

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

13, 14 and 15 April 2010

(Extract from book 5)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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Privileges Committee — Ms Darveniza, Mr D. Davis, Mr Drum, Mr Jennings, Ms Mikakos, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Rich-Phillips.

Select Committee on Train Services — Mr Atkinson, Mr Barber, Mr Drum, Ms Huppert, Mr Leane, Mr O'Donohue and Mr Viney.

Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration — Mr Barber, Ms Broad, Mr Guy, Mr Hall, Mr Kavanagh, Mr Rich-Phillips and Mr Viney.

Standing Orders Committee — The President, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr D. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Lenders, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Viney.

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FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Vogels, Mr John Adrian	Western Victoria	LP

¹ Appointed 3 February 2009

² Appointed 9 March 2010

³ Resigned 1 March 2010

⁴ Resigned 9 January 2009

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WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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

Tuesday, 13 April 2010

Public holidays: cup days

Raised with: Minister for Small Business

Raised by: Mr Drum

Raised on: 10 November 2009

REPLY:

I fully appreciate that local show days and race days are important events in regional districts and that, in past years, the provision of part-shire arrangements has enabled non-metropolitan Councils to show support for such events by way of a holiday.

However, in practice, there were many non-metropolitan Councils that did not gazette Melbourne Cup Day, or an alternative day, as a public holiday. This caused confusion for employers and employees with respect to public holiday arrangements, particularly for those that worked across different Council areas. It also meant many Victorians missed out on one public holiday each year.

As a result of last year's amendments to the *Public Holidays Act 1993*, the Government estimates that around 500,000 Victorians in regional areas who previously did not receive a Melbourne Cup Day or alternative public holiday now enjoy 11 public holidays each year. Further, the certainty and consistency provided by the new arrangements enables regional businesses to make long term plans and staffing arrangements with confidence.

In November 2009 I held a constructive and encouraging meeting with regional stakeholders to hear their views as to how the Act functioned in its first year of operation since amendment. I also sought advice on the best possible outcome for regional communities in respect of their Melbourne Cup Day public holiday arrangements.

In this context, discussions are continuing as to any preferred part-Shire arrangements for the Melbourne Cup Day or an alternative full day public holiday in future years.

University of Melbourne: faculty of the VCA and music

Raised with: Minister for the Arts

Raised by: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 12 November 2009

REPLY:

The amalgamation of the VCA with the University of Melbourne to form the Faculty of the VCA and Music (VCAM) has resulted in significant changes to the financial modelling of the original VCA. However, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne has provided a guarantee to the Victorian Government that the students will maintain studies in 75 per cent of their core specialist areas.

Your question highlights the complexity of the issues related to the funding of VCAM, particularly in regard to the calculation of rental charges and overheads levied by the University. The question of subsidies is raised in the

Discussion Paper released by the University of Melbourne on November 10, 2009. This paper, *Defining the Future for the VCA and Music at the University of Melbourne*, poses a series of questions for discussion and consultation.

The paper also invited submissions from students, staff, graduates, employers and the public. Given the level of research you have undertaken into the financial modelling at the University, I trust you incorporated this material into a submission to the University as part of the consultation process.

I will continue to monitor the consultation process and was pleased to hear that Dr Ziggy Switkowski, Chair of Opera Australia, was appointed as the independent Chair of the Review Committee which has been formed to assist with the consultation process. Former Victorian Government Minister for the Arts, the Hon Mary Delahunty, has also joined the committee as a community representative.

I understand a large number of submissions have been made to the review committee and I look forward to the results of the review process.

Mental health: Bendigo

Raised with: Minister for Community Services

Raised by: Ms Lovell

Raised on: 24 November 2009

REPLY:

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provide a specialist response to children and young people with mental illness throughout the Loddon Mallee Region. CAMHS in the Loddon Mallee Region is provided by two Area Mental Health Services, the Bendigo Health Care Group and the Mildura Base Hospital.

CAMHS operates at the tertiary level providing multidisciplinary services targeting children 0-18 years of age who have severe and complex disorders that cause functional impairment. It provides triage; assessment; active case management and bio-psychosocial therapeutic interventions (individual, family and group); intensive mobile outreach support for hard to engage, at risk clients, and specialist assessments for Autism.

Whilst CAMHS supports young people in greatest clinical need, it also supports the broader service system to support children and young people, including schools and youth services, General Practice, Student Support Services, Protective Services and other health and welfare agencies.

Highly specialised supports for children and young people, such as in-patient psychiatric care are provided by three metropolitan hospitals. CAMHS in Loddon Mallee Region has a relationship with the Austin Hospital where young people requiring inpatient care are referred.

In regard to your concern that the O'Sullivan family did not receive any communication in response to their visit to Bendigo CAMHS for an assessment of their daughter, I understand the family was provided with verbal feedback following their visit and the referring doctor was provided with written feedback in line with the service's usual procedures.

A further recent development in Loddon Mallee includes the establishment of a mental health triage and consultation service to Disability Services called the Enhanced Regional Service Response (ERSR). This is a joint initiative between Mental Health and Disability Services to improve supports to people with an intellectual disability who are also experiencing mental health issues. Although this service targets adults, including young adults, the triage team has agreed to consider the presenting specialist needs of Holly O'Sullivan, enabling a comprehensive assessment across both Holly's disability and mental health needs. Disability Services will continue to work closely with Holly and her family, along with Holly's paediatrician and CAMHS, to work towards an improved quality of life for both Holly and her family.

