

# VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into budget estimates 2010–11

Melbourne — 20 May 2010

#### Members

Mr R. Dalla-Riva

Ms J. Graley

Ms J. Huppert

Mr W. Noonan

Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr G. Rich-Phillips

Mr R. Scott

Mr B. Stensholt

Dr W. Sykes

Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt

Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

#### Witnesses

Mr J. Merlino, Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs,

Mr Y. Blacher, Secretary,

Dr P. Hertan, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation Victoria,

Mr S. Gregory, Chief Financial Officer,

Ms K. Krsevan, Director, Office for Youth, and

Mr G. Ross, Project Officer, Sport and Recreation Victoria, Department of Planning and Community Development.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on the 2010–11 budget estimates for the portfolio of sport, recreation and youth affairs. On behalf of the committee I welcome Mr James Merlino, MP, Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs; Mr Yehudi Blacher, secretary Department of Planning and Community Development; Dr Peter Hertan, executive director, Sport and Recreation Victoria, Department of Planning and Community Development; Mr Stephen Gregory, chief financial officer, Department of Planning and Community Development; Ms Kati Krsevan, director, Office for Youth, Department of Planning and Community Development; and Mr Grant Ross, project officer, Sport and Recreation Victoria, Department of Planning and Community Development. Departmental officers, members of the public and the media are also welcome.

In accordance with the guidelines for public hearings, I remind members of the public that they cannot participate in the committee's proceedings. Only officers of the PAEC secretariat are to approach PAEC members. Departmental officers as requested by the minister or his chief of staff can approach the table during the hearing. Members of the media are also requested to observe the guidelines for filming or recording proceedings in the Legislative Council Committee Room.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. There is no need for evidence to be sworn. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript to be verified and returned within two working days of this hearing. In accordance with past practice, the transcripts and PowerPoint presentations will then be placed on the committee's website.

Following a presentation by the minister, committee members will ask questions relating to the budget estimates. Generally the procedure followed will be that relating to questions in the Legislative Assembly. I ask that all mobile telephones be turned off.

I now call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 10 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information that relates to the budget estimates for the portfolio of sport, recreation and youth affairs.

**Overheads shown.**

**Mr MERLINO** — Thanks very much, Chair, and thank you to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for the opportunity to present. Can I congratulate everyone on reaching the end. I am sure you are exhausted after a marathon period. I will first present on the sport and recreation part of the portfolio. It has been an incredibly busy and important year, the last 12 months, for sport in our state, capped off by recently again being crowned the ultimate sports city.

As the committee would be aware, sport and recreation makes a significant contribution to a number of key strategies in the statement of government intentions. In jobs, investment in new world-class sporting facilities such as the redevelopment of Melbourne Park and AAMI Park creates hundreds of jobs and helps to attract major events to Victoria.

In the area of bushfires, funding and support to rebuild sporting facilities is playing a major part in helping communities get back on their feet after the bushfires. In building active communities, the government is helping to build active communities around Victoria through programs which support the construction of new community facilities to provide opportunities for increased sport and recreation participation.

On the environment, the government recognises that sport is affected by climate change, and we are providing grants to help local communities implement sustainable approaches to water management of sport and recreation facilities.

Key achievements for 2009–10 in community sport — the budget includes funding to implement a hard-hitting campaign to promote the new sport code of conduct and support state sporting associations in implementing the code. The code has been endorsed by high-profile ambassadors from a range of sports, as you can see in that photo from when we launched the campaign. We support the need to stamp out unacceptable behaviour in community sport.

In addition, we are providing funding to rebuild sporting facilities destroyed by the Black Saturday bushfires, such as the oval at Pomborneit, which you can see there. Sport and Recreation Victoria has employed staff to work directly with bushfire-affected sport and recreation clubs across Victoria.

On drought relief, I recently approved funding for 52 projects through the 2010 rounds of the drought and synthetic surfaces programs, bringing the total number approved since 2006 to over 590.

On Strengthening the World Game, this program has been successfully implemented, and the program is maximising capacity of community soccer clubs to cater for additional participation.

Key achievements in major sporting events — as I mentioned, we have been crowned for the third time in a row the world's ultimate sports city. Last year's Australian Masters golf tournament held at Kingston Heath attracted unprecedented interest, with over 107 000 spectators attending across the practice day, the pro-am and the four competition days, delivering a \$34 million boost to Victoria's economy. Tiger Woods was obviously the major drawcard for that event.

Other events held during the year included the 49th Rip Curl Pro surfing event, the Audi Victoria Week and Sailing World Cup, and the Hockey Champions Trophy, which was hosted very successfully at the State Netball and Hockey Centre. The Australia versus New Zealand Rugby league test match was of course a very special event that marked the opening of AAMI Park.

Key achievements in terms of state facilities — the government continues to undertake an ambitious program for state facility development to ensure that athletes, officials and spectators can benefit from using the best possible facilities and to support the attraction of major events. Some major milestones in the ongoing development of our major sports precincts were achieved in 2009–10. A number of state facility projects of the highest importance were completed, including the Melbourne rectangular stadium, AAMI Park, as shown in these images; the National Ice Sports Centre; and the premiership stand at Skilled Stadium.

A number of major projects commenced or moved into a new phase of development, including detailed planning for the redevelopment of Melbourne Park and the development of the new state athletics centre, as you can see in that image on the screen. The redevelopment of AFL training facilities continued with the completion of work at Princes Park and Arden Street — and the Arden Street facility includes the State Fencing Centre — and the commencement of works related to the St Kilda Football Club in Seaford.

Our priorities for 2010–11 include a range of new budget initiatives. The community facility funding program will continue to help provide high quality accessible community sport and recreation facilities across Victoria. As discussed earlier, a key priority will be the implementation and monitoring of the community sport code of conduct. The sustainable sportsground program will consolidate the work of the drought and synthetic surfaces program. And the Premier's Active Families Challenge will run again in 2010, building on the success of the challenges in 2008 and particularly in 2009 when over 50 000 people took part. This year the challenge will be delivered in spring.

Priorities for state facilities include the Melbourne Park redevelopment. The first elements of the redevelopment of Melbourne Park are expected to be completed prior to the 2011 Australian Open, and further works will commence in 2011 post the open. That will be the practice right through the course of the next several years.

The main works contractor for the state athletics centre has been appointed and is scheduled to commence work on site this month, and construction will continue through 2010–11. On the MCG and Yarra Park, planning is under way for both the refurbishment of the Great Southern Stand at the MCG and also landscaping and recycling in Yarra Park, with works on the park commencing later this year or early next year. There is also \$12.7 million which has been allocated in the 2011 budget to purchase land and design a new state multidiscipline shooting centre to cater for a wide range of shooting sports.

