

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Tuesday, 1 May 2007

(Extract from book 6)

Internet: www.parliament.vic.gov.au/downloadhansard

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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The Hon. S. P. BRACKS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. J. W. THWAITES

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition:

Mr E. N. BAILLIEU

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

The Hon. LOUISE ASHER

Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. J. RYAN

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. L. WALSH

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Tuesday, 1 May 2007

The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 2.04 p.m. and read the prayer.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Water: Melbourne supply

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change. I refer to the fact that Melbourne Water has commenced drawing water from below the recommended minimum operating level at the Upper Yarra Dam and that this water contains high levels of manganese, and I ask: can the minister report to the house what actions have been taken to ensure Melbourne's water quality and to reduce unacceptable levels of manganese?

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question and indicate that Melbourne Water is managing our water system under a time of great stress because of the drought, but it is doing an excellent job. I want to congratulate the people of Melbourne who throughout April have continued to save water and to do an excellent job in water conservation. I point out that Melbourne Water is carrying out its function to ensure that water quality is maintained.

I would also point out to the house that the opposition leader has made a number of allegations about water and water management which have not proved to be true, and we will be very interested to see whether his claim that Melbourne Water will not be able to access water from Thomson Dam on 18 May proves to be correct.

Film industry: government initiatives

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to the government's commitment to attracting international filmmakers to Melbourne to boost the Victorian economy. I ask the Premier to detail for the house the most recent example of the government delivering on that commitment.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the member for Narre Warren North for his question. I can remember about seven and a half years ago we embarked on a strategy to revive the film and TV industry in Victoria. At that time, as many members of this house would remember and certainly many members of the public

would remember, most of the activity in Australia was going to New South Wales and Queensland — Queensland had the Warner Brothers studio and Sydney had the Fox Studios. Victoria was being left behind on film and TV, yet we had such a historically strong base. In effect what was happening was that talented and skilled people from Victorian film were taking their skills to New South Wales and also to Queensland.

We commissioned Sigrid Thornton to undertake an examination of the film and TV industry and make recommendations on how we could improve that and how we could reposition Victoria to the way it was originally, as one of the film leaders in this country. One of the key recommendations that her report made was that we needed a studio. We needed a permanent, ongoing space in which production could occur, and the best way to have a studio was to have an independent studio not aligned to any of the key production houses overseas. That is exactly what we did.

Of course, Central City Studios in the Docklands is now established and it has been an unbelievable success over a short period of time. Already Central City Studios has had at least 10 productions including — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Bass!

Mr BRACKS — Its productions include *Hating Alison Ashley*, the Delta Goodrem film which was a hit with teenagers around Victoria and Australia, *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, and *Last Man Standing*, the miniseries which was quite successful as one of our commercial productions. In the last two years, for example, we had significant major international films including *Ghost Rider* — Nicolas Cage starred in that — and *Charlotte's Web*, which has been promoted more recently around the world.

The member for Narre Warren North asked me about any recent developments in addition to those on film and TV. Recently the Minister for Innovation, who is also the Treasurer, was able to announce the biggest single production that we have ever had in Victoria — that is, the \$180 million of value to the Victorian economy in the 10-part TV miniseries *The Pacific*, which will be an absolute boon for the film and television industry here in Victoria.

As has been reported, the director will be Steven Spielberg, and one of the stars of the show will be Tom Hanks. It will have a cast of stars from around the world, as well as significant local production involved in it. Eighty per cent of all those employed in the

miniseries will be employed in Victoria. That is a great achievement. Of course there will be some scenes which occur interstate — some of the tropical scenes cannot be done in Victoria — but most of the country and provincial scenes — —

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr BRACKS — Just a little bit — only 20 per cent. But regional Victoria will star as a location, alongside Victoria Barracks, the Flinders Street station and other areas in the state as well.

Just to highlight how big this is, we are talking about something like 4000 people being employed and a \$180 million contribution to the Victorian economy. This is a massive vote of confidence in the film and TV industry here in the state. At a time when the Australian dollar is high and at a time when there is pressure on other production houses around this country, we are getting the lion's share of film and TV production in Victoria, and that is a great achievement.

Eight years on, I believe those commitments we made are bearing fruit in employing Victorians here in Victoria and not sending our skills interstate. It was neglect under the previous government that lost us leadership in the film and TV industry. I am happy to report to the house that leadership in the film and TV industry is now coming back to Victoria.

Murray–Darling Basin: federal plan

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier update the house on the government's most recent negotiations with the commonwealth regarding the Prime Minister's national water plan and the prospect of reaching some agreement?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. I am very happy to update the house.

An honourable member — Last man standing!

Mr BRACKS — I am standing up for the interests of Victoria, you are quite right. I am very happy to update the Leader of The Nationals and the house on the progress to date. Obviously we have a significant difference with the commonwealth on the general referral of power — the constitutional power vested in the state — for water and land management. The commonwealth still has a position where it wants a general referral of power for all water and land in association with not only the Murray River but also the tributaries and streams leading up to that — effectively

everything north of the Divide — which would go under a generalised head of power to the commonwealth.

We believe that it needs to be more specific and spell out exactly what it wants if it is to have the head of power in this area in relation to caps on entitlements and how the funding will operate in the future. Our preference of course is for an intergovernmental agreement, with more power and responsibility given to the commonwealth for caps and entitlements, for a water market to operate effectively, for rewards out of the \$10 billion over 10 years, which is not a significant amount in relation to the job that needs to be done, and for rewarding good and sound irrigation practices producing surplus water, rather than rewarding the poorest behaviour around the country, which is the current default position of the current scheme. We do not believe the scheme is suitable in its current form. That is backed up by irrigators right around the state.

Of course we know the commentary on The Nationals when they changed their position. It could be just pure coincidence, and let us give them the benefit of doubt, that The Nationals changed their view on the very day that the Council of Australian Governments was meeting. That was pure coincidence. There was nothing political about that. There was nothing about giving a lift to the Prime Minister or The Nationals leader — nothing at all. It was just that they came to that decision on that day!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — We will continue to stand up for the interests of Victorians. We will continue to stand up for the interests of irrigators. We will continue to stand up for the interests of the environment in getting the Murray River flowing again and in making sure we get a good deal for Victoria. We are not going to sell out because your political masters just tell you what you should do. This was a test for The Nationals. They had a choice: standing up for Victoria or effectively kowtowing to the federal coalition. They did the latter.

Child care: places

Mr LUPTON (Pahran) — My question is to the Minister for Children. Can the minister outline to the house what action the Bracks government is taking to address the needs of working parents in relation to the number of child-care places and the quality of child-care services in Victoria?

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Children) — I thank the member for Prahran for his question and for his

ongoing interest in children's services. The government believes in giving every Victorian child the best start in life. This means making sure that every child has the chance to participate in high-quality learning and care programs, because children are learning and developing no matter where they are. That is why last month the Premier and I released the document entitled *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood*. This plan forms part of the national reform agenda — an agenda which Victoria has taken the lead on.

What we announced is a plan to deliver an extra 3000 child-care places for working parents right across Victoria. Contrary to what our Liberal Party colleagues in Canberra, particularly the federal Minister for Families, Mal Brough, might say, there are not enough child-care places here in Victoria. We know this because working parents in our own electorates tell us this every day. We know this because the ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) data shows us that 20 000 Victorian parents do not participate in the workforce because of a lack of affordable child-care places.

I wonder what those opposite think of their colleague Mal Brough's argument that there are no child-care shortages here in Victoria when his own data, which was released a couple of weeks ago, shows that there are child-care shortages right across Victoria, including in Liberal electorates.

I know the member for Prahran is aware that there are child-care shortages in South Yarra, because he takes an interest in his electorate and has taken up this issue on behalf of working parents. But I wonder if the member for Malvern agrees with his colleague in Canberra on whether there is a child-care shortage in Glen Iris or if the member for Caulfield is aware of a child-care shortage in Caulfield North. If they agree that there is a problem, I ask them to stand up for working families here in Victoria and urge their federal counterparts to take this issue seriously. We need an extra 3000 child-care places here in Victoria, and if the federal government comes on board, we can drive these reforms further and faster.

In addition to more places, it is crucial that we have high-quality child-care services as well. That is why we have commenced a review of the children's services regulations here in Victoria. For the first time in a decade, this review will provide us with an opportunity to frame new regulations and standards to ensure better care for Victoria's children.

We are examining important issues like child-to-staff ratios. We are examining program delivery, staff

qualifications and health and safety regulations. These are important issues that will drive quality outcomes for children here in Victoria. Importantly we are also regulating family day care and outside-school-hour care for the first time. I can inform the house that as part of this review we have received almost 800 submissions from early childhood staff, from local government, from service providers and from families right across Victoria. They have all submitted their views as part of this review. Because we want parents to have a strong voice, I can confirm that we are undertaking further parent consultations. This is because the Bracks government values the input from working families. We are listening to what they are saying to us.

Our federal Liberal counterparts might like to say that parents are simply being too fussy when it comes to selecting child care. That just shows how out of touch they are. There is a government that has stopped listening.

I welcome the overwhelming response we have had as part of this review process, because we want to ensure the right balance between affordable child care for parents and high-quality services for our children. Along with our plan to boost child-care places here in Victoria, our work will continue to ensure that Victoria is the best place to raise children.

Water: desalination plant

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — My question is to the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change. I refer to a leaked internal and confidential Department of Sustainability and Environment 2006–07 budget document which states:

It is not proposed to do any further work on desalination.

And I ask: is it not a fact that the government has only resurrected desalination due to Liberal Party policy —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The government benches will come to order.

Ms ASHER — I shall repeat the question —

An honourable member interjected.

Ms ASHER — You enjoyed it so much, I will repeat it: is it not a fact that the government has only resurrected desalination due to Liberal Party policy and due to the complete failure of the minister to handle Victoria's water crisis?

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change) — I thank the member for Brighton for her question. She has not had a very-high-profile role in water, and I imagine that it would be sensible for her to look at the fundamental policy that the government released in October last year — our central region water strategy — which sets out the plans to provide 167 billion litres of extra water for Melbourne by 2015, including the commitment to a feasibility study on desalination.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! That behaviour by the members for Kew and South-West Coast is most inappropriate.

Mr THWAITES — That feasibility study was announced back in October last year, well before the Liberal Party made any commitment or statement in relation to desalination. Subsequent to that, the desalination feasibility study has been commenced by Melbourne Water. They are undertaking it now, and it will be released in due course.

Roads: rural and regional Victoria

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — My question is to the Minister for Roads and Ports. Can the minister outline to the house what actions the Bracks government is taking to improve road infrastructure and road safety in regional Victoria?

Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) — I thank the member for Ballarat West for her question. I want to say that the Bracks government has a proud record of achievement when it comes to funding country roads. We have put, on average, about \$250 million per annum since we have been in government into funding country roads. In the last budget — in the current financial year — we have put \$341 million into country roads. We have put \$92.8 million, in addition to that \$341 million, into major country road upgrades, such as the Calder Highway, the Albury-Wodonga bypass, the Goulburn Valley Highway and the Geelong ring-road. We stand to work cooperatively to ensure that we have safe and quality country roads.

Victoria's spending on country roads is first rate. Since this government came to office it has increased its funding for road safety initiatives by 280 per cent. In country Victoria that means we have undertaken over 900 projects to improve country roads. The four lowest road tolls have occurred in the last four years as a consequence of the tangible efforts made by the

government. The road toll has decreased right across the state by 18 per cent as a consequence, in 2002, of the introduction of our Arrive Alive strategies.

I am pleased to advise the house that when the Premier announced the \$15 million grey spot funding initiative in October last year, the first initiative that he announced was the upgrade of the Borung Highway at the Donald intersection. I am pleased to say that that intersection was upgraded and opened yesterday — and ahead of budget.

There has been a lot of rhetoric coming from the other side of the chamber in respect of country roads, but the government will not underfund or defund country roads. There are some members in this chamber who have been advocating that we fund country roads at \$200 million a year. We are not going to defund country roads to such an enormous extent — that is a \$50 million reduction in country roads. Some members on the other side of the chamber have not learnt a thing in terms of selling out and underselling the country.

This government is committed to working in cooperation with the federal government, but of course to work in cooperation you actually need the other side to carry its own weight. It is underselling Victoria. By their silence those members on the other side of the chamber are underselling Victoria as well.

Victoria contributes 25 per cent of commonwealth fuel taxes, Victoria carries 25 per cent of the national freight, and Victoria only receives 16.5 per cent of fuel taxes from the federal government. To put that in some sort of context, it is \$362 out of the pocket of every Victorian motorist over the life of the current AusLink funding.

The government remains committed to standing up on behalf of Victorians for a fair deal for Victorians. But we are actually going out and doing it ourselves, despite the absence of support from the other side of this chamber. There might be some weak-kneed dears on the other side of the chamber, and there might be some wusses on the other side of the chamber when it comes to standing up for Victoria, but what there certainly is not is a willingness on their part to actually stand up when it counts. This government will do that. We are delivering on improved country roads for all Victorians.

Police Association: WorkSafe assessment

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I refer him to the Ombudsman's report on the WorkSafe investigation into bullying at the police union, which

recommended that the Police Regulation Act be amended to address ‘the status of serving police officers being fully paid union officials’, which is supported by the Chief Commissioner of Police, and I ask: when does the government propose to amend the act?

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — As you, Speaker, are aware, the Ombudsman made a report and suggested that within the police force the police union should be separate from police management. Of course that is a sound principle and one that has been widely endorsed. I gather from the comments from the opposition that it is even endorsed by its members. It is lovely to have them on board. It is something the government expects that in time we will be legislating — —

Mr McIntosh — When?

Mr CAMERON — You know — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Kew and the minister!

Mr CAMERON — I will tell him! I will introduce — —

The SPEAKER — Order! No, the minister will not.

Mr CAMERON — I will tell you, Speaker! It is our intention to introduce a bill at 2.45 p.m. on a Tuesday, but on a Tuesday to be fixed.

Drought: community sport program

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — My question is to the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. I ask the minister to update the house on what action the government is taking to assist Victorian sporting competitions which are suffering from the drought.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — I thank the member for South Barwon for his question and his interest in community sport. As members are all too aware, the drought is having a severe impact on local sporting grounds right across Victoria. The drought is making it hard for local clubs to maintain safe grounds and good quality fields for their players to compete and train on.

Sport at a grassroots level is a vital part of every community right across the state. I have heard countless stories from local sporting clubs across the state about Saturday’s sporting events being the most crucial social activities for many farmers and farming communities doing it tough. Attendances at football and netball

games last year were at record levels. That is indicative of communities getting together and supporting each other at a local level. It is not just about the competition and the players; the social and economic impacts of local sporting clubs collapsing would be devastating.

In light of this the government acted swiftly to ensure country sport survived the drought by committing \$1.9 million through drought relief for country sports programs, and that has had a fantastic response to date. Communities are turning to synthetic greens, drought-resistant turf, water storage facilities, large rainwater tanks and water treatment systems. So far close to 100 of these projects have been funded by the government. Individually these are not headline-grabbing, big-ticket items, but if you ask any of the countless volunteers who spend their hours at every local club, they would say that this is having a huge impact on their local sporting clubs.

There is still more to be done. Currently we are at the beginning of May, and there are still several football leagues that have not yet commenced their seasons because of the state of their grounds. The continued severity of the drought — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr MERLINO — Like Richmond, exactly! The government, in partnership with the Australian Football League, Cricket Victoria, Tennis Victoria and Football Federation Victoria, announced in March a further \$4.6 million to establish the drought relief for community sport program. I want to take this opportunity to commend those partners and their commitment to grassroots sport.

Through this program every council in Victoria on stage 3, stage 3a or stage 4 water restrictions was offered a grant of \$50 000 to provide immediate drought relief. Metropolitan councils also have the opportunity to apply for further \$40 000 grants. Applications have come in from right across the state. I am pleased to say that, for example, it has already ensured that four local football and soccer leagues in Geelong will go ahead this season. With the help of the government’s \$50 000 grants, trucks are currently carting water to 16 grounds right across the south-west region, bringing those grounds up to a standard where 51 local clubs can play in seasons that would otherwise have been cancelled.

I want to take this opportunity to also congratulate Football Geelong, the organisation within which all those clubs are represented, the local members in the Geelong region, the local council and the wider

community on their outstanding efforts in raising funds to ensure that those games can continue.

The overall drought package continues this government's track record of supporting grassroots sport. The power of sport in binding communities cannot be overestimated, and I look forward over the coming weeks and months to announcing further successful grant applications as the government supports clubs and communities in tackling the drought.

Human Services: HIV case review

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the high-risk HIV-carrier scandal and the minister's repeated comments to this house and to the media that she had appointed former police commissioner Bob Falconer and Professor Graham Rouch to review every single HIV case, including all those taken in the 2006 police raids, and to subsequent revelations that Professor Rouch has a conflict of interest in a number of these cases, and I ask: will the minister now confirm that she has once again misled the Victorian public and that not all cases will now be reviewed, and will the minister now come clean and advise precisely how many or how few cases are actually to be reviewed?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Health) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I did advise the house and the Victorian community that we were appointing Bob Falconer and Professor Graham Rouch to review each and every case that we have of a person who has come to the attention of the Department of Human Services as having HIV and engaging in risky behaviour.

Professor Rouch has identified that, because he is named in some of those cases, he will nominate a person of equal standing who will review cases on his behalf, and every single case will be reviewed by the nominee of Professor Rouch and Bob Falconer.

Drought: government assistance

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. I ask the minister to detail to the house what action the government is taking to support Victorian farmers and communities during this period of drought.

Mr HELPER (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the member for Seymour for his question and his ongoing interest in agricultural sectors in Victoria. Of course, every member in this house would welcome the rains over the weekend. They were fantastic in

delivering some future direction for agriculture and some hope for the future for agricultural sectors.

Particularly in the Wimmera-Mallee the rain was an excellent start for the grains sector, so we welcome that rain very much. I went to Stawell on Sunday, and it was great to see puddles on the side of the road and some real rainfall. The rains were described in the *Age* of 30 April as:

... the best rain since 1983 ... not only for the volume of rain but because it is so timely ... the timing is perfect.

That description was a quote by Jim Delahunty, who is one of that great clan in the Wimmera, the Delahuntys — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HELPER — Great in number! The rain has certainly been welcomed in many parts of Victoria and by many agricultural sectors, but of course one period of rain does not a drought break. There is a long way to go for particular sectors of agriculture and particular regions across the state.

The government, along with farmers and farmer organisations, is keeping a very close eye on a number of factors. The first is whether there is follow-up rain — and the timing of that follow-up rain. A second is whether that rain actually produces pasture growth so that the fodder situation eases across the state. A third factor that I am sure farmers will be keeping a very close eye on is livestock prices and how they develop. Also, irrigation allocations, which will become apparent later, will be of clear interest to irrigators.

The Bracks government will continue to deliver its \$158 million response to the drought, delivering a coordinated package across the whole of government in support of farmers, farming families and rural communities. So far this \$158 million drought package has achieved a number of significant outcomes. For example, 2000 stock containment areas have been built, reducing significantly the risk of dust storms during the drought. On-farm advice and planning has been extended directly to 550 farmers who have been visited individually, and nearly 10 000 have attended information and workshop sessions conducted under the same program.

There are also 22 rural counsellors who support so well individual farming enterprises, families and individual farmers in their time of need. There is the \$5000 rural water bill rebate and the emergency bore and water supply points program — many bores and supply

points have been constructed and more are under development.

There is the drought employment program, which provides additional income to more than 1200 farmers and rural workers across the state. Millions of dollars for regional projects have been provided, with examples being the Small Towns Development Fund and the \$300 000 grant made to local government under the local infrastructure works program for exceptional circumstances-declared areas. There is the drought apprenticeship retention bonus, with 500 businesses each recently receiving their first \$750 payment, resulting in the retention of 1000 rural apprentices and trainees. We understand that we have to monitor and note developments in terms of how the breaking of the drought unfolds, and the government will do that.

I would like very much to note my appreciation, and I am sure the appreciation of rural and regional communities, of the dedication of ministers, departments and organisations right across Victoria. Organisations such as local government play a very important role, as do catchment management authorities, the Victorian Farmers Federation and other agencies and organisations that have made the delivery of drought assistance the excellent outcome we have seen.

The government will continue to monitor the situation, with an eye to developing future assistance, if that is necessary.

STATE TAXATION AND GAMBLING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET MEASURES) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Congestion Levy Act 2005, the Duties Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Casino Control Act 1991 to implement measures in the 2007–08 state budget and for other purposes.

Read first time.

WATER ACTS AMENDMENT (ENFORCEMENT AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Water Act 1989 and the Water Industry Act 1994 to make further provision for enforcement, to amend the Infringements Act 2006 to extend the operation of that act with respect to infringement offences under by-laws and for other purposes.

Read first time.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS REGISTRATION AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction and first reading

Ms PIKE (Minister for Health) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Health Professions Registration Act 2005 and for other purposes.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — Could the minister give a brief description of the bill?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Health) — This bill introduces some amendments in light of the Council of Australian Governments decision to establish a national registration and accreditation scheme.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (DNA DATABASE) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Crimes Act 1958 in relation to DNA databases and for other purposes.

Read first time.

PETITIONS**Following petitions presented to house:****Olympic Park: rectangular stadium**

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the inadequacy of the proposed capacity for the new soccer stadium to be built in the Olympic Park district.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria expand the capacity of the stadium to be built as the home ground of Melbourne Victory football club and Melbourne Storm rugby club in the Olympic Park district from 20 000 to 30 000.

By Mr HERBERT (Eltham) (61 signatures)**Nuclear energy: federal policy**

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the commonwealth government's promotion of a nuclear industry in Australia, and the strong likelihood that Victoria will be selected as a site for the construction of a nuclear power facility.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria reaffirm the opposition of the Victorian government to the creation of a nuclear industry in Victoria, including the construction of a nuclear power plant.

By Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) (29 signatures)**Springvale Road, Mulgrave: service road**

To the Parliament of Victoria:

This petition of the undersigned residents of the city of Monash draws to the attention of the minister for transport the need for a service road in the vicinity of our homes in Springvale Road, namely from the Seaview Crescent to Highfield Avenue intersections. The reason for this need is one of safety. Old homes are being replaced by blocks of units thus creating more local traffic. Parking is not viable in Springvale Road due to the high volume of traffic.

Your petitioners, the undersigned residents, therefore respectfully request that a service road be provided in this area.

By Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave) (27 signatures)**Sewerage: Birregurra**

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of concerned residents and friends of Birregurra draws to the attention of the house that any septic tank sewerage system is not a solution to our health and environmental problems.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria support a subsidised, modified

conventional sewerage system as a long-term solution for the citizens of Birregurra.

By Mr MULDER (Polwarth) (266 signatures)

Tabled.

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Frankston be considered next day on motion of Dr HARKNESS (Frankston).

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Eltham be considered next day on motion of Mr HERBERT (Eltham).

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Polwarth be considered next day on motion of Mr MULDER (Polwarth).

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY**Report 2006**

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment), by leave, presented report.

Tabled.

MELBOURNE COLLEGE OF DIVINITY**Report 2006**

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment), by leave, presented report.

Tabled.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS VICTORIA**Indigenous affairs report 2005–06**

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Victorian Communities), by leave, presented report.

Tabled.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE**Statute Law Revision Bill**

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) presented report, together with appendices.

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.***Alert Digest No. 5*****Mr CARLI (Brunswick) presented *Alert Digest No. 5 of 2007* on:**

Accident Towing Services Bill
Building Amendment (Plumbing) Bill
Equal Opportunity Amendment Bill
Fair Trading and Consumer Acts Amendment Bill
Gambling and Racing Legislation Amendment (Sports Betting) Bill
Statute Law Revision Bill

together with appendices.**Tabled.****Ordered to be printed.****DOCUMENTS****Tabled by Clerk:**

Adult Multicultural Education Services — Report 2006 (two documents)

Ballarat University — Report 2006 (two documents)

Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Box Hill Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Chisholm Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Deakin University — Report 2006

Driver Education Centre of Australia Ltd — Report 2006

East Gippsland Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Financial Management Act 1994:

Budget Paper No 2 — Strategy and Outlook 2007–08

Budget Paper No 3 — Service Delivery 2007–08

Budget Paper No 4 — Statement of Finances 2007–08 incorporating Quarterly Financial Report No 3

Gordon Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE — Report 2006 (two documents)

Holmesglen Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Kangan Batman TAFE — Report 2006

La Trobe University — Report 2006

Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986 — Certificate under s. 7

Melbourne University — Report 2006

Monash University — Report 2006

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Casey — C90

Glenelg — C36

Latrobe — C16

Moonee Valley — C76

RMIT University — Report 2006

South West Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Audit Act 1994 — SR 22

Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 — SR 23

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 — SR 21

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Ministers' exemption certificates in relation to Statutory Rules 17, 23

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Swinburne University of Technology — Report 2006

Victoria University — Report 2006 (two documents)

William Angliss Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Wodonga Institute of TAFE — Report 2006

Youth Parole Board and Youth Residential Board — Report 2005–06, together with an explanation for the delay.

The following proclamation fixing an operative date was tabled by the Clerk in accordance with an order of the house dated 19 December 2006:

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 — Remaining provisions (other than ss 18, 185, paragraph (b) of s. 190(1), 191(3), Division 2 of Part 4.6, Division 2 of Part 4.7, Division 3 of Part 4.8, Part 4.13, s. 349(2), sub-paragraphs (ii) and (iii) of s. 350(2)(b), ss 352, 353 and 354, paragraphs (d) and (e) of s. 547, Divisions 4 and 5 of Part 7.8 and s. 605) — 23 April 2007 (*Gazette G16*, 19 April 2007).

NUCLEAR ACTIVITIES (PROHIBITIONS) AMENDMENT (PLEBISCITE) BILL

Council's rejection

Message from Council read rejecting bill.

GAMBLING REGULATION AMENDMENT (REVIEW PANEL) BILL

Council's amendments

Returned from Council with message relating to amendments.

Ordered to be considered next day.

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent on 23 April to:

**Livestock Disease Control Amendment Bill
Prahran Mechanics' Institute Amendment Bill
Victims of Crime Assistance Amendment Bill.**

APPROPRIATION MESSAGE

Message read recommending appropriation for Accident Towing Services Bill.

APPROPRIATION (2007/2008) BILL

Message read recommending appropriation and transmitting estimates of revenue and expenditure for 2007–08.

Estimates tabled.

Introduction and first reading

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer), pursuant to standing order 87, introduced a bill for an act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of the government for the financial year 2007–08 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

Statement of compatibility

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Appropriation (2007/2008) Bill 2007.

In my opinion, Appropriation (2007/2008) Bill 2007, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The Appropriation (2007/2008) Bill will provide appropriation 'authority' for payments from the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of government for the 2007–08 financial year.

The amounts contained in schedule 1 to the Appropriation (2007/2008) Bill provide for the ongoing operations of departments, including new output and asset investment funded through annual appropriation.

Schedules 2 and 3 of the bill contain details concerning payments from advances pursuant to section 35 of the Financial Management Act 1994 and payments from the advance to Treasurer in 2005–06 respectively.

Human rights issues

1. *Human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the bill*

The bill does not raise any human rights issues.

2. *Consideration of reasonable limitations — section 7(2)*

As the bill does not raise any human rights issues, it does not limit any human rights and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the charter.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities because it does not raise a human rights issue.

THE HON. JOHN BRUMBY, MP
Treasurer

Second reading

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

Five months ago, the people of Victoria returned the Bracks government to office.

We wasted no time in getting back to work.

We pushed through tax cuts and bonuses worth \$900 million — cutting stamp duty, bringing forward payroll tax reductions, abolishing business rental duty and extending the first home bonus.

We started work on the goldfields super-pipe — to bring water security and certainty to Bendigo and Ballarat.

We delivered a \$138 million bushfire recovery and response package — helping fire-affected communities in provincial Victoria to recover and rebuild.

We slashed V/Line fares by 20 per cent and abolished zone 3 from the public transport system — saving passengers up to 50 per cent of their daily fares.

We have led Australia in stem cell research — becoming the first state to introduce legislation to allow somatic cell nuclear transfer.

And we have attracted major new investment to Victoria, including filming of the world's largest ever TV miniseries *The Pacific*, which will inject more than \$100 million and up to 4000 jobs into the state's economy.

In just five short months, we have made a strong start to our third term in office — and to the task of building a more prosperous and fairer Victoria.

The 2007–08 budget builds on that strong start.

Speaker, this budget is about growth. It is about fairness. And it is about the future.

It is about sustainable long-term growth — providing further tax relief, cutting costs for business and delivering the biggest infrastructure investment program since Henry Bolte was Premier.

It is about fairness — giving every child the best possible start in life, making kindergarten free for low-income families and undertaking the biggest ever one-off investment in public housing.

It is about the future — creating a new state-of-the-art ultranet for our schools, establishing a major new biosciences research centre for our primary industries and continuing to lead Australia in tackling the challenges of climate change and water.

Speaker, this budget commences delivery of all of the government's election output commitments and just under half of the number of asset commitments.

The budget invests in the strengths of our economy and the skills of our people. It puts in place the right conditions for sustainable and balanced growth, now and into the future.

And it does so from the foundation of a Victorian economy that is more diverse, innovative and competitive than ever before.

A diverse and resilient economy

Despite the drought and the bushfires, despite the highest Australian dollar in 17 years and despite not possessing rich mineral deposits in the midst of a

resources boom, Victoria is punching well above our weight.

In 2006–07, Victoria's economy is expected to grow by 2.75 per cent, increasing to 3.25 per cent in 2007–08.

Jobs growth remains strong, with more than 380 000 jobs created since October 1999.

Over the past year, Victoria has generated around 70 000 new jobs and attracted almost one in every three skilled business migrants to Australia.

Over the past two years, more jobs have been generated in country Victoria than in the whole seven years of the former Liberal-National government.

And Victoria now leads Australia in many areas of the economy.

In 2006:

Victoria approved more building work than any other state in Australia.

We had more housing starts than any other state in Australia.

We attracted more business migrants than any other state in Australia.

Melbourne added more people than any other capital city.

And in new growth industries such as biotechnology, ICT (information and communications technology), and film and digital media, Victoria has surged well ahead of the rest of the nation.

Victoria has retained its AAA credit rating — and for the eighth consecutive year, the government will deliver an operating surplus in excess of \$100 million.

We will deliver a surplus of \$324 million in 2007–08 and surpluses averaging \$424 million over the following three years.

In this budget, we also deliver \$632 million in savings through the *Efficient Government* agenda: savings that reflect Victoria's leadership in using new technologies and systems to deliver better government — and savings that will be reinvested in frontline services.

