

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates

Melbourne—Monday, 23 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

Mr Richard Wynne MP, Minister for Planning,

Mr John Bradley, Secretary,

Mr Julian Lyngcoln, Deputy Secretary, Planning,

Dr Jane Homewood, Executive Director, Statutory Planning Services,

Mr Mark Briglia, Acting Chief Financial Officer, and

Mr Graeme Emonson, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning;

Mr Dan O'Brien, Chief Executive Officer, Cladding Safety Victoria; and

Mr Stuart Moseley, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Planning Authority.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, this time with Minister Wynne for Planning. I will again ask the Deputy Chair to do the honours with the statement. Thank you.

Mr D O'BRIEN: 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.

I welcome the Minister for Planning, as well as officers from the department. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement of less than 10 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

Mr WYNNE: Thank you very much, Mr O'Brien, for that generous introduction.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Your last go, Dick, so bring it home.

Mr WYNNE: I will bring it home as fast as I possibly can, so you can all get out of here. Thank you very much to the committee. As this is my last PAEC, I am very pleased to be with you to talk about planning, which is a critical area of government responsibility.

I would like to begin again by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations, and I do pay my respects to elders past and present and any other First Nations people who are listening to the broadcast today.

With me today, to my left, I have got John Bradley, Secretary of the department; to my right, Julian Lyngcoln, Deputy Secretary, Planning; Dan O'Brien, the CEO of Cladding Safety Victoria, to John's left; and Dr Jane Homewood, Executive Director, Statutory Planning, to Julian's right. Also with us, who can be called up at any time, are Stuart Moseley, the CEO of the Victorian Planning Authority; Graeme Emonson, the Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, at DELWP; and Mark Briglia, Acting Chief Financial Officer.

If I can, Chair, I might commence my presentation.

Visual presentation.

Mr WYNNE: I will start, as I started last time, with population, because that is fundamental to the whole argument around planning. As of September 2021 the total population of Victoria was set at about 6.6 million people. With international borders now reopening we will return to our previous growth rates. Our budget predictions expect Victoria's growth rates to return to normal by 2023–24 at 1.6 per cent per annum.

The next slide, slide 3: our regional cities continue to thrive. Around 45 per cent of the total regional growth in 2021 was concentrated, not surprisingly, in our three regional cities. Geelong grew by 2.3 per cent, Ballarat by 1.7 per cent and Bendigo by 1.6 per cent. As you drive down to Geelong today, you will see—I can wax lyrical about Geelong. There has been an extraordinary transition of Geelong over the last 15 to 20 years from being a place of manufacturing—textile, clothing and footwear and of course the motor car industry. To have actually completely reimaged itself is quite extraordinary. To see the CBD of Geelong now with cranes in the sky and really high quality residences being built there is quite an amazing story of transition. It is not dissimilar of course to Ballarat and Bendigo building on the inherent strengths that they have.

In 2021 another 45 per cent of regional growth was found in our peri-urban areas: Surf Coast shire, 4.4 per cent; Bass Coast, 3.7 per cent; and Baw Baw, 3.1 per cent. And there were almost 70 000 dwelling approvals in the 12 months to March 2022 across Victoria. There was a 9 per cent increase on the previous 12 months, surpassing the 65 000 per annum rolling average over the last five years—I mean, some pretty amazing figures.

Dwelling approvals in regional cities remain at record levels of almost 10 000 in the 12 months to March 2022, similar to the previous 12 months. Just a couple of brief examples: 400 approvals in Wodonga and 300 in Warrnambool. We talked earlier in Housing about when I was down in Warrnambool only last week and just how critical it is going to be to ensure that we do get the interventions around the affordable rental scheme up and running but also land supply well. The VPA and the department have been working with councils to ensure there is adequate land supply, but there is a lot more work that we need to do, particularly in the strategic planning area, to ensure that we have got a really strong throughput of land going forward.

In 2021, \$38.7 billion of building work was undertaken. I mean, this underpins our economy. Building reform remains a strong focus for us to support this important industry, and we provide funding to enable the Victorian Building Authority, headed by Stuart, to strengthen building approvals—actually, that is wrong. I have given you another job.

Mr MOSELEY: Thank you, Minister.

Mr WYNNE: The Victorian Building Authority—to strengthen building approvals including our risk-based, targeted inspection audit program. We inspected 10 142 sites, which is over 10 per cent of our building permits, which is a very, very good outcome, and compared to other states our building system is very sound and robust.

The reforms announced in the 2022–23 budget address deficiencies in building regulation and gaps in workforce skill and competence. The budget also focuses on the expert panel review work, which Anna Cronin headed, including strengthening the role of the state building surveyor to provide complex technical expertise for industry and establishing a building monitor to improve the consumer experience. This will support economic recovery as poor construction impacts property values and creates frankly unnecessary disputes.

Our support for housing of course will boost the construction of social and affordable housing, and we have spent a very pleasant last hour talking about the \$5.3 billion build. But I do want to make one critical point. My planning department will continue to support the Big Housing Build, but I want to be very, very clear: I am not the decision-maker for these permits. They are assessed independently by the planning department; I have no sight of them, I have no oversight of them. The ultimate decision for any approvals for the Big Housing Build lies with my ministerial colleague the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the obvious reason for that is a probity question. I mean, you cannot be both applicant and decision-maker. So I think that the way that we have structured this is entirely appropriate and indeed has worked—well, to the best of my knowledge, because I have no exposure to it—extremely well.

This current budget includes funding for urban redevelopment in our network of activity centres and growth in regional Victoria, which we talked about earlier. We will obviously continue our focus on post-pandemic economic recovery, with reforms to the building sector keeping communities safe through our cladding rectification program; supporting regional growth, as I have talked about earlier; facilitating land and housing that keeps pace with demand; and critically, maintaining a strong commercial property sector in our CBD. The CBD of Melbourne is absolutely critical to the economic, cultural and sporting life of our city, and we must continue our investment there.

Our 2022–23 budget includes funding for a number of reforms, and they are up there for people to see. I am conscious of the time, Mr O'Brien, so you can cast your eyes over those. I will not give you the laundry list, but they are all there for your consideration. Chair, that will do.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you, Minister. On page 32 of budget paper 3 the department states an aim of meeting *Plan Melbourne* objectives.

