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WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied by the departments on behalf of the appropriate ministers

Wednesday, 6, May 2009

Bannockburn: community hub

Raised with: Regional and Rural Development

Raised by: Mr Vogels

Raised on: 28 February 2008

REPLY:

The Bannockburn Community and Cultural Hub project is an exciting development for the Golden Plains Shire Council.

The project involves a major upgrade to the existing Bannockburn Public Hall which will result in a 200-seat multi-purpose facility, including capacity for performing arts and cinema, and the development of a new adjoining community learning centre and neighbourhood house.

The State Government is fully committed to this project as it will result in significant community and economic benefits for residents of the Golden Plains Shire. I approved funding of \$250,000 to Council from the Small Towns Development Fund on 9 April 2008. Furthermore, a grant of \$300,000 was also approved by the Department of Planning and Community Development.

A funding model to deliver this project is based on a partnership approach between all levels of Government. In addition to the significant contribution from State Government, funding commitments have also been sourced from both Local and Federal Governments to enable the achievement of this important project.

This project will result in improved community meeting and social facilities in a town with a current limited provision. Importantly it will also provide a range of learning facilities, small business facilities such as hot desks and information technology, and infrastructure to support regional organisations to deliver employment, training and health services from Bannockburn.

Anglesea: riverbank facilities

Raised with: Regional and Rural Development

Raised by: Mr Vogels

Raised on: 11 March 2008

REPLY:

The approval of State Government funding of \$250,000 to the Surf Coast Shire Council for the Anglesea Riverbank Development Project was based on strong socio-economic benefits, including improving community and tourist infrastructure, providing greater capture for local businesses and increasing the livability of a small coastal town.

It is difficult to obtain full support from all members of the community for projects such as this. However, the Surf Coast Shire Council has demonstrated strong support for the project from both residents and a range of community and business organisations through a comprehensive consultation process.

The Anglesea Community Hub facility was highlighted as a core feature of the Anglesea Riverbank Master Plan, which for the first time established a shared vision to protect the river environment and improve recreational facilities.

As part of the Master Plan process, a comprehensive consultation strategy was developed, which included stakeholder consultation/interviews with approximately 70 individuals and groups. It also involved a survey of property owners in Anglesea that elicited 840 responses, many actually highlighting the need for improved infrastructure and tourist facilities. Further consultation included meetings with the appointed project Steering Committee, a public information day, a stakeholder briefing evening and a four-week period of public exhibition and comment.

Importantly, public comment and feedback during the public exhibition period resulted in a number of amendments to the final master plan. However, following Council's adoption of the Anglesea Riverbank Master Plan, there were no objections to the scope and focus of the identified Community Hub facility.

The Surf Coast Shire Council has communicated with residents throughout the development process and has provided many opportunities for input and feedback. Council has also sought to satisfy concerns through the re-scope of building plans including reducing the size of the building and reducing the number of toilet cubicles.

The project is nearing completion and Council expects the facilities to be available to the community and visitors alike early in 2009.

Housing: energy and water program

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr Scheffer

Raised on: 16 October 2008

REPLY:

The government recognises that low income households need support to become more energy efficient and resilient to a changing climate and low carbon economy.

In addition to the programs mentioned by Mr Scheffer, the Victorian Government funds a number of targeted energy efficiency measures for low income households, including:

- The HomeWise grant scheme supporting low income households to purchase more efficient household appliances. The No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) provides loans to low income households for the same purpose and is delivered by the community organisation, Good Shepherd.
- An energy concession is available to concession card holder households for six months of the year to help them cope with winter heating needs.
- Ongoing water and energy efficiency retrofits of Victoria's existing public housing stock.
- Higher levels of rebates for insulation have been made available to concession card holder households and to landlords with concession card holders as tenants.

Further assistance for low income, and other households, will arise through the Commonwealth Government's \$3.9 billion Energy Efficient Homes Package recently announced as part of the \$42 billion Nation Building and Jobs Plan.

Victoria is committed to working with the Commonwealth to maximise the benefits for all Victorian households, in particular those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable to climate change.

With respect to the engagement of community organisations, and the potential for industry development and employment in relation to energy efficient services, the Victorian Government will also seek to realise associated industry and employment benefits arising from the Commonwealth Energy Efficient Homes Package.

The government recognises that community organisations can provide a highly effective means of delivering assistance to low income households. This approach has been utilised in the government's NILS program and in the Energy and Water Task Force program.

The Energy and Water Task Force (EWTF) is an ongoing place-based program that audits and retrofits low income households. The networks and knowledge of social and community organisations are utilised to successfully deliver the program across Victoria. The program also stimulates local employment and re-skilling by recruiting local, long-term unemployed residents and offering training opportunities as well as employment. Over 60 per cent of these recruits go on to further training or employment.

Victoria's highly successful \$33 million Regional Solar Hot Water Rebate program is another good example of the government's commitment to green skills. The program provides training for 'green' plumbers in regional areas of Victoria to support the effective roll-out of solar hot water systems. Since June 2008, some 1,000 regionally based plumbers have completed the GreenPlumbers course which is aimed at improving the knowledge and skills of plumbers to install and maintain solar hot water systems.

The government also supports emerging jobs in the green economy through the development of a range of accredited training programs including for: Ecosmart electricians, Home Sustainability Assessors, Facility Managers, Energy Efficient HVAC and Building Energy Analysis Professionals.

Verney Road School: early education program

Raised with: Children and Early Childhood Development

Raised by: Ms Lovell

Raised on: 28 October 2008

REPLY:

The Treasurer (for the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development): I am informed as follows:

The Victorian Government is committed to improving outcomes for all children by acknowledging and catering for their diverse needs. A key element of this commitment is an emphasis on improving the outcomes for children with disabilities and additional learning needs.

The Early Childhood Intervention Service (ECIS) provides support to children with a disability and/ or developmental delay from birth to school entry, and their families. The 2008-09 State Budget allocated \$29 million over four years to increase and improve services and reduce the waiting list for children with disabilities or developmental delay and their families.

Early Education Programs are specific programs provided by special development schools for children with disabilities or developmental delay, and by schools for hearing and/or visually impaired children. The Program is designed for pre-school children with severe to profound or multiple disabilities aged between 2 years and 8 months and 4 years 8 months as at 1 January of the year of entry.

Programs are provided on a group basis, are centre-based and children attend these programs up to three days per week. Individually tailored programs are developed for each child and family. Programs include the provision of support to families by school based therapists and teachers. Verney Road School provides such a program in Shepparton.

There are no plans to alter funding for these programs.

Metropolitan Fire Brigade: Moonee Ponds station

Raised with: Police and Emergency Services

Raised by: Mr Finn

Raised on: 30 October 2008

REPLY:

I refer to the issue you raised concerning the proposed site for the new Metropolitan Fire Brigade fire station abutting Dean and McPhersons Streets in Moonee Ponds.

I have been advised by the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFESB) that meetings and consultations have taken place with the Moonee Valley City Council, management of the Moonee Valley Racing Club (MVRC) and the local community.

In relation to the proposal for a new station in Moonee Ponds, the MFESB has further advised that the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) having considered all arising issues, found that there is a clear net community benefit that would flow from the development of a new fire station in this area.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

Emergency services: telephone alert

Raised with: Police and Emergency Services

Raised by: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 11 November 2008

REPLY:

A report on a nationally consistent telephony based warning system was prepared by the Federal Attorney General's Department for the Council of Australian Government (COAG) meeting held in October 2008. This report was also tabled at the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management-Emergency Management (MCPEM-EM) on 6 November 2008.

