

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Thursday, 15 February 2007

(Extract from book 2)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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The Lieutenant-Governor

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Council — Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr W. R. Tunnecliffe

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Dr S. O'Kane

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FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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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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Kotsiras, Mr Nicholas	Bulleen	LP	Weller, Mr Paul	Rodney	Nats
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Languiller, Mr Telmo Ramon	Derrimut	ALP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling	Doncaster	LP
Lim, Mr Muy Hong	Clayton	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

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Thursday, 15 February 2007

The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 9.31 a.m. and read the prayer.

RULINGS BY THE CHAIR***Hansard*: incorporation of photographs**

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise the house that yesterday a precedent was set in the other place whereby a photograph was incorporated in *Hansard*. This should not be seen by members as a practice that I will allow in this place.

Mr Baillieu — On a point of order, Speaker, I am aware that photographs have been incorporated in *Hansard* as a result of activity in the Assembly chamber in the past. I invite you to look again at that opportunity.

The SPEAKER — Order! I am certainly not aware of photos having been incorporated in *Hansard*. On this occasion it was in relation to a members statement. I am quite happy to clarify it. There could obviously be occasions when my ruling could be reviewed, but not as a general rule for members statements.

Mr Baillieu — Further on the point of order, Speaker, to the best of my knowledge in the past those photographs have been incorporated with the agreement of the parties in the house.

The SPEAKER — Order! I will take it on board, but it is not my intention to allow as a general rule the incorporation of photographs in *Hansard*, particularly not for members statements.

SHADOW MINISTRY

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — I advise changes to frontbench responsibilities. In the other place David Davis, a member for Southern Metropolitan Region, will be responsible for manufacturing and export, and in the Assembly the member for Sandringham will be responsible for scrutiny of government.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Gas: Phillip Island supply

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria sheweth that natural gas be made available to residents of Phillip Island.

Phillip Island is one of Victoria's and Australia's major tourist destinations and it is a community which is consistently growing. There is ample support for this service to be established in this thriving community.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the Bracks state government supports the establishment of natural gas on Phillip Island, Victoria, as a matter of utmost urgency.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray.

By Mr K. SMITH (Bass) (650 signatures)

Bittern: drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

We, the undersigned citizens of Victoria, draw to the attention of the house plans for a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in Bittern, Victoria. This project has been established without notifying or consulting the community of Bittern. We strongly object to any developments within our community, such as this centre, that are established without community consultation and urgently request that the community participates in this planning decision.

We, the undersigned concerned citizens of Victoria, ask the Legislative Assembly of Victoria to:

provide a fair and open process of community consultation in the establishment of this drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in Bittern, Victoria; and

revise existing legislation that allows drug and rehabilitation centres to be built in residential areas without community consultation and planning permits; this will ensure that the community continues to have a say in local planning decisions.

By Mr BURGESS (Hastings) (1745 signatures)

Planning: Mornington Peninsula development

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the undersigned residents of Victoria calls on the house to reject the plan by the Bracks government for the Mornington Peninsula to become another suburb of Melbourne, and requests that the area have a separate and district planning scheme that allows for the rejection of inappropriate development and high-rise buildings, and enables the special character of the Mornington Peninsula to be retained and enhanced.

By Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (620 signatures)

Nepean Highway—Uralla Road, Mount Martha: safety

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria sheweth that the intersection of Uralla Road and Nepean Highway, in the suburb of Mount Martha, is extremely dangerous and unable to safely cope with the current and ever-growing traffic volume.

Traffic at this dangerous intersection is likely to increase by approximately 20 per cent with the establishment of the new Balcombe Grammar School.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the Bracks state government urgently fund the upgrade of the Uralla Road and Nepean Highway intersection, Mount Martha, as a matter of utmost urgency.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (73 signatures)

Tabled.

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Bass be considered next day on motion of Mr K. SMITH (Bass).

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

Ordered that petitions presented by honourable member for Mornington be considered next day on motion of Mr MORRIS (Mornington).

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria — Report year ended 30 September 2006

Ombudsman — Own motion investigation into the policies and procedures of the planning department at the City of Greater Geelong — Ordered to be printed

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

Cardinia — C93

Casey — C3

Darebin — C69

Colac Otway — C22

Moira — C20 Part 2

Mount Alexander — C25

Rural Finance Act 1988 — Direction to administer exceptional circumstances assistance under the Rural Adjustment Scheme.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Adjournment

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Mental Health) — I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday, 27 February 2007.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Ministers: conduct

Mr K. SMITH (Bass) — The government claims that it was elected for being open, transparent and accountable, but that lie flew out the window last week, when two of the most senior government people did not have the guts to meet with a handful of farmers who wanted to discuss the worst water crisis to face Victoria. These two gutless wonders, the Premier and the Deputy Premier and Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change, conspired with an adviser to get the farmers into a building on the promise of a discussion. Then, after a thumbs-up from the adviser that the farmers were inside, the two gutless wonders jumped into their chauffer-driven limousine and drove off. I cannot believe they could do something like that and not even be prepared to meet with these farmers, who have suffered so much.

They were up there for a media event regarding the promised pipeline, but it turned into a media embarrassment for them. There were two other ministers and a former minister who also did not have the guts to meet with those local people, and they were local members. It is amazing the difference before and after the election. Before the election those five Bracks socialist government ministers would have been crawling over people just to get their votes. Two and a half months later, what a difference there is: now they do not even want to talk to them! These are the actions of an arrogant bunch of gutless pinkos.

Marjory Walkowski

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Mental Health) — I rise to acknowledge the wonderful life and work of a well-known Geelong identity, Marjory Walkowski, who died on 31 December last year. Marjory devoted

her life to service, both overseas in the air force and to the local community in Geelong.

Marjory began work at the Geelong Hospital in 1950, serving as a supervisor of the maternity wing and then as director of nursing from 1956 to 1981. She played an active role on the board of Karingal for 17 years, working with people with intellectual disabilities. She was also one of the founders as a board member of the Geelong Hospice Care Association. She made significant contributions to other local organisations, including the Geelong Polish Senior Citizens Club and the Association of Independent Retirees, and was a member of her local University of the Third Age and the Geelong YWCA board. Marjory made other contributions as well at a state level to the National Florence Nightingale Committee of Australia and to the board of management of the Fairfield hospital.

Mrs Walkowski was also an inaugural member of the Ministerial Advisory Council of Senior Victorians, serving from early 2001 until 2003, when she resigned due to ill health. In my new role as Minister for Aged Care I am conscious of the valuable role this council plays, and I am aware of her great contribution to the council. She was also awarded the Order of Australia in 1980.

Marjory Walkowski was a great contributor throughout her life as a health professional and a volunteer, and I pay tribute to her and the life she lived.

Drought: government assistance

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — The drought is hurting many people in country Victoria, and the hurt is going to get worse and continue for a long time yet. I call on the Bracks government to substantially increase the level of support to affected families, businesses and communities. The government should make it easier for those affected to receive assistance so that proud, independent but emotionally stressed people can get help whilst retaining their dignity and self-esteem.

Specific measures which would provide significant benefit include: increased funding for stock containment areas; cash grants to affected farmers whose costs of getting through the drought often run into hundreds of thousands of dollars; more support for small businesses, such as building on the Regional Development Victoria business continuity program; extending the \$1000 tank rebate to all Victorians and not just to those on reticulated water supplies; providing rebates to people who are forced to cart water for stock and domestic purposes; and providing rate relief to drought-affected local government areas by an

allocation of money to each local government area to enable them to reduce rates to, say, 5 per cent for ratepayers.

The Nationals represent most of country Victoria, and we have a good appreciation of the issues. We are keen to work with the government to help our communities through tough times. What about it, Premier Bracks? Is the Premier prepared to use the extensive experience of Nationals members to help him live up to his claim that he governs for all Victorians?

Champions for Werribee project

Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) — I rise to speak about an excellent community-based initiative that is taking shape in my electorate of Tarneit; it is the Champions for Werribee project. This visionary project will see notable personalities from sporting, cultural and community fields working closely as mentors to the students of Werribee Secondary College as a pilot program, with the potential for broader application.

I would like to acknowledge particularly former Prime Minister Bob Hawke for his support in officially launching this initiative. Werribee Secondary College has a proud history of offering academic excellence to students in its community. Aably led by principal Steve Butyn, the school has the distinction of possessing international school accreditation and will soon offer the International Baccalaureate to its students.

The Bracks government is not only supporting the Champions for Werribee project through the Department for Victorian Communities but is also upgrading school facilities across Tarneit. Local students will benefit from an improved learning environment thanks to the government's commitment to fund stage 2 of the Werribee Secondary College's building program.

Other schools in my electorate, such as Cambridge Primary School, Manorvale Primary School, Mossfield Primary School and Warringa Park Special School, are all enjoying improved facilities funded by this government. These programs are indicative of the Bracks government's commitment to providing all young people with the best possible start in life.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the Western Bulldogs Football Club for being the provider of the inaugural group of mentors and role models through the Champions for Werribee project. I am sure this concept will expand to include many more community leaders.

Government: performance

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — I wish to lament the failures of the Bracks government. They include the failure to properly manage public transport needs on the Sandringham and Frankston train lines, leading to commuters having to board overcrowded trains at stations or having to squeeze into trains that are already overcrowded so as to avoid their being late for appointments. According to the latest available Connex statistics, the Sandringham line had the most train cancellations of any line in Victoria. That is a disgrace.

I also wish to lament the dismantling of the police in schools program by the Bracks government. That program had a profound effect on relationships between young people and members of the police force over a considerable period.

