

# VERIFIED VERSION

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2015–16

Melbourne — 20 May 2015

#### Members

Mr Danny Pearson — Chair

Ms Sue Pennicuik

Mr David Morris — Deputy Chair

Ms Harriet Shing

Dr Rachel Carling-Jenkins

Mr Tim Smith

Mr Steve Dimopoulos

Ms Vicki Ward

Mr Danny O'Brien

#### Staff

Executive officer: Ms Valerie Cheong

#### Witnesses

Ms Jane Garrett, Minister for Emergency Services,

Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary,

Mr Shaun Condron, Chief Finance Officer, and

Mr Neil Robertson, Deputy Secretary, Emergency Management, Department of Justice and Regulation, and  
Chief Executive, Emergency Management Victoria, and

Commissioner Craig Lapsley, Emergency Management Victoria.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2015–16 budget estimates. All mobile phones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome to the hearing the Minister for Emergency Services, the Honourable Jane Garrett, MP; Mr Greg Wilson, Secretary, Department of Justice and Regulation; Mr Shaun Condron, Chief Finance Officer, Department of Justice and Regulation; Mr Neil Robertson, Deputy Secretary, Emergency Management, and Chief Executive, Emergency Management Victoria, Department of Justice and Regulation; and Mr Craig Lapsley, Emergency Management Commissioner.

All evidence is taken by this committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege. The committee does not require witnesses to be sworn, but questions must be answered fully, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

Departmental officers may approach the table during the hearing to provide information to the witnesses if requested, by leave of myself. However, written communication to witnesses can only be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way.

Members of the media are to observe the following guidelines: cameras must remain focused only on the persons speaking; operators must not pan the public gallery, the committee or witnesses; and filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I now invite the witness to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 5 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

### **Visual presentation.**

**Ms GARRETT** — Thank you, Chair, and it is a real pleasure to be talking about such a critical part of this budget for the Victorian community, which is the emergency services portfolio.

The pie chart provides a breakdown of the justice output budget for 2015–16 by ministerial portfolio, and my emergency services portfolio is represented by the purple slice of \$955.4 million. These funds provide the output budgets for the CFA, MFB, SES and EMV and also contribute to ESTA's budget, which is primarily met through service fees and contract payment from our police and emergency services.

In terms of the \$78 million in budget initiatives for 2015–16, these are the delivery of our very extensive election commitments in this area of emergency services. It includes funding to commence the recruitment of the additional 350 CFA career firefighters and 100 MFB firefighters over the four years. It includes a trial of specialised support for firefighters suffering from PTSD, specialised brown coal fire training and land for an emergency services hub in Morwell, over and above the \$5 million already budgeted to build a new CFA station at Morwell.

The budget also provides \$33.5 million, included in this, to purchase 70 new CFA trucks — 20 more than were promised by Labor at the election — comprising 20 medium tankers, 40 heavy tankers and 10 medium pumpers that will incorporate modern, up-to-date firefighting technology, boosting the capability and safety of firefighters, including volunteers, who crew them. We are providing \$11 million over four years to build four new stations at Huntly, Edithvale, Buninyong and Plenty and upgrade the Wattle Glen station. Support for these stations is critical, as they are situated in either high-risk bushfire zones or high-call-out-rate communities. This funding will also provide for installation of very necessary toilets and bathrooms in rural CFA fire stations.

The emergency medical response program will be expanded to integrated CFA brigades. This provides life support and CPR training to CFA firefighters and installation of defibrillators on fire trucks. EMR involves the dispatch of firefighters at the same time as paramedics. We know through study that this increases survival chances in particular for heart attack patients or those who are in a real emergency.

The budget also supports the thousands of lifesavers who protect families in Victorian waters with funding for facilities at Ocean Grove and South Melbourne surf lifesaving clubs. To keep up with the fast-growing population in Bellarine the local SES headquarters will receive funding to expand its facility to help the unit grow.

The budget invests this \$78 million, which includes the recruitment of more firefighters, boosting their skills, upgrading resources and providing them with more support. This commences the recruitment of an additional 350 CFA career firefighters and 100 MFB firefighters over the next four years. This investment is necessary to ensure that Victoria's fire services can meet increasing service demand pressures. It demonstrates our commitment to increasing the focus on community service delivery and safety. Training is vital, and it will be improved further with \$9.6 million to fund the EMR program at integrated CFA stations, as I said.

Victoria is experiencing an increase in cardiac events, which places greater pressure on Ambulance Victoria and on emergency response times. This investment will provide basic life support and CPR training to CFA firefighters and the installation of defibrillators. Firefighters will be dispatched at the same time as Ambulance Victoria paramedics to attend cardiac arrests and provide an emergency medical response. Significantly all new CFA and MFB recruits under the joint recruit course will be trained in EMR. We are also investing \$300 000 so that work can commence on establishing a new CFA regional training facility to replace Fiskville. This seed money will allow the CFA to identify and assess potential sites and the best plan for change.

