

# TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into budget Estimates 2018–19

Melbourne — 15 June 2018

#### Members

Mr Danny Pearson — Chair

Ms Sue Pennicuik

Mr David Morris — Deputy Chair

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Steve Dimopoulos

Mr Tim Smith

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Vicki Ward

Ms Fiona Patten

#### Witnesses

Ms Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Suburban Development,

Mr John Bradley, Secretary,

Mr Mark Curry, Executive Director, Office for Suburban Development, and

Ms Phuong Tram, Acting Chief Financial Officer, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2018–19 budget estimates.

All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome the Minister for Suburban Development, the Honourable Lily D’Ambrosio, MP; Mr John Bradley, Secretary of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; Mr Mark Curry, Executive Director, Office for Suburban Development; and Ms Phuong Tram, Acting Chief Financial Officer.

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, any PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee’s website as soon as possible.

Witness advisers 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 must remain focused only on the persons speaking. Any filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I 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 D’AMBROSIO** — Thanks, Chair. It is a great pleasure for me to present an overview of the suburban development portfolio with respect to this budget. The portfolio’s functions are to ensure that as Melbourne grows it becomes stronger, fairer and more sustainable. The *Suburban Development Statement*, which was released in May last year really articulated the portfolio’s vision that as the city continues to grow all of Melbourne’s residents will have affordable, reliable access to jobs, services and infrastructure, no matter where they live. According to population projections, by 2051 Melbourne will be home to about 8 million people, with 70 per cent of Melbourne’s new housing expected to be within established areas. That is why the portfolio is focused on revitalising established suburbs as well as creating more livable new suburbs in the greenfield areas of Melbourne’s fringes.

The statement also articulates the portfolio’s unique role in key initiatives. Key functions of the portfolio include metropolitan partnerships and their administration; the five-year plans for jobs, services, infrastructure development and updates; and coordination of government portfolios, departments and agencies to improve delivery of services and infrastructure to suburban communities.

The six partnerships hold annual assemblies to engage with communities to identify important challenges and opportunities and to help shape advice to the state government on priorities for their regions. Around 1100 people attended the first group of assemblies last year. This year’s annual assemblies are being held right now. Also there are two regions that are holding local business forums in the coming months. To ensure the voices of young people are heard in the formation of partnership advice a successful youth forum was held at the state library on 7 May. It was attended by more than 120 young people from schools across the six regions.

In addition, the first set of the five-year plans was released in 2017, reporting on the state government’s strategic and investment priorities across Melbourne’s six metropolitan regions. The updated five-year plans will be finalised by the first quarter of 2018–19. They will incorporate government’s responses to the advice received from the partnerships after the first round of assemblies held in 2017, including of course any new emerging themes from the current round of assemblies.

This state budget responds to the partnerships outcome priorities. They include: women and girls in sport, new schools construction, tech schools, Community Sports Infrastructure Fund, homelessness and rough sleeping, active transport, and partnership priority projects that my department will deliver include eastern and northern regional trails, greening the pipeline zones 4 and 5, land information services, business case development for the Pakenham sewage treatment plant and for a metropolitan open space strategy.

There is \$2 million over two years allocated to the partnerships through a development fund to assist the partnerships to seed and further develop their areas of interest or priorities. The partnerships will also play an important role in promoting the \$30 million Pick My Project grants initiative, and will have the opportunity to encourage applications for priority projects identified through the annual assemblies.

In addition to the budget responses to partnership advice submitted to the government in November last year, departments have supported, or supported in principle, all but one of the 114 priority actions and have committed to engage actively with the partnership to progress these.

Following the establishment of the portfolio, the Minister for Planning and I jointly recommend projects to the Treasurer for his approval for growth areas infrastructure contribution funding. This budget allocates \$205 million of GAIC to help build infrastructure across several growth areas. This means that the Andrews Labor government has approved a total of around \$360 million for important GAIC projects in Melbourne's fastest growing communities. This takes the total GAIC project allocation to \$373.5 million, roughly equivalent to the total cash contributions collected to date. We have also introduced annual funding rounds and clearer processes so we can actually facilitate the spending of this money in a way that delivers services and infrastructure in a more timely fashion.