In regard to respite supports in Bendigo, the Victorian State Government funds over \$1.6 million of disability respite support each year in the Bendigo area. This includes in-home support, respite camps for children, social groups/activities and out-of-home overnight respite.

In addition to this funding, approximately 200 people, including families, who live in the Bendigo area, have been allocated ongoing Individual Support Packages, which allows them flexibility and choice in regard to their disability supports. Approximately 32 of these people are young people aged of 21 years or younger, many of whom live within the family environment. Their collective packages provide for over \$1 million worth of supports each year.

The Department of Human Services Disability Services continues to work with families and service providers to improve respite supports for families with children with complex support needs. Although a children's respite facility may suit the needs of some children and their families, some children and young people with Autism and intellectual disability are better suited to a more personalised approach. This is now possible due to the Victorian Government's commitment to shifting the control of people's supports away from service providers and into the hands of families and people with a disability through the continual increase in individual support packages and person-directed approaches.

Charlton Bowling Club: liquor licensing fees

Raised with: Minister for Consumer Affairs

Raised by: Mr Drum

Raised on: 26 November 2009

REPLY:

I refer to your adjournment debate on 26 November 2009 regarding the impact of the new risk-based liquor licence fees in the Liquor Control Reform Regulations 2009 on the Charlton Bowling Club, and full club licences more generally.

Charlton Bowling Club operates under a full club licence. This entitled the club to provide liquor on the premises to members and their guests at any time of the day and night, except for Sundays, Good Friday and ANZAC Day, when trade is limited to 10 a.m. or 12 p.m. until 11 p.m.

The Club's licence also entitles it to have underage persons on the premises in connection with sporting activities only.

The Charlton Bowling Club's licence permits it to trade for significantly more hours per week and year than commercially licensed premises nearby.

The Club's operating conditions, particularly its ability to host underage sporting activities, clearly necessitate the active oversight of the Director of Liquor Licensing, the newly-formed Compliance Directorate and Victoria Police.

I do acknowledge that some licensed sports clubs have expressed a concern that reflects a division between the activity of the club and the licence scope. To this end, I will consider ways in which licences might be reconfigured in future.

In Victoria, licence categories are largely based on whether liquor is supplied for consumption on or off the premises, rather than the business type. It is not feasible or practical to set fees tailored to each licensee's individual circumstances. Extensive research was undertaken for the Allen Consulting Group Report Alcohol-related Harm and the Operation of Licensed Premises to determine risk factors that are linked to alcohol-related harm to set licensing fees accordingly. The risk factors identified as part of the new fee structure represent the best objective indicators of the increased risk of harm available for all licence types.

Evidence shows that alcohol-related violence is a problem across the state, not only in metropolitan Melbourne. This is highlighted by the fact that 11 of the 22 licensed premises with the highest rate of alcohol-related crime are located in rural and regional Victoria. Further, analysis of Victorian offence data shows that even small venues are associated with alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour.

Under the new fee structure, annual renewal fees include a base fee (differentiated by licence category) and risk fees for extended operating hours and compliance history where relevant. Where risk fees apply to a licence, a 'venue capacity multiplier' is applied to the sum of the base fee and the relevant risk fee, to take account of the increased risk associated with larger premises. The relative risks associated with different types of businesses will be reviewed as part of the ongoing evaluation of the licence fee structure.

In relation to the renewal fees for full club licences under the new fee structure, the base fee is the same as that for general and on-premises licences. However, the extended operating hours risk fees will not apply to club licences because they have special conditions regarding club rules and membership requirements, and historically have been limited to supplying alcohol to members.

Where certain licensees would suffer serious financial hardship by paying the increased licence renewal fee, licensees could apply to have their fee waived or reduced.

The new fee structure commenced on 1 January 2010. Further information is available on the Department of Justice website at www.justice.vic.gov.au/alcohol.

I note that an application under the hardship scheme was received from the Charlton Bowling Club, and the Director of Liquor Licensing has notified the club of the decision by letter dated 9 February 2010.

Box Hill: central activities district

Raised with: Premier

Raised by: Mr Atkinson

Raised on: 27 November 2009

REPLY:

Box Hill is identified in *Melbourne @ 5 million* as one of six areas across Melbourne to be promoted as Central Activities Districts (CADs). This status reinforces Government's commitment to Box Hill and underscores its importance as a major residential and commercial hub and one of Melbourne's biggest transport interchanges.

Government has established the Box Hill CAD Project Control Group (PCG) to drive strategic planning and development in Box Hill. The PCG includes senior representatives from Whitehorse City Council, the Department of Planning and Community Development, the Department of Transport and VicRoads. The PCG will consider proposals such as the extension of the light rail from Burwood Highway through Box Hill. The PCG will also be supported by specialist working groups, including representatives from other relevant portfolios, such as health and industry.

The PCG governance model has been applied successfully in other CADs to identify and oversee the delivery of strategic projects that achieve Government policy. I consider the Box Hill CAD PCG to be well placed to guide the strategic planning and development of Box Hill and support the implementation and delivery of future improvements.