In terms of reforms ahead and support for firefighters, a strategic action plan will outline statewide strategic priorities with corresponding actions to support Victoria to achieve its vision of safer and more resilient communities. It will guide all-hazard all-agency reform for the next three years and give the community confidence that progress will be made. EMV is currently finalising a plan on behalf of the State Crisis and Resilience Council in consultation with all relevant departments and agencies, and I look forward to this plan landing in July.

As part of our commitment to support firefighters we have provided funding to trial specialised support for firefighters suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, providing them with access to one-on-one counselling by specialists. The Victorian government has also made a commitment to introduce legislation to give career and volunteer firefighters presumptive rights to compensation for cancer claims arising from their service. Scientific research has shown links between firefighting as an occupation and an increased risk of developing some cancers. Introducing these laws will bring Victoria in line with other jurisdictions that have already acted to give firefighters the certainty and justice they deserve. The government, led by the Minister for Finance working closely with me, is working hard to develop this legislation.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. I will lead off. In the context of the 2015–16 budget and your own portfolio responsibilities can you inform the committee how this budget acquits *Labor's Financial Statement*?

**Ms GARRETT** — *Labor's Financial Statement* includes commitments to reopen the Hazelwood mine fire inquiry, provide 450 new firefighters, purchase new CFA trucks, develop and upgrade fire stations and amenities, expand the emergency medical response program and upgrade facilities for the State Emergency Service. The statement provides support for firefighters with funding for presumptive rights and a program to support firefighters with post-traumatic stress disorder. The government has increased emergency services funding and delivered on its election commitments because making our communities safe starts with protecting the people who protect families. The budget invests \$78 million to recruit more firefighters, boost their skills, upgrade resources and provide more support. Funding will also upgrade facilities for lifesavers and the State Emergency Service.

To increase the ranks of emergency service personnel the budget includes funds to commence the recruitment of 450 firefighters, additional career firefighters, because more boots on the ground means more homes and properties are safe. Training is vital, and it will be improved further with \$9.6 million to fund the emergency management response program at integrated CFA stations. EMR dispatches firefighters at the same time as paramedics, increasing survival chances for heart attack patients. The budget provides \$33.5 million to give firefighters the resources they need to do their job. The money will purchase 70 new CFA trucks — 20 more than promised. This new fleet will comprise 20 medium tankers, 40 heavy tankers and 10 medium pumpers, manufactured here, that will incorporate modern, up-to-date firefighting technology, boosting the ability and safety of the firefighters, including volunteers, who crew them.

The budget also provides \$11 million to build four new stations at Huntly, Edithvale, Buninyong and Plenty and upgrade the Wattle Glen station. Support for these firefighting stations is critical because of their location in either high-risk zones or high-call-out-rate communities. As indicated in the presentation, this includes \$1 million for the installation of bathroom and washroom facilities in rural stations. The building and upgrading of CFA stations and amenities will help units grow and give firefighters a safe and comfortable place to meet and train, as they deserve.

To care for those who care for us the budget also invests \$200 000 to expand support services for firefighters suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. A two-year grant to the Austin Health Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital will help affected firefighters, who can be exposed to horrific scenes every time they are on shift.

The Victorian government has made a commitment to introduce legislation to give career and volunteer firefighters presumptive rights to compensation for cancer claims arising from their service. The communities in Latrobe Valley, in particular Morwell, endured significant impacts from smoke and ash during the Hazelwood coalmine fire in February and March 2004. We announced the reopening of the Hazelwood coal mine fire inquiry in May this year to investigate the reported increase in deaths following the fire. The reopened inquiry will also consider options for rehabilitation of the Hazelwood coalmine. The government will provide \$30 million in funding to implement all of the recommendations of the September 2014 mine inquiry report, and a new emergency services hub for fire and ambulance services will be established at Morwell, with a further investment of \$3 million to purchase land for the new station.

I was proud to launch the new CFA city of Latrobe district, district 27, on 1 April 2015. The new district will see 23 brigades across the region united under one command to share extra support staff, training and resources in an area that is vital to Victoria's power generation and economy. The new district was an unfunded promise from the previous coalition government. This government made it reality, with a \$5.5 million investment.

**Mr T. SMITH** — I refer to budget paper 3, page 269, which details the output summary for the Department of Justice and Regulation. In a media release issued by the Labor Party on 18 November 2014 an elected Andrews government committed to \$141.3 million for 450 firefighters, so I ask: can the minister outline to the committee how much in the 2015–16 budget has specifically been allocated for 450 additional firefighters?

**Ms GARRETT** — Thank you for the question. As stated in the presentation there are \$78 million worth of new initiatives that acquit our election commitments, and part of that is commencing the recruitment and training of the additional 450 career firefighters. These numbers will be delivered at the end of the four-year term. I think it is worth noting — and I will ask the commissioner, Mr Craig Lapsley, to speak about this — the issues around recruitment and training of firefighters. We have a backlog from the previous government, which did not deliver on the 342 in full. We also have issues around the closure of Fiskville due to ongoing contamination. We have certainly heard some explosive issues relating to Fiskville in the inquiry just this week. We are moving now to training in a joint recruit fashion, and the commissioner may wish to speak to those issues.