I also wish to lament the failure of the Bracks government to properly introduce water recycling measures at Southern Cross station. It is now retrofitting an arrangement at massive costs to the taxpayer.

I wish to lament the failure of the Bracks government to properly address the issue of housing stock to enable the provision of accommodation within a reasonable time frame for a large number of Victorians who are on the priority and standard housing waiting lists.

I wish to lament the outright hypocrisy of the Bracks government in that it has failed to fulfil undertakings given a number of years ago to repeal over 200 acts of Parliament which prohibited access to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. Not only has it failed to remove those acts from the statute book but during its time in office it has introduced around 100 more acts that contain section 85 provisions.

Fr Peter Norden

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Local Government) — I rise to acknowledge Fr Peter Norden, SJ, who on Australia Day was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia. There are few people I can think of who would be more deserving recipients of this high honour. Fr Peter Norden recently celebrated 25 years as a priest of the Jesuit order, and in that time he has been a tireless advocate and servant of the forgotten members of our society.

He is most widely known by Melburnians for his service as chaplain at Pentridge Prison in Melbourne after the retirement of the iconic Fr Brosnan. Since then he has served as policy director of Catholic Social Services and separately for Jesuit Social Services as

executive director, policy director and associate director. In these roles he has made a seminal contribution to his Jesuit calling of standing up on social justice issues for the poor and marginalised in our society.

Peter has also been parish priest of St Ignatius Church in Richmond for some years and has worked tirelessly for the refugee communities in our public housing estates. Of particular note has been his work with the East Timorese community. It was Peter who helped lead the successful campaign to keep these long-time residents in their homes in Melbourne. But there is much more to Peter's outstanding contribution to our community, whether in academia, in social justice or in service to offenders and young people and to the mental health sector. He is as fierce a competitor as he is an advocate of social justice. I can attest to his sporting prowess through the broken nose he gave me in a social game of football.

I applaud this timely acknowledgement of Peter Norden as an Officer of the Order of Australia, and I look forward to a continued collaboration with him in support of the disadvantaged in our community.

Telstra: Kew tower

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — I start by acknowledging Trinity Grammar School, one of the great schools in my electorate.

Telstra plans to build a mobile phone tower above the Willsmere shops in the Kew electorate. Telstra's proposal has caused great concern in the community around Willsmere shops. Many parents, residents and traders have spoken to me, arguing that the Telstra tower is in the wrong place — only metres away from a local kindergarten on one side and a playground nearby. Telstra has lodged plans with Boroondara council and invited comment, and that is probably appropriate, but it is not subject to normal planning laws as we know them. However as was reported in the latest edition of the *Progress Leader*, Telstra spokesman Mr Pat O'Beirne said the tower is a:

... part of Telstra's next G-network rollout and necessary with the Kew cottages development expected to increase demand for coverage.

The Bracks government has already started the disgraceful overdevelopment of Kew Cottages without regard for the impact it will have on local traffic, schools or the local amenity. On top of all this the Bracks government's overdevelopment will see Telstra's tower dumped where it is not needed and not wanted. And on top of that, the Bracks government

could solve this problem by inviting Telstra to build it where it is needed, at the Kew Cottages.

Malcolm McKay

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — Gentle and strong was Mal McKay. And for Marj, with whom he shared a loving 54 years of marriage, he was not, as has often been suggested, a man in a million — he was a man in 10 million. That made Mal one of Australia's most treasured people. This accolade was echoed repeatedly during his life by all whose paths he touched. Too often kind words are spoken about a person after they pass on; but with Mal, those who knew him commented repeatedly on his goodness. He touched one's life rather than crossed one's path.

Mal, unlike so many others, was always genuinely interested in each and every person he met. He made time for a quick or long chat, depending on what was appropriate, and he remembered details about people, and children in particular, that showed that his 'Hello, how are you?' was a true question, which in turn meant that people gave him an honest answer. From there the conversation could go where it was required.

Mal became a mentor to hundreds of children and often their parents. His pride in our children could only have been a reflection of his immense and intense pride in his own children, Colin, Sheryl, Allan, David, Malcolm and Gaylene, and in their spouses and 17 grandchildren. We thank them for sharing him with us.

Thanks to Mal and Marj the Strathmore Unicorns Basketball Club is a vibrant club. Mal was a co-founder of the Broadmeadows Basketball Association. He always encouraged children to do their best. He encouraged people who normally would not play basketball to do so; he helped them in every way to participate.

Preschools: funding

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — Our youth are our investment in the future, and I again express my extreme disappointment that country preschools are starting another year not under the control of the Department of Education. I congratulate the new Minister for Children on her appointment and ask her to review the funding and operations of our country preschools.

Children from birth through to adolescence require a supportive and nurturing environment in the home and in educational settings for the optimal development. There is plenty of evidence in Australia and internationally showing that early childhood

development sets a trajectory for outcomes in adult life. Research has shown that investment in preschool education has a very positive effect on later life. My travels around my electorate, like those of the new member for Mildura, reveal that most of our preschools are finding it very difficult or nearly impossible to raise funds to continue on top of the difficulties of attracting qualified teachers. It is a worrying trend that local government is being forced to take control of our preschools.

I bring to the attention of the minister that there is strong support in western Victoria for preschools to come under the control of the Department of Education, as they are in South Australia. I call on this government to follow The Nationals policy and move preschools into the education department or at least increase funding to alleviate the strain on committees of management which are being forced to raise about \$20 000 each just to open their doors. We in western Victoria want our fair share from this Labor government in Melbourne. It must increase investment in our country preschools to allow more of our children to enrol and increase the country participation rate, which is nearly 3 per cent lower than in the city.

John Dixon

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — Today I pay tribute to the life of John William Dixon, known as Jack. Jack Dixon passed away on 5 January 2007 after a brief illness. Jack was born on 23 April 1915, two days before the landing of the Anzac forces at Gallipoli. Jack served in World War II when he joined the Royal Australian Air Force in August 1941 and ceased his military service in 1948. Jack met, in his words, his 'wonderful wife', Margaret, after Sunday night benediction. I believe he also followed her home — but never mind, we will not go into that — —

An honourable member — I think that's stalking.

Mr LANGDON — That is stalking! He married her, after a short courtship, in St Mary's Church, Thornbury, on Australia Day 1952. Jack and Margaret had four children, Christopher, Martin, Anne and Maureen. Jack was extremely proud of his children and is known to have said, 'Four lovely children, all of whom are doing their best for the betterment of the community'. We have Martin, the Liberal member for Nepean, in the house today, Chris is a member of the ALP in Ivanhoe, Anne is with the Catholic Church and Maureen is in the teaching profession. Clearly Jack encouraged a range of ideas at home. Jack was a pillar of St Pius X Catholic Church in West Heidelberg and was involved with a large range of community groups

over the years. It was a privilege to have known him. Jack will be sadly missed by all who knew him. My sincere condolences to a family I know very well — his wife, Margaret, his children, their partners and his grandchildren.

Gaming: regional caps

Mr O'BRIEN (Malvern) — The Bracks government's gaming policies mean that 543 poker machines are required to be shifted from some suburbs to others by December this year. Under Labor any non-capped local government area with fewer than 10 machines per 1000 adults can be targeted to receive an increase up to that amount. The city of Stonnington, which includes the electorates of Malvern and Prahran, has 3.8 machines per 1000 adults. This means that under Labor's policies Stonnington faces a potential increase of up to 480 new machines. My constituents do not want an additional 480 poker machines. They do not need an additional 480 poker machines in their backyards, but under this government's policies that is what they could get.

I am sure that even the member for Prahran would concede that his constituents do not want 480 new pokies. What is worse, under Labor's planning laws, local communities are completely powerless to stop an influx of new pokies, as the recent Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal decisions affecting the Romsey and Ringwood communities demonstrate. This government's flawed regional pokies caps policy means that many communities in Victoria are now under threat. The Bracks government's gaming policies have been a monumental failure, and the threat to communities such as Stonnington is just one more example of that failure.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the member for Narre Warren North I remind him that as he enters and leaves the chamber he needs to acknowledge the Chair.

Human rights: Vietnam

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — Speaker, I apologise, for that oversight.

I want to raise concerns about recent activities of the Vietnamese government and the arrest of human rights lawyer Nguyen Van Dai, who is also a member of the Bloc 8406 pro-democracy movement in Vietnam. Recently he and five other cyber-activists were arrested between 3 and 4 February on the ground of trying to overthrow the government. This contrasts starkly with the recent activities of the Prime Minister of Vietnam

who, on 10 February, had an online chat with more than 20 000 Vietnamese people, during which he suggested that the country has free speech, free media and so forth.

He went on for about 2½ hours, answering what I suspect were set-up questions. At the end a question was posed to him as to why all 600 media outlets in Vietnam were still controlled by the state. At the end of the day Vietnam needs to deal with this issue quite properly. I think there was pressure on them at the time by the World Trade Organisation to deal with freedom of the press. The Americans applied enormous pressure. For some reason Australia decided not to put pressure on them along those lines. The result of not putting pressure on Vietnam is that they continue to behave in this way and harass human rights and pro-democracy activists.

Warrandyte Road, Warrandyte: pedestrian crossing

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — I rise to speak on one of the many promises that this government made in the lead-up to the election. The promise made to the residents of the Warrandyte township was in relation to the upgrade of the pedestrian crossing on the township's main street. This upgrade was to include pedestrian-operated traffic lights and kerb ramps to allow easier access for the disabled and for the elderly.

