directly.

Terry GARWOOD: Well, if we did it, I was not aware of it, because we have not had it.

Jade BENHAM: That is okay.

Jeremi MOULE: Yes, it seems unlikely, but I am certainly happy to check.

Jade BENHAM: Great. No, that is fine. How many FTE staff were dedicated to supporting the treaty negotiations within DPC, and what was the total cost of those staff?

Jeremi MOULE: There is a dedicated treaty negotiations and strategy team in the Department of Premier and Cabinet that is on a fixed-term funding profile. That team reports to me. I would need to get the accurate FTE and cost number, but is in the order of 30 to 35 FTE. I am happy to provide that in more detail, but that gives you a sense of the size.

Jade BENHAM: Yes, and the cost within that detail.

Jeremi MOULE: Absolutely.

Jade BENHAM: Yes, great. Thank you. About the questionnaire, it lists a review commission called the interim scoping commission on compensation issues. Given this review cost taxpayers \$150,000 and it is clearly public interest, can you explain who was paid to write it and why it is not being published?

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, I am sorry, do you have a page number to assist us?

Jade BENHAM: Yes, the questionnaire, section H, page 70.

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you. Ms Benham, just to be clear, so we are all looking at the same thing, this is the first principles review of the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act*?

Jade BENHAM: Yes.

Jeremi MOULE: Is that the item, yes? Thank you. Mr Garwood will catch up with his paperwork, but I will ask him to respond to that.

Terry GARWOOD: I will try and just find the relevant section. The background of this work is the High Court's Timber Creek decision of 2019. As a result of that Timber Creek decision, the compensation arrangements that are payable under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* have to take account of the findings of the High Court – those findings adjust the compensation payments – and also come to grips with impact on culture. As part of the process, the government has instituted a first principles review of the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* on the basis that it wanted to see what improvements could be made to the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* both from a government perspective and from the perspective of the traditional owners as well. That was the first principles review, which sought to come to grips with the High Court's decision around the native titles around Timber Creek. As part of that we had to come to grips with this cultural loss question and what that looks like and how we can come to grips with it. As a consequence of that we brought some consultants in to look at compensation issues et cetera. I do not think there is any reason why that could not be made available to you, because it is a document that seeks to come to grips with the compensation outcomes of the High Court's Timber Creek decision.

Jade BENHAM: Great. If that could be supplied to the committee, that would be great. With regard to the settlement agreements that you just mentioned, can you confirm whether the department is engaging with local councils regarding the potential impact of the settlement agreements? There seems to be some confusion or concern around some of these because of just the lack of communication, really, so can you confirm that the department is communicating?

Terry GARWOOD: The department is very actively engaging with councils impacted by recognition and settlement agreements, of which we have got four, and we have got currently seven matters that are also now before the Federal Court in terms of native title. One of the opportunities that come out of recognition and settlement agreements under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* is engagement with local government. Traditional owners want to do that, and we in the department want to do that as well. Communities, those local traditional owners, are on country. Local councils: I was responsible for Local Government Victoria for seven years. They are very active in the space of connecting to local communities, including traditional owners, and you are perhaps hearing of that engagement that is occurring. That is good, and we will continue that engagement with local government.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. You said there were four local governments that you –

Terry GARWOOD: There are four recognition and settlement agreements.

Jade BENHAM: Great. Okay. Can we talk about how, quickly, as referenced in the questionnaire, the department funds and supports RAPs, registered Aboriginal parties, and holds oversight of the cultural heritage management plans.

Terry GARWOOD: Yes.

Jade BENHAM: The committee has previously asked for the average waiting time and cost of the CHMPs undertaken by each RAP. The question was taken on notice last year, but no response was provided, apparently. Can the department now provide the average waiting time and the average cost charge to applicants to provide the information they will require for their CHMPs?

Terry GARWOOD: I apologise if that information has not been provided previously, and I will seek to provide the information. I will take it on –

Jade BENHAM: Yes, if we could get that for 2023–24 and 2024–25, that would be terrific. Thank you very much.

Terry GARWOOD: Yes, will do.

Jeremi MOULE: Ms Benham, just on that point, there will be a question as to whether or not the department holds the data or has access to the data. I recall in responding to questions on notice previously that

we had to try to work through that. We actually did not have the data because it is for the specific issues of those that are dealt with by the RAPs themselves.

Jade BENHAM: So the RAPs do not share that data with the department?

Jeremi MOULE: We did not have a dataset. There may be some specific matters that they consider where the department becomes involved, but otherwise they are matters that are worked through by the RAPs in question, and they do not. In terms of us responding to this committee's request, we do not necessarily hold that data. We will take your question on notice and respond to it again, but I do recall that the last time when we had a similar question, we had to try to work through that issue.

Jade BENHAM: Okay. I just thought it was something that the department would have oversight of. Richard.

Richard WELCH: I am going to go back to SRL now. In respect to the value capture for the SRL, when can we expect the legislation to be drafted?

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Welch, that is absolutely a matter for government decision, and when the government is ready, it will make its announcements in relation to that.

Richard WELCH: Have you participated in any drafting of prospective legislation?

Jeremi MOULE: I am not in a position to be able to answer that question, because that would go to the internal workings of government and high-level deliberations. As I indicated to you previously, and you made the point that we have been at this for a long time, this has been an iterative process where continuous advice has been provided and work done leading up to what will ultimately be the government's decision and announcement around the approach to value capture.

Richard WELCH: Okay. Thank you. Mr Loos, the SRLA monthly update expressed that there is a station interchange works area. An SRLA officer noted that local MP briefings had been conducted for Glen Waverley and Box Hill. Why was no briefing offered for the MP for Sandringham, whose electorate is adjacent to the Cheltenham SRLA station?

Jason LOOS: I think that would be a matter to discuss with the SRLA CEO.

Richard WELCH: You do not have any oversight of briefings for MPs?

Jason LOOS: No.

Richard WELCH: Do you think any briefings will be offered in the near future?

Jason LOOS: That is a matter for the SRLA.

Richard WELCH: Does it concern you that briefings were held on a partisan basis?

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Welch, we do not have visibility of that work. I think that is absolutely a question to be directed to DTP and the SRLA when they appear before you, and they should be able to explain to you what their approach to engagement in community and certainly with local MPs is.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. In the same section it notes that the SRLA have engaged commercial and legal advisory services to support negotiations with Vicinity Centres and the Scentre Group. What do these negotiations pertain to?