Mr WYNNE: Yes.

Mr NEWBURY: Following this reference, the *Plan Melbourne* summary document details an objective of strengthening community participation.

Mr WYNNE: Yes.

Mr NEWBURY: So can I take you to the Markham estate?

Mr WYNNE: Yes.

Mr NEWBURY: There have been a number of breaches of planning provisions, specifically a breach of amendment C321 regarding exceeding height limits, overshadowing surrounding properties, breaching tree protection zones and design breaches which have seen the neighbourhood character ignored. With your planning minister hat on, are you concerned about residents being ignored and whether or not you are, frankly, ignoring the *Plan Melbourne* objectives?

Mr WYNNE: Well, Mr Newbury, I understand the Markham estate intimately. I was at the Markham estate last week with the outgoing Member for Burwood and indeed the incoming member for the newly named seat of—

A member: Ashwood.

Mr WYNNE: Ashwood. Thank you very much.

Mr NEWBURY: You were there with Asher Judah, were you?

Mr D O'BRIEN: You left yourself wide open for that one.

Mr NEWBURY: I will let him know.

Members interjecting.

Mr WYNNE: There are so many places I could go with you.

Mr NEWBURY: A good part of the world. He is going to be a good local member.

Mr WYNNE: Oh, yes. No, he will go well. Asher Judah, my goodness, what a warrior. Anyway, good luck to him. Do not throw me off.

So we went to the Markham estate. It is an extraordinary development that we are doing there. And in fact if you did follow my socials, you would have seen me—did you see me up there on the roof?

Mr NEWBURY: No. Which socials are we talking about? Twitter, Instagram?

Mr WYNNE: I mean, seriously, seriously. If you did follow—

Mr NEWBURY: I am not sure that you actually run your socials. I am going to call you out here.

Mr WYNNE: That is not true. I am fully on top of it.

Mr NEWBURY: Do you know the difference between Instagram and Twitter?

Mr WYNNE: Next question. That is a thing. It is a thing.

Mr NEWBURY: Anyway, back to Markham estate, please.

Mr WYNNE: Listen, I have got my two boys. They manage these matters on my behalf.

Mr NEWBURY: There you go.

Mr WYNNE: They are the experts. It is outrageous.

So we were at the Markham estate. To suggest that there has not been consultation with the council and with that local community about the redesign of the Markham estate, which has now gone on—do not hold me to the figure, but I reckon it must be five years, if not more.

Ms TAYLOR: Yes.

Mr WYNNE: It is at least five years. Ms Taylor, I think you would probably attest to that. I mean, we have amended that development so many times to respond to the neighbourhood concerns of people surrounding the Markham estate. And let me tell you, Mr Newbury, when I went to the Markham estate, it was almost as bad as the one that we redeveloped for Mr Hibbins. I went to that estate years ago when I was a former housing minister. When you walked out of there, it was an absolute disgrace. The walls were full of mould, but we still had people living in there. I mean, it was a disgraceful situation of this concrete stock that was well past its use-by date and ought to have been redeveloped.

We set back the Markham estate 15 metres off the boundary of the neighbouring properties. All of the trees that abut that boundary have been retained, because I saw them less than two weeks ago. There is underground car parking on the site. It is truly, I think, one of the best developments that we have done, and it is responding to the needs of that neighbourhood. And in that context, if there are any regulatory matters that you put to me that you believe are in breach of the planning permit, obviously that is a matter for the council.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. And I am now following you on Instagram, which you will be pleased to know.

Mr WYNNE: Oh, that is a relief.

Mr NEWBURY: I am boosting—I am going to be honest—your very low following. So I do not want to embarrass you—

Mr WYNNE: Have a look at me on Twitter. I am up—I am 10 000 on Twitter. Do not worry about that.

Mr NEWBURY: Instagram is where it is at, and they are obviously not where you are at.

Mr WYNNE: Well, you are—

Mr NEWBURY: That is okay. We will move on. Back to the *Plan Melbourne* objectives that I was referring to, 8000 people have petitioned the government to change its plans for the former Kingswood Golf Club development in Dingley Village. Despite numerous objections—which have been supported by your colleague, Mr Pakula—the government has refused to compromise on a number of aspects of the development. Residents' concerns include that the development is in no way supported by local council, with 8000 residents objecting; that in adding 2000 new residents to the area the development will put undue pressure on local traffic congestion; that the site includes a basin, which if disturbed during development, would cause flooding to adjacent properties; and that it will reduce the amount of green space in Clarinda. Given the government's intention on the *Plan Melbourne* objectives, how are you meeting those objectives in light of those concerns?

Mr WYNNE: Well, I am well aware of the Kingswood golf course redevelopment proposal. I mean, it has been subject, as you rightly say, to extensive community commentary around it. I referred the proposed amendment to an advisory committee. Informal consultation with the council and community occurred between June and September of last year. Sixteen hundred and fifty submissions have been received, which clearly demonstrates, you know, community activism around this. The public advisory committee hearing on the matter commenced on 15 November last year and finished just before Christmas. The advisory committee considered the planning merits of the amendment, and all submissions and their recommendations have been provided to the advisory committee. I did receive the advisory committee report in March, and I will consider the recommendations and the reviews of all parties before I make a final decision on the proposal. I mean, it is a big site. It has got quite a lot of challenges around it.

Mr NEWBURY: A lot of locals are really unhappy.

Mr WYNNE: Yes. I understand that. And I understand the aspirations of that community, but in the job as the Minister for Planning you have to strike a balance. That is the job.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you.

Mr WYNNE: I will be guided in all of those considerations by the work of the advisory committee, who have done excellent work in this space. Everyone has had a go at this.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Minister. I will take you to the topic of regional growth and population and budget paper 3, page 32. There is a statement there, 'Delivering sustainable growth for a resilient Victoria', which references the need to update regional growth plans to support population growth that has occurred during COVID. Obviously the pandemic has had a significant impact on all Victorians. Are you able to tell the committee what kind of assistance and support the department has provided to regional and rural councils?

Mr WYNNE: Thanks very much, Mr Maas, for the question. In fact it goes to some of the conversation we had earlier with committee members in relation to some of the challenges in regional Victoria more generally, particularly around population growth, particularly around affordability, particularly around land supply. That is why, through the Victorian Planning Authority, we have done some really important work: the Streamlining for Growth program has been really crucial in this space; the development facilitation program has recently been expanded to consider fast-track rezonings—resupply levels have dipped below five years of zoned land; the regional hub program; and our broader planning reforms.