Speaker, as a result of the Bracks government's sound financial management, Victoria's net financial liabilities will reduce from 10.6 per cent of gross state product in June 1999 to just 6.1 per cent in June 2007.

In real terms, that's a massive reduction in liabilities of around \$11 billion.

And, most importantly, it has given Victoria the capacity to make critical investments in human capital and infrastructure.

Over the past seven years, the government has invested \$16 billion into capital works. Over the next four years, we will invest a further \$13 billion.

It is the biggest infrastructure investment program in Victoria in 40 years. It is a program that reaches to every corner of the state — and one that is delivering the infrastructure Victoria needs to be competitive, to drive higher levels of productivity and to create high-value industries and jobs.

Cutting costs for business

The government's good financial management is also contributing to Victoria's reputation as a highly competitive investment location.

At a time of unprecedented international competition for labour and capital, Victoria continues to attract high levels of business investment because the government has the drive and the capacity to transform the state's taxation system and cut costs for business.

Since coming to office the Bracks government has cut taxes by more than \$4 billion.

No other state can match our record on business tax reform.

We have slashed the top rate of land tax from 5 per cent to 3 per cent. We have abolished more taxes under the intergovernmental agreement with the commonwealth than any other state. And we have reduced the payroll tax rate to 5.05 per cent — the second lowest in Australia.

These reforms are giving Victoria the competitive edge we need to stay ahead and attract new investment and jobs.

And our plan is working. This year, new private sector investment in Victoria will exceed \$35 billion — almost double the level of 2000–01.

To stimulate more investment and jobs, I am today announcing more than \$1 billion in further tax relief and reduced business costs.

We will introduce an additional \$508 million worth of land tax relief.

We will cut the top rate of land tax from 3 per cent to 2.5 per cent. We will cut the middle rate by one-third. And we will increase the tax-free threshold from \$200 000 to \$225 000 — removing 28 000 Victorians from the land tax base and giving Victoria the lowest level of land tax in Australia for virtually all businesses owning land worth between \$400 000 and \$4.5 million.

We will abolish special land tax for primary producers within Melbourne's urban boundary to remove disincentives for farmers who want to change the use of their land.

In this budget, we will slash by around 40 per cent the stamp duty on new motor vehicles worth between \$35 000 and \$57 009 — delivering a saving of between \$525 and \$1425 on a new car and taking Victoria from the second highest duty in Australia on an average family car to the second lowest.

Speaker, when we first came to office, one of our top priorities was to return Victoria's WorkCover scheme to a fully funded position, while ensuring fair benefits for injured workers and competitive premiums for employers.

We were told it could not be done.

But today, Victoria is a safer place to work than ever before, injured workers have access to increased benefits and Victoria has one of the few workplace injury insurance schemes in Australia that is fully funded.

It is another example of the government's good financial management — and today, for the fourth year in a row, we will cut WorkCover premiums by a further 10 per cent, taking premiums to their lowest ever level and saving employers \$668 million over the next four years.

Driving business and jobs growth

Speaker, meeting future challenges will require Victorian industry to move into new areas, become more innovative and competitive and leverage off a more skilled and educated workforce.

The budget continues the government's investment in training and skills — an investment that is delivering significant dividends, with Victoria now having more apprentices and trainees complete their training than any other state in Australia.

In this budget, we will invest:

\$30 million for stage 2 of the TAFE Automotive Centre of Excellence at Docklands; and

\$4.5 million to develop a new nursing centre of excellence at Box Hill TAFE.

We will provide \$25 million to extend the apprentice completion bonus scheme — encouraging employers to support more apprentices and trainees to complete their training.

We will provide \$8.3 million to attract skilled and business migrants and \$6.7 million to help job seekers and mature age workers move into areas with skills and labour shortages.

The budget also continues to back Victorian businesses in securing new investment and export opportunities, with a \$106 million package that includes:

a \$66 million boost for tourism and major events;

a \$9.9 million expansion of our successful export programs, including Opening Doors to Export; and

an additional \$9.3 million to support the work of the small business commissioner.

History-making investments in education

Speaker, a high-quality public education system is essential to meeting future challenges.

That is why education remains the Bracks government's number one priority.

That is why we have invested an additional \$6.1 billion in education since 1999, employed an additional 7300 teachers and staff in government schools, and built or replaced 57 schools across the state.

And it is why Victoria now leads Australia in education — with the lowest class sizes in more than a decade, literacy and numeracy levels at or above the national average, and the highest year 12 or equivalent completion rate of any state.

In this budget, we invest more than \$500 million to commence the biggest school rebuilding program in Victoria's history — a program that will transform the state's education system and give every child, every parent and every community pride and confidence in their local school.

We will modernise and build 131 schools, including seven new schools in Melbourne's high-growth suburbs of Berwick, Caroline Springs, Craigieburn, Whittlesea, Pakenham, Point Cook and Werribee.

We will deliver major school regeneration programs in Altona, Broadmeadows, Laverton, Dandenong, Geelong, Bendigo and Wangaratta.

In this budget, we also allocate \$118 million to employ an extra 300 teacher assistants, attract 200 new, specialised teachers into government schools and continue the employment of 256 primary welfare officers — a highly successful initiative that has helped thousands of young Victorians to improve their school performance.

Speaker, the government also leads Australia in delivering state-of-the-art technology to improve teaching and learning in government schools.

In this budget, we will invest \$60 million to create a new ultranet — the first of its kind in Australia — which will provide a single, 24-hour information point for parents, teachers and students.

For the first time, parents will be able to get access to their child's results, homework tasks and attendance records. Students will be able to keep up with class work if they are sick or away from school. And teachers will have less paperwork — and more time to teach.

Building a world-class health system

Victoria's hospitals and health services have also benefited from the government's commitment to modernising services and making use of the latest technologies.

Over the past seven years, we have increased hospital funding by more than 80 per cent and brought an extra 7200 nurses and 1500 doctors into our health system.

Victoria's hospitals are now back in the black. We are treating 300 000 more patients each year. And our waiting lists have hit an eight-year low.

The new Casey Hospital and the new Royal Dental Hospital have opened, the Austin redevelopment has been completed, the new Royal Women's Hospital will open in 2008, and work will commence later this year on the Royal Children's Hospital.

But the pressures on our health system are immense and growing. Public hospital admissions have grown by almost a third since 1999 — the equivalent of filling another three major hospitals.

In this budget, we will provide a further \$1.9 billion to make sure that our health system can manage these pressures.

We will expand and upgrade suburban hospitals in Frankston, Sunshine, Footscray, Epping and Maroondah.

We will redevelop hospitals and health services at Warrnambool, Ballarat, Stawell, Nathalia, Leongatha and Murtoa — and commence planning for new projects at Bendigo Hospital and Geelong Hospital.

We will allocate \$38 million to expand Victoria's rural health workforce, including new specialist and GP obstetrics positions to give women in regional areas more options during pregnancy and birth.

We will provide \$195 million to continue our elective surgery blitz, including creating two new public elective surgery centres at St Vincent's Hospital and the Austin.

Speaker, Victoria's hospital emergency departments are recognised as the best in Australia. In this budget, we provide \$255 million for emergency departments to treat an additional 234 000 patients.

We will also allocate \$21 million to treat an extra 72 000 outpatients, \$60 million to provide more hospital-based services such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy and dialysis — and \$106 million to treat more people, including more services at our new day hospitals in Lilydale, Craigieburn and Melton.

And importantly, in this budget we also allocate additional resources to tackling preventable chronic diseases such as diabetes.

Tackling environmental challenges

Speaker, more than ever before, Victorians are aware of the significant environmental challenges and risks facing our state and our nation.

Our farmers have now suffered a decade of drought. Inflows to the Murray–Darling Basin are at record low levels. And last year, Melbourne received one of the lowest levels of rainfall on record.

When it comes to water, we all know that we have to make every single drop count.

That is why we have helped Melbourne to become the leading city in Australia for water conservation.

That is why we have invested \$1.7 billion in water and catchment projects, along with more than \$3 billion committed by water authorities.

That is why we have invested in major water projects to improve the security of supply for our cities and

farms — projects like the Gippsland Water Factory, the western treatment plant, the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline and the reconnection of the Tarago Reservoir.

We have taken these actions because we want to make the availability and security of water an economic strength for this state.

But more needs to be done.

In this budget, we provide an additional \$136 million to achieve even higher levels of water efficiency and recycling.

We continue to improve the efficiency of our irrigation systems by investing:

\$38 million to modernise the Shepparton irrigation area; and

\$10 million to improve irrigation practices on Victoria's farms.

We continue to make sure that we use our water more wisely by providing:

\$16 million over two years for water recycling projects across Melbourne;

\$10 million to continue to deliver the Vision for Werribee Plains; and

\$4 million for a major recycling project at Leongatha.

We will continue to encourage behavioural change in water use by providing \$8 million to help businesses and households achieve water savings and \$20 million for rebates on efficient household water products.

We will also provide \$10 million for new stormwater projects in urban areas and \$20 million to upgrade water quality in small country towns.

In total — and when complete — these initiatives will produce water savings in excess of 80 billion litres.

That is the equivalent of building another Sugarloaf Reservoir. And it shows what we can achieve when governments, businesses and households work together to change our water behaviour.

But even with these — and other — measures in place, it is essential that there is an augmentation solution for Melbourne.

Our options are well known, with studies into the eastern water recycling project, a desalination plant and

stormwater re-use all well advanced. The government is also examining the proposed north–south pipeline.

And in the coming months, the Bracks government will outline our major augmentation plan to meet Melbourne’s future water demands.

Speaker, the government also has a strong record on tackling the challenge of climate change.

We have introduced the Victorian Renewable Energy Target to cut industry greenhouse emissions by 27 million tonnes and generate jobs and investment in renewable energy projects.

And we are implementing the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target scheme to help families to reduce greenhouse gas emission and cut their power bills.

In this budget, we begin an exciting new CarbonDown program — a \$10 million partnership with the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry to help small and medium-sized businesses cut their carbon emissions.

We will provide \$11.5 million for a clean coal authority in the Latrobe Valley, a new office of climate change and new research into greenhouse gas technologies and strategies to address climate change.

We will also encourage Victorian households to play their part with a \$14 million Rebates for Being Green program for households that upgrade to high energy-efficient appliances.

Maintaining Victoria’s livability

Speaker, by 2030, an additional 1.3 million people will call Victoria home. That will place much greater pressure not only on our environment, but also on our cities and towns.

The 2007–08 budget provides substantial new funding to maintain Victoria’s reputation as one of the world’s most livable places in the face of strong population growth.

We will provide \$75 million to revitalise suburban centres, including a major \$52 million regeneration project in central Footscray.

We will create new opportunities for Victorians to stay healthy and active with a \$102 million increase for grassroots sport and recreation, including upgrading local swimming pools and building new community sporting facilities.

We will invest \$63 million to enhance Victoria’s status as the nation’s cultural capital, including a new Arts in the Suburbs program, Australia’s first centre for books and ideas at the state library and further funding for Melbourne’s newest cultural icon, the Melbourne Recital Centre — due to open in 2009.

Victoria’s livability is also closely linked to our world-class parks, reserves and forests.

Since 1999, the government has created the Great Otways National Park, established Victoria’s first marine parks and reduced logging in our native forests by 30 per cent.

In this budget, we provide \$95 million to employ new park rangers, upgrade facilities in national parks, create urban walking tracks and bike paths, and support the end of logging in the Otways.

Investing in Victoria’s transport system

Speaker, Victoria’s population growth is also increasing pressure on our transport system.

That pressure includes rapidly rising demand for freight transport, greater congestion on our roads and an unprecedented 18.4 per cent increase in passengers on the metropolitan rail system in recent years.

Over our first two terms, the government has moved to address these pressures through significant new investment in the state’s transport network.

We have undertaken the biggest country rail upgrade in more than 120 years. We have extended the metropolitan train, tram and bus networks. We have overseen the transformation of Southern Cross Station into a world-class transport interchange and a new landmark for Melbourne. And we are well advanced in delivering the \$1 billion plan to increase capacity on the Monash–West Gate corridor.

In this budget, we will provide \$362 million to bring forward the delivery of 10 new trains, recruit 22 extra drivers and further increase train capacity.

We will also provide \$62 million for a new train station at Coolaroo in Melbourne’s north-west and upgrades to stations at Watsonia, Burnley, Mentone, Frankston, Broadmeadows, Preston and Coburg.

We will provide \$48 million to duplicate the track between Clifton Hill and Westgarth, and \$37 million to commence triplication of the track between Caulfield and Springvale.

Speaker, over the last seven years, the government has invested more than \$4 billion on building better roads across Victoria.

The recently upgraded Calder–Tulla interchange highlights the benefits of this investment.

In this budget, we continue to improve Victoria's road network, including \$194 million to upgrade city and regional arterial roads, and \$30 million for a new congestion improvements program.

A major boost to housing

Speaker, housing affordability is a significant issue across Australia, and one of the first actions taken by the government in this term has been to make housing more affordable.

In December, we cut stamp duty on the average family home by 14 per cent — and extended the first home bonus to 30 June 2009.

Our land tax reforms will cut \$700 off the price of an average block of land, and we are introducing a new electronic conveyancing system that will cut the expenses of buying a home.

These measures will make housing more affordable.

But while Victoria enjoys the highest rate of home ownership of any Australian state, many Victorian families cannot afford to buy a home or pay rent in the private market.

Victoria's sustained economic growth and the government's good financial management mean that we have the capacity to do more to help these families.

Today, I announce the biggest ever one-off investment made by a state government in housing.

We will allocate an extra \$510 million for social and public housing — providing 2350 new or redeveloped dwellings and improving services for homeless Victorians.

This funding boost will bring total investment in social and public housing in Victoria to \$1.4 billion over the next four years.

This will dramatically increase the supply of housing for Victorian families and directly tackle housing related poverty. But it will do more than that.

It will make a substantial contribution to the state's economy — helping to improve education and health

outcomes, and creating new jobs by delivering a major stimulus for Victoria's building industry.

Tackling disadvantage

Speaker, it is now two years since the government released the *A Fairer Victoria* statement.

Since then, we have invested \$1.6 billion to create new solutions and opportunities for disadvantaged people, families and communities — with positive results.

Families at risk are getting help earlier. Children are getting a better start in life. People with a disability are getting more personalised support. Our mental health services have improved dramatically. And we are helping more older Victorians to remain independent and active members of our community.

In this budget, we will provide \$171 million to improve services for children, including creating 40 new children's centres and upgrading not-for-profit kindergartens across Victoria.

We will increase the kindergarten subsidy from \$320 to \$730 a year for health care card holders — effectively making kindergarten free for 17 000 low-income families.

We will provide an \$83 million boost for home and community care services to support older Victorians living at home.

We will deliver major new funding of \$214 million to support Victorians with a disability, including new accommodation and support packages, and additional aids and equipment.

We will also boost drug prevention and treatment services by \$156 million, including a focus on young people using multiple drugs, new prevention initiatives and a new 'war on ice' campaign.

Speaker, Victoria's carers are our unsung heroes, caring for vulnerable members of our community, often at great financial and personal cost to themselves.

In this budget, we deliver a \$33 million package to support carers, including a substantial expansion in respite services and \$4 million to help Carers Victoria to deliver training and support programs.

Community safety and justice

Speaker, the government has also invested to record levels to make Victoria a safer place.

We have employed 1400 additional police — and built or upgraded more than 150 police stations across Victoria. We have increased funding for police by more than 50 per cent — and Victoria's crime rate has been reduced by 22 per cent.

In this budget, we provide \$96 million to provide 350 new police, 25 specialist crime fighters and 25 forensic investigators.

We will build eight new police stations and refurbish one other at a cost of \$86 million. We will provide \$28 million to give our police access to the latest equipment and to increase the police fleet by 100 vehicles.

The budget also provides \$45 million to reduce delays in our court system, \$43 million to improve coronial services and \$8.8 million to extend community legal centres in regional areas.

As the recent bushfire crisis showed only too clearly, Victoria owes a great debt to the men and women of our emergency services — both professionals and volunteers.

The budget acknowledges that contribution by delivering an \$80 million boost to Victoria's emergency services, including new CFA stations and new equipment for the SES.

Investing in provincial Victoria

The recent bushfires devastated many regional communities. In other parts of Victoria, many more communities continue to experience the ongoing devastation caused by the drought.

Speaker, the government stood by our farmers and rural communities in 2002 when it did not rain. We stood by them again in 2006 when it did not rain. And we will continue to stand by our rural communities.

In this budget, we deliver new support for our agricultural sector, including:

- a \$30 million weeds and pests program; and

- \$13 million for the Our Rural Landscape program to develop scientific solutions to the threats posed by climate change to regional industries and communities.

In this budget, the government will provide funding of \$180 million to create a new biosciences research centre at La Trobe University's Bundoora campus. The centre will reinforce Victoria's leadership in agricultural biotechnology, help to protect our primary

industries from plant and animal diseases, and include a focus on developing drought-proof crops and water-efficient practices.

We will also provide a \$23 million boost for regional tourism attractions and events, including \$5 million to upgrade regional airports.

The government also recently restored Victoria's regional rail track to public control, with the budget providing \$134 million for the buyback, \$25 million for maintenance works and \$53 million for the Mildura line freight upgrade.

In aggregate, budget measures for regional Victoria in health, education, police, water and industry support total more than \$1 billion. These initiatives will help country Victorians through difficult times and ensure provincial Victoria remains a great place to live, work and invest.

Appropriation bill

Speaker, the Appropriation (2007/2008) Bill provides authority to enable government departments to meet their agreed service delivery responsibilities in 2007–08.

The bill supports a financial management system that recognises the full cost of service delivery in Victoria and is based on an accrual framework.

Schedule 1 of the bill contains estimates for 2007–08 and provides a comparison with the 2006–07 figures. In line with established practice, the estimates included in schedule 1 are provided on a net appropriation basis.

This budget maintains Victoria's record of leadership in accounting practice, presenting our reports under the Australian equivalents to the International Financial Reporting Standards.

The budget has once again been reviewed by the Auditor General as required by the standards of financial reporting and transparency established by the Bracks government in 2000.

Conclusion

Speaker, five months ago Victorians once again entrusted the Bracks government with the governance and the future of this state.

The 2007–08 budget repays that trust.

It meets the undertaking we gave to Victorians last November to tackle the challenges of the future and invest in the services that matter to Victorians and their families.

It charts a course for the government's third term in office that will ensure Victoria continues to grow and move forward in a balanced, responsible and fair way.

And it makes the right decisions and investments to give Victoria every advantage in meeting the challenges ahead and carving out a strong, secure and sustainable future.

Speaker, I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr WELLS (Scoresby).

Debate adjourned until next day.

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT 2007/2008) BILL

Message read recommending appropriation and transmitting estimates of revenue and expenditure for 2007–08.

Estimates tabled.

Introduction and first reading

Mr BRACKS (Premier), pursuant to standing order 87, introduced a bill for an act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the Parliament in respect of the financial year 2007–08 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

Statement of compatibility

Mr BRACKS (Premier) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Appropriation (Parliament 2007/2008) Bill 2007.

In my opinion, the Appropriation (Parliament 2007/2008) Bill 2007, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The purpose of the Appropriation (Parliament 2007/2008) Bill 2007 is to provide appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2007–08 financial year.

Human rights issues

1. *Human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the bill*

The bill does not raise any human rights issues.

2. *Consideration of reasonable limitations — section 7(2)*

As the bill does not raise any human rights issues, it does not limit any human rights, and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the charter.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 because it does not raise a human rights issue.

THE HON. JOHN BRUMBY, MP
Treasurer

Second reading

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The bill provides appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2007–08 financial year including ongoing liabilities incurred by the Parliament such as employee entitlements that may be realised in the future.

Honourable members will be aware that other funds are appropriated for parliamentary purposes by way of special appropriations contained in other legislation. In addition, unapplied appropriations under the Appropriation (Parliament 2006/2007) Act 2006 have been estimated and included in the budget papers. Prior to 30 June actual unapplied appropriation will be finalised and the 2007–08 appropriations adjusted by the approved carryover amounts pursuant to the provisions of section 32 of the Financial Management Act 1994.

In line with the wishes of the presiding officers, appropriations in the bill are made to the departments of the Parliament.

The total appropriation authority sought in this bill is \$92.1 million — in clause 3 of the bill — for Parliament in respect of the 2007–08 financial year.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition).

Debate adjourned until Tuesday, 15 May.

HOUSE COMMITTEE**Membership**

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Victorian Communities) — By leave, I move:

That Ms Beattie, Mr Delahunty, Mr Howard, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Scott and Mr K. Smith be members of the House Committee.

I move this motion to provide the component of Legislative Assembly members to the House Committee. We wish those members well, and we wish you, Speaker, well when dealing with those members.

Motion agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Program**

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Victorian Communities) — I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 4.00 pm on Thursday, 3 May 2007:

- Equal Opportunity Amendment Bill
- Fair Trading and Consumer Acts Amendment Bill
- Gambling and Racing Legislation Amendment (Sports Betting) Bill
- Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill
- Statute Law Repeals Bill.

This motion identifies to members of the house that in terms of the ordinary legislative program for this week, the government intends to put forward these five pieces of legislation. In the context of a traditional parliamentary week, this is a light load. However, we recognise that time will be taken up in government business this week because of the motions concerning the two appropriation bills — one having been moved by the Treasurer, and the other, on the parliamentary appropriation bill, having been moved by the Premier.

We anticipate there will be a response from the opposition and The Nationals to the general appropriation bill — that is, the budget — this Thursday. Today we have also heard by way of a message that amendments have been made to another gaming bill in the upper house; debate on those amendments has been adjourned until tomorrow. We anticipate that we will deal with those amendments

tomorrow, in addition to the five bills which are on the government business program.

I think this government business program, the subject of my motion, is an achievable workload in the context of this week being budget week. We will hear from the Treasurer, and we also anticipate that there will be a response on Thursday from the opposition. I commend this motion to the house.

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — Regrettably I have to say that the government business program is an utter disgrace. It demonstrates a complete contempt for this place in its totality.

Two bills that are on the government business program cannot be debated until Thursday this week. The debates on these bills were adjourned two weeks ago, and they cannot be debated until Thursday. Of course that two-week period in itself poses a great deal of difficulty for the opposition, particularly because there is only one week off between sitting weeks. A large number of people have to be consulted, and these bills have to be discussed.

The shadow ministers in respect of two bills, the Equal Opportunity Amendment Bill and the Fair Trading and Consumer Acts Amendment Bill, say they received little or no notice from the government. The government's answer in relation to the fair trading bill is, 'Why even bother consulting with the community? We will stick it up on our website. That will be good enough'. Those two bills are significant, yet we know perfectly well that as a result of the arrangements between the government and the opposition, the budget reply will occur on Thursday morning and The Nationals will also give their response on Thursday morning.

The time taken for the opposition's budget response is unlimited under the standing orders, for obvious reasons, and will take a significant amount of time, yet notwithstanding that being apparently the focus of this week, we also have these two significant bills. There will not be ample time to debate the two important bills about equal opportunity and fair trading. Not only do we not get ample debating time, but members and others are complaining about the lack of time there is to consult on those bills.

In relation to the three other bills on the government business program, while no doubt they are important, it is not anticipated that any one of them will incur any degree of opposition from any member in this place. More importantly, there is not a large number of speakers. One would anticipate they will be exhausted

by the conclusion of today's program, which will leave very little to be done tomorrow, apart from the amendments that the Leader of the House has identified in relation to the Gambling Regulation Amendment (Review Panel) Bill.

I am aware that the amendments to the Water Amendment (Critical Water Infrastructure Projects) Bill, which were moved in the upper house, will not be attended to this week, so we will have little or nothing to do tomorrow, yet on Thursday we will have the budget responses and a little over 2 hours to debate two significant bills. Certainly the Fair Trading and Consumer Acts Amendment Bill amends a number of different acts, and all of this will mean there will be little or no debate.

It is a demonstration of the fact that when it comes to the management of this place the government just has utter contempt. It really does not care. This is a not a program that has just burst in on us over the last few weeks; the government has set its program for the sitting right throughout this year. That is well known and well understood. It is for the government to manage its affairs in this place. It has demonstrated that it does not have enough business for the next two days, and most importantly, it has shown its utter contempt for the Parliament, given the way we will be debating two important bills, particularly in budget week.

Certainly there will be a number of speakers who will be unable to make contributions in relation to these matters by 4 o'clock on Thursday. Accordingly the opposition will be opposing the government business program.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — I rise on behalf of The Nationals to also raise concerns about the government business program. As the member for Kew outlined, we have known about our parliamentary sitting dates since late last year, so the government had ample time to plan its business program over the whole year. From discussions with the Leader of the House, I know we originally had six bills to be debated this week along with the budget. I was pleased to see that after discussions with him on Thursday one of those bills was dropped off to allow further discussion. But I was unaware that two of those bills can only be debated on Thursday.

To be really technical about the matter, they were brought in after 4.00 p.m. on Thursday of the last sitting week, and yet we are going to debate them before that time this Thursday, which is within the two-week period. By all accounts the practice of this house is to allow that to happen; but my understanding of the law

is that we would run into problems if that were to happen. Like the member for Kew, we have grave concerns, particularly about the two bills that are going to be debated on Thursday.

We have highlighted to the Leader of the House that we have had only a week away from Parliament, whereas we normally have a two-week break. During that week we were away from Parliament we also had Anzac Day, so no business was able to be transacted to consult with the people who will be impacted on by this legislation or, importantly, to get briefings.

The member for Murray Valley, who will be our speaker on the fair trading bill, was only able to attend a briefing late yesterday afternoon, just before our party meeting. He was even unable to prepare a briefing note in time for our meeting at 5 o'clock last night. There have been concerns among those in our party about the management of the government business program for this week.

We see the water legislation is on the government business program. When that came into the house we were told it had to go through very quickly so that the infrastructure projects could be implemented across Victoria. It was said that it was vital for it to go through this house. As the member for Swan Hill, who is our spokesperson on water, said, it was a sham; it was unnecessary legislation. In fact we could get all the infrastructure in place with the current legislation. We have seen how important it was after the amendments were introduced in the upper house; it came back here a fortnight ago, yet we are still not going to debate those amendments to get it through this house! How vital then was it that it went through this house?

The main concern we raise about the water legislation is that there are no savings for the people of north-east Victoria. Again I highlight that is not happening with the water projects that are being put in place, such as the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline — that great project for which I have lobbied for over seven years. It is in place, and I can inform the house it is moving rapidly. There are enormous water savings that can be made for industry, the community and, importantly, for the environment.

The other bill on the notice paper that will not be debated this week is the Senate Elections Amendment Bill. That could have been debated this week. The government was keen to get it through in preparation for the federal election. It must know more than I do — that the federal election is going to be either late this year or even early next year. There does not seem to be any hurry to get that one through.

We also see on the government business program the address-in-reply debate. It is not on the guillotine list. We heard the Governor speak five months ago, yet we still have not voted it off the notice paper. It again highlights that the government has not been able to manage the government business program. Also, earlier we heard from you, Speaker, that the Gambling Regulation Amendment (Review Panel) Bill has come back from the Legislative Council with amendments. My understanding is that they will be debated tomorrow.

Like the member for Kew, I think we have very little to fill the next two days with. If we need a filler, the address-in-reply debate might be the only way to go about it. But the real concern we have is that on Thursday the lead speaker from the Liberal Party will have unlimited time but the lead speaker for The Nationals will have only an hour. It is anticipated that the response to the budget will take 2 hours. That will mean there will not be 2½ hours, as the member for Kew said but, on my calculations, 1½ hours for two important pieces of legislation to be debated in this house — namely, the Fair Trading and Consumer Acts Amendment Bill and also the Equal Opportunity Amendment Bill. They are two important bills that cover areas on which our people will want to have a say. But they are going to be cut short because of the guillotine at 4 o'clock.

For those reasons — even though we have had good consultation in relation to this from the Leader of the House — because of the impact of it, particularly on Thursday, we will also have to oppose this government business program.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 53

Allan, Ms	Kosky, Ms
Andrews, Mr	Langdon, Mr
Barker, Ms	Languiller, Mr
Batchelor, Mr	Lim, Mr
Beattie, Ms	Lobato, Ms
Bracks, Mr	Lupton, Mr
Brooks, Mr	Maddigan, Mrs
Brumby, Mr	Marshall, Ms
Cameron, Mr	Merlino, Mr
Campbell, Ms	Morand, Ms
Carli, Mr	Munt, Ms
Crutchfield, Mr	Nardella, Mr
D'Ambrosio, Ms	Neville, Ms
Donnellan, Mr	Overington, Ms
Duncan, Ms	Pallas, Mr
Eren, Mr	Pandazopoulos, Mr
Graley, Ms	Perera, Mr
Green, Ms	Richardson, Ms
Haermeyer, Mr	Robinson, Mr
Hardman, Mr	Scott, Mr
Harkness, Dr	Seitz, Mr

Helper, Mr
Herbert, Mr
Holding, Mr
Howard, Mr
Hudson, Mr
Hulls, Mr

Stensholt, Mr
Thomson, Ms
Thwaites, Mr
Trezise, Mr
Wynne, Mr

Noes, 33

Asher, Ms
Baillieu, Mr
Blackwood, Mr
Burgess, Mr
Clark, Mr
Crisp, Mr
Delahunty, Mr
Dixon, Mr
Fyffe, Mrs
Hodgett, Mr
Ingram, Mr
Jasper, Mr
Kotsiras, Mr
McIntosh, Mr
Morris, Mr
Mulder, Mr
Naphine, Dr

Northe, Mr
O'Brien, Mr
Powell, Mrs
Ryan, Mr
Shardey, Mrs
Smith, Mr K.
Smith, Mr R.
Sykes, Dr
Thompson, Mr
Tilley, Mr
Victoria, Mrs
Wakeling, Mr
Walsh, Mr
Weller, Mr
Wells, Mr
Wooldridge, Ms

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Don Di Fabrizio and Damian Tripodi

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Victorian Communities) — I rise to thank two very active and important members of the Gippsland community. These two men are characterised by their passion and determination and by their commitment to serving the migrant community in Gippsland. Don Di Fabrizio and Damian Tripodi were the driving force behind the Gippsland Immigration Wall of Recognition. Don is the president of the Italian-Australian Coordinating Committee of Gippsland, and Damian is the secretary. Both are successful businessmen in their own right, Don in the construction industry and Damian as the local cafe owner in Traralgon.

