

## **CHAPTER 12: DEPARTMENT FOR VICTORIAN COMMUNITIES**

### **Transcript of Evidence**

#### **12.9 Aboriginal Affairs portfolio**

# VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into budget estimates 2007–08

Melbourne — 10 May 2007

#### Members

Mr G. Barber	Mr G. Rich-Phillips
Mr R. Dalla-Riva	Mr R. Scott
Ms J. Graley	Mr B. Stensholt
Ms J. Munt	Dr W. Sykes
Mr M. Pakula	Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt  
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Business Support Officer: Ms J. Nathan

#### Witnesses

Mr G. Jennings, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs;  
Ms J. Samms, acting deputy secretary, people and community advocacy division;  
Ms A. Jurjevic, executive director, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria; and  
Mr S. Gregory, chief finance officer, Department for Victorian Communities.

**The CHAIR** — I now welcome Ms Jennifer Samms, acting deputy secretary, people and community advocacy division; Ms Angela Jurjevic, executive director, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria; and Mr Stephen Gregory, chief finance officer, Department for Victorian Communities. I call on the minister to give us a presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the Aboriginal affairs portfolio. I think you have had passed around a brief summary of the overheads.

**Overheads shown.**

**Mr JENNINGS** — Thank you very much. I think I might even be quicker than 5 minutes. It is important for us to understand the gravity of the issues that we are dealing with, and the gravity of the issues that we are dealing with is that Aboriginal people in the state of Victoria are continuing to die approximately 20 years on average below the rest of the population. Many people, when they consider the experience of indigenous people in Australia, forget that we have an issue in Victoria, and that applies to Victorians as much as it applies to other people in other parts of the country. It is certainly something that I spent a lot of time on, convincing the commonwealth government on that issue.

We want to work in partnership with Aboriginal people and have a number of agreements that have been entered into and collaborative arrangements that underpin the work of taking the life experience of Aboriginal people forward by engaging and empowering Aboriginal communities and indeed by an appropriate level of coordination between our efforts and the Aboriginal community organisations' efforts. That culminates in a framework where we have made commitments, through the Victorian indigenous affairs framework, about long-term sustained variation to the quality of life for Aboriginal people, to be measured by the success in those areas over a 5, 10, 15-year horizon.

With the annual budget in Mr Forwood's day I used to say that we continue to have exponential growth within the Aboriginal affairs budget, and probably if he were here I would say it again. That is what it certainly looks like; that is an exponential curve. What I may worry about is that there are a number of one-off elements within that budget and that I may not be able to say this the next year, so I will say it this year. Over the life of our government we have had exponential growth within the Aboriginal Affairs budget, culminating in \$30.8 million in that budget this year.

In outlining these issues I err on the side of crossing over between what I am formally responsible for, which is the 30 million, as distinct from the projects I am about to talk about, but I do play a whole-of-government role in terms of providing for the indigenous affairs framework, coordinating the ministerial taskforce on Aboriginal affairs and playing an active role within those program areas.

I draw to the committee's attention significant investment in this year's budget to deal with the early years of children by providing access for disadvantaged Aboriginal kids to receive free early childhood education. We want to increase the capacity of the early childhood education programs and undertake an important piece of benchmarking work on the wellbeing of indigenous children, so that we can benchmark our efforts now and into the future.

Within my responsibilities is the funding of \$5.1 million over four years to continue to support the capacity of indigenous organisations, particularly through governance and through innovative ways of delivering and coordinating services and providing for the new voices of Aboriginal people through those programs.

In the last year, as I indicated to the committee, we have introduced Improving the lives of Indigenous Victorians as the overarching framework by which government efforts in six key areas will be measured and benchmarked over a 5, 10, 15-year horizon. We have been very successful in rolling out the governance training program, which is designed to support the governance acumen of community organisations that are charged with a lot of responsibilities in their community and also receive significant investment from the public purse to undertake very important community building and community service responses.

We have implemented the commonwealth heritage act, which will be proclaimed shortly and will take effect at the end of this month. We have embarked upon a new regime of community engagement and representation, which is sorely needed in all Aboriginal communities, including those in Victoria. After the demise of ATSIC there has been a malaise in the degree of coordinated voices of Aboriginal people. Regardless of what people think of the relative merits of ATSIC, it provided such a space and an opportunity, and there has been a vacuum on the national political horizon since.

We are undertaking important work in terms of the infrastructure audit and the current state of assets in the hands of Aboriginal communities to try and ensure that they comply with occupational health and safety and fire regulations so that people are working in safe workplaces that provide for well-rounded community services.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister.

**Dr SYKES** — Minister, my question relates to the funding of the implementation of the Aboriginal Heritage Act and concerns raised with me by the Bangerang people. Given that you have agreed to meet with them personally, and also in the interests of keeping it moving to enable Mr Barber to get a couple of questions in, I am happy to have my question taken on notice.

In essence, the question relates to how registered Aboriginal parties will cover their costs in fulfilling their obligations under the cultural heritage act processes and questions in relation to the estimated cost of management plans of about \$15.8 million over the next 10 years. I am happy just to table it.

**Mr JENNINGS** — I am happy to answer it. In fact interestingly enough, Dr Sykes, as somebody who is asking questions on behalf of the Bangerang, I think you might be sitting next to somebody who might be asking questions on behalf of the Yorta Yorta. You might be balancing one another out.

The substantive point in relation to either Bangerang or Yorta Yorta's aspirations for being a registered Aboriginal party is that they are currently being considered by the Aboriginal Heritage Council which is charged with responsibility for making that determination under the act. The council is very mindful of public and private statements I have actually made to say the aspirations of the people in question should be recognised and responded to and acted on appropriately by the heritage council. The answer applies to anybody who might ask me a question about that.

On the question of how does a registered Aboriginal party maintain sustainability, that is something that is exercising the heritage council and my office greatly and, I am sure, members in the community are concerned about it too. The basic building blocks of the story are that there are a range of activities of cultural analysis and assessment and monitoring that Aboriginal organisations are charged with the responsibility of undertaking under the act.

They will attribute a certain cost structure which is yet to be determined but is being circulated in draft form in terms of the regulatory impact statement where there are suggestions about what the appropriate fee structure should be to be able to provide for a meaningful and professional service by a registered Aboriginal party and enables them to be financially viable. So there is a balancing act between what the costs to a developer may be and for being the beneficiary of that work, and what might be the appropriate cost structure to ensure the cultural heritage program is viable. And that is the balancing act we are trying to achieve. Was there one other element to that question?

The last issue was about the cost within the regulatory impact statement. I draw to the committee's attention that the no-change basis in terms of the commonwealth legislation and its requirements in terms of the assessments and management plans that have not been undertaken but should have been, and of course many costly delays to projects, that in fact the net cost may actually be reduced to Victorian business over the course of the next 10 years because the assessments and approval processes are done up front before planning approval is given rather than being an overlay after construction has commenced when people have realised they should have taken account of cultural heritage and did not.

**Mr SCOTT** — My question relates to the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework, a whole-of-government approach to Aboriginal affairs that you outlined in your statement. What is the expected progress for the current budget in developing and implementing a whole-of-government approach to Aboriginal affairs?

**Mr JENNINGS** — I thank you for the question, because this is something we have dedicated a lot of our time to in the last couple of years, in getting to this situation involving lots of consultation both with the Aboriginal community and within government to try and make sure there is an appropriate alignment between what the indicators of quality of life are saying about what improvements need to be made for Aboriginal people and the way in which government goes about it in partnership with Aboriginal people.

We have drilled down into the first six areas that we wanted to emphasise. This is not to abrogate any of our responsibilities to provide quality service and access to Victorian Aboriginal people, just as we should provide them for any Victorian citizen. Specifically we go beyond that by trying to find ways to improve maternal and childhood health, literacy and numeracy, year 12 completion or equivalent, and the pathways to employment, that we prevent family violence and improve justice outcomes, we improve economic development, settle native title claims and address planned access issues and that we build six indigenous capacity issues. They are the six areas that are priorities, strategic areas for intervention. Within those, we have a number of specific actions that we require. I will not go through the lot, but I will give the committee an example of them.

In relation to improving maternal health and early childhood development, there are five measures. The first is to reduce reported smoking and alcohol use during pregnancy by indigenous mothers. In this budget there is a corresponding investment in maternal and child health programs. Again, that applies to the second and third indicators which are designed to reduce the indigenous perinatal mortality rate — so those children up to the age of three who die prematurely — and we try to ensure that babies, when they are born, have a high birth weight rather than a low birth weight and so that they are, as a consequence, not at risk of jeopardising their long-term health.

Action number four is increasing the indigenous four-year-old kindergarten participation rate. We have done that in a two-fold way by making sure that Aboriginal people get access to kindergartens just as all Victorian children from low-income families will get access to that. But we have taken that further by providing the same support for indigenous three-year-old children. Indeed we want to reduce the rate of indigenous child protection substantiations.

In my previous presentation to the committee, and in my work as the minister who is responsible for child protection matters, I can assure you that we will be leaving no stone unturned in terms of trying to provide the wherewithal of Aboriginal agencies which are charged with the responsibility of placing Aboriginal children, and that we will provide a lot of impetus and support to Aboriginal families to make them stronger so that their children are not at risk. That applies to the original family of an Aboriginal child, but also those foster families who may receive a child. We want to see the same empowerment, capacity and resilience. In all Aboriginal families we will insist both of them staying at home in the first instance, but if they are out of home, they are to be placed in families that are functioning well, are resilient and can actually cater for the child's needs.

They are very tangible and specific actions that have a direct link back to the budget. I could, if we were here long enough, go through the rest of the framework to indicate where we are taking action in accordance with that framework. We are very determined to turn around the circumstances of Aboriginal people during the life of this government and beyond.