**Comm. LAPSLEY** — Most certainly, Minister. One of the most important things with our recruit training is that it is a changed environment. For the first time we have brought MFB and CFA recruits together at what we call the Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre at Craigieburn. It is a new centre — it was opened late last year — and in December we ran the first joint recruit training course. That is a great outcome, and it is actually more than just about training together. It is about joint capability. It is about interoperability, and for the last five years we have been very focused on interoperability. That comes from the royal commission, and it is an extremely positive step.

We are now using Craigieburn as the key place for our career firefighters, given the fact that Fiskville is not available and will not open again. Next year, 2015–16, we have a program of 200 recruits. Career recruits will come through that program; 115 of those are new additional recruits and 85 are dealing with attrition from the two organisations. It is a big program — the biggest program we have run for many years, probably forever — and obviously this is utilising year 1 of what is the new funding.

**Mr T. SMITH** — On a point of order, Chair, what I was seeking was the specific line item for these new additional firefighters.

**Ms SHING** — Further to the point of order, I thought you were asking what proportion of the allocation — —

**Mr T. SMITH** — No, the line item for these new 450 firefighters — where is it? That is what I am asking.

**Ms GARRETT** — If you go to budget paper 3, page 288, it makes clear that in our total output costs this is the funding to commence the recruitment of 450 career firefighters. It is included in the 78 million that I referred to in my presentation, and most importantly, as the commissioner pointed out, that work is underway and we will be seeing an increase in operational firefighters, as reflected on page 287.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Page 287 or 288?

**Ms GARRETT** — I referred to 288, which says the total output cost includes funding to commence the recruitment of 450. As was made clear in my presentation, there is an additional \$78 million that has been allocated to commence this recruitment, to provide new trucks and to roll out the EMR. All of this is done in accordance with our election commitments, and as you can see on page 287 there is a clear and demonstrable increase in the number of permanent operational staff at the end of the upcoming financial year.

**Mr T. SMITH** — I have a supplementary, Chair, if I could.

**The CHAIR** — I think that — —

**Ms SHING** — Further to the request, I think there was a clarification sought from Mr Smith in relation to the principal.

**The CHAIR** — Yes, okay.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Thank you, Ms Shing. Minister, my supplementary is regarding the 450 firefighters and the \$140 million maximum. That is not in the budget, so how are you intending to pay for that over the forward estimates? Can you confirm that no services will be cut, no programs will be cut, firefighters' pay will not be cut, volunteers will not be cut and you will not raise the fire services levy to pay for this increase?

**Ms SHING** — Now I am going to have to raise a point of order. I am just wondering how it is that those requests for assurances are related to the total output cost that was referred to in the principal question. I understand the link between the request for assurances around the delivery of the total recruitment of the 450 career firefighters, but I am not sure how your follow-on is relevant to the principal question.

**Mr T. SMITH** — I suppose what I am getting at is: where in the forward estimates is this additional funding provided for for these new firefighters?

**The CHAIR** — In terms of the first part of your question about seeking some assurances around services not being cut, I am happy for that part of the question to stand. In relation to the fire services levy — I could be wrong, and if I am wrong, I am sure Mr Morris will pick me up on this — the administration of the fire services levy actually falls within the purview of the Treasurer, so I do not think it is fair to ask a question of the minister in relation to FSPL. But if you want to ask a question as to whether the minister is able to provide some assurances that there will not be a reduction in service delivery or provision — —

**Ms WARD** — Especially when you played a few games with the fire services levy.

**The CHAIR** — Order, Ms Ward! I am happy for the question to stand, but you may wish to restate or rephrase it.

**Mr T. SMITH** — Thank you, Chair. Could the minister detail in the forward estimates where this funding for these additional firefighters is, and can she give assurances that no reduction in services will occur to pay for it?

**Ms GARRETT** — Certainly we did not come into this election with one of the most comprehensive packages to support our fire services and expand our fire services with a mantra to cut services. This is quite the opposite — this is going to be one of the biggest boosts in firefighting numbers that we have seen. It will be a significant increase, particularly in terms of CFA personnel, from what currently exists. We made a commitment that this 450 will be delivered, will be delivered in full and will be delivered outside of the fire services property levy — but again, as the Chair rightly pointed out, that is a matter for the Treasurer. We have made it clear in these budget papers that this year is the commencement of that. I think the commissioner has

made those issues very clear about some of the challenges that we face, but this commitment will be delivered and fully funded without any cuts to services.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Thank you, Minister. I note that in your presentation you mentioned — and it is also in budget paper 3, page 83 and page 88 — the commitment for providing support for firefighters with post-traumatic stress disorder. I note that the Austin Hospital in particular is an excellent place to base this program through their previous work in this area. I am just wondering why this is framed as a pilot program and not simply an ongoing program for firefighters, who as you acknowledge do suffer quite a lot of trauma within their day-to-day duties, and if you are committed to funding this service into the future if it proves successful.