Housing: Oakleigh family

Raised with: Minister for Housing

Raised by: Ms Lovell

Raised on: 9 December 2009

REPLY:

Ms Jane Butcher lodged an application for public housing on 28 October 2009.

The Department of Human Services has contacted Ms Butcher to discuss her housing options. This included providing information about early housing assistance, bond loan and referral to a housing association. The department will continue to work with Ms Butcher to find suitable long term accommodation for her and her family. Ms Butcher is encouraged to maintain contact with the department to address her housing needs.

Racing: jumps events

Raised with: Minister for Racing

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 10 December 2009

REPLY:

As you may be aware, on 21 January 2010 the Board of Racing Victoria Limited (RVL) announced that jumps racing would continue beyond the 2010 season subject to it meeting strict criteria, including significant reductions to the 2009 fatality rates and number of falls as well as increasing the number of starters participating in jumps races.

The RVL Board has also confirmed its intention to cease jumps racing immediately if all conditions are not met at the conclusion of the 2010 season and will establish a transition fund to assist trainers and jockeys.

It is important to understand that RVL is an independent body established under federal corporations law. Strategic decisions relating to the Victorian thoroughbred racing industry, including those pertaining to jumps racing are made by the Board of RVL and not by the Government.

The RVL Board is best placed to take into account views from all sides of the debate and has made a decision that will allow jumps racing to continue but in a way that will best protect the welfare of both horses and jockeys.

Housing: first home owner grants

Raised with: Treasurer

Raised by: Mr Dalla-Riva

Raised on: 2 February 2010

REPLY:

I refer to the issue raised in the Adjournment debate of 2 February 2010 in the Legislative Council, regarding the experiences of Ms Deane and Mr Honan relating to their first home buyers grant.

The First Home Owner Boost scheme (the Boost) is a Commonwealth initiative designed to assist first home owners in purchasing or building their first home. The Boost is administered under the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 (FHOG Act) and ended on 31 December 2009. Under the FHOG Act, the amount of assistance available to an eligible applicant is strictly dependent upon the contract date. For contracts entered into between 14 October 2008 and 30 September 2009, the Boost offered a further \$14,000 for building a new home, and \$7000 for contracts signed between 1 October 2009 and 31 December 2009.

Given the unfortunate circumstances in which Ms Deane and her partner have come to enter into a new building contract, I am pleased to advise you that I have approved an ex gratia payment of \$14,000. However, this payment will be subject to:

- a) the couple meeting the eligibility criteria for the first home owner grant;
- b) construction commencing within 26 weeks of the date of the new building contract; and
- c) the new home being completed within 18 months of construction commencing.

The couple should also note that first home owner grant assistance is generally paid in anticipation of the applicant meeting the eligibility criteria for construction and residency. Should the couple fail to meet these requirements the first home owner assistance, including the ex gratia payment, will need to be repaid.

Disability services: Bendigo family

Raised with: Minister for Community Services

Raised by: Mr Drum

Raised on: 2 February 2010

REPLY:

Disability Services Branch, of the Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for funding and providing a range of supports and services for people in Victoria with an intellectual, physical, sensory or neurological disability or an acquired brain injury.

A range of disability services and supports are available and tailored to the individual's needs and circumstances including aids and equipment, case management or individual support packages. Disability Services also supports care giving relationships by providing assistance for families and carers.

A person with a disability can access these supports in addition to community services which are available to any member of the community, such as hospitals, schools, housing and recreation.

Information about the range of supports available can be obtained by all members of the community by contacting the Disability Services Intake and Response service on 1800 783 783. A person with a disability or their family can also ask the Intake and Response service for assistance to develop a plan for their support needs.

Whooping cough: immunisation

Raised with: Minister for Health

Raised by: Mr D. Davis

Raised on: 2 February 2010

REPLY:

Victoria, like the rest of Australia, has seen an increase in notifications of pertussis (whooping cough), over the past 2 years. Three deaths in babies have occurred during this epidemic in other States/Territories, not in Victoria.

Currently whooping cough vaccine is provided in combination with other vaccines such as tetanus and diphtheria. This combination vaccine is given at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months and 4 years with a booster given to 15-17 year olds.

Victoria has for many years had a very strong immunisation program, with 92% of 12 month old children fully immunised against whooping cough, and 96% by two years of age. Despite this, the increase in whooping cough infection is a reminder of the important role vaccines play in protecting our community from serious diseases. Immunisation is the best protection against this and other vaccine preventable diseases.

Even if a person is fully immunised against whooping cough in childhood, the nature of the vaccine is such that the immunity wanes in late adolescence and adult life.

The majority of infections are being seen in adults due to waning immunity from their vaccine. A booster dose is recommended for adults, particularly those planning pregnancy or for both parents as soon as possible after delivery of an infant, and others such as people working with young children and health care workers. Booster doses for adults are not funded under the National Immunisation Program.

However, to respond to this increase in notifications, in June 2009 the Brumby government implemented a whooping cough vaccine program for new parents. Vaccinating new parents will protect their babies until they are 6 months, when immunity from their own three dose course of pertussis vaccine will protect them.

Brimbank family violence unit: closure

Raised with: Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Raised by: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 3 February 2010

REPLY:

The Brumby Government is taking a strong stand on family violence, which is one of the most significant social issues affecting our community. Intimate partner violence alone is the leading contributor to preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15-44.