**Mr BARBER** — Minister, again in relation to the implementation of the heritage act this year, which I am sure will be a major activity for your department, your regulatory impact statement says that the cost to your department, in addition to the processing of applications and so forth, is that Aboriginal affairs will also be undertaking a range of other activities to support the new legislative regime, and that you will 'provide training, guidelines and advice to affected parties' on the new legislative requirements. I am presuming that is correct.

**Mr JENNINGS** — Yes.

**Mr BARBER** — Then when it talks about the cost to registered Aboriginal parties, it really just talks about it in terms of the fees. So I think it is a bit light on in that respect. The issues that I think may arise for registered Aboriginal parties, which will come back to your department's support in terms of training guidelines and advice, are things like section 113 of the act, where people actually have to be registered as Aboriginal parties and how that can end up in VCAT, under section 114; again in section 116 of the act; and later, when it comes to the actions of registered Aboriginal parties, in section 150 of the act there is a whole set of requirements for people to demonstrate their status as a registered party, and in some cases proving things that they had to prove as part of their native title claims all over again; and onto section 153 of the act.

In terms of just getting registered and then being able to adequately represent yourself as a registered party when a matter comes up, what training guidelines and advice to affected parties will you provide, and will that advice run to funding them to be able to maintain the advice, to get the advice and to go through the processes that your act has set up?

**Mr JENNINGS** — As a starting point, we do not want people to reinvent the wheel. In fact I am sure, Mr Barber, you are an astute observer of the building blocks of this legislation and how it differs from the commonwealth legislation. As a building block of our approach there is a far closer correlation between traditional owners, native title aspirants and what the outgoing commonwealth legislation was. So when the Heritage Council makes a decision about who should be a registered Aboriginal party it is obliged under the act to consider what native title determination has been found.

**Mr BARBER** — Sure.

**Mr JENNINGS** — Or what is the standing of that claimant group.

**Mr BARBER** — Yes.

**Mr JENNINGS** — And in fact for the vast majority of native title claimants there will be no additional documentary evidence of their standing beyond what they may have already undertaken in relation to preparing their native title claim. That does not mean that any of them should have the luxury of sitting back and not forwarding it to the Heritage Council, or that they should comply with the open invitation to ensure that that information is provided to the Heritage Council to enable it to make a decision. Beyond that we recognise that there are some people who have connection to country.

They may not be native title claimants — they may seek to be — or have currently not achieved that level of analysis to be able to provide for that certainty and that confidence. Through the Heritage Council and through Aboriginal Affairs Victoria we have contacted many Aboriginal community organisations and people who may be aspirants to encourage them to be very mindful of what information they may need to obtain and to suggest to them the form that should take, and indeed we are very willing — through the auspices of the Heritage Council — and sympathetic to any potential registered Aboriginal party to assist them in a tangible way to ensure that they can make an application.

I have been encouraging, and I encourage anybody who is interested in this area to say to potential registered Aboriginal parties that they should have a specific conversation with the secretariat of the Heritage Council about this matter to see what assistance may be able to be provided through their auspices.

The ongoing question about people's capacity to pay goes back to part of Dr Sykes' question about the fee structures and the viability of registered Aboriginal parties. Depending upon the volume of work that may be appropriate and that they may be considered in, or depending upon their degree of extra cultural heritage involvement and expertise that may have additional commercial benefit to be able to drive that — —

**Mr BARBER** — And to defend those decisions through VCAT if necessary under section 125.

**Mr JENNINGS** — I will get there. Part of this financial sustainability — and I have said it at every community event that I have been at, and I have been to hundreds — is to say that the structure of the program should account for the costs of going to VCAT. If it is required that will be something that registered Aboriginal parties may be called upon to fund within the context of defining a sustainable business model for the registered Aboriginal party. At every turn the Heritage Council and Aboriginal Affairs Victoria are very, very dedicated to ensure that we create a viable business model for those registered Aboriginal parties.

In terms of the path to VCAT, we should understand that effectively under the reserve and default powers of a registered Aboriginal party under the act, they will not be going to VCAT voluntarily because the only time that an issue will go to VCAT is when there is a dispute between a developer and a registered Aboriginal party because if a registered Aboriginal party says no to a development — —

**Mr BARBER** — The developer has to challenge it.

**Mr JENNINGS** — The developer has to challenge it. It is not the other way around.

**Mr BARBER** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — We have got time for two more quick questions. Ms Graley?

**Ms GRALEY** — Yes, I am mindful of the time. What progress has been made in commissioning the statue of Sir Doug and Lady Nicholls?

**Mr JENNINGS** — Okay. The importance of Doug and Lady Nicholls is actually something that I hope will be more and more of a feature of the Victorian community whereas in fact probably Doug Nicholls became most recognised and most popular in South Australia, even though he was a very, very important Victorian. And in recognition of the great role that he has played in a whole variety of ways — he came to prominence in the sporting field and beyond that in terms of his pastoral care in the community, but far beyond being a pastor of religion he provided inspiration to generations of Aboriginal people involved in a whole raft of community organisations — this year we are wanting to make sure that we pay due recognition to his significant contribution.

We anticipate it to be on the 101st anniversary of his birth, on 9 December. We have set ourselves a target to try and unveil the statue to mark his life and his beloved Lady Gladys's life for their important contribution. We have provided for a space for it to occur in the parliamentary gardens on Spring Street. It will be one of the first opportunities that there will be access for an indigenous person to be in such a prominent public space within Melbourne. Hopefully it will not be the last; it will be the foreteller of others to come.

Significant preparatory work has been undertaken in terms of getting the land available, and dealing with Melbourne City Council and various agencies within government. An artist has been commissioned to do the work. Louis Laumen — in fact I probably do not do justice to the French pronunciation of that glorious name, and I will provide the spelling to our friends to make sure that we do justice to it — has commenced the work. We are very optimistic that it will be a great community event when we bring his ancestors together to celebrate his achievement and to mark the prominence of Aboriginal people within the state of Victoria. Doug Nicholls is as good as any person to be the personal embodiment of that.

**Dr SYKES** — And a glorious football player as well.

**Mr JENNINGS** — Exactly!

**The CHAIR** — And as a final very quick question, Mr Barber, because I am conscious of your time, Minister?

**Mr JENNINGS** — Sure.

**Mr BARBER** — Thank you. You might be able to provide a more fulsome answer on notice, but section 38 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act is going to require a whole range of government departments, including yours, to have its activities in compliance with that act with some deadlines throughout this year.

One of the rights under that act is that for Aboriginal people to maintain their distinctive spiritual material and economic relationship with the land and waters of Victoria, what activities will fall to your department this year to assist public agencies, including your own, but other agencies I am sure, to be in compliance with that part of the act and what costs and requirements will that put on your department? Given that a number of them will probably ring you up straight away when they realise they need to be in compliance with that section of the act!

**Mr JENNINGS** — It is very tempting to answer this question in a different way, but I will not. I will resist the temptation to answer in terms of what the perception of those public practices may be. But what I can volunteer is that there are many programs designed already in terms of training and immersion in cultural heritage values and understanding. It is more developed in some departments than others, and most of them to deal with land management issues are reasonably well versed, if not very well versed, in cultural heritage.

That does not mean from time to time there may not be some contentious issues that occur within public land, but as a general rule, and in terms of making sure that there is cultural awareness provided there are well-developed and well-integrated opportunities for that to take place in terms of the specific programs under the land and economic development program. As you would be aware, there is a whole emphasis on making sure Aboriginal people are empowered to provide for their own interpretation of cultural heritage matters and their involvement in land management matters, and even though agreements that may not actually be fully living up to their potential, such as the land management arrangements around the Yorta Yorta, as you and I have actually discussed in the Parliament

previously, there are open doors and opportunities available for community aspirations to be expressed and understood, and ingrained within the actions of government.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. I have a question on notice which I will pass to the secretary to convey to you. That concludes consideration of budget estimates for the portfolios of community services and Aboriginal affairs. I thank the minister, witnesses and departmental officers for their attendance today. It has been a very good session. Where questions were taken on notice the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date and the committee requests written responses to be supplied within 30 days and considered for inclusion in a further report of the committee to Parliament. Thank you everybody.

**Witnesses withdrew.**



## **Transcript of Evidence**

### **12.10 Aged Care portfolio**

*The transcript for the hearing on this portfolio will be included in a future report of the Committee.*

## **Transcript of Evidence**

### **12.11 Employment portfolio**

# VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into budget estimates 2007–08

Melbourne — 7 May 2007

#### Members

Mr G. Barber	Mr G. Rich-Phillips
Mr R. Dalla-Riva	Mr R. Scott
Ms J. Graley	Mr B. Stensholt
Ms J. Munt	Dr W. Sykes
Mr M. Pakula	Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt  
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Business Support Officer: Ms J. Nathan

#### Witnesses

Ms J. Allan, Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment;  
Mr Y. Blacher, secretary;  
Ms P. Digby, executive director, local government, employment and adult education;  
Mr S. Ward, director, employment programs; and  
Mr S. Gregory, chief financial officer, Department for Victorian Communities.

**The CHAIR** — I now welcome the minister; Mr Yehudi Blacher, Secretary of the Department for Victorian Communities; Ms Prue Digby, executive director, local government, employment and adult education — that is a mixture; Mr Stephen Ward, director, employment programs; and Mr Stephen Gregory, chief financial officer, Department for Victorian Communities. We have half an hour for this. I ask the minister to make a presentation of no more than five minutes on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the portfolio.

**Ms ALLAN** — Thank you very much, Chair. I will be pretty brief. You have heard me go through my presentations now a couple of times. They are reasonably consistent because it is reasonably consistent, positive news for both the Victorian economy and this year's budget.

