

CORRECTED VERSION

SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LAND DEVELOPMENT

Melbourne— 19 November 2007

Members

Mr D. Davis

Mr P. Hall

Mr P. Kavanagh

Mr E. O'Donohue

Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr B. Tee

Mr E. Thornley

Chair: Mr D. Davis

Deputy Chair: Mr B. Tee

Staff

Secretary: Mr R. Willis

Research Officer: Ms C. Williams

Witnesses

Ms E. Johnstone, senior planning adviser, and

Ms L. Thomas, Melbourne 2030 liaison officer, Municipal Association of Victoria.

The CHAIR — I declare the public hearing of the Legislative Council Select Committee on Public Land reopened. Today's hearing is in relation to Victorian government policies relating to the sale and development of public land. I welcome the MAV personnel, Liz Johnstone and Lisel Thomas.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act 1975 and is subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. You will be provided with a proof copy of the transcript in the next couple of days, and you will be able to make any minor corrections to that. Would you open with just a short presentation, and then the committee would like to ask some questions. Thank you for your submission.

Ms JOHNSTONE — Thank you, and thank you for the invitation to come back and speak with you again in support of our submission. At the outset I would like to declare that, as a member of the community, I also am a member of the Victorian Coastal Council. I do that having heard some of the questions that related to coastal matters in the previous submitters presentation. I am also the chair of the Central Coastal Board, but I am not here in any way in that capacity. I am here as a full-time employee of the Municipal Association of Victoria, but I just think it is appropriate that that be noted.

I understand you have raised a number of questions that you would like us to talk a bit more about today, and they are around the process by which surplus land is identified and the lack of, I suppose, local government involvement in that process as a key level of government and provider of a range of services and facilities; and also the complexity of the legislative framework regarding the sale and alienation of public land. From the previous discussion it was quite clear that the MAV would see the definition of public land as broad. We would see it as a broad definition because, from a community perspective, they are not too concerned about which level of government or which piece of legislation — —

The CHAIR — An archaic definition. Keep going.

Ms JOHNSTONE — Or how that land is enabled for public use and enjoyment. They really do not have much concern about whose responsibility it is — it is government, and they wish government would more often get its act together for a common purpose and common good. I suppose councils do find the operating environment and legislative environment they work within to be complex and often constraining, and of course there are checks and balances there.

The other item you have identified is looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the current administrative framework regarding the sale and alienation of public land, and the requirement of councils to purchase public land at full market rates. Obviously that issue is compounded where councils have had a longstanding role either in the provision of that land in the first place or in adding value to the land in terms of locating service facilities on that site, and often they have borne a cost in terms of its ongoing maintenance, repair and improvement over time which is often not reflected in the market price.

Limitations in terms of tenure arrangements for council-managed public land — often they are only able to offer uses or tenure to community clubs and facilities or service points that are really part of the community, and they really would like to be able to offer them more security of tenure in the longer term. Just as there needs to be a long-term and integrated approach to the identification of future land to service government's needs or to provide for the acquisition or reservation of land for, say, rail provision in the longer term, it needs to be a similarly integrated and coordinated discussion across levels of government to identify land that is surplus and able to be sold. Councils have also raised issues about their own capacity and ability to play in the marketplace to enable the purchase of land.

We have gone through our submission and identified a number of points under those topics that you have given us. We are able to provide that in writing to you, or I can take 10 or 15 minutes now and go right through it slowly.

The CHAIR — Yes. If you want to refer to it, we have got a copy of the submission. You have an abbreviated set of points there.

Ms JOHNSTONE — Yes, we have chopped it up a bit.

Ms PENNICUIK — Can we get a copy of that too? It does not have to be now.

Ms JOHNSTONE — Yes, we can forward a copy after today, that would be fine. And do you want to have discussion as we go and deal with one point at a time?

The CHAIR — Just finish, and then we will ask you questions after that.

Ms JOHNSTONE — Okay then. Specifically with regard to the concerns about the current process by which surplus land is identified, our key recommendations there would be that councils need to have early advice — as early as possible — of any intention to sell that public land and that they really need a minimum of 60 days to make an informed view and to also perhaps have the consultation that is required with the community to see whether or not they are actually in the position to be able to afford to buy that land. Councils should be given a formal opportunity to have an input prior to the state government deciding that those assets are surplus.