**Ms GARRETT** — I think that is an outstanding question, and thank you. We do know that, like many front-line emergency services workers, the horror of death, particularly of young children, in fire is incredibly traumatic for those who are on the scene. Obviously the horrors of Black Saturday had an impact on the psychological wellbeing of our firefighters. We all pray that there is never another Black Saturday, but we know that there will be other fires, particularly given that Victoria is one of the most bushfire-prone areas in the world. We also have a range of issues ongoing around the manner in which we are living in Victoria. I note that, as the member for Eltham here does, many members are living in very leafy areas. We have a growing peri-urban fringe, so these are all challenges we are facing, and they are probably answers I can go into on different questions.

It is really important that we get this right. It is a complicated area around how you best deal with firefighters who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which is why we wanted to do a pilot program out of the Austin — to get the best possible analysis and work done in close consultation with health professionals, affected firefighters and the fire services as to what a successful program would look like going into the future. This is very much a targeted pilot with the aim of getting the best possible model to then roll out. On that, we are having an evaluation of the trial effectiveness, and this takes some time. You have to work out what is working, then you have to evaluate the impact on affected firefighters — did that work or did that not work? — and it raises its own occupational issues and its own particular impacts. We will be conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness of the trial and looking at whether or not it can be improved and at what needs to be changed. I would then certainly see that program being rolled out extensively.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** — Thank you, Minister, for that commitment to our firefighters. You mentioned that it is a very targeted program: how many firefighters do you think will benefit from this pilot program over the two years?

**Ms GARRETT** — Do you want to respond to that, Commissioner?

**Comm. LAPSLEY** — Yes. It is one of those things that is very interesting about numbers because it is quite a personal issue about the individual. I think that is why the pilot program is important — to actually understand the extent and types of personal experiences our firefighters are having. It is inappropriate, I suppose, to answer with a number. I think what it has got to be is an open program in which people have the confidence that it has got the right content and it has got privacy around it, because these things are individual based and require that level of sensitivity. That will be interesting as part of the evaluation to say what is the uptake and to what extent the uptake is of the types of trauma that are being experienced. Hence the pilot program is critical and evaluation is even more critical to understand the extent of what the program should be in the future.

**Ms GARRETT** — Also, if I may add, it has traditionally been an occupation where perhaps people have not felt that they can talk about things. Obviously there is inherent bravery in firefighters who do that work, career and volunteer, and I think traditionally that may have extended to them feeling that they cannot reach out for help if they are affected. That is another purpose of this pilot: what will speak to these very courageous individuals who do put their lives on the line and who are dealing with really horrific situations? What will speak to them to get them to feel it is okay to seek help if they are being impacted in a very negative way by what they are experiencing?

**Ms SHING** — Good afternoon, Minister. Good afternoon, representatives.

**Ms GARRETT** — Good morning, I think. It is still morning, isn't it?

**Members interjecting.**

**Ms SHING** — I withdraw my assertion that it was in fact afternoon. Good morning, Minister. Good morning, Chair, and fellow committee members. Good morning everybody else who is seated at the table. Minister, I note that you referred to district 27 in your presentation, and again that is something which you were very involved in and indeed you got to receive your bright yellow protective clothing.

**Ms GARRETT** — I did — we were thinking I should wear that today.

**Ms SHING** — Not that you would need protective clothing in this environment, but the point is well made. It was good to see Mr Lapsley there as well.

**Ms GARRETT** — He is in his frock, so I should have worn mine.

**Ms SHING** — That is correct. The pips are shining under the light. Taking you to budget paper 3, page 12, if I may, and the allocation of the \$5.5 million toward the creation of district 27, which is something which has quite rightly received very positive reports as far as the synthesis of various services and the coordination of better information for dealing with the specific sorts of emergencies that are encountered in our neck of the woods, I ask you to explain how the government is delivering on this initiative to create district 27 and what it will mean for people in Gippsland and around the area who are facing these sorts of unique challenges in terms of emergency services management.

**Ms GARRETT** — Thank you, Ms Shing. I know that as a local member there and a very passionate advocate of making sure our community is safe, you and I were very pleased to be at the opening, which I thought was one of the really special days that I have had as Minister for Emergency Services. A lot of work went in by a lot of people, and I acknowledge that that work commenced under the previous government.

It is a very complex area. It has got power generation issues and natural resources. It has got very proud committed communities. There was a view after the Hazelwood coalmine fire that there needed to be a better target around a district dedicated to that area. That is related to people's participation in that district, to command and control structures and to the community all working together.

It has brought together 23 brigades across the region, and they are united now under one roof. It was good news when they rang the despatch and it worked. We were all keen for that to happen, and they said, 'Yep, this is district 27', and everybody really cheered, because it is one roof, one command, to share extra supports, training and resources in an area that is vital to Victorians. Obviously it is vital to the people living in the Latrobe Valley, but it is vital to all of us that these assets are safe and that the people who work in them and look after them are safe.