Our suburbs are the engine room of our sustainability, livability and prosperity, making Victoria a really fantastic place to live, to work and to raise a family. That is why as Melbourne's population grows we need to ensure that Melbourne does not just in grow in size but grows into a stronger, fairer and more sustainable city. Through the partnerships' five-year plans, the GAIC program and improved delivery coordination arrangements we are giving Melbourne's six regions a direct say in the development of their local areas. Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Minister. We will have government questions now until 12.16 p.m.

**Ms WARD** — As someone who has spent most of her life in the outer suburbs I am very glad to see this portfolio in operation and the work it is doing, because the outer suburbs can certainly, with some governments, be the forgotten people, as it were. Minister, I would like to draw your attention to the metropolitan partnerships. You mentioned the annual assemblies in your presentation. Budget paper 3, page 60, sets forward how the budget has put money into the metropolitan partnerships. Could you please talk us through how this funding will support the work that the metropolitan partnerships are currently undertaking?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Thank you for the question. Really this goes directly to what the objective of the portfolio is, which is to actually listen to communities. Last year the partnerships articulated that it would be very useful to them to have a small amount of money available to them that could be strategically used to develop up some of their priorities through business planning so they are actually able to work through the issues, challenges and opportunities that they identified through all of their consultations and engagements across regions, and of course importantly through the assemblies, to focus on those priorities that really mean the most to them.

The fund is going to provide around about \$330 000 of seed funding over the two-year period for each of the partnership regions. Funded projects will support the progress of actions towards delivery of a partnership priority outcome area. I mentioned earlier that it could include business cases, feasibility studies, research studies, plans or pilot programs. We are really enabling the partnership to really develop up those ideas, so we are not just trying to say to them, 'Look, running these assemblies, give us your advice', and that is it. They want to work really hard and strategically on those issues that might need more time or more development before they are actually developed up to a point of being recommended to government for further support. We are really pleased.

Regarding some of the projects that could be funded, if you like, I will just pick out some examples by region, and this demonstrates the particular priority areas that each region has. For example, southern region has a very strong focus on support for young people, so it could go towards developing up or scoping an exercise on TAFE

sites regarding a youth foyer. Eastern region could include potentially a scoping study to identify areas of greatest need and a range of options for integrating health and social services, assisting users to navigate the health and human services system. This just reflects on the priorities that have already been identified by the regions themselves — to get deeper and develop up those ideas so they are more ready for us to be able to take as a government for real consideration and response.

**Ms WARD** — I have attended a metropolitan partnerships assembly, in Ivanhoe last year, I think it was. You were also kind enough to attend, and thank you for that. It is really interesting to see the different communities and where there are connectivity issues but also where there is a lot of disparity and there are quite different needs even though there may be only 15 kilometres, if that, between different communities. So it is an interesting format, if you like, and it can develop some really interesting insights I think into the needs of communities. How successful do you think, as the minister, that these assemblies have been?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — I think they have been really very, very successful. As you know, we had our first assembly last year, and importantly the focus of the assemblies and the whole work of the partnership regions is about looking at the strategic level issues and understanding what the challenges are that are probably shared equally, to varying degrees potentially but shared, and therefore coming up with solutions to meet those challenges. It is actually a different focus than the normal business of government and the normal business of individual councils. Collectively we can actually have a more strategic understanding of the challenges and therefore a more strategic and timely response to them.

If we look at the assemblies last year, we had a fantastic outcome. We had more than 1100 people that came to assemblies across the six regions. We have already had a couple of assemblies. The second round has already started, and we are seeing really good numbers at those ones too. The participants are able to really pick the themes that are really important to them but also pitch them amongst their peers — in the community, that is — so they are actually owning the ideas, owning the understanding of the challenge and then deciding amongst themselves, 'Well, where should our effort be focused on? Where should we go to get the best outcomes for this broad community?'