We feel councils need the time because it is a complex property matter. Often the acquisition of one site will lead to rationalisation or disposal elsewhere or have implications for service delivery elsewhere. It is not a quick decision about ‘Do you want to buy it? If so, here is the price’. We also think that the councils’ own due diligence would require it. They need time to actually do the proper site inspections and make their own inquiries as to the value of the land.

Currently the process within government does not seem to be a broad assessment of what other community objectives might be currently being served by that land or to which that land could contribute in future. It seems to me that the early involvement of council in that process would be helpful to ensure that it is a wider and more forward-looking assessment of the future role of that land.

We also think it could be a reciprocal process. Councils have quite stringent legislative requirements for their own identification of surplus assets and their disposal. It seems that they could be broadened to include a requirement to advise and consult other levels of government as to whether that land is needed for any of their strategic purposes. We are not saying, ‘Just include us’, we are saying that it could be a balanced approach.

Lisel, please feel free to add points if I miss anything. The second question you asked was around one of the 2030 initiatives, 617, which was to change the policy that governs the disposal of government land and buildings to reflect the best use rather than the highest price achievable. I have touched on that. It is also about basing the policy on socially responsible criteria.

You asked the MAV what progress has been made by government to achieve this initiative. Obviously we have not actively researched that question. As you would be aware, there is the first of the five-yearly reviews of the implementation of Melbourne 2030. Our observation would be that, particularly through the focus on transit cities and principal and major activity centres, there has been more cooperation by councils with parts of government. It is definitely not an easy integrated whole-of-government view around those centres and the level of interaction across government varies. The role of local government in structure planning is paramount and so the success to some extent is driven by the early input of government agencies to that structure planning process.

One of the concerns of councils has been that they do not have that sort of helicopter view of the relative roles that those centres play, not just in terms of a retail function but also an employment function or a cultural function or even in terms of their linkages through bike paths and open space and how they contribute to other state policy objectives. Whilst there has been good work around housing in terms of looking at the state strategy across Melbourne and breaking that down into regional housing statements and then local policy, that has not been the approach for a range of other policy objectives.

Again, we think involvement with councils early in the process to identify surplus land would be worthwhile here. We would also say that it is not just a service objective or a social objective; it is also the environmental services or benefits that land might provide that may need to be taken into account. I do think Melbourne 2030 provides quite a useful integrated planning framework when we are into phase 2. Phase 1 was really about getting the policy in place to some extent and starting to build the mechanisms to give effect to it. I hope that will be strengthened.

The next question is about funding models to assist council assemble land. There are opportunities for councils, particularly around mechanisms which are not annualised but which provide more longer term support. A lot of these objectives need to be delivered over quite a significant period of time, and yet political cycles and funding cycles tend to not support that longstanding commitment and investment. We have identified some mechanisms in our submission that might be worth exploring — as I have said, grants, particularly those that fund outcomes over a

sustained period or a longer term horizon rather than an annual process. Whilst councils have been asked to identify their own land, there might be mechanisms to engage across government to identify their rights or government-owned land — did I say government-owned land? — public land.

The CHAIR — Public land of all types.

Ms JOHNSTONE — Yes. That can contribute to these objectives. Long-term leases, I think, are a useful mechanism that could be explored, that would avoid the need for sale. Also perhaps a trust fund or other mechanism could be investigated that provides for some value capture, I suppose, for some of the moving public land and assets to meet community needs as they change over time.

The complexity is a reality. You asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the current framework. I suppose one of the strengths is that it does enable quite a quick realisation of the full market value of land that is surplus and has been identified as being surplus. Obviously, the weakness is that it might not have fully considered alternative purposes or needs that are not yet known for land. I think personally that we are in changing times. Councils are grappling with quite a number of policy issues that were not as front-of-mind just 5 or 10 years ago; productive land close to Melbourne, for example, may well become increasingly important in the medium term than might have been foreseen 10 or 15 years ago.

As to the complexity of the legislative framework, we did not do a full analysis of that. I guess that is a matter we thought the committee would be looking into in some detail. We do know that councils tend to learn by doing; they tend to learn by their trip-ups to some extent. It is a difficult area for them, and particularly for those councils that do not have the capacity to retain in-house legal advice or opinions by advice when they need it.

We have not made specific recommendations to you about how to simplify the administrative framework, but we would be eager to look at any recommendations the committee makes that do, I suppose, give councils a stronger voice in the identification of surplus land and enable them to acquire or use that land through other mechanisms than purchase at market price, particularly as needs might change over time.