Victoria supports a nationally consistent telephony based warning system and continues to undertake significant scoping and technical work to support this. The report tabled at COAG and MCPEM was prepared by a national working group and outlined the developed broadbased system requirements.

Victoria provided significant input into the working group and undertook further research with telephony technology developers to determine what is technically achievable to provide a public emergency warning system using telephony; this work is continuing. The first step was for the Federal Government to allow access to individual phone numbers, and the new Federal Government has now introduced this legislation. A decision on how to progress this issue at the national level is yet to be finalised and will be made by COAG when it meets next.

This work is complex and requires significant attention from a policy and technical aspect to ensure any investment in a telephony based emergency warning application delivers safety outcomes to the community in an efficient, effective and robust manner, for any emergency situation, anywhere in Victoria.

The Victorian Government is continuing to explore options with the Federal Government and Telstra that will enhance emergency warnings through the use of telephony in Victoria.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

Yarraville: church hall maintenance

Raised with: Planning

Raised by: Mr Pakula

Raised on: 2 December 2008

REPLY:

I note your support for the old Wesleyan Church (now a hall) in Hyde Street Footscray, which is owned by Maribyrnong City Council.

I am pleased to advise that the Hyde Street Church Hall in Footscray has received a 2008/09 Victoria's Heritage grant of \$68,000. This grant will allow for urgent repairs to the windows and external doors and provide for the renewal of stormwater drainage system and rainwater goods. This grant followed an earlier project development grant of \$15,000 in 2006/07, also from Victoria's Heritage Grants, which funded the full assessment of the building and documentation of a prioritised list of works. This earlier grant assisted the Council in planning a way forward for a building needing a substantial program of repairs and enabled the recent successful funding application for works.

This building is a great community asset, regularly used by local African, Uruguayan, Spanish and Vietnamese community groups as well as the local playgroup. I understand Maribyrnong City Council has committed funding for the building in 2009/10, and this commitment shown by the Council helped secure the \$68,000 grant. This project illustrates the benefits of the funding heritage projects of high community benefit.

Port Fairy: community centre funding

Raised with: Regional and Rural Development

Raised by: Ms Tierney

Raised on: 2 December 2008

REPLY:

I thank the Member for raising this matter. I note that in June 2008 you announced a \$500,000 grant from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development towards this project.

I am now pleased to inform you that, in addition to that grant, I recently approved a Moyne Council request for a \$250,000 Grant from the Small Town Development Fund Grant for the project. I announced this Grant to Moyne Shire Council in Port Fairy on 30 January 2009.

The Grant from my Department will be allocated towards the construction of an integrated and viable multi-use community facility. Flexible, multi-use facilities for community groups to meet in the area are very limited and this project will provide much needed infrastructure in Port Fairy. Benefits include:

- Providing an important community facility that will significantly improve the town's livability.
- Providing a minimum of 50 hours per week community access to the multi purpose space.
- Providing quality reception and office space to visiting professional service providers in small business and key industry sectors.

I thank you for your interest in this project.

Kyneton hospital: obstetric services**Raised with: Health****Raised by: Mrs Petrovich****Raised on: 4 December 2008****REPLY:**

The Brumby Government is committed to providing safe and quality maternal health services to all Victorians. As such, we have a broad range of policies, programs and initiatives currently in place to support the ongoing provision of quality birthing services in rural Victoria.

The birthing service at Kyneton District Health Service (KDHS) offers women in the Kyneton district and beyond, a choice in their model of care that includes obstetrician care, shared care arrangements with GP obstetricians and midwives, and a team midwife model of care, which has proved very popular with local women.

Almost \$10 million has been allocated since 2003 through the Rural Maternity Initiative to support sustainability of maternity services in rural Victoria. Continuity of midwifery care, access to caseload models of care, annualised salary for midwives, antenatal and postnatal care provided in the home, collaborative care, funding of antenatal care have all been implemented in recent years as a result of Government initiatives and policy directions. KDHS has received a total of \$160,500 under the Rural Maternity Initiative to support and ensure sustainability of the team midwife model of care.

KDHS has delivered in excess of 170 births per annum over the past two years and is continuing to explore and develop opportunities to enhance care for mothers and babies, and provide a service that will ensure sustainability of maternity services into the future. Kyneton District Health Service is not downgrading obstetric services.

City of Wyndham: election**Raised with: Local Government****Raised by: Mr Finn****Raised on: 3 February 2009****REPLY:**

Within 14 days of the declaration of an election result, a candidate or 10 voters who dispute the validity of a council election may apply for an inquiry into the election by a Municipal Electoral Tribunal. The application must be made in writing, contain certain prescribed details (including the grounds on which the inquiry is sought) and be forwarded to the principal registrar of the Magistrates Court along with the prescribed fee.

It is up to an applicant to determine the reasons behind why an inquiry is requested. Further, the *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act)-which sets the framework for the operation of Municipal Electoral Tribunals-does not regulate whom an applicant may contact or seek advice from, over the preparation or content of their application.

If anyone has evidence to indicate that a person has prima facie breached the Act with regard to any council election, they are encouraged to contact Local Government Victoria, which is responsible for inquiring into and, where appropriate, investigating possible breaches of the Act.

Public transport: Southern Metropolitan Region**Raised with: Public Transport****Raised by: Mrs Coote**

Raised on: 4 February 2009

REPLY:

The metropolitan train network experienced disruptions throughout January 2009. Connex advises that services on all lines were affected by a combination of train availability, speed restrictions associated with buckled rail lines, air conditioning faults and power loss and fluctuations as a result of extreme heat.

The total number of cancellations on the Frankston and Sandringham lines in January 2009 was 194 and 253 respectively.

DOT and Connex fully acknowledge the inconvenience passengers experienced during this period. While every attempt was made to minimise delays, adherence to safe working practices was required by Connex to ensure the safety of staff and passengers.

The investigation into the tram collision which occurred on 31 January 2009 is yet to be completed. The cause of this incident has not been confirmed.

Inverleigh-Winchelsea Road: traffic

Raised with: Roads and Ports

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 4 February 2009

REPLY:

It is acknowledged that traffic volumes on the Inverleigh–Winchelsea Road have increased since the opening of the Ring Road due to it being used as a part of a link between Fyansford and Winchelsea. VicRoads will continue to monitor the levels of traffic using this road following the opening of the Geelong Ring Road. It is expected that traffic volumes will reduce once works are completed later this year on Stage 3 of the Ring Road to Waurin Ponds.

As you are aware, VicRoads has undertaken a number of measures including shoulder re-sheeting, line marking and advisory speed signing, as well as liaison with transport operators, to provide safer driving conditions on the six kilometre narrow section. A dust suppressant treatment has also recently been applied to further improve safety.

VicRoads will continue to monitor the safety and operational performance of the road and ensure it is maintained to the appropriate standard.

Parkside estate, Shepparton: street names

Raised with: Planning

Raised by: Ms Lovell

Raised on: 4 February 2009

REPLY:

As you are aware, the urban renewal project by VicUrban at Shepparton's Parkside Estate involves the creation of 92 residential lots in the middle of an established neighbourhood. This has required the new street layout to integrate with the existing street pattern, which in some cases has involved converting existing courts into streets.