Since 2005, the Government has invested over \$100 million in the family violence reform program. This investment and commitment has dramatically changed the culture of responding to family violence in Victoria: with police, courts and family violence services working more collaboratively than at any time in our history to reduce the impact and repetition of violence.

A key part of the family violence reforms has been the implementation of the Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence. Implemented in 2004, the Code is recognised as excellent practice and is being modelled by other states.

Since the beginning of these family violence response reforms, Victoria Police has been at the forefront of driving significant strategic and operational changes in police practice. As a result of these changes, we have already seen an increase in the safety of women and children and perpetrators being made more accountable for their actions.

Since the introduction of the Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence, there has been a 212 per cent increase in the number of intervention orders sought by Victoria Police—including Family Violence Safety Notices. Therefore, the number of people receiving intervention orders has more than doubled in the four-year period following the introduction of the Code.

Victoria Police will continue to build on this improvement and continues to support and advance the reforms, as outlined in its strategy to reduce violence against women and children—*Living Free from Violence: Upholding the Right* released in 2009.

Victoria Police trialled a reallocation of resources in the Brimbank area during February this year. Family Violence Liaison Officers continued to maintain contact with stakeholders during that period and a sergeant had been tasked with monitoring family violence incidents. It had been hoped that this would improve the ability of general duties

police to respond to incidents of family violence with the assistance of expert officers who are highly experienced in dealing with these matters.

Victoria Police have advised that following a review of the trial period, which involved seeking feedback from the Sunshine Magistrates' Court as well as other service providers in the area, Brimbank Police have committed further staff to their Family Violence Team commencing response shifts on 5 March 2010. I am further advised that Victoria Police has extended the assessment period of reviewing responses to family violence to conduct a deeper analysis over the next 2 months.

The review process will incorporate feedback from key external stakeholders as Brimbank Police are committed to addressing family violence and working with their integrated family violence service partners in the west sub-region of Melbourne.

I trust this information is of assistance and thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention.

Puffing Billy: refurbishment

Raised with: Minister for Tourism and Major Events

Raised by: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 3 February 2010

REPLY:

Thank you for raising the matter of the long-term viability of the Puffing Billy Railway.

Puffing Billy is an iconic part of Victoria's tourism heritage, attracting approximately 260,000 passengers each year.

In recognition of its status as one of Victoria's best known and most popular tourist attractions, the Government's *Regional Tourism Action Plan 2009-2012* identifies reinvestment in the Puffing Billy Railway (as well as new investment in associated business opportunities) as one of the key 'actions' for the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges region.

Tourism Victoria has also helped fund development of the *Puffing Billy Railway Business Plan 2009-2014* and the *Puffing Billy Railway Draft Corridor Master Plan*. Together these plans identify strategies to ensure the long term success of the Puffing Billy Railway.

Having helped fund this important work, the Government is continuing to work with the Emerald Tourist Railway Board to ensure the railway can be enjoyed by future generations.

Bushfires: neighbourhood safer places

Raised with: Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 4 February 2010

REPLY:

The Interim Report of the Royal Commission recommended the process of identifying and establishing Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSPs) begin in the highest risk communities for this fire season.

NSPs are places of last resort when all other options have failed. They are places, such as ovals and public buildings, that may offer relative safety or assembly and provide some immediate shelter from fire, when all other options have failed.

It is important to note that NSPs should not be considered to be a substitute for a well prepared personal Bushfire Survival Plan, and should not be relied upon as part of the plan as somewhere to go during a bushfire. A NSP is a place of last resort when all other options have failed, and people may be killed or injured attempting to travel to such a location when fire is in the landscape. Safety is not guaranteed once people have assembled there, and emergency services may not be present at these sites.

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) has worked to complete a technical assessment of potential NSPs in 52 of the state's highest bushfire risk areas, as well as other areas identified by councils, and is now working with local councils to assist them in their implementation, where identified. The State Government has provided \$1.25 million to the CFA to assist in this task, and an additional \$500,000 to the Municipal Association of Victoria to assist councils in their role.

Not all towns in Victoria will have a NSP, as there is not always a suitable location. The community's attention should focus on developing a plan that involves leaving high-risk areas early, rather than relying on NSPs. The new fire danger ratings will help determine when to do this.

I have been advised by the CFA that, currently, there are eleven council designated NSPs in the North West, Midlands-Wimmera area and South West of Victoria, that are within the 52 high-risk bushfire townships. In Halls Gap, the Visitor Information Centre has been council designated, and Lake Bellfield Reservoir Wall is awaiting council approval.

In addition, the CFA has identified 37 NSPs outside the 52 high-risk townships in the Midlands-Wimmera area, with five locations receiving council approval to date.

A list of all designated NSPs can be obtained from the CFA website.

I trust this information is of assistance, and thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention.

Centre Dandenong Road, Dingley: bus lane

Raised with: Minister for Roads and Ports

Raised by: Mrs Peulich

Raised on: 23 February 2010

REPLY:

While I was not able to attend the community meeting regarding this project on 5 March 2010, Ms Janice Munt MP, Member for Mordialloc, was present at the meeting as part of her work on behalf of local residents concerned about this project.

As advised by Ms Munt at the meeting, the Government has responded to these concerns by postponing the implementation of the bus lanes until the current section of the Dingley Arterial, between Perry Road and Springvale Road, is complete.