I really, really encourage councils to request the support of the Victorian Planning Authority, or indeed the regional hub program and absolutely my department. Indeed I know the CEO of the Victorian Planning Authority will consider any requests that come to him, because the key here is to ensure, with the VPA in particular—they have got a very unique set of specialist skills—that they come and support regional councils in their strategic and statutory planning roles. They do not come in as some sort of big brother, big sister, that stands over and tries to dictate to local councils. They actually come and work alongside in a really collaborative way, and we have heard some extraordinary success stories in terms of the work that we have been able to do in regional Victoria. So I absolutely encourage councils that may be listening to this today to please reach out to us.

My department also established the regional planning hub, again to support regional and rural councils in facilitating planning approvals, completing key strategic planning work and enabling growth and economic activity. The program has thus far supported 68 requests for assistance since July 2021, which is fantastic. Of those, 17 were requests for statutory planning support, 26 were strategic planning support and 25 were for professional development support, and they have been funded. The statutory support alone has assisted 14 regional and rural councils in the assessment of development applications with a combined worth of \$100 million.

We have got regional members here today, and we know the difficulty of being able to attract staff to our regional councils to support what is crucial activity, whether it be of a strategic or statutory nature. So I really think the regional hubs and the VPA have got a crucial role to play in this space to supplement and support the

work of those councils. But more systemically, I think we have to think more creatively about how we can attract what are a large number of young planners who are coming out of the universities to take up the wonderful opportunities that are available in regional Victoria. I mean, I did a lecture for RMIT final-year students. I think they were fourth year or fifth year.

Dr HOMEWOOD: Yes, fourth year.

Mr WYNNE: They were fourth-year students, who are coming out now into the wide world of statutory and strategic planning, and we had a group—I do not know, there might have been 60-odd there, I think—and you think, ‘Well, how do we grab those young people and get them to go out and get experience in regional Victoria?’. I think that is one of the keys. Sadly, it will not be a job for me, but it will be a job for the next planning minister to really think creatively about how we can have a much stronger engagement with the universities and look to what sort of incentives we can put in place to attract these young, highly educated people and the really crucial work today that they do into our regional cities and regional communities more generally. That, I think, is one of the great challenges that we need to consider.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. Do you have any specific examples of assistance from the program?

Mr WYNNE: Gee! How long have you got? How long have we got here?

Mr MAAS: About a minute and a half.

Mr WYNNE: Okay, let me give you five: South Gippsland—

Mr D O’BRIEN: An excellent area.

Mr WYNNE: an excellent part of the world. South Gippsland planning scheme review—done.

Mr D O’BRIEN: That is great. Is that what—

Mr WYNNE: Well, it is very important in terms of land release.

Mr D O’BRIEN: Right, good. Yes, yes.

Mr WYNNE: Glenelg planning scheme review, Horsham planning scheme review, Corangamite planning scheme review, Benalla planning scheme review—Baw Baw, a backlog of 70 oldest planning applications. We have got 70 with the Baw Baw Shire Council delivered. Anyway, on and on it goes. We have got one, two, three, four—anyway, there is about a good dozen there that go to the crucial aspect of strategic planning, which of course then follows with the statutory planning as well. That is the great gap that we really have to look at to ensure that we get proper and orderly planning in regional Victoria, because they are desperate about it.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Minister. I might leave it there.

Mr WYNNE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Maas. Mr Hibbins.

Mr WYNNE: Mr Hibbins, what have you got?

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. What have we got? I would like to ask about fast-track schemes. I think you mentioned a few before, but there have obviously been a number that have been developed recently—the development facilitation program, new state-significant projects and the VPA fast-track scheme. Now, some of these I understand were introduced during COVID and were there to assist with the COVID recovery. Are they now going to be permanent parts of the planning system?

Mr WYNNE: Well, that is the intention of this government. There may be another position taken in the next round. The development facilitation program has played a really important role through COVID. There were 18 applications with a combined investment of \$1.21 billion—I mean, that is a large amount of money—to ensure that we had a pipeline of work going forward. You know, we came out of COVID, we had the lockdown, and we had to ensure that industry kept going. I mean—

Mr HIBBINS: But is it now going to be a permanent part? It is kind of like there is this sort of creep. Okay, you introduced it on the basis of COVID, but now you are saying, 'Look, this is going to be a permanent part of the planning scheme'. It is no longer in response to COVID.

Mr WYNNE: Sorry, I am not sure what your question is. Are we going to keep going with it?

Mr HIBBINS: Well, there is kind of like a bit of planning creep there and centralisation creep by saying, 'Look, we've got to do this because of COVID, but now it is going to be permanent'.

Mr WYNNE: Yes. I mean, it will be reassessed. The next planning minister may take a different approach.

Mr HIBBINS: Well, that was actually my next question around reviewing and assessing these programs.

Mr WYNNE: Well, it is supposed to be reviewed at the end of the year.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay.

Mr WYNNE: But these were pretty acute circumstances that we found ourselves in. We did speak to local governments, absolutely. We took their input in relation to the project facilitation work. But you know, a billion dollars worth of work being facilitated is really critical to ensuring that there is economic activity still going through the system.

Mr HIBBINS: Now, were these the reforms that were going to deliver the property industry the super profits that the Premier referred to in regard to—remember the social housing levy that was ditched? Now, the Premier seemed to indicate that this was a trade-off between, you know, reforms that were going to give the industry super profits and then taxing those reforms. Now he has said reforms are off the table. Are these different reforms that were going to give the property industry super profits?

Mr WYNNE: No, they are a different set of reforms that—

Mr HIBBINS: What were they?

Mr WYNNE: Well, I will tell you about them. Look, the social housing contribution scheme is not government policy. It will not be government policy; we will not be pursuing this policy at the next election. The government has made its position crystal clear about this, but that does not mean that we do not continue with reforms more generally in the industry.