The local police and community consultative committee has been campaigning for this crossing since 2002. They are concerned that the safety of pedestrians and motorists has been at risk for the four years the community has been waiting for government action and will continue to be at risk while this upgrade is delayed. The current 'flashing legs' style of crossing has been of concern to local residents and shop owners for some time.

Correspondence with the previous Minister for Transport and with VicRoads over the past four years has resulted in standard delaying responses. However, one month before the election the Labor candidate announced the upgrade would commence. He described the government's response after this four-year wait as 'an example of the government continuing to provide the highest commitment to benefit the local community'.

The Minister for Roads and Ports has so far declined to confirm when the upgrade will occur or even whether the government will uphold its election promise. I call on the minister to make good on the government's

promise to the people of Warrandyte and to deliver this project without further delay.

Australia Day: Macedon Ranges awards

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — It gives me pleasure to talk about the Australia Day celebrations that were held at the Top of the Range Tearooms in Mount Macedon on 26 January. I was accompanied to the event by the mayor and councillors. Individuals and groups that have made outstanding contributions to our communities were recognised.

The Australia Day ambassador was former champion golfer Peter Thomson. The 2007 Australia Day citizen of the year for Macedon Ranges was awarded to Larina Strauch. Larina has a long commitment to many community groups. She is a local historian who has published a number of histories about local groups. She is a friend of the botanic gardens. There is hardly an event where Larina has not had some part to play.

The young citizen of the year was Jessica John. A student from Romsey, Jessica has made an outstanding contribution to her school and local community through her involvement with the Youth Dimensions program at Gisborne Secondary College and the Romsey youth group. She has also played a key role in organising the first skate competition by the Romsey youth group.

The community achievement award went to Loy Jackson. Loy has been involved in the Woodend community since 1969 through local sporting groups, including netball, athletics, tennis and swimming. Loy has been involved with the Woodend Lions Club since it started in 1972 and has been a key organiser in the annual Woodend art show, Carols by Candlelight and the monthly Woodend market.

Dianne Dale is a State Emergency Service and Country Fire Authority volunteer, a local businesswoman, and a prolific fundraiser for both of those groups.

Lachlan Milne works for the council on environmental affairs and goes well above and beyond his duties.

Wodonga Senior Secondary College: school nurse

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) — I stand to condemn the Labor government for the reduction by two-thirds of the three Wodonga Secondary School campuses' nursing allocation. This bombshell was dropped in the second week of January, a mere two weeks before students were due to return to school; or, in the case of year 7 students, before they began their secondary

school careers. The Department of Human Services announced:

The amalgamation of the three schools ... has resulted in the three former schools now being classified as one school and therefore being eligible for only one 0.5 FTE secondary school nurse position rather than the three 0.5 FTE positions previously allocated.

During the 2006 school year Mitchell College, Wodonga High School and Wodonga West Secondary College rearranged their year groups to become Wodonga Middle Years College, Huon; Wodonga Middle Years College, Felltimber; and Wodonga Senior Secondary College. The schools have changed in name only and not demographics. The same number of students attend these three secondary schools and the campuses have not moved. They have simply created a senior college and two middle-years colleges.

It is vitally important for adolescents to have school-hours access to a nurse. All students should be able to turn to someone other than a teacher for any physical, psychological or personal medical issues; that is equally important for year 7 students who will come from small rural schools and who may be overwhelmed by the sheer size of their new environment. Time and again the Bracks government has emphasised the need for health education assistance to do with the burgeoning problem of childhood obesity.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired.

Australia Day: Casey awards

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — On Australia Day I attended the City of Casey Citizen of the Year awards, which included an award for the community event of the year. It was a terrific occasion and illustrated that community spirit is well and truly alive in the electorate of Narre Warren South.

There were six nominees for the Senior Citizen of the Year award, and all of them would have been worthy winners. Nominees included people like Edith Krause, who has provided foster care to more than 200 children; Ted Clay, who has been an outstanding member of the Country Fire Authority for 50 years; and Margaret Trickey, who has volunteered at the Hampton Park opportunity shop for 15 years. The award was won by Tom Hartley, who has made an outstanding contribution to our local community through his involvement in scouting over 50 years. He has been an inspiration to hundreds of young people who have benefited from his wisdom, patience and compassion.

The young citizen of the year award went to Nicholas Bell, a student at Beaconhills College, who is truly committed to working and caring for others; and in a cause close to my own heart, he is the convenor of the East Timor Friendship Committee as well as a participant in the Christmas tree fundraiser. I look forward to Nicholas and the other young citizens who were nominated taking up leadership roles in our local community in future years.

The Casey Citizen of the Year award was won by Margaret Fairhurst, who has devoted endless hours to the local community through her involvement with scouting, local schools and community events. I caught up with Margaret at a recent citizenship ceremony, and she is really enjoying her ambassadorial role. I am sure that all who meet her will be inspired by her drive and energy and, most of all, by her encouraging smile. All in all, it was a great event with some great community leaders being deservedly recognised.

Drought: northern Victoria

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — I rise to speak about the current drought conditions in northern Victoria which are continuing to exert enormous pressure on our farming sector. Reduced water allocations — in the Goulburn system it is 24 per cent, and in the Campaspe system it is zero — a lack of feed for stock, difficulty in sourcing grain and fodder, increased costs and escalating debt are contributing to rising stress levels amongst farmers. The year 2006 will be remembered for being the 10th consecutive year of below-normal rainfall. It was the third-driest year on record for Victoria.

The forecast economic growth in Victoria for 2006 has been revised down since the presentation of the 2006–07 budget, reflecting the impact of drought conditions on agricultural output. Milk production in Rodney is close to 20 per cent down for the month of January, even though farmers have invested heavily in extra grain and hay or whatever they can get to feed their cows. When it comes to prime lamb and beef, producers have simply destocked. National sheep numbers are expected to drop to their lowest levels for 60 years during 2007.

The drought is not over. We call on the Bracks government to bring in rebates for farmers who have to cart water for stock and domestic purposes, as well as \$20 000 cash grants. That would give farmers real support rather than pretend support.

Australia Day: Eltham electorate awards

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — I would like to congratulate the following people from my electorate of Eltham who were recipients of Australia Day awards, which were organised by Jenny Macklin, the federal member for Jagajaga. Alison Buist has put in a tremendous amount of time and effort as the membership secretary of the Eltham Toy Library and has helped provide a fantastic time for many parents and young children in Eltham. Lindsay and Peggy Enderby have enriched their community as lay preachers in the Uniting Church for a number of decades and have organised the Richmond Ecumenical Foodshare for the past 20 years. Andrew Evans, the president of the Eltham East Primary School council, is a valuable volunteer and has shown terrific leadership in improving educational outcomes at that great local school.

Fay Gravenall, the secretary of the Nillumbik Landcare Network and Friends of Wattle Ward, is a passionate volunteer for many environmental causes. Sharon Naughton has been a hardworking volunteer with the Diamond Valley Foodshare for 11 years and has helped literally hundreds of people. Glynn Pritchard has volunteered in the community at St Margaret's Anglican Church for over 40 years and has helped strengthen enormously that church community. Penny Puckey, the founding principal of the Plenty Valley Montessori School, personally provides food hampers and household items for those in need. Finally, David Snowdon, the secretary of the Diamond Valley Prostate Support Group, has raised awareness of this important health issue, particularly through the 2006 Men's Health Awareness Concert.

Port of Hastings: expansion

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) — I support some expansion of the port of Hastings, because I want members of my community to have the small business and job opportunities which will come from a thriving port. However, my support is entirely conditional upon two things: firstly, that there is an upfront and full environment effects statement, not the staged EES that has been proposed by the Port of Hastings Corporation; and secondly, that the development is planned and implemented in a way that is sensitive to the needs and desires of the local community.

I would like to place on the record just some of the actions and plans of the Port of Hastings Corporation that I oppose and will fight to either improve or stop. Firstly, there has been no effective consultation with the community. Many of those who will be the most

dramatically affected by this plan still do not know of its existence. The incompetent manner in which this process has been conducted has only served to alienate the community and reduce support for the port expansion.

Secondly, for more than 40 years successive governments have planned to service an expanded port of Hastings by establishing a rail connection through the Western Port Highway corridor. The corporation has used cost as an excuse to dump that plan in favour of a new route that would cut a swathe through many rural communities, including Pearcedale, Devon Meadows and Clyde. I totally oppose this freight train route.

Thirdly, against the recommendations of its own consultants the Port of Hastings Corporation decided to also include Crib Point in its port development plans. What wonderful development is earmarked for this beautiful little community? It is a bitumen plant.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired. The member for Cranbourne has 40 seconds.

Aged care: Frankston North centre

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — Only 50 of 180 beds will be made available as concession beds in the proposed aged-care centre to be constructed right in the heart of Frankston North in my electorate of Cranbourne. Of the 50 beds that are being made available as concession beds, 25 will be taken up by residents from the proposed closure of the Milpara Park aged-care facility in Frankston.

Over 1000 residents are over the age of 65. Many of them live in one bed Office of Housing accommodation with no family support. They are reliant on home and community care funding and Meals on Wheels services to see them through, day by day. I certainly hope that the mayor and the councillors of the City of Frankston will join me and take the opportunity to start campaigning on the ratepayers behalf — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! The member's time has expired.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed from 14 February; motion of Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) for adoption of address-in-reply.

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — Last night I was highlighting the significant gap between the spin in the Governor's speech, which was prepared by government spin doctors, and the government's failure on the ground to deliver its promises. I talked about its failure to deliver rail standardisation to western Victoria. I also talked about its failure to deliver on alternate energy, closing down the geothermal bore.