**Overheads shown.**

**Ms ALLAN** — As you can see from the first slide, since coming to office in 1999 we have seen the Victorian economy and, more particularly, the labour market go from strength to strength. You can see in the chart on the presentation — and everyone has a copy of the presentation — the unemployment rate trending down; the red line is trending down. That is the statewide figure and also — importantly for Dr Sykes and me, in country Victoria — in provincial Victoria the unemployment rate has decreased. Obviously that is a result of the additional 380 000 jobs that have been created across Victoria and particularly the 120 000 jobs in provincial Victoria. I think these figures show that the Victorian economy is going in the right direction whether you are in country Victoria or in metropolitan Melbourne.

If you look at the foundations and the areas that we have focused on as the government, whether it is in that investment in infrastructure — I think this year's budget going forward has an average of \$3.5 billion investment in infrastructure and investment in education and training, which I have gone through in my previous two presentations — our focus is on attracting more people to Victoria, more migrants to Victoria. That is really seeing those strong jobs figures.

In terms of where the employment portfolio sits, we have some particular roles. Since 1999 more broadly, our Jobs for Victoria package, which is a range of different employment programs and initiatives, we have seen more than 7200 people assisted into employment. We have seen Victoria's share of the skilled migration intake increase quite significantly from under 20 per cent when we first came to office to over 25 per cent in terms of the latest figure. Also, we are looking to the future and the work we have done over the last couple of years both in establishing the workforce participation task force, receiving their report, and then looking at implementing a strategy into the future.

For last financial year, just very briefly, you can see there under the Work Force Participation Partnerships program, there has been over 1000 people assisted into employment. Given that we are at a time when, as I said before, the labour market is pretty tight — we have low unemployment but we also have employers seeking particularly skilled people — this is a partnership program that very much matches those people who are looking to head into work into the areas where people are looking for people with particular skills and qualifications. Over the last 12 months we have continued our work in increasing Victoria's share of Australia's skilled and business migration intake. What is going particularly strongly is our Live in Victoria website, which is a very important tool as part of our skilled migration strategy.

I think this is a very important set of figures for us to consider. We often focus on the skilled migration area but the business migration is an important part of the work we do. In this financial year to date we have seen provisional sponsorship; Victoria has supported more than 1300 business migrants who will contribute over \$600 million in investment and in turn create more than 2900 jobs. Those are very strong figures in investment in Victoria. And we did work in regional areas — across 11 regional areas — on our regional skills shortages survey project to help us to get that detailed set of data on skill shortages right across the state.

This year's budget, just very briefly: more funds to continue the good work in skilled migration, including two overseas postings, in the UK and India, two very important key markets. No, I am not putting my hand up for the job but Richard, do you want to?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Yes.

**Ms ALLAN** — You were just looking interested all of a sudden.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — You were looking at me, that is all. I do not know which one I will take!

**Ms ALLAN** — You were looking interested. We have additional funds to continue the Workforce Participation Partnerships program; two new programs helping particular groups of workers — people get into the workplace with mature-age workers and people with a disability; and also support for the Connectus program that helps young people at risk to re-engage with education and training. I might stop there and see if there are any questions from the committee.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. I am sure there will be many questions so I will ask Ms Graley to start off.

**Ms GRALEY** — As you can see, most MPs are very interested in disability issues. You had the screen up there and talked about the new disability trainee scheme. I am just wondering if you could explain it and outline what it will achieve.

**Ms ALLAN** — Certainly. As I said before, we know that no matter how low the unemployment rate does get there are particular people in our community who face a range of different barriers to getting into the workforce. That is why we are focusing in on assisting people with a disability in this program. Just briefly, I should just mention that last year the government established the Office for Disability, and also passed the disability act in 2006, which requires that we have the development of disability action plans by all departments, statutory authorities and corporations in place from 1 July this year.

A key element of those plans is also about the removal of barriers to employment for people with a disability. In addition to this specific program you are also seeing work being undertaken across government. Certainly under this program we are seeing \$1.6 million being provided to assist graduates with a disability to find and retain employment. We will see 200 positions become available over four years for people with a disability who have completed a post-secondary qualification and need some assistance in finding employment.

This program has been informed by our workforce participation partnerships (WPP) program, which had job seekers with a disability as one of its key target groups. Through WPP, as at the end of March this year, we have seen \$7 million worth of projects that have helped a further 275 people with a disability make the transition into employment. As you can imagine, it is a new program. It has just come on line in this year's budget, so further guidelines will be developed. In future I would be happy to report back to the committee on how that program is going.

**The CHAIR** — Terrific. I might follow up a program which is current, namely Workforce Participation Partnerships, which you will find on the same page — 337 — but it is continuing on this year with an extra 2.5 million. How are you going to build on the past and going into the future with this program?

**Ms ALLAN** — This Workforce Participation Partnerships program has been very successful. The PAEC staff might remember — there are all new PAEC members — back in March of last year when we made significant changes in our employment programs I took the opportunity to brief PAEC on those changes, which were about refocusing our suite of employment programs so it is very much targeted in on helping those people, as I said, with a range of different barriers to finding employment but at the same time understanding what the local industry and skill needs were so we can make that match.

Since WPP has been in place we have seen over 1000 people be placed in sustainable employment. I mention 'sustainable employment' because one of the key criteria for funding under this program is that a certain proportion of funding, I think — Stephen, is it 30 per cent or 35 per cent?

**Mr WARD** — Forty per cent.

**Ms ALLAN** — Forty per cent is provided after successful completion of 16 weeks employment. So it is very much weighted towards that sustainable employment outcome.

In this year's budget, alongside a number of other new initiatives that have been introduced by the government, we have provided an additional \$2.5 million to continue this very positive program, because, as I said, we have to continue to support people with a barrier to employment. We have to support them in a very positive way, which is about putting partnerships in place at the local community level, bringing the training providers, bringing the

community organisations that support them, bringing industry and business to the table and putting that partnership in place, which I must say is an interesting contrast to the way the federal government does their unemployment workforce arrangements, which are unfortunately not about partnership, they seem to be about punishing people who are not in employment.

**The CHAIR** — I assume beyond that is part of this review you are doing overall as well?

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes.

**Mr WELLS** — Minister, you use the unemployment rate seasonally adjusted — the ABS — so that would show that over the past three years the unemployment rate has been consistently higher in Victoria than the national average; would that be true?

**Ms ALLAN** — Well, it has been consistently above. I think when you say ‘higher’ you are making it sound like it is dramatically higher. I think the chart that was up on the screen just before shows that it is quite close to the national rate. At the moment Victoria is at 4.9 per cent and the Australian rate is 4.5 per cent, so it is still quite low. We are talking here about low unemployment rates — very positive outcomes for Victoria.

**Mr WELLS** — So it is higher than the national average?

**Ms ALLAN** — But it is a lot lower than the 6.6 per cent when we came to office back in 1999.

**Mr WELLS** — Which was lower than the national average — the 6.6 per cent?

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes.

**Mr WELLS** — Would you agree then that the 6.6 per cent that you just referred to was actually below the national average?

**Ms ALLAN** — At the time?

**Mr WELLS** — Yes.

**Ms ALLAN** — Back in 1999?

**Mr WELLS** — Yes. It was below the national average.

**Ms ALLAN** — Okay.

**Mr WELLS** — All right. So after the last three years we have been consistently higher than the national average in Victoria, which is disappointing. You mentioned the Workforce Participation Partnerships program and the \$24 million over the two years. To date, how many partnerships have been funded and how much funding has been allocated to this Workforce Participation Partnerships program?

**Ms ALLAN** — As I mentioned before, 1000 people have been helped into employment. The overall target for the program is 2000 people in total. The program is still going on because there are projects under way — as at the end of March, 89 projects have been funded with a total funding of \$24.6 million — and as I said, already 1000 people have been helped into employment, and I think we are well on our way to exceeding the target of 2000 people.

There are some very strong examples of where this project has made a real difference, whether it has been helping migrants find employment or helping people in country Victoria find employment. It has been quite a successful program, and, as I said, it has very much been used as a basis to inform our new programs, such as Experience Counts and the disability trainee program that we were just talking about.

**Mr WELLS** — It is \$26.4 million for 89 projects? So \$24.6 million has been spent on 89 projects?

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes, and that has realised over 6100 job seekers. We have already seen 1000 go into a job; our target was 2000, and 6100 have been registered with our WPP projects.

**Mr WELLS** — So this slide that says 2.5 million for 2007–08, that is in addition to the 24.6 ?

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes. Well, the 24 has been expended — sorry, it has not all been expended, it has been committed, because as I said 40 per cent of the payment is on successful completion of 16 weeks employment.

**Mr WELLS** — The question was: how much has actually been spent now on this program?

**Ms ALLAN** — We have spent 14.3 , but we have committed 24.6 . As I said, I think it is quite important that we emphasise that the weighting of this program is 40 per cent on successful completion of 16 weeks employment. That is seen as a sustainable employment outcome. It is not a notional figure of, say, 10 per cent, which historically other employment programs have provided. It is very much putting a heavier weighting at that end so that we can get people to focus on the sustainable outcome. It is not about just getting people to the front door of the job, it is about getting them to stay on — and stay on for 16 weeks.

**Ms MUNT** — I refer the minister to page 9 of budget paper 3 and in particular the heading ‘Workforce skills and training’ where it talks about the policy of ‘*Maintaining the Advantage — Skilled Victorians*’. I am interested in how the overall strategy of the workforce participation will contribute to the government’s skills and training agenda.

**Ms ALLAN** — In terms of our commitment to a workforce participation strategy?

**Ms MUNT** — That is right — the overall workforce participation strategy as part of that policy.

**Ms ALLAN** — I mentioned in the presentation earlier that we established a workforce participation task force back at the start of 2005. That was chaired by John Button and had a number of industry and local government community organisations represented on it. They presented me with a report at the end of 2005 and a range of recommendations; a couple of the recommendations influenced the thinking behind the program, such as Experience Counts and the disability trainee one as well, but also the government has made that commitment to develop a whole-of-government workforce participation strategy.