Their commitment to migrant issues extends beyond their own Italian heritage to embracing and representing with respect and compassion a vast array of cultures and ethnicities. Evidence of this can be found on the wall itself, which lists the names of people from 27 different migrant groups and communities. That list continues to grow. The wall is symbolic of the significant and enduring contribution made by migrants to the development of the Gippsland region. It pays tribute to many of the people who came to this country faced with the challenge of finding work, creating new lives and eventually becoming proud Australian citizens. Don and Damian are testimony to the great

success many of these migrants have achieved and to the contribution Victoria's migrant community has made to this state.

Water: treatment plants

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I wish to highlight the government's failures in the upgrade of the eastern and western treatment plants — and I note the government had the gall to mention the western treatment plant in the budget just delivered! The eastern treatment plant upgrade was announced as a project in 2002, but it still has not happened and will not happen, according to the government, until 2012. The western treatment plant upgrade was first announced by former Deputy Premier Pat McNamara on 25 May 1999 at a cost of \$120 million. The ALP adopted this project in its 2002 election policy under the banner of Labor's 'Werribee vision' — so the party had been in government for one term before it even embraced this project.

The government said there would be a cost decline, with the cost going down to \$100 million, but by 2004 the cost had risen to \$124 million, as outlined in a press release from the then Minister for Water dated 18 August 2004. By 3 November 2004 — a period of just two and a half months — the cost had blown out by another \$2 million, with the minister saying in this Parliament that the cost would now be \$126 million for the upgrade of the western treatment plant. The plant eventually opened on 29 June 2005, at a total cost of \$160 million. It is interesting to look at this in the context of today. Yet again this is a project that was over budget, and it arrived six years after the first announcement. No-one should have any faith in the capacity of this government to deliver on any of the water projects mentioned in the budget.

Tarneit community centre: construction

Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) — I rise to congratulate the Bracks government for working in cooperation with the Wyndham City Council to construct the much-anticipated Tarneit community centre. The project will start this month, as the works tender has just been awarded. The Tarneit community centre is a new initiative that the Bracks Labor government has been pleased to support with a \$1.5 million injection into the project, which is aimed at building stronger communities and supporting working families. The local council is also contributing \$2.7 million.

The contemporary design of the centre will consist of two kindergartens, a maternal and child health centre, child care, three large community rooms, a computer

learning lab, an internet kiosk, community meeting spaces, a playground, consulting rooms, an outdoor entertaining area and programs to suit local residents. The centre's design will allow for future population growth in the area and will one day house an additional branch library and learning centre. This is just another example of the Bracks Labor government providing improved services and facilities for working families in Tarneit, which of course is a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Health: rural patient transport

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — I raise the issue of patient transport to medical specialists. For the frail, elderly and ill in my electorate, getting to a specialist medical appointment in Echuca, Bendigo or Melbourne is a difficult task. Rural Ambulance Victoria has tightened its criteria, closing an important avenue of assistance. Many elderly people have no family close by to help out, and public transport is often unavailable or unsuitable, putting patients in a conundrum as to how to get to an appointment — so it has fallen to local government to pick up the responsibility. Of the six councils in my electorate, the majority assist people to reach specialist medical care and treatment. Those that provide this vital community service usually offer a car, funded through the HACC (home and community care) program, driven by a volunteer.

However, Swan Hill Rural City Council is failing to make its HACC-funded cars available for this vital service. A few generous citizens have been using their own cars to take patients to medical appointments at their own cost and risk, but the demands are now so great that they can no longer do this, so a steady stream of people are now approaching my office for help. Although I can understand the demands on the council's purse — in the absence of other support — I see the provision of this service as a legitimate role for the council as part of its HACC program. I commend those councils in my electorate who have recognised the need for patient transport and urge those who have not yet done so to act, rather than just saying it is all too difficult.

Warburton Advancement League

Ms LOBATO (Gembrook) — I would like to draw the house's attention to a community organisation that has been serving the Warburton area for the past 53 years, the Warburton Advancement League. This organisation was established in 1954 and has a proud history of planning and implementing projects for the betterment of the Warburton community. The vision, enthusiasm and drive of the league's members has

produced many great results, such as the establishment of the Warburton Caravan Park, the construction of local tennis courts, and the refurbishment of the civic theatre, which now stands proud on Main Street in Warburton as the Upper Yarra Arts Centre.

The Warburton Advancement League was also instrumental in the development of 6 kilometres of walking track around the Yarra River and has been heavily involved in the genesis of community events that have now become an essential part of the local calendar. One of these is the very successful Warburton Up & Running event held every year. Other events, such as the Winterfest and the Carols by Candlelight, would never have got off the ground without the tremendous support, input and knowledge provided by members of the Warburton Advancement League, including Ted Chisholm and the incumbent president, Jesse James, who is as much of a local institution as the league itself.

The league has always worked closely and collaboratively with government agencies at all levels as well as with other community organisations, always with the aim of improving Warburton and providing a range of activities and events for both local residents and visitors. On 16 May I will be attending the league's special general meeting to urge local community members to continue to support the league as well as to assist with the planning on how to improve and consolidate this organisation and the vital work that it undertakes.

Signposts and Lifeline South West: funding

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — I wish to highlight two important services operating in south-west Victoria and the significant gap between the rhetoric of the Bracks Labor government and the reality of a lack of state funding for these vital on-the-ground services in country Victoria.

Signposts is a very effective program run by the Victorian Parenting Centre to help parents of children aged between 3 and 15 years with developmental delay or an intellectual disability to manage difficult or challenging behaviour before it becomes a serious problem for the children or their parents. The programs in south-west Victoria and indeed across the state are very successful. They have been oversubscribed by parents wanting the services and there are waiting lists. However, state funding of \$200 000 a year for this program is to be cut and these programs will have to be discontinued as of June this year. This is a true early intervention service which is popular, effective and will save dollars later on, and the funding should not be cut.

Lifeline South West is similarly a very effective program, providing counselling and support for people, particularly for those in crisis situations. Regional and rural Lifeline centres have been very busy in recent times due to the impact of the severe drought. South West Lifeline deals with 6000 to 7000 calls per annum, but it is only given \$47 500 per year from Victoria whereas other regional Lifelines are given \$95 000. Lifeline South West deserves the same funding as every other Lifeline right across country Victoria.

Veterans community men's shed

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — I rise to inform the house of a terrific initiative that is being opened within my electorate this week — on Thursday in fact — that is, the veterans community men's shed. The Greensborough RSL sub-branch has worked for over three years on this concept, since Lee Webb, president of the Greensborough RSL, first formed a project committee.

The aim of the shed is to provide veterans with a common meeting place where they can learn new skills and work on interesting projects. The men's shed will create a support network based on common interests and experiences, which will be of great benefit to veterans, particularly those who are experiencing ongoing health issues. The RSL worked with the Banyule council to find a suitable workplace and funding was sourced to purchase equipment and tools for the carpentry, welding, metalwork and leatherwork activities that the veterans will undertake. Sometimes it is important to provide places and opportunities for both men and women to speak with their friends, discuss issues of common interest or concern, or just hang out together locally and discuss points of interest. The men's shed at Lower Plenty will provide that service.

I would like to congratulate Lee Webb, Kevin Mundy and the entire project committee for their hard work in making this project become a reality. The veterans community men's shed will provide many men with the opportunity to learn new skills, to share old skills, and to develop friendships in an understanding and supportive environment. I congratulate the Greensborough RSL for undertaking this great project.

Premier's Drug Prevention Council: future

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — I rise to condemn the government for the way it has sidelined the Premier's Drug Prevention Council. Since 2001 the council has been charged with providing expert advice to the government. It plays a crucial role in the

development of drug policy. When the Premier instituted the council he said, 'I believe the council will make an enormous difference in our attack on drugs in Victoria'. But he has obviously changed his mind. The council's tenure finished a month ago. Since then its members have not been reappointed, the chair has retired, the council has not been reconstituted and the important work it was undertaking on liquor licensing and alcohol-related harm has stalled. Talk from within the sector suggests that whatever comes next will no longer have the Premier's name.

Rather than a body to provide advice to the highest levels of government, apparently the government wants the process watered down. There are huge drug problems in Victoria. Around 400 000 Victorians use cannabis every year, 114 000 have recently used methamphetamines, and 23 per cent of regular users of meth will develop psychosis. Sixty-four per cent of young people have recently drunk to risky levels, and hospital admissions due to alcohol-related harm are at an all-time high.

With new funding coming online the government needs the knowledge and expertise that the drug and alcohol community can bring to its deliberations. We need Victoria's best minds on the job — and, no, those minds do not reside on the other side of the house.

Schools: reading challenge

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — It is fantastic that the Premier's reading challenge is now in its third year and that schools in Narre Warren South are enthusiastically involved again. I will soon be visiting Fountain Gate Primary School with one of the reading ambassadors, Sally Ripin, and look forward to a super reading time. Only yesterday I received a delightful note from Ann Damon, teacher-librarian at the Eumemmerring Secondary College Fountain Gate campus, which says in part:

Thank you for the Premier's reading challenge posters and bookmarks we received today.

You will be pleased to know that we have 11 year 7 classes (approximately 250 students) and 4 year 8 classes and a small number of year 9 students also participating in the Premier's reading challenge.

This is our third year of participating in the challenge, with 45 successful participants in the first year (reading 10 books to meet the challenge) and 125 successful participants last year (reading 15 or more books; one year 7 student read 135 books between February and August last year). We are very proud of the efforts and positive attitudes that many of our students are displaying regarding the reading challenge ...

We are very concerned that our young people develop the habit of reading for pleasure as the skills and knowledge they

develop in doing so contribute directly to their chances of academic success as well as predisposing them to lifelong learning.

This is a note from a dedicated teacher who is encouraging in her students a love of books and reading and who understands the power of such learning to transform people's lives and learning. We are indeed fortunate to have many teachers in our community who provide inspiration to students every day.

Last week I took part in the Anzac Day service at the same college, led by principal, Vicki Walters, and the student leaders. Cr Wayne Smith, a teacher at the school, spoke eloquently — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Munt) — Order!
The member's time has expired.

Drought: mental health initiatives

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — *I Just Want Five Minutes of Your Time* is the title of a CD produced by Benalla farmer, Jim Carlisle. Jim has written 16 songs which express the anguish and emotional strain being experienced by tens of thousands of farmers, their families and communities throughout country Victoria. Jim is lucky — he has the ability to put his thoughts on paper and sing them to those who will listen. Many others cannot or will not do this; they bottle their thoughts inside, not seeking help, not sharing their anguish.

The words of Jim's songs offer an insight into the minds of people battling to cope with the toughest drought in living memory. They are words like:

I've fallen in a hole again,
In my mind there is no doubt;
I'm trying to look for positives,
But I can't see my way out.
Smart people tell you what to do,
And how to get it right;
Next thing your mind is doing overtime,
In the middle of the night.
Your debt is growing and your confidence shrinks,
You worry about what people think;
Your body aches from work and stress,
You recognise life is a mess.
... friends I have but few;
And when you're feeling down and out,
They hardly visit you.

Let us hope that the recent rains are the beginning of the end of the physical drought, but even if that is so the financial and emotional impacts of the drought will linger for years.

I call on the Premier to respond to Jim's plea on behalf of country Victorians and to ramp up financial assistance and mental health support measures for drought-battered country Victorians.

Holocaust: commemoration

Mr HUDSON (Bentleigh) — On 15 April I attended the Yom Hashoa commemoration organised by the Jewish Community Council of Victoria at the Robert Blackwood Hall which was attended by a number of members of Parliament. The commemoration is held in memory of the 6 million men and women, including half a million children, who were victims of the Holocaust. This year's commemoration was based on the theme of hiding, and explored the physical, psychological, social and cultural impact on Jewish families and their descendants of being forced to hide from the Nazis.

The impact that hiding can have is best exemplified by *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which Anne Frank began writing shortly after her 13th birthday. Through her diaries she provides a window into the life of many who were forced to live in close proximity to others, cut off from the world and living with the terror that they could be discovered and could face annihilation.

In this moving commemoration, survivors of the Holocaust lit memorial candles and gave personal testimonies of their experiences. These were a telling reminder that the impacts of hiding were not just physical. Many Jewish people were forced to give up their identities by changing their names, converting to Christianity, falsifying papers and concealing their backgrounds. Jewish children were sent to convents, boarding schools and orphanages far from home to hide. Those who survived the Holocaust still carry the physical and psychological scars of their experiences and remind us that we must never allow such an act of genocide to happen again.

Congratulations to the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and the many volunteers who were involved in arranging this year's Holocaust commemoration.

Public transport: student concessions

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) — I rise to condemn the Bracks government, a government that claims to govern for all Victorians, over the matter of concession travel for Victorian residents studying interstate. Benambra is a country border electorate, and many of its residents travel to Canberra or New South Wales for further education. Public transport concessions are available only to holders of concession cards issued in

Victoria, and therefore residents of Victoria studying in the ACT (Australian Capital Territory), for example, are not eligible for concession travel in Victoria.

Nicole Jasinowicz is a resident of Wodonga — a Victorian — who is currently studying at the Australian National University, living in a residential college on campus and wanting to come home on holidays. Although she is eligible for transport concessions in both New South Wales and the ACT, she is not eligible in her home state, so when she travels to visit family in Melbourne during her breaks it is as a full-fare-paying passenger.

We are not encouraging our Victorian children to come home during holidays and breaks from study interstate. The danger is that these students will increasingly travel interstate and start identifying more with those states. Once they have completed their further education and received their qualifications, they will then be inclined to gain employment within those states rather than return to Victoria, so Victoria will lose those skills. Full-time students with permanent residency in Victoria should be entitled to concession travel in Victoria so they can continue to identify as Victorians and so they can return to Victoria with their required skills and qualifications.

Scots Church: volunteers

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — I rise today to pay tribute to a constituent, ALP branch member and elder of the Scots Church, Robert Lowe. On Sunday, 22 April, on the ABC's *Hymns of Glory* program Robert outlined the work that he and volunteers from the Presbyterian and Scots joint mission undertake with disadvantaged communities in the Flemington area. In its mission statement Scots Church states that it aims to be 'generous in our outreach to the communities in which God has placed us'.

This was certainly evident during the program. It supports many families and individuals facing hardship by distributing food, clothing, linen, toys and much more. The mission provides a service at Flemington Presbyterian Church on a fortnightly basis on Tuesdays between 10.00 a.m. and 12.00 p.m. Robert said that there are between 60 and 70 people who attend regularly and that there are always new faces, including young people in need of assistance. It was heart warming to see the response from the community members as they showed their appreciation of the volunteers.

Scots Church is located at the corner of Collins and Russell streets in Melbourne, and its foundation stone

was laid on 22 January 1841. As the population flourished during the gold rush the congregation soon outgrew the original building, and the present church was completed in 1874. Today the church continues to serve its own congregation and many Melburnians. I believe there is always a good story to be told, and I commend Robert and the team of volunteers from Scots Church for their efforts in supporting these vulnerable communities.

Preschools: funding

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — I was recently invited to visit one of my local preschools to discuss various issues and concerns. Pinemont Preschool is one of about a dozen in my electorate that is run very competently by a committee of parents, all of whom work extremely hard in providing a fun and caring environment for the children there.

One thing was made very clear to me on this visit — the work these parents do and the time and effort they invest in the service of our community are amazing. Despite the fact that the parents are serving their community and providing care for our children, this government has not provided enough assistance for them. The generosity of parents in fundraising efforts and in the time they devote to working bees has often been the only thing that has kept these preschools afloat.

This government has to date happily put the onus for maintenance onto the parents. The deluge of regulation and paperwork that is dumped on these committee members is also incredibly daunting for these parents. If it were not for the support of Kindergarten Parents Victoria (KPV), many committee members would not know where to start. Let us think about that for a moment. I am told that government departments are of no help in these matters and that it is the privately run KPV which actually supports these parents.

There are many other issues that require attention, be they subsidies for three-year-olds attending kindergarten or government assistance for special-needs children. The long and short of the matter is that this government needs to further assist these parent-run kindergartens instead of putting roadblocks in their way at every turn.

Heidelberg Historical Society: 40th anniversary

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — On Sunday, 29 April, I had the great pleasure of attending the 40th anniversary luncheon of the Heidelberg Historical Society. The society was established after a successful

historical exhibition held at St John's Anglican Church in Heidelberg. On 18 April 1967 the then mayor of Heidelberg, Cr Vern Henderson, chaired a meeting which resolved that the historical society be formed. A further meeting on 25 May established an interim committee, with Mr Rollo Hammet as convenor and Mrs Patricia Bellgrove as secretary.

In the 1970s it became obvious that the society, with its growing membership and expanding collection of records and memorabilia, needed a permanent home. I am extremely pleased to advise the house that the then member for Ivanhoe, Mr Bruce Skeggs, negotiated the move of the historical society to the old Heidelberg courthouse, which was over 100 years old. In 1979, after restoration, the courthouse was opened to the public. During the 1980s the society was extremely involved in Victoria's 150th anniversary celebrations and Australia's bicentennial in 1988. It was also actively involved in the 150th anniversary of local government in November 1991 and the Federation celebrations in 2001.

I would like to take the opportunity of thanking Mr Graeme Speers, the president of the society, for being master of ceremonies. I also thank various other members of the committee, including Elizabeth Barham, Gloria de la Rue, Mary Reid, Joan Carson, Patt Tippett, and Ian and Vicki McLachlan, the centre management of the Ivanhoe Centre, Ireland Florists and Chocolatier for all their assistance on the day.

Tourism: Echuca-Moama

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — I would like to congratulate all those associated with the innovative campaign of the Echuca Moama and District Attractions Association to address a misconception that the Murray River at Echuca-Moama is dry. The campaign follows damaging reports in the metropolitan media which incorrectly said that boats were sitting on the bottom of the riverbed. The report has had an immediate and negative impact on tourism in the region, prompting a major community campaign to address the issue.

As part of the campaign a local airline, Aus-Air, towed a banner around Melbourne on Anzac Day and last Saturday containing the message 'River flowing at Echuca-Moama' in order to generate publicity. Businesses on both sides of the river have backed the campaign, with many assisting in financing the promotion. The initiative has been a wonderful example of the community working together to help overcome a major challenge. The tourism industry is of major importance to our region, and it is inspiring to see so

many of our small businesses working together to protect it.

For the record, the river is flowing at Echuca-Moama. The paddle-steamers are still plying the Murray, the houseboats are still operating and the fish are still biting. If water-related activities are not your forte, why not come and wander through Echuca's historic port precinct, the Great Aussie Beer Shed and the Holden museum area, or why not visit some of the Rodney electorate's other attractions, such as the Barmah and Gunbower forests, Echuca and — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Munt) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Country Fire Authority: Yan Yean electorate

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — Today I wish to congratulate three new CFA (Country Fire Authority) captains who have recently been elected to head brigades serving my electorate. Captain Rohan Thornton has taken over the helm at North Warrandyte from Paul Buck, who served an amazing 12 years as captain. Captain Ken Collins has succeeded Darren McQuade at Yarrambat; Darren headed up Yarrambat for 10 years. I know that both of these well-loved ex-captains will continue their diligent service to the CFA and that they intend to play a greater role in their respective Lower Yarra and Whittlesea-Diamond Valley groups. I am particularly pleased to welcome Captain Helen Kenney to her position as the new captain of the St Andrews brigade, taking over from Mal Sissons. It is wonderful to see women taking up senior roles in the CFA, and I hope to see many more.

I want to thank the three retiring captains on their outstanding service in protecting their local communities and communities further afield, together with their partners, families and employers, who have made this outstanding service possible. I wish the three incoming captains all the best and look forward to working with them all both as a local member and as the Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services.

On Sunday it will be a privilege and an honour to lay a wreath in Myrtleford to commemorate the 64 CFA members who have died on tours of firefighting duty since 1945, including some from my own Yan Yean electorate, five from the Panton Hill brigade and one from Wollert. We must remember these courageous men and women who have made the highest sacrifice to keep their neighbours and communities safe.

VicRoads: Lilydale roadworks

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — The lack of thought, poor planning and arrogance of the Minister for Roads and Ports is reprehensible. Last Tuesday the owner of a small business in Lilydale came to see me in a distressed state. He has spent the last two years building up his fish and chip shop, and we all know that convenience food businesses need easy access for vehicles. Three roads give access to this business: Hereford Road, Alfred Road and Anderson Street. When I was there on Tuesday, 24 April, VicRoads had closed not one, not two, but all three of these access roads. The shop's name is Gilligan's Island, and thanks to VicRoads its owner was well and truly marooned on an island.

Last Wednesday — Anzac Day — I saw the owner again. I was so concerned about his state that I tried to contact the Minister for Roads and Ports. Because it was a public holiday I could not get him by telephone, so I sent an email saying:

Can you please get one of your senior people to call me urgently?

And I gave my phone number. I further said:

I am taking the step of contacting you personally because I have just left the gentleman and I am concerned that he may become so depressed that we will have a terrible result.

It is now Tuesday and I have still not had a response from the minister. Fortunately the shop owner is a more resilient man than I initially expected him to be, and despite this appalling treatment he will fight back. He now has to borrow more money to pay his rent and leases and to advertise and promote his business. His turnover has dropped to virtually zero, and the roadworks will not be finished for weeks, yet this minister will not even return a call.

Dr Paul Clarke

Mr BROOKS (Bundoora) — I wish to commend Dr Paul Clarke, who recently retired from general practice after servicing the medical needs of the Diamond Valley community for approximately 40 years. Dr Clarke commenced working in Watsonia Road, Watsonia, in 1968 with Dr Eamon Spillane, and in 1975 was the founder of the Greensborough surgery he has just retired from. The practice was then located in Grimshaw Street, and in these early years Dr Clarke was on call 24 hours a day and worked extremely long hours. Two years later Dr Gary Carter joined the practice as a partner.

The practice at Grimshaw Street was small, with parking and traffic problems. Recognising these problems, the practice moved to the current site in Greensborough Road in 1985. As the demands of the area grew Dr Clarke and Dr Carter developed an associateship with Dr Maurice Vivarini. Dr Clarke was supported in running the practice through these years by his wife, Teresa, particularly in the early days as she raised their family of eight children. I have been told of one occasion when Mrs Clarke completed the surgery's payroll from her maternity ward; and in those early days, prior to mobile phones, she would have to stay at home and take all the after-hours calls and know exactly where Paul was.

Dr Clarke was a board member of the Diamond Valley Community Hospital for many years as the medical representative, and he delivered over 2000 babies in the district, including half a dozen of my nephews and nieces. Dr Paul Clarke retired in March at the age of 68 years due to ill health. His dedicated and professional care, and his generous, gracious and humorous nature will be missed by people in the Diamond Valley. I know I speak on behalf of the local community when I wish him well in retirement and thank him for his contribution to the people of Diamond Valley.

Channel 31: digital licence

Mr LIM (Clayton) — The federal communications minister, Senator Helen Coonan, has constantly assured community television that it will be assisted in making the transition to digital broadcasting; however, so far the rhetoric has not translated into action. Community television promotes open access, diversity, local content and independence. It has survived and strengthened over the past decade, despite facing an uncertain regulatory future and receiving no regular government funding.

Channel 31 Melbourne is proud to broadcast in more than 17 languages and has an ongoing commitment to providing a platform for new and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. But without access to digital, Channel 31 will not be able to survive as a viable television broadcaster. While the station is strong at present — reaching over 1.3 million viewers a month, and with 90 locally made programs on every week — digital broadcasting is vital for the survival of this station. Without it, all the hard work from marginalised communities will be wasted.

As long as the federal government drags its feet on granting Channel 31 a digital licence, the station will lose more and more of its viewers as they switch over

to digital television and set-top boxes. Because the station relies on audience-related income and not on external funding, it requires access to all of its potential audience. It should go without saying that the community should be able to access community television, regardless of which television set they own.

Drugs: federal policy

Mr HODGETT (Kilsyth) — I would like to commend the federal minister for Casey on running an anti-drugs meeting in our electorate last night. He had information on what the federal government is doing to combat this problem that faces many of our local communities.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Munt) — Order! The time for making members statements has now ended.

STATUTE LAW REPEALS BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 15 March; motion of Mr BRACKS (Premier).

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — The Statute Law Repeals Bill is, as its name suggests, a bill to repeal a number of statutes on the Victorian statute book. In particular there is a schedule to the bill containing 282 acts which are repealed by this bill. In addition, clause 4 of the bill singles out for special attention Act 5 Vict. No. 14 (New South Wales) (1841 Bank of Australasia). It receives special attention because it is a New South Wales act which is proposed to be repealed by this bill, in and for Victoria. It is an act that relates to the manner of providing evidence in court as to the content of the royal charter of the Bank of Australasia. After extensive investigation, which is detailed in the explanatory memorandum, by many learned and worthy bodies, it has been concluded that that act is no longer needed and can be repealed.

I would like to commend the work of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC) in relation to this bill. The committee has examined the bill, has taken evidence from the chief parliamentary counsel and has reported to this house. As SARC points out, the acts that are to be repealed by this bill fall into three main groups: the first of them being spent principal acts, which are mentioned in items 1.1 to 1.17 of the schedule in the explanatory memorandum; the second being spent amending acts with transitional or substantive provisions, mentioned in items 2.1 to 2.92 of the explanatory memorandum; and the third being

spent amending acts which are now wholly in operation and have amended their principal acts and contain no transitional savings or substantive provisions.

The chief parliamentary counsel has certified that all of the acts proposed to be repealed by virtue of the bill are appropriate for repeal as part of a statute law bill. Insofar as the bill goes, all appears to be in order and the opposition supports the bill. However, it is worth considering this bill in the context of how far it goes and how effective it is in achieving the objective the Premier referred to in his second-reading speech, of ensuring that our laws remain clear, relevant and accurate. The issue of accuracy is perhaps not under consideration, but certainly many citizens of Victoria would consider that our statute book is anything but clear and relevant, and that the bill before the house goes nowhere near remedying that situation.

That conclusion is borne out by a recent report of a body established by the present government, the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC). Page 2 of that body's April 2007 edition of the *Victorian Regulatory System* says that the 72 business regulators that it examined administer over 32 000 pages of acts and regulations, which is an increase of 4.5 per cent on 2006 and 4.8 per cent on the year before. Despite the worthy efforts of the bill before the house, the regulatory burden in Victoria is continuing to grow, and the commission goes on to describe some of the things that are purportedly being done to attempt to reduce that regulatory burden. As is common with the current government, there is a lot of looking into and not a great deal of action. I refer in particular to page 5 of the VCEC report, which says:

... Victorian regulators are considering the use of benchmarking as a tool to support improved regulatory performance. The Department of Justice, for example, is investigating (as part of its Better Business Regulation project) the feasibility of a benchmarking exercise across its regulatory portfolio, which includes consumer protection, business registration and licensing, gambling and racing and Victoria Police.

In this example, which VCEC has highlighted, we have reference to regulators considering doing something, investigating something and looking at the feasibility of doing something but not actually doing anything in particular. Despite the best efforts of the bureaucrats at VCEC — who I am sure have their hearts in the right place and would be keen to do more if they were given the opportunity — all that is coming out of this regulatory reform process of which the government is so proud is the very modest bill that we have before the house at present.

The reality of limited regulatory reform is to be contrasted with the very sweeping claims and promises that have been made by the government in recent times. I refer in particular to a publication called *Reducing the Regulatory Burden — The Victorian Government's Plan to Reduce Red Tape*, which was issued and authorised by the Treasurer in his own name in 2006. It made various commitments to reducing the regulatory burden and improving the legal regime which governs and regulates us.

In that document the government and the Treasurer committed to cutting the existing administrative burden of regulation by 15 per cent over three years and 25 per cent over the next five years and ensuring the administrative burden of any new regulation is to be met by an 'offsetting simplification' in the same or a related area. The document went on to say that the government will measure the administrative burden of specific regulations based on a standard cost model, develop a comprehensive and coherent range of initiatives to reduce the burden, and monitor progress towards achieving targeted reductions.

It further said that where ministers bring forward new proposals for regulation, these will also include reductions in the administrative burden within the minister's portfolio which are at least equivalent to any additional administrative burden. It gave as an example that an increase in the burden of environmental regulation would need to be offset by a reduction in the same or related area such as streamlining licensing requirements.

Since that statement we have seen the flaws in the whole package of promises. There are two crucial flaws in particular, the one being there is absolutely no mechanism to demonstrate either to this house or to the public that any of the claimed reductions in administrative burden that have been promised are actually occurring. Certainly no measurement is being published to show that is the case and in particular absolutely nothing to enable any verification of this promise that a new burden would be offset by some other simplification in the same or a related area.

We repeatedly see bills coming to this house, imposing new regulatory burdens with not a word to the house about offsetting burdens. If the government is to argue that this bill currently before the house is part of the process of complying with this requirement, then it is a very cheap and nasty trick, because while the repeals in this bill are worthy and will reduce the volume of pages on the statute book, they have very limited effect indeed in actually reducing the red tape and regulation governing Victorians. The implementation of this bill

will certainly lead to a somewhat smaller statute book and therefore perhaps make it a little bit quicker to find applicable law, but this bill is not repealing a single existing burden on the Victorian community.

The second serious flaw in the government's regulatory reform model is that although it has cited that its reforms are allegedly based on a model being used in Holland, there has been a crucial omission, because under the Dutch model there is an independent scrutinising body that had the capacity to examine all new proposals and, if it feels it necessary, to make its reports public. That provides a real check on bureaucracy and on executive government because if the government wants to persist with a piece of regulation, it runs the risk that the regulatory body will make a public adverse report.

In Victoria the government does not want to take the slightest risk of anything like that happening, and it wants to make sure that it is all very much kept behind closed doors and that there is as little accountability as possible. Indeed we have seen that even with the VCEC itself, which has been established on a legally dubious basis. Unlike the Productivity Commission in Canberra, it is very much under the thumb of the Treasurer and the Treasury, and there is no requirement whatsoever to have its reports tabled in Parliament. Even the VCEC, whose bureaucrats try to do the right thing, are being stifled and controlled by the Treasurer and the Treasury. They do not have the independence to speak out on regulatory issues and to report directly to Parliament in a way that the commonwealth Productivity Commission does.

This bill is a very limited step indeed along the path of attempting to reduce the regulatory burden. As I have said, the opposition believes that insofar as it goes it is worthwhile, but it is a very small step along the way, and I think what needs to be answered by government members in speaking on this bill — and by the Premier, if he returns to close the second-reading debate — and the assurance that needs to be given to the house is that there is absolutely no intention to claim the repeals of the legislation in this bill as in any way going towards meeting the government's promises under its red-tape reduction policy. If the government were to do that, it would be a cruel hoax indeed and would simply add insult to injury for all of those Victorian citizens and businesses that are struggling under the regulatory burden that is being imposed on them by this government.