Ms THOMAS — I think it is also worth remembering that community perception of the value of public land often has little to do with who owns or manages land. The current processes required to transfer or sell public land from one government entity to another can lead to very high levels of community anxiety and concern, and that may occur in a situation where the land will remain in public use. So there is enormous concern and community anxiety purely because the land is moving from one government entity to another.

The CHAIR — It creates the process itself?

Ms THOMAS — Yes.

Ms JOHNSTONE — We did note in our submission that under the Local Government Act, councils can transfer, sell or lease land to the Crown without needing to provide public notice, and in that case the legislation is clearly set as an enabling piece of legislation that allows that surplus land to go back to the state, and it seems to me that there might be a model that could be also worked in other ways that enabled councils to lease or purchase or have that state land transferred to them.

I have mentioned briefly the transfer of land or the ability for councils to purchase land at full market price, and that has been raised, I understand, by a number of councils in their submissions to this inquiry. You asked the MAV whether we had raised that matter with the state government and whether we were aware that the state government had investigated that with councils.

I am not aware in detail of the history. My professional view would be that the MAV seeks guidance from its members at two state councils each year where resolutions are put, and that informs our policy priorities. I am quite sure if I was to go back through past state council decisions, there would be a number of relevant state council motions to this matter. Whether they have only brought the matter to government's attention or it has led to other action, I am not aware. I could not find any current project other than this opportunity that progresses this topic.

Whether full market rates are appropriate I suppose is a question for this committee, in what situation those rates are appropriate and in what situations they could be discounted. Some of the things we would suggest are relevant would be around the community benefit that the land provides and, when those community benefits are continuing,

it seems to me that either a long-term lease arrangement or a nominal sum might be appropriate. Often it is the cumulative impact of a number of decisions over time. I think Stonnington mansion might be an example of that — or even St Helliers, it seems to me something particular to tertiary institutions, perhaps — where a decision in the past of transferring that asset across carried with it the authority of that separate legal entity to do as it chose with the asset to achieve its agreed purpose. So whilst the education services continued, they did not continue from that site in that form, and it seems to me there needs to be a mechanism that actually then when those assets are being — —

The CHAIR — Claws it back somehow; is that what you are saying?

Ms JOHNSTONE — Or provides an opportunity for the asset to come back to the public for public purposes rather than the public needing to play into the market, so it just seems to me that it is not simply a question alone for the holder of the asset, but is probably more a question of a requirement, I suppose, for the holder of the asset to go through a process prior to them being able to dispose of it as an unencumbered asset on their books.

We did raise short-term tenure arrangements, and we are recommending that, particularly for public land that is used for community level open space and those things, councils be empowered to manage it, that they be able to enter into longer-term tenure arrangements to give valued users of that space security of tenure, and also that any costs that council has incurred through management or improvement to that space be recognised if it was to be sold.

The last question that you raised was around the City of Darebin who identified the need for that longer term strategic coordinated approach to the sale of public land across departments, and you asked how the MAV would describe the current process and what changes could be made. I think I have touched on the changes that could be made. Essentially, we need to take an integrated approach across both levels of government and we need to be more broadly informed around the benefits that that land provides rather than the direct benefit associated with its primary use.

I think the MAV would describe the current process as not providing sufficient time for councils to adequately respond. That is based on one objective of realising the highest and best value in exchange for a public asset which, whilst it is a responsible objective for government, it should not be the sole objective, and I think we would describe the process as lacking some flexibility for councils to negotiate other outcomes or a holding pattern when they may well know that in 10 or 15 years that land might be required for other purposes. We will provide these notes to you by email after the meeting, thank you.

The CHAIR — I thank the MAV for its submission and your additional piece of information today. It is helpful and comprehensive. It fits closely with our terms of reference, and I certainly think the MAV has a very important place here.

One of the key questions, it seemed to me talking to some of my local councils and others, is the process by which councils are now developing public land and public open space policies across their municipal districts, and they are beginning to do that in a very systematic way; I reference Boroondara, and Bayside is in the process at the moment. Is there a role for that process to be, as it were, coordinated with probably federal and state governments, but also, it seems to me, to take account of opportunities to add to the stock of public open space? It is a long-winded question but I am trying to put a number of aspects of it — and I say that also in the light of Melbourne 2030 and the committed policy of putting another million people in Melbourne. It seems to me frankly that — this is my view rather than the committee's view — with more people and greater density, the need to identify public land in its various forms and to preserve it increases. I do not know what your thoughts are on those couple of points?