This morning I wish to highlight another example of the Bracks Labor government's failure to deliver on its rhetoric, because it is completely letting down its heartland supporters in the western suburbs of Melbourne. I will examine the transport of goods to and from the port of Melbourne. In *Growing Victoria Together*, a 2001 statement, the Labor government promised the following:

The proportion of freight transported to ports by rail will increase from 10 per cent to 30 per cent.

In November 2004 it reiterated this commitment in the *Victorian Ports Strategic Framework*, in which it also said:

More than 80 per cent of container movements to and from the port of Melbourne are by road, and 89 per cent of containers handled in the port involve multiple moves before reaching their destination. Rail's share of Melbourne's port traffic is growing — assisted by a new rail link servicing West Swanston Dock, the use of long trains into the port and the start of port shuttle services.

This is what the government said in 2004. In April 2006 there was a report produced by Booz Allen Hamilton, which did a consultancy for the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission. The report says:

Increased rail market share, particularly for containerised cargoes (most notably import containers where rail's share is very low). This is most likely to come from the successful development of a commercially viable metro rail freight shuttle network linking the port of Melbourne to a number of intermodal terminals ...

What this report says is that to achieve the 30 per cent target and to get trucks off the road, you need port shuttle services to move the containers in and out of the port rather than putting them on trucks. The port development plan produced by the Port of Melbourne Corporation in August 2006 states:

An important part of achieving the government's 30 per cent rail mode share target is the development of viable shuttle train services between the outer urban intermodal terminals and the on-port rail terminals.

When looking at how that can best be achieved we need look no further than what the Victorian Freight

and Logistics Council said in its consultation paper of October 2006 — only late last year. It said:

The Victorian government announced a rail target for port cargoes of 30 per cent in 2010. This target cannot be achieved through increasing interstate long-haul cargoes or intrastate regional cargo volumes. The only solution to achieve this target is to focus on attracting the more than 1 million containers in the metropolitan Melbourne conurbation. By focusing on this market, the government is more likely to achieve the greatest impact and value for the limited funding available for investment. This target relies on a network of consolidation hubs to assemble a rail offering for port shuttle.

Everybody is saying that the only way to achieve this laudable target of 30 per cent of goods going in and out of the port on rail is to have an effective port shuttle service that takes those containers to areas where they can be further distributed, that takes the trucks out of the inner suburban area and out of the port area, and that improves the environment and the quality of life in that area.

In contrast to the government's rhetoric and its myriad reports — we have seen report after report from the government — stating that the rail target is part of its climate change strategy, its environmental improvement strategy and its transport strategy, and in contrast to the port of Melbourne saying that it is committed to this 30 per cent target, what do we find? We find a press release of 19 January from the CRT Group headed 'Port shuttle service closure', which states:

CRT Group wishes to advise that the port shuttle service operating between its Altona North terminal and the port of Melbourne will cease effective 18 February 2007.

Guess what? That is the only port shuttle service operating. It started in 2003, and it is closing in 2007. That is condemning the inner suburbs of Melbourne to an extra 3500 to 5000 truck movements, because it will take goods off the port shuttle and put them back on trucks. There will be more trucks on the West Gate Bridge, more trucks on Footscray Road and more trucks on Francis Street, and more pollution damaging the quality of life and health of residents and damaging the environment. But does this government care? No, it does not. The Bracks Labor government treats the environment with contempt, treats transport management with contempt and, worst of all, thumbs its nose at its heartland supporters in the inner suburbs of Melbourne. What are the consequences of this decision? I refer to an article published by the online Transport.Industry-News.net service, which states:

Victorian government policy calls for 30 per cent of shipping containers through the port of Melbourne to be carried by rail by 2015.

The actual promise was for 2010. The article states further:

But they've got Buckley's of achieving that if the imminent demise of CRT's pioneering port rail shuttle is anything to go by.

...

The company has had difficulty getting rail 'paths' to the port, and it took an hour's travel time for the 22-kilometre trip plus another 2 hours if the train was to go to Patrick or P & O.

What it is saying is that it is the incompetence of the Bracks Labor government that has scuttled the port shuttle. Indeed the *Lloyd's List Daily Commercial News* of 1 February states:

The exit of the port shuttle would create, Mr Dunn estimated, between 3000 and 3500 additional truck movements between Altona and Port Melbourne.

That's a conservative figure. It may increase.

It certainly will increase, because the trade in the port of Melbourne is increasing by an average of 8 to 10 per cent a year. There will be more trade and more trucks. The government strategy was to get these containers onto a rail shuttle service to reduce the number of trucks, but it failed to deliver. The only port shuttle service that was operating on rail is now closing, and the government is doing nothing about it. Those in government simply do not care about their constituents in the inner suburbs of Melbourne. They mouth the rhetoric and the spin about environment, climate change and quality of life, but they simply do not deliver. They are happy to sip their lattes on the foreshore of Williamstown, but they are not prepared to look after the quality of life of the people who live in Francis Street, Yarraville. Indeed the *Altona-Laverton Mail* of 24 January states:

Traffic on the West Gate Bridge is set to increase after logistics giant CRT Group's shock announcement that it will close the rail service ...

Residents can expect 3500 more truck trips along roads such as Francis Street in Footscray and the West Gate Bridge because of the rail service closure.

It is not as though the government could not do something about it. I refer to the *Melbourne Port@L Strategy — Consultation Draft* of August 2006, which says this about the port shuttle service:

Promoting an increase in rail activity will also require a systematic rail growth plan that recognizes the current lack of cost competitiveness of short-haul urban freight rail. Such a plan will need to address issues such as terminal governance, track access, operating protocols and other policy initiatives considered appropriate to encourage the use of the rail shuttles from the port to outer urban intermodal terminals.

Further on it says it will be facilitated by:

... promoting the progressive introduction of highly efficient metropolitan port shuttle trains running between outer urban intermodal terminals and the Swanson–Dynon precinct.

The government has identified the need for the shuttle services and identified the things it needs to do to make them happen, but it has simply failed to deliver because it does not care about its Labor heartland. It does not care about the inner suburbs of Melbourne; it does not care about the extra 3500 truck movements on the West Gate Bridge, Footscray Road and Francis Street; and it does not care about the people in Yarraville, Seddon and Footscray. The government simply does not care. The Governor's speech is full of rhetoric on climate change, on the environment and on health and quality-of-life issues, but when it was put to the test in its own heartland on its own promise to have 30 per cent of freight movements by rail, it simply let the rail shuttle service close down because it does not care — and it does not deliver.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms DUNCAN (Macedon).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

CONTROL OF WEAPONS AMENDMENT (PENALTIES) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 14 February; motion of Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services).

Ms RICHARDSON (Northcote) — I am pleased to rise in support of the Control of Weapons Amendment (Penalties) Bill. The purpose of this bill is to discourage the possession of controlled and prohibited weapons. In particular the bill increases the penalty for the possession of controlled weapons to 12 months imprisonment and the penalty for the possession of prohibited weapons to 2 years imprisonment. Reducing the likelihood of serious injury or death is a key objective of the bill — in other words, the bill seeks to enhance community safety.

The bill implements an important commitment given by the Bracks Labor government prior to the last state election. It is part of the Bracks government's broader strategy to improve community safety and tackle crime. The community has long held the view — I know it is shared by all members in this house, as demonstrated in this debate and in previous debates — that these

weapons, when used unlawfully, are a menace to individuals and to society. It is important that we act swiftly to contain the distribution and possession of these weapons.

The kinds of weapons we are talking about on the prohibited list — and there are 37 of them in total — range from flick-knives, swords, maces and daggers to extendable batons and crossbows. To obtain lawful possession of these weapons a person is required to demonstrate that they have a specific need for them. Weapons on the controlled weapons list include knives and machetes, which are potentially very dangerous but are also commonly used. These weapons are available only if a person can demonstrate that their use is lawful. I think the often-cited example is the machete in the backyard to clear away some undergrowth.

Unlawful possession and use of such weapons pose a very serious risk to the community. Of particular concern to me is the number of young people who feel it necessary to carry a weapon. Some claim that they somehow feel safer if they slip a weapon inside their clothing when they go about their daily lives, including attending school or university. Members may recall that a report was prepared last year following the security measures that were introduced in the Parliament and Treasury buildings. The report states that 30 knives were confiscated from schoolchildren visiting Parliament. So children who were off to learn about our democracy and how we do business in our state Parliament woke up in the morning thinking about their school excursion and slipped a knife into their pockets. It is very alarming and must be one of the greatest concerns for parents. It is something about which we need to learn a great deal more.

Recently the Department of Justice, through the Victorian Law Enforcement Drug Fund, sought to do just that. Funding was provided for a study conducted by RMIT University, in collaboration with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Victoria Police and the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. The aim of the study was to provide a better understanding of the motivation of a young person's desire to pocket a weapon or otherwise conceal a weapon in their clothing. The report, entitled *Living on Edge — Understanding the Social Context of Knife Carriage Among Young People*, makes the very important point that it is very difficult to determine the exact number of people choosing to carry weapons. Further study will have to be undertaken to try to learn how many people are carrying weapons and to understand why they are. I commend the authors of the report and the Bracks Labor government on its decision to fund that research. That study, along with this bill, is another example of

the government's broad strategy to improve community safety in Victoria.

Victoria is the safest mainland state in Australia. That has not happened just by accident. It is the safest because since its election the Bracks Labor government has implemented measure after measure such as this bill to tackle crime. What a proud record of achievement the Labor government has maintained. The Labor government's commitment to improving community safety has had a direct impact on the lives of the people living in Northcote. In the past five years we have had a crime rate reduction of 23 per cent. As I said, these things do not happen by accident. We have a new Northcote police station and a 15 per cent increase in the number of uniformed police. Clearly the measures introduced by the Bracks Labor government across the state, and particularly in Northcote, are having a direct impact on the crime rates in our community.