This section of the Dingley Arterial was identified in the *Victorian Transport Plan* and construction will commence later this year. It will be a vital step towards improving safety and reducing the volume of traffic in Dingley Village by diverting motorists away from the local road network, including Centre Dandenong Road.

Construction of this section of the Dingley Arterial will further enhance other network improvements that the Government has made in the Dingley area, including the recently installed traffic lights at the intersection of Lower Dandenong Road and Boundary Road. I note that traffic volumes on Centre Dandenong Road are now nine per

cent lower than they were a year ago, before the construction of the lights began, and it is expected that traffic will reduce further as commuters become familiar with the improved intersection.

The Government remains committed to installing the bus lanes on Centre Dandenong Road following completion of the current section of Dingley Arterial. The project will improve the travel times and reliability of the bus service and is in line with the Government's *Keeping Melbourne Moving* strategy, which identifies the importance of improving the flow of road-based public transport.

University of Melbourne: faculty of the VCA and music

Raised with: Minister for the Arts

Raised by: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 23 February 2010

REPLY:

The University of Melbourne has embarked on a consultation process "designed to achieve the best structural and educational outcomes for the current Faculty of the VCA and Music." A Review Committee was formed to evaluate the responses to the discussion paper, *Defining the Future for the VCA and Music at the University of Melbourne*, issued on November 10, 2009, as one part of the consultation process.

In your Adjournment Debate Question on Notice you asked me to raise a range of matters with the University of Melbourne. I confirm that I have drawn your Adjournment Debate Question concerns to the Vice-Chancellor's attention.

You raised the composition of the Review Committee particularly the independence of the arts representation. The Review Committee is chaired by Dr Ziggy Switkowski and is composed of fourteen members. The community representative on the committee is the former Minister for the Arts, the Hon Mary Delahunty, while the representative of the VCAM Advisory Board is the former MSO Managing Director, Mr Trevor Green, and the appointed representative of Southbank is the well respected artist, Associate Professor Jon Cattapan.

I note that you had issues about the omission of members with a performing arts background and representation of the VCA alumni. I believe the following Review Committee members meet these criteria. A member of the committee is the international award winning documentary filmmaker, Ian Lang, who was a graduate of Swinburne Film and Television School which ultimately became the Film and Television School of the VCA while another member, Brian Long, is a music graduate of the former VCA.

VicRoads: agricultural show signage

Raised with: Minister for Roads and Ports

Raised by: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 24 February 2010

REPLY:

As part of a three-year Government initiative to improve road safety and enhance the touring experience for motorists and tour groups, VicRoads is in the process of removing tourism and advertising signs that do not conform to relevant guidelines and which have not been authorised by VicRoads. This is necessary to avoid a proliferation of signage that may be distracting for motorists, and also to ensure that signs are clear and concise so that they are easily understood. This work is being done following recommendations handed down by the Parliament's Rural and Regional Committee, which was supported by members of the Liberal Party and chaired by a member of the Nationals.

As you have noted, the show organisers did not seek prior approval from VicRoads to install signage publicising these events and, as such, the signage was removed.

However, the Brumby Government acknowledges the benefits for regional areas of promoting events such as these to the wider community via some signage on roadsides. As such, I have requested that VicRoads work closely with the Shire of Cardinia to identify suitable and appropriate locations for promoting community events in line with current guidelines.

I am advised that the signage for the Pakenham Show that was removed by VicRoads was subsequently delivered to the Pakenham Racecourse following a request from the show's organisers.

Land tax: Ballarat

Raised with: Treasurer

Raised by: Mr Vogels

Raised on: 25 February 2010

REPLY:

The Brumby Labor Government has provided more than \$3 billion of land tax cuts since 1999. These reforms have been made to moderate the effect of the property market boom and have been achieved by:

- cutting the top rate of tax in five state budgets from the 5 per cent rate left by the previous Kennett Government to the current rate of 2.25 per cent;
- cutting rates for land tax payers in the middle brackets on four occasions; and
- increasing the tax free threshold to the current level of \$250,000 compared to \$85,000 in 1999.

Land tax on vacant land is intended to provide a disincentive to land banking, which is “the practice of acquiring land and holding it for future use”. Land banking is detrimental to the property market as it often results in lower supply and/or higher prices than socially optimal at any given time.

The increase in the Ballarat landowners land tax assessment is a result of the direct actions of the landowner making changes to the land that significantly increase in the value of the land. The State Government does not control or determine the land valuations that land tax is based upon. Local councils value land every two years for the purposes of levying council rates. Where land is subdivided and prepared for sale the value of the land will increase significantly, a benefit which will be realised by the developer upon sale.

A land tax bill of \$57,000 is attributed to landholdings in excess of \$4.42 million. Landholdings of the same value would incur a land tax liability of \$73,355 in NSW. Corporate landholdings of this value would incur a land tax liability of \$66,350 in Queensland.

Disability services: respite care

Raised with: Minister for Community Services

Raised by: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 9 March 2010

REPLY:

Disability Services in the North and West Metropolitan Region (N&WMR) are aware of the matter raised by Ms Hartland and officers are working closely with the Cammarano family to develop a solution that meets the

family's needs. I can advise that Mrs Cammarano has been offered respite support for her son Steven at Curlew Ave for the entire month of October (approximately four and a half weeks). Mrs Cammarano has further agreed to the region sourcing a further two weeks of respite including the option of attending a camp. Disability Services N&WMR are currently investigating other options for the additional two weeks the family have requested.