Where new streets were created or two existing streets were joined, it was necessary to change street names.

The City of Greater Shepparton Council is responsible for approving street name changes and VicUrban has worked closely with the Council.

The issue of renaming streets was first raised by Parkside residents during a community consultation forum in 2002. Residents gave wide support for the renaming of certain streets as part of the renewal work.

In response, VicUrban held a street naming competition in 2005 which was overseen by the Parkside Neighbourhood Renewal Steering Committee. The competition was widely communicated within the community with over 114 entries received from residents.

Entries from the community were presented to the Parkside Neighbourhood Renewal Steering Committee, who selected a short list of names for VicUrban to recommend to Council. The Council approved the new street names on 6 December 2005.

I am advised that it is the Council's responsibility to formally notify residents regarding street name changes and to provide residents with support and assistance when changing their details. I am further advised that at the Parkside Neighbourhood Renewal Steering Committee on 5 February 2009, the Council reconfirmed the resources and support available to residents to assist with their transition to the new street names. The Council also encouraged residents that are experiencing any difficulties with the street name changes to contact the Neighbourhood Renewal Officer for further assistance.

Housing: disruptive tenants

Raised with: Housing

Raised by: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 5 February 2009

REPLY:

Specific information on the case raised in the adjournment debate cannot be provided due to privacy issues.

However, I'd like to make some general comments in response to Mrs Coote's assertions on 5 February 2009. I remind the House that, like all landlords in Victoria, the Director of Housing is bound by the provisions of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (RTA). The RTA specifies the rights and obligations of both tenants and landlords.

Importantly, public housing tenants have the same rights and obligations as any other tenants in Victoria. This includes the right for quiet enjoyment of their home.

In addition, the Government is not responsible for the behaviour of private individuals in their own homes, even where that home is publicly provided. However, the RTA does specify requirements for tenants not to use their rented premises in a way that causes a nuisance or interference to a neighbour and to avoid damage to their premises and maintain them in a reasonably clean condition.

Where a complaint is received from neighbours about a particular tenant, the Office of Housing does have policy and procedures in place to meet its obligations as a landlord in line with the requirements of the RTA. The Director of Housing investigates and attempts to resolve complaints.

The RTA contains provisions to address tenancy breaches. These can include serving a breach of duty notice on the tenant, making application to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to seek a compliance order, serving a notice to vacate and making an application to VCAT to seek an order for possession that may result in the eviction of the tenant. If a tenant endangers the safety of occupiers of neighbouring premises, the Director of Housing issues an immediate notice to vacate in accordance with the RTA. It should be noted that there must be evidence in relation to complaints against tenants for a matter to be pursued at VCAT.

Privacy laws prohibit Office of Housing staff from discussing personal issues concerning a tenancy with neighbours who may be affected by the tenant's behaviour. Therefore at times it may appear that the Office of Housing is not responding effectively or promptly enough to complaints, when actions are taking place to resolve the issues.

To enhance the Director of Housing's response to antisocial behaviour in public housing, a range of new initiatives is being implemented during 2009.

As to the issue of compensation, there is no requirement for any landlords to compensate neighbours for poor behaviour undertaken by their tenants in Victoria. Accordingly, the Director of Housing does not provide compensation for the illegal or disruptive activities of its tenants.

The RTA does not require a landlord to compensate neighbours for the criminal actions of a landlord's tenant. If a person is a victim of crime in Victoria, the person may be able to get compensation and financial help. There are three main ways of doing this:

- the person can apply for financial assistance through the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal;
- they may also seek a compensation order as part of the criminal proceedings against the offender; or
- through civil court action against the offender.

Affected neighbours can also contact the Police if they are concerned for their safety.

The Office of Housing will continue to respond to complaints and act as decisively as it can if situations of anti-social behaviour arise.

Shepparton: children's centre

Raised with: Children and Early Childhood Development

Raised by: Ms Darveniza

Raised on: 5 February 2009

REPLY:

The Treasurer (for the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development): I am informed as follows:

The Victorian Government has provided a Children's Centre Capital grant of \$500,000 to Batdja Aboriginal Corporation for the development of an integrated children's centre. The Victorian Community Support Fund has also provided \$500,000 for the project.

The development of Batdja Lidje Children's Centre has included a merger of the Batdja Aboriginal Corporation and Lidje Aboriginal Corporation to form a new entity that will provide early childhood education and care, playgroups, family services and community space for children and their families in Shepparton. Maternal and Child Health services will also be offered from this centre.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has funded the Centre for Community Child Health to assist all the partners in the development of new governance arrangements and transition to the new operating model.

It is anticipated that the 65 place Batdja Lidje Children's Centre will commence operations in Term 2, 2009.

Bolton Street, Eltham: upgrade

Raised with: Roads and Ports

Raised by: Mrs Kronberg

Raised on: 5 February 2009

REPLY:

VicRoads and the Department of Transport consider Bolton Street to be appropriately classified, and there are no plans to declare Bolton Street as a state arterial road. The spacing of arterial roads in the area is comparable to other parts of the northern suburbs.

St Paul's Cathedral, Bendigo: restoration

Raised with: Planning

Raised by: Ms Lovell

Raised on: 5 February 2009

REPLY:

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention. The recent closure of the St Paul's Anglican Cathedral is of concern, as this is a significant complex and it is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Heritage Victoria has been assisting the Cathedral in planning for the long term future of the building through funding of a condition survey which has set out a prioritised list of works required.

There has been a consistently high level of demand for funding of repairs to churches throughout the state, and funds from Victoria's Heritage Grants have been provided to a number of churches, where a strong public benefit can be demonstrated. However, the scale of funds required in this instance is beyond the scope of the Victoria's heritage grants programs. Commonwealth funding has been made available for larger scale church and cathedral projects in the past, and the Cathedral should be exploring this avenue, as well as private philanthropic grants. The Cathedral should also explore the setting up of a fund raising appeal through the National Trust, where tax deductible donations are possible.

Heritage Victoria will continue to work with the Cathedral by advising of any funding opportunities as they arise.

Crib Point: bitumen plant

Raised with: Planning

Raised by: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 5 February 2009

REPLY:

I appointed an Advisory Committee to assess and provide a recommendation on the proposed bitumen facility at Crib Point.

As part of its consideration of submissions in relation to the application, the Advisory Committee conducted a public hearing in August 2008.

The Advisory Committee has submitted its report for my consideration.

The future development and expansion of the Port of Hastings will have an impact on the future growth of Melbourne, which makes the proposed development one of State significance.

As the matter is of State significance the merits of the proposal must be given serious consideration.

After I have thoroughly considered all the matters including the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, I will be in a position to make a recommendation to the Governor in Council.

Once the Governor in Council makes its determination, I propose to release the Advisory Committee's report.

Land tax: rates

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr D. Davis

Raised on: 26 February 2009

REPLY:

I refer to the issues you raised during the adjournment debate in the Legislative Council on 26 February 2009 concerning the DSE (Department of Sustainability and Environment) discussion paper *The Future Direction of Rating Authority Valuations in Victoria*.

Eleven public information sessions to provide additional detail on the proposal were held throughout the State during the public consultation period which ran from 1 December 2008 to 16 February 2009. The information sessions were attended by 220 people representing a range of valuation stakeholders. In addition, presentations and discussions were conducted for a number of industry bodies.