Jeremi MOULE: Firstly, they are highly commercial, so the extent to which that can be revealed in this forum would be a matter for the SRLA to advise on, Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Which I accept, but can you say what advisory services were engaged?

Jeremi MOULE: We did not engage those advisory services, and I think that the SRLA would be able to answer that question for you.

Richard WELCH: The SRLA has noted that the final draft of the preliminary project report for SRL East was submitted. Can a copy of that final report be provided on notice to the committee?

Jeremi MOULE: I could ask two questions. Which document are you referring to, and then secondly, submitted to whom?

Richard WELCH: To DTP, and presumably it is the final draft of the preliminary project report for SRL East.

Jeremi MOULE: Mr Welch, we do not know the answer to that question. It is probably a question best directed to the SRLA. Between us, we think that is probably a document submitted to Infrastructure Australia.

Richard WELCH: But you would know if you had received that document or not because it would have been submitted to you.

Jeremi MOULE: Sorry, I thought you referred to it being submitted to DTP.

Richard WELCH: You have not received it? You do not know if you have received it or not?

Jeremi MOULE: Obviously there is a lot of documentation related to the SRL. We cannot be certain whether we have or have not received that document, Mr Welch. But in terms of its content and composition, I think they are questions best directed to the SRLA.

Richard WELCH: Is there a template copy of the NDA that grant recipients are required to sign?

Jeremi MOULE: Sorry, could you repeat that?

Richard WELCH: Could we have a copy of the NDA template that is used for grant recipients?

Jeremi MOULE: The grant recipients did not receive an NDA. There is a confidentiality clause in the agreement, Mr Welch, which you would expect to see in every legal document that ever gets received.

Richard WELCH: That is fine. Is there a template version of that?

Jeremi MOULE: There is a template grant recipient contract, which we are happy to provide to the committee.

Richard WELCH: Thank you. Are we done? We are done.

The CHAIR: If you have got no more questions, we are done. We are going to go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair, Secretary and officials. I want to take you to the accessible communications policy. The reference is DPC's annual report 2024–25, page 38. I note that DPC has led the program of work to build accessible communications, including the Victorian government's accessible communications policy. Secretary, how is the department evaluating the effectiveness of this policy, and how does it aim to help Victorians?

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you, Mr Tak. I am going to ask Mr Puls to answer this question in detail. But obviously this is a really important part of the work that we do in DPC that supports whole-of-government communication activity. We do a lot of this in the multicultural space and certainly a lot in the accessibility space as well to make sure that all Victorians can access the information that they need about government programs and policies. Mr Puls, if you could add to my answer. Thank you.

Joshua PULS: Thank you. The Victorian government accessible communications policy was endorsed by the Victorian Secretaries Board, so the heads of all the departments, in April 2025 and was then published on the Victorian government website. The policy aims to make sure that all Victorians can access and understand government information. It sets out the expectations for Victorian public servants when it comes to communicating in a clear and direct way, because obviously we cannot assume that everyone is going to communicate in the same way or be able to receive information in exactly the same way. It is a best practice guide for departments and entities to follow, and it delivers on one of the six systemic reforms in the *Inclusive Victoria: State Disability Plan 2022–2026*. It aims to ensure a consistent approach to how we and the VPS

share information with the Victorian community by adhering to a whole-of-Victorian-government style guide, international plain language standards, web content accessibility guidelines and also the Brand Victoria guidelines.

We certainly hope that by implementing this policy this will make government communications more accessible to everyone, regardless of their accessibility challenges or language background. I think you asked about the evaluation of this. Because it was only endorsed in April 2025, it is probably a bit soon for the evaluation piece, but certainly for anything like this we would be wanting to make sure that it is working and that it is actually having the desired effect. But at this stage, we are still very much in the implementation stage.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. I also refer to the same annual report, page 39, and the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission. Secretary, can you talk about the department's role in establishing this Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission?

Jeremi MOULE: Yes. Thank you. Certainly we did a lot of the early work providing advice to government about the form that that commission should take and then a lot of the genesis work so that it was ready to stand up and be active on day one, on 31 December last year. In terms of the more detailed work that we did, again, I will ask Mr Puls to respond to that question.

Joshua PULS: Yes, sure. Thank you. As the Secretary said, we led the policy work and the development of what ultimately became the *Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Act 2024*, which then involved supporting the recruitment of the inaugural commissioners as well as staff who initially were seconded from DPC to make sure that the commission could start work straightaway. It obviously has moved to a much greater degree of independence since its establishment. David Wolf was appointed as the chair and Natasha de Silva as the sessional commissioner. Both of those were endorsed unanimously by the Integrity and Oversight Committee, as required under the Act. DPC is currently supporting the recruitment, through a public process, of an additional sessional commissioner because the Act provides for the full-time chair and two part-time sessional commissioners. That recruitment process continues. Certainly I know from Commissioner Wolf, the chair, that there has been a great deal of work, particularly in terms of getting them set up and establishing their internal procedures and so on. As you would expect for an independent officer of the Parliament, now that there is that implementation or the development of the policy work, the passage of the Act and then the establishment, they are operating much more as you would expect an independent officer of the Parliament to act without visibility from us.

Our real role now – because under the Act, it is the Premier who recommends the appointments of commissioners to the Governor in Council after consultation with the Integrity and Oversight Committee – our continuing role, really, is in supporting that process. But in terms of the ongoing operations of the commission, that is a much more independent arms-length thing, as you would expect, under the supervision of the Integrity and Oversight Committee of this Parliament.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. I am interested in the treaty and self-determination. Again, Secretary, through you, or perhaps Mr Garwood, how will the Statewide Treaty support self-determination for First Peoples in Victoria?

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you, Mr Tak. I will ask Mr Garwood to respond to that question. Thank you.

Terry GARWOOD: Thanks, Mr Tak. I might answer that question by drawing on the Statewide Treaty first, because it sets the scene for my direct response. I will just quote out of the Statewide Treaty, which is such an important document that we will see being reflected in conversations in this place in many different ways over the years to come. The preamble of the Statewide Treaty – and I will call out just various parts of it – says:

The place we now call Victoria holds the oldest living cultures on earth – a truth that belongs to all Victorians and a legacy to uphold with pride. Victoria today is shared by many cultures, each adding to the richness of its story. One of Victoria's greatest strengths is its courage to face the truth – to listen with open hearts, and to move forward with honesty.