I talked earlier about the Victorian Planning Authority and what it has done in terms of land release. We have fast-tracked the release of 150 000 properties in the last two terms of the government, a further 95 000 lots in metro Melbourne and 44 000 in regional Victoria, which is their current business plan, and they are on target to do that. We talked about the regional planning hub and the critical importance of that, particularly in rural and regional councils. And the Streamlining for Growth program provides funds to councils for, obviously, housing growth and economic development. But there is a lot more than that. The funding we received in the last budget, the \$111 million that we talked about last time—

Mr HIBBINS: Can I frame it this way. What is not happening because of the abandoned social—

Mr WYNNE: Well, there is plenty happening, and I will tell you about it: \$4.5 million—

Mr HIBBINS: That was not my question, though. The question I asked you was about—you know, the Premier said, 'Well, we were going to do these reforms. Now that's off the table'. What is off the table?

Mr WYNNE: I do not know where you get this. What is this super profits idea? What is this?

Mr HIBBINS: Well, it is the Premier's words. He said, 'Super profits reform is off the table if you're not going to go ahead with the social housing levy'. What are these reforms that are off the table?

Mr WYNNE: No, no, no. That is just not correct. I mean, what the Premier was saying—look, I am not going to get into this conversation with you about the social housing contribution. That conversation is over. I mean, all we were—

Mr HIBBINS: I just want to know what the reforms were.

Mr WYNNE: Well, I am telling you what the reforms are. What the Premier was seeking to say was, ‘Well, you’re making some pretty good profits through the work of this government. We just wanted you to provide a modest contribution back—1.75 per cent. Okay?’. In this game timing is everything, in politics, and its time did not come.

The funding we received in the last budget is really important to this conversation: \$4.5 million to establish the development facilitation program, as I indicated; \$2 million to address underdelivery of infrastructure in growth areas; \$9.2 million to implement planning rules and processes to cut red tape; \$9 million to implement a better planning approvals program to streamline permits; \$7.5 million obviously when we are talking about the regional hubs; \$4 million for better information on the planning system—and on it goes.

Mr HIBBINS: Can I ask—

Mr WYNNE: So it is not as if we have not continued to be extremely active in that reform space, because we simply—

Mr HIBBINS: Is inclusionary zoning on your series of reforms?

Mr WYNNE: I have indicated the position of the government, Mr Hibbins, in relation to that. Let us not muck around with this. This was part of the SARC, as you well know, and that is no longer the policy of the—

Mr HIBBINS: Well, there is a difference. The one that you abandoned is about developers paying a fee. Another form of inclusionary zoning is actually developers, you know, putting in affordable or social housing within their developments themselves.

Mr WYNNE: Well, herein lies the great dilemma of this of course, because we find ourselves in a position now where the development community are frankly at the whim of local government. So, you know, your friends at Yarra, God bless them, may have a view. Darebin may have another view. Port Phillip may have another view.

Mr HIBBINS: It is called democracy.

Mr WYNNE: What we were going to bring was consistency to the process around the development community providing social housing, and unfortunately that opportunity was wiped out. So now we are in a position where we are at the whim of local government. But we are hoping to reach a compact with local government to get a consistent application of what you would call an inclusionary housing scheme, and we continue to work on that so that all sides know what field they are playing on.

Mr HIBBINS: Great. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, Minister and officials, for your time this afternoon. I would like to take you to the topic of renewable energy, something that gets everyone excited, but none more so than Ms Taylor.

Mr WYNNE: Oh, yes.

Ms RICHARDS: I refer you to budget paper 3, page 29, in reference to the Victorian renewable energy target and ask perhaps—

Mr WYNNE: You are sounding a bit croaky.

Ms RICHARDS: I am. I think I am speaking too much. Can you explain to the committee what your department has done to assist government in reaching the targets?

Mr WYNNE: Thanks very much, Ms Richards. Back in 2020 I became the decision-maker for all new planning permit applications for large-scale electricity generation in Victoria—large-scale batteries, major electricity transmission lines and all traditional generation facilities such as thermal, gas and coal; this of course is in addition to wind farms and solar—so ensuring that we as a state are doing everything we can to centralise

decision-making and facilitate these projects. It is working. We are seeing record numbers of projects and approvals.

Since 2015 the government's renewable energy policies and programs have been successful in driving absolutely the growth of renewable energy generation in this state. In 2021 renewable energy produced 32.6 per cent of Victoria's electricity generation, up from 26 per cent in 2020 and 12 per cent in 2015. Since the legislation of the VRET in December 2017 the government has granted approvals to 24 solar farms, five wind farms, eight large-scale batteries and amended permits for five wind farms. This is pretty amazing. This amounts to approvals of over 2000 megawatts—2000 megawatts—of renewable power and over 2500 megawatts of battery storage. We talk about climate—are you going to talk about climate today?

Mr Hibbins interjected.

Mr WYNNE: Of course you will not, because the target that this government is going to deliver by 2030 is quite an extraordinary target, and I am immensely proud of what we are achieving there. We will see what the commonwealth government has got to say about this—the new commonwealth government, the federal government—in the future, but certainly there is no question that Victoria absolutely has led the way. Great for the environment, great for jobs as well, particularly our friends at Keppel Prince in Portland and other manufacturers as well. It is a good story. It is a really good story.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, Minister. I am interested in perhaps understanding and getting some insights from you on how you balance these decisions with other concerns.

Mr WYNNE: Well, obviously in 2019 we did introduce the solar energy guidelines to ensure solar energy facilities are built in the right location, including the requirement to give consideration to potential impacts on agricultural land and also irrigation land particularly for solar. I particularly want to call out the Member for Shepparton, who did some excellent work in that space with us, because we had this inherent conflict potentially going on here where we had people seeking to put in place solar farms on irrigated land where the state had invested an enormous amount of money in irrigation infrastructure upgrade, so it was completely incompatible. That was, I think, a really important body of work that we did there. The protection of irrigation districts—obviously the Goulburn-Murray irrigation district—was really important, which, of course, as we know had received in excess of \$200 million worth of investments. You just cannot put this situation in a vulnerable state.

Further, our government has identified renewable energy zones in the regions to target renewables such as wind and solar in appropriate locations. Of course, my colleague the dynamo Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change is doing that work. We also established the Agriculture Victoria planning and advisory service in December to assist our farmers and councils in better planning outcomes.

Ms RICHARDS: It is interesting to know where they are going.