They are working absolutely really well, and I am very, very pleased that we have got a lot of people coming to them from all walks of life that typically would not necessarily be engaged directly either at a local government level or at a state government level with any formal organisations in their community. That is a really important measure of how important these opportunities are — these assemblies are — for really engaging with communities and then of course ensuring that government is able to respond more clearly and in a more timely fashion deliver on the outcomes that people need.

**Ms WARD** — You have touched on the south-east and the east in terms of some ideas of what they have got going. What are the key themes that have come out of the other regions?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — In terms of the priorities, if you look at the western metropolitan area, you have got jobs and skills. Perhaps I could just describe that. We know that the western region has a significant population of course, a growing population, and that they have a particular acuteness in terms of the number of jobs that are available locally to that population. That is not to say that does not exist in other regions, but it is a particularly acute matter for them and has been for a long, long time. It is about jobs and skills, public and active transport, road congestion and freight — of course understanding that freight for the western metro region is really important. It is important for them to reduce entrenched disadvantage through better health and education services. They want to also see a greener region. You can understand that of course, with western Melbourne being one that traditionally has had a lot of built-up manufacturing, heavy industry and the like, so for them that is something they really value a lot. And of course waste and recycling, as you would imagine, is very important.

If you have a look at the inner south-east, it is about affordable and social housing. You can certainly understand that in that area it is a particularly acute matter in terms of the affordability of housing and the options for housing. It is about equitable access to education. Obviously in that area, the inner south-east, has got a fairly diverse range of education offerings.

**Ms WARD** — When they are talking about education, are they talking about schools or are they talking about further training and higher education?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — I think it is a combination of both there. Open space and environment is also a particular one. I am happy to go through some of the others. I have mentioned eastern —

**Ms WARD** — Let us give the northern a go.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Let us give the northern ago, okay. There is the economy and transport-connected young people. Obviously with being a big growth area — we know that there are very young families, and now families that have got teenage kids — they are starting to really feel that there is an issue in terms of them being able to be connected to the communities. Connections for young people are really important. That could be a physical connection — that is, in terms of transportation — but it could also be about services. There are education pathways, but environment features everywhere across all of these, but it is also an issue that is important to them.

**Ms WARD** — Okay. Out of that, it will be becoming a five-year plan. Is that right? Can you talk us through how that is going to work?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — What we are doing here in government is new. It is very new, and we need to make sure that there is a confidence the community can have that this is not just a talkfest or a series of talkfests — that it gets fed into government and then whatever happens, happens and we will see you next year. It is not that at all. It is about trying to get government to do things differently, in a way that has a focus on actually being able to deliver better services — more targeted, well targeted — and that can mean of course that they are targeted differently and also delivered in a way that people can expect them and should expect them to be delivered.

**Ms WARD** — There are also layers of empowerment there too, aren't there?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Absolute layers of empowerment. So when we talk about the individual partnerships, when we talk about the assemblies, we also talk about an obligation on government to report back, and we report back annually either through a budget process or where they are priorities that are identified by the partnerships, where they are non-budget related, through programs that may already exist. So we typically will be reporting back through updates to our five-year plans for jobs, services and infrastructure, and each region has one of those that is its own. So we will be measured as a government on the priorities, but understanding that these are not just one-year, set-and-forget. It is really an evolution of improvement in terms of the way that we deliver services and infrastructure and growing those job opportunities as locally as we can.

**Ms WARD** — And it also means we are not playing catch-up with the population growth that we are experiencing.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — That is exactly right, yep.

**Mr MORRIS** — On the same subject, Minister, perhaps not surprisingly, I have a slightly different view of the success or otherwise of these organisations, and that is in large part based on a review of the minutes of the various meetings. I think indeed a very troubling picture is painted.