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — The Statute Law Repeals Bill does a number of things. Principally, it does three things: firstly, it repeals a whole range of

acts of Parliament; secondly, it takes out spent amending acts with transitional or substantive provisions; and thirdly, it takes out spent amending acts that are wholly in operation.

If you look through the list of acts set out in this repeals bill, there is quite a bit of history there. My learned colleague has given a very detailed explanation of the technical issues of this bill, but I thought I would spend a few minutes just talking about some of the spent principal acts. For example, there is the Goldsbrough Mort and Company Limited Arrangement Act 1895. For those of us who have been involved in agriculture all our life, Goldsbrough Mort and Company is a great name that contributed substantially to the development of Victoria. You can still see Goldsbrough Mort wool stores around various places in the country.

The Tallangatta Township (Removal) Act 1950 reminds us of the development of the Hume Weir and the fact that the Tallangatta township had to be moved for the expansion of that weir. Unfortunately, as members would know, that old township is again visible because the water levels of the Hume Weir are so low — but we live in hope that by next spring, the old Tallangatta township will be again under water.

The Grain Handling Improvement Authorities (Abolition) Act 1984 makes me think about the development of the Grain Elevators Board and how that board serviced Victorian grain growers very well over time and how it was actually morphed into VicGrain, then effectively taken over by GrainCorp and the value that was released for grain farmers out of that whole process. It was a government authority that, over time, principally grain growers had paid for with their charges. When it was privatised and the grain growers were given shares in the company, with subsequent mergers they turned it into some quite substantial shareholdings for grain growers.

The list of acts to be repealed includes the Parliament House Completion Authority (Repeal) Act 1997. It would have been a very sad day in this house when that bill was introduced. It reminds me of the shenanigans that went on around that legislation and that members are still working in this building in conditions that existed in the 1850s. If that bill had been proceeded with at the time and had Parliament House been completed as was originally intended, it would have been a great statement for Victoria. This place would have been a lot better place to work for not only members of Parliament but particularly for the staff who work here.

I commend the then minister, Bill Baxter from another place, who was appointed at that time to oversee the completion of Parliament House in line with this legislation. He would have done an excellent job of implementing what was intended under this legislation and made sure that Victoria's Parliament House was actually completed as was intended in the 1850s.

My recollection of that time is that the present government, then in opposition, agreed that the then Premier should introduce a bill that would allow, in effect, people to go into the national park in the Grampians to get the stone for construction that would finish Parliament House. There had been agreement from the opposition when the bill was introduced, but then it reneged on the deal. The Premier of the time, in his inimitable fashion, effectively told the then opposition leader, John Brumby, what he could do with the fact that he had broken his commitment to allow that bill to pass so that government could actually get on and make this Parliament House the building that our forefathers envisaged it would be.

If you go through some of the spent amending acts with transitional or substantive provisions, there are again some items of interest. There is the National Parks (Amendment) Act 1988 with some of the issues around the provision of lands that have ceased to be roads or reserve forest.

Many times members have talked here about how national parks and Crown land are managed in this state. Land is being constantly added to the state's existing national parks or Crown land, but there is no relative increase in the resources necessary to manage those national parks and Crown land. As a lot of people would say, and as has been said in this place many times, Crown land controllers are actually neighbours from hell. That is not a reflection on the staff who do the job, but a reflection on this government which does not give them the resources to carry out their roles effectively, including managing Crown land well.

When the Catchment and Land Protection Act has been amended over time it would have been appropriate for the powers given to the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to include the same enforcement procedures for dealing with Crown land managers as apply for its dealings with private land managers.

Another act to be repealed is the Mildura College Lands (Amendment) Act 1990. The principal 1916 act was very visionary for this state. It was set along similar lines to the college land grants legislation in the USA. Alfred Deakin and the Chaffey brothers, who helped set up Mildura, set aside land so that there could be a

revenue stream for agricultural colleges in that area, which I think showed a lot of vision for the area and for agriculture in Victoria. It is a pity it was not taken up in other places.

One act that is very dear to my heart is the Agricultural Industry Development (Tomato Processing) Act 1992. The Tomato Processing Industry Act 1976 helped the development of the industry that I had a very personal stake in. The then agriculture minister, Ian Smith —

Mr Mulder — Good man!

Mr WALSH — He was a good man. In 1976 he introduced into this place a bill to set up a negotiating process, where tomato processing growers and tomato processors could actually come together and negotiate with equal strength. It helped the development of that industry substantially.

That goes back to a time when we actually had agriculture ministers in this place who cared about agriculture, who had a passion for agriculture and who were actually committed to seeing it grow, instead of having, as the state has had over recent times, agriculture ministers who have been quite prepared to allow their budgets, as a percentage of the total state budget, to decrease, who have been prepared to see a reduction in staffing commitments, who have been prepared to accept a reduction in the skills of the agriculture department and who, in particular, have been prepared to allow reductions in the extension services of agriculture.

The morphing of the Tomato Processing Industry Act 1976 into the Agricultural Industry Development (Tomato Processing) Act 1992 was a parting gift, I suppose — I use the word 'gift' in inverted commas — from the then Minister for Agriculture, Ian Baker, in the dying days of the Kirner government. It was something that I believe started the downfall of that industry in this state, because it set up a situation where growers could no longer negotiate with processors from an equal position. Effectively over time processors have exploited the grower sector of the industry, to a point where there are now very few growers left in the industry. Over time the processing sector has also died, and we have seen a flood of imports coming in and replacing local production because there has been no commitment from either side of the industry to continue the fight against imports.

I can remember when that bill was introduced, because it was my first experience of spending a lot of time in this place. It was at a time before there were standing orders that limited speaking times and put in place

finishing times. Many a long night was spent sitting in the gallery — sometimes it was 2.00 or 3.00 in the morning — listening to debates on other bills while waiting for the debate on that particular bill to come on. The then minister, Ian Baker, was noted for his enjoyment of fine food and wine. By late at night he had quite often partaken of quite a bit of both, which led to some interesting debates on that bill. For someone who was uninitiated in the way the Parliament worked, it was quite a fascinating time.

As I went through the bill I found the Miscellaneous Acts (Further Omnibus Amendments) Act, an interesting act that among other things contains a saving provision from the repeal of the Decentralized Industry Incentive Payments Act 1972. That involves another great concept in history, particularly when you think now about the issue of decentralisation and how we could get more industry and more people moving out into country Victoria instead of just letting Melbourne continue to grow and churn up good agricultural land, particularly to the east, and create an increasing demand for water, because as Melbourne grows it needs more water.

One of the major concerns we have as a party is that as Melbourne continues to grow and its demand for water continues to increase, there is the threat of water being taken from northern Victoria to meet that demand. To my mind that would transfer wealth from northern Victoria to Melbourne, whereas we would particularly like to see the government exercise its mind as to how it might put in place some incentives and some assistance to get small to medium-sized enterprises out of Melbourne and relocating to northern Victoria, where they could take advantage of the water that is there. If a number of farms are going to be taken out of agriculture and their water put into some form of secondary or other value-adding industry, let us do it in country Victoria so that we can continue to create wealth for those communities rather than just transfer their water straight to Melbourne. Acting Speaker, I know you are well aware of these sorts of issues, given the ongoing debate about the Snowy River and some of the things that have happened there.

One of the last acts I want to touch on is the Primary Industries Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2004, which deals with the Australian Food Industry Science Centre Act 1995. I have had the pleasure a number of times of going out to Werribee and visiting the Australian Food Industry Science Centre, which was set up in the Kennett years and which my predecessor, Barry Steggall, had quite a bit to do with in his role as the convener of Food Victoria. I think that was the first time we had pulled together a

number of organisations and put them in one place so that we could utilise the skills and benefit from the synergies of having scientists working together to push forward the food industry in Victoria in a way that added value to our agricultural produce. Having made that contribution, I indicate that The Nationals will not be opposing the bill.

Ms THOMSON (Footscray) — I rise to speak in support of the Statute Law Repeals Bill. This bill looks like a bit of administrative legislation that tidies up the statute book, but it is more than that. We have a very complex system of laws in this state. It is hard enough to understand and read a normal act of Parliament without having to read bills such as this which are passed from time to time. This really is about ensuring that our acts of Parliament remain up to date, are streamlined and actually represent the legislation that has been passed by this house and the other place. So it is an important piece of legislation.

I am not going to go through all the acts that are affected by this bill. Needless to say, what we are looking at are those bits of legislation which have amended substantive acts and have been incorporated into those acts and are therefore now redundant. There are also substantive acts that are now redundant because of practices that governments have changed. What this bill does is streamline our legislation. When we have a look at the statute book, which probably contains enough acts to account for 50 forests, we see the importance of remaining cognisant of the need to update our legislative framework and ensure that our acts of Parliament are streamlined from time to time.

Along with that comes the need to review acts as they sunset as a result of sunset clauses having been put in place. It is also important to see that the necessary work is done to ensure that acts remain effective pieces of legislation that represent and reflect the current thinking of the community. When we look at this bill we can say it is pro forma legislation that involves a bit of housekeeping — although maybe it is more like spring cleaning. It is about a big clean-out of legislation that makes it much easier to find our way through acts of Parliament as we pass them and as they apply in Victoria.

This is, as you can see, a comprehensive review that picks out redundant bits of legislation and ensures that we keep our statute book as streamlined as we can. We are creating laws all the time, and as we come into the chamber to debate pieces of legislation it is good to know that we as a Parliament are also cognisant of the need to clean out acts which become redundant as a

result of the laws we pass. With those words I indicate my support for the legislation before us.

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I wish to make some comments about the Statute Law Repeals Bill, and I do so from the perspective of having been a member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC) a long time ago. I reiterate that this is a substantial repeal bill that involves an extensive cleaning out of lapsed, spent and redundant legislation. Two hundred and eighty-two acts are being removed from the statute book by this bill. Some of the acts that are being removed are quite historic, some are more modern, and some of them I have spoken on as they have progressed through this Parliament.

I want to make a couple of comments about the process. I believe it is very important to reduce the amount of paperwork that people, and particularly businesses, are required to comply with. We as legislators seem to legislate willy-nilly. We come in here for however long it is — 16 weeks this year — and we legislate. Insufficient attention is paid to the burden of legislative and regulatory requirements on individuals and on businesses. Whilst it is good to repeal a number of these acts, the process has been too lengthy. I am grateful to parliamentary counsel for the very good explanatory memorandum, and I wish to refer to it.

The bill will repeal that part of Act 5 Vict. No. 14 (New South Wales) (1841 Bank of Australasia) which still applies to Victoria — obviously it is a very old act. The Victorian Law Reform Commission had recommended in February 1989 that this act be repealed; and the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, in a very extensive process such as this one, recommended in November 1995 that it be repealed. You have to ask the question why it has taken so long to remove an 1841 piece of legislation from the Victorian statute book. I note that in 1989 the ANZ Group confirmed to the Law Reform Commission that the act was no longer needed.

It is all very well for the government to compliment itself on its performance — and as a member of the previous government, I can make the comment about all of us — but these processes are taking way too long. I refer to page 3 of the bill, which details the repeal of the Goldsbrough Mort and Company Limited Arrangement Act 1895. That is a very old company, and I suspect that only those who have had some exposure to the wool industry would remember that company.

The same two points apply: the Victorian Law Reform Commission recommended a repeal of this act in

1989 — Elders has been consulted; obviously they are not territorial about the Goldsbrough Mort and Company Limited Arrangement Act 1895; they do not think it is relevant anymore — and SARC recommended in November 1995 that that act be repealed.

Obviously I have chosen two extreme examples, but there is a whole series of other acts. The bill also refers to the repeal of the Ammunition Factory Act 1889, the Federal Council Referring Act (Victoria) 1889 and a range of more modern pieces of legislation, principally amending acts which have now been incorporated into principal legislation and which, as I said earlier, I recall speaking on in recent times.

The process for this needs to be speeded up and addressed. The government appears to have done that, so I want to do something quite unusual and say that this is a good step forward from the government, not in terms of repeals but in terms of the practices it has brought to this chamber since the last election. I refer to the report on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2006. The minister, as the house would be aware, referred this bill to the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, whose job it is to go through and check that parliamentary counsel's recommendations for appeal are sound.

The committee makes a very good observation at page 4. It talks about the processes the government seems to have assumed in relation to automatic repeal of amending acts. This legislation will not address the principal acts that become redundant, but it will address the many acts that we deal with in this Parliament where we are amending principal legislation and where obviously the amendments are incorporated into the principal legislation and the amending acts are no longer needed. I quote from SARC's report:

The committee notes that the predecessor of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee made recommendations⁴ that where an amending act contains no savings or transitional provisions and the amending act has come into force and achieved its purpose in amending another act that an automatic repeal of the amending act should be considered.

Footnote 4 says that that was a recommendation by the then Legal and Constitutional Committee in its report to the Parliament in 1982 on the Statute Law Revision (Repeals) Bill. The recommendation made to this Parliament in 1982 was that if there is an amending bill, an automatic repeal should be considered after the act has been incorporated into the principal act. The SARC report then states:

The committee notes that in the course of taking evidence from the chief parliamentary counsel in its consideration of

recent statute law revision bills the committee had referred to its earlier recommendations supporting the adoption of an automatic repeal mechanism in amending bills.

The then Legal and Constitutional Committee made this recommendation and the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee has made this recommendation. To give credit to the government and the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, which is quite bipartisan on these issues, the committee noted that:

... since the commencement of the current Parliament in December 2006 automatic repeal provisions have been included in appropriate amending acts.

The Water Act, which comes within my area of responsibility as shadow Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change and which was debated in this place in December 2006, had an automatic repeal clause. The SARC report also says:

The committee endorses this new legislative mechanism and considers that this practice will reduce the time-consuming effort in compiling schedules for future statute law repeals bills.

And no doubt it will.

I want to pay tribute yet again to one of those rarities in politics where you have members of Parliament from all sides of the house — the Liberals, Labor and The Nationals — working together to get a good, sensible outcome. This legislation is a good example of that. You, Acting Speaker, were not on the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. In the report there are pleasant colour photos of all the members.

Frankly, I think it is absurd to have some of these old principal acts still on our statute book. It is absurd that recommendations were made long ago to repeal some of these acts. It is also absurd that we have had a recommendation to put an automatic repeal mechanism before this Parliament since 1982, which has subsequently been reiterated by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I bemoan the time that this has all taken.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! The member for Lowan should acknowledge the Chair.

Ms ASHER — I bemoan the fact that sometimes we, as legislators, simply legislate and do not appreciate the burden we place on individuals, businesses and members of our society. But I think we have ended up in a good place as a consequence of the government adopting a policy which was initially recommended in 1982 and subsequently recommended by a bipartisan all-party committee which is functioning well. In this case we have a good outcome.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — It is with pleasure that I join this debate. It is an unusual situation when all parties in the house support the Statute Law Repeals Bill. It is not often that I say it is a pleasure to follow the member for Brighton, but certainly today it is. Who would have thought there would be some unanimity on budget day? How unusual!

The member for Footscray made some good points about this legislation being a housekeeping and spring-cleaning exercise. This legislation will be welcomed by the community. It is something this Parliament and this government can do to make their lives simpler. To repeal both principal acts and amending acts is common sense, and it is unlikely that we will be criticised for doing so.

I want to address some of the acts which will be repealed. This is a history lesson for some of the history buffs in this chamber like the member for Essendon. One reflects on what happened in 1889 in the then colony of Victoria when the Ammunition Factory Act was passed in this place. The Goldsbrough Mort and Company Limited Arrangement Act is also to be repealed. I had an experience to do with Goldsbrough Mort in recent days. I stayed in an old Goldsbrough Mort wool store in Sydney which has now been made into apartments. It reminds us of the great wool history of this country.

The Marong Reserve Mining Act 1895 is also going to be repealed. My father's family mined and farmed in the Marong, Inglewood and Dunolly districts around that time. I might see what I can find out about our ancestry.

The Mildura College Lands Act 1927 will also be repealed. The member for Swan Hill referred to Mildura and the Deakin brothers. I actually went to two Mildura colleges. Only one of them was referred to in the act — that was the Mildura Technical School — but I also went to St Joseph's College.

The Western Metropolitan Market Act 1938 will also be repealed. The member for Mill Park and I take a great interest in this now that the wholesale fruit and vegetable market is relocating to our district in Epping. It is interesting to look at this history.

The Croydon Fruit Cool Stores Act 1949 will also be repealed. I can think of some of the orchards in my electorate, such as in Strathewen and over the river in Warrandyte, which still operate to this day. The Narree Worrnan Land Act 1969 is also mentioned in the bill. The members for Narre Warren North and Narre

Warren South might wonder about the different spelling of Narre Warren in that act.

Recently I have looked at quite a few of the acts of the 1990s which are being repealed. The Victorian community was placed under a lot of stress during the seven years of the Kennett government. It was an upheaval felt particularly in the public sector. The Electricity Industry (Amendment) Act and the Electricity Industry (Further Amendment) Act were introduced. We know how the Latrobe Valley was turned upside down at that time by the overhaul and sell-off of the SECV (State Electricity Commission of Victoria). Some 10 000 workers lost their jobs, and the impact of that was felt by their families for a very long time.

As a former official with the Community and Public Sector Union — I was the vice-president between 1993 and 1996 — I know the Public Sector Management Act only too well. I hear some murmuring from the other side of the house. We know that the Liberal Party does not find unions tasteful. It likes to put them down at any time, but I stand here as a proud former elected trade unionist and a present union member.

Many public sector workers lost their jobs, although the public sector has certainly now regained its independence; it has a lot of very good people working in it and advising government. We know those on the other side keep putting them down and talking about the cardigans, but I do not think they are cardigans or that the many people who lost their jobs in the 1990s should be forgotten. Probably there is still some loss of corporate memory in relation to all those wonderful people who worked for government at that time.

We could recall the ramming through of changes to local government in this state under the Local Government (Further Amendment) Act 1995. Former Premier Jeff Kennett, who was the then Leader of the Opposition, promised to never amalgamate councils when the Cain government attempted to do that through a process of negotiation, discussion and partnership with councils. But then once Jeff Kennett had the keys to office, he forced amalgamations through and caused a lot of upheaval for the people working in that industry. His actions caused a lot of problems that would not have occurred had local government amalgamations been done in a cooperative way.

I recall that in 2004 this house dealt with the Wrongs (Remarriage Discount) Act. That act is a reminder of some of the really archaic and arcane pieces of legislation that have existed on our statute book. That act offered a discount to husbands if their wives were

not considered to be attractive, which is something you would think to be unbelievable in this day and age.

This bill also repeals a number of appropriation acts, which is appropriate given that we have a new one of those each year. I commend the Liberal and National parties for supporting the government's position on this bill. I also thank the very hardworking members of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. They do a lot of work that I would probably not have the patience to do or on which I would not be able to pay necessary attention to detail. They do a big favour for members of this house. Their reports are examples of how the parliamentary committee system works in a cooperative way.

I would particularly like to commend the current chair of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, the member for Brunswick, and his predecessor the member for Mill Park who, I understand, is also going to speak on this bill. I commend the bill to the house and wish it a speedy passage.

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) — I am pleased to join the debate on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2006. I, too, am happy to support the legislation. As the member for Yan Yean has pointed out, the Liberal Party will be supporting this legislation. It is refreshing to hear the words of the member for Yan Yean, because we can only hope this position will also be adopted by the government in regard to other important legislation, particularly in regard to the national water initiative which all premiers in this country support — with the obvious exception of one. I only hope the same position and same spirit of debate is adopted by the Premier.

As has been pointed out, this bill will repeal upwards of 282 pieces of legislation, some of which date back to the 19th century. One has to ask why it has taken this house so long to repeal such legislation. Nevertheless bills which are deemed to be no longer required or spent are going to be repealed by this legislation, and we think that is appropriate. I would also like to congratulate the work of members of the all-party committee who have worked towards identifying the legislation that needs to be repealed.

As identified by the minister in his second-reading speech, this bill is part of the regular mechanism for a review of Victoria's statute book. The bill is vital to the orderly management of the state's statutes, so that the law remains clear, relevant and accurate. The bill repeals redundant acts which the chief parliamentary counsel has identified as being redundant, and therefore it is obviously appropriate that we go through this process.

I do not propose to address all the 282 acts that are to be repealed, but three are of particular interest to me, and I would like to comment on them. One is the Narree Worran Land Act 1969, which refers to a parcel of land in an area of Narree Warren, near my electorate, which forms part of the area colloquially known as the 'police paddocks'. It is an area which is very important to the people of my region. It is a 499-hectare reserve, and it has great significance for the Aboriginal community because it was the site of the first native police corps.

I have looked at the website, and for the house's benefit I would like to provide a bit of history on the police paddocks. The Port Phillip Aboriginal protectorate station was established at the location to protect Aboriginal people from frontier violence by encouraging them to move to government stations. From October 1840 to December 1844 the official headquarters for the Melbourne, or Western Port, district was Nerree Nerree Warren. At this location school classes and religious services were held for Aboriginal people and rations were provided in exchange for manual labour.

The native police corps was stationed there from 1842 until the early 1850s. The corps, which consisted of Aboriginal men under the leadership of Captain Dana, was involved in dealing with disputes between Aboriginal and European people across Victoria. The native police were also the first police stationed on the goldfields, and they acted as guards at the then Pentridge Prison at Coburg. Aboriginal people worked as trackers with the Victorian police between 1879 and 1963. Until 1931 many of the trackers were based at the Victoria Police horse stud depot at the Dandenong Police Paddocks Reserve. As members can see, it is an important site.

Over recent years it has become the location for a number of sporting bodies. As a young person I played football and cricket at this location, but, unfortunately, the site has fallen somewhat into disrepair. It is pleasing that the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs is in the house, because he, too, I am sure would understand the importance of quality sporting services in that region. This site has the potential to be upgraded in the future, because one thing we do not have in the east is sites suitable for sporting facilities in the future. That important site needs to be examined in that regard.

Another act I refer to is the Construction Industry Long Service Leave (Amendment) Act 1985, which concerns the transition of lift installers. This act deals with the provision of a portable long service scheme for employees who operate in the construction industry. Colloquially known as the 'co-invest scheme', it

provides a portable fund into which employers are required to pay long service leave contributions and from which employees have access to long service leave payments after a given period of time regardless of the number of employers they have worked for.

What concerns me is that over recent times there has been a successful push to expand the coverage of the scheme. We understand that traditional employees in the construction industry — those on building or heavy construction sites — would fall within the domain of the co-invest scheme, but we have seen the scheme expanded to include employees engaged in metal maintenance works. So employees who are not working on a true building or heavy construction site but who are performing metal maintenance work are now covered by the scheme. It is very important that we put a clear fence around future employees who fall within the scope of this scheme, because, as we know, it is a direct cost to business, particularly small business, and it is incumbent on this house to ensure that we do not unnecessarily burden businesses in the future.

The third bill I refer to is the Freedom of Information (Amendment) Act 1990. It is quite appropriate that this bill is going to repeal a part of that legislation. As members know, this government was elected in 1999 on its promise of being open, honest and transparent. I do not think we have seen any openness, honesty or transparency in this government. It promised to open the doors to members of the community to allow them to gain or be provided with appropriate information and to ensure that there was an air of transparency about government, but as we know, that has not been the case.

To see that, one only has to look at the situation with the proposed EastLink tollway. A member from the other house, Richard Dalla-Riva, made what is for this government an inappropriate request. He asked for the information this government had prior to the 2002 election regarding future tolling on the EastLink project. As we know, Mr Dalla-Riva had the audacity to ask the question, and of course the government wheeled out Queen's Counsel — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! The honourable member has strayed fairly far and wide from the bill. That latitude is not accorded to speakers other than lead speakers. I would request the member to keep to the bill.

Mr WAKELING — I thank you for that, Acting Speaker, and I am happy to talk with respect to the bill. I was indicating that the Freedom of Information (Amendment) Act is another piece of legislation to be repealed by this bill, and I was pointing out to the house

the concerns that I and members of the party on this side of the house have with regard to freedom of information. It is important to remember, whilst we are repealing legislation that is deemed to be inappropriate, that it is equally important for the government to ensure that it applies the terms of legislation that is currently in operation. With that, I indicate that I am happy to support the bill before the house. I congratulate those involved on their work.

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) — I am also pleased to speak in support of the Statute Law Repeals Bill. I come at this from my own perspective as a past member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. My time on the committee was terrific, particularly as I became a member when I was new to the Parliament. It exposed me to the mechanisms by which bills, acts and regulations are constructed and, indeed, deconstructed. Of course the bill we have before us today is a result of recommendations as to how we deconstruct acts that are on the statute book.

Government laws, which emanate from the Parliament, need to remain relevant and clear over the life of their existence. That is why from time to time we have bills of this kind that assist us in tidying up the range of legislation on the statute book. Whilst some may consider this to be a little tedious or ho-hum, I think it gives us a very good insight into what is important in the way of communication and information in the modern age.

Statutes, regulations and acts are very easily accessible to most people in the community via the internet — if not in people's homes then at our public libraries and schools. It is even more important in the modern climate than previously that we as a Parliament ensure we are able to present a range of statutes that are clear, remain relevant and are not left on the shelf, if you like, to be giggled at or seen as irrelevant to people's lives. That is why, again, it is very important that we have bills such as this and processes that from time to time involve people trawling through the statute book to identify acts and regulations that are obsolete or redundant and recommending their repeal by the Parliament.

This bill repeals a number of acts which have been identified as redundant by the chief parliamentary counsel. Most of these acts are in any case spent and have no effective life, and they include acts which amended parent acts. In fact the bill includes acts which themselves repealed acts, so we are being asked to repeal acts which were passed by this Parliament to repeal previous acts, which is quite an interesting turn. Nevertheless, this is part of the tidying up process, and I

know our chief parliamentary counsel is highly professional and very adept at identifying acts that need to be repealed.

The bill also provides for the repeal of certain principal acts which are spent or redundant. Putting aside for one moment the work of the chief parliamentary counsel, I wish to draw attention to the fact that this Parliament relies quite heavily on and is well served by bodies outside this place that assist in the process of identifying acts which should be repealed due to their redundancy, their spent nature or their obsolescence. By way of example I refer to some acts which external bodies have recommended this house consider repealing. I refer to The (Victorian) Federal Council Act of 1885. It was the Victorian Law Reform Commission which recommended that act for repeal, along with other federal council acts, in its *Report No. 16 — Obsolete Legislation (Second Report)* of February 1989. The commission reported that this group of acts became redundant upon Federation in 1901.

I want to mention also the good and solid work of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, which also recommended the repeal of this act in its own report, entitled *Redundant and Unclear Legislation — Second Report*, which was finalised in November 1995. The Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, of course, has an ongoing reference to consider and report on obsolete, redundant or unclear acts, and that is a job the committee has done very well and very studiously and with good, solid dedication. Certainly Parliament is well served by robust and solid mechanisms that keep our body of statutes clear and relevant. I wish to pay tribute to bodies such as the Victorian Law Reform Commission and certainly the parliamentary Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, and of course I pay due respect to our chief parliamentary counsel.

I wish, again by way of example, to refer to another spent principal act which will be repealed by this bill — that is, the Ammunition Factory Act 1889. The same report by the Victorian Law Reform Commission commented that this act was obsolete. Again the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, in its report of November 1995, followed with the same recommendation. We can see how, through the mechanisms that have been established, endorsed and supported by the Victorian Parliament, we have been well served by these bodies keeping a very careful and expert eye on the bookshelf, if you like, of Victoria's statutes to make sure we have acts and references that are very much relevant to the people in our community and to our way of life.

It is not as simple as just identifying acts that may seem quaint or obsolete. Indeed it is a very sensitive and very professional task to identify obsolescence and to get to the point of recommending the repeal of an act. Great care must be taken to ensure there will be no unintended consequences on other laws which may make reference to the act that is being recommended for repeal or to which the proposed repealed act may refer. That is very important so that Parliament is not left having to revisit repealed acts or repeal bills such as this for the purpose of correcting oversights or unintended consequences of acts that we may have repealed.

That makes for a very efficient Parliament. It ensures that people can genuinely have confidence that the Parliament knows how to go about its business in a very orderly and professional way, in a way that is highly responsive to community expectations. I am certainly very pleased that the general population can have confidence in the ability of this Parliament, due to the very expert advice that is received via the bodies that I have referred to, to identify acts that are considered to be no longer necessary.

By way of an example of how careful we must be and how sensitive issues are in terms of the unintended consequences of repealing acts, I point out that the clause notes on the repeal of acts schedule state in regard to various acts that are recommended for repeal that any continuing effect of the transitional and saving validation provisions of the acts sought to be repealed will be saved by section 14 of the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984.

When we make a minute analysis of the acts in the schedule, we can see the care that is taken and the professionalism that is displayed in ensuring there are no unintended consequences; and where there is a view that there may be some issue that may be outstanding, those matters are protected or saved by the Interpretation of Legislation Act. I am very pleased to commend the bill to the house.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — I rise on behalf of the Lowan electorate to speak on the Statute Law Repeals Bill. As members know, the main purpose of the bill is to revise the statute law of Victoria by repealing spent acts. It is important that that be done. There are many acts of Parliament, many of which are outdated — in other words, they are spent — and for orderly management they need to be disposed of. We need to make sure that laws made in this Parliament in the state of Victoria are clear and, importantly, accurate. We also need to make sure they are relevant to today's needs.

The chief parliamentary counsel has identified many acts as being redundant, and they are listed in the bill. There are 16 spent principal acts, 10 repealing acts that are unnecessary, but importantly there are 92 spent amending acts which have transitional or substantive provisions.

These acts are seen to be spent and in effect to have no further purpose. It is important to delete them from our records — and to remove them from our cabinets. In years gone by members would have had cabinets full of them in their offices, and we can see all the statute law volumes right in front of us in this chamber. It is interesting to note how great it is for our generation to be able to access any of the updated acts through our computers. It must be a godsend, particularly for the staff at Parliament House but also for the community, to be able to access acts in the way we are able to do so today. So it is important to dispose of the acts that are redundant or spent and have served their useful purpose.

I want to speak on a couple of the acts that will be repealed by the bill. One is the Ammunition Factory Act. That factory used to be in the western suburbs of Melbourne. It is great, when you arrive there from the great region of western Victoria, to see that area being developed, mainly for housing but also for other industries. It has taken a long time for that to happen, but it is great that it is happening today. Another act to be repealed by the bill is the Marong Reserve Mining Act, which deals with a great little area around Bendigo.