The Department of Human Services, Disability Services continues to work with families and service providers to improve respite supports for families with children with an emphasis on making available a range of respite support options that are flexible and offer real choice.

As a result of the Victorian Government's commitment to shifting the control of people's supports into the hands of families and people with a disability themselves, more creative and personalised approaches are able to be developed.

Western Highway: Ararat and Beaufort bypasses

Raised with: Minister for Planning

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 9 March 2010

REPLY:

In response to the request of the Member for Western Victoria Region that the Minister for Planning ensure adequate funding for VicRoads to include road construction planning for Ararat and Beaufort in its proposed study of the Western Highway, I advise that the Minister for Planning is not responsible for the funding of roads and the question should be directed to the Minister for Roads and Ports.

Princes Freeway: safety

Raised with: Minister for Roads and Ports

Raised by: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 9 March 2010

REPLY:

I am informed that as at the date the question was raised:

The Brumby Government is taking action to improve the safety of our roads for all Victorian road users. Victoria has recorded its seven lowest road tolls over the past seven years and recorded our lowest ever road toll in 2009. The Government's *arrive alive 2008–2017* road safety strategy aims to drive down the road toll by a further 30 per cent by 2017. As part of this strategy, the Government is investing \$650 million over ten years for road safety improvement projects.

I am pleased to advise that the Government has allocated \$1.5 million in funding for the installation of safety barriers along the five-kilometre section of the Princes Freeway between the Princes Highway and the Pakenham Bypass. Works are expected to commence in October 2010.

Planning: Sunbury development

Raised with: Minister for Planning

Raised by: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 10 March 2010

REPLY:

After extensive consultation with the local community, Hume City Council has recently resolved to adopt the '275 Racecourse Road, Sunbury–February 2010' Master Plan. The effect of adopting this Master Plan is that Council acknowledges that there is some development potential on this site.

No development can or will commence on the site until the most appropriate suite of planning controls are developed for this site.

The application of planning controls and guidelines will occur through a formal planning scheme amendment process. Council will need to request authorisation from me to prepare a planning scheme amendment at which point, my Department will assess the request to ensure it complies with the requirements of the *Planning and Environment Act*, the Hume Planning Scheme and the *Planning and Environment Regulations*.

Formal exhibition of the amendment will occur as part of the planning scheme amendment process and the community will have the opportunity to make a formal submission on the tools being used to realise the development proposal. There will also be the potential for an independent Panel to be convened if submissions remain unresolved.

Hume City Council notes that aside from the planning scheme amendment process, a number of additional reports need to be prepared before the Master Plan can progress to the development stages. My Department will ensure the appropriate reports are prepared before deciding on any authorisation request from Council.

Rail: Ivanhoe communications tower

Raised with: Minister for Public Transport

Raised by: Mr Guy

Raised on: 24 March 2010

REPLY:

The tower to be installed at Ivanhoe train station is part of the State Government's \$144 million investment in the new Digital Train Radio System. DTRS is the digital train radio system that will replace the existing Urban Train Radio System.

The new DTRS will provide highly reliable voice and data radio coverage, enabling train drivers to communicate more efficiently with each other and the control centre.

This will deliver a range of benefits, including improved identification of trains around the network, more timely management of events and emergencies, and improved safety management of the network.

The tower at Ivanhoe station is one of approximately 74 new base stations being installed around the network, and one of approximately 100 base stations that will make up the DTRS network.

The base stations and towers are located within the existing rail corridor and not on private land. Planning permits, approvals and associated community consultation processes are not required for the installation of DTRS base stations and towers because they will be located within the existing rail corridor, within Public Use Zone 4—transport zoning.

However, the view taken by the Department of Transport is that nearby residents should be informed about the project and provided with avenues to discuss any concerns or seek further information.

Project representatives distributed works and project information to nearby residents in Ivanhoe on 12 March 2010 and conducted a follow-up doorknock on 22 March 2010, giving residents the opportunity to speak with members of the project team from the Department of Transport.

The Department has also spoken with officers at Banyule Council to ensure they have all relevant information and are aware of the process being undertaken.

The locations of the base stations are selected based on a number of factors. Each base station requires specific positioning to achieve maximum radio coverage. A key factor is minimising the amount of infrastructure required to deliver the system by using existing infrastructure where possible, to also reduce the overall impact for nearby residents. Other factors include the availability of electricity, accessibility to the site for maintenance and any heritage or environmental considerations, including visual impact. Possible sites are also reviewed from a safety perspective to ensure that the tower does not obstruct the view of other railway infrastructure, especially signals.

A site selection group consisting of a technical radio planner, a town planner and safety personnel assessed various locations in the vicinity of Ivanhoe station. The alternative sites assessed by the site selection group were deemed unsuitable for a number of reasons, including that coverage would be compromised and that the land on the eastern side of the squash courts is not within the State's rail reserve.

The selected site was determined to be the optimal location for the Ivanhoe base station and tower with consideration of all of these factors.

An arboricultural consultant conducted a formal assessment of the potential impacts that construction works and the installation of the tower would have on the spotted gum near the site. This assessment concluded that the construction works and installation of the tower would not significantly affect the tree's health or amenity.