At the first meeting of the eastern metropolitan partnership specific queries were raised regarding the confidentiality requirements given that CEOs have full disclosure obligations to their elected councils, and there was clarification on the extent of involvement of councillors in the work of the partnerships. At the second meeting of the inner south-east metropolitan partnership concern was expressed about the scope of boundaries of the roles of CEOs on the partnership. At the third meeting of the inner south-east metropolitan partnership the question was raised as to how and when local MPs can be involved; there is no indication of a response. At the second meeting of the eastern metropolitan regional partnership mention was made of negative attitudes towards the program. At the sixth meeting of the eastern metropolitan region the reflections on its annual assembly included a narrow demographic, a lack of youth, over-representation by one council area and the observation that discussions did not go deep enough. The second meeting of the inner south-east metropolitan region identified a lack of representation of business and industry bodies. And the fifth meeting of the inner south-east metropolitan partnership identified confusion about who the partnership is and how it differs from other council engagement.

In the light of what is essentially a self-assessment, because it is those meetings themselves, will you now admit regarding these unrepresentative quangos that the concept was wrong, the approach is wrong and the execution has failed.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — No, you are absolutely wrong, and I would suggest to you, if you consider that disparagingly that is your view of them, then you would be saying the same things —

**Mr MORRIS** — I am quoting from the minutes.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Well, you are obviously well engaged with the process, which I commend you for.

**Mr MORRIS** — It is not my view; it is the minutes. It is the organisations themselves.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Yes, and I would suggest then that you are equally disparaging of the regional partnerships and assemblies that have been so successful also in regional Victoria.

**Mr MORRIS** — I do not believe I quoted from any minutes from regional groupings.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — You are talking about the concept.

**Mr MORRIS** — I was quoting from the minutes of these metropolitan partnerships, which is what the question is about. So let us not take the issue sideways; let us actually respond to the question that was asked.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — The question is quite rightly about the process of the establishment of these. These are all modelled on regional partnerships that have been very, very successful — the regional assemblies.

**Mr MORRIS** — And these ones have failed.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Can I say to you that the questions of boundaries for CEOs and councils have all been managed in a way that preserves the integrity of the processes.

**Mr MORRIS** — Not according to the committees themselves.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — We have councils that are involved. You talk about lack of council representation. Every council has a seat at the table here in the partnerships. Certainly the partnerships have it within their authority to engage with industries through a whole range of forums, and some of them are doing that absolutely.

Assemblies are one of the important vehicles through which engagement occurs. The partnerships host these assemblies. They also have and are adopting other ways of engaging with their regions. As I mentioned earlier, there are several industry forums that have been undertaken. There was an absolutely successful youth forum assembly that was held in early May, I think it was, and we had those young people reporting back to the assemblies. That is what is happening right now. Those young people are absolutely empowered by this process, as are their broader communities. This has been welcomed.

**Mr MORRIS** — Let us just say, Minister, the minutes do not reflect that.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — They feel, and the feedback —

**Mr MORRIS** — Can I move on and ask you about some specific aspects of the partnerships.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — You do not like the good news.

**Mr MORRIS** — I note, and I think this is the pronunciation, Capire Consulting has been appointed by the government to organise and run all six metropolitan assemblies and to undertake the coordination of the work of the metropolitan partnerships. Can I ask how much has been paid to that company?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Yes, we will seek to find that. We will need to take that on notice. We will take that on notice and ensure that that comes to you as quickly as possible.

**Mr MORRIS** — My understanding is that a million dollars has been paid and a similar amount will be paid in the forthcoming year, but I would appreciate confirmation of that.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — If you know the answer, I am not sure why you are asking.

**Mr MORRIS** — I am saying that that is my understanding, but I would appreciate confirmation of that figure.

I understand according to the minutes of the inner south-east metropolitan partnership that consulting firm was to forward to you a summary report on the consultation findings of both assembly and online engagement. It is understood that similar reports were received by each of the metropolitan partnerships. Will you provide copies of those reports to the committee?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — The committee or the partnership?

**Mr MORRIS** — To this committee.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — I am not sure. I do not think there is an issue with that at all. I will consider that and let you know.

**Mr MORRIS** — Well, Minister, we have had this from a number of ministers in the past. They say they will consider it, and then they consider it and they say no. So I am just asking: will you provide them or will you not?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — I prefer more transparency than not, that is for sure — it is a hallmark of the way I operate — so if I am able to provide it, providing it does not breach any confidentiality matters, I am absolutely prepared —

**Mr MORRIS** — With the usual caveats, of course, yes. That is fine.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Yes, of course.