The other great thing about that day — or was that another visit? Anyway, it was when we met with your task force.

**Comm. LAPSLEY** — Yes.

**Ms GARRETT** — I will pass to the commissioner on that, because I think these things are real examples of where you can effect change when people have done the work, when they are willing to open their hearts and minds to a different way of doing things. Often it is difficult. People are quite rightly very protective of their brigades or their area of work, or their mineworkers versus other mineworkers. I think the creation of district 27 was just a broader reflection of not just the emergency services working together and not just the CFA but also the broader community. If you could give the committee an update on those issues, it would be really helpful.

**Comm. LAPSLEY** — Thank you, Minister. Just to add to that, I think the most important thing is to acknowledge that the Latrobe city is one of more complex cities in the state in that it is a provincial city but it has industry of significance, and if that industry fails, so does Victoria.

It is broader than power; it is mines, generators, APM and other complex issues within their critical infrastructure that need to be protected. The move to district 27, a single command system, is not just about CFA. It has got 23 CFA fire brigades in there under the new single command system, but the focus is now about how we connect the business, how we connect to community. We well know, and we all know across Victoria, the sensitivities of what the Hazelwood fire has brought.

We obviously separately operate a task force down there, but we have seen a change of goodwill, relationships, competency and the acknowledgment of what needs to be done in a joined up way, and district 27 is one of those that will hold that together. It will be the glue that holds a lot of it together ongoing. It is a structural change that we have welcomed, and we will certainly work very hard to make sure it will be successful.

It was established in December of 2014 and was operationally launched on 1 April 2015. In a very short period of time we have seen an initiative that was identified, was put in place and is now operational to be effective in Morwell and the Latrobe Valley, but the important thing is it is about the Latrobe City Council and that broader area and what the industry and the community need.

**Ms GARRETT** — And it is the first new district created in 53 years, which shows just what an achievement it has been. Again we acknowledge the work of the previous government and obviously our government in funding it.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Minister, I want to talk about emergency medical response. In *Labor's Financial Statement* the commitment was listed at \$5 million. This is despite the coalition's commitment being costed at close to \$8.8 million. I see now in the budget papers, on page 83, that the total cost now is \$9.6 million, so my question is: did the department recover that additional cost from Ambulance Victoria or were their programs cut to make up the difference?

**Ms GARRETT** — There certainly were not programs cut. Thanks for your question. Clearly we are investing almost double what our initial commitment was to make sure that this program is a success. A lot of work has gone into how it will be rolled out, and this is the appropriate figure for that to occur and to make sure that Victorian lives are saved.

We were somewhat bemused about the fact that a report that was done under the previous government did not appear to see the light of day, but we are pleased about the outcomes of that report, which showed dramatic increases in survival rates where both firefighters and ambulances are despatched, and that is why we are rolling this program out to integrated stations. It involved about 80 hours worth of training for firefighters in lifesaving techniques and of course the defibrillators, which are playing such a huge role and are being installed not just in our emergency services but in our sporting clubs and the like. We know what a difference that has made. I am really proud that the government has acted on it. It is very clear that we have almost doubled the financial commitment, as we should have, to make sure that it works. Perhaps if the commissioner could talk about the joint recruitment course and the training there, that would be of assistance as well.

**Comm. LAPSLEY** — Thank you. I think the most important thing is this is about the community, this is about better health outcomes, and it is a great program and we welcome it. MFB has operated in emergency medical response for 15 years. CFA has run a pilot over the last number of years, and this now sees us move at the integrated stations that the CFA will provide that service, which is critical. We will see next year a number of CFA integrated brigades move to what is medical response, and that is a program being worked through at the moment. It does reach to integrated brigades in the outer metropolitan area and provincial cities, so it is across Victoria from Mildura to Traralgon and Dandenong, Springvale, those CFA brigades.

The other thing that is important, and what the minister has focused on, is the fact that our new recruit course will see the CFA recruits come from that recruit course trained, so that is one part of it that is funded in the recruit training. Obviously there is other funding to bring the current people to the level required to provide that medical response, so there is two parts to how we build that capability.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I understand the commitment was to implement EMR at all integrated stations, but a recent report by Ambulance Victoria has identified 150 fire stations as potentially suitable for EMR. Ambulance Victoria are to provide 32 stations of priority, of which 12 were volunteer stations. In the budget there is only funds for integrated stations, meaning stations such as Hastings, Werribee, Truganina, Echuca and Sorrento, which are on the priority list, will not get access to EMR. Is there any intention to extend EMR to those volunteer stations? I would probably like to go back to my initial question and ask where the other 4.6 million has come from as well.