With regards to concerns about radiofrequency electromagnetic energy (RF EME) emissions and potential adverse health effects, base stations produce weak RF EME levels that are well below the limits specified by the Australian Communications Authority.

A nationwide study published in 2000 by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) found that the typical exposure level from base stations and towers is hundreds and sometimes thousands of times below the regulated limit.

Current advice from the World Health Organization is that recent reviews have concluded exposure to RF emissions from base station towers does not cause any adverse health consequences.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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

Wednesday, 14 April 2010

Housing: Leongatha

Raised with: Minister for Housing

Raised by: Ms Lovell

Raised on: 3 February 2010

REPLY:

I am advised that Ms Wotherspoon and her carer, Ms Price, are on the waiting list and have recently been offered accommodation in Wonthaggi. I understand they informed the Morwell Housing and Community Building staff that they wish to remain on the housing waiting list until suitable accommodation becomes available in Leongatha.

I am advised that while funds are available from within Stimulus package to construct new homes in Leongatha there are clients with special needs already on the waiting list for properties in this area who may be allocated housing ahead of Ms Wotherspoon. Ms Wotherspoon and Ms Price have been made aware of the situation by the Morwell Housing and Community Building staff and will be informed of any available housing as soon as possible.

Libraries: Geelong redevelopment

Raised with: Minister for Local Government

Raised by: Mr Koch

Raised on: 25 February 2010

REPLY:

Thank you for raising the City of Greater Geelong's proposed redevelopment of the Geelong City Library and historical archive facility.

The Department of Planning and Community Development has not, to date, received a formal request for funding from the City of Greater Geelong for the redevelopment of the Geelong City Library and, as such, I am unable to comment on the specific details of this project.

However, I understand that the Council passed a resolution at a recent meeting committing \$20 million to the project and to seek funding from State and Federal Governments for the Geelong City Library. I look forward to receiving additional information on this exciting project from the Council.

The Victorian Government supports councils, including the City of Greater Geelong, in the provision of library facilities through the *Living Libraries Program*. The *Living Libraries Program* has seen \$31.5 million allocated to councils and regional library corporations to rejuvenate library facilities across Victoria, with a total of 124 projects having been funded under this program to date. This investment has resulted in the refurbishment of library facilities in Corio, Geelong West and Belmont and, in the 2009 funding round, \$350,000 was provided to the City of Greater Geelong for a new library in Waurin Ponds. Thank you for your interest in the Geelong City Library and the provision of library services in the City of Greater Geelong.

Parks Victoria: Ferny Creek land**Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change****Raised by: Mr O'Donohue****Raised on: 25 February 2010****REPLY:**

Parks Victoria has provided a notice to horse owners to phase out grazing in the Dandenong Ranges due to the land being reserved as National Park. This action is in accordance with Parks Victoria's Park Management Plan dated March 2006. The plan states: *To phase out grazing from the National Park and to manage fire risk through mechanical slashing.*

Horse owners have been given approximately 5 months notice to find suitable alternative arrangements. Parks Victoria has provided assistance to horse owners by facilitating contact with the manager at the Burnham Beeches property adjacent to the Mountain Ash Paddock where the horses are currently located, as well making inquiries on horse owners' behalf with local horse riding clubs. Grazing will cease on 6 April 2010.

The Mountain Ash Paddock has been fully assessed and incorporated into the East Metropolitan Fire Districts, Fire Operations Plan. This plan outlines the fuel break network that will be maintained around the property. The overall fuel hazard will be managed via slashing, mowing and even burning as per the management actions undertaken for the remainder of the Dandenong Ranges National Park. This action is consistent with the information provided by the local member to the horse owners recently regarding management of fine fuels.

As a result of the change of use of the Mountain Ash Paddock from grazing, which provided exclusive use of the land to a few people, the area will now become available to a wide range of other visitors and activities, such as walking and cycling, for the first time in decades. The future use of the site will still provide for horse riding as an important recreational activity. Parks Victoria has redeveloped the historic Tan Track which is expected to attract large numbers of horse riders from across the broader Dandenongs area and beyond.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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

Thursday, 15 April 2010

Department of Sustainability and Environment: land purchase

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr P. Davis

Raised on: 4 February 2010

REPLY:

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) has been investigating the purchase of a small number of properties currently for sale on the open market, as well as those which have been submitted as land acquisition proposals in the Gippsland area. These properties are currently being considered in light of the criteria outlined below. DSE is not seeking to purchase farmland, but rather is seeking high quality native bushland.

If a property appears to meet the criteria based on analysis of desk top mapping and other information, a preliminary visit to the property to clarify the vegetation type and quality is undertaken. Based on the criteria outlined below, DSE advises that the property in question is not suitable for purchase under this scheme.

Purchase of freehold land, targets properties that have vegetation in good condition, are adjacent to or nearby existing parks and reserves and that meet the criteria for inclusion into the Protected Area Reserve System. These criteria include contributing to:

- a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system;
- ecosystem linkages; and
- streamlining park management activities.

Brunswick Special Developmental School: future

Raised with: Minister for Education

Raised by: Mr Guy

Raised on: 24 February 2010

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

Brunswick Special Developmental School has increasing enrolments and been facing accommodation pressures for some time. There are limitations on the site the school shares with Brunswick North West Primary School that prevent any further expansion.