However, in spite of a fall in crime rates overall, there has been an alarming increase in the number of incidents involving weapon offences in the city of Darebin, in which Northcote is entirely contained. The increase of some 42 per cent is of great concern to the residents. Recently Northcote residents read in their local newspaper of a band of three individuals who confronted commuters leaving the Dennis railway station. The three of them came with a knife and batons and they took away property and cash. It was obviously a very intimidating experience for the local residents. A few weeks earlier those same three individuals had similarly approached commuters who had left the Regent railway station. Members of the community are obviously very concerned about those people targeting their neck of the woods. Incidents such as these have rightly increased community concern, and the Bracks Labor government has responded entirely appropriately.

I am very pleased that later in the legislative program the government will introduce further amendments to tackle crime and improve community safety. These amendments will ensure that the possession of a weapon on or around licensed premises will attract greater penalties. Members will have heard of many, many incidents arising from the mix of the possession of a prohibited or controlled weapon and alcohol, and the disastrous consequences that arise following a bump on the shoulder or a ridiculous tiff. The amendments that will be introduced later will also ensure that self-defence will no longer be a lawful excuse for carrying a controlled weapon. I look forward to the introduction of these measures. Getting these weapons

off the streets is a key objective of this bill and therefore I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs VICTORIA (Bayswater) — I am pleased to speak in support of the Control of Weapons Amendment (Penalties) Bill. I am always really happy to support measures intended to protect my fellow Victorians. In speaking about Victorians, I want to speak very dearly about the people in the seat of Bayswater, which includes suburbs such as Boronia, Knoxfield and Ringwood. Every now and then suburbs in my electorate are featured adversely in the media. We do not want to hear or read a lot of that, but it is easy to understand why when we look at the crime figures.

Two-thirds of my electorate is in the city of Knox. The 2005–06 provisional crime statistics show an astounding increase in serious crime in Knox. Homicides went up by 133 per cent. The fact is that people are four to five times more likely to be stabbed with the types of weapons that the bill addresses than they are to be shot. It is hoped that the sorts of statistics that have been provided will decrease following the implementation of the amendments proposed by the bill. Weapon offences in the city of Knox went up by 24 per cent, which I find astounding. Hopefully the bill will address that.

Obviously it is for each local member to have constant communication with local members of the police force. I am blessed by having my electorate serviced by three 24-hour police stations. The officers in charge of the three police stations have all said that they actually need more police numbers on the ground. That is no surprise as that is what we hear all the time. However, one of the officers in charge of a station in my electorate claims he needs an additional 20 per cent — not just an extra two or three members but an extra 20 per cent — in manpower, to reduce officer fatigue and adequately police his area. Evidence shows — and again it is no surprise — that more police numbers equal fewer crimes.

However, there will always be members of society who wish to harm others. Much police time is taken up in dealing with situations exacerbated by the behaviour of people with a mental illness and the like. All the police officers with whom I spoke prior to my election in November last year were 100 per cent in favour of the Liberal Party policy to provide a single phone number for officers to call to refer Department of Human Services cases 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That would expedite officers returning to the streets. Obviously police know what they want to do; they

know why they joined the police force. As I said, more police presence equals less crime.

Why then has this policy not been adopted by the Bracks Labor government, in an attempt to streamline procedure and get police doing what they joined the force to do? In lieu of this logical and very inexpensive policy, and in lieu of more operational personnel in my area, I hope the amendments made by the bill may act as a deterrent for some and that better punishment is dealt to those who do not respect our safety. Colleagues who have listened to talkback radio in the past few days and even over the past few years will surely be aware that the public's perception is that sentences for criminals are far too light. The amendments increasing penalties are a small start in winning back the confidence of those who saw fit to elect each of us to this place. Members of the public have the right to feel safe and protected. I urge the government to fulfil its promises of further reform and more operational police personnel. For me, that is vital. After all, prevention is far better than cure.

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I must say it is always a pleasure for a member of Parliament to be able to speak on a bill that their party had as part of its election platform, so I am very pleased to be able to contribute to the debate on the Control of Weapons Amendment (Penalties) Bill today.

The legislation was first introduced in 1990 to regulate weapons other than firearms and body armour. It was updated again by the then Minister for Police and Emergency Services in 2000, when the current regulations were put in place, containing — as I think other members have outlined — the list of prohibited weapons. These include a large range of knives and daggers, a range of martial arts items, and maces — which is something the Parliament of Victoria might like to have a look at. The act specifically refers to the banning of maces, which perhaps has not been considered!

I think the act, and the updating of it, is interesting, particularly because we are now living in a very different environment in relation to the sorts of weapons that are used in attacks on people. Some of the weapons that were identified in 2000 are not ones that would be readily known to many members of Parliament — I hope they are not readily known by them. They include such things as climbing claws, nunchaku and baton-chucks, all weapons that we are not perhaps familiar with. Of course one of the reasons for forming this legislation is the result of a case involving a samurai sword heard by Justice Charles, who made a number of recommendations to Parliament

about how the Control of Weapons Act might be updated.

There are things identified as weapons that I do not think we would often regard as weapons. The act covers three areas: prohibited weapons, controlled weapons and dangerous articles. Dangerous articles relate to the sorts of things that we see frequently in our lives and would not particularly see as dangerous. Kitchen knives are some of those.

The act also has a very significant section which removes the legitimacy of holding these weapons for reasons of self-defence. I have been surprised, since the introduction of the security screening system in Parliament House, by the amazing number of weapons that are carried by people on a daily basis, a situation which seems to me to be extremely dangerous. Things that have come through the security system here include lethal-looking kitchen knives and weapons that people have fashioned themselves. Even in a place such as the Parliament, which you would think of as non-violent, flick-knives, knuckledusters and other weapons have been brought in by visitors.

One of the alarming things in terms of community safety is that many of these weapons are held by young women, which I would have thought is quite a dangerous thing. The reason they give for having them is, of course, for self-defence; but if you think about it, most young women are much smaller than their likely attackers, who, with all due respect to the men here, are more likely to be males, who in most cases are substantially bigger than they are and therefore — —

Mr Holding interjected.

Mrs MADDIGAN — I would like to apologise to the Minister for Finance. It was not a personal reflection on him. He is looking very worried. But realistically — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! The member will address her remarks to the Chair.

Mrs MADDIGAN — I was just referring to the Minister for Finance in passing. Speaking through you, Acting Chair, I would point out that he knows the crime statistics far better than I do, being a former Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and he would be well aware, of course, that young women are frequently attacked by men.

If in most of those situations a young woman did have a weapon on her, it is more likely that it would be used on her than on the person who was attacking her. So it seems to me to be a very dangerous practice that people

are walking around on a daily basis with things like sharpened kitchen knives and flick-knives in their handbags — and I do not think people realise how prevalent it actually is.

One of the reasons given for the 2000 act was the increasing use of dangerous articles. Unfortunately, in some of the information provided at the end of last year we also saw an increase in attacks involving prohibited weapons. If you look in the papers on a daily basis, you know it is very rare that a day or two goes by without someone being attacked with a knife or some other weapon. I think part of this bill needs to be about a greater publicity program so that the community is aware of which weapons are prohibited and which are unlawful. I have a strong feeling that many people in the community do not know that the weapons they carry on a regular basis are in fact prohibited or controlled or are considered dangerous articles.

This is an excellent bill. As I said, I enjoy seeing legislation come into Parliament to fulfil a party policy. This bill increases the penalties prescribed in the act, and I will quickly go through them. Penalties include the doubling of the current maximum imprisonment penalty for the possession of controlled weapons, from six months to 12 months; and a quadrupling of the imprisonment penalty for the possession of prohibited weapons, from six months to two years. The amendments also include a doubling of the maximum penalty for the unlawful carriage, possession, use, import, manufacture, sale or purchase of a prohibited weapon, and a doubling of the maximum penalty for the unlawful carriage, possession or use of a controlled weapon without a lawful excuse.

Those penalties send a very strong message to the community that the government is serious about ensuring community safety remains a high priority in its continuing policies, including its ongoing law and order policy, on which more legislation will be introduced here in the future. I am very pleased to support this bill.

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) — It certainly gives me pleasure to support the position put by the member for Kew on this legislation. I must say I have been listening with interest to the comments of members on the other side of the house as they have detailed story after story of knives being out of control in this state. It is interesting that the government, which has been in power for eight years, is now doing something about fixing community safety issues.

The Liberal Party went to the last election with policies on a whole range of community safety issues; those

policies were designed to improve community safety. I know it is an important issue, as does my party. Now the government has finally been dragged, kicking and screaming, to do something about it.

Opposition members, including the members for Benambra and Kilsyth, have made it clear that this piece of legislation will have three tiers of penalties — that is, for ‘prohibited’, ‘controlled’ and ‘dangerous’ articles. Whilst the opposition supports the legislation we believe it does not go far enough.

For the purpose of applying penalties, we think the government should have dealt with all weapons in one category. The situation may arise where a barrister may argue before a magistrate that because a person was using what is classified as a dangerous article their offence should be treated as less serious than if the person had been using a prohibited weapon.

One should always remember that all weapons can inflict the same level of pain on an individual. Why should the government be taking the soft option by not developing a uniform penalty response? In my electorate of Ferntree Gully, in Melbourne’s east, community safety is a major issue. In the 18 months prior to the election, when I was a candidate for the seat, people regularly raised community safety as a major concern. Many people told me they believed community safety was not being dealt with appropriately by the government. That is a reason why the opposition benches now have newly elected members from the eastern suburbs.