Ms JOHNSTONE — I think it is clear that if private open space per household diminishes and as household size diminishes the pressure on the public land increases, and with the changing climatic conditions the resilience of open space to cope with that increased pressure and uses similarly diminishes. You also have more coordinated and active use of public open space for fitness trainers, personal trainers, Tai Chi, a whole range of cultural events and even in some cases, farmers markets. The range of uses of public open space is increasing. I would refer you back to the comments we made about the need for some guidance at a state or regional level about open space.

The CHAIR — You think a council level is not large enough to do that or you think councils should take the lead?

Ms JOHNSTONE — I think councils can do very well in terms of managing their own open space networks and providing different parks to provide different opportunities for different types of recreation. I think they are very good at identifying habitat corridors that might cross municipal boundaries, bike paths and trails and those things and working in a coordinated way on those. What is enough open space for the future population of Melbourne? What type of open space that is and where should it be is a policy question for government, not for a council independently. Some councils will obviously have more than enough, and that perhaps is a benefit of history. Some councils will have a great need for improved public open space.

The CHAIR — Should there be, for example, financial support from government to undertake those assessments that some councils are taking now or is that only one aspect? I am just trying to understand exactly how this should operate, in your view?

Ms JOHNSTONE — I think it is different for different councils.

The CHAIR — Should there be a register of public land so this is an identification, as it were, of opportunities?

Ms JOHNSTONE — Most councils would have on their asset registers the public land that they own and manage. Most councils would have identified in their planning schemes 'public use' land whether that be riparian or coastal or state national parks.

The CHAIR — What about state government land or indeed federal government land that may be a prospect for a land use change or sale?

Ms JOHNSTONE — I think for a council to build the case about the requirement for them to need and provide future open space that is currently not yet provided is where it is more difficult. Traditionally it has been linked to subdivision which had a notional 5 per cent of the value of the development or the land to be provided. 'Subdivision' implied — whether that is the right instrument, I do not know any more. It seemed to work well for a long period of time but it also can lead to not a particularly well strategically located — —

The CHAIR — It does not work well with infill perhaps?

Ms JOHNSTONE — That is correct.

Ms PENNICUIK — Thank you, Ms Johnstone. I just want to talk a little bit about the process. You identified that councils would need earlier advice on the disposal of surplus land and you need to be having input into that, which sounds like a very good thing. You said you needed a minimum of 60 days; I have two questions about that. What is the time frame you usually are getting?

Ms JOHNSTONE — I think it is normally under 30, isn't it?

Ms THOMAS — Offers of sale must be accepted or rejected within 30 days, but often it is greater than that. It is not always just 30 days that is offered to councils. There is another process — where is my reference to it? In the Victorian Guide to Regulation the statutory period for submissions is 28 days but government policy is to allow 60 days.

Ms JOHNSTONE — The decision to purchase land cannot be made without a council resolution or it would be unlikely that the council would delegate that matter to a CEO, and councils generally meet monthly so you have a meeting cycle that already presents some constraint in terms of timing. Most real estate agents do not give less than 60 days for advertising, do they?

Ms PENNICUIK — But it is not just getting the council together to make the decision; it is then consulting with communities. To me 60 days seems like the barest minimum because if you are dealing with community they cannot always react like that.

Ms JOHNSTONE — I guess there would be two steps in the process perhaps. Where the council has some involvement in the decision as to whether it is surplus to policy requirements, not just to a particular requirement of the manager of the land, which ideally the council would either be informed by recent community consultation or some strategic work, and they would know that that potentially provides an opportunity that meets a

need. In the absence of that then they would need time to consult and then there would be the second part of the equation: if we are to buy it, how do we negotiate that?

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes, so really 60 days would be the barest minimum particularly if you do need to go out for wider consultation?

Ms JOHNSTONE — I think that is fair to say, yes.

Ms PENNICUIK — I asked the representatives from the Department of Sustainability and Environment a question about community input, and they said they do identify groups. In your experience, or the MAV's experience — you are probably not going to say no — is the community consulted widely enough?