There have been 118 submissions received to date (11 March 2009) from a wide cross section of the community. Of these submissions, 12 were received late, however given the recent bushfires, Land Victoria is continuing to accept submissions. The significant number of submissions received suggests that the community has been adequately consulted. Submissions received will be analysed and taken into consideration in developing the proposal further.

Victoria is the only jurisdiction that operates a decentralised system for determining valuations for rating purposes. The State Revenue Office (SRO) uses the site value of a property to determine land tax. The proposals in the discussion paper do not alter the basis of site value assessments. The discussion paper did not amend land tax rates or thresholds.

Councils' powers to strike rates and to have influence over council budget outcomes would not be diminished under the foreshadowed proposal. Councils would be provided with property valuations biennially (every two years) as is the case at present and will maintain control of the supplementary valuation process. Councils would also have the opportunity to shape revaluation outcomes for their municipality by participating in consultation phases through Valuations Best Practice (VBP).

At the time submissions to the proposal were requested, no mention was made that these submissions would be made available to the public. As a consequence, Land Victoria has received these submissions in confidence, and in the expectation that honest comment on the proposal would be received on which government can make a decision. Other than where submitters have chosen to make their own responses public, there is therefore no basis for submissions to be made publicly available.

Cost structures for accessing valuation data would remain the same for municipalities, the SRO and other rating authorities. Costs for accessing valuation data by the wider community will be determined following a consultative process, in the event the proposal progresses.

Revenue from the sale of valuation data is not a driver for the proposed changes and therefore has not been included in cost estimates of the proposal. No detailed analysis of estimates of costs or revenue from the sale of data has been made. The driver for the release of valuation data to the wider community includes benefits arising from greater information access and public policy benefits.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

Public transport: tertiary student passes

Raised with: Public Transport

Raised by: Ms Lovell

Raised on: 26 February 2009

REPLY:

The Victorian Student Pass is available to full-time primary and secondary students who possess a valid Victorian Public Transport Concession Card. It ensures that regional students who are not eligible for the Conveyance Allowance have fares capped at \$410 per annum when travelling on metropolitan, V/Line and town bus services.

The low price of the Victorian Student Pass reflects the fact that most primary and secondary students travel relatively short distances to and from school.

The Victorian Student Pass is not available for tertiary students in either metropolitan or regional areas. Tertiary students are able to access public transport fares at half the adult rate in line with all other adult concession categories such as Health Care Card holders and Disability Pensioners.

There are no plans to revise the current eligibility criteria at this time.

Princes Highway: eastern upgrade

Raised with: Roads and Ports

Raised by: Mr P. Davis

Raised on: 10 March 2009

REPLY:

In response to the matter raised by Mr P. Davis, MLC, regarding the condition of the Princes Highway east of Orbost:

The State Government committed to invest \$650 million over ten years to improve the safety of our roads for Victorian communities. This funding is one of the highlights of the Government's arrive alive road safety strategy, which aims to drive down Victoria's record low road toll by a further 30 per cent by 2017.

In relation to the Princes Highway east of Orbost, the State Government allocated \$4.1 million for the construction of three overtaking lanes between Cann River and Genoa. These works were completed in late 2007.

The State Government allocated a further \$1.56 million for road safety works on the Princes Highway east of Orbost, in the vicinity of Tonghi Creek and Stony Peak Road, under the arrive alive Safer Roads Infrastructure Program. This program is specifically aimed at improving road safety and reducing the number and severity of run-off-road crashes. These works were completed during 2008.

The Princes Highway is regularly inspected and maintained in accordance with VicRoads' Road Management Plan. The inspections include identifying any works, in the sections where the shoulders are unsealed, necessary to maintain the highway in a safe and trafficable condition.

VicRoads is currently investigating potential approaches to further improving road safety on Princes Highway East. Any proposals for upgrades will be considered and evaluated on a region-wide and state-wide basis having regard to factors such as safety, amenity and environment.

Bushfires: wildlife funding

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr Drum

Raised on: 10 March 2009

REPLY:

I refer to the adjournment debate matter you raised on 10 March 2009 about the progress of applications under the Bushfire Wildlife Volunteer Grant Program.

The Government fully appreciates the urgent need to provide financial support to wildlife rehabilitators and veterinarians who have volunteered their services to rescue and rehabilitate wildlife during the February 2009 bushfires.

The Department is implementing the Grant Program as a priority and has engaged additional staff to assist with the processing of payments. It has also consulted with a probity adviser to ensure the funding is allocated in a legal, consistent and fair manner.

Since the announcement of the program, over 100 applications have been received. Of these, 71 have been approved with 40 payments made. DSE Corporate Finance Systems are awaiting completed forms from remaining applicants in order to progress the remaining payments.

Information collected from grant applications shows that in excess of 1500 individual animals have received treatment for burns and other injuries during and after the bushfires. This includes a wide variety of mammals, with nearly 400 koalas, 350 kangaroos and wallabies, and 60 echidnas, as well as hundreds of various species of birds and reptiles receiving treatment by dedicated volunteer shelter operators, foster carers and vets.

I trust this answers your question.

West Gate Bridge: safety rails

Raised with: Roads and Ports

Raised by: Mr Finn

Raised on: 10 March 2009

REPLY:

In response to the matter raised by Mr Finn regarding the Brumby Government's decision to install public safety barriers on the West Gate Bridge:

The installation of temporary public safety barriers on the West Gate Bridge is on track to be delivered within the time frames announced by the Brumby Government in March 2009.

This will see temporary barriers installed by mid-June 2009.

Bushfires: land management

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 10 March 2009

REPLY:

I am informed that:

The Inverleigh Nature Conservation Reserve is approximately 1050 hectares and is managed by Parks Victoria. It is situated two kilometres northwest of Inverleigh and has a good track network within the reserve that is maintained annually for fire vehicles access. There are also 40 to 60 metre fuel breaks to the north, along a high voltage powerline, and to south, on the boundary to Common Road, which are slashed when required.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) has assessed the fuel loads in much of the reserve to be 'moderate' to 'high', with some small areas considered to have 'very high' fuel loads. I understand that the Midlands Fire Operations Plan proposes three fuel reduction burns for the Inverleigh Nature Conservation Reserve over the next three years. Officers from DSE are confident that, given favourable weather conditions, they will be able to conduct at least one of these burns in 2009. DSE and Parks Victoria believe that they will be able to undertake a 114 hectare fuel reduction burn in the north-west corner of the reserve before this winter.

I also understand that Parks Victoria rangers and a DSE Fire Management officer have recently met with some of the local Inverleigh residents, including Ms Andrea Bolton, to listen to their concerns about fire management within the area and to advise of the fuel reduction works that are proposed to be undertaken over the next three years.

The officers also discussed with residents fire management works and actions that could be undertaken on private land in order to further enhance the protection of residents and to complement the fire protection works that are being undertaken on public land.

Roads: Footscray tunnel

Raised with: Roads and Ports

Raised by: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 10 March 2009

REPLY:

I attended a public information session held in Sunshine on Monday 16 March 2009 about projects in the western region of Melbourne as identified in the Victorian Transport Plan.

Residents in the Sunshine area were notified via advertisements in local papers, posters at community venues, information on websites and direct email notification to stakeholders.

More than 100 people attended the information session.