Priorities for major events include the UCI world road cycling championships, which is to be held in Geelong and Melbourne in September and October this year, a massive international event which will feature the world's best cyclists, including our own world champion Cadel Evans. The 2010 JBWere Masters golf tournament will be at the Victoria Golf Club in November, and preparation will also continue for the 2011 Presidents Cup to be held at the Royal Melbourne Golf Club.

We also have a new funding program, the regionally significant sporting grants program. The implementation of this program will be a key priority in 2010–11. The program will provide support for a number of state, national and international championship level events that will provide significant benefit to the region in which they are hosted. The Commonwealth Games will be held in Delhi later this year, and the government and the Victorian community will be looking on with keen interest at the performance of our VIS athletes there.

There are the world cup and Asian cup bids. The Victorian government has worked with FFA in preparing an outstanding bid book for the 2018 and 2022 FIFA world cups. The government will continue to work with the FFA in the lead-up to FIFA's decision in December this year. The FFA is also bidding for the Asian Football Confederation Cup in 2015. A decision on who will host the tournament is likely to occur in July, and it will have implications for Victoria if the tournament is awarded to Australia, as we expect it will be. That is the sport and recreation portfolio.

### **Overheads shown.**

**Mr MERLINO** — I will quickly switch over to the youth portfolio. Young people are vital contributors to the wellbeing of our economy and communities now and in the future. They make up 17 per cent of the Victorian population, and their diversity reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of our population more broadly. Overall young Victorians continue to do well, particularly when we look at comparisons with other states. Victoria has the highest completion rate of year 12 or equivalent of any state: 86.8 in 2009. More young Victorians participate in sport than do young people nationally: over 66 per cent compared to 64 per cent. Victoria has the lowest youth offender rate in the country.

The Office for Youth exists to ensure that young people have a direct link to government. The youthcentral website and the Young People Direct program are excellent examples of direct communication between young people and government. This input from young people is coupled with thorough research to clearly identify the needs of young people and inform relevant policy across government. We then respond to these identified needs through a range of programs and initiatives, which are highlighted on the next slide.

As you can see, we have a range of initiatives and grants programs in place to support and involve young people. The Advance, Youth Foundations Victoria and FReeZA programs give young people the opportunity to get more involved in their communities. The mentoring, FReeZACentral and youth participation and access programs give young Victorians the opportunity to learn new skills and build confidence. youthcentral and Young People Direct give young people the opportunity to have a voice in their community and include their views in decision making.

The government's youth policy is called Future Directions: An Action Agenda for Young Victorians. It focuses government and community action in five outcomes areas, which are listed on the slide. I will shortly be reporting on outcomes from Future Directions' top 40 actions.

In terms of the key achievements for 2009–10 I would like to highlight a few: youthcentral achieved a record site usage in the past year, exceeding 100 000 unique users in a month, and we expect to reach 2.3 million page impressions for 2009–10. Given we are already the most popular government youth website in the nation, it is something we are very proud of. We introduced a new Cybersmart section and also a getting a job CD resource, which has been provided to all Victorian secondary schools.

Fifteen Youth Foundations Victoria sites have been established, and in 2009, 83 grants totalling more than \$163 000 were made by the sites to local youth-led projects. On 10 April this year I launched a new music equipment grant competition, giving young people a chance to win music equipment.

In terms of priorities, 2010–11 will bring some important innovations and reforms in youth affairs. Some of those highlights include new funding of \$400 000 per year over two years to increase the base level of grants for FReeZA events. There is new funding for the youth-led cyber safety initiative — that is \$3.6 million over four years. That will deliver peer-to-peer cyber safety education programs, and six community organisations will be given grants to provide that program. Importantly there will also be resources for parents, which is the other critical side of the cyber safety issue.

We will continue to support the implementation of a number of critical projects that support young Victorians in bushfire-affected areas.

Thanks for the opportunity to present on both the sport and recreation and youth affairs portfolios. I will be happy to answer any questions that you have.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. In respect of the funds which are to be provided through the budget, both next year and the following years, for your portfolios, could you give the committee a little bit more detail — no more than 4 minutes — in terms of what plans and strategies you have underpinning your budgets and whether there is any change. You have mentioned Future Directions for the youth portfolio, but what are your strategies in the medium and longer term?

**Mr MERLINO** — I will start with the sport portfolio. The sport and recreation portfolio budget is based on a range of planning processes and strategies. In general these planning processes and strategies have not changed since last year, although strategies related to specific initiatives develop further during the year — for example, the planning strategy relating to Melbourne Park.

All of these processes are underpinned by high-level government policy frameworks, including Growing Victoria Together, A Fairer Victoria and the annual statement of government intentions. As identified in the PAEC questionnaire, budget initiatives in the sport and recreation portfolio make a major contribution to a number of Growing Victoria Together goals, including building friendly, confident and safe communities; more quality jobs and thriving, innovative industries across Victoria; a fairer society that reduces disadvantage and respects diversity; and high-quality, accessible health and community services.

At the departmental level, planning for sport and recreation is based on the Department of Planning and Community Development's strategic plan outlined in the department's corporate plan 2010–14. The sport and recreation portfolio contributes to each of the department's strategic directions, which are planning communities for growth and change; investing in community infrastructure and heritage, including continuing to develop Melbourne's key sporting precincts; strengthening communities and promoting inclusion; and building organisational performance.

At the business unit level sport and recreation is guided by Sport and Recreation 2005–10 — A Five Year Strategic Plan for Sport and Recreation Victoria. This plan sets out the following four strategic directions. Under active people, active communities SRV funds programs that encourage and facilitate positive participation in sport and active recreation including the community sport code of conduct and the access for all abilities program. Under building capacity for tomorrow SRV provides funding for a range of programs that support the development of community and elite-level sporting facilities and other programs that build on capacity, including the provision of sporting uniforms. Under collaboration for development, capacity building in the sport and recreation sector is a key objective of a number of SRV programs such as the state sporting association grants program and the country action grants program. Under state of achievement Victoria is the world's best host of major sporting events, and SRV also supports the elite sporting achievements through other initiatives including its support for the Victorian Institute of Sport.

Specific 2010–11 budget initiatives are based on significant planning processes of their own. All budget initiatives relating to sporting facilities are based on ongoing processes of substantive, medium and long-term planning. For example, funding for stage 1 of the redevelopment of Melbourne Park is based on long-term strategic planning designed to ensure that the Australian Open grand slam tennis tournament remains in Melbourne, and we have achieved that to at least 2036.