Mr WYNNE: Well, they are going everywhere, Ms Richards. Many of these, of course, have gone through an EES process, as we know, and everyone has had the opportunity to have a say about them, and that is a good thing. I will just give you a quick burst on where they are. Wind farms—Wimmera Plains, 52; Delburn, 33; and Golden Plains is an amendment currently being challenged in the Supreme Court, 215 turbines. Solar—Cosgrove, Mangalore, Winton, West—no, I have not got that one—Fulham, Hamilton, Cobden, Faraday, Hepburn and Melton. Batteries—Melton, Loy Yang A and B, Latrobe, Chirnside Park and Phillip Island. So it is a very, very active program. As the responsible minister, I am responsible for all of that. Many of these bigger projects, of course, have to go through an EES process, and that is the appropriate channel for consideration, particularly of these particularly large wind farm and indeed, in some cases, solar farm projects.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, Minister. I might leave that there.

Mr WYNNE: Righto. Good on you. Thanks.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Richards. Mr Newbury.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Minister, I asked you about a couple of projects previously in relation to *Plan Melbourne* and how those projects were in line with those objectives. Can I ask one more while I have got you.

Local residents have raised concerns about the planning of the new Union station, which will take place at the former stations for Surrey Hills and Mont Albert. The station entrance will be 4.5 metres from residents' front doors. Did you have any role as planning minister in the approval of that project?

Mr WYNNE: Union station in Windsor?

Mr NEWBURY: Box Hill.

Mr WYNNE: Box Hill. I am sorry; I am going to have to—

Mr NEWBURY: Take it on notice?

Mr WYNNE: I am pretty good at it, but I have got to say I do not know this project. It may in fact be a project that—I am just looking to Dr Homewood there, whether she has got any further advice on this. No, we do not, I am sorry. Hang on. We have got something here. No, it is a level crossing. It is not the level crossing?

Mr NEWBURY: No, station. If you could take that on notice, that would be terrific.

Mr WYNNE: No, I am sorry, I will have to take that one on notice. I am sorry, I do not have any detail on it.

Mr NEWBURY: Secretary, can I ask you a question in relation to page 190 of budget paper 3. The median number of days taken to assess a planning scheme amendment was 45 in 2021–22, up from the predicted 35 days—you can take my word for it.

Mr WYNNE: No, he will not take it on notice; he has got it.

Mr NEWBURY: No, no, I said you can take my word for it. What I am wondering is: why was there that increase? I know that the budget papers suggest that COVID—the catch-all excuse for everything—is used, but we are not actually talking about frontline work, so why has there been such a significant delay?

Mr BRADLEY: Thank you for the question. It has been something which we have discussed with previous estimates, which is recognising that there have been an increasing number of prescribed and ministerial amendments and increasingly complex amendments, which has made the performance against this measure something which has been the subject of review—and the PAEC committee has asked us to have regard to that measure in the past. Certainly the COVID-19 impacts on staff, in terms of their availability, the availability of the workforce itself and the impacts of working remotely, have impacted on performance against that measure, but also resource impacts on staff due to prioritisation of recovery activities and work across the planning groups. So those things have impacted on performance in addition to the complexity. But what we have seen is an improvement in performance during the course of the year, and the year-end result is expected to improve since the result of 71 days due to the implementation of a new reporting framework and a workload management framework. We would expect to see our performance under this measure improve, but we have adjusted the measure going forward to recognise the nature of the kind of amendments that we are receiving on a regular basis.

Mr WYNNE: Yes. So last time it was 71 days, the last time we spoke about this, last year. It is down to 45, but we hope to get back to the target of 35 once we have got people back in. Dr Homewood will assist me with this. Sometimes the delay is because of councils not actually providing full and comprehensive information—so that we have got to go back and forth—which delays things, and sometimes that is unfortunate. But we do have a target of 35, and I think we can have a level of confidence, because certainly we have pretty much halved it, that we can get back to that target of 35. So, Dr Homewood?

Dr HOMEWOOD: And, Minister, there are delays if things are in court, and we have seen an increasing number of matters go to court. That then does not stop the clock; it continues those days. But, as we said, we have been working very hard to bring that assessment of those amendments down.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Secretary, can I take you, on the same page, to the aim to assess planning scheme amendments in 40 days, which is 15 days longer than the 2021 target listed in the department's annual report. Given the easing of restrictions et cetera, why will it take the government longer to assess these amendments?

Mr BRADLEY: Why will it take longer to assess the planning scheme amendments?

Mr NEWBURY: Yes—that is, why has number increased between the report and the budget?

Mr BRADLEY: Sorry, Mr Newbury, if I was not clear, but that was really what I was speaking to in my answer to the first question—

Mr NEWBURY: Oh, sorry.

Mr BRADLEY: which was that we have revised the target. We have recognised the challenge in achieving that target due to the complexity, the numbers going to court cases and those issues that Ms Homewood mentioned. And for that reason, while we will be working as hard as we can to get back to the 35 days exactly as the minister said, we have revised for 2022–23 the target to 40 days, recognising just the complexity and the nature of the increased number of prescribed ministerial amendments.

Mr WYNNE: There were actually more amendments—more amendments, more litigation—and of course COVID as well. The culmination of all three has been quite a challenging environment to be in, I must say.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. You were speaking before, Minister, about the housing tax, and can I just get one clarification—

Mr WYNNE: No.

Mr NEWBURY: from the department—

Mr WYNNE: No.

Mr NEWBURY: I can ask whatever I want.

Mr WYNNE: You can ask anyone you like, but—

Mr NEWBURY: I am going ask a question.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, you have put a proposition—

Mr NEWBURY: I have not actually put any question, Chair, so you cannot cut me off before I have asked a question.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, please do not speak to me in that way.

Mr WYNNE: No, you can ask. It was not a housing tax—that is all I am saying to you.

Mr NEWBURY: Okay. All right.

Mr WYNNE: It was not a housing tax, it was a contribution by industry. It was not a tax. I mean, you chose to put it—

Mr NEWBURY: I mean, you can call it a contribution, I will call it a tax.

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, you can put a proposition. The minister is entitled to answer it.

Mr NEWBURY: Okay.

The CHAIR: Please proceed with your relevant question.

Mr WYNNE: It is not a tax. Go on, ask away.

Mr NEWBURY: Secretary, the minister said it is dead. Is the department doing any work, consulting in any way—is there any departmental money being spent in any way—in relation to what the minister calls a contribution?