VicUrban: Officer land

Raised with: Planning

Raised by: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 10 March 2009

REPLY:

VicUrban owns 370 hectares of land in the Shire of Cardinia. VicUrban proposes to develop the land as two projects, a 29 hectare residential development at Cardinia Road, which is currently under construction, and the Officer Project, which is currently being planned.

Approximately 80 per cent of VicUrban's land-holding is under grazing licence. A total of 23 hectares of land is not licensed for grazing due to the presence of significant native vegetation. These ungrazed areas of native vegetation are adjacent to the existing residential areas.

In the week commencing 9 February 2009, VicUrban arranged for the slashing of undergrowth along the boundaries that abut neighbouring residential properties, in accordance with advice from Cardinia Shire's Fire Prevention Officer. Other work was also undertaken to improve access to the site and remove rubbish along the railway corridor.

I am advised that VicUrban had already fully complied with the Fire Prevention Notice when it was issued by the Shire of Cardinia on 18 February 2009.

I am further advised that VicUrban is in discussions with the Department of Sustainability and Environment about the long-term management of native vegetation on its land.

Rail: Sunbury line

Raised with: Public Transport

Raised by: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 10 March 2009

REPLY:

The Victorian Transport Plan released by the Premier in December 2008 details a number of initiatives to improve capacity on Melbourne's train network. As part of the *Plan* the Brumby Government is committed to electrifying the rail line to Sunbury.

The Sydenham-Sunbury rail corridor is one of the north's biggest growth areas. Patronage on the Sydenham line has grown by 55 per cent over the past three years, representing the largest growth on the network.

Although existing services from Sunbury may meet current needs, there is very limited capacity to add extra services to Sunbury or Watergardens. Electrification provides a longer term solution that caters for future generations in the Sunbury and Watergardens areas.

Crowding on the line will be alleviated by providing more peak hour metropolitan services which is vital to the ongoing viability of Melbourne's broader train network.

Sunbury and Diggers Rest passengers will ultimately benefit from more than double the number of current services on weekdays and weekends. Sunbury and Diggers Rest customers will have full access to all metropolitan railway stations including direct access to the city loop.

Metropolitan trains can carry more than twice as many passengers as V/Line trains. By replacing the Sunbury-based V/Line trains with metropolitan trains, more people will be able to travel to and from stations between Melbourne and Sunbury. Electrification will also provide more flexibility in the timetable, allowing extra services to be added.

Facilities at Sunbury and Diggers Rest Railway Stations will also be upgraded to meet the requirements of disability discrimination legislation. Passenger amenity and security improvements at both stations will include new platform shelters, upgraded waiting rooms and toilets, improved station staff facilities, more seating, improved lighting, CCTV coverage and real time passenger information displays. As a Premium Station, Sunbury Railway Station will also be staffed from first to last train.

Works to electrify the network to Sunbury will commence in 2010 with metropolitan trains to run from Sunbury in 2012.

Housing: shire of Pyrenees

Raised with: Housing

Raised by: Mr Vogels

Raised on: 10 March 2009

REPLY:

At the request of Mr Vogels MP, the Office of Housing met with the two constituents on Wednesday 18 March 2009 to discuss their current accommodation needs.

During this discussion, it was identified that both families are presently housed in secure affordable accommodation in the township of Beaufort. One family has a current public housing application lodged with the Office of Housing, the other family is still deciding if they wish to apply for public housing. Staff at the Office of Housing will continue to work with the families to explore all available long term housing options.

The Office of Housing presently has 13 elderly person units within the township of Beaufort and a total of 29 properties across the Pyrenees Shire.

City of Stonnington: councillor

Raised with: Local Government

Raised by: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 11 March 2009

REPLY:

In 2008, the Victorian Government amended the *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act) to rewrite the conflict of interest rules. The new rules provide much clearer direction about what is, and what is not, a conflict of interest for Councillors, Council officers and members of special committees. Councillors hold a position of trust and it needs to be clear to all of us that our Councillors are acting in the public interest.

At my direction Local Government Victoria (LGV) has prepared *A Guide to Conflict of Interest in Local Government*. I commend the Guide to the honourable member as it provides a detailed explanation in plain language of the amendments to the Act.

Section 79 of the Act sets out what steps a councillor who has a conflict of interest in a matter (which is to be, or is likely to be, considered or discussed at a meeting of the Council or the special committee), must take in order to comply with the Act. A failure to comply with the provisions of section 79 is an offence under the Act.

The allegations raised by the honourable member are of a very serious nature. Similar allegations have also been the subject of a written complaint to me which I have referred to LGV for investigation. I have been advised that LGV has commenced its investigation which is ongoing. I have now asked LGV to include as part of its investigation the allegations raised by the honourable member.

Police: Loch Sport

Raised with: Police and Emergency Services

Raised by: Mr P. Davis

Raised on: 11 March 2009

REPLY:

The Brumby Government has always supported the operational independence of Victoria Police. Decisions on the placement of police throughout the state and how to tackle crime are operational matters made by police command. I am assured by the Chief Commissioner of Police that the level of policing across Victoria is continuously monitored by the respective Regional Command Officers, with a view to maintaining optimum policing effectiveness.

Policing across each Police Service Area (PSA) is managed in a flexible manner to ensure the best possible use of available police resources. The police service in rural centres is rarely dependent solely on local police resources as mobile police patrol units are tasked with responding to calls for assistance across each PSA and support is also provided by specialist units from across the Division where required.

The State Government is strongly committed to ensuring that Victoria Police has the resources it needs to make those operational decisions in the best interest of the whole Victorian community. Since coming to office, the State Government has increased the number of police by over 1,400. We have also increased funding to Victoria Police to a record budget of more than \$1.75 billion in 2008-09, and funded the construction and refurbishment of over 150 police stations across the state.

Parkinson's Victoria: funding

Raised with: Community Services

Raised by: Mr Drum

Raised on: 11 March 2009

REPLY:

In 2008/09, the Government will spend \$1.17 billion on support for people with a disability, including people with Parkinson's disease. The Government has doubled the funding available for people with a disability since taking office and includes an increase of \$105M this year.

An amount of \$200,000 has been made available to Western Health in 2008/09 to undertake a 2-year demonstration project employing a Parkinson's Clinical Consultant for specialist health expertise and support for people with Parkinson's disease. The project will compliment the work of the existing movement disorders clinics and strengthen the support already provided to people with Parkinson's disease through community rehabilitation services across Victoria.

The movement disorder clinics, as with other highly specialist health services, are based in metropolitan health services and accept referrals from across Victoria. These clinics support individuals with complex movement disorders; however, most people with Parkinson's disease are managed by their local doctor and can be supported with therapy from local community rehabilitation and health services.

Otway Forest Park and Enfield State Forest: access

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 11 March 2009

REPLY:

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change: I am informed that:

The public consultation process used for the proposed road and singletrack closures in the Otway Forest Park and Enfield State Forest is consistent with the *Consultation and rehabilitation process on proposed road and singletrack closures (final)* guideline.

This guideline was developed in consultation with key stakeholders and includes an agreed consultation process. The main elements of the public consultation process include: a six week public consultation period to follow the release of a proposed plan; key stakeholders to be advised of the proposed closures and their comments sought; and signs to be erected in the forest to advise users of the proposal.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment staff are currently considering the submissions received on the proposed road and singletrack closures in the Otway Forest Park and Enfield State forest. The review process is expected to be complete in April or May 2009.