It goes on to say:

Yet the relationship between First Peoples and the State of Victoria has been profoundly shaped by colonisation and its enduring harm. Our shared history bears the weight of injustice, dispossession, disruption of Country and acts that sought to erase First Peoples and silence cultures. The Yoorrook Justice Commission revealed how deeply this pain and trauma runs – and how it continues to shape lives, families, and communities today.

It goes on to say:

We stand together committed to a better future – one that is just, fair, and equitable, and honours the rightful place of First Peoples.

Treaty is how we make that future possible.

...

Treaty is an opportunity to listen, to learn, and to affirm the rightful place of First Peoples as decision-makers of their own futures, on their own Country. It recognises the need for meaningful change – enabling self-determination to flourish, for the good of all.

...

The State of Victoria enters this Treaty to reckon with the past, to create lasting change, and to build a stronger, fairer future for everyone lucky enough to find belonging in this land. This is a place of ideas and energy – a state alive with culture, creativity, and difference – where people come not just to live, but to belong. It is only in a place like this, bold enough to face hard truths and generous enough to imagine something better, that the words of this Treaty could be scribed.

This Statewide Treaty marks a new beginning – an invitation to walk forward together, guided by truth, integrity and determination.

Through Treaty, we build better future for all.

And then finally, it says:

Treaty offers the clearest way forward – a commitment to justice and self-determination, and returning decision-making power, authority and resources to First Peoples so they can shape their future on their own terms. This journey will continue, through further Statewide Treaties and Traditional Owner Treaties, to deliver self-determined outcomes for First Peoples and create a more just and hopeful future for all Victorians.

Specifically in relation to the Statewide Treaty, it establishes Gellung Warl as a representative body that will make decisions in relation to First Peoples and provide advice to government. As we know, for too long laws and policies have been made about First Peoples without First Peoples, but when First Peoples lead the way to design policies and solutions, we get better outcomes for First Peoples. We also seek to support truth-telling and self-determination. Situating Gellung Warl within the existing structures of the state ensures that First Peoples representatives can advocate for First Nations communities, provide information, work on building community leadership capability and work with the Victorian government to close the gap between First Peoples and other Victorians. It will also ensure the state is accountable for achieving better outcomes for First Peoples and support ongoing truth-telling and self-determination by advocating to the Victorian government for the interests of First Peoples in Victoria. It will also ensure that information provided to the state is streamlined and making the most of the expertise provided by Aboriginal community controlled organisations and other Aboriginal advocates and knowledge holders while ensuring that such information is representative of the needs of all First Nations people in Victoria. In short, treaty is the gem of self-determination that it brings, and it is a gift to all Victorians.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you. With the same reference, how will Statewide Treaty support the commitment to closing the gap for First Peoples in Victoria?

Terry GARWOOD: Thank you again for that question. Firstly, I should say that the Victorian government acknowledges the strong advocacy and service delivery role of Aboriginal community controlled organisations, or ACCOs as we tend to call them in short. Statewide Treaty will strengthen the support work of ACCOs in Victoria through enabling First Peoples to lead the way in design and solutions, ensuring we get better outcomes across areas like health, housing and education. Gellung Warl will be answerable to the First Peoples community in Victoria through elections and in accordance with a community governance and answerability framework that it is required to develop. The treaty Act also requires secretaries and the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police to develop guidelines on how the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl will be consulted on the development of legislative proposals or policies that are directed to First Peoples and certain matters that are specified in the treaty.

I am looking forward to the opportunities that arise from the work that we are doing with our partners under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which is Ngaweeyan Maar-oo. Ngaweeyan Maar-oo comprises representatives from all of the partnership forums that the Victorian government is engaging with and a representative group of Aboriginal community organisations from across the state. They will be working closely with the First Peoples' Assembly within Gellung Warl to advance the closing the gap work. As the Productivity Commission itself said in its most recent report, there is too much business-as-usual work by

jurisdictions in relation to Closing the Gap. Transformation is needed, and they specifically pointed to the work on treaty here in Victoria as the transformation that is needed to close the gap. In terms of closing the gap, yes, Victoria has got mixed results, and I could go through all of those. I will not go through all the details except to say we have got mixed results. There is more focus, more work, more effort required, and that is exactly what Gellung Warl will set out to do, together with the Victorian government and as well with community organisations. Thank you.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Mr Garwood. Moving on to the Yoorrook Justice Commission, the investments and response, Secretary, I refer to DPC's annual report 2024–25, page 45. How much has the Victorian government invested in the Yoorrook Justice Commission and how has the Victorian government responded to the commission?

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you, Mr Tak. I am going to ask Mr Garwood to continue in just a moment.

Terry GARWOOD: Yes, I am just going to find my place and then I will be able to point to it. Sorry, give me a second, Secretary.

Jeremi MOULE: That is all right.

Terry GARWOOD: Just a minute. Here we are.

Jeremi MOULE: That sticky-note system is letting you down.

Terry GARWOOD: Yes, I am finding the right spot. Okay, so what it has cost – my apologies for the delay: in total \$57.3 million was allocated to the truth and justice process in the Victorian state budget in 2021–22. This included \$10 million for the state response to the Yoorrook Justice Commission as well. The DPC budget estimates questionnaire response provided a figure of \$58.3 million. This included the \$0.9 million that went to the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria to support the commission, so the total cost was \$58.3 million.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you.

Terry GARWOOD: If I can just go on to say that the work of the commission is encapsulated in all of the reports that have been provided. The first report was *Yoorrook with Purpose*, which was the report that was provided in the midst of the COVID pandemic, which had two recommendations, both of which have been addressed by the government – one partially, but it will be completed shortly. Then the next report was *Yoorrook for Justice*, which contained 46 recommendations, to which the government has provided an initial response, and we are continuing to work on a response to that. Then the third report was the *Yoorrook for Transformation* report, which was delivered in late June of this year to the government. But the report that I will particularly call out is the Truth Be Told report, which was if you like their final report on top of those three reports that I mentioned. Truth Be Told is the official public record of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples from the commencement of colonisation right through to now. It lays out, in an entirely referenced way, that impact and why that impact continues today because of the significance of the dispossession and impact on people's lives. So it is very important work that informed the negotiations around treaty. You will see that one of the recommendations that has been picked up through the statewide treaty and the *Statewide Treaty Act* is the need for ongoing truth-telling work, not in the way of a royal commission but more as community-based truth-telling, on country, at place. Yoorrook was a royal commission and functioned in that way, but the work of Gellung Warl in relation to local truth-telling will be more community-based, on country, at place, involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people talking about the history of local areas, which will be very important going forward.