Mr BRADLEY: No.

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. I will leave it there, with 20 seconds left.

Mr WYNNE: Good on you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Newbury.

Mr WYNNE: No is no.

Mr NEWBURY: I just want it on the record.

Mr WYNNE: Good, and I gave it to you on the record: no. It was not a tax, it was a contribution.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: I think it would be helpful for me to understand more about Digital Twin Victoria. If I can refer you to budget paper 4, page 58, there is a table of existing projects for DELWP with the first line item identifying 'Digital Twin Victoria (statewide)'. Could you explain what the Digital Twin Victoria entails?

Mr WYNNE: Thank you very much, Ms Taylor. Some people might call me a Luddite when it comes to some of these things, but let me tell you: this digital twin is unbelievable. We are twinning with our friends in Ararat—

Mr RICHARDSON: You are what?

Mr WYNNE: Twinning with them—combining with our friends in Ararat—to pilot the digital twin. I mean, it is quite an extraordinary program, and I am thrilled about it. The digital twin represents a record—when you see it, you are going to go crazy; it is quite extraordinary—\$37.4 million investment in digital twin and spatial innovation over four years. It includes the \$35.2 million I announced in July, which followed a successful Fishermans Bend proof of concept and a \$2.2 million statewide pilot. The program is being led by Land Use Victoria. We have partnered with the CSIRO—of course our most pre-eminent national science organisation—to develop the Digital Twin Victoria platform. The platform uses technology from the CSIRO data and digital arm, Data61. Digital twin organises visually large masses of data in one virtual place to create a 3D—can you believe this?—digital version of the world. The vision of the program is set to create a digital twin of Victoria online.

A member interjected.

Mr WYNNE: What are you laughing at? This is sensational.

Mr NEWBURY: I think you could just get a globe, but that is okay.

Mr WYNNE: Oh, dear. 3D—don't you get that bit? 3D.

Mr NEWBURY: How much did that cost?

Mr WYNNE: I told you, listen up: \$37.4 million we are investing in it.

Mr NEWBURY: A globe is about 50 bucks.

Mr WYNNE: It is a beauty, and we will be launching some other bits of this shortly. Do not distract me. There are already more than 4000 state and national datasets in Digital Twin Victoria, and the program is based on building six core capabilities that relate to data, platforms, skills, analytics, governance and community engagement.

In the 4 minutes I have got left, we went out to a farmer in Ararat where we actually talked a bit about the work we are doing with the Ararat council—I will have a bit more to say about that shortly. He was absolutely over the moon about just how powerful this is to assist him in being able to plan for his crops: where they should go, where the productive land is, where he should not be farming, when he should be planning particular crops, what meteorological data looks like on a trend line. I mean, this is something else. This is an amazing, amazing piece of technology which, I tell you, this farmer just could not believe. We are going to do a lot more work piloting with the Ararat council, who have been absolutely magnificent.

Mrs McARTHUR: Very good council.

Mr WYNNE: Wonderful, and a wonderful mayor. I was out there with her.

Mrs McARTHUR: Great mayor.

Mr WYNNE: Terrific. So we are going to do some fantastic work in terms of the digital work. When we piloted Fishermans Bend, when you think about this—I will not go there, I promise you; too much work I could do there—in terms of being able to look at Fishermans Bend in a 3D form of what it is going to look like in 10 or 15 years time, fly-throughs, the whole lot. Honestly, it is phenomenal.

Mr RICHARDSON: At least they've got a school now.

Mr WYNNE: They have got a school there. They have got some open space there now. Let us not go there; it is too painful for some. It is really, really powerful, and particularly for planners, who are then able to actually visualise what these buildings and what this area is going to look like in 10 or 15 years time. It is a phenomenal program. I recommend it to you. Sadly, I will not be able to see too much of it launched in my time, but there you go.

Ms TAYLOR: Great. Okay. I feel like you have probably explained many of the benefits of the Digital Twin program. Was there anything else you wanted to share on that? Otherwise it might be helpful for the committee to understand more about the eComply pilot to assist industry.

Mr WYNNE: Well, yes. Digital Twin Victoria's eComply framework was developed through the pilot project, delivered in partnership with Development Victoria, the Brimbank City Council, Office of Projects Victoria and of course the Victorian Building Authority. The partnership engaged a consortium led by one of Australia's fastest growing property technology startups, Archistar, together with Jacobs and AAM. EComply uses Digital Twin technology to assist in assessing a potential development's compliance, for instance, with the small lot code in greenfields developments. Requirements such as setbacks, allowable heights, open space, permeability and overshadowing can easily be assessed and areas of non-compliance identified in the platform. So you go into it, you look at a development, you see how it sits within the landscape there. What are its setbacks like? Does it actually overshadow? Incredibly powerful in terms of councils being in a position, and indeed planners more generally, to ensure that when developments do start to roll out they do actually comply because you can actually look at them in their digital form and see how they fit into the broader urban context. Incredibly powerful. Wonderful, wonderful investment. It is a beauty.

Ms TAYLOR: I have 30 seconds; I might leave it there.

Mr WYNNE: Righto. Good idea.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Taylor. Mrs McArthur.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Minister, you mentioned the EES before.

Mr WYNNE: Yes.

Mrs McARTHUR: Last week we had the energy minister here, who basically brushed off all responsibility for the western Victoria transmission project, claiming that the EES process would solve every issue. As the minister responsible, what do you say to the thousands of landowners and residents along the 190-kilometre route whose lives will be blighted by the 500-kilovolt, 80-metre-high monster towers carving their way through communities?

Mr WYNNE: Thanks very much for the question. I am not surprised you asked me this question. This is obviously a very significant project, and again, this is a question of finding a balance, isn't it, and getting it right? I mean, we need to ensure that we do have an adequate—to use a rather crude term—pipe down which all of this renewable energy can come and be pumped back into the system more generally. I think people absolutely understand it; I do not think anyone debates it.

Mrs McARTHUR: No.

Mr WYNNE: I mean, the question is where and how.

Mrs McARTHUR: How do you transmit it?

Mr WYNNE: Yes, where and how, and I absolutely get that. It is an important project, clearly, to help deliver renewable energy to the state—as we talked about earlier in terms of the projects up in that region. Clearly in 2020 I decided the project needed to have an EES. That is self-evident because, obviously, of its potential to have significant effects across several environmental values and the need to mitigate those effects, including consideration of any feasible alternatives. I have considered public comments on draft scoping requirements before issuing final scoping requirements for the EES, as you know, in December of 2020.

It is a complex project, as I am sure you would concede, and the proponent, AusNet, is not expected to formally submit the materials for assessment until later this year—potentially October is the best estimate we have at the moment—and I strongly encourage anyone with concerns at this time to raise them with AusNet, and a formal opportunity for consultation during the EES will follow. There is no question about that. As you are aware I am sure, the EES that we had at Crib Point, certainly—I mean, I will not be the decision-maker around that, but I think there is no doubt that there will need to be an extension of time, then the normal period for submissions I suspect will have to be extended because there is so much community interest in a project like this. It would be inappropriate for me to prejudge what the next minister will decide to do in relation to that, but what I have established is a good, proper, transparent, robust process for an EES to properly consider all of the views.

Mrs McARTHUR: And, Minister, given there are about 30 of these projects potentially in the pipeline across the state—

Mr WYNNE: Yes.

Mrs McARTHUR: what sort of planning process should be put in place so that we do this in the best possible way that does not impact on the lives, the agriculture, the environment, the community that this above-ground transmission is clearly impacting?

Mr WYNNE: Well, they are the issues that will have to be exercised through the EES process. You know, I mean, I simply put the Crib Point matter to you, where clearly community groups got themselves very, very well organised and ensured that their voice was heard, and I clearly encourage obviously the groups along the western Victoria transmission line to continue to actively engage in the process, because this is a proper process, it is a transparent process and it is an independent process, and everybody's voice needs to be heard in this.

Mrs McARTHUR: Going onto another issue, Minister, are you aware of the serious concerns raised by the Community and Public Sector Union regarding workplace culture at the Victorian Building Authority and the allegation that harassment and bullying contributed to the death of a VBA building inspector?

Mr WYNNE: Yes, I am aware of this matter. This is a very tragic event that has occurred here, and I absolutely send my condolences as the minister. The VBA chair has also engaged actively with this gentleman's partner, and of course we have put in place appropriate supports for staff members at the VBA as well to assist them through what is without a doubt a very tragic event that has occurred here. I do note of course that there will be without doubt—well, these matters have been reported obviously to WorkSafe, which is a statutory requirement. Obviously the coroner has been notified, and the coroner will form a view about what form of investigation needs to be made there. And I do indicate to you that the VBA has begun an independent inquiry into the matter, so obviously it would be wrong for any of us to comment further on that until that work is finished. But I do say that I do absolutely—absolutely—send our full condolences to this gentleman's partner. He has not yet been laid to rest and I think we need to be absolutely respectful of the circumstances of this situation, but I can absolutely assure you that this will be thoroughly investigated. The VBA is going through a transformational situation, but this is a tragic event, a very tragic event.

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes. Thank you, Minister, and I am sure we all send our condolences to the family. Would you be aware of any other cases?

Mr WYNNE: Well, it is a statutory authority. It has its own board, and all of those matters are matters for the board of the authority.

Mrs McARTHUR: And you are attempting to remedy the situation?

Mr WYNNE: Absolutely.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs McArthur; your time has expired. Mr Richardson.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister, and thank you, department representatives, for joining us. I want to take you to the top of your Better Apartments, Minister, and I refer to budget paper 3, page 32, delivering sustainable growth in Melbourne's metropolitan and major activity centres. We are seeing transformation year to year across our communities, not just in the CBD but in suburban areas increasingly and suburban activity centres, with more apartment developments. For the committee's benefit, are you able to outline how the *Better Apartments Design Standards* improve the livability design of apartments in our cities and in our communities?

Mr WYNNE: Thanks, Mr Richardson. As you would be well aware, it has been a very interesting shift in apartment construction. Obviously we have got quite a deal less now in the CBD than what we have had, but we see popping up around our activity centres, around our transport nodes, really high quality medium-density apartment dwellings being built. So if I think about areas like the new apartment complexes that are being built around the Arden transport hub in North Melbourne, just near my football club—going so well as they are—this is the sort of quality of apartment dwellings that you are getting, clustering around these activity hubs. It really is, I think, a perfect example of not only the sorts of commitments a government makes to apartment standards but the leadership that the government has shown, which is then followed by the private sector in terms of the sorts of product they are now bringing to market.

When I first came into this job it was not uncommon to see applications of developments at 45 square metres—like, tiny, tiny developments—where the bedroom only had a sliding door and you could maybe get a double bed into the room and no wardrobe. I remember one of my staff came back from one of these inspections completely horrified to say that you actually had to basically launch yourself into the room, which had no window, no ventilation, and that that was the sort of amenity that people were getting. I mean, I am not a giant, but I am reasonably tall—but I could tell you, you could actually reach up and touch the roof of these places. I mean, these were not the sorts of places that we ought to have in this state. That is why with our first iteration of the apartment guidelines—shock, horror—the development community said, 'Oh, my God, we're going to hell in a handbasket; this is all over'. Well, guess what? They have been adopted in full by the development community more generally. You do not see a 45-square-metre apartment ever anymore in any of the applications that we have.

That is why the second iteration of our apartment guidelines has been so important, and we talked to the development community about that in February of last year. It seemed it sort of slipped a little bit by a few people, but it is a really good project. We announced five new design standards and more green open space in apartment developments—cannot argue with that—which of course makes them more attractive in our neighbourhoods. They follow a 10-month, obviously, public preview of the standards to allow the industry and councils to familiarise themselves with the changes. So I am really pleased with what we have done.

Specifically, the standards do the following: 10 or more apartments will be provided with communal open space with the capacity to plant a canopy tree—not a little thing from Bunnings but a proper canopy tree. They will be designed to avoid wind tunnelling in public spaces and on streets and be finished with high-quality materials that will be maintained over time; I mean, some of the stuff that was getting built there was just not sustainable. They will be finished with high-quality materials and be flexible to provide more usable private open space.

I am really pleased with this set of standards. I mean, they are the second iteration of it, Mr Richardson, as you know. And when you go around now and you see the quality of apartments that we are getting now, industry has actually understood that this quality of apartments is what the market both is looking for and what the market is prepared to pay for, and I think it is a terrific development.