The other act I want to talk about is the Mornington Sewerage Authority (Validation) Act. In my previous life I was member of the then Horsham Water Authority. In the days when amalgamations were occurring that authority and others were amalgamated into a greater authority, which in turn is now being amalgamated by this government. I heard the member for Yan Yean criticising the amalgamation process, but she overlooked the fact that although many of our water authorities were amalgamated by the previous Kennett government, authorities have also been amalgamated by this government. For example, Grampians Water has been amalgamated with Wimmera Mallee Water; and a couple of water authorities down in the south-west have been amalgamated to establish what is now called Wannon Water.

I have three water authorities in what is the largest electorate in the state: Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water, Wannon Water and Southern Rural Water. They do a great job, but the amalgamation process gave them the opportunity to attract skilled staff and to get better

resources, whether they be financial or human resources, to deal with the many challenges faced over the last seven years through a shortage of water mainly because of lack of rainfall; but I do not believe this government acted quickly enough.

Even during the difficult times in the Kennett years when there were no funds, money was spent by the then minister responsible for water, Pat McNamara, on upgrading the walls of many lakes and storages in my electorate and other country electorates to make sure they were safe for the new environment we live in today. Importantly, we were able to do that because of the amalgamation of those authorities; it enabled them to gain particularly better physical resources but also financial resources.

Some concerns are being raised in my area now that the water authorities are losing a bit of contact with the community, and importantly their costs are rising. I know that is the case because in reality many of these water authorities have to meet the new world health standards on water that are stipulated in the legislation — health legislation and the like — that has come through Parliament. But those costs are getting to the stage of sometimes becoming overbearing, and they could be costs that will drive industry and even members of the community out of this state.

It is interesting to note, when considering the repeal of the Mornington Sewerage Authority (Validation) Act by the bill, that there is a lot of history in water. It is a difficult topic. I know the member for Swan Hill, who jumped into the debate on this bill with gusto, spoke about some of those things.

Mr Langdon interjected.

Mr DELAHUNTY — He was very much an authoritative member on this bill.

The other act I want to talk about relates to my roles in the past as a councillor and local government commissioner — that is, the repeal of the Town and Country Planning (Planning Schemes) Act. Many changes have been made to planning schemes under previous governments and this government. While most of those changes have been for the good, the biggest difficulty has been that the community has not been brought along with the changes, including those made to the Aboriginal Heritage Act, which has been discussed in the media lately.

There have been many changes to the planning schemes, including overlays and the like, that people have to operate under. Many industries are able to deal with those changes because they have the necessary

resources to do so, but I speak on behalf of a very isolated community. A couple of the councils in my area have limited resources. West Wimmera shire, one of the smallest in the state, Hindmarsh shire, Yarriambiack shire in the electorate of the member for Swan Hill, and others in my electorate have enormous difficulties in meeting the requirements of planning schemes by having access to the staff, skills and resources necessary to understand the many changes. As a former councillor and commissioner I know how important it is to have a good understanding of the planning schemes which are in place to protect the community and to help in the development of the shires.

Another act that the bill repeals is the Grain Handling Improvement Authorities (Abolition) Act 1984. As members know, a long time ago there was only one grain-handling authority in this state, the Grain Elevators Board of Victoria. That changed and now others are operating, including GrainCorp and the AWB. There are many other private companies, authorities and industries, including grain handlers and storers of hay such as the Moore brothers in Horsham. Importantly we have seen a great boost to our communities as a result of the recent rainfall. In the area that I represent there has been rainfall of 4 to 5 inches in some places, with about 2 inches around Hamilton. We hope that this is the start of more rain and that we will see more grain coming into the grain storages of Victoria.

I want to talk about the Decentralized Industry (Housing) Repeal Act. While public housing is vital for the development of country Victoria, it is often overlooked. We have great difficulty in attracting qualified people to many of our country towns, whether they be health or education staff or police. We need public housing. I note that today's budget says that 800 public housing units will be allocated throughout Victoria. We want to make sure that country Victoria gets a fair share of those units, particularly the country communities and small towns that require public housing to attract the qualified people we need to help us not only in health but also in education, which is vital to the continuing development of my area.

Before I finish I will comment quickly on the Sunday Entertainment (Repeal) Act. In the 1970s I lived in Melbourne, where I studied, worked and also played sport. On Sundays, as you, Acting Speaker, would remember, Melbourne was dead. You could have fired a cannon up Bourke Street and not touched anyone, because there was no-one about. That changed through the 1990s, with the election of a government that really did open up not only Melbourne but also Victoria as the

place to be. We have seen major changes, whether it be in sports, the arts or, importantly, entertainment. There have also been changes in shopping. If you talk to people, particularly women, about what they want to do when they go on holidays, they will tell you they want to go shopping. Melbourne was once a place where you did not go — because it was closed. In those days Victoria was a six-day-week state. I know there have been changes due to economic development, but the biggest changes were made following the election in the 1990s of a government that opened up Victoria so that it was the place to be.

I will not make too many more comments on this bill, because the Leader of The Nationals has come back and I know he was disappointed that he could not make his presentation earlier in the day. The reality is that we have been trying to fill in time so he can do that. With those few words, I indicate that I will be supporting this legislation.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — The Statute Law Repeals Bill 2006 is an important piece of legislation, as is reflected in the contributions that have been made in the chamber, including the valuable contribution made by the member for Brighton. It is important to understand how the acts that will be repealed reflect the history of Victoria. A number of years ago the chief parliamentary counsel included in the introductory wording of a comparable bill the remark that it succinctly and evocatively recalled important elements of Victoria's history — and, might I add, Australia's history.

The bill currently before the house repeals 77 acts, including many amending acts. Interestingly they include a number of acts that go back a long way, among them The Ammunition Factory Act 1889. A brief perusal of the record of the debate that took place in those days shows that the bill had the purpose of establishing a gunpowder manufacturing plant in Victoria. It was deemed to be more beneficial to the people of Victoria to manufacture gunpowder within the colony than import it, because if it exploded on board a ship the consequences would be diabolical, and that example was given in the debate. In relation to a current debate on explosive or dangerous material — yellowcake — there is a letter to the editor in the *Australian* today, from which I will read:

Whilst having avoided a meltdown with the ALP's left faction over the expansion of uranium mining, [Mr Rudd] ... failed to show any leadership and take responsibility on what to do with the final radioactive product. The decision is grossly negligent.

If Australia is to mine more uranium and reap its economic benefits, we should also take responsibility for the final product. Our shores provide a much more secure climate, both politically and geotechnically, for the long-term storage of radioactive waste than any current customer of Australian yellowcake.

In that letter to the editor, which I might add is very well written, concern is expressed about what is to be done with a dangerous product. In the 1889 Victorian debate the view expressed was that it would be better for us to take responsibility for dangerous products on our own shores. I might add that the writer went on to note in their letter that:

Australia needs to embrace all forms of energy that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The correspondent to the *Australian* wrote that undeniably the decision will rest with the Australian electorate and then said:

... with Mr Rudd's target of reducing Australia's carbon emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 but no action plan as to how that will be achieved, nuclear power, together with clean coal and solar, may be the only way.

The letter starts with the sentence:

Kevin Rudd is trying to have his yellowcake and eat it too.

Other pieces of legislation referred to in the Statute Law Repeals Bill include acts relating to the then Federal Council of Australasia. A number of interesting contributions were made to the debates on those bills. One member asked whether the legislation would give a taxing power to the federal council. He was surprised by the suggestion that there would not be a taxing power. History has proved not only that the federal council ended up with some taxing powers but that its successor, the Commonwealth of Australia, ended up with significant taxing powers.

There was vigorous debate around a range of other themes. One member spoke with some prescience about the probability of there being a war between Germany and England. Other members of the house apparently said no, but the record shows that 10 to 20 years beforehand there had been some major concern about the activities of Bismarck and an expansionist Germany and its designs on Holland. There was very much an overview of the steps being taken towards Federation and of the international issues that were affecting Australia at the time.

Another act that is being repealed is the Fisheries (Abalone Licences) Act. The abalone industry is a very significant industry in Victoria, which has one of the last sustainable supplies of abalone, with 70 or so operators. In the words of the member for Gippsland

East at the time — the sentiments of which are probably well known to the current member for Gippsland East — the basic concept is that abalone licence holders are engaged in an industry which has a fairly high risk element attached to it and a relatively short working life. Unfortunately people who spend considerable time under water are subject to health problems, notably a disease which affects the shoulders and leads to a gradual deterioration in those joints. He said also that divers who have been engaged in the industry for a period, even, perhaps, for most of their working lives, still consider that they need some sort of security. In the case of the member for Gippsland East, he has entered the Victorian Parliament and is moving very well.

I cannot do anything more than strongly emphasise the significance of the abalone industry to Victoria, with some 70 or so licences. The last time I checked they were each valued at about \$6 million and licence-holders had the opportunity to collect their product — their 20 tonnes or so of abalone — 98 per cent of which was destined for the export market. I might also add that some was destined to remain within the Victorian marketplace, noting the recent guilty plea by a Sandringham Chinese shop proprietor to a charge of possession of abalone. He has been punished by the Victorian courts. It is an offence that has great gravity attached to it, and I note that the fish stocks in other areas and other jurisdictions have been exhausted.

I turn to a couple of other matters referred to in the bill, including the Metung Land Act, which comparatively speaking is one of the more recent acts, and the Marong Reserve Mining Act. These acts reflect elements of the state's history, the wisdom of this chamber and how decision-makers have wrestled with the various bills that have come before the house and adjudicated on them. Several of the acts mentioned in the Statute Law Repeals Bill were pivotal in the march to Federation, including The Federal Council Referring Act (Victoria) 1889, The (Victorian) Federal Council Act 1885, the Federal Council Referring Act (Victoria) 1892 and the Federal Council Referring Act (Victoria) 1896.

In the debate on one of those pieces of legislation it was suggested that the idea of federation had not sprung up overnight like a mushroom but rather had been a product of the seeds of many ideas that had been planted and nurtured and had come to fruition. Today we are in fact repealing a number of statutes that have been significant in the history of this state, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — It is a great pleasure to join the debate in relation to the Statute Law

Repeals Bill. Of course this legislation is comprised of three essential parts which are dedicated to the one cause — namely, alleviation of the ever-burgeoning content and number of those pieces of legislation that are referred to in the bill. There are three categories of legislation: the spent principal acts; the spent amending acts with transitional or substantive provisions; and the third category is the spent amending acts now wholly in operation.

Legislation of this ilk is always interesting. It is like having your life pass in front of your eyes when you go through the 70-odd pieces of legislation referred to in the schedule. Many different aspects of the make-up of Victoria's community are reflected in the pages of a bill such as this, and it is always interesting to reflect on some of them as being examples of the way in which Victoria has developed and of the different aspects of legislative instruments that have been used over the years to enable the state to function.

For example, in clause 1.3 of the schedule there is reference to The Ammunition Factory Act of 1889. That reminds me of a position which applied in Gippsland for many years in the 19th century when one of the first ports of entry into Victoria was Port Albert. The people who came ashore at Port Albert had the intention of pursuing the dream of discovering gold in the hills of Gippsland, and of course later they became traders. As part of that process many of them had to cross the Thomson River, and in 1883 what has become known as the swing bridge was constructed just south of Sale. This magnificent construction — which to the credit of the present government has been refurbished and is now fully functional — is the only one of its type in Australia.

The importance of this particular piece of legislation — The Ammunition Factory Act — is that as the group of people who were seeking gold or who were wanting to trade continued to travel north from Port Albert, it became necessary for a particular location to be established where gunpowder could be stored. This obviously was most necessary for those who were engaged in using blasting power for the purposes of getting access to the gold reefs. A powder magazine was established just outside Sale. This facility is of an extraordinary design. It has a concave roof, the walls are about 4 feet thick, using the language of the day, and it was designed to enable storage of the gunpowder in circumstances which were relatively safe. The basic intent was that if something did go amiss, the resultant explosion — although no doubt it would be of catastrophic dimensions — would nevertheless have been contained because of the design of this facility.

Some years ago one of our great local historians, Peter Synan, together with the members of the Sale Rotary club, decided to restore this building to its former magnificence. Through their own efforts and through being able to raise some money via different sources, they were able to reinstate the building to its former glory. To this day it stands as a reminder of the great assets that were built in that era as Gippsland was opened up back in the late 19th century.

I see there is also reference in the bill to the Parliament House Completion Authority (Repeal) Act 1997. This again was a pivotal moment in the history of Victoria. Bill Baxter, who enjoyed a magnificent parliamentary career spanning a little more than 30 years as a member for the former electorate of North Eastern Province in the Legislative Council of this Parliament, was given the task by the government of the day to oversee the design and construction of Parliament House as it was originally intended to be. This brilliant concept, which was apparently supported by all sides of politics at the time, proceeded to a point where designs were completed and work was imminent. It was indeed an excellent design, and Bill Baxter contributed much to bringing all of that together. He was the one who was basically responsible for the fact that at long last we were going to see the completion of this magnificent building in which we all now have the honour of representing our respective electorates on behalf of the people of Victoria.

Of course it all ran foul because we, as the government of the day, needed to be able to access the stone to enable the work to be done and that stone had to be taken from the quarry from which the existing stone had originally been obtained. By that stage the quarry was in a national park, and we needed to pass legislation through this place to permit us to gain access to the stone. Everything was going swimmingly until such time as the actual debate came on in the chamber. I was actually in here on the night that the debate occurred, and it was to our absolute astonishment that the then opposition, which was then led by the present Treasurer, objected to the passage of the legislation. It was with utter disbelief that we, as the government of the day, were faced with this news. Instead of a wonderful project going forward and instead of our being able as a community to celebrate the completion of this magnificent building in all its glory, the whole thing was stymied by the Labor Party, which took the miserable decision, for what it saw as a bit of opportune politics, to object to the legislation that was before the house that evening. Consequently — and I must say in a contemporary building sense, tragically — the opportunity was lost to complete Parliament House.

The County Court Jurisdiction Act 1983, which is also to be repealed, was one of those which, over the years when I was practising law, sometimes came before the house by way of expanding the jurisdiction of the court. It saw the development of the County Court to an extraordinary degree over the course of the years — particularly in the civil jurisdiction; eventually it obtained unlimited capacity with regard to claims — and that piece of legislation was part of the process of enabling that to occur.

The Accident Compensation (Amendment) Act 1987 will be repealed. The Accident Compensation Act, the principal act, which was passed in 1985 signalled the end of an era and the beginning of another. I was then engaged in a very substantial litigation practice based in Gippsland, and a lot of that work was around the notion of accident compensation. When the act came into being in 1985 it brought about enormous changes in the way in which people who had the misfortune to be injured in accidents were able to be compensated.

Similarly, the Transport Accident (Amendment) Act 1988 was consequent upon the principal act, which was passed in 1986. The passage of that legislation brought about enormous change to the way in which people who were unfortunately injured in car accidents were able to be compensated. I can remember conducting a public meeting in Sale about that legislation; it was attended by one of the motorcycle organisations, the members of which turned up in great numbers, on bikes and in leathers, which certainly brought another tone to the evening which had not necessarily been contemplated by me when I called that public meeting.

Suffice it to say, that is but another aspect of one's life passing in front of one's eyes, and when you view pieces of legislation such as this, I think it is interesting to see the extraordinary influence which the Parliament of Victoria has upon the way in which Victorians live their lives. I wish the legislation a speedy passage.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

HOWARD FLOREY INSTITUTE OF EXPERIMENTAL PHYSIOLOGY AND MEDICINE (REPEAL) BILL

Second reading

Order of the day read for resumption of debate.

Declared private

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order!
The Speaker has examined the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill 2007 and is of the opinion that it is a private bill.

Ms PIKE (Minister for Health) — I move:

That this bill be dealt with as a public bill and that fees be dispensed with.

Motion agreed to.

Debate resumed from 15 March; motion of Mr BRUMBY (Minister for Innovation).

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — It is a pleasure to speak on the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. At the outset I advise the house that the opposition will be supporting this bill, which basically does what its title says it will do — that is, repeal the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine Act. In essence it will transfer all the property, the rights, the liabilities and the staff to a new corporate body, and that new body's name will be a shortened version of the original body's name: it will be known as the Howard Florey Institute.

Why is this being done? Because the government has had a long-time commitment, which is supported by the opposition, to the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. This is a very important area for Victorians — and for humanity — and also for the bioscience industry in Victoria.

The creation of this new centre requires the amalgamation of three bodies, the first being the Howard Florey Institute, to use its new name. The Howard Florey Institute is covered by its own act of Parliament, and that is why we have to repeal the original act. The Howard Florey Institute will be amalgamated with the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute.

As I said, the current Howard Florey Institute has its own piece of legislation. There are only two other similar organisations covered by acts of Parliament: the Baker Medical Research Institute and the Prince

Henry's Institute of Medical Research. The act for the former institute passed through Parliament in 1980, the latter in 1988. It is almost unique for these sorts of institutions to be set up under their own acts of Parliament.

The amalgamation of those three bodies will form what will be known as the Florey Neuroscience Institutes, which will gather together the expertise, personnel and the infrastructure of all the institutes I have mentioned into one institute. This government has committed \$53 million of capital for this new centre, which will be located in Parkville and at the Austin Hospital. This concept of amalgamation is very important. If you talk to anybody involved in any sort of medical research centre, you will hear that critical mass is very important. It is very important to have researchers together so that they can interact in a social sense at least, but also obviously in a professional sense; and when they are in close proximity, they can do that far more readily.

Amalgamation also cuts out a fair degree of duplication that can happen with equipment and administration, and such duplication can be a very expensive exercise, because some of the equipment being used can be shared across institutes — for example, three large, identical pieces of equipment may be underutilised, but when critical mass is reached and a large number of scientists and researchers are working together, that equipment can be used much more productively, which can free up budgets to a certain extent so that more equipment can be purchased and used more effectively.

There are three consequential amendments in this bill that relate to the Cancer Act 1958. The name of the new body will be inserted three times into that act, so they are minor amendments.

What sort of things will the new Howard Florey Institute do? It was interesting and timely that I noticed an article in the *Herald Sun* of 27 April entitled 'Melbourne coup on Parkinson's — test warns of disease', the first two paragraphs of which state:

Melbourne researchers have developed a breakthrough blood test that can detect Parkinson's disease, even in those with no symptoms.

Developed by a team of Howard Florey Institute, Mental Health Research Institute and Melbourne University specialists, it measures the level of a particular blood protein linked to the degenerative disease.

This sort of research has been happening over many years, and here is another timely example of the wonderful work the institute does. The amalgamation will enable world-renowned scientists to work with

many young researchers, which I think is very important. They will learn about the brain, research treatments for various ailments, diseases and conditions of the brain and then apply those treatments to various brain disorders that Victorians might have. Once again, the creation of the new institute and the scientific research conducted in it will not only benefit Victorians but also be shared throughout Australia and internationally.

It is important that in this field we keep and retain national or international leadership. As I said, the amalgamation is certainly going to enable that to happen. It is very important in all biomedical and medical fields that the co-location of research and clinical applications occurs. It is very important that all the scientists are physically located together so they can collaborate and share their experiences and experiments. It goes without saying that that is commendable and something we should strive to achieve.

It is important for researchers to also have a place where the clinical applications can take place which is quite close to where the research is happening so that a strong collaborative relationship can be built up between the clinicians and the researchers. They can talk about what they are working on and how it can be applied in a practical sense. The clinicians can say, 'This is a good idea, but have you thought about applications happening this way or that way?'. That two-way relationship is very important for better development and better research.

Obviously the patients are a key part of that relationship, so the clinicians can actually not so much research — we are not treating people as guinea pigs — as apply the end products and watch and help those who have various ailments. It is important for that to be done without the clinicians or the researchers having to travel across Melbourne to another hospital. The time and energy involved in that is prohibitive. If the patients are located nearby, that certainly cuts down on time and makes for more efficient research — and the end-products of the research can actually benefit those patients.

The institute is an amalgamation with the National Stroke Research Institute, which was established in 1994 and was based at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. Even though I grew up about 300 metres from the Heidelberg repat hospital, I had never actually been inside it. My mother still lives just down the road from it, so I had a good look on a tour through it recently. A lot of it has not changed over the last 50 years, but there are some exciting developments there, and part of that

is the National Stroke Research Institute. The institute undertakes national and international trials of treatments across various areas such as basic science, neuro-imaging and ultrasound. It conducts clinical trials, epidemiology and neuro-rehabilitation, and it tackles many public health issues as well.

The institute does not do this on its own. It collaborates with a number of centres nationally and internationally, including the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the Royal Perth Hospital, St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, the Royal Brisbane Hospital, the Flinders Medical Research Institute and the Central Coast institute. They are really quite far reaching, and it is a very strong partnership that is only going to be enhanced by what we are doing in this place today.

The Brain Research Institute, which is the third body which is part of this amalgamation, conducts research into combating brain injury and mind disorders. It is working on a number of diseases and problems that great numbers of people in our community are faced with each day. These are not obscure diseases; they are mainstream problems that affect so many people here in Victoria and around the world. They are quite degenerative and can attack anybody; they really rob people of quality of life. The sorts of things being worked on are strokes, Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, addictions, autism, dementia and depression. Looking at that list we can see that the issues the Brain Research Institute is tackling are very important. If we can help it further its work, accelerate its work and enhance its work, I think we are doing a great thing.

The Brain Research Institute is working with an impressive partnership group. It works with universities such as Harvard and Princeton and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, also INSERM in Paris and the National Neuroscience Centre in Singapore. We can see that this is a very worthwhile partnership with which the new Howard Florey Institute will be working.

A lot of Victorians and Australians may have heard of Howard Florey, but many people really do not know who he is. I will just read through a brief chronology of his career and life. In 1921 he was a Rhodes scholar for South Australia, and in 1925 he gained a Rockefeller travelling fellowship to the United States — quite an incredible achievement for an Australian back in 1925, over 80 years ago. In 1927 he was a lecturer in special pathology at the University of Cambridge in the UK. From 1931 to 1935 he was the Joseph Hunter professor of pathology in the University of Sheffield in the UK.

In 1941 he became a fellow of the Royal Society, which is a very eminent position, and he was knighted in 1944. In 1945 he received the Nobel Prize for Physiology and Medicine, which he shared with E. Chain and A. Fleming for their work in penicillin. From 1960 to 1965 he was the first Australian president of the Royal Society, once again showing his international eminence, and in 1962 he was a professor of pathology and head of the pathology school at the University of Oxford in the UK. In 1965 he was made a life peer, and also in 1965 he came back to Australia and was made chancellor of the Australian National University in Canberra. He died in 1968.

It was interesting to note in that chronology that he was actually knighted before he received the Nobel prize, so he had quite an eminent position in the medical science field before that wonderful discovery of penicillin. He did an incredible amount of work on penicillin. Sir Robert Menzies, former Australian Prime Minister, said Howard Florey had more effect on the welfare of the world than any other Australian. That is a very high recommendation. It is something that unfortunately a lot of Australians and Victorians are not aware of.

I talked about the importance he placed on research and clinical applications being close physically. The example I am going to give is a true indication of the sort of person Howard Florey was. I think this description of him is the absolute epitome of that:

Florey suffered from a range of gastrointestinal symptoms, on which he blamed his irritable personality —

I know a number of people who may be suffering from that!

He investigated his own condition by — among other tests — regularly swallowing a rubber tube to extract his stomach contents.

I should not be talking about this before dinner, should I!

The diagnosis was achlorhydria. His famous pinched smile was to hide the erosion of his teeth that resulted from drinking hydrochloric acid. The tests also sparked his interest in saliva and mucus and the antibacterial qualities of lysozyme.

There was a man who literally put his research where his mouth was, and he was quite prepared to experiment on himself. What a character he was! I should rest my case there, but he was also described as being a methodical scientist, an idealist, obsessive and persistent. He had a contempt for the media, but he was a team player. He was humble, he was quiet and he was honest.

The work he did on penicillin was as a result of the injuries that many soldiers suffered in World War II. He just could not understand the infections that came from their injuries and the numbers that were killed as a result, just as he could not understand that something could not be done about it. That was the catalyst for his research into penicillin. He really was a great humanitarian. He also said that in medical research we must be prepared to take risks and to tackle some very hard issues. That is what he certainly did, but he was driven by the terrible injuries that he saw in many soldiers as a result of World War II.

The by-product of penicillin was population growth. He often said that so many more people are living now and going on to have families. Penicillin really had a marked effect on population growth, especially throughout the Western world. He said that if he had caused this to occur, he should perhaps be doing something that could have a negative effect on population growth. He then felt compelled to research contraception, and he had a real interest in population control. He was a true scientist. He just followed his developments and interests. He could not just leave things like that; he always went on to the next stop.

I thought to myself, 'I wonder if the other scientists at the institute are like that?'. I am sure they have wonderfully methodical, scientific brains. I am sure they are open; I think they are persistent, but I do not know whether they have a contempt for the media. They may not be experimenting on themselves, but I am sure they show some of the qualities of Howard Florey. There is a suburb in Canberra named after him. The old \$50 notes that are no longer in use also had his face on them. He was a great Victorian, and it is a great institute. With those words, I support the bill and wish it a speedy passage.

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — I rise on behalf of The Nationals, who will be supporting this bill. Whilst we support the bill because we believe that research and development is the way forward for this state and is what this state has been built on — and, from the farming industry perspective, is what has kept us competitive — what does concern us is the budget of \$53 million. It is a good commitment by the government; however, if we spend that \$53 million, we will want to be able to use it. Unfortunately the farming community has not been able to take advantage of some of the research we have done in this state through the DPI (Department of Primary Industries) on the likes of canola.

The Howard Florey Institute is also known as the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology

and Medicine. It is a world-renowned Australian medical and research institute that undertakes clinical and applied research into treatments to combat brain and mind disorders, and faulty cardiovascular systems. The institute is based at the University of Melbourne and in 2005 employed 300 staff, including many scientists and postgraduate students from overseas.

Areas being researched by scientists include Parkinson's disease, stroke, motor neurone disease, traumatic brain and spinal cord injury, addiction, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, brain development in premature babies, autism, heart failure and memory loss. They are all well worth researching as they are disorders that we would all like there to be less of in Victoria.

The institute was established in 1971 by the Victorian government and named after Howard Florey, the Australian Nobel prize-winning scientist who developed penicillin. The institute is a global leader in research into the physiological control of body fluid and electrolyte balance, especially in the regulation of the adrenal salt-retaining hormone aldosterone, instincts that control ingestion, and the Relaxin hormone. In 1997 it also chose to specialise in neuroscience research.

The origins of the institute are based on the 1947 groundbreaking work of the founder, Dr Derek Denton, and his investigation into the control of the salt and water balance in health and disease. The Nationals wrote to the Howard Florey Institute to find out its views on the bill. We got a letter back from Graeme Chandler, the chief operating officer, and I would like to take some time to quote from it:

As secretary to the board I can advise that the board has been unanimous in its support for the concept of the repeal bill since it enables the establishment of the Howard Florey Institute as a corporate entity (HFI), the corporate entity then becoming a wholly owned subsidiary of the Florey Neuroscience Institutes. Two other institutes, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute, will also become wholly owned subsidiaries of the Florey Neuroscience Institutes (FNI). This is the amalgamation part of the project which has to date been led by the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine.

When established on 1 July the FNI will become the lead agent for the project, which in addition to the amalgamation noted above will see:

the building of two new research facilities, one at the University of Melbourne and the other at the Austin Hospital; and

co-location of the FNI with the Mental Health Research Institute at the new building at the University of Melbourne.

For Melbourne, Victoria and Australia it is believed that the project will:

deliver a critical mass of neuroscientists commensurate with leading edge neuroscience research institutes internationally —

which means Victoria will be up there with the best of them. The project will also:

capitalise on the major investment in research and operational infrastructures being made by the Victorian government;

deliver shared research and administrative platforms to enhance efficiencies;

facilitate commercial and incubator activities in a dedicated neuroscience and mental health research precinct;

grasp the biotechnology opportunities in the neuroscience arena with the extraordinary promise of rapid advances made available through stem cell and growth factor technologies, genomics, proteomics and advanced neuro-imaging;

deliver world-class facilities attractive to international research stars.

Brain and mind disorders pose the largest health, economic and social capital burden to Australia of any disease group because they are chronic, debilitating and occur across the lifespan. Reducing brain and mind disorders has the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians and make significant budgetary health outcomes. We are excited by the opportunities afforded by the project funded by the state and federal governments, the Potter Foundation, the Myer Foundation et cetera, and believe the repeal of the current Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine Act is but the first step of many to establish a new era in neuroscience research in Melbourne.

That is where it finishes. I ask the minister, when he is summing up, to tell the Parliament how much the federal government is contributing and how much the Potter Foundation, the Myer Foundation and others are contributing as well so that we have an idea of the global budget of this new development that is coming to Victoria, not just the Victorian government's share. The Nationals are proud to support the bill, and I commend it to the house.

Mr LUPTON (Pahran) — I am very pleased to be able to speak in support of the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. As Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Innovation I take a particularly close interest in the matters flowing from the Victorian government's life sciences statement, *Healthy Futures*, which it released in April 2006 and which is an integral part of the development and growth of our life sciences sector here in Victoria.

Back in April 2006 the Victorian government announced a breakthrough package of funding commitments to ensure the strength of Victoria's world-class research institutes. We labelled that statement *Healthy Futures*, and it involved a funding commitment of \$230 million and included three central components. The first part is about strengthening Victoria's world-class medical research facilities. Here in Victoria we lead Australia and are on a par with any of the leading medical research facilities anywhere in the world. We have in Victoria about one-quarter of Australia's population, but we have about half of Australia's research scientists. That is because Victoria is the hub of medical and scientific research in this country and the Healthy Futures package is designed to make sure we build on Victoria's strength in that regard and maintain our leadership position.

The second element of Healthy Futures is about improving the health of Victorians. That is being done through direct investment by the Victorian government in the important areas of medical research that we are conducting in this state.

Thirdly, the intent of the Healthy Futures program is about creating new industries and jobs in the emerging life sciences sector. Of the \$230 million Healthy Futures package, \$53 million was devoted to the creation of a new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. In order to create that new Australian centre, two steps were involved.

The first was to amalgamate the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute to form a new body called the Florey Neuroscience Institutes. The second step in creating the new Australian centre is to co-locate the Mental Health Research Institute with the new Florey Neuroscience Institutes in new premises which will be developed in the Melbourne University precinct at Parkville and at the Austin Hospital site.

The bill before the house is an essential part of the creation of that new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Medical Health Research, because to facilitate the creation of the centre the legislation that currently controls the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine needs to be repealed. The institute itself proposed that to the government, and the government has acted appropriately in agreeing to that repeal and bringing this legislation before the house. The repeal of the act that governs the current operations of the Howard Florey Institute will allow the creation of the new Australian centre and will bring together in the new organisation a vital critical mass of scientific researchers here in Melbourne.