**Mr MORRIS** — I further note that the minutes of the 18 October 2017 meeting number 6 of the inner south-east metropolitan partnership state that the Capire summary report on the assembly process is currently with the minister's office for approval before it is made public and live on the website. Minister, given your practice of vetting the assembly reports in this financial year, do you plan to continue this practice in the coming financial year and over the forward estimates period, or is it your intention to stop the process of sanitising the documents and the findings on the assemblies?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — If you are suggesting that I am trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the partnerships from a whole range of sectors across metropolitan Melbourne, I think that is quite disparaging of them.

**Mr MORRIS** — Why do they need your approval to go up on the website?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Well, I am the minister and ultimately I take responsibility for the conduct of my portfolio. I am also really interested to know —

**Mr MORRIS** — Do they need your consent? In other words, you get the opportunity to modify the documents before they go out.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — I do nothing that 'modifies' — the word that you use. I am interested to know —

**Mr MORRIS** — Well, why do they need your consent?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — I have a lot of documents that come my way, as is the course of responsible —

**Mr MORRIS** — They could come to you for information in the normal way but they need your consent apparently before they are released?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — What I am saying to you is that ministerial responsibility means that ministers are accountable, and the fact of this is that —

**Mr MORRIS** — So you need the information that you do not need to —

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Let me tell you that this government is out there making ourselves available, unlike any other government has ever done. We are saying to communities: you tell us where government can do better. You tell us what your needs are and we will listen and we will act on those recommendations. So transparency is the way we operate, and ultimately it is about delivering for communities.

**Mr MORRIS** — I understand an interdepartmental committee is meeting regularly on these matters. Will you release the agenda, minutes and recommendations of the interdepartmental committee and particularly which items made it into the budget for the forward estimates period and which ones did not?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — No, that is a document of internal working processes.

**Mr MORRIS** — So you are all about transparency but when I ask for a specific set of documents or specific information, no, I cannot have it.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Why don't you reveal cabinet documents, Minister, while you are at it?

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — Yes, I will give you cabinet documents too while we are at it.

**Mr MORRIS** — So you are all about transparency except for the stuff we actually want to see, except for the actual information that would tell us what you are and are not doing.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — The business of government is the administrative processes of government. For someone who does not think there is much value in these things, you actually go to all of these things. You seem to go to all of these —

**Mr MORRIS** — We are very keen to see exactly what is being done.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — A lot is being done.

**Mr MORRIS** — You are all about 'transparency' — your own words. You talk about transparency but you are not prepared to release this information.

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** — I am happy to report on the fact that —

**The CHAIR** — Order! Ms Shing to read into *Hansard* some questions on notice from the crossbench.

**Ms SHING** — These are questions being asked on behalf of Ms Patten, so if they could be taken on notice and provided in writing, I am sure she would be grateful.

The first question is as follows. The northern metropolitan assembly is referenced as one of six such partnerships in budget paper 3, page 69. It held an assembly on Wednesday, 25 October, last year. A report from that assembly has since been published, which states that the prevention of harmful gambling was one of the top three priorities for the region, with a reduction from \$400 million in gambling losses to 200 million in gambling losses listed as priority action. The question is: how does your portfolio take such a priority, or indeed any of the priorities, from each of the six partnerships and turn them into budget outcomes?

The second question from Ms Patten is as follows. The northern trails strategy — budget paper 3, page 69, being the reference — proposes 96 regional trails in the north of Melbourne for recreational use, be it walking, riding or jogging. What is the time line for the delivery of these trails?

Thank you on behalf of Ms Patten.

**The CHAIR** — Take that on notice. I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance: the Minister for Suburban Development, the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio, MP; Mr Bradley, Mr Curry and Ms Tram. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing. A written response will be provided within 10 business days of that request.

With the indulgence of the Deputy Chair and the members, I do want to acknowledge that this is our last hearing of the estimates for the 58th Parliament. I do want to thank a number of people. I would like to thank Patrick for his assistance as well as Jacque and Elise in terms of sorting things out from a catering perspective. To Hansard, thank you for your patience and forbearance. To the secretariat, Dr Caroline Williams, Dr Kathleen Hurley, Ms Amber Candy and Ms Melanie Hondros, who have spent most of their time here, thank you for your efforts.

I do want to thank the other members of the committee for their patience and tolerance. I am very pleased with the changes that have been implemented in the course of the 58th Parliament with PAEC. I think it has improved on what was there previously, and to members of the government team I thank you for your patience and your support throughout the course of these hearings.

**Mr MORRIS** — Thanks, Chair. And, Minister, sorry to hold you. It is almost traditional to make these comments but I think it is important too. This is the conclusion of my eighth estimates, and I have got to say it is experience I do not particularly want to see repeated. We have had budget week, we have had a parliamentary sitting week, then estimates, Parliament, estimates, Parliament, estimates and Parliament, which I think is the most drawn-out process certainly that I have been involved in. I think the first four were done over four weeks, and I am sure this is not a process to be repeated. I do agree that the changes we have made in terms of the format of estimates are an improvement, even if they do not go as far as was committed to in a document I will not specifically refer to at this point in time because it would be inappropriate. But we have made it through those seven or eight weeks and we are actually still talking to one another. I think that is an achievement as well.

The broadcast, the vision, is now, I think, in its sixth year, and it is interesting, Chair, how it has evolved. I do not know whether this still occurs, but the *NBC Today* show, of course, is a networked program, and they have a small number of viewers that actually do not have a local news service. So at 25 minutes past the hour they go to local news, and for the very small number of viewers that do not actually have a local news service, they sit around and keep talking, and that is quite often the most entertaining part of the show. In the years when I used to watch it you used to actually probably learn more about what was actually going on in the United States than from the headline news. For those who are watching online and are not able to see what goes on in the committee when the cameras are turned off and that slide is up that says, 'Hearings will be resumed at 12.00 p.m.' or whatever it is, can I say, you are missing out. It has become more entertaining as the weeks have gone on as perhaps people have become more diverted.

But on a serious note, this is a significant logistical exercise. It really is. You mentioned, Chair, Caroline, Kathleen, Amber and the other members of the PAEC team. They have spent a lot of time in here, and we certainly do appreciate the hard work, the support. Of course in terms of the secretariat, and to some extent the committee, we are only halfway through the process because the report now has to be written. I also want to recognise on behalf of the opposition members the Hansard team, both sound and vision and the reporters at the table; the attendants; the security staff; and Patrick of course.

But also, on a more personal note, I do want to acknowledge the work of all the people that stand behind Mr Smith, Mr O'Brien and me, both in this building but also in our electorate offices. We are all away for a very long time. For Danny and me and Harriet, we are here basically, and the offices continue to work in our absence, and that is much appreciated. We do recognise, I am sure, the amount of extra work that throws on our staff. Also we should acknowledge our families because they do not see much of us in any case — that is the life we have chosen, no complaints about that — but when you have so many weeks away, and again for the three of us we are basically camped in here, it is not just us doing the work, so I think we should acknowledge them.

And finally, as I said, I think the changes are an improvement. Estimates are an incredibly important part of the accountability process. Governments and departments and agencies are spending public money — they are spending taxpayers money — and they need to be able to tell the community publicly what they are spending it on and to justify that process, and that, when it is all said and done, is what this estimates process is all about. Whichever party is sitting at the table, whichever party is sitting in the chair, the important thing is about that accountability. That is something that I think we need to be vigilant about to ensure it is maintained. We need, as committee members, to try to improve it.

In conclusion, Chair, can I just wish the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in the 59th Parliament all the best in their deliberations. I have certainly enjoyed my eight years in estimates; it has been quite a ride.

**The CHAIR** — I am sure those on this side of the table would welcome you to stay on as Deputy Chair in the 59th Parliament.

**Mr MORRIS** — I will be fine. Eight years is enough!

**The CHAIR** — All right. You do not have to go home, but you cannot stay here.

**Committee adjourned.**