Meng Heang TAK: Yes. That is fantastic work out there. In terms of strengthening the Aboriginal community controlled sector, I refer to the DPC annual report 2024–25, pages 163 to 168. Secretary, what is the government doing to strengthen the Aboriginal community controlled sector and work with the sector to achieve Closing the Gap targets?

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you, Mr Tak. Are you able to continue?

Terry GARWOOD: Yes. Thank you again, Mr Tak, for that question. You are referencing, if you like, a range of grant funding that has been provided through our partners in Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, who are our

Closing the Gap partners. You can see a range of funding that has been provided listed on page 164, and you can see the spread of organisations that are connected through Ngaweeyan Maar-oo through those funding arrangements. But then if you look through the grant details, you will see in there – it is laid out in different parts of those pages – for example, on page 163, ‘Building the capacity of Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs) to deliver a full range of disability services’ and funding provided to the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative for that purpose, as the lead Aboriginal controlled organisation focused on disability. So there is some funding that has been provided to support building the capacity and as an example of how we build the capacity around disability services, which is an underdeveloped program area.

Then if you go on you can see other parts: on page 164, ‘Developing a sector strengthening blueprint for Aboriginal children’, as listed there, with work with the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency Co Op Ltd and some funding provided there. Below that you can see ‘Developing Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Five-year Regional Growth Plans’. Again you can see funding that has been supported. But these are all Closing the Gap initiatives very specifically. On the next page, page 165, you can see an early years summit that I was pleased to attend, as well as the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, building an understanding and consensus on the Aboriginal early years model. Again, funding provided to Aboriginal community controlled organisations is on page 165. Then if I go on – I am just trying to see if there are other references to the work. Another one is here on page 167, the regional oral health feasibility study with the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative, another Closing the Gap initiative.

We have got Ngaweeyan Maar-oo and our partnership forum, which includes all secretaries of the departments, co-chaired by Secretary Moule, which is very focused on what we can do to address Closing the Gap. That is about Victoria’s mixed results, and you can see where we are going after particular issues, whether it is in the child protection area, whether it is in the dental area or whether it is in the disability area. We have got a particular focus of going after our areas where we need to lift our game, and we are doing that, as your question suggests, in partnership with Aboriginal community controlled organisations.

Meng Heang TAK: Is there anything else you would like to add, Mr Garwood?

Terry GARWOOD: Just to make the observation that we are entering a new era in relation to our work with the Aboriginal community. We call it a treaty era, and that is why I purposely introduced into my answer to the question some details directly out of the treaty, because it will be informing so much of what we do as we go forward. And yes, it is completely connected to the *Statewide Treaty Act*, but I think it is important for all of my colleagues in government, in departments, to get their heads around getting ready for the implementation of treaty. We have got a little bit of time to get ourselves organised, because Gellung Warl will be stood up by the first of May next year. So we have got some details to work through, and we will do that. And then there are quite significant commitments that the government and the First Peoples’ Assembly have agreed to work on together through treaty.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Mr Garwood. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Tak. We will go to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good morning. Just looking at budget paper 3, output initiatives on page 73, ‘Anti-discrimination measures’. Can I ask: has the department analysed whether certain regions or suburbs in our state have experienced particular increases in racist or racially motivated incidents over the budget period?

Jeremi MOULE: I am just trying to reflect on the work that was done in preparation for the strategy development. I think there was work done to understand, in a geographical sense, where reported incidents of racism were prevalent, in part to understand where best government might be able to direct its support services, particularly through various community organisations that do such good work in those communities to combat racism. I am not sure, Ms de Kretser, if you have any further detail that you might be able to add?

Dannii de KRETSEK: Sure. It is a really important part, how you identify it locally. Partly what the grants that I mentioned earlier that are going to 30 organisations seek to do is actually have registers where particular communities can report acts as well, and then they link in to the relevant authorities. So that is something that we are looking to strengthen. I do have data on statewide trends of antisemitism and Islamophobia, but what we

will be seeking to do out of the LARI work, or the work that is about anti-racism, is actually seeking to wrap our arms around how things are going locally, and that is what some of these initiatives get to.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Just to just make sure I have understood perfectly, the department does have data where you would see that disaggregation geographically of where we are seeing the sharpest increases in racist incidents. Is that correct?

Jeremi MOULE: Yes. The two bits to our answers go together. One is that, yes, we do have some data, certainly, whether that is data that directly comes to us from service providers or other parts of government, or in fact when you read about incidents in media reporting and so on. Part of the investment that we are making in the racism strategy is actually to give people a place where they can consistently report incidents of racism, so that government, with an overarching view, can have a better understanding of both prevalence and where you might see emerging issues and the specific nature of those issues as well, because it has been a pretty disparate manner in which we have been able to capture aspects of that data. But we by no means have all of it.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The data you do have though – can that be provided to the committee?

Jeremi MOULE: I think that the most relevant material will be what we might have had access to in supporting the development of the strategy, because we would have depended on that for some of the initiatives that are in there. Yes, we can take that on notice.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Particularly geographically disaggregated material, where you can provide it, would be much appreciated.

Jeremi MOULE: Yes, understood.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Moving on, you will recall that earlier this year Camp Sovereignty was violently attacked by neo-Nazis. This is a sacred burial site. It holds ongoing significance for many First Nations people. Can I ask: what has this department done in response to the increasing public presence of neo-Nazis in our state?

Jeremi MOULE: I will answer that in a couple of ways. One is, firstly, to say that obviously we provide advice to the Premier on these matters, but they are actually being progressed by other parts of government. The government during the reporting period brought forward pieces of legislation that sought to strengthen the ability, particularly of Victoria Police, to respond to incidents of racism, particularly the types of behaviour that you described that occurred at Camp Sovereignty. In addition to that, there is further work that Victoria Police continues to do in making sure that it understands both the likely behaviours that we have seen are prevalent in the last little while and how it might best respond to those incidents. You are right to call that out. That was a shocking incident that occurred in Melbourne.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Can I ask what support this department has provided to First Nations people at Camp Sovereignty in the wake of those attacks?