Sandringham: beach renourishment

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 11 March 2009

REPLY:

The Royal Avenue Foreshore Protection project at Sandringham aims to protect the cliffs between Royal Avenue and Southey Street from further erosion by wave attack and storm surge, return the natural appearance of the beach, and make the area safe for public use. The project also involves stormwater management, new car parking, beach access paths and revegetation.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is implementing the Royal Avenue project in accordance with the Victorian Coastal Council's 2005 recommendations on foreshore management at Royal Avenue. DSE has commenced renourishing the Royal Avenue beach with 20,000m³ of sand, dredged from the seabed offshore from the Sandringham Harbour Breakwater. DSE has completed works to construct a groyne, minor cliff stabilisation, and remove redundant structures from the beach. The new beach anchored by the new groyne aims to protect the cliffs from further erosion.

Since the new groyne has been constructed and the new beach partly constructed, the unstable cliffs between Southey Street and Royal Avenue have not suffered further erosion. This is an early indication that the new groyne and beach are protecting the cliffs as intended.

Once the project is completed, DSE will implement a two year sand monitoring program of the Sandringham beaches, focusing on the Royal Avenue and Southey Street beaches. DSE is currently appointing a consulting coastal engineer, which has the appropriate level of expertise and local knowledge of the Sandringham beaches, to design and implement the monitoring program on behalf of DSE.

The monitoring program aims to characterise the movement of sand, as well as the summer and winter beach profiles when the erosion and accretion of sand peaks. Monitoring will be initially conducted at one month, three months and six months, and then at six monthly intervals and following extreme storm events. The frequency of the monitoring program will be reviewed after one year.

The findings of the monitoring program, in combination with investigations already complete, will provide a clearer understanding of coastal processes of the Sandringham beaches.

Development of a master plan is not considered necessary at this time as the project and the monitoring program are not yet complete.

Housing: complaints procedure

Raised with: Housing

Raised by: Ms Lovell

Raised on: 12 March 2009

REPLY:

Information provided to the Office of Housing during the complaints process is bound by the Privacy Principles of the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and the *Health Records Act 2001*.

When people lodge a complaint with the Office of Housing or the Complaints Management Unit the collection and use of this information is subject to clear requirements.

Details of the person lodging the complaint are not provided to the person who the complaint has been made about.

However, it should be noted that if the matter warrants legal action, details of the complaint will need to be provided to the person who the complaint has been made about. For example, if a complaint is received that an Office of Housing tenant or visitor to the property has displayed dangerous behaviour towards a neighbour, details of the alleged offence including date and time, will need to be provided on the legal notice. This was emphasised in the matter of Director of Housing v. Pavletic [2002].

Specific details of the complainant such as their name or address will not be provided to the individual that the complaint is about.

During the complaint investigation process the Office of Housing will only access or disclose personal information about the person lodging the complaint if consent is provided. Complaints can be made anonymously if preferred.

A state wide email will remind Office of Housing staff of their responsibility to adhere to the privacy principles in order to ensure that the anonymity of complaints is respected. Claims of individual breaches of the Privacy Act will be reviewed and investigated when specific information of the claim is provided to the Office of Housing.

Barmah State Forest: flooding

Raised with: Water

Raised by: Ms Darveniza

Raised on: 12 March 2009

REPLY:

In January, four regulators which control flows to Barmah Forest in Victoria were vandalised and opened, allowing water into the forest.

The volume of water which entered the forest was 800 ML. Both Goulburn-Murray Water (G-MW) and River Murray Water have confirmed that this is the correct figure.

The water entered the forest at a time when it was not ecologically desirable, as the forest ecosystem responds better to winter/spring floods. Due to the hot weather, floods in summer can result in water quality problems and may result in fish kills though de-oxygenation. However, due to the dry conditions, the forest currently supports very few fish populations, and these were not affected.

Staff from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority investigated the risk of adverse ecological impacts in the affected area and concluded that there was no significant risk of damage. This has proven to be the case.

G-MW staff investigated the extent of damage to the regulating structures. Extensive damage was done to one of the regulators—the Punt Paddock regulator.

The issue is a police matter and the police have undertaken an investigation. Members of the public reported seeing a person in a private utility with dogs at the sites at the time that the damage was done. Police have questioned a person on this issue, however no charges have been laid.

It is quite clear that DSE staff members were not responsible for the damage.

Housing: maintenance

Raised with: Housing

Raised by: Ms Mikakos

Raised on: 12 March 2009

REPLY:

I thank the member for Northern Metropolitan for her inquiry into this Government's approach to the Rudd Governments National Building and Jobs Plan and in particular the \$100 million that the Brumby Government has secured for the repair and maintenance of its social housing portfolio.

The Government will be using these funds in order to undertake a range of repair and maintenance activities across all segments of its social housing portfolio. A program of works and projects has been developed in order firstly to maximise engagement with the building industry but also to:

- reduce the maintenance backlog
- target dwellings in poor condition so that they can remain available for occupancy, thereby further increasing the net social housing stock target
- and finally to ensure that works are undertaken that increase the responsiveness to tenant requirements for reasonable quality amenity, reduce incidence of vandalism and damage, and address anti-social behaviour.

This Government has a long history of commitment towards the maintenance and upgrade of its high rise public housing estates. In the past five years, this government has invested \$373 million in public high-rise buildings, of which \$287 million has been allocated to buildings within the Northwest Region. A further \$47 million will be invested in the northwest region in the upcoming financial year as part of an overall allocation of \$63.6 million in 2009-10, which includes a \$1.6 million contribution from the Nation Building and Jobs Plan stimulus funding.

- By June 2010, all of the foyers in the older person high-rise buildings will have received either major upgrades or maintenance refresh works. In the family high-rise buildings, almost 40% of all of the foyers will also have received either major upgrades or maintenance refresh works
- As at the end of this financial year, approximately 40% of our 6,890 high rise flats will have received major upgrade works, with works to a further 341 units to be undertaken next year, of which 243 will again be located within the Northwest Region
- In terms of the infrastructure of these high rise buildings, in the past five years, this government has spent \$58 million on fire services, mechanical and electrical upgrades, \$1.5 million on civil works, as well as a further \$61 million on building fabric repairs, a total of \$120 million across all of its 44 high-rise buildings.

This Government has developed a broad and strategic program of maintenance and repairs which maximises use of Nation Building and Jobs Plan stimulus funding across all sectors of its portfolio including the aforementioned works to its high rise public housing estates in 2009-10. Finally, the repairs and maintenance stimulus program that this Government has developed is based on the condition of its properties and aims to improve the comfort and amenity for its residents and most importantly engaging the building industry and therefore maximising job creation opportunities.

Rooming houses: registration**Raised with: Housing****Raised by: Ms Lovell****Raised on: 31 March 2009****REPLY:**

The Government is committed to improving protections for rooming house residents. The Government is taking action of a number of fronts to pursue these improvements.

As you have noted, the Government amended the Health (Prescribed Accommodation) Regulations 2001 last year to increase the scope of the regulations.

Prior to these changes, stakeholders, including the TUV and local government, expressed confusion with which rooming houses were required to register with local government and which weren't. The Government has responded to this request by amending the regulations and extending the protections of the regulations to smaller rooming houses. This will see provisions such as minimum room sizes, prevention of overcrowding, cleanliness, sanitation and other health standards now apply to these rooming houses. The changes were enthusiastically supported by a range of stakeholders. I am sure the House will agree that affording residents of smaller rooming houses the benefits of these additional provisions has been a beneficial change.