Officers from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development have been working with the principal and school council on possible alternative sites for the school for some time. While a number of sites have been investigated, including school sites in the area, they do not meet the specialised requirements of the school.

The regeneration and merger projects in the Northern Metropolitan Region of the Department will free some school sites that can be used for educational purposes. The closest and most suitable site to Brunswick Special Developmental School that has been identified and will become available in 2011 is the Banksia–La Trobe Campus of Charles La Trobe P–12 College in West Heidelberg.

The Brunswick Special Developmental School Council proposed this site as they believe it is the only viable option for the new school. While it is located some 8.5 km from the current school site, advantages of the site include its size and proximity to public transport, a swimming pool, shops and parklands.

The West Heidelberg site will also become available in the time frame required for the construction of the new special developmental school.

The Brunswick Special Developmental School Council sought feedback from families as part of the consultation process in making their decision. The council believes that the West Heidelberg site is the best available site for the new school and is acting in the overall interests of current and future students and their families.

The school council and the Department are conscious of the importance of transport arrangements to families and recognise that transport routes may need to be reorganised.

Students attending special developmental schools deserve the best possible education in twenty-first century learning environments and the construction of the new school will enable this to occur.

Bushfires: Walhalla warnings

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr P. Davis

Raised on: 24 February 2010

REPLY:

The State Control Centre procedures for updating the Victorian Bushfire Information Line after hours service have been updated and staff retrained following the unfortunate error over the Christmas New Year period.

Regional tourism centres receive all warnings that are distributed by the Department of Sustainability (DSE) and Country Fire Authority (CFA) websites and media outlets via email. DSE and CFA are currently working with Tourism Victoria to ensure that the regional tourism offices are the appropriate location for receipt of these warnings. In addition, local staff liaise with tourism operators during incidents to ensure that they are aware of any risk that may be posed to their business.

Glen Huntly reservoir site: heritage overlay

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 25 February 2010

REPLY:

The reservoir at Booran Road, Glen Huntly has been identified as being potentially of statewide significance. It is currently being assessed by Heritage Victoria. If it is recommended for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register and this recommendation is endorsed by the Heritage Council, it would not prevent the land from being used as recreational open space. Registration does not necessarily stop a place from being altered or redeveloped.

Police: resources

Raised with: Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Raised by: Mrs Peulich

Raised on: 25 February 2010

REPLY:

The Brumby Government is committed to providing safe streets and homes for Victorians by ensuring Victoria Police is highly professional and well resourced. Since coming to office, the State Government has increased the number of police by over 1,400. Further, we have increased funding to Victoria Police to a record budget of more than \$1.89 billion in 2009-10. The Government has also committed nearly \$450 million to fund the construction or refurbishment of over 160 police stations and residences across the state, in Victoria's largest ever police station building program.

The Government's additional support to Victoria Police is showing good results. Victoria's crime rate has fallen 25.5 per cent since 2000-01. Local Victoria Police crime statistics are readily available on the Victoria Police, My Place website.

However, the fight against crime is ongoing. That is why at the last election the Government committed to a further increase of 350 sworn police by 2010, as well as an additional 50 forensic and specialist investigators. In August 2009 the Government announced funding of \$47 million for an additional 120 police for the Operational Response Unit (ORU). This unit is now operational and carries out targeted law enforcement and public order operations, focusing on alcohol and weapons offences, and dangerous and irresponsible driver behaviour. With over 120 specially recruited and trained police, the ORU is now being deployed where they will have the strongest impact across the State in the CBD, metropolitan, regional and rural areas. It is expected that the ORU will grow to more than 200 police by the end of 2010.

Decisions on the placement of police throughout the state are operational matters and are made by police command on the basis of assessed need. It is important that this process is not subject to political interference. 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.

The Government also recognises the excellent work Neighbourhood Watch members carry out in partnership with police and local government in improving safety, security and quality of life through the prevention of crime. The dedicated work of Neighbourhood Watch members improves the rapport between police and the community and increases feelings of safety across the community.

The Chief Commissioner of Police has confirmed that Victoria Police will continue to fully support Neighbourhood Watch. Police members will still attend meetings when invited and continue to contribute to crime prevention and safety initiatives. In addition, 23 full time police Neighbourhood Watch coordinators will be working across the state.

Since it was formed in 1983, Neighbourhood Watch has had very few changes. Yet, crime trends and the way police deliver services to the community have undergone great change.

By aligning with the Police Service Area, Neighbourhood Watch will ensure it remains effective and provides a focus on a broader range of crime prevention measures. It will allow better liaison with police and local government and create more opportunities for people to be involved.

Furthermore, Victoria Police is dedicated to ensuring the safety and welfare of young people throughout the state and police are taking positive steps to address some of the issues and problems faced by Victoria's youth. Youth programs developed by police encourage young people to engage in positive social interaction through safe activities that are drug and alcohol free.

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

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COUNCIL

Thursday, 15 April 2010

Under the new Youth Resource Officer Model developed by Victoria Police and implemented in 2006, officers are assigned to specific local government areas and work closely with local youth agencies and government to address relevant youth and youth justice issues. The program aims to improve police and youth relationships and provide an increased focus on 'at risk' youth.

I trust this information is of assistance and thank you for taking the time to bring your concerns to my attention.