Terry GARWOOD: Thanks, Mr Puglielli, for the question. The first thing I would like to mention is that both the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples and I visited Camp Sovereignty not long after those assaults and that racist behaviour had occurred. Uncle Robbie Thorpe and others very generously involved the minister and me in the smoking ceremony of welcome and opened a conversation about what the plans are for people associated with Camp Sovereignty to look to develop some form of interpretive centre there. There are conversations that I know the Camp Sovereignty representatives are pursuing. There is a multilayered involvement on that particular area with the Melbourne City Council and other agencies as well. We are just continuing to offer our support to those conversations. We will certainly stand ready to see what assistance we can provide in terms of taking forward that particular focus around the interpretive centre. I might also mention, perhaps straying a little bit beyond the question, the ongoing work that we do with Victoria Police around what occurred there, but I will just leave it at that point because there are a number of prosecutions that are before the courts as a result of that.

You can see, I think, from what I am saying that we are very concerned about what happened there and prepared to step forward personally on country at that site and be welcomed by Uncle Robbie and others and participate in ongoing conversations about developments at that site. It is a very important site. I remember

when those Aboriginal ancestral remains were walked down Swanston Street and placed there, then the rock was placed over there and then there is the plaque acknowledging those ancestral remains that are buried there. I have had a lot of involvement over the years with the repatriation of ancestral remains back on country. Sometimes we do not know where those remains come from. The place we have got at Kings Domain enables that site at Camp Sovereignty to be acknowledged. Then we have got another place at Weeroona Aboriginal resting place out near Melbourne Airport where other ancestral remains that are unprovenanced, as the technical term goes, have been reburied. Our colleagues in the Aboriginal heritage council work very closely on the repatriation of Aboriginal ancestral remains, and we are still doing that work now as I talk. But that site is really, really important, and we are entirely connected with wanting to support and assist its future use and recognise its important place in the state.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I might move on to another matter. Looking at budget paper 3 – I believe it is page 4 I am referring to – ‘Delivering a Victorian Truth and Justice Process’, a key reform recommendation from the *Yoorrook for Justice* report was to begin and diligently progress the establishment of a dedicated child protection system for First Peoples children and young people. Where is this recommendation up to?

Terry GARWOOD: Well, you would be aware of the government’s response to the *Yoorrook for Justice* report. I have to say that was one of the more complex recommendations, and if I recall rightly, I think it fell into the ‘under consideration’ category and, frankly, it still remains in that space. Notwithstanding that, the government is investing significantly in the child protection space, and our colleagues in the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing would be better placed to talk about the initiatives and significant funding that has been provided in response to particularly Aboriginal out-of-home placements and more generally in relation to the child protection system. I have worked in and been involved with that system for 10 years myself, so I have some familiarity with it. Just to answer your question more specifically, we have got the final *Yoorrook for Transformation* report, which has got 100 recommendations on top of the 46 that were in the *Yoorrook for Justice* report; we are collating up a response to all of those 100. A number of those 100 recommendations are being delivered through treaty – quite a number in fact. Some of them will require budget outcomes, and we are just going through a budget review consideration process, and some of them are, frankly, recommendations for churches and other charitable bodies. So we are working through all of those, and in providing a response to those hundred recommendations we are reaching back into the *Yoorrook for Justice* 46 recommendations and bringing those forward for government to consider where we still have ongoing work. So we will not just be addressing the hundred recommendations in *Yoorrook for Transformation*, we will also be going back over those recommendations around *Yoorrook for Justice*.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. And just to confirm I have understood correctly: this particular recommendation, is it still under consideration?

Terry GARWOOD: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay, thank you. It has not progressed beyond that, is what you are saying?

Terry GARWOOD: Oh, no, sorry – my colleague here can talk a little bit about that space as well.

Dannii de KRETZER: One of the things I will just add to Mr Garwood’s response is what you will also see in budget paper 3 is there is public reporting around children that are allocated to an Aboriginal agency. So that is one of the primary ways of creating an Aboriginal-led child protection system, and you will see against the target of 341 children that was set in 2024–25 there were 449 children that were under an Aboriginal agency, so that is a primary mechanism for achieving that recommendation.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. On another matter, can I ask: has this department received advice regarding the impact of the bail laws that were introduced in the 2024–25 period on the risks to incarceration of First Nations people and of deaths in custody?

Jeremi MOULE: When you say ‘received advice’, what do you mean?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Have you received advice related to those risks?

Jeremi MOULE: From stakeholders?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: From anywhere, at this point.

Jeremi MOULE: I think, firstly, the bail reforms are obviously a matter that is being brought forward by the Attorney, so the engagement that was done in relation to those reforms, as would be the case when the government brings forward any legislation, was led by that department. I think that we are certainly aware of the significant concerns that have been expressed by representatives of First Nations communities in Victoria about those changes. I think we would have received them formally, informally and read about them in media reporting, so we are certainly conscious of those matters.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay, thank you. Did this department provide advice to the Premier on those potential impacts of those bail laws?

Jeremi MOULE: We provided advice to the Premier on the bail law reform package as a whole. One of those elements would have gone to the impacts of the changes on vulnerable groups, of which of course First Nations young people are one. I certainly have discussed earlier with other members of the committee – I cannot go to the nature of that advice, but it is standard for us to provide advice on legislation that comes forward to government for consideration.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Are you able to tell us when that advice was given?

Jeremi MOULE: Other than to say that in the lead-up to consideration by government and then ultimately introduction of the Bill, it would have been in a timely way to support that decision-making in that window.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. So it was definitely before the legislation passed the Parliament?

Jeremi MOULE: It would have been before the Bill was introduced to the Parliament. As part of the considerations of government, once a proposed Bill is brought for government consideration, that would be the time at which we would be providing our advice on that for consideration by the Premier.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Was that advice also offered to the Attorney-General?

Jeremi MOULE: Our advice is for the Premier.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. On another matter, looking at budget paper 3, page 163, ‘State electoral roll and electoral events’, can I ask for the department’s assessment of how much lead time the VEC would need in order to implement changes to group voting tickets in time for the 2026 state election?

Joshua PULS: That would be a technical question for the Electoral Matters Committee to ask the commissioner, I think. The inner workings of implementation of the electoral roll and the system is very much a matter for the electoral commission, which is obviously an independent entity. So that is not something that we would get involved in.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Right, okay. So during the budget period in question you have not received advice in relation to these matters?