**Ms GARRETT** — We have made a budget allocation for this commitment to be delivered, and services have not been cut. But we had an election commitment. This is a budget that delivers on our election commitments and those commitments are related to integrated stations. Clearly there will be ongoing

discussions and communication around other issues, but this is firmly acquitting our election commitment for integrated stations.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Minister, I was very interested in your presentation when you, on page 5, made mention of presumptive legislation. I am sure you would be aware that it is something that the Greens have been pushing for and in fact we introduced legislation in the previous Parliament regarding that. I was interested in you raising it in your presentation, and you mentioned that you are developing this legislation in consultation with the Minister for Finance. My question really is: what does that involve in terms of your department and the MFB and CFA? What involvement are you having, and what sort of resources does that require?

**Ms GARRETT** — Thank you for your question, and I know your personal, very deep interest in this issue. Presumptive legislation is a really critical step forward in Victoria, and we know that in other jurisdictions and federally cross-party work of all parties delivered that scheme. I think it was co-sponsored by the Greens party, the Labor Party, The Nationals and the Liberals — —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Federal level.

**Ms GARRETT** — Certainly it was cross-party. I think it is probably to our shame in Victoria that we have not acted more quickly on presumptive legislation. There have been many international studies and national studies which show a clear link between the exposure to toxins that are an inherent part of firefighting and certain cancers. The need for presumptive legislation is of course that it is very difficult for a firefighter through a normal WorkCover or common-law claim to demonstrate which exposure caused the injury. They would have attended countless fires during their time, and to have to prove the causal link between that fire and the injury is near impossible in many situations. Presumptive legislation is vital so that burden is removed and that they of course are presumed to have a causal link between their cancer and their service. Of course they still have to meet certain conditions, but you are removing that often insurmountable hurdle about connecting the incident to the injury.

Our election commitment was that this would be introduced within the first 18 months, and we are on track to do that, so the work is now going on in terms of the development of the scheme. It is not just the legislation that is necessary, it is how the scheme will operate. Of course those details will emerge, but I am working closely with Minister Scott. He is also making sure that our compensation system is able to accommodate this new approach to firefighters, and I am really, really pleased, and again I thank all the parties who have been supportive of this. I know it was a bit of a last-minute coming for some but I think also when we consider this week and some of the revelations at Fiskville and some of the practices there that are being detailed, it is more critical than ever that firefighters — who are exposed to traumatic incidents, do put their lives on the line and are of course exposed, by virtue of attending factory blazes or chemical blazes, to toxin in a day-to-day way — are provided with compensation where appropriate without these often insurmountable hurdles.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Minister, you mentioned studies around the world that have made these links and where programs are in place, and of course we heard that in the Legislative Council committee's inquiry into the Greens bill. I was interested in resources that might be required from your area rather than the Minister for Finance's area, and also, looking ahead, once there is legislation whether — similar to the issue that Dr Carling-Jenkins raised about post-traumatic stress disorder — there is going to be any assistance or resources applied by the CFA and the MFB with regard to assisting members who may want to take advantage of the new legislation.

**Ms GARRETT** — Certainly in the normal business of my department and Mr Scott's area there is work going on now about the development of this proposal. That is being handled in the normal day-to-day course of our work, and it is advancing well. Clearly in any upcoming budgets there will be allocation made for how the scheme operates.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Assisting members; is that what you are saying?

**Ms GARRETT** — An allocation made for people to access compensation through the new scheme. What assistance is — —

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Awareness and education, that sort of thing.

**Ms GARRETT** — I am sure there will be an awareness and education approach.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Minister, I want to commend you on your grasp of your portfolio and the support you provide to emergency services.

**Ms GARRETT** — Thank you.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — I also want to commend you on the recent appointment of the president of the MFB, Dr Andi Diamond, an excellent appointment.

**Ms GARRETT** — Thank you.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — With a slight indulgence, Chair, I just want to let you know that I had the pleasure of spending almost a full shift, three-quarters of a shift, at Windsor — I think it is station no. 25, from memory — with Phil and the team there. They say, ‘Walk a mile in my shoes’. I walked I think a second in their shoes. That is all it constituted really, three-quarters of a shift. It is incredible the work they do. Not only is it vital but it takes a real human toll. I think they do an amazing job and we should support them in every way we can.

**Ms GARRETT** — That is very well said.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — My question is a bit more specific than that. It is just in relation to BP3, page 83. There is a line item here that says ‘Country Fire Authority training site planning’, with \$300 000 in this coming financial year. I just wanted to ask you a bit more about that line item and why it was necessary as this budget initiative.

**Ms GARRETT** — Thank you for that opening. I think it is really important. I have now visited dozens and dozens of rural, regional and metro stations and sat and talked with people, as I should as minister, and every time I am really blown away by their service. It is not just the operational service they provide. There is real leadership in our community from our firefighters, and in our rural and regional communities from the volunteers and the career firefighters it is a source of a lot of community focus and engagement. I think that needs to be acknowledged and respected. It is about employers who let staff attend as volunteers. Their contribution is extraordinary and needs to be recognised.

Of course the health and safety of our personnel is of critical importance. We have known there have been concerns about the Fiskville training site for some time. I am really pleased that one of our key election commitments was to hold a parliamentary inquiry to look at what has gone on at Fiskville over decades to date, to examine management practices and look at what recompense should be provided to people who have been affected. I know that anyone who followed Monday’s hearing really could not help but be moved by quite different testimony from different perspectives but all who have been deeply impacted by that facility.