Mr Robinson — What about the Scoresby? Come on, you have changed your tune already.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! The member for Ferntree Gully, without interjection.

Mr WAKELING — I am pleased the member for Mitcham wants to talk about the freeway.

People I had regularly spoken to raised concerns about young people carrying concealed weapons. People have every right to feel concerned because in Knox, the municipality in which I reside, over the last 12 months the rate of crime against the person, including assault and homicide, has increased. One only has to look at the statistics relevant to the suburbs I represent.

In the last 12 months the Rowville community has suffered a 16.5 per cent increase in crime. In Ferntree Gully and Lysterfield the rate has increased by 13.1 per cent; and in Boronia, by 5.5 per cent. By any measure, that is highly inappropriate. That is a deplorable record for a government that has been in power for eight years.

The communities in my electorate expect much more from this government to improve community safety.

In 1999 the government promised that it would deliver to the Rowville community a 24-hour police station. As a former councillor with the City of Knox, I had the pleasure of attending the opening. Former police minister, Minister Haermeyer, launched it with much fanfare, but I should explain to the house that at about 10 o'clock every night of the week that police station closes its doors. If people in Rowville want to speak to a policeman after that time, they have to drive to the Knox police station at Wantirna South.

Ms Duncan — Or they could use the phone.

Mr WAKELING — Whilst the police may go home at 10 o'clock every night, the criminals in Rowville do not. It is a shame that roving gangs of young people are common in the area. Residents are raising concerns with me about young people being out at night and the fact that their police station is not open at night.

Whilst this bill does not go far enough, at least it is an indication that the government is at least prepared to try, perhaps belatedly, to do something about fixing the problem. The government needs to bite the bullet. More needs to be done to deal with problems associated with the control of weapons. The government needs to get more police out on the beat. We need to make sure that stations such as those at Rowville and Belgrave are operational 24 hours a day, so that police can adequately deal with the proliferation of weapons.

Members must remember that simply increasing the penalties, as this bill does, will not necessarily reduce the number of weapons on the streets. The only real deterrent that will stop the proliferation of weapons out there is an increase in police numbers — that is, having police on the beat. That is the only effective measure that will lead to a reduction in the number of weapons on the streets.

The government talks a lot, but it has had eight years to fix this mess. When I was at the Rowville police station members stationed there said, 'We need 10 extra members at our station'. The Liberal Party promised that, but what has the government done to fix the situation? Nothing. Whilst The Liberal Party supports the bill because it is an indication that the government is prepared to do something, perhaps belatedly, on this issue, much more needs to be done, particularly in getting more police out on the beat.

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I am very pleased to join the debate on the Control of Weapons Amendment

(Penalties) Bill. I strongly support the legislation, and I am sure the residents in the Mitcham electorate, whom I represent, will also fully support its increased penalties for the possession, advertisement for sale, purchase, importation and manufacture of prohibited and controlled weapons.

As previous members have said, the bill proposes to double penalties for those offences. The increases are quite dramatic, but I suggest all members would agree they are absolutely justified because the weapons around which the offences are based are designed solely to inflict harm.

It might be worthwhile at this stage for me to describe to the house the sorts of weapons we are talking about. The relevant regulations contain a lengthy list of 'prohibited' weapons. The list includes flick-knives, daggers, knuckle knives, swordsticks, butterfly knives, double-end knives, push knives, trench knives, throwing blades, ballistic knives, non-metal ceramic knives, crossbows, pistol crossbows, general category crossbows, blowguns, darts designed to be projected from a blowgun or similar device, hunting slings or slingshots designed or adapted in a certain manner, catapults, shanghais, hunting slings, dart projectors, slingshots manufactured and intended for commercial distribution, articles designed to discharge capicum spray, articles designed or adapted to emit or discharge offensive, noxious or irritant liquids, powders or gases, shark darts, extendable batons, knuckledusters, weighted gloves and studded gloves.

At this point I make comment on the following item in that list. The regulations also include:

... a mace or any other similar article capable of causing injury that consists of a club or a staff fitted with a flanged or spiked head.

A 'mace' will be of particular interest to members of the house because there is one right here, in the house. I am very pleased to note that the regulations have the qualification:

... other than a ceremonial mace made for and used solely as a symbol of authority on ceremonial occasions.

I am sure that as long as the parliamentary officers contain themselves, notwithstanding the aggravation we in this house might generate at times, we will have no problems with the mace remaining exempt from the regulations which relate to the legislation we are debating today.

The list also includes a flail; a whip with metal lashes; a cat-o'-nine-tails; a hand-held, battery-operated article commonly known as a 'laser pointer'; an article

consisting of a baton or stick, so constructed that it can be broken to form two or more parts, and joined by a chain and known as a baton-chuck or bo-chuck; a scythe or sickle-shaped article known as a kama; an article known as a kubotan; a sai or jitte; a throwing star; an article known as a Chinese whip, a whip spear, a seven-piece iron chain or a nine-piece iron chain; a butterfly sword; a tonfa; and a sword. Those instruments fall within the definition of 'prohibited weapon'.

Included in the definition of 'controlled weapon' is a more modest list of things such as spear guns, batons or cudgels, bayonets, imitation firearms and cattle prods. The significance of that list is that people who are of a particular bent will see a commercial opportunity to devise new products which are derivations or modifications of those I described and because of a technicality might fall beyond the regulations. That is why the legislation is amended in this place from time to time and regulations are extended to ensure that the law catches up with people who are that way inclined.

I strongly support the bill. I am pleased that previous speakers have elaborated on this issue by referring to things as extant police numbers because that allows me to digress a little in my contribution. At this stage I wish to raise a concern I have. As much as we in Victoria are looking to properly and reasonably extend penalties for the control of weapons, it has to be put in the context of what is contemporary — that is, these efforts are somewhat undermined by a slackness at the commonwealth level. Anyone wanting to look at the evidence of that claim need only look at an article on page 5 of today's *Australian* and headed 'ADF at fault in theft probe: Keelty'. I will quote excerpts of this article to the house because it raises some very grave concerns about the security protocols within the defence department that have led to a number of weapons disappearing and falling into criminal hands. The article states:

Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty has blamed the defence department's poor procedures for its failure to track down stolen military weapons and prosecute thieves.

Mr Keelty told a Senate committee that inadequate military policing and record keeping had frustrated police inquiries.

He said defence had referred 139 cases to the AFP for investigation since 2001. Of those, 19 involved theft of guns, ammunition, helmets, radios and other defence security equipment.

The details of some of the cases were revealed and widened concerns that weapons, including rocket-launchers, had fallen into the hands of warring criminal gangs and a terror cell plotting an attack in Sydney.

But Mr Keelty said just one investigation into the recent theft of army rocket-launchers had resulted in a prosecution.

That relates to a Sydney gun dealer who was charged last month with 17 offences relating to black market sales of seven rocket-launchers to an underworld figure, who then allegedly sold five of them to a terror suspect.

Mr Keelty told the Senate's legal and constitutional affairs committee that:

Part of the problem has been the difficulty in being able to trace weapons or trace persons who are accountable for matters ...

Mr Keelty made the comments as New South Wales counter-terrorism police moved to follow up claims revealed in the *Australian* this week that authorities had failed for eight years to properly explore claims that a group of men with links to a bikie gang had been receiving stolen military weapons, including a powerful rocket-launcher capable of bringing down an aircraft.

The article goes on, but I will not continue. Suffice to say that if we are genuinely concerned and serious in this place about — and I take up the comments made by the previous speaker — making the efforts that should properly be made to curb weapons, the federal government also needs to do its part. As much as the people in my electorate, including me, have concerns about the sorts of weapons that I have described and the uses to which they can be put, it is almost like that comical scene out of the *Crocodile Dundee* movie when Paul Hogan pulls out the big knife and says, 'No, that's a knife'.

In the context of what is happening in the Australian Defence Force, a stolen rocket-launcher — something capable of bringing down a plane — is a far more serious weapon to have out on the streets. Yet the federal police commissioner, Mick Keelty, has said that for eight years — my recollection is that we have had a federal Liberal government in office for the last eight years — there has been a total lack of process, scrutiny and adequate security in place to keep track of these weapons and the uses to which they might ultimately be put.

This is a sensible bill. It continues the government's strong record over the past few years of tightening penalties and responding to community concerns about safety. Looking back to last November I suspect one of the reasons the government was returned to office so handsomely was that Victorians are very confident that as a government we are getting on with the job of affording them the levels of support in the pursuit of community safety that they deserve and desire.

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I am pleased to speak on the Control of Weapons Amendment (Penalties) Bill. As the member for Benalla said in his contribution, The Nationals will not be opposing this legislation.

The main purpose of the legislation is to increase penalties for possessing, carrying, using, displaying or advertising for sale, selling, purchasing, causing to be imported, or manufacturing a prohibited weapon without an exemption under section 8B or an approval under section 8C of the principal act. There is a list of prohibited weapons in the principal act, and I will not go through all of them. Some of them include things that are sold frequently, such as daggers, double-ended knives, flick-knives, slingshots and knuckle knives. The bill also includes a number of other articles defined as prohibited weapons.

It is sad to know that people are increasingly carrying weapons, particularly knives. We see in the media on a daily basis that people are using knives, whether they be in gangs or just think it is normal to carry knives. This is responsible legislation in that it doubles the penalty for a person possessing a knife when they do not need to. In that situation there should be an increased jail sentence or increased penalty. That is what this bill does, and it is a very sensible outcome of the bill.