To assist the committee’s consideration, I have another chart, the ‘Projected Growth in Victoria’s Working Age Population’. I am not sure who has the handout, but if that could be handed around. I think this is a pretty clear way of showing why we need a workforce participation strategy because it shows quite dramatically the decline in the projected growth of Victoria’s working age population from today through to 2035. If you look around at the moment, the working age population is expected to increase by 35 000 per year.

When we get to 2035, I think you see it drop off to about 5000 people. That is why we have to do everything we possibly can to maximise the workforce participation of women, of people with a disability, of mature age workers, or people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. That came through very strongly in the report from the John Button workforce participation task force report and is also why the government has picked it up, because we want to continue to drive Victoria’s economic productivity, and we want to continue to drive our prosperity.

We know to do that we have to get more people into the workforce, and it gets harder and harder the lower the unemployment rate goes down, which is a great thing — 4.9 is a very strong unemployment rate for Victoria, but we have to continue to work very hard to increase workforce participation across a range of different areas.

**Dr SYKES** — Minister, can I take you back to the graph headed ‘Victoria Labour Market Continuing Strong Performance’. I would like you to perhaps offer some explanation in relation to a couple of things: first of all, the quite violent fluctuation of the provincial labour market in comparison with the Victorian average line, and also in particular could you offer some explanation in relation to the unemployment figure coming down as we head into the tough end of the 1-in-100 year drought?

I guess some things I would like you to comment upon are the figures for the provincial cities of Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat versus rural; and secondly, whether in assessing employment, in addition to the government initiatives such as the catchment management authority-type work, which has been much appreciated out there, would you by chance be counting feeding stock and carting water as forms of employment that have pulled the figure down?

**Ms ALLAN** — In terms of the breakdown — and I think I know where you are going with this, because we have seen very strong employment growth in the labour market in our provincial centres, you have seen the population growth figures as well where the latest data shows the four fastest-growing inland cities in Australia are

in country Victoria — Bendigo, Ballarat, Mildura and Shepparton — so we have very strong population growth which is driving that jobs growth in the provincial centres, which has seen the unemployment rate come down.

It is a bit more volatile for your small country towns, as you know very well. A small change in the labour market — a company putting even 5 or 10 people off — can be very difficult for that local community to support, which is why we have a range of programs like WPP to support people, in those circumstances.

As to the precise figures, I might have to take that question on notice and come back to you in terms of provincial Victoria versus rural, but make the point on the way through that regional Victoria's unemployment rate compared to other regional parts of Australia is performing very strongly as well. As I said before, we have had over 120 000 jobs created in provincial Victoria over the last seven years. We now have an unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent, so we have 4.9 per cent statewide and 4.9 per cent for regional Victoria. That is very strong and well below the double digit unemployment rate we saw in country Victoria in the mid-1990s. I think when you have a deliberate program of investing in infrastructure, investing in services in country Victoria that we have had, you will see those sort of results both in population and in unemployment.

**Dr SYKES** — With respect, Minister, if in fact the PEG has the more detailed presentation, its information shows high figures in the provincial cities, and what I am alluding to — that there may be much poorer performance in the rural areas because of the impact of the drought — the assertions you are making may not carry weight.

The first principle says we are in a very serious drought out there that is having a very severe economic impact. I have people coming to me, young kids, unemployed, because they have been put off. I cannot believe this, it does not match up with what I am seeing in my electorate, so it would be very beneficial to have those figures teased out, and then we can have the discussion about whether your assertion is correct or whether mine might be more accurate.

**The CHAIR** — Why do we not take those on notice. I want a couple more questions on employment before we finish.

**Ms ALLAN** — Very briefly, I am happy to have a chat about that because there are a number of employment-related initiatives as part of the \$157 million that is being provided as part of the drought assistance package to country Victoria, and that was very much exactly as you said — we know that the drought is having a huge impact. I think the Treasurer in his budget speech said it has taken 1 per cent off the forward growth in terms of the budget, so that has been factored in. It is having a very strong impact on country Victoria. That is why we have seen that package put in place, where there is a range of employment initiatives that you, Bill, I suspect might know pretty well already, but I am happy to provide some further information on those.

**Dr SYKES** — You would agree that these figures here do not match up with that policy decision ?

**Ms ALLAN** — I think you are confusing anecdotal evidence with statistics.

**Dr SYKES** — I am not confusing the pain on individual faces and the young people who come to me and say they are out of a job because of the drought, and those figures do not match up with those observations.

**The CHAIR** — We will check that one out.

**Mr PAKULA** — Minister, I would like you to briefly take us through the skilled migration strategy which is on page 337 of BP 3 and just how you think the strategy will build on the success that we have had over the last few years?

**Ms ALLAN** — Certainly. I have another chart that shows how we are doing very well year on year, and above the national average. I ask you to hand that one around as well for the committee.

This year's budget does provide, as I indicated, additional funds for the skilled migration program. To go back, we put in place the Victorian skilled migration strategy, I think it was launched back in 2004, with an additional \$6 million of funding, and it has seen us achieve the strong figures. It meant we put in place things like the Live In Victoria website and a range of other supports. This year's budget provides \$8.4 million in funds for the skilled migration strategy, and also complements the \$6 million in funding that was provided in the Provincial Victoria Growth Fund when the \$500 million Provincial Victoria statement was released back in late 2005.



We were able to secure \$6 million in funding, recognising that skilled migration is not just about attracting skilled and business migrants to Melbourne, it is about attracting them to regional and rural areas as well. The competition in this base is really intense. We are not just competing with other countries like New Zealand and Canada and the UK and the like, we are also competing against other states. I think some of us would have seen in the recent media reports, I think, of Queensland and WA and some of the activities they are up to in particular, so we have to continue to innovate, we have to continue to put more funds in this area, and that is what this budget provides.

As I indicated in my presentation, there is funding for the two overseas postings, one in the United Kingdom and one in India. They are our key source countries. They are the countries with the largest intakes, from where skilled migrants are coming. We are also building on the success of our Live In Victoria website.

It is easy to say we have a website, but it is actually quite a sophisticated tool where it is not just about promoting Victoria — when you Google ‘Migration Victoria’, up comes our website. It actually has online, and we are constantly streamlining and automating as much as possible the visa application requirements, and also putting quite detailed information, so in terms of when people click on there and they might be interested in a job in Benalla, they can click on the site and it will come up and it will tell you what schools are there.

**Dr SYKES** — Will it tell you the name of the their local member?

**Ms ALLAN** — No, we left that off. We did not want to scare them away, Bill. It puts in place a whole lot more information so when they are coming — it is not just the skilled migrant we are attracting, we are attracting their family as well, and that is why that vital information is provided at the same time.

**The CHAIR** — A final question on employment. Mr Dalla-Riva is happy to ask Mr Barber’s question.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Thanks, Chair. In respect of BP 3 at page 249, major outputs/deliverables: employment programs. Just going down — and I will not be specific on each one, but the range across a variety of actuals targets for 06-07 and the target for 07-08. We notice there has been a decline in the quantity and quality outcomes, in particular the government youth employment scheme — you have dropped the target there for this financial year; overseas qualifications unit — client services provided — actual and what is expected is significantly less into this financial year; skilled migration program, which you mentioned in your report, was 62 600 in the average month; you say it is now averaging 56 — a drop again. In quality, the skilled migration program — 92, down to 85, and you are expecting an 85 again.

Turn over the page, Minister. I guess the crux of my question in relation to some of the declines in the performance measures is: we see in 2005–06 there was an actual spend of 27.1 million; expected outcome in fact is 25 million — \$2.1 million less than the previous financial year — and the target that was set for 06-07 was 29.9 and the target for 07-08, in other words the next financial year, is \$4.6 million. Given that there are declines in some of the performance measures and that the total output costs are significantly less than previous years, can you explain, Minister, the reason behind this cut in spending?

**Ms ALLAN** — Sorry — we have just followed you from the 25.3, 29.9, 27 — you mentioned a 4 there, what was that?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — The target for 06-07 was 29.9 and the target for 07-08 is 25.3. So I am comparing your actuals with expected outcome, and your targets with your targets. So, just trying to work out why there is — I guess it is a twofold question; you could answer it two ways if you wish. Why was there a reduction in the expected expenditure from the previous year, and why is there a reduction of nearly \$5 million in the targeted expenditure from this current financial year into the budget year?

**Ms ALLAN** — I take it you do not want me to go through all the explanations behind those performance measures?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — No, but it just seems — —

**The CHAIR** — You can take it on notice.

**Ms ALLAN** — Okay, because we are happy to provide that information for the committee, and I do not have the chart I am afraid — —

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Well, it is on the record, and you may wish to get those charts to me.

**Ms ALLAN** — I might ask either the secretary or Stephen to assist, but in terms of the variants from the 06-07 target and 07-08 target — I mentioned before, we have committed \$24.6 million to the Workforce Participation Partnerships program, but not all of it — most of it will have been expended — I think we said 14.3 has already been expended, so it is really about seeing the rest of it go through the system, if you like. So not all of it was expended in the — the bulk of it was expended in 06-07, but there is still some more to be spent in 07-08 — unless, Stephen, you wanted to — —

**Mr WARD** — Just as a carryover of 4.5 on committed programs into 07-08.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — That is right, but you are still expecting your total output of 25.3, including that carryover?

**Mr WARD** — The last payment is the bulk of the payment so that is what is being carried over into the next financial year.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — But the 25.3 in the target, that is where that is going into?

**Ms ALLAN** — Into WPP? Not all of it is, no. There are the new initiatives that are coming on as well — the youth employment scheme, skilled migration. WPP is just part of it but there were more funds allocated and spent to it up to 06-07 than there are in 07-08.

**The CHAIR** — Okay, we will look forward to the additional information which is provided. Thank you very much, Ms Digby and Mr Ward, for your attendance.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

## **Transcript of Evidence**

### **12.12 Local Government portfolio**

*The transcript for the hearing on this portfolio will be included in a future report of the Committee.*

## **Transcript of Evidence**

### **12.13 Multicultural Affairs portfolio**

*Please note the Multicultural Affairs transcript and the Veterans' Affairs transcript are combined into one transcript.*

# VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into 2007—08 budget estimates

Melbourne—3 May 2007

#### Members

Mr G. Barber	Mr G. Rich-Phillips
Mr R. Dalla-Riva	Mr R. Scott
Ms J. Graley	Mr R. Stensholt
Ms J. Munt	Dr W. Sykes
Mr M. Pakula	Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt  
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#### Witnesses

Mr S. Bracks, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Veterans Affairs;  
Mr Y. Blacher, secretary;  
Mr S. Gregory, chief financial officer;  
Mr G. Lekakis, chairperson, Victorian Multicultural Commission; and  
Mr J. MacIsaac, executive director, youth, seniors, veterans and disability, Department for Victorian Communities.

**The CHAIR**—Right, Premier. I welcome Yehudi Blacher, secretary to the Department for Victorian Communities; Stephen Gregory, chief financial officer, Department for Victorian Communities; George Lekakis, chairperson, Victorian Multicultural Commission; and James MacIsaac, executive director, youth, seniors, veterans and disability, and departmental officers. Premier, I ask for your presentation on your more complex matters regarding multicultural affairs and veterans affairs.

**Mr BRACKS**—Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR**—You have about 35 minutes for this.

**Mr BRACKS**—Yes, I will do my best possible. Thank you, Chair. I will deal with multicultural affairs first and veterans affairs second. I think that was the understanding. Achievements in 2006-07: if I can go to that first on the slide presentation—there should be something circulating around committee members—multicultural and multifaith harmony as part of A Fairer Victoria 2, Progress and Next Steps, \$2.1 million was provided over four years to fund initiatives that bring different faiths and community groups together to promote multifaith and multicultural harmony. The Multifaith Multicultural Youth Forum held in July 2006 was the first of its kind in Victoria. It was an important opportunity to improve dialogue between young people from a range of cultural and faith backgrounds, and that was very successful.

Secondly, in 2006-07 the Language Services Strategy, as part of Fairer Victoria again \$3.1 million was allocated to extend the Language Services Strategy for a further four years. The second phase will focus on CALD communities, refugees and mental health clients. We have rolled out the new Australian interpreter symbol and the Victorian interpreter card with over 169,500 distributed by 31 March as well. We have made significant progress in delivering the refugee brokerage program. The projects in partnership with refugee communities, including brokering access for refugee groups to local community recreation facilities, and assisting emerging groups as well. The total number of projects will soon increase to nine.

The VMC grants: I think most members here would be familiar with the grant program. Of course, we have increased the grant program and in this budget we have extra resources for the VMC grants as well. Since 1999 we have increased it from \$750,000 under the previous government to now \$3 million in 2006-07. From July 2006 to April 2007 the VMC provided about 1,575 grants worth more than \$2.3 million. In accord with what I submitted earlier, we will have more efficiency in the delivery of that in the future. The grants program continues to grow in popularity every year. There is no shortage of applicants, I have to say. I congratulate the VMC for the rigour they show in the application of those grants.

The merger of VOMA into the VMC: as you know, we committed in the budget in our commitments for a third term to the merger of the department into the VMC in order to produce a saving and in order to streamline services and facilities to the multicultural communities. The view of the government was that whether it was the Premier or another minister, they will receive from their own department's advice, as they will from the VMC, and we did not require therefore a Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs to achieve that aim. I am very pleased to see in the budget that that has been—

**The bells having rung.**

**The CHAIR**—Thank you, Premier. We need to suspend our hearing again.

**Hearing suspended.**

**The CHAIR**—We are back in session.

**Mr BRACKS**—Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR**—Thank you, Premier.

**Mr BRACKS**—As I mentioned just briefly, the merger of VOMA into VMC has captured an extra \$1 million which enables us to put that into direct outcomes for the many multicultural communities and the grant program itself. New budget initiatives. Three major cultural precincts to be refurbished: Lygon, Lonsdale and Little Bourke Streets. An \$8 million investment to restore the key laneways, undertake street beautification and boost resources to communities to showcase their cultural heritage. We are increasing the funding of the volunteer Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria. That is going to increase from \$180,000 to \$250,000, and we are establishing a new multicultural centre in Geelong with up to \$1 million in matched funding.

Increased budget initiatives: increasing funding to VMC's—multicultural communities—community grants program; additional funding of \$4 million over four years. Increased funding for community harmony initiatives with additional funding of \$2 million over two years. So, Chair, I think you want me to go onto veterans affairs?

**The CHAIR**—Yes, please. That would be great.

**Mr BRACKS**—There is an overarching principle committed to ensuring that ex-servicemen and women are remembered, are honoured and are supported in recognition of the service they have offered their nation. In 2004 I announced that I would assume responsibility for all veterans affairs. Previously it was associated with several ministers; the consumer affairs minister, the health minister and other ministers. I assumed total responsibility for that and I think that has been an important and significant initiative. Since then our key priorities have been to strengthen commemoration, education and support to veterans and to create a more coordinated approach to issues affecting our veteran communities.

We have realised the changing needs of our ageing community, as well as the increased interest amongst young people, are important as a focus for the future. The veterans unit within the Department of Victorian Communities has provided operational support to coordinate activities across government. The achievements in 2006-07. Still, as I reported last year, one of our great achievements has been the Victorian Spirit of Anzac schools competition including an overseas study tour. The third tour has just finished successfully across Europe and into Gallipoli as well.

Restoring community war memorials grant program. I know many members have taken advantage of that. Many communities have utilised that and we are seeing the upgrade of those regional memorials right around the state. Fifty thousand dollars for Anzac Day activities. That is now free travel before, during and after for three days. That enables our veterans to come in for commemoration activities and assistance to support those events. The Shrine of Remembrance and ongoing support. As you know, the undercroft has been redeveloped, the education facilities are in place and we have provided more support operationally and for programs for the education officers to undertake their work. We have had a record number of young people and students going through that centre. It is outstanding.

The Victorian Veterans Council and Victorian Veterans Fund which was a reform that went through our parliament, recognising that we needed to consolidate that and to adhere to the original principles that those funds were created on, and the Veterans Heritage Working Group to protect and display Victoria's related heritage. The key priorities for 2007-08 in the budget—and I will finish here.

Commemoration and education activities: we have in this budget \$2 million over four years to support the continued development of the Veteran Commemorative and Education Agenda and extending the Restoring Community War Memorials Grants for a further four years. There is still some work to be done and I imagine once we finish it there is probably even more work to be done to those we finished in the first round. There is a case to be put not only for the permanent memorials but some of the honour boards, for example, which are not captured by the static memorials in communities. Those honour boards are quite significant in a whole

range of communities, whether you go to Melbourne High School or other schools. You will see those honour boards and there is some work to be done there. We are keen on looking at changes in that area.

The Victoria Spirit of ANZAC prize: the 2007 tour is completed. The 2008 tour will be selected on the basis of every education region for government and private schools. The Shrine of Remembrance: \$200,000 to upgrade the public address system; it is a bit patchy and needs to be improved. New budget measures, and probably the biggest of those is not contained within the Department of Victorian Communities but in the Department of Human Services—and that is, a new mental health facility at Heidelberg that has been roundly praised and supported. It does not say here, but from memory it is about \$10 million that we are providing to that. I know the veteran community have sought that for a long time. If you see it, you will see what needs to be done and I am looking forward very much to that upgrade happening as well. Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity.

**The CHAIR**—Thank you, Premier. We will take questions on either of the portfolios. Ms Munt?

**Ms MUNT**—Premier, could you please detail for me what new measures is introducing through the 2007-08 budget to commemorate the service of our veterans.

**Mr BRACKS**—Thank you for your question. That enables me to elaborate on matters I was not able to cover in that report. The interest from the community in commemorating the sacrifice of the servicemen and women in engagements and conflicts overseas continues to grow; we only have to look at the new records being established for attendance at Anzac Day services each year, and particularly the number of young people involved in the parade, not only in Melbourne but in regional and suburban centres all round Victoria. This interest in our service history is demonstrated by the growing participation of school students. That has probably been the biggest change that we have seen over the last two to three years. The Anzac prize is recognition of that but you will see that involvement in all communities.

In this context there has been considerable interest in commemorating significant anniversaries, such as the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan that occurred in August last year. We contributed \$20,000 to help the Victorian Vietnam Veterans Association make that commemoration the outstanding success that it was. This year we have another important anniversary, members of the committee should note: the 65th anniversary of the battle for Australia, effectively—the heroic decision made to redirect our troops to defend Australia at Kokoda, which arguably saved the nation by halting the advance of the Japanese from a staging post at Port Moresby—and the Battle of the Coral Sea which brought the war to our doorstep as well. I think that will be a very important and moving event.

In recognition of this interest by the community, the government in its recent election policy committed to invest \$2 million over the next four years to support ceremonial events and commemorative initiatives. We have delivered on our election commitment by allocating this funding in the budget for 2007-08 and the subsequent three years. The funding will be used to support commemorative events and the implementation of a range of initiatives including upgrading the memorial to our World War II commandos at Tidal River, undertaking an inventory of Victoria's war memorials and developing a guidebook to Victoria's wartime heritage. This funding will go for another four years.

**The bells having rung.**

**The CHAIR**—We will once again take a break.

**Hearing suspended.**



**The CHAIR**—We have reconvened. We have agreed we will finish at six o'clock and if you have any questions, you can put them on notice. We might pass to Richard to ask a question.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA**—In relation to the \$14 million that you proposed to strengthen multicultural Victoria, you allocated \$8 million for cultural precincts which you indicated earlier. You also suggested \$4 million to boost the Victorian Multicultural Commission's community grants, \$2 million over two years for community harmony. Is that new, additional money or is that existing money that is already in the system?