Joshua PULS: Because the VEC is funded through the DPC outputs, we work with them on their budget, and obviously the VEC has very particular funding arrangements that are provided for in the *Electoral Act*. So that is all managed through DPC. But in terms of how they actually deliver their responsibilities, that is obviously, as you would expect, not something that we get involved in.

Jeremi MOULE: Just to be clear, we do not advise the VEC on any matters. They, quite rightly, make their own decisions.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. But on advice, has this department provided advice to the government on these matters?

Joshua PULS: There have been two reports relating to electoral matters that have come to government: one, the Electoral Matters Committee review of the 2022 election, and the government tabled a response to that; and then there is also the EREP, Electoral Review Expert Panel, report, which was also provided to government. Those matters are both still under consideration by government and their responses to those. Obviously, as part

of our ongoing work, we of course brief the government on that, but as the Secretary said, we cannot go into the nature of that advice.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Are you in a position to confirm regarding changes to group voting tickets, though, specifically? Has advice on those matters been given to government?

Jeremi MOULE: I would just repeat what Mr Puls just said, which is that on those two reports that have come to government, we would have provided advice to government on them in their totality.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. Just on another matter, I might come back to the anti-racism strategy. Can I ask: has the department developed any baseline indicators to measure racism and discrimination as they occur in this state to support monitoring of the effectiveness of that strategy?

Jeremi MOULE: As we were discussing earlier, a mechanism that is funded in the strategy is actually being able to capture that data more accurately and more holistically, so that it is not just individual or small clusters of incidents that might come to our attention through general reporting across government or media reporting or other stakeholders bringing those to our attention but in fact trying to build a dataset that allows you to more holistically, across the state, better understand incidents and then respond to those, whether that is through the nature of the grants that we provide to community organisations or otherwise. Ms de Kretser, you look like you have got something to add.

Dannii de KRETSE: I think one of the fundamental actions in the strategy is also about establishing a monitoring and evaluation framework, which is work that the team has underway. That is where we hope to bring home the indicators that you are seeking to look at in a more systemic way. A key part of the strategy is using data better, and that is something that my team is turning its mind to right now.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. And at this stage, what data is being recorded, given that that is still underway?

Dannii de KRETSE: I am happy to take that question on notice. We will look to provide you with also a geographic lens of everything that we have got, as well as the information we have got on particular forms of rising incidents of racism and hate that we are seeing.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. I might move on. There are Closing the Gap areas, which we have referred to today, where Victoria is faring better than some other Australian jurisdictions, such as imprisonment rate and increases in land and sea rights, and then there are areas where we are faring worse, like first year university attrition rates and the number of children in care. Can I ask: why were there Closing the Gap areas that worsened during this budget period?

Terry GARWOOD: Sorry, Mr Puglielli. I just did not quite hear the last question.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The areas in Closing the Gap that worsened for our state in 2024–25: why did they worsen?

Terry GARWOOD: Oh, okay. Thank you for the question. You are right to point out our mixed results in relation to Closing the Gap. It is one of the commitments in driving treaty to come to grips with that, with transformation work through treaty. I think the reality of that is there are so many complex factors that are at play in relation to the work that we are doing in this space. When I look at the progress, I can see some areas where we do not have data available. I can see, in relation to babies with a healthy birth weight, Victoria has a very good result; we have reached the national target threshold. We have a good result in relation to children enrolled in the year before full time schooling in terms of early childhood education – amazing result, effectively 100 per cent against a target that has been set. It is lower than that, and we have achieved 100 per cent participation. Then if I look at children that are developmentally on track across all five domains, we have got limited improvement – they are not on track; there is more work to be done in that space. If I look at the proportion of Aboriginal children achieving attaining year 12 or equivalent, it is improving, but we will not meet the national threshold just yet – but we are still improving.

In relation to Aboriginal people completing a tertiary qualification, again, limited improvement – we are not on track; it is an area that we need to improve. Youth that are in employment and education: again, another area with limited improvement – perhaps you were pointing to that there. In terms of Aboriginal people who are

employed, there are good improvements since the baseline year. We have reached the national threshold, so a tick there in that space. This is a strange figure, this one, but the overcrowding figure does not go to the hub of the issue. But nonetheless it is there. And again, we have reached the national target threshold there, which is a good result. In relation to reducing the rate of Aboriginal people in incarceration, good improvements since the baseline data. The simple answer is there are a lot of complex things that are at play in relation to where we are not achieving the results. We continue to focus on it with the projects I mentioned earlier through Ngaweeyan Maar-oo and going after those areas where we have got to improve.

The CHAIR: I am just going to interrupt you there, Mr Garwood. Thanks, Mr Puglielli. We will go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Thanks again, Secretary. I just want to draw your attention to question 3, page 27, of the questionnaire, in relation to the program of state funerals and memorial services. I note that in the last financial year there were five such services organised by your department. And I would like to note one of them was for Mr Stefan Romaniw OAM, who was a dear friend to many in this place, but also a widely respected leader of the Ukrainian community, renowned and respected around the world in fact for his advocacy for Ukraine and its people around the world. I would actually like to personally acknowledge and thank your department for the work you did on that particular service. Over the five state funerals that were conducted by DPC in the past year, can you give me an overview of the sort of work that your department does in relation to this program?

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you. Within Mr Puls's area, there is a part of DPC that deals with events of state significance. That is a fairly broad range of activity, but one of those things is the delivery of state funerals and memorial services. It is obviously an unpredictable workload but very significant and very time sensitive as well when it becomes necessary to respond to those things. The nature of the services ranges from significantly large, when you have got someone who has a very large persona and is well known. The largest one we have conducted, which was not in the reporting year, was the service for Shane Warne. There are others where the team supports in a much more discreet way. Certainly with the passing of former ministers from some decades ago, more often than not the families that we engage with just want some support in putting together funeral arrangements. Then essentially they are having a private funeral but with the support of the state. We conduct support for those as well. So they vary significantly in the nature of the response.

Also there is a big difference between conducting and supporting a funeral service and that activity, and a memorial service, which might be conducted some weeks or even months after the actual passing of the individual. It is a really important thing. It recognises significant contributions from Victorians from various walks of life. At one stage in my earlier career I was responsible for working through these things, and it is actually quite a privilege to sit down with families in one of their most difficult times and be able to provide them with the level of support that the team does. Mr Puls, is there anything you wanted to add to that?