Sadly in Shepparton last year a person was stabbed outside a nightclub, and the person died on the street. That happened in a country town, and it is happening in other towns right across the state, not just in Melbourne. What we have to do is make sure that it is not normal practice for a person to go out to a nightclub or a school while possessing some sort of knife, whether it is on their person or whether it is in a bag or something else they are carrying.

The minister said in the second-reading speech that the intention of the bill is to enhance community safety. We need to keep knives off the streets, but we also need to keep our criminals off the streets. One of the issues that I would like to raise is that a number of people out there are increasingly unhappy with the way the justice system is working. I was pleased to see this bill coming forward. The government, in dealing with some issues, tinkers around the edges without doing what the community is asking for, which is to put in place a set of minimum sentences for certain crimes. Last year I presented a petition containing about 12 500 signatures. That was picked up in a very small time. People are concerned, and we have seen polls in newspapers showing that people are calling for minimum sentences and other changes to the justice system.

I tabled the petition after the death of two Toolamba girls who had gone to Melbourne to work. The concern we have is that many country children come down to Melbourne to seek employment, and many country parents set them up in houses, which is what happened to Colleen and Laura. Their parents, Allan and Shirley, set them up in a house, and unfortunately it was next door to the person who allegedly perpetrated the crime. Now the family has to live with that for the rest of their lives.

Their daughters went to Melbourne, where they bought them a house because they thought they would be safe, but in fact it was found afterwards that their house was next door to a person who had a 20-year criminal history of violence and had just come out of jail for other serious offences. Those included raping and bashing a vulnerable, elderly, blind woman in her bed. The person was a known offender, and the family is wondering why it did not know that he was allowed to live there.

My community in particular is continuing the fight, saying that we need minimum sentences for certain crimes, as they have in New South Wales. Also in the area that I represent, the Shepparton district, we have a number of police stations that are closed at various times because of a lack of police numbers. We are told that police numbers are appropriate in Shepparton, but it cannot be when the Murchison police station closes for two weeks at a time when the police officer in charge goes on leave for whatever reason. We have the Mooroopna police station and the Tatura police station closed from time to time as well. So I would like it put on the record that to enhance community safety we also need to look at other things such as making sure we have enough police.

The government is bringing in other initiatives which are good and which the community would support, such as the abolition in time of suspended sentences and the retraining of judges. People are saying that some judges are out of touch with community expectations, and I think it is a good outcome that judges are going back to be retrained about what the community expects, whether in the sentences or the penalties that judges give.

I would like to touch on something interesting that the police once told me about knives, because sometimes we need to enhance our safety in our homes. The police told me that in many instances when they go to crimes where there have been stabbings the knives used have been in little receptacles on benches. The police said to make sure that if you have any knives, whether they are dangerous knives or just kitchen and carving knives,

they are put in drawers or out of sight, because they present an opportunity if somebody comes in to rob the house. If that person is caught unawares and there are knives close by, they could use one as a weapon — or indeed another person who lives there could use one as a weapon. The police said we need to make sure we keep ourselves safe.

I am pleased to say that we are not opposing this bill. The Nationals are pleased with anything that decreases crimes, deters people from carrying knives on the street and sends a very strong message to anyone else who carries knives. Some people respond that the reason they are carrying knives is for self-defence because they know other people are carrying knives. We have to make sure that this legislation is a deterrent. It is not appropriate to carry knives, and the government is bringing this legislation in to say it is not going to be accepted — and as a deterrent, hopefully, the penalties and jail terms will increase. I am happy to say The Nationals will not be opposing this legislation.

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — I am pleased this morning to speak in support of the Control of Weapons Amendment (Penalties) Bill. It puts into place an election commitment made by this government and builds on previous amendments that this government has introduced. A previous speaker suggested that this is a hastily-put-together piece of legislation and that we had been brought kicking and screaming to introduce it into this Parliament. I will forgive that previous speaker, because they have been in this house for just a short time, but I would invite them to look at the laws that have been passed by this government in previous years and to check out the sort of legislation that has been dealt with in this house, particularly the Control of Weapons Regulations 2000, which were amended in 2004.

In 2000 new restrictions were placed on the sale, display, marketing, possession and use of knives and other dangerous weapons. This was in response to the dramatic increase in knife offences that had occurred in the previous five years, from 1995 until 2000. In 2004 amongst other things we extended the list of prohibited weapons to include swords, which were previously classified as controlled weapons.

The bill before us today is part of the government's community safety policy, in which we indicated we would double the penalties for the possession of controlled weapons and the possession of prohibited weapons. This amendment represents a doubling of the maximum imprisonment for controlled weapons offences from 6 months to 12 months and a quadrupling of the maximum imprisonment for

prohibited weapons offences from 6 months to 2 years. It doubles the maximum penalty for the unlawful carriage, possession, use, import, manufacture, sale, or purchase of a prohibited weapon from 120 penalty units to 240 penalty units. The amendment also doubles the maximum penalty for the unlawful carriage, possession, or use of a controlled weapon without lawful excuse.

Further amendments will be made in due course in this session of Parliament. That is not because it is all so time-consuming; it is just that it is necessary, particularly when looking at changing things like the definition of 'lawful excuse'. These are quite detailed changes to the law that need consultation and careful preparation. We do not want these laws to be introduced in a hasty manner and then be overturned or appealed in our courts.

This is a response to a particular case some years ago that highlighted the difficulties with the current provisions. It is important that we make sure there are limited reasons why anyone can carry a controlled or a prohibited weapon, and increasing penalties is one way of doing that. As has been previously mentioned, it is important that we have police on the ground who are able to detect and prosecute these sorts of offences, when and where they occur. That is why the Bracks government has funded the provision of over 1100 additional police in this state.

That stands in stark contrast to the opposition, which, I say again, did one thing when in government but says another when in opposition. When in government it cut police numbers by 800, and it is almost amusing to watch them sitting across the chamber and arguing with straight faces — and for the most part they are able to maintain straight faces — while they criticise this government for what it has done with police numbers. Our action stands in stark contrast with what occurred in the opposition's seven and a half years in government. But that cry is not uncommon in this chamber — that is, 'Do not do as we did, just do as we say while we are in opposition'.

As I said, the Bracks government has already banned the sale of swords and crossbows. It has funded the purchase of 480 new hand-held metal detectors to enable Victoria Police to better detect those sorts of weapons. The government has also increased the powers of police to search persons suspected of carrying weapons. This amending bill builds on the previous track record of this government. It continues to be tough on those offences, and it will continue to ensure that Victoria is a safe place to live. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — It is with pleasure that I speak on the Control of Weapons Amendment (Penalties) Bill. I support it because I, like many members of the community and members of this house, strongly believe that for a very long time the penalties for carrying dangerous and unlawful weapons have not gone far enough.

After speaking to my constituents and having listened to various media commentators, I find a common feeling in the community is that this government is soft on crime. As an example members only need look at the Crime Victims Support Association's website, which will give the house a clear idea of that association's feelings towards the government's stance on crime:

... the community ... are sick and tired of the soft penalty doled out to savage criminals and the failure of the Bracks government to make our streets safe ... victims of crime ... have lost all confidence in community punishment.

Further to that, police officers I have spoken with are frequently frustrated that once the people they arrest get to court, often they are given penalties which equate to little more than a slap on the wrist. As much as this government might address the issue of maximum penalties, the public perception is that those found guilty are rarely prosecuted to the full extent of the law. There is currently little disincentive to those who wish to carry and use a dangerous or unlawful weapon, because they believe that, if caught, they will probably be treated fairly lightly.

It is important, therefore, that the increased penalties described in this amending legislation send a message to the judiciary that it needs to act on the public's wishes and use the sentencing powers it is being given to a much fuller extent. That would go a long way to restoring public confidence in the sentencing process and some way towards showing that the government is as tough on crime as it purports to be.

Yesterday I was surprised to hear the member for Yan Yean point out that this bill addresses a section of the act not changed since 2000, and I was further surprised that she said that with some measure of pride. The reality is that it is disappointing that this government has not listened to public opinion for nearly seven years. We only have to listen to our local communities to be fully aware of their opinions over that time, and it is disappointing that, if it has taken seven years for the government to act on this message to the limited degree that action has been taken, it does not bode well for further amendments having a speedy passage through Parliament.

Members opposite yesterday pointed to the government's increasing police numbers as some measure of its being tough on crime. Let me respond to the member for Macedon. It is not just the opposition or the people of Warrandyte electorate who are saying this; the police force and the broader community are saying the same thing — that is, ensure that police are put on the front line and are not bogged down on special projects or on non-core police duties such as acting as de facto wardens when convicted criminals spend extended periods in police lockups. Let us get the police back on the streets where they are wanted and where they are needed.

I say again that I am pleased that these penalties will be increased. I am pleased that honourable members on the other side of the house have pointed out that this amendment is not the be-all and end-all when it comes to the government's attention to the control of dangerous and unlawful weapons. That is a clear acknowledgement by government backbenchers that these laws do not go far enough. They need to be much stronger, and they need to be much more wide reaching. When the government next addresses the issue of criminal penalties it would do well to consider the lack of confidence the public currently has in the sentencing process. I trust the government has the courage and fortitude to introduce the kind of tough penalties that will act as a real deterrent.

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — It is with great pleasure that I contribute to debate on the Control of Weapons Amendment (Penalties) Bill. It gives me a great deal of pride to be part of the Bracks Labor government that has brought so much attention to community safety, police numbers and police resourcing. My electorate of Ivanhoe would join with me in congratulating the government on, for example, the brand new police station and improved courthouse at the Heidelberg complex. These are continuing steps in the right direction by the Bracks government to improve community safety.