The responsibility to enforce the regulations rests with local government. Other protections for rooming house residents are contained in the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and Building Code of Australia. Consumer Affairs Victoria has been working with local government to improve inspection and enforcement practices. In July 2008 enforcement activities resulted in the successful prosecution of Mr Frank Cassar for multiple offences under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 relating to rooming houses. Mr Cassar was fined \$16,000 for these offences.

I note that the member mentions information she has on the location of illegal rooming houses operating in the Monash-Oakleigh area. I would encourage her to provide this information to the relevant local government authority or Consumer Affairs Victoria.

The Victorian Government is expanding and improving the supply of affordable housing in Victoria. \$60M has been earmarked for the delivery of 350 new homes for low income families and single people. This includes the delivery of 120 units for single people in specific locations (Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Frankston, Latrobe Valley, Broadmeadows and Ringwood) as a response to shortages of accommodation for single people in those areas. These opportunities will be further expanded by the recently announced Nation Building National Partnership Payment. Victoria will receive a further \$1.5 billion to expand social housing. This will provide new affordable housing options to a range of Victorians, including some who would otherwise seek accommodation in rooming houses.

Improved supports to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will be pursued by the Victorian Government through the joint investment made with the Commonwealth in implementing the National Partnership on Homelessness.

Water: charges**Raised with: Water****Raised by: Ms Hartland****Raised on: 31 March 2009**

REPLY:

The current tariff structure for residential customers in metropolitan Melbourne consists of volumetric charges and fixed service charges. Volumetric charges encourage households to reduce their consumption as much as possible and are therefore an important component of the tariff structure. However, the cost of maintaining the infrastructure for storing, treating and delivering water to a particular household remains much the same regardless of how much water the residents actually use.

A decrease in fixed charges and corresponding increase in volumetric charges may provide further incentives to conserve water, but would have to be balanced against the necessity of funding the fixed costs of ongoing works to maintain a reliable and high-quality water supply; these works can be even more important during times of low water storages.

Water prices are set by Victoria's independent economic regulator, the Essential Services Commission (ESC), and reflect the cost of providing water and sewerage services. The ESC also regularly reviews the water retailers' tariff structures, testing their capacity to cover service costs while also providing appropriate price signals to encourage customers to use this scarce resource wisely.

The ESC is currently reviewing Melbourne's retail water prices and tariffs with its decision to take effect from 1 July 2009. Further information on the current Melbourne price review and on the role of the ESC can be accessed at www.esc.vic.gov.au or by phoning (03) 9651 0222.

The Victorian Government, in its White Paper, *Our Water Our Future*, made water conservation a central element in addressing decreasing supplies caused by drought and the effects of climate change. All Victorians need to be involved in water conservation if we want to achieve water security.

As a result of the Government's water conservation measures, Melburnians have reduced their per capita water consumption by approximately 35 per cent compared to the average during the 1990s. Our water saving effort has meant that our water storages are at a higher level than they would have been without conservation.

However, savings alone are not a long-term solution to Victoria's water needs. This is why on 19 June 2007, the Government released *Our Water Our Future: The Next Stage of the Government's Water Plan* which identifies projects and measures to diversify our water sources and use what we have more wisely. These include the 150 billion litre desalination plant to be built at Wonthaggi, modernisation of irrigation infrastructure and a continued emphasis on household and industry recycling and conservation.

These projects are necessary, but will put increasing pressure on water prices as water corporations pass on costs associated with delivering the new water sources.

Concessions for water bills for low-income earners have been increased by 14.8 per cent to \$182 in the 2008–09 State Budget to help offset the rise in water bills.

Bushfires: Crown land fencing

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 31 March 2009

REPLY:

Government provides the following assistance for Crown Land / Public Land boundary fences burnt during a bushfire;

Government will reimburse reasonable insurance excess to a maximum of four hundred dollars (\$400) on all insured Crown land boundary fences destroyed or damaged by bushfires regardless of the tenure of the land where that fire originates. If you have a 'no excess' policy you will also be eligible for reimbursement.

Government will also repair or replace crown land boundary fences burnt by the fire agencies undertaking back burning during a bushfire emergency.

The policy is based on recommendations from the 2003 Victorian Bushfire Inquiry and the 2007 Environment and Natural Resources Committee (ENRC) Inquiry. The policy relies on the basic principles of;

- shared responsibility for bushfire management and the subsequent recovery post fire between government and the community, and
- that no policy should create a disincentive for the uptake of insurance by individual land-holders.

Prior to the 2008/09 season the fencing and control line rehabilitation policy was only for assistance where bushfires originated on public / crown land. DSE and the CFA worked closely in the lead up to the 2008/09 season to broaden the policy to remove this inequity to include all bushfires of any origin. All fire affected land-holders with fences to public land now enjoy the same assistance regardless of fire's origin / land tenure.

A range of other assistance is also available to fire affected land-holders including:

- a one-off grant of up to \$5,000 for immediate repair and restoration costs, with additional funds available up to a total of \$25,000 for eligible businesses with damage
- a low-cost loan scheme through the Rural Finance Corporation
- free access to professional business advice and counselling services

Women: suffrage centenary

Raised with: Women's Affairs

Raised by: Ms Tierney

Raised on: 31 March 2009

REPLY:

I thank the member for Western Victoria for the invitation to participate in the *Empowerment through Protest* conference in Portland later this year and look forward to receiving an invitation. I would be delighted to attend the conference if my diary allows the opportunity.

Portland is the birthplace of our most well known suffragist, Vida Goldstein. She was the first women to stand for parliament in the British Empire and last year Portland honoured her by building a seat for Vida.

The centenary of women's suffrage was celebrated across the State of Victoria in 2008.

As part of the celebrations, the Victorian Government produced the Victorian Women Vote curriculum materials for upper primary and lower secondary schools. The engagement of young people in this democratic milestone is vital to ensuring the pursuit of equity in all aspect of political and civic life.

Thank you to Gayle Tierney for bringing this event to my attention.

Rail: Cardinia Road, Officer, station

Raised with: Public Transport

Raised by: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 1 April 2009

REPLY:

The construction of Cardinia Road Railway Station is part of a program outlined in *The Victorian Transport Plan* of building four new railway stations throughout Melbourne's growth areas. Building the new growth area stations as a program of works ensures time and cost savings.

With four new railway stations to be built, it is important that disruption caused by the construction works does not affect large parts of the rail network all at once. The construction of railway stations is complicated by the need to maintain train services and the safety of both commuters and workers throughout the building process. This requires that works in the vicinity of an operating rail line only occur when trains are not operating. This is achieved by completing works during several short construction periods, minimising disruptions to commuters and adjoining residents.

The projected completion date of the project (2012-2013) takes into account the above factors. The Department of Transport is responsible for the planning of the project and it is expected that consultation with key stakeholders will commence towards the end of 2009. This will enable the plans and designs of the station to be finalised prior to the project being tendered and subsequently constructed.

Pensioners: concessions

Raised with: Water

Raised by: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 2 April 2009

REPLY:

In line with the Victorian Government's commitment to building a better future for Victorian families, the State's concessions program was reformed in 2004 to ensure that benefits were better targeted to those Victorians most in need.