Ms JOHNSTONE — It is really hard for me to make a judgement on that. Councils have not said they have not been consulted, and whether that carries with it a responsibility then for the councils to go and liaise with those community groups I suppose is unclear; or whether talking to council is deemed to have met that purpose. Most councils will tell you that that is not enough, they need to check in and engage.

Ms PENNICUIK — Earlier, Ms Johnstone, you said it was hard to comment about the complexities, but I wondered if you could identify — we are talking about the complexities of the legislative framework in dealing with this whole issue — maybe the two outstanding issues that you think are involved?

Ms JOHNSTONE — I guess it is the status of the land and the purpose to which it is being reserved, and then the parameters around either having that changed to enable another use to continue, because often whilst council might have an interest in land it might be for another purpose. My understanding is there are myriad purposes to which public land can be reserved and used. And then there are also often planning requirements that might go with the change of use, even though that use might still be a community-based use or for a community purpose. If it is public land, there are also restrictions on how tenure is able to be given. This committee would probably be aware of the difficulties councils are faced with even with the Retail Tenancies Act for those small — generally — component of club-based activities that might be deemed commercial. It is complex.

Ms PENNICUIK — Those are a few key ones. I might come back to that.

Mr THORNLEY — I do not have any questions, but I want to put on the record my appreciation for the work that you have put into this submission. Not all of the submissions we get are big-picture, policy-oriented in the way that this is; some of them tend to detail particular grievances about particular decisions, and this has clearly had a lot of work into it. Whilst I do not agree with all parts of it, I do appreciate the work. Thank you.

Mr TEE — Can I just echo that. As you know, I was not here for most of the submission, but I did read the submission and I thought it was very constructive and provided a lot of opportunities for us to investigate as a committee. It is a very helicopter view, and as you can imagine we spend a lot of time on individual cases which are important, but in terms of our role I think it has given us a number of opportunities, and I want to thank you for that.

Mr O'DONOHUE — I echo those comments. Can I ask you to make a comment on green wedge management? Just from my own dealings with local councils, especially interface councils, there seem to be some issues with green wedge management plans and having the resources, first of all, to complete those plans, and then how they are implemented and I suppose what can be perceived to be a lack of clarity about land use in the green wedge.

Ms JOHNSTONE — We prepared a research report, it would be two years ago now, through a survey of councils with responsibilities for green wedge areas, so we are happy to provide that as well, if you would like that.

It seems to me that they change significantly from west to east across Melbourne. The Mornington Peninsula and the Yarra Valley have managed those non-urban areas at a regional scale even before the council's boundaries were changed to reflect that, so to some extent they are facing probably more challenging issues, because there are a range of competing land uses that would like to locate in those high amenity, high-value areas, whereas to the west of Melbourne they are not as highly valued and their value is not as well understood. I think they are different. Councils do — almost the same from east to west — have different capacity to manage it, whether that be their own strategic planning resources or their on-ground environment officers; they do vary. Also some councils with

green wedge responsibilities are predominantly non-urban and will remain so. Not more than say 70 to 75 per cent will remain as primarily agricultural or natural uses.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Can I just interrupt you: are you referring that 70 to 75 per cent to councils by population or by land area?

Ms JOHNSTONE — By land. In fact Mornington Peninsula shire, for example, I think they say 70 to 30, as do most of the interface councils as a group, but then you have also got some councils that have peripheral, if you like, responsibility for some green wedge areas. So whilst the green wedge might be seen cohesively, the management is probably a little bit more disparate.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Is that an issue, do you think? Do you think there should be more consistency in the management of the green wedge? Do you think government should provide resources to allow that to happen?

Ms JOHNSTONE — It would be remiss of me not to attend a committee meeting such as this and say that councils did not need more resources. So yes, they could always do with more support. Sometimes that is the tools to get on with things and a bit more of a facilitative style when they are developing their policy frameworks, rather than being told what they cannot do. Sometimes it would be good to be helped to what you can do. The technical resources: some of the flora and fauna data available to councils is 8 to 10 years old. Some of the mapping layers are pretty poor. Government has that research capacity and has that data available, and easier access to that would be really helpful for councils. Sometimes it is simply some money to get some much-needed work done. Yes, all of the above.

Mr O'DONOHUE — I suppose I will just finish my other comment. My electorate encompasses some of the interface councils. The interface councils have growth pressures and immediate calls and challenges on their resources. It appears to me that sometimes things such as the management of the green wedge gets pushed down the priority list because it is not an immediate pressing challenge. It is in that context that I ask you those questions.