**Mr BRACKS**—The money for the ethnic precincts—Lygon Street, Little Bourke Street and Lonsdale Street—is new money because that was a new allocation. In relation to the grants program, as I mentioned before, from the abolition of VOMA we captured \$1 million. In effect, we have a \$1 million extra capacity to put into other programs that we had. The money for the other matters raised there—the matters I have referred you and you have referred to—is new money. The Hope Centre is new money.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA**—With the \$1 million savings that you are proposing with the merger, how are you planning to gain that money? Are you proposing to make any staff redundant or is it garnered? As a subset to that question, is the merger as a result—my understanding is that VOMA and VMC cannot get on together?

**Mr BRACKS**—No. It is to do with the fact that, as I mentioned before, myself as Multicultural Affairs Minister, or any other minister, will have from their department advice which they will receive after the Victorian Multicultural Commission would submit its advice as well. That would happen as normal course of business. The whole Department of Premier and Cabinet, for example, is available to me. The whole of the department is also available to Daniel Andrews, the minister assisting me in multicultural affairs. We felt that was a duplication on which we could make a saving and we wanted to put more resources into front-line services to assist our multicultural communities. Those front-line services, including the grants program, included the extra money for the ethnic precincts. We think that is money better targeted.

In relation to staff that were there, we are expanding other areas of the public sector and they have been allocated jobs in other parts of the public sector, so no jobs were lost.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA**—And they get on well together?

**Mr BRACKS**—Well, VOMA does not exist, but, yes, they used to get on famously. They used to love each other.

**The CHAIR**—Thanks very much, Premier. That concludes the consideration of budget estimates for the portfolios of Premier and Cabinet and Multicultural Affairs and Veterans Affairs. There are a couple of questions to take on notice. If they are passed to me, I will pass them to Yehudi. It has been a very useful session. I thank the Premier and Mr Blacher and the departmental officers for their attendance. Where questions are taken on notice, the committee will follow them up with you in writing at a later date and request that written responses to these matters be provided within 30 days and they will form part of one of our reports to parliament. Thank you very much.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

## **Transcript of Evidence**

### **12.14 Sport and Recreation portfolio**

*The transcript for the hearing on this portfolio will be included in a future report of the Committee.*

## **Transcript of Evidence**

### **12.15 Veterans' Affairs portfolio**

*Please note the Veterans' Affairs transcript and the Multicultural Affairs transcript are combined into one transcript.*

# VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into 2007—08 budget estimates

Melbourne—3 May 2007

#### Members

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**Mr BRACKS**—Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR**—You have about 35 minutes for this.

**Mr BRACKS**—Yes, I will do my best possible. Thank you, Chair. I will deal with multicultural affairs first and veterans affairs second. I think that was the understanding. Achievements in 2006-07: if I can go to that first on the slide presentation—there should be something circulating around committee members—multicultural and multifaith harmony as part of A Fairer Victoria 2, Progress and Next Steps, \$2.1 million was provided over four years to fund initiatives that bring different faiths and community groups together to promote multifaith and multicultural harmony. The Multifaith Multicultural Youth Forum held in July 2006 was the first of its kind in Victoria. It was an important opportunity to improve dialogue between young people from a range of cultural and faith backgrounds, and that was very successful.

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The merger of VOMA into the VMC: as you know, we committed in the budget in our commitments for a third term to the merger of the department into the VMC in order to produce a saving and in order to streamline services and facilities to the multicultural communities. The view of the government was that whether it was the Premier or another minister, they will receive from their own department's advice, as they will from the VMC, and we did not require therefore a Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs to achieve that aim. I am very pleased to see in the budget that that has been—

**The bells having rung.**

**The CHAIR**—Thank you, Premier. We need to suspend our hearing again.

**Hearing suspended.**

**The CHAIR**—We are back in session.

**Mr BRACKS**—Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR**—Thank you, Premier.

**Mr BRACKS**—As I mentioned just briefly, the merger of VOMA into VMC has captured an extra \$1 million which enables us to put that into direct outcomes for the many multicultural communities and the grant program itself. New budget initiatives. Three major cultural precincts to be refurbished: Lygon, Lonsdale and Little Bourke Streets. An \$8 million investment to restore the key laneways, undertake street beautification and boost resources to communities to showcase their cultural heritage. We are increasing the funding of the volunteer Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria. That is going to increase from \$180,000 to \$250,000, and we are establishing a new multicultural centre in Geelong with up to \$1 million in matched funding.

Increased budget initiatives: increasing funding to VMC's—multicultural communities—community grants program; additional funding of \$4 million over four years. Increased funding for community harmony initiatives with additional funding of \$2 million over two years. So, Chair, I think you want me to go onto veterans affairs?

**The CHAIR**—Yes, please. That would be great.

**Mr BRACKS**—There is an overarching principle committed to ensuring that ex-servicemen and women are remembered, are honoured and are supported in recognition of the service they have offered their nation. In 2004 I announced that I would assume responsibility for all veterans affairs. Previously it was associated with several ministers; the consumer affairs minister, the health minister and other ministers. I assumed total responsibility for that and I think that has been an important and significant initiative. Since then our key priorities have been to strengthen commemoration, education and support to veterans and to create a more coordinated approach to issues affecting our veteran communities.

We have realised the changing needs of our ageing community, as well as the increased interest amongst young people, are important as a focus for the future. The veterans unit within the Department of Victorian Communities has provided operational support to coordinate activities across government. The achievements in 2006-07. Still, as I reported last year, one of our great achievements has been the Victorian Spirit of Anzac schools competition including an overseas study tour. The third tour has just finished successfully across Europe and into Gallipoli as well.

Restoring community war memorials grant program. I know many members have taken advantage of that. Many communities have utilised that and we are seeing the upgrade of those regional memorials right around the state. Fifty thousand dollars for Anzac Day activities. That is now free travel before, during and after for three days. That enables our veterans to come in for commemoration activities and assistance to support those events. The Shrine of Remembrance and ongoing support. As you know, the undercroft has been redeveloped, the education facilities are in place and we have provided more support operationally and for programs for the education officers to undertake their work. We have had a record number of young people and students going through that centre. It is outstanding.

The Victorian Veterans Council and Victorian Veterans Fund which was a reform that went through our parliament, recognising that we needed to consolidate that and to adhere to the original principles that those funds were created on, and the Veterans Heritage Working Group to protect and display Victoria's related heritage. The key priorities for 2007-08 in the budget—and I will finish here.

Commemoration and education activities: we have in this budget \$2 million over four years to support the continued development of the Veteran Commemorative and Education Agenda and extending the Restoring Community War Memorials Grants for a further four years. There is still some work to be done and I imagine once we finish it there is probably even more work to be done to those we finished in the first round. There is a case to be put not only for the permanent memorials but some of the honour boards, for example, which are not captured by the static memorials in communities. Those honour boards are quite significant in a whole

range of communities, whether you go to Melbourne High School or other schools. You will see those honour boards and there is some work to be done there. We are keen on looking at changes in that area.

The Victoria Spirit of ANZAC prize: the 2007 tour is completed. The 2008 tour will be selected on the basis of every education region for government and private schools. The Shrine of Remembrance: \$200,000 to upgrade the public address system; it is a bit patchy and needs to be improved. New budget measures, and probably the biggest of those is not contained within the Department of Victorian Communities but in the Department of Human Services—and that is, a new mental health facility at Heidelberg that has been roundly praised and supported. It does not say here, but from memory it is about \$10 million that we are providing to that. I know the veteran community have sought that for a long time. If you see it, you will see what needs to be done and I am looking forward very much to that upgrade happening as well. Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity.

**The CHAIR**—Thank you, Premier. We will take questions on either of the portfolios. Ms Munt?

**Ms MUNT**—Premier, could you please detail for me what new measures is introducing through the 2007-08 budget to commemorate the service of our veterans.

**Mr BRACKS**—Thank you for your question. That enables me to elaborate on matters I was not able to cover in that report. The interest from the community in commemorating the sacrifice of the servicemen and women in engagements and conflicts overseas continues to grow; we only have to look at the new records being established for attendance at Anzac Day services each year, and particularly the number of young people involved in the parade, not only in Melbourne but in regional and suburban centres all round Victoria. This interest in our service history is demonstrated by the growing participation of school students. That has probably been the biggest change that we have seen over the last two to three years. The Anzac prize is recognition of that but you will see that involvement in all communities.

In this context there has been considerable interest in commemorating significant anniversaries, such as the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan that occurred in August last year. We contributed \$20,000 to help the Victorian Vietnam Veterans Association make that commemoration the outstanding success that it was. This year we have another important anniversary, members of the committee should note: the 65th anniversary of the battle for Australia, effectively—the heroic decision made to redirect our troops to defend Australia at Kokoda, which arguably saved the nation by halting the advance of the Japanese from a staging post at Port Moresby—and the Battle of the Coral Sea which brought the war to our doorstep as well. I think that will be a very important and moving event.

In recognition of this interest by the community, the government in its recent election policy committed to invest \$2 million over the next four years to support ceremonial events and commemorative initiatives. We have delivered on our election commitment by allocating this funding in the budget for 2007-08 and the subsequent three years. The funding will be used to support commemorative events and the implementation of a range of initiatives including upgrading the memorial to our World War II commandos at Tidal River, undertaking an inventory of Victoria's war memorials and developing a guidebook to Victoria's wartime heritage. This funding will go for another four years.

**The bells having rung.**

**The CHAIR**—We will once again take a break.

**Hearing suspended.**

**The CHAIR**—We have reconvened. We have agreed we will finish at six o'clock and if you have any questions, you can put them on notice. We might pass to Richard to ask a question.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA**—In relation to the \$14 million that you proposed to strengthen multicultural Victoria, you allocated \$8 million for cultural precincts which you indicated earlier. You also suggested \$4 million to boost the Victorian Multicultural Commission's community grants, \$2 million over two years for community harmony. Is that new, additional money or is that existing money that is already in the system?

