

## Questions on Notice - Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic (19 May 2020)

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Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Minister. There have been a number of environmental decisions that the Government are required to make by law. I would like to get an understanding of if in fact these decisions that have been delayed are actually related to COVID. First of all, **the Government was due to respond to the 2018 Victorian state of the environment report in March and failed to do so. Was this because of COVID-19? And when can the public expect a response to that report?**

Ms NEVILLE: Look, I do not have that detail with me. **I will take that on notice.** I would say, though, if you think about the summer, the figure I gave you about the State Control Centre, and you think about who are the biggest contributors to managing the State Control Centre, particularly during bushfires but after that, it is DELWP staff. So overwhelmingly they are the ones who are staffing the State Control Centre. Does it impact on business as usual? It does; there is no question about that. Other departments contribute as well—justice et cetera—but it is overwhelmingly DELWP. I would suggest that, rightly, a decision was made at that time that we had a state of disaster, we had significant bushfires, bushfire recovery, and I know that that probably more than anything has impacted on DELWP's capacity to just do business as usual.

### Answer:

*Under the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003 the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change is responsible for tabling the Victorian Government response to the State of the Environment report on the first Parliament sitting date after the 12 months since the report was released.*

*The 2018 State of the Environment Report was tabled in Parliament on 19 March 2019, thus the legislated tabling date for the Victorian Government's response is the first sitting date after the 19 March 2020 – which would have been 5 May 2020, according to the Parliament yearly sitting dates released at the beginning of 2020.*

*However, on 23 April Parliament was recalled two weeks early for a one day emergency sitting to pass vital legislation to assist the ongoing response to the coronavirus pandemic.*

*Given the current situation, the Victorian Government's response to the State of the Environment 2018 report will be tabled in Parliament at the earliest feasible opportunity..*

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Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Minister. We will go through some other decisions. **The Government was supposed to make announcements about new national parks in Victoria's central west in response to recommendations from Victoria's independent environment assessment council but has failed to do so. Is this not being made in relation to COVID, and when can we expect a response or a decision?**

Ms NEVILLE: I will get you a bit more on when it is likely, but I would probably go back to my answer just before, Mr Hibbins. We have had an unprecedented bushfire season, as you are aware, and that raises a whole lot of issues. We have got a Federal royal commission going on about bushfires, so DELWP are part of that—massive energy going into that. We have got a pandemic on at the moment. Are people focused on other issues? Yes, I think that is right, but that does not mean those

issues you are raising are not important. I think it probably means that there are delays in those rather than them not coming. It is about just making sure that other things that are really important around pandemics, royal commissions, bushfires are priorities at this particular time.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Minister. Any further information that can be provided on notice would be helpful.

**Answer:**

*The Victorian Government's Response to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's (VEAC) Central West Investigation Final Report has been delayed and we will confirm the timeframe for finalising it shortly.*

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Ms VALLENCE: Thank you. Minister, on Victoria's alpine resorts, when will Victoria's alpine resorts get certainty about the snow season? I noticed just earlier in May that the season was still being assessed, and you also announced that you would provide some support—if you could provide information on what that support is to Victoria's alpine resorts and when they will receive certainty.

Ms NEVILLE: Yes, so look—

The CHAIR: I am sorry, Minister, to cut you off there, but the Member's time has expired.

Ms VALLENCE: On notice?

**Answer:**

*On Sunday 24 May 2020, the Victorian Government announced that the 2020 snow season will commence from 22 June 2020. This provides certainty to the alpine industry and allows time to ensure plans are in place to ensure people can safely enjoy skiing facilities and resort venues safely. My Department is working closely with the Alpine Resorts and industry to support the Chief Health Officer's decision making and ensure a comprehensive framework and COVIDSafe Plans for each resort.*