Ms JOHNSTONE — Yes.

The CHAIR — My question is also about green wedges. It seems to me that there are different parcels of land within the wedges. There is private land, there is state government land, sometimes there are parcels of federal government land, and indeed parcels of council land. How do the councils look at this and look at the future of those wedges and protecting them and expanding them in terms of managing their own land on one hand, and ensuring that local management plans like biodiversity plans and so forth on the state government land, which you referred to, fit in with what you are trying to do? It is a complex mix, but I wonder if you could lay that out. What could be done better there?

Ms JOHNSTONE — My observation is that they are generally quite practical and good at developing local policy that is outcome based. The actual owner of the land would inform the strategy more so than the objective being pursued. I do not think there is a range of views, although there might be, around whether or not conservation values can be achieved on public land as well as on private land. I think some private land owners have shown a willingness and an ability to pursue conservation outcomes. Similarly some public land is better managed than others in terms of the management of weeds, feral species and intrusions.

The CHAIR — Are there opportunities there to improve that?

Ms JOHNSTONE — Yes. It probably comes down to a resourcing question, and a question of priorities.

The CHAIR — A coordination question too?

Ms JOHNSTONE — Yes. There is always coordination. There is no point removing weeds from your land if your neighbour is not doing the same. There is a need for coordination across all land tenure and ownership.

The CHAIR — Do councils look at parcels of land in those wedge areas in their broader policies as part of strategic parcels?

Ms JOHNSTONE — Of council-owned land?

The CHAIR — Yes, their own land.

Ms JOHNSTONE — I believe so, yes.

Ms PENNICUIK — Ms Johnstone, you mentioned under point 8 the issue of not having enough time, which we talked a little bit before. You said that one possible solution for some particular issues might be to have a holding pattern, so a decision on something might be delayed. That has been raised by some people on one particular issue that we have been looking at, which is the Devilbend issue. That would have been a solution there — to actually not make a decision until we get a bit further down the track. I wonder whether the MAV has made this recommendation to the government, either on a particular case or in general terms.

Ms JOHNSTONE — We tend not to get involved in a particular site unless a council requests that of us or a state council resolution takes us there. We probably have not made that recommendation. The example that was in my mind was around the sale of school sites in the inner city, which is now re-populating. There are prams everywhere. Schools are now starting to reintroduce boundaries. The gentrification, if you like, of the inner city has seen a lot of church and other traditional providers of community services leave, and there is pressure for aged care. I think it was more in that context of the use that that public land, in our way of thinking of it, provided in terms of school services. Whilst they might not be needed for now, a large holding of lands and buildings to provide other services will be needed in the future, although it might not be needed now. That was more the context than the actual public land for open space and environmental services.

Ms PENNICUIK — That is interesting. I was having that very thought as I rode on the tram passing what used to be the Yarra Park school. I was thinking exactly the same thing: I wonder if all the people who live there will need a school? The other question I had was that you raised the issue of productive land and that that is becoming more of an up-front issue than it has perhaps been. I think it has probably been an issue for about 30 years. I can remember when some parcels of orchards were turned into housing estates in the past and people raised that issue that their productive land was being built over. Has the MAV made any submission or comments to the government about that issue?

Ms JOHNSTONE — No, we have done no work in that area yet. There is a project that we are involved in called Planning for Health and Wellbeing, which is being auspiced by the Planning Institute of Australia and funded by VicHealth, and so it is in that environment that we have had some discussion around the topic. But other than that we have not done any work on it.

The CHAIR — Is there anything else that either of you wanted to put on the record for the committee?

Ms JOHNSTONE — No, just that it is an important topic for councils. They provide a myriad of services to the community. Increasingly government is looking to co-locate and integrate a range of services, for example, to school sites. That to me says that if we do not better integrate local government into the sale and disposal of public land, then it is a bit of an unequal partnership, so councils would be keen to work more closely with government on this.

Ms THOMAS — I suppose we should also clarify that the submission was prepared by the MAV executive in a draft provided to MAV members for comment. It aims to broadly reflect the views of local government in Victoria, but it does not purport to reflect the exact views of individual councils, so you will hear differently from individual councils.

The CHAIR — Indeed we have a number of submissions from individual councils which have a series of points.

Ms THOMAS — That is correct. We are hoping that the recommendations made in the submission are useful as a starting point for you to do some further exploration and analysis.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned.