

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates

Melbourne—Tuesday, 17 May 2022

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O'Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

WITNESSES

Ms Ros Spence MP, Minister for Community Sport,

Mr Simon Phemister, Secretary,

Mr Peter Betson, Deputy Secretary, Sport, Recreation and Racing, and

Ms Georgina McCann, Executive Director, Community Sport and Recreation, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their elders past, present and emerging as well as elders from other communities who may be with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

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

We welcome Minister Spence, in the first instance for the community sport portfolio. We invite you to make a presentation, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

Visual presentation.

Ms SPENCE: Thank you, Chair, and to the committee, for the opportunity to present on the community sport portfolio, including investments through the 2022–23 Victorian budget.

Can I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meeting today, including elders past and present.

I am particularly pleased to be coming in front of the committee at a time where the community sport and recreation sector is getting back on its feet after an incredibly challenging two years. As restrictions continue to ease, it has been really wonderful to see the dedication, collaboration and shared purpose that the sector, from our grassroots clubs to our largest peak bodies, has brought to supporting Victorians to get back to the activities that they love.

The community sport and active recreation sector is a major contributor to Victoria's social, cultural and economic wellbeing. Eighty-one per cent of Victorians are active at least once a week, and prior to the pandemic the wider sport sector contributed an estimated \$9.2 billion in gross value-add to the Victorian economy and supported approximately 71 500 full-time jobs across the state. Of course the sector would be nothing without its dedicated volunteers. Approximately 738 000 Victorians volunteered across the sector in 2021, from virtual committee meetings to helping out in canteens when they reopened, and it is the hard work of these volunteers that has kept our sector afloat over the past two years. Approximately 10 000 community facilities across the state provide significant value to the economy and the community, with a recent analysis finding that community sport and recreation infrastructure generated over \$7 billion worth of benefits to Victoria per year. That includes \$2.3 billion in direct and indirect health benefits associated with the reduced risk of illness and improved mental health through participation in community sport and recreation. Pleasingly, the community sport and active recreation sector is bouncing back from the challenges that COVID-19 presented, which included a 27 per cent reduction in registered participants from 2019–20. And with winter

seasons of sport commencing and restrictions lifted, we can be sure to see a strong return to community sport and active recreation.

In the face of the challenges of the past two years the Victorian government has provided significant support to ensure that the sector was able to continue to provide participation opportunities for Victorians. Over the past year alone we have provided \$10 million to over 6500 clubs, associations and leagues as part of our community sport sector COVID-19 short-term survival package, in addition to almost \$40 million provided through the package in 2020–21. We have also delivered four rounds of the popular Get Active kids voucher program, providing payments of up to \$200 to help Victorian families get their children involved in their favourite sport and recreation activities. Over 55 000 vouchers have been issued through the program to date, with the fourth round open until the end of this month. Through the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation we have continued to deliver programs through the Change Our Game initiatives to create lasting opportunities for women and girls to participate, contribute and achieve success, both on and off the field.

To increase Victoria's capacity to meet current and future demand for sporting facilities, we have approved nearly \$70 million to support 87 local sports infrastructure projects in 2021–22. In all, the Victorian government has allocated over \$1.2 billion in support of community sport and recreation infrastructure since 2014, and we have provided over \$8.7 million in grants this year through the Together More Active program to support the sector's organisational capacity and sustainability to create more participation opportunities and to increase equity, diversity and inclusion.

The 2022–23 budget reflects the Victorian government's commitment to supporting the sector and ensuring that our communities have access to facilities that are safe, accessible and reflect community need, with \$88 million allocated to meet Victoria's demand for local sport and active recreation infrastructure. This investment comprises both a competitive funding program and support for strategically identified projects that will provide significant benefit in their communities. \$1.3 million over two years is also being invested to support young people to gain and retain employment in the sport and recreation sector by subsidising accreditation costs. This investment will help over 2000 young people gain access to employment in the sector, in jobs where accreditation is required; for example, as lifeguards or swim coaches. So thank you to the committee for your time today.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr O'Brien, Deputy Chair.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Welcome, Minister. I am going back to the Secretary, though, I think, to start with. Secretary, as we discussed with Minister Pakula—I think you were here then; I cannot remember—the sport, recreation and racing budget has been cut by 18 per cent in this budget. How much of that cut applies to the community sport portfolio?

Mr PHEMISTER: I will actually defer to Deputy Secretary Betson on the community sport portfolio because we can build that one up for you.

Mr BETSON: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. In the 2021–22 budget the community sport and recreation portfolio contributed \$153.3 million to the total sport, recreation and racing output budget, and in 2022–23 that now represents \$179.8 million, an increase of 17.3 per cent.

The increase is due to the funding in the current budget for 'Meeting Victoria's demand for local sport and active recreation infrastructure' of \$88 million, with some offsets in terms of local sports grants that are now being delivered; they have reduced that contribution by \$27 million. The infrastructure stimulus program as part of COVID support funding has ended due to COVID ceasing, and therefore that has reduced by \$20 million—so overall a 17.3 per cent increase for the community sport portfolio.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, what was the increase with the program?

Mr BETSON: 17.3 per cent.

Mr D O'BRIEN: But what was the program that is new or has increased?

Mr BETSON: The new program is 'Meeting Victoria's demand for local sport and active recreation infrastructure' of \$88 million announced in the 2022–23 state budget.

Mr D O'BRIEN: I think that is in the questionnaire. That is the continuation of the 'Local Sports Infrastructure Fund', 'Female Friendly Facilities Fund' and the 'Country Football and Netball Program'.

Mr BETSON: Correct. That is the correct reference, Mr O'Brien.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay. So the \$27 million that has been cut, that is just the local sports grants that were a COVID—

Mr BETSON: The local sports grants were a program in a prior budget that now has projects being delivered, and as projects are delivered, they therefore no longer contribute to the output funding in that particular year. So it just represents a completion of projects from prior budget rounds.

Mr D O'BRIEN: That program has gone, though, now—is that right?

Mr BETSON: It is nearing completion.

Mr D O'BRIEN: There is no additional money for it, is what I mean—no further grant money.

Mr BETSON: Not for that particular program, no, but the continuation has been for the infrastructure funding program, for competitive as well as funded projects through the current budget.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sure. Minister, you talked about, in the presentation, the impact of lockdowns on participation. I am sure you are aware of the Federation and Victoria university research that showed 230 000 players left community sport across 2020—a decline of about 27 per cent—and that particularly impacted the most remote and small rural communities as well as outer suburban areas. What are you doing to get people back into community sport?

Ms SPENCE: We are doing quite a lot to get people back into community sport. Firstly, we are working with Vicsport, who are doing a lot to work with the sector. The Get Active Kids voucher program is making sure that household budgets are not a barrier. We do not want finances to be a barrier for kids participating. Making sure that there are appropriate facilities is also important so that facilities also are not a barrier, but there is a big piece of work to do in that space. We need to continue to work with communities. We do not want participation numbers to continue to fall off.

I have to say that that is not a constant—the non-resumption of participation. I have been out talking to a lot of clubs right across the state, and in some areas there is quite a big resumption, where in fact some clubs are having more teams come back. In some age groups there is quite high resumption, with more teams, and in some areas there is not. There is also some concern about whether or not there are young people perhaps not coming back and doing two sports, which they might have done before, and they are only coming back and doing one. So a bit more analysis needs to be done as to what that resumption to sport looks like. It is not as clear-cut as just saying there is an across-the-board 27 per cent reduction in participation. It really does differ, so we do need to be careful.

Mr D O'BRIEN: When you say analysis needs to be done, that was going to be one of my questions. Have you asked the department or your state sporting organisations for reports back on that?

Ms SPENCE: Absolutely. Vicsport are doing some surveying of the sector; that has been very helpful, but it does need to be rather in depth. We will continue to do that work because it is no good throwing resources at something when you do not know the detail of it; we want to be careful. But what you mentioned about being in regional areas, that is a concern, and we need to make sure that particularly in those areas we are being careful about understanding what the problem is.

Mr D O'BRIEN: That same research that I talked about—I am sure you saw the reports of it—also showed an alarming spike in kids who literally cannot catch, throw and hit a ball. I guess the question is: what are you doing about that, and why haven't you changed the Get Active vouchers so that they are available to everyone, not just those on lower incomes?

Ms SPENCE: Well, there is obviously a resourcing issue with providing those vouchers to everyone. At this stage we are providing those vouchers to those that are most in need, and I am comfortable with that approach

at this stage. Looking at expanding the program down the track is something that can be considered. There is an issue—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Did you model what the cost would be to open it up to all comers?

Ms SPENCE: No, I have not modelled what the cost would be, but I would suggest that it would be a lot more than what the cost is for providing it to the numbers that we are providing it to at the moment. The issue that you raised about young people having a lack of entry-level sports skills is something that I discussed just recently at the community sport round table that I hold with representatives of the peak sports. It is something that is of concern and why I have said that we are going to do further research into that—because it does have flow-on effects when you then look at how those sports are going to develop. It is an issue that I am aware of. It is an issue that I am discussing with the sports, and we do need to do that further research as to how we can address that. Whether that is through working with the sports directly or with the volunteers, there is certainly a piece of work to be done.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Chair. And thanks, Minister, for your attendance this evening. To the department officials as well, thank you. Minister, if I could take you to the topic of the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund—the budget paper reference is BP3 at page 85—I was hoping you could outline for the committee how continued funding for the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund will lift participation in sport, and that is with reference to the various ways that the development of modern and accessible community sports infrastructure helps improve participation.

Ms SPENCE: Thanks, Mr Maas. Thank you for your question. As minister I am committed to boosting participation. This also goes to the question that Mr O'Brien was asking about participation, and doing that through our growing investment into community sport and recreation infrastructure is a really important way of boosting that participation. The LSIF, the local sports infrastructure program, including funding to community sports infrastructure by the Victorian government, has been running in one way or another for the last 50 years, so it has been a really longstanding and successful program. And it is through our investment in the LSIF, accompanied by a series of other infrastructure packages and programs, that we have broken all records in infrastructure funding for community sport in Victoria. More than \$1.2 billion has been invested in community sport and recreation infrastructure by this government since 2014. That is a huge amount of investment, and we are seeing really good results from that. Building better facilities for Victorians means people, including young people, are more likely to participate in sport if they have got those really great facilities that they are drawn to and that they can participate at. The LSIF services the entire community sporting sector, and it supports the delivery of all kinds of projects, from indoor basketball stadiums to lighting for country football grounds or new clubrooms that create a safe and welcoming environment for girls and women to participate. We are really proud of this program and what it does to boost participation amongst Victorians right across the state.

The current round of the program comprises five streams, and they are to deliver indoor stadiums and aquatic facilities, female-friendly facilities, community sport lighting, community facilities and planning for projects. It is a really wideranging program that supports all aspects of the sector. For example, delivering new lighting projects means that outdoor facilities can be used for more hours of the day and into the night, improving the utilisation of facilities and enabling more people to participate. While the explosion that we have seen in female participation in AFL, in cricket and in other sports has put pressure on existing facilities, we have managed to keep up with the rate of growth by investing in high-quality LED lighting, which enhances the use of grounds. The Female Friendly Facilities Fund has transformed many really tired old clubrooms and revolutionised the experience of women and girls participating in sport. I have been around and seen some pretty crummy clubrooms that you certainly would not want your daughters going and using, and then seeing the transformation into what really are appropriate facilities is terrific. In fact since 2018 we have invested almost \$55 million in female-friendly facilities, and this targeted LSIF stream creates those really safe environments—and I am sure that we would all agree that that is of vital importance to get more girls and young women involved in sport.

I could go through each of those five streams in detail, but we will save that for another time. What I will say is that I am really excited to announce that assessments of applications under the current round of LSIF are being finalised at the moment and successful recipients will be announced shortly, so I am very much looking forward to that, Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Excellent. Thank you, Minister. I think it is quite helpful sometimes if there are examples that you can point to where LSIF has been helpful in particular communities. Are you able to outline some individual examples where the investment has supported participation in community sport?

Ms SPENCE: Sure. Thank you again for the question. Let me start by saying that there are literally hundreds of community sports infrastructure projects that I could mention, but I will give you the details of just a handful from last year's round of LSIF. I had the pleasure of opening the Narrandjeri Stadium at John Cain Memorial Park in Thornbury last Friday with the Member for Northcote, Kat Theophanous. This project was funded through the 2020–21 program, and it received \$2 million from the aquatic centres and indoor stadiums stream. It was done in partnership with Darebin council. Now, this new stadium is quite an outstanding facility. It includes four multiline sport courts. It includes a show court with fixed spectator seating for 340 people as well as public amenities, four change rooms and many other benefits. It is a really high quality facility that is going to benefit that community enormously, and it really enhances that precinct—so really nice.