Joshua PULS: Thank you. I would just add that it is a very particular exercise when you are sending out staff of the department – obviously there is the engaging with churches or cathedrals or wherever memorial services might happen. But there is always an element of working with the families as well. Most of our people do not have advanced training in social work or psychology or grief counselling or those sorts of things. So it requires a great deal of real, human sensitivity, and I am certainly very proud of the team. Sometimes there are complex circumstances that attach, either in any tragedy or in any family. So I am very proud of the way the team try to work very sensitively with grieving families who – for whatever the state's interest in a memorial might be, first and foremost this is a person who has died and family and friends who are grieving, and that has always got to be at the centre of what we do, even though it is perfectly appropriate that the state might also want to mark that person's contribution. So it requires very, very particular sensitivity on the part of the team who work directly with the families, and they really take that sensitivity very seriously.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Mr Puls and Secretary. I will pass back to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, Secretary. I can understand from your presentation why you talk to, and the department members of staff talk to, having a meaningful role and making a real difference. I am going to return to a place where I think a real difference is being made, which is around the Aboriginal community controlled organisations. I am just hoping to understand how we think the Statewide Treaty is going to change

and affect Aboriginal community controlled organisations, and what does the pathway forward look like for them?

Jeremi MOULE: Yes. Thank you. I am going to ask Mr Garwood to answer that question, but in doing so, I just want to really acknowledge the significant work that those organisations contribute to the wellbeing of our First Nations people and also the extraordinary leaders that have come through that sector. Those leaders are very familiar to us. They have made contributions over decades, and they are incredibly important and are a significant part of our work going forward. I will ask Mr Garwood to more specifically answer your question.

Terry GARWOOD: Yes. Thanks, Secretary, and thanks, Mr Hilakari. As I touched on a little bit earlier, the Aboriginal community controlled organisation sector has been at the forefront of driving reforms in this space. I mean, this is my 45th year in the public service, and so –

Jeremi MOULE: Sorry, was that 45, Terry?

Terry GARWOOD: Yes, I started when I was five.

Mathew HILAKARI: I was going to say, do you get a specific medal for that?

Terry GARWOOD: So I have been able to see the Aboriginal community controlled organisation sector over many years. When I was a regional director in the Department of Human Services for three years in Wangaratta and then seven years in Bendigo, I saw regional-based Aboriginal community organisations and the important work that they do. But I have been able to see the journey of them over many years, starting with very small levels of support and assistance, trying to advocate to government about the importance of Aboriginal community control over delivering solutions. It has been wonderful to see the progress of the ACCO sector, as we say in the jargon, the Aboriginal community controlled organisation sector, to see the likes of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd, the cooperatives around Victoria – Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative at Shepparton and Mooroopna, the cooperative at Geelong, Wathaurong cooperative, the cooperative at Bairnsdale, the cooperative at Mildura, the cooperative at Portland. All of these community-based organisations are at the forefront of wanting to address disadvantage and improve health outcomes, whether it is mental health, whether it is incarceration, all of those things. These organisations have been at the forefront, the cutting edge, over really – I mean, I have been around 45 years, but they have been just a little bit longer than me. Some of them started in the mid-70s, for example, and the early 70s as well. I should mention also the Aborigines Advancement League, the mother of all of these organisations.

The opportunity that now lies in front of us is to strengthen and elevate the voice of those organisations through treaty, and I know the two outstanding co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly, Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg, are in close engagement with the Aboriginal community controlled sector, particularly through Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, which I spoke about earlier, driving the way in which we can elevate the voice of that ACCO sector and make sure that we find a way to support and assist that important work that they do on the ground – not to replicate that work but to support and assist that work.

So I am looking forward to the opportunities, after 45 years, to see what transformation comes out of inserting treaty into our democratic system, our way of government, and an agreement that has been reached by the First Peoples' Assembly with the Victorian government, signified by the passage of the *Statewide Treaty Act*, which then received royal assent as part of that process. I think if I reflect back, I can see tremendous opportunities, but I can see even more opportunities coming forward now as a result of treaty.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you so much. And now, through you, Secretary, I might just ask about the cultural heritage reform. The annual report of course references reform work under the self-determination policy and the reform advice. Could you just outline for the committee what outcomes we are expecting to deliver in the period ahead?

Terry GARWOOD: Thank you, Mr Hilakari, for that question as well. The minister has announced some particular initiatives in relation to Aboriginal cultural heritage. For example, there is to be the development of an online platform which we call the strategic Aboriginal heritage assessment – SAHA, as we say. We have got three of them. Two of them have been done, and we have got a third one that is nearly completed. The two that have been done are Wurundjeri and Djaara, Bendigo, and another one coming with Eastern Maar. What are

they? They are strategic cultural heritage maps of country, where Aboriginal sites are, where developers should look to avoid where possible to understand what the issues and implications are of going into those sites. But you do not have to read where the sites are; you can see them in the SAHA maps. The minister announced that we are intending to go to an EOI, expression of interest, to do some more of those strategic Aboriginal heritage assessment maps. That is one initiative. We are also –

Mathew HILAKARI: Who is that aimed at? Who is going to be using those maps on a regular basis?

Terry GARWOOD: It is going to be online and available. It is available for all developers, all the community to see, effectively. So everybody can see. Do not say you do not know where Aboriginal cultural heritage sites are; there is the map that provides you, and this is the group that you have to be liaising with in terms of addressing Aboriginal cultural heritage matters.

The second area of strategic reform is we are also looking to pilot a new role, with the investment coordinator-general as a point of connection for, particularly, private developers. If they have got any issues, the office of the investment coordinator-general role that we are looking to pilot there will provide assistance. We are also in intensive engagement at the moment with the private sector heritage advisers and registered Aboriginal parties – that is to say, all Aboriginal groups that have defined areas of country across Victoria. Seventy-five per cent of the state is covered by those registered Aboriginal parties. The other 25 per cent that is still in negotiation is the responsibility of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. We are looking to develop guidelines in consultation between RAPs, private developers – by that I mean the UDIA, the planning institute and a range of other large private developers – together with heritage advisers to come together to work through whether there is any way that we can tighten up some of our processes. Is there any way that we can look to get a bit more consistency across those areas? So that is a piece of work that is underway at the moment. A very big workshop is on tomorrow where we are looking to engage with all of those parties, and then we will look to continue that work next year. Then finally, we have released some new information packs that clearly explain Aboriginal cultural heritage processes as well. So we have got those four particular initiatives that we are actually working through at the moment that the minister announced, with a commitment of \$5 million to support the rollout of those initiatives. Most of that is going into the SAHA space, I would say, but all the other areas have also got funding support.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. Thank you so much. I am going to just change, Secretary, to the *Victorian African Communities Action Plan*, coincidentally also a \$5 million project. I refer to budget paper 3, pages 73 and 74. I am just hoping you could outline to the committee how some of this funding has been used and the positive engagement that it has had.