I was fortunate enough to visit the Howard Florey Institute a few weeks ago at the invitation of the director of the institute, Professor Fred Mendelsohn, who gave me a very detailed and informative tour of the institute and explained the basis upon which the new organisation that will be created by this amalgamation process will operate.

Along with other research institutes in and around Melbourne, such as Bio21 in Parkville, AMREP (Alfred medical research and education precinct) in my own electorate of Prahran, and the Monash STRIP (science, technology, research and innovation precinct) at Clayton, the new Australian centre is another example of what the Bracks government is doing to provide the clusters of research and the clusters of scientists, medical researchers and biotechnical experts that are needed to do the advanced research in life sciences that is required to make groundbreaking breakthroughs in treating many of the debilitating diseases that so many people in our community have to endure.

The new Australian centre, as described to me by Professor Mendelsohn, will have approximately 500 researchers operating in it once it is set up and established, and that will provide the critical mass of people necessary to deal with research into such diseases as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, stroke and a variety of other brain disorders and associated illnesses and diseases. A very important part of the way in which we are conducting medical research in Victoria is the devotion of significant amounts of money and infrastructure spending to the life sciences.

Sitting suspended 6.31 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Mr LUPTON — The passage of this legislation will allow the creation of the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. The Victorian government is contributing \$53 million to that project as part of the \$230 million package of funding which was announced in April 2006 as part of *Healthy Futures*, the Victorian life sciences statement.

The three essential components of this measure will deliver an ongoing strengthening of Victoria's world-class medical research facilities. Victoria has the best medical research facilities in Australia; they are on a par with the best medical research facilities in the world. This bill will continue to strengthen the position of Victoria's medical research institutions.

This legislation also contributes to the long-term improvement of the health of Victorians — which is a

major concern of this government — through its investment in health. It will create new industries and jobs by stimulating the life sciences sector and making sure that we develop the skills that we need to treat those debilitating diseases such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease and stroke that afflict so many thousands of people in Victoria, Australia and around the world.

This legislation will contribute to making sure that our life sciences sector in Victoria continues to lead the world. It will make sure that all the interdisciplinary skills that are so important to the development of a strategy — biology, botany, zoology, genetics, genomics tissue engineering and biotechnology — are linked in Victoria. The Bracks government is committed to contributing to innovation and industry in this state to make sure that we have the jobs that are important for the future so that our children, who are most important to us, and all other Victorians are able to have the healthy future they deserve. That is what this legislation will deliver. I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I am pleased to speak on the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. It is a straightforward bill and consistent with the provision of the Corporations Law and with government policy. This debate gives me an opportunity to speak of the work and the history of the Florey.

The founding director of the institute in 1971 was Derek Denton, an eminent medical scientist who was internationally acclaimed for his groundbreaking work in the chemical balance of fluid in the human body. The institute was established by Liberal Premier Sir Henry Bolte. The institute was named after Howard Florey, the Australian Nobel prize-winning scientist who developed penicillin. He was actually Baron Florey of Adelaide and Marston. This is the title he assumed when honoured by the Queen. He was born in Adelaide, went to university there and later went to Oxford University. In 1921 he became a Rhodes scholar. He was a brilliant man who deservedly received many accolades from around the world, including from the then Soviet Union. He died in February 1968.

I have read extracts from *Hansard* in 1971, the year the Florey institute was founded by Sir Henry Bolte. It is quite interesting and humbling to read how the laboratory came about. It was in response to a letter of gift to the University of Melbourne. This letter was signed by Kenneth Baillieu Myer and William Ian Potter. The transcript says:

The letter described the active interest of a group of citizens in the basic research being carried out by Dr Derek Denton and colleagues and Professor R. D. Wright, which had attracted international recognition. They wished to provide first-class laboratory facilities for the style of research which involved long-term experiments on large animals prepared by special surgical procedures.

Sir Henry's speech on 31 March 1971 details the work being carried out and lists the original members. We should be thankful for the farsightedness over 40 years ago of this group of worthy citizens, who saw the need for and established it. The money that was put into it came from many people. Very substantial donations came from the Reserve Bank of Australia and the Rockefeller Foundation. Sir Robert Menzies, the then Prime Minister of Australia, made a special grant of \$200 000 on behalf of the commonwealth government. The total capital raised was \$750 000 — and that was in 1971 terms.

The institute has achieved an awful lot in that time. Recent achievements include the announcement on 26 April that a new blood test is being developed that could diagnose and monitor the treatment of Parkinson's disease. I will quote from the Howard Florey Institute press release, which says:

A simple test to diagnose Parkinson's disease (PD) before systems appear by measuring the levels of a protein in blood is being developed by researchers from the Howard Florey Institute, the University of Melbourne and the Mental Health Research Institute of Victoria.

...

While the clinical outcomes of this test will be significant, it also opens up new avenues of PD research and drug development.

Further research using this test will also help us better understand the many different forms of PD and work towards ways to prevent or delay the disease.

We have heard a lot about Parkinson's disease and other diseases in this Parliament, and it is interesting that this research and these results are being achieved without the use of embryos. I have been quite influenced by the speeches of Professor Mendelsohn of the Florey institute that I have read. The institute also announced on 26 July that a brain scan for premature babies was being developed. This research is the result of a collaborative approach by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, the Royal Women's Hospital and the Howard Florey Institute, which are working together in the hope of helping premature babies. It is groundbreaking work that is being taken up around world.

In 1997 the Florey institute decided to focus on neuroscience, and it has experienced rapid growth since

that time. The Florey has attracted outstanding scientists to its laboratories, and it currently has 300 staff working in eight different research teams. They are researching Parkinson's disease, stroke, motor neurone disease, traumatic brain and spinal cord injury, addiction, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, brain development, autism, heart failure, dementia, Huntington's disease, schizophrenia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and depression.

Over the past 18 months I have had the pleasure of meeting with and listening to the senior executive director, Frederick Mendelsohn. When you have not had a formal education you are often in awe of people who have so many letters after their names. Professor Mendelsohn is a bachelor of medicine, a doctor of medicine, a bachelor of surgery and a doctor of philosophy, and he is a fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. When I read about all that before I met him I thought, 'My gosh, how am I going to hold a conversation with this man?'. But he was absolutely fantastic. At the Caladenia dementia centre at Mooroolbark, which is in my electorate and whose committee of management I am on, Professor Mendelsohn was able in layman's terms to explain his work to a group of 80 people from varying backgrounds. In particular he was able to talk about the work that he is doing with the brain.

He has initiated studies on the localisation of receptor subtypes in the brain, which has triggered a large body of work not only in his own laboratory but also in groups around the world. What they are doing is amazing. He talked about the hope all those results are bringing and what they can lead to. He explained it all in simple and clear language. The people who were at that meeting are carers of dementia patients. Although they knew this was happening too late for their loved ones, they really appreciated the fact that research is being done and that there are real possibilities for future treatments of and maybe even cures for the diseases I have previously listed.

The amalgamation of the Florey institute with the Baker Medical Research Institute and the Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research will create the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. I believe this is a very good thing, and it is supported by everyone involved. I support this legislation and commend it to the house.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Victorian Communities) — I am delighted to speak in support of this bill. The Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine has for a long time led the way in medical research in this country. It has achieved

global prominence in a number of research areas and is very highly respected. It is about to undergo an amalgamation with two other neuroscience research institutes, and the purpose of this bill is to facilitate this amalgamation in a technical sense by allowing the establishment of the Howard Florey Institute as a corporate entity. Before going into that and into the future of the Florey institute, I would like to talk about its wonderful history. It has a history of achievement that does Victoria and our medical research proud.

The work of the Howard Florey Institute began in the 1950s with research workers in the ionic research unit of the Department of Physiology at Melbourne University. In 1963 it shifted into new laboratories, appropriately named after one of Australia's most eminent scientists, Sir Howard Florey, becoming known as the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine.

Scientists at the institute led the world in a number of research projects, including a study of the influences which control the balance of body salt and water. This balance is essential for life, and in disturbed conditions such as high blood pressure, kidney disease and heart failure, it is absolutely critical. The institute also achieved world eminence through its research into and control of the sodium-retaining hormone, aldosterone, and it used novel experiments involving conscious, unstressed sheep. Alongside that, groundbreaking work was being conducted on the mechanisms involved in the brain's control of the thirst and salt appetite.

The institute was also a leader in the introduction into Australia of new technologies associated with DNA and peptide chemistry, and it was the first to isolate and characterise the hormone relaxin. They are both areas of active research in the institute to this very day.

In 1997 the board of the institute decided to focus its activities purely on neuroscience. This decision was made for three fundamental reasons: firstly, the huge burden of brain and mind disorders in our present community; secondly, the opportunities being offered by the emergence of new enabling technologies to study the brain; and thirdly, the fact that although there were many small, excellent neuroscience research groups in Australia, none of the major research institutes was focusing on this important area. Over the last decade the institute has more than doubled its number of scientists and its receipt of competitive research funding.

As I have already mentioned, the institute is now about to amalgamate with two other neuroscience research institutes, the Brain Research Institute at the Austin

Hospital and the National Stroke Research Institute, to form a new entity to be called Florey Neuroscience Institutes. The FNI will be housed at two sites, one of them on the University of Melbourne campus in Parkville and the other in the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg, a wonderful institution out in the northern suburbs of Melbourne.

At the Parkville site, Florey Neuroscience Institutes will co-locate with the Mental Health Research Institute of Victoria and neuroscientists from the University of Melbourne to form the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. This new institute building in Parkville will house more than 500 staff and research students, and the centre will have an operating budget of more than \$40 million per annum. A smaller clinical facility is also being developed at the Austin Hospital.

The institute's aim is to be among the top 10 neuroscience institutes in the world by 2015, and I have every expectation that it will make it. In support of this objective the Bracks government has contributed \$53 million to help make this exciting project a reality here in Melbourne. The new institute's research will be focused on major brain and mind disorders, including neuro-degenerative disorders, particularly Alzheimer's disease; Parkinson's disease; and motor neurone disease. It will also be looking at stroke, brain and spinal cord injury, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, brain development and regeneration, and schizophrenia, mood disorders and addiction.

It is clear that neuroscience is one of the most dynamic areas of science in the 21st century, and major progress is likely to come in combating these serious brain and mind disorders in the years ahead. The new centre will put Victoria in the driver's seat in these exciting advances, which will benefit the health and wealth of not only all Victorians but all Australians and — given the institute's reputation — the rest of the world.

The repeal of the current act will allow the Howard Florey Institute to become part of Florey Neuroscience Institutes, and it will enable this new entity to continue the fine tradition established by the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine. I am looking forward to tracking the progress of Florey Neuroscience Institutes, and want to thank all the scientists, both past and present, who have contributed to the Howard Florey Institute's outstanding record to date. I am really confident that that will continue into the future, and I commend the bill to the house.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — It gives me great pleasure to speak on the Howard Florey Institute

of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. A number of important provisions are contained in the legislation. It repeals the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine Act 1971; it provides for the transfer of all property, rights, liabilities and staff to another entity; and it enables the Howard Florey Institute to combine with the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute to form the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research.

The Howard Florey Institute was founded in 1971 by the Victorian state government and named after one of Australia's Nobel laureates, Howard Florey, who invented penicillin. But despite its formal structuring in 1971, the institute actually had its origins in 1947, when its founder, Dr Derek Denton, started an investigation into the control of the salt and water balance in health and disease. Dr Denton served for many years as a distinguished executive officer supervising the work the Howard Florey was undertaking, and still continues the work in research today at the University of Melbourne. Currently the Howard Florey is Australia's largest brain research centre, with 300 staff and students from around the world all working here in Melbourne.

Brain and mind disorders are critical because they are the biggest cause of disability in our community, and more effective treatments are urgently needed. Research being carried out by the scientists of the Howard Florey Institute includes many of these areas, such as Parkinson's disease, stroke, motor neurone disease, addiction, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer's disease. The work that the Howard Florey scientists do means that the institute has an international reputation for leadership in this area. During the past year the Howard Florey filed five provisional patents and saw four others enter into patent convention treaty stages in a variety of jurisdictions around the world. In addition, two new patents have been granted in the USA. so a very strong innovative platform of scientific research comes out of the Howard Florey on an ongoing basis.

I would like to highlight a couple of areas of the Howard Florey's work that are very relevant to my portfolio areas of mental health and drug abuse. To that end I will quote from some of the Howard Florey's press releases. The first one says that:

Scientists at Melbourne's Howard Florey Institute have discovered a system in the brain that stops an alcoholic's craving for alcohol as well as prevents relapse once they have recovered from alcohol addiction.

In regard to a second area of research that the institute has been successful in, another of its press releases says:

A new study from the Howard Florey Institute in Melbourne may help explain why people who experimented with amphetamines, such as 'speed', as teenagers are more likely to become addicted and more susceptible to heart attack following reuse of the drug as adults.

Another release about aged care states:

In a world-first study, scientists at Melbourne's Howard Florey Institute have uncovered that people with Alzheimer's disease have the same pain threshold as people without the disease, but have great difficulty communicating the level of pain they are experiencing.

The study has significant clinical implications and raises important concerns about the current inadequate treatment of pain for people with Alzheimer's disease.

These three pieces from press releases relating to the research the scientists at the Howard Florey are undertaking show some of the critical breakthroughs that are being made in the areas of mental health, drug addiction and aged care, and I am very pleased to be able, in supporting this bill, to support that ongoing work.

This new institute will bring together basic science, clinical and public health research in the neurosciences to create Victoria's biggest research institute after the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute. The amalgamated facility will have about 500 staff and a budget of \$30 million. The aim is to create an international leader in neurosciences. It will develop two new research centres, one at Melbourne University and the other at the Austin Hospital. It will also be co-located with the Mental Health Research Institute. What this amalgamation will ensure is that it remains a magnet for the world's best neuroscientists and clinicians. It will make it commensurate with leading-edge neuroscience research institutes internationally, such as the Salk Institute in the USA, Mill Hill in the UK and others in Canada and Sweden. As we should be, we are at the leading edge of this research around the world.

The project is estimated to cost a substantial \$125 million. I am very pleased by the partnership basis on which the contributors have come to this project. The state government is making a significant contribution, but so too is the federal government. I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the federal government's doubling of the NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council) funding. It is an important supporter of the work done by the Howard Florey and other research institutes around Australia.

Between 2003 and 2006 total NHMRC funding was about \$1.5 billion. Victoria receives over 40 per cent of that NHMRC funding. That is a very clear example of how we in Victoria are taking on medical research and leading the country. We are also contributing to world thought in relation to the work we are doing in this state, and we must ensure that that continues.

I would also like to recognise both the Ian Potter Foundation and the Myer Foundation as critical contributors to the development of the Howard Florey Institute. Melbourne philanthropy has played a critical role in supporting medical research in Victoria. That goes back many decades, particularly with the Myer Foundation, which has supported the Howard Florey Institute also across generations of the family. Currently the Howard Florey Institute is chaired by Martyn Myer. Melbourne philanthropy is very much about what makes us different here in Victoria, and it has helped establish us as a leading researcher in medical science — and that continues today in terms of our leadership across the country.

I would also like to acknowledge the director of the Howard Florey Institute, Fred Mendelsohn, who last year was awarded the Equity Trustees not-for-profit judges award for his 10 years of visionary leadership of the Florey. The Equity Trustees not-for-profit awards recognise the outstanding achievements of chief executives in the not-for-profit and charitable sector. Professor Mendelsohn was recognised for his great ability to bring together students, scientists, clinicians, general staff members, leaders of industry and government to share a common vision. I am very pleased to say that I was one of the panel of five judges who gave him the judges award. I was thrilled to be able to recognise the outstanding work he has done for neuroscience over the years for the benefit of Melbourne, Victoria and Australia in general.

A significant measure of our future prosperity in Victoria will be our ability to be innovative, to generate and support ideas, to do the research that needs to be done and to commercialise the breakthroughs as they are achieved. The bringing together of these important institutions in the area of neuroscience is a crucial part of keeping Victoria at the forefront of the medical research community in Australia and the world. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr BROOKS (Bundoora) — I am delighted to be able to speak in support of this very important Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill, which repeals the original act and provides for the transfer of property rights, liabilities and staff to a new entity. It is important in

considering this bill to view it in the context of the Bracks government's life sciences strategy as outlined in the document *Healthy Futures*, which was released last year. I will read from an overview page of that document, page 5, which says under the heading 'Healthy futures highlights':

The Victorian government is supporting growth in medical research and life sciences to enhance the health and economic wellbeing of Victorians and to maintain our leading edge in this exciting field through additional investment of \$230.45 million, including:

1. Leading the world

\$50 million to support the expansion of Victoria's premier medical research institute, the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, creating an institute to rival the world's best;

\$53 million to develop one of the world's largest neurosciences and mental health centres by integrating four leading institutes — the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute, the Mental Health Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute — into a new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research;

\$35 million to maintain Victoria's leadership in stem cell research by creating a new Australian Regenerative Medicine Institute in partnership with Monash University;

\$16 million to facilitate the merger of the Austin Research Institute and the Burnet Institute to create a new Victorian 'super institute' for infectious diseases at the Alfred Medical Research and Education Precinct;

\$9.2 million for new research infrastructure at Austin Health to ensure that the research institutes and groups in the Austin biomedical alliance are able to maintain their research edge.

We can tell from that overview that it is the clear position of the Bracks government to strive to have Victoria seen as a leader in the world in terms of science and research.

Another indication of the government's commitment to science and research is the announcement in today's budget of funding of \$180 million for the bioscience research centre, which will focus on agricultural biotechnology and on things such as plant and animal diseases, drought-proof crops and water-efficient practices. I must say that I am very pleased that that new centre will be located at Latrobe University, which is within my electorate of Bundoora.

This bill is an important step in the process of creating the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research, which will also see the incorporation of the Brain Research Institute and National Stroke Research Institute. I am very excited that the proposed

facilities for this new centre, the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research, will be located not only at the University of Melbourne campus at Parkville but also at the Austin Hospital site in Heidelberg, which is very close to my electorate. That follows on from the massive redevelopment of the Austin Hospital, which has been completed, and continues on at the repatriation campus in Heidelberg Heights.

The bringing together of these three institutes as the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research will provide critical mass and economies of scale in the work it does. It will also create an institute that will help to reinforce Victoria's leading position in the international research community and allow for an increased focus on translating research into practical benefits for people suffering from degenerative conditions. This new body will sit neatly alongside the recently created Victorian neurotrauma initiative (VNI), which will focus on bringing the benefits of neuroscience research to the patient. VNI is a partnership of the Transport Accident Commission, the Victorian Trauma Foundation, Neurosciences Victoria and the Victorian government.

The importance of having many researchers working together in collaboration was certainly not lost on Howard Florey, after whom the institute is named. Florey was one of the first researchers to bring scientists together to work as a team, recognising that a collaborative approach, with researchers working together on the same project, was more beneficial than having many researchers all working individually.

Can I also say that Florey, who essentially discovered penicillin, would have to be one of the most underrated Australians of the last century. I would argue that not enough Australians know that Florey built a team of scientists at Oxford University in Britain in the 1930s and that, along with Ernst Chain and others, he worked on the properties of antibacterial matter that is produced by mould, which eventually led to the development of penicillin. On Saturday, 25 May 1940, Florey's team tested penicillin on eight mice which had been injected with lethal doses of streptococci bacteria — and as they say, the rest is history. Four mice treated with penicillin lived, and by the end of the Second World War penicillin was being used to treat many people.

So the Howard Florey Institute, which was created in 1971, is named after a Nobel laureate and one of Australia's great scientists. It has approximately 300 staff and students, who undertake important work such as research into Parkinson's disease, dementia, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, Huntington's disease,

motor neurone disease, addiction, brain and spinal cord injury, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression, schizophrenia and autism.

These are conditions that cause immense personal pain and suffering within our community and also cost our community many millions of dollars each year in health and support costs. This bill will allow for a more efficient and concerted effort to find cures for illnesses affecting the brain and nervous system, and, as I said before, it will allow for a better translation of research into practical benefits for people suffering from the conditions I have just mentioned. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — I rise with great pleasure to speak on the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill, and in doing so I intend to speak in support of the bill and the potential benefits that could be realised with the restructure and/or merger of the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute to form the Florey Neuroscience Institutes. The partnership that will be formed between the Florey Neuroscience Institutes and the Mental Health Research Institute will be the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. This will lift the profile of the extremely important work that has been and is currently being conducted in brain and mental health research, and with the \$53 million that the Bracks government is going to inject into infrastructure, the opportunity to extend and enhance this important research will become a reality.

This commitment by the Bracks Labor government is both timely and appropriate. Mental health is fast becoming the no. 1 health issue confronting Victorians and indeed country Victorians. Depression is far more widespread in our communities than ever before. In the country the risk of depression is being dramatically increased by the current drought, which is affecting most parts of regional Victoria, and also by the impact of the recent bushfires on many individuals, families and businesses.

In my electorate of Narracan we have a situation at the West Gippsland hospital where the number of mental health presentations at the emergency department has increased significantly over the past three years. This is putting enormous pressure on staff and at times compromising the safety of staff and other patients. I take this opportunity to remind the Bracks government that it is failing the people of West Gippsland by ignoring this situation. It is failing in its duty of care to provide a safe environment for patients and staff in the emergency department of the West Gippsland hospital.

The beyondblue organisation, headed up by former Premier Jeff Kennett, has achieved significant results in lifting the awareness and public understanding of the debilitating illness of depression. I believe the jury is still out on whether illicit drug taking leads to depression or whether depression drives people to despair and then to reliance on illicit drugs. Much more research is needed into all aspects of mental health, and it is the responsibility of governments to ensure that the right environment for research is provided for our medical specialists and scientists.

We have seen major advances in recent times with the treatment of brain trauma and stroke. People suffering epilepsy have also been given new hope, as have people suffering Parkinson's disease and motor neurone disease. The Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research to be based at Parkville and the Austin Hospital will go a long way towards providing a facility that will assist and encourage our medical researchers in their extremely important work. I commend the bill to the house and congratulate the Howard Florey Institute for the work it undertakes.

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — I too rise to support this important legislation. The Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill, I am pleased to say, has the wholehearted support of members of this house. We should be supporting it wholeheartedly, and I believe one of the reasons why it is a public bill is that it is obvious that public health and wellbeing is increased as the result of the work of the Howard Florey Institute and other institutes.

This legislation establishes the Florey Neuroscience Institutes, which is based upon the Brain Research Institute, the Howard Florey Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute. In many years to come I think we will be talking about this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to harness the wonderful skills of our scientists and the government funding that accompanies this amalgamation, and we will be saying that as a result of the visionary work of both the current government and members of this Parliament, greater scientific advances have been achieved.

As other members have done, I want to quote Professor Frederick Mendelsohn, the director of the Howard Florey Institute, who stated in the institute's annual report:

Neuroscience is a very fast-moving field and now holds great promise for our mission to decipher the brain's complex functions.

We wish him and the entire team in the Florey Neuroscience Institutes great success in their work.

I want to briefly look at how the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine began. It was formally established in 1971 by an act of the state Parliament, and, as has been outlined, it was named after the Australian Nobel prize-winning scientist who developed penicillin. The member for Bundoora has outlined that very well.

Today, under the directorship of Professor Mendelsohn, the institute has broadened this research to incorporate research into the brain and how it maintains the critical balance needed to keep the body healthy. After 30 years at the forefront of medical research, that institute remains one of Australia's leading research institutes, and we are collectively proud of the fact that it is one of the key organisations in the amalgamation we are discussing here tonight.

We need to look at whether there are any advantages for a medical research institute to be governed by an act of Parliament. Today the state budget was handed down, and given the Bracks Labor government's focus on its Healthy Futures policy and the wonderful biotech and bioscience endeavours of many of our elite brains here in this state, we know why it is important that this institute be governed by an act of Parliament. It is important because the act may serve some purpose in marketing the institutes and in fundraising generally. As has been outlined by an earlier speaker, Victoria is very good and in fact very generous in regard to its philanthropic endeavours. As a result of this bill there will be a balance between the issue of consistency among all research institutes and government support.

The government's commitment has already been mentioned tonight, and I want to add how proud I am of the fact that the Victorian government has committed \$53 million towards the new infrastructure for the centre at the University of Melbourne in Parkville. As a local MP I share the joy of residents in the northern suburbs that the Austin Hospital will be part of this important new step through the Healthy Futures policy.

Members would be aware, but it is important to place on the record, that the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill also deals with assets, liabilities and staffing issues. The bill provides for the transfer of all property, rights, liabilities and staff of the former body of the Howard Florey Institute to a company, limited by guarantee, which will be incorporated under the Corporations Act and which is to be the successor in law to the institute. It is of particular importance in an environment where

work status and work employment could be problematic that this bill will ensure that all legal and company establishment costs associated with the repeal and the creation of the new act will be borne by the Howard Florey Institute.

I strongly support the fact that Victoria is working diligently to position itself as one of the top five biotech capitals of the world. In the last sitting week, during the debate on the Infertility Treatment Amendment Bill, I spoke extensively about what I believe are important ethical issues in relation to how we position ourselves as one of those top five biotech hubs. I wholeheartedly support this legislation before us. You only have to look at the annual report 2005–06 of the Howard Florey Institute to see why. From my perspective it outlines wonderful advances that will have unanimous support in this Parliament.

I will mention a few things from the institute's annual report. In the area of brain development, Professor Tan's team has found a protein in the brain that can save neurons from dying after experiencing brain injury. Obviously that has the full support of this Parliament. The annual report also mentions the development of a reliable model for depression. The work that team is doing with Huntington's disease patients is acclaimed not only here in Victoria but internationally. The institute is doing great work on brain injury and repair. In particular I highlight work done on Parkinson's disease. Research has shown that patients with Parkinson's disease have only 20 per cent of the normal level of brain-secreted protein alpha synuclein.

All of us know people who have had some of these diseases. I think it would be rare for a member of this house to not know someone who has suffered from them. We want to give people who are experiencing less-than-optimal health and wellbeing hope for the future, and I believe this particular institute will do just that. Therefore I commend the bill to the house and wish it a speedy passage.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — It is with great pleasure that I join my colleagues in supporting the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. The aim of this bill is to bring about and support in a legislative framework the merger of the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute. The Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill will enable the amalgamation of the three institutes to create the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health

Research, which will be based in Parkville and at the Austin Hospital.

One cannot mention the Florey name without wanting to go back into history just a little bit. The Florey name is closely associated with the word penicillin, but the penicillin story started a little earlier — back in 1928, when Alexander Fleming, a British scientist, noticed that mould had prevented the growth of bacteria in his laboratory. However, the main plot of the penicillin story involves the rediscovery of penicillin some 10 years later by the Australian scientist, Howard Florey.

Howard Florey and his dedicated team's systematic, detailed work transformed penicillin from an interesting observation to a lifesaver, and Howard Florey received a Nobel prize for his work in 1945. He was one of the first scientists who found it helpful to have a team of people working together. He established a team of scientists at Oxford University in Britain. He realised that science had reached a point where a team of specialists was needed and that the job was too big for just one person.

In May 1940 this team performed one of the most important medical experiments in history. The work was so urgent that the team worked right through a weekend on Saturday, 25 May of that year. The team tested penicillin on eight mice, all of which were injected with a lethal dose of streptococci bacteria. Four of the mice were treated with penicillin and four were used as controls. By the next day the treated mice had recovered and the untreated mice were dead. In the early days of World War II the lives of eight mice might have seemed insignificant; however, the rescue of half of them through the use of penicillin led to the treatment of many allied soldiers as early as D-day in June 1944. This may well have influenced the outcome of the war. I am not saying it did; it just may well have!

The results of the test on mice were so exciting that Florey knew it was time to test the drug on humans. In 1941 the first patient to receive penicillin was a man by the name of Albert Alexander, who had been scratched by a rose thorn and whose eyes and scalp had become swollen as a result. He had already had one eye removed and abscesses drained, and even his remaining eye had to be lanced to relieve the pain of the swelling. He was given penicillin and recovered within one day. That is part of the story of penicillin, but it adds a little to the romantic story of this great man and the institute named after him.

As I have said, the Howard Florey Institute will be the name of the institute created by the amalgamation of

the Florey Neuroscience Institutes — the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute — and will be co-located in Parkville and at the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg. It is a very ambitious plan. The amalgamated institutes will join forces with the Mental Health Research Institute in facilities which will be built at the University of Melbourne's Parkville campus and at the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg. The cost of the project is \$175 million and will be funded by the federal government and the state government. We have heard that the state government is putting in about \$53 million and that \$46 million is coming from the University of Melbourne. Importantly the amalgamated institutes will continue their own work and operate under their respective identities.

There is a person whose name has been mentioned on numerous occasions in this debate — that is, Professor Frederick Mendelsohn. He has said:

The FNI —

the Florey Neuroscience Institutes —

will enhance Australia's ability to compete internationally at the forefront of brain research, leading to discoveries that will benefit people around the world affected directly and indirectly by brain disorders.

I would like to mention some of the other FNI developments. First of all, the University of Melbourne has agreed to contribute \$46 million towards the expansion of the new neurosciences building on its campus in Parkville and at the Austin Hospital. The Parkville building will accommodate almost 200 University of Melbourne neuroscience researchers with FNI and Mental Health Research Institute (MHRI) staff. The Austin Hospital will accommodate around 100 University of Melbourne researchers with FNI staff. The new buildings at Parkville and the Austin Hospital are capable of producing a wonderful opportunity for Melbourne neuroscience researchers to work together — the word 'together' is important — on a regular basis.

In 2006 Professor Frederick Mendelsohn received the Equity Trustees Not for Profit Judges Award — an important award for his 10 years of visionary leadership at the Florey institute. He was recognised for his great ability to bring together scientists, students, clinicians, general staff members and leaders of industry to share a common vision. Since becoming director in 1996 Professor Mendelsohn has changed the research direction of the Howard Florey from an institute of physiology to one of a major focus on brain disorder research, including dementia, multiple sclerosis,

Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease and epilepsy. We all recognise that it is important to find cures for some of these diseases, or at least to develop meaningful treatments for them. In this place we passed the stem cell research bill just recently, hoping to find through the use of stem cells another way to address some of the issues and find some cures for these diseases.

The budget for the Florey institute has grown enormously over the last few years. Professor Mendelsohn has been very instrumental in the amalgamation of these institutes, and I think he should be recognised for that. The work of the Florey institute covers enormous areas. It looks at Parkinson's disease, stroke, motor neurone, traumatic brain and spinal cord injury and a large number of other diseases to do with the brain.

The Mental Health Research Institute was set up to improve the diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses including particularly schizophrenia, bipolar and Alzheimer's disease. I could say a little more about that, but time is running very short, so I am moving on as fast as I can.