Mr RICHARDSON: Obviously a lot of these changes were worked through before we hit the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr WYNNE: Yes, they were.

Mr RICHARDSON: How will these designs and standards support future residents in a post-COVID world?

Mr WYNNE: Well, the really interesting thing here is we have learned lessons relevant to better apartment designs from how people live and work in their homes, because now people are responding in a different way. You know, sometimes people are working a couple of days—two or three days—at home and a couple of days maybe here in the city or in one of the regional hubs. People are spending more time there and converting their homes to basically be offices as well as their homes. And you now see developers building properties, apartments in particular, which actually have in effect a third office, because they have recognised that the COVID response has meant that people are in fact building into the design of their apartments a relatively modest but separate office, so you are not working at your kitchen table all day with the rest of your family. Having green open space and communal areas at hand is really important in terms of both amenity but also people's mental health and their physical health. We think that we have actually got this right, and we think industry have responded really favourably to it, so I am really pleased with these two iterations of our apartment standards.

Mr RICHARDSON: I will leave it there. Thanks, Minister.

Mr WYNNE: Thanks very much, Mr Richardson.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Richardson. Mr Barton.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Chair. Minister, \$6 million has been allocated to the program 'Unlocking new communities and affordable housing'. This is a \$1 million decrease in funding compared to last year. How many new homes are expected to be delivered as part of this program in 2022–23?

Mr WYNNE: Sorry, I have just got to find that one. What number?

Mr BARTON: Budget paper 3, page 27.

Mr WYNNE: We will just go to that if we can. We are shuffling away here. I may have to take it on notice, Mr Barton. I would be horrified—my last question here in PAEC. Am I going to ask Mr Moseley to come up and answer this on my behalf or not? I think I might have to. No pressure, Stuart—the last question in PAEC for me. Sorry, Rod, I have not got it for you. Stuart is the CEO of VPA.

Mr MOSELEY: Thank you, Minister, for the invitation. The unlocking new communities and housing program in 2021–22 initiated three new greenfield projects and saw four through to completion—that is, the funding was applied to help achieve those goals—and it delivered land for 50 000 new homes and 32 000 new jobs in 2021–22. In 2022–23 that funding will be applied—\$4 million to structure plans in Melbourne's growth corridors and \$2 million to projects in regional Victoria.

Mr WYNNE: So in 2021–22—we got it in the end, Rod—the Melton East, Casey Fields and South Bendigo regional employment precincts, and as Stuart has said, the \$6 million will go to \$4 million allocated to Melbourne for our greenfield projects and \$2 million for regional Victoria, and that is why that investment is incredibly important, particularly in those regional areas that I talked about. On top of that of course we are also going to have to plan for the Commonwealth Games in some of those regional cities as well, so that is why this sort of funding is going to be very, very critical to that work going forward.

Mr BARTON: Minister, I asked this question because only yesterday I was in regional Victoria—

Mr WYNNE: Where were you?

Mr BARTON: Nagambie.

Mr WYNNE: A beautiful part of the world.

Mr BARTON: A good place for the rowing, obviously.

Mr WYNNE: Yes, I am not sure what has happened there—whether the rowing is actually going there or not.

Mr BARTON: We might have to rethink about that. This project supports precinct planning for high-priority areas to maintain a pipeline of land supply. How does the government ensure that the homes built on this land are affordable?

Mr WYNNE: Well, it is a very good question. It goes to our earlier conversation. It goes to a conversation about ensuring that we have adequate land supply. I mean, there are three or four crucial dynamics to affordability. The first is that—

Mr BARTON: Because it is booming out there, isn't it?

Mr WYNNE: Sorry?

Mr BARTON: Regional areas are booming, the prices.

Mr WYNNE: Regional areas are booming, and as I indicated earlier, I was in country Victoria only recently where every conversation I had was about saying, 'We think it's fantastic we've got population coming here; where are we going to put them? We need key worker housing. How are we going to deal with that?'. So today what I think I have provided to you is a fairly comprehensive answer from the housing portfolio point of view in terms of the Big Housing Build, the rental affordability program that we are putting out there, the work that we are doing through our regional hubs, trying to ensure that we get good strategic planning out there, and working with Stuart and his team alongside our regional councils to look at the question of where you have got contiguous parcels of land to the broader established community that you can get that land released out, because it is land that can be developed. We saw excellent examples of that out there, but obviously it is also about bringing all of those kinds of dynamics together that is key to this. So it is about strategic planning, it is about land release, it is about the state being in that space with the Big Housing Build and it is about the affordable rental housing proposition that we are putting in place but also ensuring that the development community comes in behind us working in concert obviously with the government, the VPA, my department and local government together. That is actually the answer to this, but land supply is absolutely fundamental to it.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Minister. I will just go back to one in my local electorate, in fact. I will refer you to budget paper 3, page 32. 'Delivering sustainable growth for a resilient Victoria' refers to planning in appropriate locations in Melbourne. Obviously the Nillumbik and Manningham green wedges are very important to my constituents in the eastern parts of Melbourne. While we are experiencing enormous pressures for growth, can you explain what is being done to make sure we protect these green wedges?

Mr WYNNE: As you know, Mr Barton, we have done extensive work in this space. In 2018 our election commitment confirmed protection of green wedges and strategic agricultural land. We will protect the green wedges from overdevelopment and secure our important farming areas close to Melbourne. Green wedges and agricultural land within 100 kilometres of Melbourne are critical to our economic contribution—\$5.7 billion in economic activity—and they employ a lot of people, so again it is about finding the appropriate balance. We have received more than 800 submissions to the discussion paper, and absolutely the right to farm will be fundamental to this and ensuring that we have a very clear articulation of where any development can occur in the green wedges. It is an excellent body of work, and we will have more to say about that in the very near future. Green wedges are part of the planning regime for our state.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Minister.

Mr WYNNE: And I thank you all very much, Chair, for my final PAEC.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and we thank you for your final appearance at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee after so many years. 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.

We thank all ministers and officers who have given evidence to the committee today as well as Hansard, the committee secretariat and parliamentary attendants, as well as the hospitality, security and cleaning staff who have looked after all of us.

The committee will resume its consideration of the 2022–23 budget estimates on Friday.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

Committee adjourned.