**Ms WARD** — It was very affecting.

**Ms GARRETT** — You of course were there. So you are having a fun life, aren’t you? Committee after committee. It is a privilege to be on a committee like that, I think, and hear those stories and work to find solutions.

When we came to office with the commitment, part of the terms of the parliamentary inquiry was of course the future of the Fiskville site. The plan was that recommendations would be made about its future after all of this was looked at. But in an unexpected turn of events we of course had earlier this year test results showing contamination of the water tanks, which led to some extensive testing of the entire facility, which again found the dangerous chemical PFOS at levels well in excess of international standards and also disturbingly in parts of the site where they did not expect to find it. That was after significant money had been spent decontaminating the site. Clearly the site remained contaminated at levels that were simply not acceptable.

After that had occurred, the CFA board made a unanimous decision that they could not guarantee the safety of the site. We have spoken about this in many different forums. It is just one thing after another with that site and people just felt that they could not continue to guarantee its safety. But of course this has come suddenly and it is a cause of distress for the Ballan community and particularly those who have worked at the Fiskville site. I am going to ask the commissioner to detail that in depth. This is investment seed money of \$300 000 to make

sure we get the processes right to as quickly as possible create another hot fire training facility in the Ballan area. Our preference is absolutely and overwhelmingly that it is in the Ballan area, to ensure that that township and surrounds continue to have this really important facility, not just in terms of the local economy but also in terms of identity and pride and also in terms of making sure career and volunteers can be trained in that area.

We have been working very closely with the Moorabool shire and the Minister for Regional Development and her team on how we manage this transition. Commissioner Lapsley has been intimately involved, and I might just ask him to talk a bit about that.

**Comm. LAPSLEY** — Thank you, Minister. I think the most important thing here is to acknowledge that Fiskville is closed and there is a lot of pain in the CFA community and the local community. I think we need to be very clear to understand and acknowledge what that has meant to CFA. But the closure of it means there is an opportunity to see something new, and the new opportunity is about a regional training facility in the Ballan district. We would say that is the Central Highlands area that services fire brigades probably from Geelong to Ballarat and Beaufort, in those areas. So it is a catchment area, that with the closure of Fiskville, still requires a training facility at a regional level but not to replace to the same size and operation what Fiskville has been over decades.

In doing so, there is more than just a hot fire training ground that we need to deal with. The CFA are leading at the moment the identification and acquisition of the land in the Ballan district to build the regional training facility, but in Fiskville there is also a memorial wall that acknowledges the deaths of 67 firefighters who have died in the line of duty. That is part of this. We need to actually scope that through and say, 'How do we do that?'. That is extensive in consultation. It will need to be thought through very sensitively, but it would be the aim to say that we have a state memorial that can acknowledge not only CFA but others as well in a way that is an appropriate way of the future. That is one of those things we need to deal with.

Obviously CFA have got to deal with the staff. There are four categories of staff out of Fiskville: there are those who are instructors, who can move on to the new training facilities; there are the PAD staff, who obviously will work in the new environment; there are the administration staff, who have already been relocated; and the hospitality staff are the sensitive group. Obviously the change is very significant to them, and that is where case management has been put in by CFA to lead through that process of each individual to see what opportunity exists for them either with CFA in the future or in the Ballan district. It is a complex series of issues, and obviously this seed funding will allow us to scope that out before we understand what the true cost of the closure of Fiskville really means.

**Ms GARRETT** — And look, just to add on that, I think there is a real sensitivity from all players — the CFA and the shire — that where local resources can be used to, for example, clean up the site or deal with issues around that they will be given priority. Our aim is for this to be as minimal an impact on the township as possible.

**Ms WARD** — Thank you, and thank you also for acknowledging the impact that that closure is having on the community, including the CFA community. We respect and understand that as well.

**Mr MORRIS** — I thought for a second that was a supplementary.

**Ms GARRETT** — We are due a few; you have had about eight.

**The CHAIR** — I am happy to oblige with 30 seconds of think music. We will be right back after a short commercial break!

**Mr MORRIS** — Minister, could I refer you to budget paper 3, two references: page 83, the output initiatives, and 287, the output group for fire and emergency services. In the aftermath of the budget on 5 May the UFU secretary, Peter Marshall, expressed to the *Age* that he felt, in his words, deserted and betrayed — very much so. The UFU were particularly vocal about the lack of funding for the post-traumatic stress disorder issue. In those initiatives there, there is some \$200 000 over a couple of years, which is apparently insufficient to employ even one full-time qualified support staff member to work with members who require assistance. Can you outline to the committee whether any of the current support services and initiatives will be cut as a result of this pilot program?