The National Stroke Research Institute looks at this very important disease which afflicts so many older people in our society; it is looking at very interesting ways to treat people particularly in terms of very early rehabilitation. We hope that program meets with good results, because we are aware that if stroke victims are treated early and if they receive the appropriate medication at an early stage, then their chances of recovery is a lot better.

There are numerous important programs that the Howard Florey has been involved in. I will mention just one: a simple test to diagnose Parkinson's disease before symptoms appear by measuring the levels of protein in blood is being developed by researchers from the Howard Florey, the University of Melbourne and the MHRI. Perhaps I have time to mention two more. Research by the Howard Florey Institute and the Austin has resulted in a drug to treat kidney failure during septic shock, which will be trialled at the Austin Hospital from the middle of this year. Finally, the Howard Florey has discovered a system in the brain that stops alcoholics craving alcohol as well as preventing relapses once they have recovered from alcohol addiction.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Powell) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — It is a privilege to join honourable members in debate on this bill, and it is great to see the support of all sides of the house for this legislation. Although it is a repeal bill, and normally you associate a repeal bill with doing away with something from a bygone era, this repeal bill is actually about helping to build a new and even better future. We are so fortunate in Victoria to have the Howard Florey Institute, headed up by Professor Fred Mendelsohn. For over 30 years that institute has been at the forefront of medical research, and it remains one of Australia's leading research institutes.

But of course we cannot stand still, particularly when it comes to medical science. We had the stem-cell debate in this house only recently, which demonstrated the commitment from so many in this house to the advance of medical science, and even those who were not necessarily keen on that bill still want to see the progression of medical science in other areas. We in this state and here in Melbourne have a tremendous reputation around the world, and we want to make sure we keep that reputation and bolster it for the future.

Speaker, you will remember the Bracks government's life sciences statement in which \$53 million was committed to create a new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. To bring that about there needed to be an amalgamation of institutes to become known as the Florey Neuroscience Institutes — that is, the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute were amalgamated.

A second stage in the movement will be the Mental Health Research Institute going into the new premises of the Florey Neuroscience Institutes as part of that broad development of the Australian centre. We will see the bringing together of that critical mass, and ultimately the sharing of the equipment and knowledge is very much part of the modern-day thinking of science. I know from my own past experience that was certainly the case in agriculture, and that is the case across all of the disciplines — the bringing together of the critical mass is just so important.

The fact that there will be 200 researchers in Parkville and 100 researchers at the Austin Hospital as part of the new FNI demonstrates our commitment as a state in terms of all the professionals involved and the broader community as to where we ultimately want to head.

There is another good reason why we want to do this — that is, to make sure we take advantage of the \$35 million in federal government funding that is on

offer so that the state is able to move forward as a result of the amalgamation and philanthropy and the commonwealth contribution. Whilst things naturally change, being able to harness change is extremely important. We have to make sure we do that to maintain our position in the world — that is, a position from which we can say how extremely proud we are of our domestic scientists. I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs VICTORIA (Bayswater) — I rise in support of the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. I believe this legislation gives us the opportunity to follow a very proud history of medical research here in Australia. I will look at the history, as many of my colleagues have done, of the Howard Florey Institute. It was named after a very great Australian scientist, originally from South Australia, who was attributed as the father of penicillin; although not making the initial discovery, he was certainly the one who followed it through.

Although Alexander Fleming made the initial discovery of penicillin some 10 years earlier, Florey went to the UK and decided to conduct extensive research in collaboration with a team of researchers there. It was through this collaborative research, which was really quite unheard of at the time, that a systematic approach was adopted. Then we had what is commonly now known as penicillin ready and available. This research took place at Oxford University. Howard Florey was actually a very reputed scholar. He spent a lot of time not only in the UK but also in America and went on to research and lecture in both places.

The breakthrough came in May 1940 — that is, 67 years ago this month, which is fantastic. It was quite an incredible discovery, because within four years of the major breakthrough, penicillin was being administered to human patients and was being widely used. It was actually used first on soldiers at the end of World War II. These days it is very unusual for a pharmaceutical company to come to the market in such a short period as four years; quite often it takes decades. We were the first nation to actually make penicillin available for civilian use after the end of the war, which I thought was most commendable. As I said, what we are hoping to achieve with this bill and with the combination of the institutes is to carry on that proud history.

Florey deservedly won the Nobel prize in 1945. He was also elected president of the Royal Society in 1960, which was a very proud moment for him. I think the nice thing about all that was that he was known as the Bushranger President, being an Australian. He was also

made Baron Florey of Adelaide in 1965, a couple of years before he died.

He is acknowledged as having saved a lot of people from dying, because septicaemia, blood poisoning and those sorts of things were great killers. We now take it for granted that we can just take a little penicillin for such diseases or illnesses whereas people used to die from them. In 1967 he was very reluctant to give interviews. He did not like the limelight, but in 1967 he conducted an interview, when he said, 'I am now accused of being partly responsible for the population explosion', which he thought was quite witty, although he was not sure that that was such a good thing. Of course that reminds me of our fabulous federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, who has also been attributed to a population explosion because of his baby bonus payment.

The Howard Florey Institute was established in 1971, which was only three years after Howard Florey died. The current make-up of the institute sees experienced researchers working with very young researchers who are very enthusiastic. It helps train them in research and research methods. It is still very much based around the theory of collaboration, which of course Howard Florey used to such great effect to end up with his fabulous discovery of penicillin.

There are now collaborations between universities in America such as Harvard and Princeton, as well as between Singaporean and French contributors. The sort of work they are now doing is predominantly in the neurosciences area. Some of the areas that I think are particularly important and close to my heart are the treatment of multiple sclerosis, systems neurobiology and research into the causes of and potential treatments for epilepsy.

The institute is currently under the directorship of Professor Fred Mendelsohn, and has been so for many years. I am sure he would be absolutely delighted with this bill and the knowledge that the institute will now merge with the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute to form the Florey Neuroscience Institutes. The FNI will also partner the Mental Health Research Institute to create the overarching Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research; it will be based in Parkville and also at the Austin Hospital.

I have spoken with Melbourne neurologist Mark Farragher, who said this is an extremely exciting step. He said it is really fantastic that Melbourne is actually going to be part of this world-leading research facility in the neurosciences. I wholeheartedly support this bill.

Mr LIM (Clayton) — Medical and health research is one of the most important economic activities in Australia, as well as being one of the most noble of endeavours. I first appreciated the extent of this when in 1996 and 1997 I served on the parliamentary Economic Development Committee's inquiry into medical and public health research in Victoria. That inquiry characterised the economic benefit as an 'increase in income and employment through the commercialisation of research, product development, sales and royalties'. I will return to this point later.

At the same time the inquiry stressed the health benefit resulting from this activity, saying:

There is a clear and demonstrable benefit arising out of medical and public health research in terms of lifesaving drugs, lifesaving clinical procedures, vaccination developments to protect against disease, preventative behaviour and risk education. All of these lead to a longer, healthier and more productive life for the community.

The benefit remains clear today, and there is a substantial return on the investment by this government and the private sector.

A paper entitled *Exceptional Returns — The Value of Investing in Health Research and Development in Australia*, prepared in 2003 by Access Economics for the Australian Society for Medical Research, said that for every \$1 invested in health research and development there is an average annual return of \$5.

The bill we are debating now will merge the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute, to form the Florey Neuroscience Institutes. The Florey Neuroscience Institutes will then partner with the Mental Health Research Institute to create the overarching Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. In our 1996 inquiry we received submissions from a number of these institutes, and I had the opportunity to visit the Howard Florey Institute and the Mental Health Research Institute. I have nothing but admiration and respect for their work.

The *Medical Journal of Australia*, in its October 2006 edition, lists examples of outstanding success in Australian health and medical research as including Frazer's cervical cancer vaccine, Cade's use of lithium for treating bipolar disorder, Clark's bionic ear technology and Marshall and Warren's unravelling of the role of helicobacter pylori in peptic ulcers. Fittingly lithium was very much a Victorian discovery by Dr John Cade, the psychiatrist superintendent of the then Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital in Parkville. While the hospital buildings made way for the Commonwealth Games village, the Mental Health

Research Institute to this day remains located on the old hospital grounds.

Our 1996 inquiry also found that Victoria was the nation's centre for medical research, and we should be very proud of this record. The bill today demonstrates the Bracks government's continuing support for the industry. The new centre, the subject of this bill, will be one of the world's largest centres dedicated to neuroscience research that will translate into practical benefits for people suffering from degenerative conditions of the brain and mind. Equally important is the fact that we can never properly estimate the real economic spin of a centre like this. We can only fully comprehend its potential by realising that it is only in this field of medical research and cutting edge technology that we are still ahead of the pack in Australia and in the world.

If you are talking about the manufacturing sector, many Asian countries, particularly China, now beat us straight down, so it is only in this field that we are still ahead of the pack. But even in this field of cutting edge technology and medical science, the South Koreans, the Japanese and the Taiwanese are catching up to us. It is in this context that the bill has my full support, and I commend it to the house.

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — It is an honour to speak tonight on the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. The purpose of this bill is to assist the government in its endeavours under the Victorian life sciences statement *Healthy Futures*. We are putting in \$53 million to create a new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research.

To undertake this, we require the amalgamation of three institutes into a new entity to be known as the Florey Neuroscience Institutes. The institutes to be amalgamated include the Howard Florey Institute (HFI) itself, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute. A second stage of the development is to move the Mental Health Research Institute into new premises to partner the Florey Neuroscience Institutes and to create the new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. By putting these brilliant institutes together, the government believes it will be able to create a mass of creative skills to ensure we continue to translate research into practical benefits for the community.

To ensure this amalgamation goes ahead, the Howard Florey Institute has indicated that the existing legislation should be repealed and that the HFI should become a fully owned subsidiary of the Florey

Neuroscience Institutes. It is also vital that we get this bill passed in a timely manner to ensure we receive the additional \$35 million in funding from the commonwealth government, which is greatly appreciated.

From talking to many scientists from Monash University — some of those associated with the synchrotron and other things — my impression is that there is an enormous amount of respect for the commitment the state government has made to science, innovation and research. Many people from overseas are surprised that a state government has involved itself to this level in research science and the like. They have told us — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr DONNELLAN — Someone has just said ‘pre-emptive’ — pre-eminent! We will not pre-empt where we should be in the future.

Research, innovation and science is a vital economic activity in many ways because it saves an enormous amount of money on health costs, improves the productivity of our workforce and goes a long way to creating a much healthier future for the community overall.

As we are aware, the fastest growing costs in most budgets, both federal and state, at the moment are for health. They grow at 100 miles an hour, and anything we can do to reduce disease and its impact on the community is to be commended. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — It is a pleasure to speak on the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. We fully support what is a very important bill. It is a surprise that the government has decided to do something in this area. The purpose of the bill is to repeal the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine and transfer all property rights and liabilities, and staff, of the above institute to the new body, the Howard Florey Institute.

When we talk about innovation and biotechnology in this state, this government is all about show. If there is a new office or if there is a new company that has decided to open up, the Minister for Innovation will turn up with his new tie and cut the ribbon for that new office. If a company decides to close up because this government has failed it, there is absolutely no sign of this government. It is happy to take the kudos when companies decide to open an office here, but it hides when companies decide to move interstate.

Queensland, for example, has outpaced Victoria in biotechnology. While Victoria has been moving at a very slow pace, Queensland has moved ahead. The Minister for Innovation is happy to put in some money provided he gets a photo opportunity. If he does not get a photo opportunity, he does not give the money out. It is all about spin and the media. It is all about scoring cheap political points, but unfortunately, they need to do more.

In Australia each state is competing for the same amount of dollars from the federal government. It is a shame that this minister cannot sit down with the other states and come up with areas in which this state can excel. What they do is duplicate other states, and federal money unfortunately — —

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I will take up that interjection. The synchrotron is over budget and late. I would be surprised if the running costs for the synchrotron do not come to about \$15 million to \$20 million a year, which this government will have to fund, because there will be no private sector money for funding the synchrotron on a yearly basis. This government can stand up and talk about numbers and about the private sector getting involved, but at the end it is all about show, it is all about trying to score cheap political points.

The opposition fully supports this legislation. It is a pity that the government on many occasions tries to score cheap political points on innovation in this state. It should be working with and not against the federal government, and it should be working with and not against the other states to come up with a strategy and vision for Victoria in the field of innovation, so we can be ready for the year 2020.

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park) — I speak in support of the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms D’AMBROSIO — Unlike the previous speaker, who chose to put boxing gloves on — but he was on the wrong track.

The repeal of this bill gives me an opportunity to reflect on and pay tribute to the wonderful work conducted by the Howard Florey Institute over the many years of its existence. Of course it was established in 1971 by an act of this Parliament, and quite fittingly it was named after Howard Florey, who others before me have already referred to in talking at length about his contributions to neurological science in the 20th

century. He was a Nobel prize winner and was one of the main people responsible for one of the great leaps forward of the 20th century — the development of penicillin. He was therefore responsible for saving innumerable lives, prolonging the lives of many others and improving the quality of life of many others still. Not only was he renowned and applauded for his breakthroughs in this area, but certainly he was well-known for significant bodies of other work in neurological science.

The origins of the institute date back to 1947 and Dr Derek Denton's investigation and research into the control of the salt and water balance and the importance of that in good health. Since the establishment of the Howard Florey Institute the many scientists who have gone through its doors have made significant inroads into many areas of neurological health, from which we are benefiting globally. Inroads have been made into many diseases, including Huntington's disease and Parkinson's disease, and into the investigation of early signs of multiple sclerosis and the identification of multiple sclerosis genes.

There has also been significant work on investigations of the brain's role in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). They are some examples of the institute's critical work over many decades, which has been of global significance to human health. On the subject of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, I refer the house to the most recent report of the Howard Florey Institute. Current research on ADHD has found that, and I quote from the report:

Currently clinicians diagnose ADHD entirely on behavioural symptoms.

His team —

'his' refers to Dr Ross Cunnington from the institute —

is investigating functional changes in the brain underlying these symptoms.

They have found that, in children and adolescents diagnosed with ADHD, the parietal cortex, flanking the midline of the brain, is significantly underactivated, particularly in the right hemisphere.

The report then directly quotes Dr Cunnington:

'The right parietal cortex mediates our ability to direct attention to objects or events in our environment',
Dr Cunnington said.

The report states that they also found that underactivation was focused in the caudate nucleus, part of the basal ganglia, and that that was consistent with the inability to maintain attention, a major symptom of ADHD. I am sure everyone would agree

that that is quite significant. It is those types of small breakthroughs that incrementally will lead us to one day coming up with a much more robust response to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which affects many young people.

It is the dedication and diligence of many scientists — some of whom are lauded and others who are not yet globally lauded — to a detailed approach that makes the body of research and work that is conducted in the Howard Florey Institute. I am pleased to say that this bill will provide a greater opportunity to bring together scientists across the neurological sciences and encourage greater collaboration, hopefully to bring about improvements and significant knowledge in the areas of disease which we have yet to conquer.

The bill is a direct result of the government's \$53 million commitment to a new facility at the Austin Hospital and the University of Melbourne at Parkville. They arise from *Healthy Futures*, the government's Victorian life sciences statement. Like all good ideas, this one is innovative and certainly there is a great synergy on one level — and I do not want to overstate this — between the diligent and dedicated Victorian scientists, who make breakthroughs and lead the country and arguably the world, and this government, which has a willingness to foster and facilitate the progress of that work. The two are necessarily compatible, and one is a great enhancer of the other. I wish to put that on the record.

The Austin Hospital is important to the community of my electorate of Mill Park. This hospital strives to provide many services which are either lifesaving or life enhancing. I have had personal experiences of the wonderful place that is the Austin Hospital. Many people in my electorate have had the same experiences.

To enable the go-ahead of this government's plan for a modern and cutting-edge facility, which will be called the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research, three existing institutes will be merged. The Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute will form the Florey Neuroscience Institutes. The bill also provides for the co-location of the Mental Health Research Institute of Victoria at the Parkville site. These actions, which this bill facilitates, will consolidate our expertise and research into a world-class neuroscience hub. We will grow Victoria's already internationally renowned reputation in the field of neuroscience research. We are lucky that we have this, but importantly the outcomes are ultimately tested by the benefits that the community derives from such

work and from encouragement and financial assistance that governments can provide.

The coming together of our top scientists in one centre will provide greater impetus in the transferral of research into practical benefits for the people suffering many neurological disorders and diseases. Previous speakers have mentioned the benefits of bringing old and new minds together. There are wonderful possibilities when there are collaborative efforts. For those important reasons I cannot but commend the bill to the house. I wish it a speedy passage that gains wholehearted and unanimous support across all parties.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — The discovery of penicillin represents one of the greatest inventions by scientists in the course of the 20th century. When reviewing the great and significant events of the 20th century, we see a number of people involved. Those events include nuclear fission, the fall of the Iron Curtain, the work of key leaders and individuals, such as Roosevelt, Gandhi and Churchill, and their impact on the 20th century. If one were to deduce the most important elements of scientific, political life and leadership of the 20th century, the work of Florey in producing commercial quantities of penicillin must stand as one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century and beyond.

When we look at the 21st century, it is interesting to see the key issues we confront as an international community. One person thought that the silicon chip would have a major impact. Other people have said that the impact of the silicon chip would be dwarfed by the discovery of the magnificent artistry of DNA structure and the work of scientists in the development of DNA during the course of this century. Some thought the impact of discoveries in that particular field would match the work of Florey. In terms of saving lives it may be the work of Florey that will stand as a work of greater achievement. Penicillin has saved countless numbers of people through controlling infection.

I turn more specifically to the bill, which is supported by the Liberal Party. A key issue in Victoria about a central hub of excellence of biomedical research relates not only to the grants available for major programs but the infrastructure that is available. I have a letter from a senior clinical researcher who is one of Australia's leading epidemiologists. He said:

However, along with many other public health and clinical researchers, I remain very concerned by the lack of infrastructure for applied health research. This issue was investigated by the Victorian parliamentary Economic Development Committee.

This was a number of years ago. The letter reads:

The committee finds that given the commonwealth has a major role in supporting science-based biomedical research, the state's responsibility must be towards increasing the levels of funding directed to research into public health, disease prevention and health delivery. This research has the greatest impact on maximising economic benefits to the state.

It is important that Victoria maintains a focus through the proper range of budget initiatives to support our sciences where that work can have an international impact on scientific matters. I note the work of the Monash immunology and stem cell laboratories, in particular the achievements, scholarship and research leadership of Dr Richard Boyd. I pay tribute to Dr Boyd and his fellow researchers for their innovative application of Australian science to bring multiple technologies to tackle complex diseases. Dr Boyd had been responsible for pioneering work in developing the world's first trials on the rejuvenation of the immune system, focusing on the thymus. It will look at replenishing the immune system which has been depleted by age and HIV and steering it down a pathway to target diseases, particularly cancer, AIDS and multiple sclerosis. In relation to Dr Boyd's work, I understand that a pilot study in Melbourne has been successful, and now two trials are being undertaken in the United States and have been funded by the National Institutes of Health.

It is salutary to read the work of Florey and also to cover the speech he made both at the banquet and in accepting the Nobel prize at Stockholm in 1945. When accepting that particular award he gave an outline of the history of his research as part of his Nobel lecture and pointed in some ways to the future role that antibiotics could play in the field of medicine, which resulted in an outburst of investigation in that area. He noted:

One has thus the prospect that this intensive study must result in the next few years in a great accumulation of knowledge, some of which may be immediately applicable to medicine and some of which will contribute to theoretical knowledge. In any event those engaged in the work can look forward to many happy hours of investigation.

Likewise, when the work in relation to the human genome was being undertaken, Dr Francis Collins, who led the world genome project, made the remark that the international scientific community was electrified by the stupendous discoveries in terms of the genetic structure of DNA and what that will mean for diseases in the future. This chamber recently considered stem cells at great length and the implications of research relating to embryonic stem cells, adult stem cells and SCNT (somatic cell nuclear transfer). The work of scientists down the track will be pivotal to curing

diseases in a range of important areas, including Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and a number of tissue-related diseases, including damage to skin by burns.

The history of the institute was well outlined by the then Premier of the day, Henry Bolte, when during the debate on the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine Bill it was noted that the Howard Florey Laboratories were initiated in 1960 by a letter of gift to the university signed by Kenneth Myer and William Potter. The letter describes the active interest of a group of citizens in the basic research being carried out by Dr Derek Denton and colleagues and Professor R. D. Wright, which had attracted international attention. The laboratories, a fine building, were dedicated by the Prime Minister of Australia, Robert Menzies, on 30 August 1963 in the presence of Lord Florey, the president of the Royal Society. Lord Florey took an active interest in the scientific investigations of the laboratories until his death in 1967. There is also an outline of the range of features of the facility.

As I indicated at the beginning of my contribution, Melbourne has been a world leader in scientific research, with a number of very important institutes. It is important that particular research programs be funded. The amortisation of those research costs may sometimes need to be spread through collaborative work undertaken by a number of different agencies and countries, taking into account the lead time between the discovery and the commercialisation of the science into products in the marketplace.

Howard Florey stands as one of the greatest scientists over the course of the last 1000 years through the significance of the impact of penicillin and antibiotics in the treatment of disease, illness and infection. If antibiotics had been available during the two great wars of the 20th century when Australia lost 100 000 men, that number would have been significantly reduced. It is important not only in times of warfare but also in terms of infections that occur on an intermittent basis.

I know the Sandringham Hospital was closed for a period of 10 days or so and that 48 elective operations were cancelled through fear of the risk of infection. A constituent did incur an infection following an operation at the Sandringham Hospital shortly after that time, and we are waiting on the results of the investigations of the health department as to the cause of that particular infection. Fortunately there are very good antibiotics that have been made available for the treatment of diseases, and we stand very grateful for the work of not only Howard Florey but also the other

Australian scientists who have committed their intellect and skill to their work.

Professor Graeme Clark, who developed the bionic ear, placed his whole scientific career and medical work on — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Green) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I am delighted to speak in support of the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. There are actually three institutes in Victoria that are governed by acts of Parliament. They include the Baker Medical Research Institute, which is governed by an act passed in 1980; the Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research — I have to advise the house that I am on the board of that particular institute; as well as the Howard Florey Institute. As they are governed by acts of Parliament the Parliament receives reports from them every year. They receive operational infrastructure support from the state, as do the other 15 Victorian independent institutes.

The member for Sandringham should admit that the Bracks government has led the charge; it has made sure that Victoria has not only maintained its reputation as a marvellous centre of biosciences and biomedical research but has actually enhanced it. It is driving the agenda to make sure that Victoria is a world leader. It is one of the five leading centres in the world in terms of biomedical research. The Howard Florey Institute is one of the 18 centres involved in this.

We are talking about innovation in Victoria. We want to make sure that we are at the cutting edge of innovation in terms of medical research. I know from my experience at the Prince Henry's, which has involved going to various meetings and dinners with the research scientists, that Victoria is the leading state in Australia in terms of biomedical research. It is way ahead of Queensland and indeed is so far ahead of Sydney it is not funny. We want to maintain and develop that, and this bill is part of that drive to do that here in Victoria.

This bill will repeal the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine Act and ensure that all the assets are transferred to the new entity. But it is not just about the creation of one new entity through the replication of the Howard Florey Institute, it is actually about putting three institutions together — namely, the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research

Institute — to form the new Florey Neuroscience Institutes.

What is behind all this? These changes are part of *Healthy Futures* — the Bracks government's Victorian life sciences statement — which I urge all members of the opposition, both new and old, to read, because it provides for not just a little bit of money but \$53 million to create a new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research.

This bill is the first step in putting these three institutions together. It will turn the Florey institute, together with the two other institutes, into a new entity to be known as the Florey Neuroscience Institutes. That will be the first step towards creating the new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research, which will be situated at the new University of Melbourne premises and at the Austin Hospital.

One of the great virtues of this is that in putting up the \$53 million Victoria is aiming to attract a further \$35 million from the commonwealth. I must say that it is typical of Victoria to be punching above its weight. This is not a 50-50 arrangement; it is actually a 53-35 arrangement. We are providing far more than the commonwealth. I know the commonwealth provides grants such as those through the National Health and Medical Research Council, which these centres attract, but here we are talking about putting in bricks and mortar to create a new institute. Together with the commonwealth we are looking to provide \$88 million for this new institute.

The new entity will create a critical mass, and I really think the Bracks government has led the way here. I personally support putting together institutes to create critical masses. We have marvellous institutes at Melbourne University in Parkville and out at Monash University. There is great virtue in amalgamating some of these institutes into larger bodies with larger critical masses in order to make sure we make the best use of our research scientists. As a member who spoke before me said, it is about melding the older, senior research scientists with the newer ones who are coming along now. It will also help diversify the various areas of science which scientists are looking at. Science, as we know, is continually developing — 'mutating' is not quite the word — in new areas which provide hope for us as human beings and hope for solutions to the problems created by the diseases people suffer and by genetic defects. Indeed on that subject we had a debate in the last sitting week of the Parliament on stem cell research.

Research institutes here in Victoria are leading the way. This bill takes another step in the direction of leadership by providing for the creation of a new centre as a result of amalgamating three institutes into Florey Neuroscience Institutes, which as I said is itself the first step along the way to the creation of the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. I think this is an excellent bill because of what it is creating. I think it demands and deserves attention in terms of the leadership which Victoria is showing and which the Bracks government is providing in terms of the biosciences and biomedical research in Australia and indeed in the world. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — It is a great pleasure to rise to speak on the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. I would like to commend the member for Burwood on his vigorous and informative contribution to this debate, and I of course agree with him wholeheartedly about the importance of this bill. I intend to make my contribution on the bill brief, so without taking up any more time I note that essentially this bill will take the public entity that is the Florey and turn it into a public corporation, ultimately enabling its amalgamation with the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute. Making it part of a much bigger and better research institute is a pretty good thing.

The government is providing \$53 million to allow this new entity to perform in an exemplary way and to further benefit the state by becoming part of the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. Following the passage of this bill, we expect the commonwealth government to contribute about \$35 million, so we are talking about \$80 million to \$90 million in government funding — for an institute with a much better structure to enable much better research to occur.

While this is a technical bill, the issue of mental health is a major issue in our society. Research into a whole range of mental health and neuroscience issues is an important part of where we head in the future. I guess that is one of the reasons why we see bipartisan support for this bill. The former Premier, Jeff Kennett, through beyondblue, certainly has a commitment to improving mental health in this state. That is something that I am sure is shared by every member of this Parliament and this community.

I was not going to speak on this bill — it is a little bit outside my area of expertise — until I heard the contribution of the member for Bulleen. He is a personal friend of mine, but I think he is totally wrong

on this issue. His disparaging comments about Victoria's contributions to health and research and his criticisms of Victoria's contributions to biomedical research were quite wrong. I want to put on the record some basic facts. I notice that the member is in the chamber to hear my comments. It is good to see that he is interested, and I know that he is genuinely interested in the debate. I am not sure whether it was the mention of Jeff Kennett or the mention of the institute that caught his attention!

There is no doubt, despite the carping criticism from some of those opposite, that Victoria is recognised as the most innovative state in Australia. There is no doubt that Victoria is recognised as the most health-conscious state and the state with the greatest health research expertise in Australia. There is no doubt that Victoria is recognised as the centre for biotechnology research in Australia. We have great health research companies, including good private research companies, and some fantastic innovation happening right across the spectrum of biotechnology and the biohealth sciences.

There is absolutely no doubt that with this bill, with the money from the state government and with the money from the federal government, we will be providing for another great, world-class institute that will put Victoria right at the centre of neuroscience and biotechnology research in this country. I certainly commend the bill to the house.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — I support the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. This is an economically responsible bill. It is all about bringing together three institutes to further highlight and further give the critical mass in the area of expertise in Australia that Victoria is now becoming renowned for.

This comes on top of the other investments Victoria has made in this field, with the synchrotron, which is just an amazing piece of technology that will put us further in the forefront of medical technology, to enable us to find some of the cures for diseases and other illnesses and ailments from which people suffer. It will also provide the jobs, research facilities and economies of scale for the scientists and the great people we are training in Victorian universities.

We are really putting in place something that the Kennett government should have done in its term of office. This is the economically responsible thing for the government to do, and it has taken the Bracks government to put all this in place. Instead of what the Kennett government used to do — to close schools, shut passenger rail services, sack nurses and close

hospitals — we are doing the right thing through this bill, and we will continue to do the right thing in Parliament.

I understand other members want to speak on this bill. I believe it is an important bill, and I agree with other members about how important it is for individuals and for families. I support the bill.

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) — It is also my pleasure to speak in favour of the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. Many members have drawn the strings between this wonderful institute and the wonderful miracle that penicillin has been for our race. I think it is important, though, that we not only concentrate on the lifesaving aspects of that wonder drug but also that we think about the wonderful things it has done otherwise.

Speaking as a father, I know this drug has brought relief to children and to families, especially young families, all over the world. To have gone through times when things such as abscesses in the ear were not able to be dealt with in the manner they are dealt with now must have been a nightmare for parents at those times. Anything we as a Parliament can do to support this wonderful institute deserves all our support. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — It is my great pleasure to add briefly to the debate on the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. The government's commitment to science and research is obviously commendable. Its recent announcement of the bioscience research centre being located in La Trobe University is testimony to this.

This bill is an important step in the process of creating the Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research, which will also see it amalgamating with the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute. I am very excited that the proposed facilities for the new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research will be located not only at the University of Melbourne but also at the Austin Hospital, which is in my electorate. The Austin Hospital has received massive boosts of funding since the election of the Bracks government, with over \$376 million invested, and the recent announcement of over \$8 million for the building of other facilities adds to this initiative.

I am well aware many members want to speak on the bill and that the minister wishes to sum up the debate, so I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission) — It gives me great pleasure also to contribute to the debate on the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (Repeal) Bill. As previous speakers have mentioned, this is a very important piece of legislation because it essentially commences the first part of a two-part process that will see the Mental Health Research Institute partner the Florey Neuroscience Institutes to create a new research centre.

As members have mentioned and as other members would recall, as part of the state government's *Healthy Futures* Victorian life sciences statement, the government made a \$53 million commitment to the establishment of the new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health Research. The process for bringing about the establishment of that centre required several different health research institutes to be amalgamated. They are: the Howard Florey Institute, the Brain Research Institute and the National Stroke Research Institute.

This bill essentially facilitates the first step in that process by repealing the legislation which created the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine, and through the passage of this legislation that set of amalgamations will be able to take place. That will in turn create the Florey Neuroscience Institutes, and then the co-location of that at the Austin Hospital, as the member for Ivanhoe said, will be able to occur.