**Mr BRACKS**—The money for the ethnic precincts—Lygon Street, Little Bourke Street and Lonsdale Street—is new money because that was a new allocation. In relation to the grants program, as I mentioned before, from the abolition of VOMA we captured \$1 million. In effect, we have a \$1 million extra capacity to put into other programs that we had. The money for the other matters raised there—the matters I have referred you and you have referred to—is new money. The Hope Centre is new money.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA**—With the \$1 million savings that you are proposing with the merger, how are you planning to gain that money? Are you proposing to make any staff redundant or is it garnered? As a subset to that question, is the merger as a result—my understanding is that VOMA and VMC cannot get on together?

**Mr BRACKS**—No. It is to do with the fact that, as I mentioned before, myself as Multicultural Affairs Minister, or any other minister, will have from their department advice which they will receive after the Victorian Multicultural Commission would submit its advice as well. That would happen as normal course of business. The whole Department of Premier and Cabinet, for example, is available to me. The whole of the department is also available to Daniel Andrews, the minister assisting me in multicultural affairs. We felt that was a duplication on which we could make a saving and we wanted to put more resources into front-line services to assist our multicultural communities. Those front-line services, including the grants program, included the extra money for the ethnic precincts. We think that is money better targeted.

In relation to staff that were there, we are expanding other areas of the public sector and they have been allocated jobs in other parts of the public sector, so no jobs were lost.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA**—And they get on well together?

**Mr BRACKS**—Well, VOMA does not exist, but, yes, they used to get on famously. They used to love each other.

**The CHAIR**—Thanks very much, Premier. That concludes the consideration of budget estimates for the portfolios of Premier and Cabinet and Multicultural Affairs and Veterans Affairs. There are a couple of questions to take on notice. If they are passed to me, I will pass them to Yehudi. It has been a very useful session. I thank the Premier and Mr Blacher and the departmental officers for their attendance. Where questions are taken on notice, the committee will follow them up with you in writing at a later date and request that written responses to these matters be provided within 30 days and they will form part of one of our reports to parliament. Thank you very much.

**Witnesses withdrew.**



## **Transcript of Evidence**

### **12.16 Victorian Communities portfolio**

*The transcript for the hearing on this portfolio will be included in a future report of the Committee.*

## **Transcript of Evidence**

**12.17 Women's Affairs portfolio**

# VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into budget estimates 2007–08

Melbourne — 7 May 2007

#### Members

Mr G. Barber	Mr G. Rich-Phillips
Mr R. Dalla-Riva	Mr R. Scott
Ms J. Graley	Mr B. Stensholt
Ms J. Munt	Dr W. Sykes
Mr M. Pakula	Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt  
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Business Support Officer: Ms J. Nathan

#### Witnesses

Ms J. Allan, Minister for Women's Affairs;  
Mr Y. Blacher, secretary;  
Mr S. Gregory, chief financial officer; and  
Ms F. Sharkie, director, Office of Women's Policy, Department for Victorian Communities.

**The CHAIR** — I thank the other witnesses for their attendance and welcome Fiona Sharkie, director of the Office of Women's Policy. I ask the minister to give a brief presentation on the women's affairs portfolio.

**Ms ALLAN** — I will be very brief, Chair, because I am sure we will have plenty of opportunities through questions to talk about some of the new budget initiatives. Can I say at the outset how delighted I am to hold the women's affairs portfolio. It is a great portfolio and provides a great opportunity for me to work with men and women across Victoria to support the whole of the Victorian government's agenda in this area.

**Overheads shown.**

**Ms ALLAN** — You can see from the first slide the range of key achievements we have made in this portfolio over the last seven years. They have really been driven by four key themes which are consistent and aligned with the priorities of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

They cover the areas of representation and equity; education, work and economic independence; justice and safety; and health, wellbeing and community strengthening. Whether it is, as you can see, putting single women on boards and committees, celebrating women through the Victorian women's honour roll or the particular work we have been doing in our safety strategy and health and wellbeing strategies, we have had a very strong focus in driving a whole-of-government agenda, working with those key portfolios that deliver services that impact on the lives of women in Victoria.

There has been a range of key achievements in the current financial year in the women's affairs portfolio, particularly against our four themes that I highlighted before, but more particularly the ongoing work this government is doing in the implementation of a family violence reform strategy, an area where we have really seen some very strong policy work being translated into practice on the ground. We have continued working with women to increase their numbers on boards and committees, with a particular focus on supporting CALD and indigenous women in this area — also, through the great activity that is going on around the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, which we are supporting as one of our themes around community strengthening, which I may get a chance to touch on during questions.

You can see on the last slide the government priorities for 07–08, coming largely out of the budget. The new budget initiatives are the final three points — the Safer Families Training program, financial literacy and the centenary of women's suffrage celebrations. The top two are some very important policy work. They are very much the work of the Office of Women's Policy. We do not have so many grant programs or funding programs, it is very much about driving whole-of-government policy, particularly around the broad policy, but especially in key areas like safety, justice and women's health.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister.

**Ms GRALEY** — I will begin where you finished, Minister, with the Centenary of Women's Suffrage celebrations — a very important event for everybody in Victoria. Can you please explain what is planned?

**Ms ALLAN** — Absolutely. It is a very important celebration, and I have a handout to demonstrate why. It has some facts and figures. The reason we have allocated funds to celebrate the Centenary of Women's Suffrage is because it is a very important milestone in women's equal participation in our democratic society. If you have a look at the information that is provided you will see that Victorian women got the right to vote in 1908. However, of course it should be noted that indigenous women did not get the right to vote until all indigenous people were granted to right to vote — I think that was in the referendum of 1967.

**The CHAIR** — Forty years ago.

**Ms ALLAN** — That is right, 40 years ago. If you have a look at the dates that we have provided there you will see that Victoria was the last state in Australia to grant women the right to vote. We did have a bit more of a battle here in Victoria to get the right to vote. It took 18 bills in the Victorian Parliament between 1889 and 1908 before there was success, and I dare not say that it might have been the upper house holding us back during that time, but we certainly did not see success in getting bills through the Parliament to get women the right to vote.

But it then took another 15 years — it took until 1923 — before women got the right to stand for election. So we got the right to vote in 1908, but we were not able to stand at elections until 1923 — and that is still in people's

lifetimes. Maybe we have parents and grandparents who were alive then, and that is why it is important to mark the centenary of granting women the right to vote with some celebrations and commemorations to remind people that it did take a bit of a battle, that there was a lot of work undertaken and to celebrate particularly the men and women who supported women getting the right to vote, but also use it an opportunity to educate people that there are still a number of areas that we have to work very hard on to ensure that women have equal participation in the community, in the workplace, and also address issues such as family violence.

So we have got a range of activities that are being planned — whether they are, as I said, public events or public lectures. We will do a lot of work with schools and use the opportunity to develop some school curriculum materials. Also there will be some community grants for local women's organisations. Then there will also be a particular focus on the induction of the 2008 women's honour roll.

There has also been a piece of public art that has already been commissioned, and with that to be unveiled in November 2008, because I believe it was November 2003 I think — no, November 23rd, 1908 when women were granted the right to vote. So the culmination of the year's events will be around November next year.

It is a very important milestone. If you think of someone who turns 100 next year was born the year women got the right to vote. So really it is not that long ago in terms of the advancement of equal — —

**Dr SYKES** — A hundred years!

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister.

**Mr BARBER** — Minister, some questions about the women's safety strategy where you have done some really good work in justice and you have done some really good work in services. My question is about the Department of Human Services, the health response, if you like. VicHealth says partner violence is the top risk factor in contributing to this in Victoria, bigger than obesity, bigger than anything.

Why has DHS not developed a statewide strategy and policy to ensure that all health providers can address this problem? I think there are some guidelines in place for GPs, but things like making sure health providers can recognise the signs, how to speak to women at that point, all the appropriate referrals and how to do those, which would all be part of this strategy if DHS had that statewide strategy and policy.

**Ms ALLAN** — Thanks Greg. In terms of your earlier comments around partner violence, I think I mentioned at the very outset a couple of hours ago that family violence is at a cost to the Victorian economy of around \$2 billion a year, so there not only, obviously, the great personal cost and trauma that it causes, but there is also a broader cost to the Victorian economy.

There is a lot of work that has been undertaken since the Women's Safety Strategy was first launched back in 2002 and it is, as I said, a whole-of-government strategy that very much relies on the partnerships that are developed with the major service delivery departments, like health, like education and like justice as well.

In the last couple of years, though, there has been significant work that was initially led out of Victoria Police, and there was a lot of work under Christine Nixon's leadership. They implemented a Victoria Police code of conduct and that has seen a remarkable, I guess, turn around in terms of having Victoria Police both identify and respond to family violence.

**Mr BARBER** — That is in justice, Minister, I mentioned that in my preamble.

**Ms ALLAN** — I am getting there. What I am wanting to demonstrate to you is that this is very much a whole-of-government approach, and in terms of DHS's role in terms of its partnership in the Women's Safety Strategy, there is a whole range of areas, and I do not know if you want me to go to through them all, but in terms of child protection —

**Mr BARBER** — Perhaps provide us with a list; that will do.

**Ms ALLAN** — They are all available. Actually, I can give you this. I did not mean to hand this out but I was just going to show you that we have a Women's Safety Strategy; this is the updated report from November 2005.