Now, I am sure that Mr O'Brien is going to regret not being here for this one, but that is his loss—

Mr MAAS: Timing is everything.

Ms SPENCE: We will refer him to the Hansard record. The Great Southern Rail Trail extension from Korumburra to Nyora is another terrific project that has seen more than 20 kilometres of gravel trail that was laid through an investment of \$800 000, and tracks like these, they add real value to active recreation participation in Victoria.

Another project—I know you, Mrs McArthur, will know about these ones; you will be familiar with this—is the Jetty Flat Reserve pavilion, that redevelopment project in Warrnambool. That is a really terrific project that saw a \$500 000 investment through the female-friendly facilities stream last year, and that is to build two new change rooms with unisex amenities, along with other significant improvements. That is a really great benefit to women and girls in the Warrnambool area that did not have that female-friendly access previously.

Mrs McARTHUR: You might get down there next time you are there.

Ms SPENCE: I will do that. The Tatterson Park oval 1 lighting installation has seen an investment of \$250 000 to install 100 lux LED lights at the number 1 oval in Mordialloc. You would know all about that one.

Mr RICHARDSON: Get around it. Here we go.

Ms SPENCE: This project is going to bring lighting at the site up to the standards required to support the running of competition football. So that will not only support that training of an evening but also having competition on site. That is going to be a real lift on that oval, so that is a great one. Another great lighting project—and we see a lot of these lighting projects, and they are fantastic, providing that extra use of facilities—is underway at Mount Evelyn Recreation Reserve through an investment of \$123 000. That is for the Mount Evelyn Football Club. They will have greater flexibility with training, and it will ensure that they are able to cater for what is certainly a growing population of female participants in the area.

So all of these infrastructure projects play a really important role in local communities, increasing participation opportunities in community sport. Not only do they serve the current membership but they also act as a really terrific drawcard to boost greater membership for clubs, thereby increasing participation in sport even more.

Mr MAAS: That is excellent. With some 35 seconds left, would you be able to very quickly outline the expected time frames for the future rounds of the program?

Ms SPENCE: As I stated earlier, I will be announcing the current round of successful recipients shortly, and I will also be unveiling the next round of the program at that time. So this year's budget allocation will be utilised to support the next round of the program, and it is projected to support more than 100 community sport

projects across the state. I am really excited to open the round so that we can support even more really great infrastructure projects and help unlock more participation in community sport. Thank you, Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Hibbins.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Minister and your team, for appearing this evening. I want to ask about public housing tenants, particularly young women from CALD backgrounds, and their ability to access sporting infrastructure and funding. There is a lack of accessible sporting facilities particularly in inner-Melbourne estates, and we are even aware of a community group that was unable to access funding this financial year to host a junior basketball and soccer tournament.

Ms SPENCE: Sorry, Mr Hibbins, I missed what group you said. Could I just get you to repeat that?

Mr HIBBINS: I do not have the specifics of the particular group. That would have hosted a soccer tournament for young African women during Ramadan. Last year they did get funding, and it would have engaged 300 young African women over six days. What is the government doing to ensure access to sporting infrastructure and funding for public housing residents and communities, particularly for young women from CALD backgrounds?

Ms SPENCE: It is a very good question. I might just pass over to Mr Betson and see. We do have the Together More Active program that does enhance participation for groups that are under-represented in sport. I can tell you a bit more about that program. That program provides a fair amount of funding to provide sector capability building, project funding, and there is a foundation stream. It is to enhance participation for groups that are under-represented. But we also do work through my other portfolio to try and engage and get people in public housing, particularly from CALD backgrounds, engaged to want to participate and use sport as a vehicle for engagement. So I am switching hats when I am having this conversation with you. But if we want to talk about this budget and my community sport portfolio, the Together More Active program is the program that assists with that.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Thank you. I want to ask about now—I am not sure if this relates to your portfolio responsibilities—the sports management plan that is being developed for Albert Park, which is due to be completed in August this year.

Ms SPENCE: That would be Parks Victoria.

Mr HIBBINS: Parks Victoria. Okay. Well, the question really is whether that is going to include a list of prioritised capital projects to improve community sporting facilities at Albert Park. Can that be potentially—

Ms SPENCE: That would be something you would need to take up with Minister D'Ambrosio.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. All right. Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. That concludes our session on community sport. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee in this capacity today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee will take a short break before moving to consideration of the youth portfolio with you. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.