Under these reforms, the cap on water and sewerage concessions was increased from \$135 to \$150 between 1 July 2004 and 1 July 2005 and, thereafter, indexed by the Consumer Price Index.

More recently, concessions were increased by 14.8 per cent in the 2008-09 State Budget to help offset the rise in water bills necessary to fund projects and measures to secure our water supplies by diversifying our water sources and using what we have more wisely.

Insurance: fire services levy

Raised with: Police and Emergency Services

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 2 April 2009

REPLY:

Victorian legislation requires the insurance industry to contribute 77.5 per cent of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) budget and 75 per cent of the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFESB) budget, as the insurance industry is a key beneficiary of prevention, containment and extinguishment of fire by the CFA and MFESB.

Under the *Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958*, municipal councils whose districts are within the metropolitan fire district are also required to contribute 12.5 per cent. The council contributions are allocated according to each council's relative share of the total net annual valuation for councils.

Once the budgets of the CFA and MFESB are set, the Insurance Council of Australia is advised of the total budget of the fire services and calculates advisory funding rates according to the overall contribution of the insurance industry. The insurance companies then pass on their contribution to their policy-holders (fire service levy).

The Department of Treasury and Finance reviewed the fire services funding system in 2003 and concluded that the current funding system is the most appropriate.

The Premier of Victoria announced on 16 February 2009 the establishment of a Royal Commission to inquire into and report on a range of measures related to these bushfires. The terms of reference of the Royal Commission state that it will inquire into the causes and circumstances of the fires, and will consider preparation and planning at all levels, including current laws, policies, practices, resources and strategies for prevention, identification, evaluation, management and communication of bushfire threats and risks. Recommendations for improvements in relation to these matters will be identified. Consideration of the fire services levy may be undertaken by the Royal Commission.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied by the departments on behalf of the appropriate ministers

Thursday, 7, May 2009

Gaming: poker machines

Raised with: Gaming

Raised by: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 1 April 2009

REPLY:

It is important to note that gambling expenditure is not the best indicator of the impact of gambling in the community. Not every dollar spent on gambling is a dollar of harm. The Government recognises gambling as a legitimate form of entertainment enjoyed by many Victorians. A large number of Victorians choose to spend their income in this way and it is wrong to suggest they are hurting themselves or anyone else.

However, as a result of responsible gambling measures introduced by this Government, gaming machine spending has declined to 1.67 per cent of household final consumption expenditure in 2007-08, down from 2.30 per cent since 2001-02.

The unavoidable fact is that some Victorians still have problems with gambling. The Government shares the concern many Victorians have about this and is committed to taking a coordinated, systematic and evidence-based approach to combating the very real effects of problem gambling.

Since coming to office in 1999, the Victorian Government has introduced a range of strategies that have resulted in a more responsible and safer gaming industry. These strategies include:

- The introduction of caps on gaming machine numbers in vulnerable areas
- Elimination of 24-hour gaming venues outside the casino
- A ban on smoking in all Victorian clubs & hotels
- Changes to the configuration of gaming machines including a ban on autoplay facilities and a freeze on spin rates
- Restrictions on access to cash in gaming venues
- Restrictions on gaming venue signage and a ban on gaming machine advertising
- Requiring winnings to be paid entirely by cheque when the payout is \$1000 or more (outside of the casino)
- Halving the maximum bet on gaming machines from \$10 to \$5 a spin outside the casino (applying on new machines from 1 July 2008 and all machines from 1 January 2010)
- Requiring the display of graphic new player information warnings about the effects of problem gambling.

The Government intends to take further action to encourage responsible gaming environments. For example, it has already announced its intention to:

- ban automatic teller machines from gaming venues from 2012
- require all gaming machines to have a precommitment mechanism that allows players to preset time or loss limits.

In addition, the Government has strengthened the Gambler's Help service system to ensure problem gamblers and their families can access effective treatment options. Funding of \$30.5 million will be provided to community based service providers over three years from 1 July 2008 to deliver Gambler's Help services.

The Government has also recently run the *Take the Problem out of Gambling* advertising campaign which has proven a resounding success. The initial results show that more problem gamblers have come forward to seek assistance since the campaign—spanning television, print, radio, online and in-venue advertising. The first phase of the campaign ran from October to December 2008, while the second phase will run until April 2009.

The Government is continuing to take a strong stance on problem gambling and to ensure that the Victorian gaming industry is amongst the most responsible in the world.

VicForests: Brown Mountain old-growth forest

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr Barber

Raised on: 2 April 2009

REPLY:

The Government is currently finalising its 2006 election commitments to protect significant old-growth forest stands in East Gippsland. I will introduce a Bill to amend the *National Parks Act 1975* and other Acts into Parliament this year.

The Bill will seek to add more than 40,000 hectares of State forest to the conservation reserve system. This will include old-growth forest, the entire Goolengook forest block, the creation of a link between the Alpine, Errinundra and Snowy River National Parks, and rainforest sites of significance. This is a major conservation outcome and one of which I am very proud.

The addition to the conservation reserve system will be delivered without job or resource losses to the vital local timber industry, which was another firm commitment made in the policy. The timber industry is irreplaceable in East Gippsland, providing sustainable jobs and ensuring the viability of several small towns.

At no time has the Government indicated that there would be a complete cessation of licensed timber harvesting in all old-growth forest in this forest management area. While ongoing access to old-growth forest is critical for the viability of the timber industry, this is within a landscape context where old-growth forests are overwhelmingly permanently protected in the reserve system.

Timber harvesting, wherever it is conducted, is undertaken to the highest standards and is systematically audited. Victoria's sustainable forest management framework within the *Sustainability Charter for Victoria's State forests* ensures we achieve a high standard of environmental care in planning and undertaking timber harvesting operations.

Devilbend Natural Features Reserve: management plan

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 2 April 2009

REPLY:

I refer to the adjournment debate matter you raised on 2 April 2009, regarding the Devilbend Natural Features Reserve Draft Management Plan December 2008.

I do not consider it necessary to meet with members of the Devilbend Foundation prior to the finalisation of the Devilbend Natural Features Reserve Management Plan. I have a good understanding of the Foundation's views through its correspondence, and a recent meeting with my office.

In January 2006 the Government decided to retain the Devilbend Reservoir site in public ownership as a natural features reserve. In making this decision the Government recognised the significant environmental values of parts of the site as well as the opportunity for appropriate recreational activities especially on the extensive areas of cleared and grazed land.

The Government's 2006 election commitments relating to the Devilbend Reservoir site included:

- the creation of a new park to provide the public with full access to the site;
- the provision of park establishment funding to be focused on revegetation, day visitor facilities, road and track works and making the park an enjoyable place for visitors; and
- investigation of new fishing opportunities and new fisheries.

The Devilbend Natural Features Reserve was created in March 2007. Prior to opening the reserve for use by the public, Parks Victoria is undertaking a thorough management planning process to ensure that any recreational opportunities that are provided are compatible with protection and enhancement of the values of the reserve.

The Devilbend Natural Features Reserve Draft Management Plan December 2008 was released for public comment by 18 March 2009. All submissions on the draft plan will be carefully considered in developing the final plan which will be submitted for my approval.

The Devilbend Natural Features Management Plan Advisory Group, which includes representatives of several conservation groups allied to the Devilbend Foundation, was involved in the preparation of the draft plan and will be able to contribute to its finalisation.