**Ms GARRETT** — There will not be cuts to services. This budget acquits every election commitment that we made — those public election commitments — including in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder. I cannot speak for Mr Marshall's views. I understand that they may have progressed since those initial comments, but again I cannot speak to those views. We take very seriously the commitments that we made. We spoke extensively about the commitments around the PTSD. There is some discussion around what year that would commence, but the commencement as it appears in the budget is in absolute line with the commitments that we made, and we are honouring those.

**Mr MORRIS** — In the light of the UFU's comments regarding the status of pre-election commitments and whether they have been funded in the state budget, can the minister update the committee on the progress of the disciplinary hearing which involves your chief of staff and the MFB staffer apparently implicated in a pornography scandal?

**Ms SHING** — I have two points of order in relation to the supplementary that has been asked. In the first instance it does not seem to address the line item in the budget in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Mr MORRIS** — It does not; there were two references.

**Ms SHING** — In the second instance it actually refers to a matter which is, again, not within the scope and contemplation of the budget papers themselves. We traversed this territory when the Premier was here and there was an attempt by Mr Smith to attribute comment on this to the expenditure of taxpayers money for the purposes of enterprise agreement negotiations. I would reaffirm the point of order that I raised then — namely, that a disciplinary matter is not within the scope of the budget papers, being operational in nature.

**Mr MORRIS** — On the point of order, Chair, the reference was quite clear. There were in fact two references, and I was quite specific about it. The first one was to page 83, which was the output initiatives; that was the reference. The second one was page 287, supporting the state's fire and emergency services, which includes the employment of some 2991 permanent operational staff and 1385 support staff. The question related to the permanent staff and the process of that disciplinary hearing, which involves the minister's chief of staff.

**Ms WARD** — You are continuing to draw these long bows.

**Ms SHING** — Just further to that point of order, the emergency management capability that you have referred to at page 287, referring to the employment conditions of the state's fire and emergency services personnel, is not something which is by extension inviting a question properly within the scope of what this committee is designed to be addressing — namely, the budget papers. A discussion of an individual matter that, much as you would like to have raised in this committee, is not properly related to the budget — —

#### **Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Through the Chair!

**Mr MORRIS** — Chair, the question goes to the appropriate administration of the emergency management capability — the employment of that staff — and the appropriate administration of that capacity is entirely appropriate in the context of the budget. The Parliament wants to know that it is funding a service that is administered in an appropriate manner, and the question goes to the heart of that: is the service being administered in an appropriate manner?

**Ms WARD** — It is such a long bow. Do we call you Robin Hood or Little John?

**The CHAIR** — Through the Chair!

**Ms SHING** — I seek that you rule in relation to the supplementary asked by Mr Morris.

#### **Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Through the Chair! I am going to rule the question out of order. I ruled on this on our very first day.

**Mr MORRIS** — What are you hiding?

**Mr T. SMITH** — On the point of order, this is of substantial public interest, and I really do think — —

**The CHAIR** — For two reasons, I have ruled previously that disciplinary hearings do not form part of the budget estimates process. There are other forms within the house with which these questions can be raised.

**Mr MORRIS** — You may consider that to be the case, but it is not in fact — —

**Ms WARD** — Please do not speak over the top of the Chair, Mr Morris.

**The CHAIR** — Order! I am ruling on this.

**Mr MORRIS** — It is not in your capacity to — —

**The CHAIR** — We are running out of time, Mr Morris. I am ruling on it as I have ruled previously. Further, the supplementary question does not relate to the substantive question.

**Mr MORRIS** — You cannot rule out questions you do not like simply because you want to protect the minister.

**Ms SHING** — Nor can you, Mr Morris, seek to ask questions which have no — —

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Order! I am happy for you to ask another question that relates to your substantive question, but I am ruling that question out. It is 11.45. We have time for one more supplementary question that relates to your substantive question, if you wish to ask it. If not, we can call it a day. I will leave it to you.

**Mr MORRIS** — Chair, if you want to be complicit in this — —

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — I will not have you casting aspersions against me based upon the fact that you do not like my rulings.

**Members interjecting.**

**The CHAIR** — Order!

**Ms SHING** — I ask that Mr Morris withdraw his assertion that the Chair is complicit. For avoidance of doubt can I ask that Mr Morris withdraw his comment that the Chair is complicit — —

**Mr MORRIS** — Actions speak for themselves. What are we hiding? What are we hiding here?

**Ms WARD** — Mr Morris, you need to get over your issue that you are no longer Chair of this committee.

**Mr MORRIS** — Clearly we are hiding something.

**Ms SHING** — Chair, I ask that he withdraw that comment.

**The CHAIR** — I ask that the member withdraw that assertion.

**Mr MORRIS** — No.

**The CHAIR** — You will not?

**Mr MORRIS** — I will not withdraw.

**Ms SHING** — You are saying the Chair is complicit?

**Ms WARD** — You are just outrageous, Mr Morris.

**The CHAIR** — That is fine if that is how this is going to be. All right, we will call it a day. I thank the minister for her attendance, and I would also like to thank Mr Wilson, Mr Condon, Mr Robertson and Mr Lapsley for their attendance. There were no questions on notice.

**Witnesses withdrew.**