Funding for the refurbishment of the southern stand at the MCG and landscaping in Yarra Park is based on long-term strategic planning based on ensuring the MCG remains one of the best stadiums in the world, retaining the AFL Grand Final at the MCG until at least 2037 and improving the financial viability of AFL clubs that play games at the ground.

Funding for MSAC is part of an ongoing planning process designed to ensure the standard of the facility is maintained. Community facility-related initiatives are based on government-wide policies and departmental and business unit planning strategies, as I outlined earlier.

I will leave sport with that. I could talk a bit more, but I will not, given the time. I will go briefly to youth as well. We talked about Future Directions.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of your Future Directions policy.

**Mr MERLINO** — My portfolio continues to prioritise initiatives across the five Future Directions outcomes: assisting young people to contribute to their communities and make a difference through programs such as Advance in schools and the 15 local youth foundation initiatives; helping young people to make a successful transition from school to a job through the popular jobs and careers resources on the government's website for young people, youthcentral; providing access to information, support and services through programs such as the Youth Participation and Access program; and supporting them to lead healthy, active and culturally diverse lifestyles such as through the popular FReeZA program which delivers youth-led events for over 130 000 young people across the state.

We continue to assist young people to choose safe behaviours including through the \$3.6 million in funding for a new youth-led cyber safety initiative in 2010–11 budget. I might stop there, because I know I have been speaking for quite a while.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Minister, under youth affairs, with increasing costs being a major barrier to Victorian youth in accessing higher education and training, why is there nothing in the forward estimates for youth support under the Youth Compact? I refer you to budget paper 3 page 317. There are references at page 321 and also at page 330.

**The CHAIR** — I am sorry, what precisely is your question?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — I am talking about the Youth Compact program.

**The CHAIR** — Where there is a lot of money, so why is there not any money — —

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Hang on.

**The CHAIR** — Sorry, I am just trying to clarify your question. I thought you had.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — The Labor Chair says there is a lot of money. I have not finished the question. Sorry, I have to laugh, because it is interesting that there is a lot of money, but it seems to cease at the end of the election year, so the question is: why is there no further money beyond this year's election for the Youth Compact program? I reference table A.9 and A.13 that show nothing in the forward estimates for 2011–12, 2012–13 or 2013–14.

**Mr MERLINO** — I would be happy to answer that question, but it is actually a question that should have been asked of the Minister for Education. It is a program that is a partnership between the department of education and Adult, Community and Further Education. It is not actually a part of my portfolio responsibilities and should be referred to — —

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — The Office for Youth falls within the DPCD.

**Mr MERLINO** — Yes, the Office for Youth falls within the DPCD.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — So the output initiatives on table A.13; it is planning and community development.

**The CHAIR** — There is a note on page 321 on the Youth Compact, which refers to the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — No, I am talking to table A.13. It is on page 330. It is within planning and community development.

**The CHAIR** — Youth Compact program for half a million dollars.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Yes, which is in the output for planning and community development.

**Mr MERLINO** — The answer to that question is, as I said, it is a partnership between education and Adult, Community and Further Education. ACFE falls within the department called DPCD; education within the DEECD. But they are both the responsibility of Bronwyn Pike as Minister for Education.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — So that is why there is no money.

**The CHAIR** — We can put that on that notice and ask the minister. Does that sound reasonable?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Yes thank you.

**Ms GRALEY** — Minister, I would like to ask you a question about the community sport code of conduct. As you are aware, in my electorate sporting clubs are blossoming and many kids and their parents are actively involved in sport, but we have had a few ugly incidents, so I am very interested in this code. Could the minister please outline the amount of funding provided and the purpose of this initiative going forward?

**Mr MERLINO** — I am quite passionate about this, and it has been a real joy working with people. As you saw in the photo in the presentation there are a number of elite sporting stars, both current and retired, who are very passionate about it, particularly those retired sports stars who have children of their own. Whilst we do a hell of a lot in terms of community facilities, we can build as many facilities as we like, but if we allow ugly behaviour, violent behaviour, abusive behaviour, to go on unchecked at community sport, then we will lose people. We will lose people volunteering to be umpires, and we will lose kids participating in the game. So I am very happy to answer this question on the Victorian code of conduct for community sport.

The budget allocates \$600 000 towards this initiative, which will be used to support state sporting associations and local sporting clubs to implement the new code of conduct. There are just on 16 000 sports clubs across the state, and more than 1 million Victorians are members of a local sports club. Unfortunately, though, there is a very small minority — and I stress a small minority — amongst this number who until now have felt that they had the right to act however they wanted. Acts of violence, discrimination and vilification are illegal acts within Victoria, whether they are on or off the sporting pitch. As extreme as these cases are, fortunately they are not common. However, we still need to stop this kind of behaviour from happening in the first place.

The Victorian code of conduct for community sport was launched to help stamp out this type of behaviour and this includes — this goes through the code — violent and abusive behaviour; vilification of any kind towards another person; discrimination against another person based on their age, gender, sexual orientation, race, culture, religion or any other relevant personal characteristic; sexual harassment or intimidation of another person; victimisation of another person for exercising their rights through the code; and failure to maintain a safe environment.

These are all breaches of the code punishable through sports-specific penalties. Every state sporting association, league and club in Victoria is required to adhere to the code and promote it to everyone involved in their sport or club. State sporting associations, leagues and clubs who do not adhere to or enforce the code will not be eligible for funding from Sport and Recreation Victoria, and any existing funding will cease. That is quite a big stick, because over the course of the last 10 years we are talking about more than \$250 million that we have invested in community facilities.

On Thursday, 29 April, I launched the latest component of the code of conduct campaign which takes a hard-hitting approach to dealing with poor behaviour at community sport. I was joined by a range of sports stars, past and present, as well as the Minister for the Respect Agenda, Justin Madden. I announced that every sporting club will receive an information kit about the campaign. The kit contains a short video on the impact negative behaviour can have on community-level sport. This video is about raising awareness across community sport, and it is something everyone in the club can watch. There will also be posters displaying the code to be put up in clubrooms. I have copies of the code and CDs which I will distribute for the committee.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you.

**Mr MERLINO** — The code of conduct website will be updated regularly, ensuring that clubs can have access to the latest information on the code and tools to continue to ensure its success. This is a long-term project. We have had a number of positive campaigns, but we felt, given community concern about this type of behaviour, we needed to have a hard-hitting campaign. We need to provide resources but also make it clear to clubs that state funding is at risk if they do not sign up and adhere to the code.

**Dr SYKES** — Minister, my question relates to sport and recreation and budget paper 3, page 170 — the total output cost in the bottom line of the table. My question is: why have the target output costs been reduced by around 2 per cent from 85.9 per cent in 2009–10 down to 84.2 per cent when, as you have indicated,

Melbourne is the world's ultimate sports city or certainly promotes itself as the sporting capital of Victoria. Is there an explanation? I note there are a couple of notes there.

**Ms GRALEY** — It is the capital of the world!

**The CHAIR** — Without assistance.

**Dr SYKES** — Thank you for the assistance. It is the capital of the world, so we should put more money into it, Minister.

**Mr MERLINO** — Indeed. I am happy to outline the reasons for that. It really boils down to the nature of the portfolio and the nature of major events, so I will happily give you an explanation as to that variance. The nature of the portfolio dictates that there will be large variations from year to year when Victoria hosts major events and receives funding for key sport and recreation-related initiatives and when these events and initiatives sunset.

The sport and recreation development budget allocation for 2010–11 is \$84.2 million compared with an expected outcome of \$87 million in 2009–10. In the first instance this is the result of the removal of the Treasurer's advance for the new announcements made during 2009–10, where funding was provided for McAdam Park motor sport facility and Glen Eira Sports and Aquatic Centre. There is also a decrease in funding from 2009–10 associated with adjustments to the major events cap and finalisation of the improving community access to VFL grounds program, the improving soccer facilities and country footy and netball initiatives, the Healthy and Active Victoria funding and reduction to the significant synthetic surfaces program.

New projects and funding increases to the base in 2010–11 include funding for the MCG southern stand redevelopment, investment in community sport and recreation facilities, the sustainable sportsground program and the regionally significant sporting grants program. Also adding to the base allocation of 2009–10 is the carry-forward estimate, around \$1.6 million, which was provided during the budget preparation process. This includes regionally significant synthetic surfaces program, Healthy and Active Victoria, improving community access to VFL training grounds, and Strengthening the World Game program. These carry-forward estimates may be reduced based on committed projects that could still be expended prior to the end of the 2009–10 year. When you look at the budget over the course of a number of years you can see it fluctuates depending on the programming of facilities development and what major particular events you are hosting in that year.

**Mr NOONAN** — Minister, under your state facility priorities you have listed Melbourne Park redevelopment, which is very exciting of course, and you have a listing in budget paper 3, page 338, for the Melbourne and Olympic Park redevelopment, stage 1. Can you provide further information to the committee about this substantial asset initiative?

**Mr MERLINO** — This was a huge development and a massive outcome for the city and the state. As sport continues to evolve at an international level, it is important that our sporting facilities are not just keeping pace but remain the best in the world. A fortnight ago I joined the Minister for Major Projects in turning the first sod of the \$363 million development at Melbourne Park, and funded in this year's budget this rebuild of one of the world's greatest sporting precincts, and we will lock in our most important international event, the Australian Open, until at least 2036.

I do not say that lightly. The Australian Open is the biggest single sporting event for the month of January in the world, and it is that important to us. When you think about the Northern Hemisphere freezing, and they see those images of Victoria and Melbourne, for those two weeks in January it is so important. I will run you a short video, which shows what the final picture will look like.

#### **Video shown.**

**Mr MERLINO** — That is the proposed roof over Margaret Court Arena, and it will be attached to Rod Laver Arena. We are trying to improve the connection to the city as well, with Federation Square east.

We are going to increase the capacity of Rod Laver as well slightly. There will be massive public space in the town square in between Hisense and Rod Laver arenas.

Stage 1 of the master plan includes: refurbishments to both the public and back-of-house areas of Rod Laver Arena, as well as landscaping works around the front of the arena and the adjacent oval; and a major upgrade to

fully enclose Margaret Court Arena, including the installation of a retractable roof and additional seating to increase crowd capacity to 7500. We will be the first grand slam event with three retractable roofs. That is going to obviously improve the operations.

The other important thing about Margaret Court Arena is that this is a great win for other sports, such as basketball and netball. They have been crying out for a stadium of capacity with 6000 to 7000 people, and Margaret Court will deliver that.

There will be: a new eastern plaza, incorporating 8 new indoor courts and 13 outdoor courts for elite training and general public use, as well as change room facilities and gymnasium; refurbishments to Hisense; additional parking and a footbridge linking Melbourne Park to the rectangular stadium. The first elements of the project involve landscaping works adjacent to Rod Laver Area, and they are expected to be completed prior to the 2011 Australian Open. We will start to get a sense around the town square, making the area between Hisense and Rod Laver the front door to the precinct, if you like.

Stage 1 will be progressively completed over the next five years. Melbourne's reputation as the world's sporting events capital was once again confirmed with the Ultimate Sports City award, which I mentioned before. Melbourne Park will be transformed into the ultimate sport events precinct. It has been 22 years since the Australian Open was moved from Kooyong to its new home at Melbourne Park. Since that time the Open has grown to impressive new heights, this year attracting 648 000 patrons, compared to 250 000 patrons back in 1988.

The Open makes a significant contribution to Victoria, generating around 1000 equivalent full-time jobs, injecting \$164 million into the economy and raising the tourism profile of our great city with almost 240 million viewers worldwide. This is a wonderful project, and it is great to get that signed up to at least to 2036.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, I take you to page 170 of budget paper 3. The first measure on that page is 'Completion of capital works at the State Sports Centres Trust's facilities'. I have been trying to follow that through the budget papers, which is somewhat difficult. Can you please outline firstly the scope of works included under the capital works description there, the original projected completion period versus the current fourth quarter 2011 and the original budget and the final budget, please?

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for that, because this replaces a discontinued measure regarding Albert Park, does it not?

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — The discontinued measure was the commencement measure; this is a completion measure.

**Mr MERLINO** — I will speak more broadly in terms of the upgrades, and then I will refer to those performance measures. The state government has committed \$2.4 million to the States Sports Centres Trust to replace key pieces of infrastructure at MSAC. This includes the replacement of the pool booms, which are fundamental for the staging of swimming events, as well as funding for a new ozone generator and chiller unit to ensure effective operation of the pool. This infrastructure has reached the end of its life cycle, and by replacing it promptly we can ensure that MSAC remains a world-class facility for hosting international-standard aquatic events.

Last year I announced funding to the value of \$5.7 million over three years to support the continued delivery of high-quality services at MSAC, and the State Netball Hockey Centre so the trust is responsible for both those facilities.

This funding will allow the State Sports Centres Trust to undertake urgent capital works across the venues as well as continue its commitment to supporting state sporting associations through the sports support initiative. To date, the trust has completed a number of refurbishment projects at MSAC, in line with the program. This includes replacement of carpet, car park improvements, furniture replacement, IT upgrades and improvements to emergency signage.

Works at the State Netball Hockey Centre include an upgrade to the hockey pitch lighting — that was a key thing in terms of the Champions Trophy recently — refurbishment of the cafe and bar and works on hockey

pitch irrigation. The operational funding provided as part of this package has allowed the trust to continue supporting community sport.

This includes offering free or discounted facilities hire to state sporting associations based at MSAC and the State Netball Hockey Centre, providing an annual rebate to MSAC stadium sports, offering free gym memberships to VIS athletes and offering discount office tenancy and room hire rates. I will review these community initiatives, along with all operations annually through the development of the State Sports Centres Trust business plan. These improvements to MSAC and the State Netball Hockey Centre will help to ensure these leading sports facilities remain at the standard required to continue hosting international-level events and meet the needs of local community users.

In terms of the budget performance measures, 2009–10 was the commencement of capital works at the State Sports Centres Trust facility. The target of quarter 2 for this measure was met, and in terms of 2010–11 it is the completion of capital works at the State Sports Centres Trust facilities.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — In terms of the two lots of funding, the 2.4 I think you said for MSAC initially, and then 5.7 you approved last year — —

**Mr MERLINO** — Yes.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Are you able to supply on notice for the committee an indication of the cash flow timing of those originally as proposed and ultimately so we can see how they track along?

**Mr MERLINO** — I am happy to take that on notice, Gordon, and provide that to the committee.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Thanks.

**The CHAIR** — In our other inquiries we normally track them if they are over 10 million. This is under 10 million.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — My question is regarding the community facility grants program but I did have a clarification on one of your earlier answers, Minister, if the Chair will indulge me.

**Mr MERLINO** — Sure.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I think you said that the major events cap was 83.9. Was that what you said?

**Mr MERLINO** — No.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — What did you say?

**Mr MERLINO** — I was talking about the total budget. If you just bear with me, I will get back to that reference.

I was referring to the 2010–11 budget and then a comparison to the 2009–10 budget. The major events cap is the responsibility of the Minister for Tourism and Major Events through DIIRD.

**The CHAIR** — Ms Pennicuik, you have a question?

**Ms PENNICUIK** — My question is regarding the community facility grants program. If you go to page 169 of budget paper 3, the target in 2009–10 was 145; the expected outcome was 235, which is quite a difference; and the target this year is 160 grants. My question is: what is the explanation for the variance between the target, the expected outcome and the new target, and what is the total expenditure in the community facility grants program, which I cannot seem to find?

**Mr MERLINO** — In terms of the variations around the performance measure ‘community facility grants’, the number approved is greater than 160. Your question that it does not more closely represent the expected outcome of 235 — —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Or the target.

**The CHAIR** — The previous target as well was greater than 145.

**Mr MERLINO** — The reason for this is that the programs which relate to this measure provide funding to a variety of community facilities which can range vastly in the scope of the project. There is a set amount of funding for these programs which can fund more projects of a lesser value or fewer projects at a higher value so the target of 'greater than 160' allows for the flexibility of the program in providing grants.

In any given year you can have a number of projects that may be a pretty minor upgrade to courts and facilities, and then in another year you have a lot of applications that are around lighting, brand-new facilities; so out of one bucket of money you obviously get much fewer facilities. It is just the nature of our community funding program. We run through minors and majors. Minors are projects for which the state can provide a grant up to \$60 000. Then there are our majors which is providing a grant for up to \$500 000. In any given year you might get one very good application for the full \$500 000 and then in another year you might be able to do two majors within that \$500 000 bracket.

The target for the budget performance measure 'community facility grants: number approved' in 2009–10 is greater than 145, and, as I said, the expected outcome identified in the budget papers is 235. This reflects the inclusion of projects funded under the newly established Strengthening the World Game program along with projects funded through the Community Facilities Funding program, drought relief initiatives and country footy and netball programs. You have the higher target there, given that we have the Strengthening the World Game program as well as those others.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — What was the total expenditure?

**The CHAIR** — The expenditure profile for the two financial years; do you have the figure for that — or else you could take it on notice?

**Mr MERLINO** — I will take that on notice.

One of the things that is different about a lot of our facilities programs is that they are almost always in partnership with local government. We run the application process; we would run an application program this year. We will run our facilities funding program out from June. Councils apply this year but then the funding is the next financial year, because we need to give councils the opportunity to budget within their own budgets for those community facilities, so I will take that question on notice.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Thank you.

**Mr SCOTT** — My question relates to the youth affairs portfolio. Minister, the output table on page 164 of budget paper 3 shows that the youthcentral website has significantly exceeded its performance measures for the 2009–10 period. What is driving this strong performance and how will young Victorians benefit over the estimates period?

**Mr MERLINO** — I think that this is a website that we should all be proud of. It is quite hard to deliver a popular government website; it is a very difficult ask. Since its launch nearly five-and-a-half years ago, youthcentral.vic.gov.au has maintained its position as Australia's most popular government youth website. The youthcentral total page impressions target of 1.4 million to 1.6 million for 2009–10 will be exceeded due to the site's active online marketing strategy and the continuing growth in recognition of the website as a trusted source of information for young Victorians.

In fact March 2010 saw the site's highest number of page impressions — almost 277 000, which represents over 100 000 unique users that month — the first time the site has passed that significant milestone. For 2010–11 youthcentral's target for total page impressions has been increased to 1.9 million to reflect the continued growth in popularity expected of the site. This is the fifth year in a row that this target has been increased.

The jobs and careers section of youthcentral is by far the most popular, with over 1 million page impressions expected in that area alone in 2009–10. This section includes extensive information on career profiles, resignation letters, resumes, cover letters, interviews and a range of other tips for jobseekers. Earlier this year I also sent all Victorian secondary schools a copy of youthcentral's *Getting a Job* CD, which packaged up the most popular video guides and information from the jobs and careers section of youthcentral to be used in

schools to help students into part-time and full-time work. I think I have got a copy of that CD for the committee as well.

Also in 2009–10, youthcentral developed and launched the ‘Cyber Smarts’ section of the website which contains information about general cyber-safety, cyber-bullying and shopping online, and with the new funding in this year’s budget we will further build on that work. The ‘Cyber Smarts’ section includes a video interview with a young cyber safety expert Tom Wood discussing the nature of cyber-bullying and how young people can protect themselves.

Youthcentral is more than a single point of access for young Victorians to youth-related government services and resources; it is a youth participation and engagement initiative that provides opportunities for young people to be involved in the site’s design, concept development and consultation across government. With over 50 per cent of all content on the site being produced by young people, youthcentral gives voice to young people’s views, ideas and creativity and provides young people with opportunities to set directions for their future life choices and employment.

Since its inception youthcentral has engaged more than 12 500 young people from all over Victoria in training workshops, content production, design and multimedia production, by being consulted on topical issues, by signing up for membership or by entering a competition. In the past year, youthcentral has actively employed 50 roving reporters aged 16 to 24, giving this group of young people invaluable experience towards a career in writing or journalism.

I will leave it there, but it is a wonderful program delivering great results.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. Before I ask Mr Dalla-Riva to continue, I ask: are these on the web?

**Mr MERLINO** — Yes: for the *Getting a Job* CD, what we did was take off all the relevant videos, all the resources, and provide that — —

**The CHAIR** — And is this one — *Stamp Out Ugly Behaviour or Your Game is History*, on the Web?

**Mr MERLINO** — That is actually the code of conduct DVD which I mentioned is going to be delivered to 16 000 clubs, and there is a website for the code of conduct as well.

**The CHAIR** — Can you give us the websites? It will save us putting up the whole thing on our website if we can just put up the references. We normally put up what is circulated on our website, so if we can get the references that will save us putting them up on an extra website; they will just put a link up.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Minister, I refer to budget paper 3, page 338. It relates to the Victorian Institute of Sport pool, and the general context in which I am asking that is in relation to the proposed move by the VIS to Albert Park. You would be aware of this?

**Mr MERLINO** — Yes

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Clearly it is into the forward estimates because there are issues, and I will just run through them: the move by the athletics organisations Athletics Australia, Athletics Victoria, Australian Little Athletics, Victorian Little Athletics, and the Victorian Athletics League are also moving out of Olympic Park to Albert Park. I am just trying to reconcile that, given you said back in October 2007 that Olympic Park was ‘home to the Victorian Institute of Sport’ — —

**Mr MERLINO** — Yes.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — I gather that these athletics organisations think the same. How are you, in the forward estimates, dealing with that? How are you funding these organisations as part of the move, and where in the forward estimates are some of the issues about buildings and facilities that would be made available to them — clearly because they are going to Albert Park — where would that come out of the budget in the forward estimates? They cannot, obviously, have their meetings on the grass.

**Mr MERLINO** — We started off talking about the VIS pool, and then more broadly about the state athletics precinct — —

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — There is funding for the pool. That is what I was saying; there was funding there but — —

**The CHAIR** — The other organisations that Mr Dalla-Riva mentioned — —

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — How is it being dealt with? It will have an impact on the budget.

**Mr MERLINO** — You have identified the funding for the VIS pool in this year's budget; it is an allocation in this year's budget. The allocation to the state athletics precinct is in previous budgets.

**The CHAIR** — The money last year, how much money was it?

**Mr MERLINO** — It is a \$53.8 million project, so you would have seen in the budget papers last year the allocation of funding through the forward estimates for the \$53.8 million. Then in this year there is \$3.5 million for the VIS pool. Perhaps if I can first explain the reason for that, and then talk more broadly in terms of the state athletic centre.

The budget, as I said, provides \$3.5 million for the inclusion of an elite training pool at the new VIS headquarters to be constructed in Albert Park. The \$50.38 million state sports facilities project will see the establishment of a new Olympic sports precinct in Albert Park, with Lakeside Oval becoming home to the administration and training bases of the Victorian Institute of Sport, Athletics Victoria and Athletics Australia.

The new headquarters for the VIS is being constructed in the historic South Melbourne grandstand at Lakeside Oval and will provide excellent modern facilities designed to fit with a refurbished 1926 building. Essentially we are keeping the facade of the 1926 building, and building a brand-new facility for the VIS.

The original plans for this project provided VIS athletes with access to the aquatic facilities at the nearby Melbourne Sports and Aquatics Centre, so the view was you have MSAC right next door. It was agreed, however, on the advice of the VIS that this would not present the optimum training conditions for the athletes, and therefore it was appropriate to pursue the inclusion of a pool in the new VIS building that could be designed to integrate effectively with all other athlete training and recovery components.

The funds for the VIS pool were sourced from the Commonwealth Games savings and that is an excellent outcome, enabling the games legacy to contribute further to sport in Victoria. The pool to be constructed within the VIS building is a four-lane, 25-metre pool, which will provide the essential aquatic training, testing and rehab elements required for Victoria's elite athletes. The pool was designed in consultation with VIS sports scientists and coaching staff and will allow for easy athlete access between adjoining training facilities, including the gymnasium, indoor running track and the sprung-floor room. Construction has commenced on the project, and it is likely that the facilities will be completed late in 2011.

Everything is connected in Melbourne. We build the new rectangular stadium. We get new tenants, we get new teams — Melbourne Heart and Melbourne Rebels along with Melbourne Victory, Melbourne Storm and the Melbourne Football Club — and you have got the constraint of providing enough training space in the Olympic Park precinct. You had Melbourne Storm moving from the old Olympic Park to the new rectangular stadium, so the only users of the old Olympic stadium, which was quite dilapidated, was an athletics event once a year.

The vision of the government is to create a brand-new Olympic training precinct: you have all of the major aquatic sports based at MSAC and now we will have track and field based at Lakeside Oval. You have got Athletics Victoria, Athletics Australia and you will also have the VIS athletes, so that will become the Mecca for young elite stars into the future.

**The CHAIR** — Do you want any information on the breakdown, Mr Dalla-Riva?

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — What is the funding?

**Mr MERLINO** — The funding for this project is detailed in budget paper 1, page 149.

**The CHAIR** — There is the break up between last year and this year's remaining expenditure.

**Ms GRALEY** — Minister, I notice in your presentation that your priorities for 2010-11 are concentrated on building the capacity and participation of young people and giving young people a voice. I am really interested in no. 3 where you talk about supporting vulnerable young people. I would like to refer you to page 164 of budget paper 3 also, which sets out your responsibility for developing a whole-of-government policy, particularly for disadvantaged young people. Could you advise the committee what progress has been made in finalising the government's vulnerable youth framework?

**Mr MERLINO** — The vulnerable youth framework will be released later this year. This is an important document, a vital document, that will drive a more consistent, systemic approach to the way we support young people from early intervention to crisis support. It will also guide us in supporting the services that work with these young people.

The framework is designed to help us tackle some really complex issues, and that was evident in the discussion paper that we released, which proposed a set of principles and focus areas for improving the way we support vulnerable young Victorians. The five focus areas were prevention and early identification, engagement in education, training and employment, local service planning, tailored responses for particular groups and effective services and capable people.

We received a range of responses to the discussion paper and we have been testing local approaches to implementing the proposed focus areas in six better youth service projects in Frankston, Wyndham, Greater Bendigo, Yarra Ranges, Swan Hill and Geelong. We wanted the whole gamut of inner metro, outer metro, interface, rural and regional city. These projects have generated a lot of information that we have used to help develop the final framework. But we have also done a lot of work across government to make sure that the development of the framework gets the building blocks for a more systemic approach right.

The Victorian government can be justifiably proud of its sustained commitment to supporting vulnerable young Victorians with major investments in service reforms and they include *Every child, every chance* and *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*, new directions for out-of-home care, the Victorian mental health reform strategy and Victoria Police child and youth strategy.

In line with what we have learnt through the development of the vulnerable youth framework, the 2010–11 budget contains a range of tailored interventions for vulnerable young people, including \$22 million over four years in new funding to employ 55 additional youth workers to support vulnerable young people who are engaging in risky behaviour and to tackle the knife culture on our streets. This is a really significant investment and was actually part of the government's announcement of the additional 1966 police. It did not get a lot of coverage but it is extremely important.

There is \$12 million over four years for new mental health teams in rural and regional areas for isolated young Victorians; a new youth crisis response capacity and youth suicide support programs; and \$3.6 million over four years for a new initiative extending successful cyber safety peer education programs currently focused on schools to support vulnerable young people up to the age of 25 in community settings. All of that follows on from more than \$270 million committed by the government in the 2009–10 budget to bolster support for vulnerable young people. We are doing the hard yards to get this right and ensure that some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people in our community are getting the support they need.

**Dr SYKES** — Minister, my question relates to target setting. For an example I will go to budget paper 3, page 164. If we look at the table under 'Youth affairs' we see that for 'Young people participating in the Advance youth development program' the expected outcome in 2009-10 was 16 000 and the target for 2010–11 is 10 500. If you look at 'youthcentral website total page impressions' the expected outcome in 2009-10 was 2.3 million and your new target is 1.9 million. Then if you look at 'Youth participation and access program: grants ...' a previous achievement back in 2008-09 was 96 per cent and your target this year is 90 per cent. Why do you constantly set targets below previous actual achievements?

**Mr MERLINO** — Sorry, I will just switch from folder to folder.

**The CHAIR** — Do not apologise; we are doing both of them together.

**Mr MERLINO** — You mentioned youthcentral, and the other two you mentioned were — —

**Dr SYKES** — Just going down page 164, for the Advance youth development program the expected participation outcome for 2009-10 is 16 000 and the target for 2010-11 is 10 500.

**Mr MERLINO** — Yes.

**Dr SYKES** — For the youthcentral website the expected outcome for 2009-10 is 2.3 million and the target for 2010-11 is 1.9 million, and for the ‘Youth participation and access program: grants acquitted within the time frame ...’ back in 2008 it was 96 per cent and your target for subsequent years has been 90 per cent. Each time you are setting a future target below previous actuals.

**Mr MERLINO** — Yes, but you can see, particularly in the first two, that we are actually increasing the targets. But I will go through each of those. The ‘youthcentral website total page impressions’ target of 1.4 million to 1.6 million for 2009–10 has been exceeded, as I mentioned in a previous question, due to the success and the high ranking of the site’s pages by search engines.

**Dr SYKES** — Sorry, can you restate that for me? It is 5 o’clock on the ninth day.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Slow down, Minister.

**Mr MERLINO** — Okay. For the total page impressions the target of 1.4 million to 1.6 million for 2009–10 has been exceeded due to the success of the high ranking of the site’s pages by search engines such as Google and an increased general recognition of the website.

**Dr SYKES** — I am happy with that.

**Mr MERLINO** — The youthcentral page impressions target for 2010–11 has been increased to 1.9 million. That follows increases in each of the last five years. This is not a static target; we have actually increased the targets for the website year on year.

**Dr SYKES** — But you are setting it below your previous achievement. I come from the country where, ‘Good, better, best, never let it rest until your good gets better and your better gets best’. If your good has got better, why does your better not get best?

**Mr MERLINO** — In answering — —

**Dr SYKES** — It has been a constant issue. I am not trying to be too smart. Sometimes we have had targets where ministers have responded by saying they are aspirational, and other times we have had what appear to be targets set below actual achievements, so you are not aspiring to a higher level.

**Mr MERLINO** — We are setting the bar higher. We are not going backwards on these targets. Websites are well known to be pretty volatile things. I make the point again that we are increasing our targets five years in a row, so year on year we are increasing the targets. I am delighted with the outcomes that we have achieved this year, and that is the reason why we significantly increased the targets, and we will continue to be the most popular website in the country and we will continue to deliver innovation. But websites, the internet, is a volatile area of communication. So we are increasing our targets, and I think that should be acknowledged by the committee. In terms of the Advance — —

**Dr SYKES** — I am not questioning that you are not increasing your targets in some of those, but your new targets are below your previous actuals or expected outcomes. So I am saying you are not increasing your targets; you are not stepping them up enough because you are already achieving over your targets. Why do you not set your new target at this year’s expected outcome?

**Mr MERLINO** — Targets are set as a minimum — as a minimum that is what we want to see — and we are saying as a minimum we want a significant increase in the target than what we set last year.

In terms of the Advance program, the Advance program participation for 2009-10, the 2009 school year, was 16 166 young people, which exceeded the target of 10 250 participants. That is a strong result for the Advance program, which continues to grow in terms of the number of schools and students participating right across the state. In recognition of this the target for Advance in 2010–11 has been increased to 10 500 to 10 750. That new target reflects, as I said, the minimum number of young people likely to be engaged by schools at the current

level of funding. Similarly the completion rate for Advance participants continues to be strong at 93 per cent, exceeding the target of 75 per cent in 2009-10, and the completion rate target for 2010-11 has been increased to 85 per cent.

What we are seeing, particularly with the Advance program, is that we provide funding, and the vast majority of schools pick up this program. We provide funding for X amount of students, and the schools actually provide additional students to participate in the program, and that is why the actual number exceeds the funding that we provide the schools to deliver that program.

**Dr SYKES** — I have no problem with that. As a matter of philosophy, you have chosen not to set your targets at or above your previous performance?

**Mr MERLINO** — The reason for that in terms of Advance is that we provide funding for 21 students per program. That is why we set the target around the 10 000 or 11 000. So we have increased this year, but the reason we are getting greater numbers is that those schools are actually providing additional students. That is the decision of the school.