It has been a very interesting debate, which reaffirms the government's very strong commitment to supporting life sciences and particularly medical health research in this state. We have developed a competitive advantage in this area not just in Australia but internationally. Our reputation is justifiably a significant one. It is about a process and an agenda that have been driven strongly by the Treasurer in his role as Minister for Innovation. This legislation, which I hope will be passed shortly, will enable that process to reach the next step.

I particularly acknowledge the contributions of the members for Nepean, Rodney, Prahran and Evelyn, the Minister for Victorian Communities, the members for Doncaster, Bundoora, Narracan, Pascoe Vale and Caulfield, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and the members for Bayswater, Clayton, Narre Warren North, Bulleen, Mill Park, Sandringham, Burwood, Eltham, Melton, Hastings and Ivanhoe. It has been a very interesting debate and one that I think reflects well on the strong commitment that the state

government has to supporting medical health research in this state. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

Remaining business postponed on motion of Mr HOLDING (Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission).

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Agriculture: Chinese bluestone pavers

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — The issue I wish to raise is for the Minister for Agriculture. The action I seek is for him to undertake a detailed scientific assessment of the quarantine risks to Victorian agriculture, our recreational fishers and our environment from the growing practice of importing bluestone, or basalt, from China and other countries. While the federal government has primary responsibility for the Australian quarantine system, the Victorian government and the Victorian Minister for Agriculture have a clear responsibility to protect our agricultural industries and our environments, and to advise the federal minister on quarantine risks to Victoria.

It has been brought to my attention that there is a rapid growth in the importation of basalt or bluestone pavers from China. Basalt is a porous stone and can absorb up to 1.5 per cent to 2 per cent of its weight in water. Basalt also has many vesicles, which are commonly called gas holes, that can carry soil, bacteria, viruses, fungal spores, plant seeds and contaminated water. I am advised that Chinese basalt is currently listed as a minimal risk import and therefore is not subject to any disinfection or other treatment prior to being imported into Australia.

I am concerned particularly about the risk of the importation of didymo, which is commonly called rock snot, which is an extremely damaging freshwater algae not found in Australia. Didymo, or rock snot, can be spread by transporting a single cell of the algae. Didymo has caused devastation in New Zealand, where

it was first detected in 2004. Now the whole of New Zealand's South Island is a declared didymo control area. It forms large mats on the bottoms of lakes and streams, affecting local fish, the local ecology and the local environment. Didymo is also in China, where the basalt is coming from.

I am concerned that didymo spores can come into Australia in the vesicles or gas holes in the basalt. These untreated basalt pavers could also introduce a range of bacterial, viral, fungal and algal organisms into Victoria, placing our agricultural industries and environment at risk. This is particularly concerning given that there is no necessary advantage in importing Chinese basalt pavers when we have excellent basalt produced within Victoria and, indeed, in my electorate of South-West Coast in the area near Port Fairy. We are taking a massive risk and we are also causing loss of jobs and loss of opportunity in Victoria and Australia.

Therefore I urge the Minister for Agriculture to take this matter very seriously. Rock snot is in many countries and is causing enormous devastation in New Zealand, where there are restrictions on recreational fishers and people moving from the South Island to the North Island who are potentially bringing it with them on their rods and shoes. The last thing we need is to have rock snot come into Australia. Certainly we do not want it to come in on imported Chinese bluestone pavers.

Road safety: tailgating

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I raise an issue for action tonight with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. It relates to road safety, specifically the unsafe but common practice of tailgating on the Melbourne–Geelong road. As members and you, Deputy Speaker, would appreciate, I travel on that road, as do many members, at least twice a week, on average, over a year. The number of cars that are tailgating is obviously of great concern not only to me but also to people in the wider community.

I do not have any statistical evidence about the problem, but as many motorists who travel at 100 kilometres per hour would vouch, the problem is prevalent indeed. Many would unfairly single out truck drivers as the culprits in tailgating, but I consider that they are singled out because they are the most visible traffic on the road whereas the problem relates very much to car drivers also. The action I seek is for the minister to investigate the issue with the objective of taking the relevant action, which will not eliminate the problem, because the problem of tailgating will never be eliminated, but will at least minimise the problem.

The safety record of the Melbourne–Geelong road has vastly improved since the Bracks government upgraded the road between 1999 and 2002.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr TREZISE — Of course, Jeff Kennett pork-barrelled the Melbourne–Geelong road but never got around to upgrading it. That is why members opposite are on that side of the house, and I am on this side of the house!

Prior to the upgrade there was one death on that road every three months. Since the Bracks government upgraded the road the fatal accidents that have occurred have related essentially to some drivers with what I would describe as absolutely erratic driving behaviour, such as driving full of drugs in the dark down the wrong side of the road at 160 kilometres an hour. As I have said, tailgating continues to be a safety concern on the road. It is a practice that needs to be addressed by traffic police in such a manner as to minimise it. This is an important issue, and I look forward to the minister's action.

Budget: drought relief

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — I wish to raise for the attention of the Treasurer a matter concerning today's state budget and its complete disregard for the farming community in northern Victoria. The action I request is for the Treasurer to outline immediately how the government plans to support farmers in the northern irrigation region of Victoria, when it has failed to make any substantial financial commitment to them in the budget.

Despite the ongoing drought conditions and the dire future facing the irrigators if they do not receive average rainfall in the coming winter–spring period, the Bracks government has failed to recognise the seriousness of the situation. Disturbingly, the only investment in today's budget for water-savings projects is \$38 million for the Shepparton irrigation area.

This pales into insignificance when compared with the national water plan, which would see billions of dollars invested in the infrastructure in the Goulburn–Murray Water area for the benefit of the environment and the farming communities. It begs the question: how does the government propose to refurbish Goulburn–Murray Water's entire system of ageing infrastructure when it is continuing to refuse to sign up to the commonwealth's \$10 billion water plan? The commonwealth plan contains provision to fund water-savings projects in the entire Goulburn–Murray Water irrigation system. In

fact, the national water plan will allocate \$6 billion for works to pipe and line channels and to create savings across the whole of Australia.

Given that the state government has made only a token investment in today's budget for water-savings infrastructure and that the government is refusing to sign up to the commonwealth water plan, we could be forgiven for asking whether the Bracks government will want farmers in the northern irrigation region in Victoria. It certainly does not look that way. If it does want farmers there, then I challenge the Bracks government to reveal when it plans to sign up to the federal government's national water plan. If it is not prepared to support farmers in this meaningful way, then it must sign the agreement to ensure that someone else will.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Is the member raising this for the Treasurer or the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change?

Mr WELLER — For the Treasurer, because there is no commitment in the budget. Aside from the lack of any significant funding in the budget for water-savings infrastructure, the government has also failed to provide funding for a range of practical measures which would have assisted farmers through the ongoing drought. There is no funding commitment to provide transport subsidies for farmers to cart essential fodder from interstate or rebates for farmers carting water for stock and domestic purposes. The condition of stock is deteriorating. Farmers are out of money, out of feed and out of cash.

There is also no commitment in the budget to reintroduce the \$20 000 cash grants to assist farmers to pay mounting bills, and to buy food and clothing for their families and urgently needed fodder for their stock. The current drought conditions across country Victoria are continuing to exert enormous pressure on the farming sector, yet the Bracks government has refused to offer any practical assistance. Again I urge the Treasurer to explain how the Bracks government plans to support farmers in the northern irrigation region through one of the worst droughts in living memory.

Universities: student places

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) — I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment. I ask the minister to lobby the commonwealth government to provide an increased number of university places in Victoria. I am very concerned to read that data released last week by the

Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee shows that Victoria has close to 40 per cent of Australia's unmet demand for higher education places. That is a whopping figure in anyone's language.

In even worse news for Victorian students, unmet demand in Victoria is on the rise. We need only look at the recent data provided by the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee to see that the number of eligible Victorian students missing out on an undergraduate university place this year is 19 per cent higher than it was in 2006. To say that this is extremely disappointing is certainly an understatement. It is disappointing not only for the students who have missed out on an opportunity to gain a university qualification but also for Victorian employers and industry. Victoria now needs a highly skilled population to drive its future economic growth, and no-one would or should dispute that. Victorians certainly deserve the same higher education opportunities that the rest of Australia enjoys, yet the door is closed to so many of our students, and you have to ask why.

Victoria has the highest year 12 completion rate of any Australian state. We have achieved this result through the concerted efforts of the Bracks government, and I wish to particularly acknowledge and commend the Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment for her great commitment, expertise and follow-through in this area — which is certainly something that is lacking federally.

The federal government is abrogating its responsibility to Victoria's young people and to industry alike. That is probably something the opposition does not want to hear, but it is a fact. The federal government must open the door to higher skills, which is something we need. We need the door to higher skills to be open so that economic benefits can come to our community. It is grossly unfair that Victoria has the highest level of unmet demand for university places of all Australian states and territories. Things have to improve.

Koo Wee Rup bypass: funding

Mr K. SMITH (Bass) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports regarding the upgrade of the Pakenham–Koo Wee Rup road and the bypass around the Koo Wee Rup township. The minister would be aware that the Pakenham bypass is nearing completion, which will bring huge amounts of traffic south of the townships of Officer and Pakenham and through to Gippsland. This will increase the amount of traffic that will be using the Pakenham–Koo Wee Rup

road as a joiner road between the Princes Highway and the South Gippsland Highway.

Currently we have a two-lane road between Pakenham and Koo Wee Rup which has a dangerous T-intersection in the middle of the Koo Wee Rup township. This intersection has to handle large trucks carrying sand from the pits to the east of Koo Wee Rup and large trucks and vehicles from Pakenham. This intersection is a recipe for disaster, and I am surprised — and relieved — that people have not been killed at the intersection. As I said, the intersection is in the middle of the Koo Wee Rup township, with shops on either side of the road and on each side of the intersection, and with a secondary school and primary school just down the road. When you add to this mix the thousands of extra vehicles that will use this road and intersection when the Pakenham bypass opens, it is clear that this road and bypass must be started now — not when people are killed!

The Koo Wee Rup bypass must be a no. 1 priority. It is on the top of the Shire of Cardinia's list, and it should also be on the top of the minister's list of priorities. The federal government has committed \$5.5 million towards this bypass, and all it needs now is for VicRoads and the minister to commit the other \$5.5 million to get this job started. I did not find any allocation for it in the 2007–08 budget, but that should not deter the minister. I ask the minister to commit some of his discretionary funding to this project and save some lives. He has now been advised of this impending disaster, and if people are killed, he and VicRoads could be seen as being responsible for those deaths because they did not act in time when they were made aware of the fact that this was a problem.

This is not the first time this issue has been raised. I know that the shire council has raised the issue, I know that the township committee at Koo Wee Rup has raised the issue, and I know that the secondary college and the primary school have raised this issue as being important and vital to the people of Koo Wee Rup. I ask the minister to take some action now and not leave it until it is too late and people have been killed at this intersection. I ask the minister to get this bypass built around the town. It is very badly needed, and it should be done now and not down the track.

Volunteers: government support

Mr HAERMEYER (Kororoit) — The matter I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Victorian Communities. I ask him to take action to encourage greater commitment to volunteerism in the community and to encourage people to become volunteers within

their own communities. I say that particularly with respect to communities like the one that I live in and represent — Caroline Springs, in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. It is one of our many growing suburbs. Caroline Springs is a community that has grown in a very short period of time from something around 2300 residents to around 10 000 residents, which it will have very soon.

There are a lot of community activities and a lot of functions that we all take for granted, but at the same time we need to appreciate that these do not occur if people do not take up the cudgels and volunteer for the many community organisations that actually provide those various services and facilities. In particular, the minister attended the Caroline Springs CFA (Country Fire Authority) brigade last week, and he saw firsthand the work that is done by CFA volunteers, not just in the Caroline Springs brigade but around the whole of Victoria. They do an absolutely magnificent job, and we saw that during the bushfires. It is often not appreciated by people moving out of the metropolitan fire district into the CFA territory that these brigades require volunteers to enable them to function as well as they do.

We have a very rich tradition of volunteerism here in Victoria, not just in the CFA but also in other emergency services like the SES (State Emergency Service) and, more recently, the community emergency response teams. There are also volunteers in other organisations like the Red Cross, school councils and parent organisations. When our local football teams take to the field on weekends, the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes to actually enable that to take place is often not appreciated.

This state has a magnificent tradition of volunteerism in the emergency services across all areas. We need to make sure that that tradition of volunteerism continues and grows so we are able to continue to enjoy many of the things that we have taken for granted over a great many years. I think our volunteers are the real unheralded heroes of our community, and it is great to see that we have a minister and a department that are dedicated to encouraging the growth of that great tradition of volunteerism. What I am asking the minister to do is to ensure that we continue to imbue our Victorian community with that volunteer spirit.

Port Phillip Bay: channel deepening

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Planning in the other place. The matter I raise is the panel process for the supplementary environment effects statement (EES) for the channel

deepening project, particularly the composition of the panel and the time lines that have been imposed on the submissions. The action I seek is that the minister take action to improve the process by ensuring that the expertise of at least some members of the original panel is made available to the new process and by extending the submission deadline by three weeks.

Mr Nardella interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Mornington does not need any assistance. The member for Mornington to continue, without interjection.

Mr MORRIS — Submissions have been called for and they close next Monday — six days from now — which will allow only six weeks in total for people to assess the documents and get their minds around them. It is a massive job. The document in my hand is one volume; there are two others of the same size. There are 1500 pages in total. If you get it on disk, it is almost 1 gigabyte of data. People need longer than six weeks to get their mind around something like that.

Members will also recall that this is in fact the second time around. The first time, there were so many problems with the EES that was provided that the whole process could not proceed and it had to be done again. Several hundred issues came up, and of course as part of that we had a \$32 million trial dredging scheme. Unfortunately this time around the panel that was appointed to review the original work has not been reappointed to oversee the assessment of the information that has now become available. All the corporate knowledge and all the experience that were gathered during that process are now unavailable to assist in getting the thing right.

I am not one of those people who say we should not go ahead with this. Victoria's maritime trade is a critical element of our economy. I think we are a very important trading state, and the fact that we are a trading state connects us to the world. We need to take every reasonable step to ensure that that connection remains, but we will not keep the existing trade if we do not act. Quite frankly I am a bit concerned about this process because I think we are now rushing to get it done, and we run the risk of cutting corners. Risks can be taken. I know I am not alone in this view. We need to remember that the proponents of this process are the same people who assured us last time that the first EES was exactly right. We need to bring all possible expertise to this process because, if we do not get it right, we will be paying for it for generations.

Housing: Prahran electorate

Mr LUPTON (Prahran) — The matter I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Housing, who is in the chamber. I seek action from the minister in relation to security for public housing tenants in the electorate of Prahran.

Back in 2006 the government commissioned security upgrades for the public housing towers in King Street, Prahran. Two towers — at 25 and 27 King Street — were fitted out with new security systems for the tenants. That involved a new swipe-card system, allowing tenants to enter the buildings using specially designed access tags, which are very small and are able to be put on residents key rings. The flats were also installed with intercom systems, allowing tenants to speak to visitors and to unlock the front door without leaving their flats. Closed-circuit television systems were installed to record any security incidents, both inside and outside the buildings.

The installation of the security system in the flats in King Street followed significant community consultation by me and by other members of the government. It has proven to be a very effective measure in terms of both increasing residents feelings of safety and security and reducing levels of criminal activity in the area.

The other public housing towers in the Prahran electorate are located in Union Street in Windsor, Inkerman Street in St Kilda, and Malvern Road, Surrey Road and Simmons Street in South Yarra. I urge the Minister for Housing to commit funding for security upgrades for the remaining public housing towers in Prahran and to commit the government to commencing work on those security upgrades this year. These are important for the safety and security of public housing residents in my electorate of Prahran. The evidence that is available following the security upgrades in the King Street towers indicates that these measures are very effective and provide greater security for residents in public housing estates in my electorate. I urge the government to fund and install these systems.

Wodonga Senior Secondary College: school nurse

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Community Services in the other place. I ask that the minister take action in relation to the school nurse allocation and return it to the level it was at before the commencement of the school year this year.

At the commencement of the school year I spoke about the amalgamation of three Wodonga secondary schools. Given the government's claim that they are on one campus, the amalgamated schools had a nursing allocation of 1.5 full-time equivalent positions, which has now been reduced to 0.5 of a full-time equivalent position. The school population is 2158, yet one part-time nurse is expected to service the concerns of the growing number of young people in those schools.

Since January the state of affairs has been like the script of the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. I have had to pass a number of tests to identify the responsible minister. I wrote to the Minister for Health, the Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment, and the Minister for Children.

Ms Allan — You covered your bases!

Mr TILLEY — I certainly did — because I was looking for a response. Nevertheless, I would like to acknowledge that the Minister for Community Services responded, but it was nothing more than lip-service and has not resolved the need for school nurses for students in the city of Wodonga. It has been two months and we still do not have provisional services for the students. The principals are ringing me frequently, and we are continuing to speak. The quest continues, and hopefully I will find the Holy Grail and be able to resolve the issue not only for the principals who are trying to service the students in Wodonga but, more importantly, for our Victorian children.

Rural communities are at breaking point at the moment, given the extreme drought. Students are coming into Wodonga, the major rural centre in the electorate of Benambra, where they are having to work extremely hard on the family properties and then try to knuckle down and learn something at school. They are going from their lives at school to seeing their parents at the point of breakdown.

I ask the Minister for Community Services to advise me when the three Wodonga secondary colleges will receive their due allocation of 1.5 full-time equivalent school nurse positions. To digress a little, despite 66 per cent of the school nurse allocation having been slashed, once again today we heard the Bracks government herald tremendous and enormous opportunities for Victorian students —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired.

Stamp duty: consumer affairs advice

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs. It concerns residents in my local community who long after the purchase of their homes have received correspondence from the State Revenue Office asking them to pay stamp duty. I ask the minister to take immediate action to help consumers in my local community who require advice on and assistance with their rights and obligations and to facilitate a complaints process about any alleged breaches of the Estate Agents Act or any other act.

Many of the residents who have been affected by the alleged breaches are simply doing it tough. Many of them have borrowed up to 95 per cent of the purchase price of their homes. Basically they have saved like mad to get a 5 per cent deposit from genuine savings. They are now proud owners of their matrimonial homes — the great Australian dream. Many of these residents are working families — mum and dad go off to work while their young are cared for in child care. With increasing interest rates, the rising cost of petrol, child care and food, the increase in general living expenses and the unfortunate level of rising debt associated with unsecured finance and credit card use, et cetera, many of these residents are doing it tough — some tougher than others.

Many residents have tried to contact the real estate agency involved but have been advised that they have simply moved on, probably walking away with a smile on their faces. The Bracks government is committed to protecting consumers, and I ask the minister to take action to provide advice and support to the members of my local community who are affected as a result of receiving these letters from the State Revenue Office.

Responses

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Housing) — I thank the member for Prahran for raising the question of security on the public housing estates in his electorate and for his very strong advocacy for public housing generally in his electorate. It has been a tremendous day for public and social housing in this budget, and I think that —

Mrs Fyffe interjected.

Mr WYNNE — We will be ensuring that there is a good spread of housing developments throughout not only the Melbourne metropolitan area but also regional centres as well. I look forward to any propositions the

member for Evelyn may have in relation to public housing.

Some of the \$1.4 billion that has been allocated to public and social housing will go to a range of housing projects, including acquisitions, redevelopments and the renovation of existing public housing stock. It is within the context of the renovation of public housing stock that the matter raised with me by the member for Prahran fits. It is important that we ensure the quality of our existing public housing is maintained. Certainly it is important that we maintain this stock within the inner city because we want to have stock that is well located, close to public transport, close to education, and close to training and employment opportunities.

We should not forget that we inherited a smouldering wreck from the previous government which basically and essentially — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The Minister for Housing, to continue responding to the member for Prahran, without the interjections.

Mr WYNNE — Deputy Speaker, thank you for your assistance, but let the record show that apart from general maintenance on the 44 public housing high-rise towers basically in inner Melbourne, over the seven years of the previous government it spent \$7 million.

Turning to the matters that the member for Prahran raised, I know he has been a very strong advocate, ensuring there are appropriate security systems in the estates within his electorate. Indeed he points to the security upgrades which were announced by the previous minister at 25 and 27 King Street, Prahran, which were completed in March 2006 at a cost of \$400 000.

Those security systems included an access-control system, which is basically a card system for entry into the public housing blocks; intercom systems where people on the ground floor can buzz up to residents to see whether they are home and get access into the buildings; and electronic surveillance by way of closed-circuit television as a third and important measure, because at the end of the day we want to ensure that residents living in this particular style of housing have appropriate levels of security made available to them.

The member for Prahran indicated that there were other areas that he has sought some assurances from the government about in terms of a further rollout of the security program. In particular the member asks me to

advise in relation to public housing at Malvern Road, South Yarra; Union Street, Windsor; Inkerman Street, St Kilda; Surrey Road, South Yarra; and Simmonds Street, South Yarra.

As a result of today's extraordinary and historic announcement by the Bracks government of the half a billion dollars further investment in public and social housing I am very pleased to report to the member for Prahran that all of those projects which he detailed in his adjournment matter will commence this year.

The residents of the area so ably represented by the member for Prahran can be advised that we will be rolling out a similar program of security services to his residents, and they deserve the quality of residence and security that all public tenants deserve. I welcome very much the support and advocacy he has shown to me but also to my predecessor in ensuring that the needs of his tenants are adequately addressed by the government, and I thank him for raising this matter with me tonight.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment) — I am very pleased to respond to the matter raised by the member for Mill Park regarding the continuing underfunding of higher education places by the federal government for Victoria. These are not just my statistics and figures; these are figures that have been provided more recently by the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee. No matter which way you look at the figures and try to cut or interpret the data, it continues to show that Victoria in 2007, as in years in the previous decade, continued to have the largest amount of unmet demand of any Australian state at exactly the time that we have more young people completing year 12 or its equivalent.

That really demonstrates that the Bracks government is doing its job when it comes to its responsibilities in education. We have the primary responsibility in government education, and in primary and secondary years, and we are seeing great results in literacy and numeracy at levels at or above the national average; in year 12 completion rates we are the best in the country. We have made over \$1 billion additional investment in the vocational education and training sector.

In the one area that the federal government has primary responsibility for — university funding — it is dudding Victoria, and it is so disappointing to see The Nationals letting their mates in Canberra off the hook by not joining with us in lobbying the federal government for additional places. I can assure the house and the member for Mill Park that is exactly what I will be doing. Indeed I have written again recently to the federal education minister, repeating our call for more places in Victoria;

that is also why I have commissioned a study on looking at unmet demand — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN — It's funny: we are a bit old-fashioned on this side of the house because we like to present facts, and that is what we are doing. We are presenting facts to the federal government, facts showing us wanting to look at what the unmet demand is and how this is impacting industry. You guys on the opposition benches can laugh as much as you like — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The minister, through the Chair.

Ms ALLAN — The problem is that students who miss out on university places are not laughing, and the employers in industry who are missing out on university-trained graduates — exactly the people they need to fill their vacancies — are not laughing either. It is an absolute disgrace that members opposite continue to let the federal government off the hook.

We will not do that on this side of the house. We take our responsibilities in education seriously, and that is why we will continue to very strongly make the case to the federal government that Victoria in 2008 cannot be duded again in the allocation of higher education places.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Victorian Communities) — The member for Kororoit raised with me his concerns over volunteer recruitment in community organisations within his electorate. I am sure the house is aware of the valuable contribution that volunteers make within the state of Victoria, just as the member for Kororoit is aware of the valuable contribution they make in his electorate. The member is a champion for volunteers, and that is widely known within his electorate.

As the member pointed out, at no other time has the importance of volunteering been so evident. We have seen one of the worst bushfire seasons in Victoria's history, and we have watched thousands of volunteers right across the state rally and risk their lives to save the lives and property of other Victorians. These volunteers have done a fantastic job. You would think the members of the opposition would be supporting the volunteers; however, they are not.

The date of 14 May marks the beginning of National Volunteer Week here in Victoria. It will be a time to celebrate the contribution made by volunteers around the state. Accordingly it is time for all members of Parliament to promote the value of volunteering not just

for the recipients of volunteer services but also to the volunteers themselves. Research shows the volunteers actually benefit from improved health and wellbeing, as well as better employment opportunities. There is something in volunteering for the people who do it, as well as for those who are the direct beneficiaries of what volunteers undertake.

That is why the Bracks government has so far provided some \$14.7 million to encourage and support volunteering across Victoria. Of this, \$3 million was in the form of small volunteer grants, a program that was designed to specifically increase the opportunities for volunteering in local communities. So far the Bracks government has awarded almost 800 such grants, meaning that around 800 different community organisations across Victoria have benefited from the support we have shown for volunteering in Victoria.

One of these organisations was the Caroline Springs CFA (Country Fire Authority) brigade, which was granted some \$3000 to fund a new local recruitment campaign. The member for Kororoit will be pleased to know that this grant will recruit an extra 30 volunteers to the brigade and will help them undergo the necessary training to fulfil their objectives of wanting to help their local community.

But that that is not the end of the story, either for the member's electorate or across the state. The Bracks government has also committed \$10 million over three years in volunteer support grants. This money will go towards funding programs designed to strengthen and extend our volunteering support services and networks, and to provide models of good practice with the potential for applicability in other locations right across Victoria.

Volunteers are a valuable resource in Victoria. A survey conducted by my department, the Department for Victorian Communities, showed that 41 per cent of Victorians have volunteered. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has also noted that the amount of volunteering has increased over the last 10 years. It is estimated that volunteers provide around \$10 billion worth of unpaid services each year. But the benefits to the state are not only financial. Volunteering brings people together, and it strengthens communities. That is why the Bracks government is interested in helping volunteering and helping volunteer organisations.

I look forward to announcing the next round of volunteers small grants, and along with the member I look forward to hearing how the new volunteers at the Caroline Springs CFA station are going, not only with their training but putting that training into practice.

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — The member for Cranbourne raised an important issue of concern to a large number of constituents in his local community, and I commend him for being an advocate for his local community, particularly in relation to consumer protection matters.

The member raised concerns about outstanding moneys that are payable to the State Revenue Office by virtue of stamp duty payments that should have been levied at the time of sale or purchase of various residential properties, but it would appear — and I emphasise ‘appear’, given that investigations are ongoing — that due to the actions of an estate agent those charges were not appropriately levied.

We take these matters very seriously and officers from Consumer Affairs Victoria together with other agencies are examining the conduct of the estate agent or the estate agency in a broader sense for any potential breaches of the Estate Agents Act or the Fair Trading Act. As I said these are important matters, and I understand from other representations and the member’s representations this evening, that many people in his community are experiencing difficulties in terms of this call upon their own financial resources, given the high level of debt some of them may be faced with in having only recently moved into those homes, only to be hit with a bill, out of the blue as it were, which is a significant impost on them.

As I said, inquiries and investigations are being made in terms of any breach against the Estate Agents Act or the Fair Trading Act. The matter is being taken seriously as there could also potentially be breaches of the Crimes Act. Officers of Consumer Affairs Victoria will diligently and efficiently investigate those matters, hopefully to the satisfaction of all those who were involved.

In terms of specific action, the member asks me to take action by providing advice and ongoing assistance to the affected families in his community. I can advise the member that Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV), following discussions with me last week, has established a dedicated 1300 number — that is, 1300 364 894 — and staff within the overall CAV 1300 unit have been briefed to deal with this particular issue. In addition, there is a range of other practical supports that can be provided to the families. I will seek advice from my department — —

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr ANDREWS — The member for South-West Coast should understand that this is an important matter

and is being treated with the same degree of seriousness and attention as was given to a matter in his local community during the last sitting week. The member for Cranbourne has raised a legitimate issue and he ought to be able to hear me respond to him.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for South-West Coast will cease interjecting, and the minister should return to his response.

Mr ANDREWS — The member has asked for action in terms of providing advice and assistance to those affected families. As I just said, the government has set up a dedicated phone line. I will also seek advice from my department as to whether other information sessions or face-to-face contact or briefings at the local level can be provided to those particular families. These are serious matters. We take them seriously and action has been taken. We will continue to support those families, and I thank and congratulate the member for Cranbourne for being a passionate advocate on behalf of families in his local community.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment) — The member for Bass raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports, and I will refer that matter for his attention and response.

The member for Mornington raised a matter for the Minister for Planning in the other place, and I will refer that to him for his attention and response.

The member for Benambra raised a matter for the Minister for Community Services regarding school nurses. In referring this matter to the minister I can comment to the member for Benambra that I share some responsibility for the school nursing program in the education and services portfolio. There are school nurses who operate out of the Department of Human Services — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN — I am sure the member for Benambra would like to hear this answer. In terms of the issues, we are doing significant works right around the state as detailed in today’s budget. Our largest capital injection in school funding and school building works in Victoria’s history will result in a range of operations at different secondary schools around the state. The secondary colleges in Wodonga have come together in a very cooperative way and obviously this is one of the unintended consequences of those arrangements. I will have a look at what the member has raised in terms of the changed allocation for the school nursing system. I would appreciate receiving any material that the

member for Benambra is happy to provide to me following tonight's adjournment debate.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Agriculture that I will refer to his attention.

The member for Geelong raised a matter for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services about road safety on the Geelong–Melbourne road — and in particular about tailgating — that I will refer to the minister for his response.

Finally, the member for Rodney absurdly raised a matter for the Treasurer regarding today's state budget. You would have thought the member for Rodney would at least have the good grace to say thank you. You would have thought he would say thank you to the state government for supporting his electorate, thank you for supporting the schools in Echuca and thank you for supporting the farmers in the Rodney electorate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The minister should simply refer the matter.

Ms ALLAN — Unfortunately, Deputy Speaker, we did not hear that from the member for Rodney. In referring this matter to the Treasurer, can I also comment in passing that the member was wanting government support for farmers in the northern region. Maybe the member missed the \$157 million that we provided in drought support to farmers across the state.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The minister should simply refer the matter.

Ms ALLAN — Maybe the member missed that funding in today's state budget. However, I am sure the Treasurer will welcome the opportunity to provide a fulsome response to the member for Rodney to put the record straight, because it is the Bracks government that supports country Victoria and it is the Bracks government that will continue to support them, whether they are farmers or people living in regional communities.

We remember what it was like when the former Premier called country Victoria the toenails of the state. That is not what this government will do, and today's state budget, which provides \$1 billion in new initiatives and additional funding for provincial Victoria, will be warmly welcomed. It is just a shame that the member for Rodney is falling into some bad old National Party habits.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 10.49 p.m.