**Mr BARBER** — Yes, I have got a copy of it right here.

**Ms ALLAN** — Got it? Excellent!

**Mr BARBER** — I cannot see anything from DHS, but if there is anything, you could let me know.

**Ms ALLAN** — In terms of DHS, we can go through; and also if I can just also say the further work that we have got coming this year is the common-risk assessment framework, and that is a piece of work — a whole-of-government piece of work — that I am responsible for as minister for family violence, so there will be work that DHS will be required to undertake as part of that. But we have got things like a resource guide for child protection and family violence services project; we have got research on the safety needs of women in rural areas that DHS is responsible for; a lot of research in recovery from family violence that DHS is responsible for. Support for vulnerable families — there is a range of innovation projects that DHS is responsible for in an ongoing way. There is the women's health and wellbeing strategy which has this as a focus as well. So there is a range of different areas.

The work that DHS does in terms of working with men who are the perpetrators of family violence, particularly in the housing area — that is an important area; the work it does with children who are both victims of and who then in turn become themselves perpetrators of violence, sometimes in the schoolyard, so there is a lot of work going on that DHS is undertaking and I am happy to provide you with some additional information on what some of those projects are, because I want to assure you that it is very much a whole-of-government approach — it is justice. We have a family violence ministers meeting quarterly and there are ministers from DHS, justice, from education, there is myself as the lead minister — I think that covers it — and police, as part of justice. I recognise that is not the end; there is a lot more work to be done in this area; and the common-risk assessment framework is going to be a very important part of that.

**Ms MUNT** — Across a woman's life, a sense of actual financial independence is vital and key to a woman's security and sense of self — and I tell that to my daughters frequently. I noticed a line item in budget paper 3, page 337, that talks about funding for a financial literacy program, and I was wondering if you could explain what that will provide?

**Ms ALLAN** — Certainly, thanks Janice. You are absolutely right. All of us understanding what we need to have in terms of financing and our personal finances for our own financial wellbeing is very important, but this is particularly important for women when you consider that 50 per cent of women who have either retired or will retire in the next 10 years will have less than \$20 000 in their superannuation, and another 20 per cent will have less than \$5000 in their superannuation. So when you consider the issues around financial security and retirement, they are going to grow significantly as the population ages, as that proportion of people increases as part of our population.

Last year, late 2005 and 2006 there was a successful pilot where there were 20 workshops held across Victoria on women and money. They were called 'Women and money — workshops for a financially fit future'. We saw more than 500 women participate in these workshops, and they were aged over 40 and 55 plus. The feedback from those workshops was very positive and showed us that 77 per cent of the participants in those workshops had gone on to take action personally towards their own financial planning as a result of that. Anything that increases all of our understandings, but particularly for women given that they historically earn less over their lifetimes and are facing lower levels of superannuation, it is very important that we do all we can to increase the numbers of women who can receive financial literacy training. That is why in the budget last week \$1 million has been allocated over four years for further financial literacy training programs. It is about helping women understand what they need to be financially secure, to help them understand how they could potentially increase their earnings and plan for their retirement. We will also be having a real focus on key groups, whether they be women, indigenous women or women from rural and regional Victoria.

In addition to the workshops we are developing a web-based online training facility. For women who cannot get to the workshops or who are pretty technologically literate, they will be able to participate as part of a self-directed learning tool online. That is really designed to extend the reach of this initiative so we can get to more women in Victoria and really help women to develop what it takes for their own financial literacy. We look forward to working with all members of the committee on how we can promote these workshops to women in our own particular communities.

**The CHAIR** — They are very good in my electorate.

**Mr PAKULA** — I have always been interested in the Queen Vic centre because I was a Queen Vic baby!

**Ms MUNT** — Me too!

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — There is a line there, isn't there?

**Mr PAKULA** — And delivered by a female obstetrician. At budget paper 3, page 243. I am interested how the Queen Victoria Women's Centre is performing against the occupancy target?

**Ms ALLAN** — Thanks, Martin. We look forward to you participating in our fundraising drive when it is kicked off later this year — and all other Queen Vic babies!

In terms of a bit of history — because I was talking before about the Centenary of Women's Suffrage — it is always important to place these sorts of centres in their historical context. We know the Queen Vic was the first women's hospital in Victoria that was operated by women, for women. It was established in 1897 and had a shilling fund as part of the fundraising drive to set it up. Since the decision was taken back in 1989 — obviously after you were born, Martin! — to relocate the Queen Victoria Hospital site to Monash, there was the opportunity, which was taken up, for the Queen Vic to be put back into a public space. That was a proposal that had bipartisan support at the time. We saw the Queen Victoria Women's Centre Act passed in 1994 for it to be established. It certainly put in place and clarified the independence of the centre, provided a clear and public statement regarding its purpose to really help build the capacity of women and women's organisations. It was opened in February 1997.

Since then we have been able to develop the centre further as a one-stop information hub that supports women and also women's organisations. I am very pleased to report to the committee that the Queen Vic centre now has a 100 per cent occupancy rate for the last year. These are tenants who have a complementary range of services for women, from legal advice to things like breast cancer support as well.

In terms of women who are using the centre — and I think this is really important, because I know the committee is interested in targets and outcomes and the like — we have seen participation by women both either in person or there is — online, of course — the centre has an info-hub website. We have seen so far more than 17 000 women access the centre, and that is up from 3000 people from the same period in 2006. That is quite dramatic, and I think it is a credit to the board of the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, who have worked very hard at getting it tenanted, getting the services connected and also promoting the range of services that the centre provides.

There has been a range of different programs that have been undertaken, which — considering time — I may not go through, but if I can just mention one. I mentioned at the start the fundraising drive; the centre is about to undertake another shilling fund as a fundraising drive. It is a heritage building and they are expensive to maintain and operate, so there is the need to raise funds for the centre, and that will be a feature of the shilling fund, and there will be a lot more publicity around that as that gets kicked off. We also have a new chair being appointed, in Catherine Brown, and further new members to come onto the board. So, as I said, there has been a great period of work that has been undertaken by the board and I think it is now going into a very positive future, considering particularly that it is fully tenanted.

**Mr WELLS** — How much rent does Emily's List pay, just out of curiosity? I notice they are one of the tenants.

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes, they are one of the tenants. I can take it on notice. There is a range of really good tenants in the centre.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — I refer to BP 3 — my favourite — page 243, women's policy. I noticed, in reviewing last year's PAEC, your predecessor, the Honourable Mary Delahunty, provided the committee with a breakdown of the women's policy output costs for 06–07. I was just wondering if you could provide us with that information as a question on notice?

**Ms ALLAN** — Sure.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — It would be useful because it relates to the question that I have in terms of the total output costs. If you cannot provide that maybe that can be forming part of that initial request. In, again, the

expected outcome for 06–07 in total output costs, 2.9, in 2007–08 there is a total output cost of 4.9. I understand that, and you mentioned in one of your answers, the women’s financial literacy is going to be \$1 million alone. I think you indicated that. I did not know if I picked up the Centenary of Women’s Suffrage celebration — what was that?

**Ms ALLAN** — That was 700 000 — do you want me to quickly run through?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Yes, it might be worthwhile. That was what was provided last year; I do not know if that would assist.

**The CHAIR** — Would you like it on — —

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Yes, something similar to what was provided last year.

**Ms ALLAN** — I can provide the figures now. We can provide it on notice as well, but just what makes up the 4.9; there is 4.95, 07–08: 1.2 is the cost of salaries and the like; operating costs that support a range of things like the Premier’s women’s summit and the honour roll is \$200 000; a couple of grants, one to WIRE — Women’s Information Referral Exchange — 200 000; the Queen Vic women’s centre, 300 000; family violence reform strategy, there is \$1 million next financial year towards that. Just on that point, that is for our coordination role; that is not the whole-of-government contribution; that obviously comes in other departments’ budgets. Women’s suffrage celebrations, 700 000; financial literacy, 250 000 — a quarter of a million dollars over the next four years; and some corporate costs, around 1.1 million. So that is how we get to the — —

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — The 300 000, just on the Queen Victoria Women’s Centre, what is that specifically aimed at?

**Ms ALLAN** — That is for all the good work they do; if you give me a few seconds.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — That is all I need.

**Ms ALLAN** — If I remember rightly — —

**The CHAIR** — Administration and maintenance, probably; is it?

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes, it is. It goes back to a commitment of \$1.9 million that was made in last year’s budget, so this is the 330 000 they receive per annum for four years and then I think in last year’s budget they had 770 000 for capital works. As I said before, it is an expensive building. The recurrent funding is for the building repairs and maintenance to go with the building.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Thank you.

**Ms ALLAN** — Also there is a whole bunch of work that needs to go on down there around bringing it up to contemporary standards, so there are some things like improved security, improving the fire and safety equipment, and the like. So a lot of that work has to go on as well.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Minister. Just as a final question, you can take it on notice, in terms of what resources in staffing and costs do your portfolio departments anticipate applying to serving PAEC hearings and inquiries in the coming year, based on experience over the past four years. I am sure you will share that with your colleague ministers to come up with a departmental answer in that regard.

**Ms ALLAN** — Certainly.

**The CHAIR** — That concludes budget estimates for the portfolios of education services, skills, employment and women’s affairs. I thank the minister, Yehudi and all the other departmental officers for their attendance today. It has been a very useful session. Where questions were taken on notice, the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date and request that written responses to these matters be provided within 30 days, and they will be included in a report to Parliament in due course. Thank you, Minister.



**Ms ALLAN** — Thank you. I have the TAFE capital figure, if Richard wants it — 51.4 million this year, in total capital spend. As I said, there are new funds that you identified — of 3.2, from memory, I think it was. It was in the budget paper.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — What portfolio was this, again?

**Ms ALLAN** — Skills — sorry, training, TAFE. We can provide it to you on notice, but we have it if you like.

**The CHAIR** — There is a further question on notice regarding the sex industry.

**Ms ALLAN** — Okay.

**Committee adjourned.**

## **Transcript of Evidence**

### **12.18 Youth Affairs portfolio**

*The transcript for the hearing on this portfolio will be included in a future report of the Committee.*