**The CHAIR** — This committee normally comments on any variations of 10 per cent above or below, insofar as the committee's view consistently has been that we prefer achievements or targets et cetera to be within that range. Otherwise we do not regard them as really good target setting if there is a variance greater than 10 per cent. I predict there will probably be a comment in that regard in our report.

**Mr MERLINO** — Yes. I guess the challenge for that one, just in relation to Advance, is you provide the funding for 21 students. For example, we then set a target of 16 000 or 17 000. It would be a challenge in terms of we are only providing the funding for 21 students per program, but I take those comments on board, Chair.

**Mr NOONAN** — Minister, I wanted to ask a sport and recreation question. Specifically I refer to investment in community sport and recreation facilities for which there is \$14 million as part of this budget's initiatives. Would the minister provide more information about this initiative?

**Mr MERLINO** — I am really pleased to provide some information on our community facilities funding program. The investment in the community sport and recreation facilities output initiative represents a continuation of the highly successful community facilities funding program. This program provides funding to assist sporting organisations across Victoria, and improve sport and recreation facilities to cater for increased demand. It gives me great pleasure to briefly update the committee on the Brumby government's commitment to community sport. As I mentioned earlier, since 2000 over \$250 million has been invested into community sporting infrastructure. Every part of the state has been touched by facilities programs. I know all the members of the committee will be familiar with these programs. The flagship community facilities funding program has our country football and netball program, which Bill would be quite familiar with; Strengthening the World Game program, which the Chair would be very familiar with; the drought relief for community sport and recreation program; and our synthetic surfaces program.

Our commitment is illustrated by these maps showing the location of projects funded under the Better Pools aquatic access and seasonal renewal categories of the community facilities funding program since 2000. The first map shows the location of projects across country Victoria. The second project focuses on the metro area. Some examples of investments I have announced in 2009-10 for the 2010-11 round under the community facilities funding program for the development of local sport and recreation infrastructure include \$2.5 million to assist Whitehorse City Council to redevelop Aqualink in Box Hill by providing new aquatic and program areas for the community; \$500 000 for the Bass Coast Shire Council to construct a surf life saving clubhouse in Inverloch; and \$60 000 to Frankston City Council to convert two en-tout-cas tennis courts to a synthetic surface at the East Frankston tennis club.

There are always many terrific completed projects that were funded under CFFP to talk about. For example, Aquamoves aquatic centre in Shepparton received \$2 million to develop a new 50-metre outdoor pool, splash park and beach area and associated infrastructure. The new splash park is incredibly popular, and beach entry provides access for people of all abilities, allowing everyone to participate.

In addition to the government's community facilities funding program, I would briefly like to touch on the government's country footy and netball program, drought relief initiatives and Strengthening the World Game.

Since 2005 the Victorian government has announced funding of more than \$10.4 million for over 270 individual projects across the state under the program. We remain committed to the country football and netball program in the long term. In terms of drought relief the government has invested \$27.7 million towards over 590 projects since October 2006. The sustainable sportsground program will consolidate this work with an additional \$4 million over the next two years. Strengthening the World Game program will contribute \$5.7 million over three years to 2011–12 to assist in catering for the unprecedented levels of growth in soccer participation in Victoria. That was the first-ever program in the state's history specifically targeted at soccer. That is just a reflection of the incredible demand out there for female changing rooms, for additional pitches, for lighting.

The sheer volume and spread of projects across Victoria through the community facilities funding program, country footy and netball program and drought relief program can be seen in these maps of projects funded in 2009–10. The first shows the whole state, and then the next one highlights metropolitan Melbourne. All of these investments in local sporting infrastructure are also an investment in local jobs. Every single project we fund means dozens of local jobs for the local community. It is a terrific program that really demonstrates our commitment to grassroots sport.

**The CHAIR** — The final question is from Ms Pennicuik.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — It is sort of a follow-up question on your previous answer, Minister. It is regarding the sustainable sportsground program, which I am interested in. I note that there are \$4 million over the next two years in the budget. The first question is: why just over the next two years? The other question is: was any broad study done across the state to quantify the need for funding in this program? You might be able to elucidate whether it is just basically for replacing grounds with synthetic surfaces or whether it is about alternative water sourcing options as well, and if you could detail some of that, including the use of stormwater or other harvested water, recycled water, other than reticulated water.

**Mr MERLINO** — Thanks very much, Sue. As I mentioned earlier, the sustainable sportsgrounds program funding — \$4 million over the next two years — will be built on the \$27.7 million we have previously invested in drought-related projects and synthetics. In terms of the first part of your question in relation to studies and the reasons we started this investment, they are twofold. One is that there were studies done. There was a lot of work done in collaboration with the MAV in terms of the impact of 13 years of drought and the impact of climate change on sporting clubs right throughout Victoria. Then you had the very, very real examples of a couple of summers ago of some leagues being on the verge of not being able to compete at all and reverting to the worst situation where you have got the trucking of water, which happened in a number of areas across Victoria.

We needed to make this investment to ensure that communities can continue to participate in sport and recreation. If there is one thing that we have benefited from through this period of drought, it is that it has forced all of us to think about more innovative ways to deal with drought and to deal with climate change. We are almost technically out of this current decade-long drought — Bill is shaking his head; we may not be. But there were certainly 13 years of drought, and we need to prepare for the next significant period of dry.

You have got the whole range of projects. I would be more than happy to provide you with a list of all those projects. It includes the obvious — the installation of synthetic surfaces. There is well-established technology in regards to hockey pitches and soccer pitches, but there is also some really innovative work being done in partnership with the University of Ballarat, the AFL and Cricket Australia to get the design, the technology and the pricing right for a synthetic for AFL and cricket. We go from synthetics to water storage; water capture, including stormwater; sinking bores; and drought resistant turf if a synthetic is not appropriate, so there are a whole range of projects right across. We have some innovative work with en-tout-cas courts with Tennis Victoria, reducing the use of water on those services. Across the board — —

**The CHAIR** — Give us the information on notice that Sue has asked for.

**Mr MERLINO** — Happy to do that, Chair.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Just cut my question off, won't you?

**The CHAIR** — I gave you an extra 2 minutes.

That concludes the consideration of the budget estimates for the portfolio of sport, recreation and youth affairs. I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance today. Where questions were taken on notice the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. The committee requests that written responses to those matters be provided within 30 days. Thank you, Minister; thank you, members; and thank you, Hansard.

**Mr MERLINO** — Thanks, Chair. Thanks, committee.

**Committee adjourned.**