Jeremi MOULE: Yes, great. I will ask Ms de Kretser to respond to that question. Thank you.

Dannii de KRETSEER: Thanks so much. The department continues to support the action plan, which has over 250 actions in it and six focus areas. It has been driven by the group that kind of is responsible for it, which is exactly the way it should be. The six focus areas for the plan are business, employment, education, health and wellbeing, inclusion and empowerment, and leadership. It has been aided by \$17 million over four years for the continuation of initiatives under the plan, and we play a role in monitoring the delivery of those. But there are also some that my staff play a role in funding directly, so I might just go to a couple of those initiatives, if that is okay.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you, yes.

Dannii de KRETSEER: The three sort of supported programs that come from DPC, they help about 880 Victorians and they relate to a project called Project Sunrise, which is an alcohol and drugs program, and it provides culturally relevant drug and alcohol supports in eight LGAs, very much for young people; the employment brokers program, which funds eight community-based brokers who provide tailored support to jobseekers of African heritage; and then finally, mental health supports and programs that are delivered by three organisations. In addition to that, there is another aspect which is about making sure school students can participate fully in school life, and that is through homework clubs, which operate across 13 local government areas.

Mathew HILAKARI: They are very popular.

Dannii de KRETSEER: Very popular. The 13 local government areas – I am happy to read those out, if that is helpful, but it is sort of a distribution of the City of Yarra, City of Casey, Greater Dandenong, Greater Geelong, Ballarat, Melton, Carlton, City of Melbourne, Moonee Valley, Darebin city, Banyule and Shire of Cardinia, and then we have got some in Greater Shepparton and also in Bendigo. This is something which the Department of Education really plays a significant role in, and we really try and make sure it is helping with student attendance and engagement levels and family and carer participation and engagement levels. That importance – families want their children to be able to read and write and do things.

Mathew HILAKARI: And to succeed.

Dannii de KRETSEER: Sometimes you feel like you want to be the person, and being able to access a homework club for a parent is very, very important. Partner school feedback; student satisfaction surveys – we actually test that with children themselves. Students' attitudes towards education we really try and draw out of those homework club interventions. Providers are also required to submit case studies in a financial summary. What we wrap around this, or what the Department of Education wraps around it, to really ensure the quality of homework clubs is a community of practice as well, where providers can come and share how it is going.

Mathew HILAKARI: And we are finding that community of practice is working well, and they are sharing good ideas and learning from each other?

Dannii de KRETSEER: Absolutely. It is amazing when you get providers around the table. You are sort of motivated by the energy of your craft, and we see that with these.

Mathew HILAKARI: Fantastic. I just thought I would ask about the mental health organisations through this program. What are the organisations, and what sort of work are they up to?

Dannii de KRETSEER: There is a lot of focus in the west. I would have to get back to you on the precise names of those organisations. I am happy to do that on notice, if that is helpful.

Mathew HILAKARI: Great. Thank you so much.

Secretary, I might just take us to the presentation from the start of this session around 50 government-owned early learning and childcare centres. I am just wondering how these were chosen. What was the basis that was gone through as a department in coming to those decisions? And where we are up to in terms of the number of centres themselves and their progress?

Jeremi MOULE: Thank you. I will ask Ms de Kretser to answer that question, but it is a significant commitment that the government has made to work through the 50. We are at various stages of working through those. We provide advice to the Premier but also support the Department of Education in its key role in that rollout. Dannii?

Dannii de KRETSEER: Thanks, Secretary. I think in terms of the way that they have been chosen, the primary aspect of this is where there were childcare deserts – locations where families did not have good access to child care – noting the centres cater from sort of six weeks after birth through to kindergarten. It is a very important aspect of not just the state's traditional role in kindergarten but actually in child care more broadly. That has been a fundamental aspect. I believe there are four open at the moment. I am going to go to one in Fawkner. There is one in Murtoa, again, where there was literally not much else for families. The beauty of these centres is they are also co-located on school sites. At Murtoa I believe it is a prep-to-12 college location and you have your child care.

Mathew HILAKARI: It has got from early childhood all the way through.

Dannii de KRETSEER: All the way through, making convenience for families likely.

Mathew HILAKARI: Is that the practice that we are looking to in general, or are we looking at some standalone ones as part of that 50?

Dannii de KRETSEER: Absolutely, the practice in general is to locate them on or close to school sites. I believe that, of the four, most are on a government school site. Then there is a significant number rolling out in 2026 – they are all available online in terms of that rollout – and again most are located on government school

sites or in very, very close proximity, with that element of convenience for multi-sibling families that might span the double drop-off issue. People really appreciate when you can get that right. So that is sort of –

Jeremi MOULE: And that co-location also supports the transition, which can be challenging for little kids as they move into primary school. If there is familiarity with the physical environment or they have seen the older kids running around, that co-location is not just a convenience thing, although that is very significant. It also helps with those transition years.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you. I might also reference the earlier presentation. I am just checking how the department supported the rapid review into child safety. I know that was a really challenging piece of work that was undertaken, but how did DPC support that rollout?

Jeremi MOULE: I think I referenced earlier that we play a unique role in the establishment of inquiries and in this instance trying to get that review underway quickly. It was such a significant issue for all those who became aware of the incidents that prompted it – not just those directly affected but for the sector as a whole – and the need for government to rapidly do some work to understand where there might have been weaknesses in the system, make recommendations around improvement and get on with doing that as quickly as possible, it was not a thing that you could have done over a two-year-long inquiry. We really needed a rapid review, so we brought in some external expertise to support that. Some department resources supported that work being done – and I am really proud of the work that got done as quickly as it did – and turned around and then gave government options on how to tighten up that sector to try to avoid the horrors of what we saw.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hilakari. Secretary and deputy secretaries, thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. It is very much appreciated. 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 is going to take a break now before beginning its consideration of the Department of Government Services at 1:30 pm.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.