This amending bill seeks to do quite a few things. Under the Control of Weapons Act, non-firearm weapons are divided into three classifications — prohibited weapons, controlled weapons and dangerous articles. Prohibited weapons are particularly dangerous and should not be available in the community, except to persons able to display a specific need for such weapons. These weapons, which include swords, imitation firearms, daggers, batons and crossbows, are clearly not required in the general community. Controlled weapons such as knives are more common and could be considered potentially far more dangerous

than a crossbow. This legislation will increase the penalties for possession of those weapons.

The community should always be protected from dangerous articles. This bill forms part of the government's community safety election policy commitment to increase existing penalties under the Control of Weapons Act 1990. It is true that action on this legislation was last taken in 2000, but the government is working with the community and with various sectors, such as the police force, the police union, the commissioner and victims of crimes groups. No one bill can come into the house at any one time and be a panacea for every problem the community might have. The government is listening, and it has acted over the years. It has also foreshadowed that later this year it will bring in legislation which, among other matters, will be another step in the right direction towards controlling weapons.

No doubt ministers will keep their fingers on the pulse and see what the community needs. The minister at the table, the Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission, is the former minister for corrections and police, and I know he did an outstanding job in those portfolios as well. It was the same with his predecessor. The government has been blessed with very good, talented members in that area.

Clause 3 of the bill will amend section 5(1) of the act to increase the penalties in relation to prohibited weapons from 120 penalty units or six months imprisonment to 240 penalty units or two years imprisonment. Clause 4 will amend section 6(1) to increase the penalties in relation to controlled weapons from 60 penalty units or six months imprisonment to 120 penalty units or 12 months imprisonment. As stated, the penalty under section 5(1) has not changed since 2000, and the penalty under section 6(1) has not changed since the act commenced in 1990. Both penalties are now out of step with community expectations. That has been acknowledged by the government, and it is why it is bringing in this bill. I know that the opposition and The Nationals are somewhat harping on that aspect, but the government is listening. No bill on any subject that has ever been brought into this house is a panacea for all situations. This is why we have amendments to legislation.

The bill also provides for the automatic repeal of the amending act on 1 July 2008. This is in accordance with the recommendation of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee that all amending acts contain an automatic repeal provision. We are listening not only to the community but also to the committees of this Parliament.

As I stated earlier, the government intends later this year to bring in further legislation to assist with community safety. I know it is a concern out there. One has only to listen to the news at night. Unfortunately news these days concentrates on the negative, more than anything positive in the community. Those constant horror stories often concern our elderly residents. The government and members of this house should do everything they can to assist them or anyone else — for example, over the next four years I will be conducting community safety forums not only to keep the community involved with what the government is doing but also to try to assist people to make sure they can live in a greater deal of safety. I commend the bill to the house. It is a step in the right direction for the government. I look forward to the next round of legislation.

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — I am very pleased to support the Control of Weapons Amendment (Penalties) Bill. Much of the detail has been thoroughly covered by members from both sides of the house so I will not regurgitate any of that. Quite simply, in terms of support, there is a community expectation that not only will the government create amendments to bills based on changing expectations, of which this is partially a consideration in the proposal, but also the government's job is in part to try to predict and change the behaviour of members of our society when they are being quite destructive and creating an increased sense of fear in our community.

This bill is terrific in the fact that it addresses those issues. It builds on the Bracks government's continued desire to provide a safe, harmonious and happy community in which we all can live and work. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission) — It gives me a great deal of pleasure to sum up the debate in relation to the Control of Weapons Amendment (Penalties) Bill. Firstly, I thank all honourable members who have made contributions to this important piece of legislation: the members for Kew, Benalla, Prahran, Bulleen, Yan Yean, Benambra, Yuroke, Kilsyth, Mordialloc, Scoresby, Northcote, Bayswater, Essendon, Ferntree Gully, Mitcham, Shepparton, Macedon, Warrandyte, Ivanhoe and Forest Hill. It has been a very interesting debate. It is an important piece of legislation which, whilst it has quite a precise set of things it wishes to achieve, nevertheless will improve greatly the penalty regime that exists in relation to these weapons.

The purpose of the bill, as honourable members have outlined in their various contributions, is:

to increase the penalty for importing, causing to be imported, manufacturing, selling, purchasing, displaying for sale or advertising for sale, possessing, carrying or using a prohibited weapon without an exemption under section 8B or an approval under section 8C.

The penalties in relation to those activities will be increased and also the penalty for possessing, carrying or using a controlled weapon without a lawful excuse will be increased.

Having listened to some of the contributions from honourable members it is worth noting that some opposition members have taken the view that the current set of arrangements, in so far as they create a hierarchy of weapons, is undesirable and that in fact there ought to be just one set of controls in relation to weapons in Victoria. That is not the government's view. We think different weapons create different levels of risk. It is important that the penalty regime reflects the risk level of different weapons and that undue impediments are not put in place in relation to potential weapons that are in fact household items used every day by families across Victoria. That sort of cumbersome set of arrangements would be very complex and quite problematic. The government does not support that.

This legislation enacts an election commitment made by the Bracks government. Further amendments to this legislation will be required over the term of the government to make sure that other commitments that the government has made are able to be enacted. I want to acknowledge and thank members of the justice policy team within the Department of Justice who have worked on this and other important pieces of legislation, particularly the director, Marisa De Cicco, and Claire Hussin, who has worked particularly hard on this legislation. They do a great job, and we thank them for their professionalism. I thank honourable members for contributing to the debate on this important bill and I wish it a speedy passage.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) for adoption of address-in-reply.

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — Having been elected to this place three times, it is a privilege to stand in this place to again represent the people of the Macedon electorate. I remember very clearly the night of 18 September 1999, when we won the election. I also remember the huge amount of gratitude I felt for the confidence that the people of my then electorate of Gisborne had shown in me and the support they had given me. I now represent the people of Macedon, and I would like to thank everyone in my electorate for their ongoing support and for the confidence they have shown in me by allowing me to again represent them in this place. I will do all that I can to honour that trust as we continue to deal with the many challenges that face Victoria and indeed Australia and the rest of the world.

I have been privileged to serve on the parliamentary Environment and Natural Resources Committee for all the time I have been in Parliament. I see environmental issues as the greatest challenges we will face as individuals and as a country. The work we have done, are doing and will continue to do has been and is necessary to ensure that we are in the best position possible to manage those environmental challenges.

I would like to thank the people who have supported me for all these years. In particular I thank Christine Roussiyan and Kate McRae. Chris has worked in my office since the day I was elected, and I have told her that I hope she will continue to work for me for my entire political career, as long as that may be. I also thank Kate, who is just great. She is young, enthusiastic and smart. Together they form a formidable team and give great service to everyone who ever has dealings with my office. Chris and Kate are always on the front line of responding to the many inquiries that come from constituents on a daily basis.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank all the branch members in my own electorate and beyond. They are tireless workers for the Labor Party and come out in rain, hail or shine to support us at every election. Staffing the booths is not an easy task. Increasingly early voting is playing a role in our elections, so booths are staffed for two weeks prior to an election. A lot of work and effort goes into supporting us as members of this great party, and I pay tribute to everybody who makes a contribution.

I also thank the fellow travellers who may not be members of the party but who support the work that this government does and the work that the Labor Party does in general. Many of these people are friends, but often some are unknown to me. For example, the booth rosters on polling days contain the names of hundreds of people who are involved. I thank all of them, even though on many occasions I have not been able to see them at the booths on the day. We always put on a nice barbecue at my house after the election to thank all our supporters. We have a lovely spit roast from a great local business. So I thank those fellow travellers as well.

Probably none of us would be here without the support of our parents. In my case I am pleased that both my parents are still with us, although they are getting a little slower on their feet. Mum would have to be one of the best campaigners ever. People in Bacchus Marsh still stop me in the streets and say, 'I remember when your mother came in to our business seven years ago'. She leaves quite an impression! Unfortunately Mum is not so steady on her feet these days, so she can no longer do all that. The support of my parents is absolutely unconditional, as I am sure is the support of other members' parents. It is just as well, because my parents have traditionally been conservative voters. But they like the work the Bracks government is doing, and we have been able to persuade them to vote for this government. After many years of debating over the Christmas dinner table, I am very pleased that Dad has finally seen my point of view.

I would also like to thank the Bracks government. As a government I think we have done fantastic work, and I am proud to be part of it. We have done great things for this state. We have invested in infrastructure in hospitals, schools, emergency services and ambulance stations, and we have invested in police and roads. The gas rollout in Macedon continues as we speak. It is the biggest rollout of articulated gas in Victoria for many years.

In the area of roads, the duplication of the Macedon Street bridge in Sunbury has made such a change to traffic flows through the town. The former Minister for Transport is in the chamber, and I thank him for sticking with that difficult project. We had to negotiate with private companies, because unfortunately, due to the amount of privatisation that has occurred in this state, this government — and all future governments — does not and will not have the control over vital infrastructure that governments once had, which makes and will make all these projects that much more difficult.

I also pay tribute to the government for the regional rail upgrade. It is the biggest upgrade of our rail services in over 100 years, and its benefits will be seen for many years to come. It is not a sexy project. At its end we will see some nice new trains, but most of the work and the money that has been invested has been for projects that are for the most part unseen. New tracks and new signals are not things that most people see, but that work has been done and will hold us in good stead for many years to come. Locally and across the state the government has put in new bus services and extended existing ones, and those services will continue to grow with this government's commitment to continuing to invest in public transport.

As a member of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee I have kept a close eye on this government's environmental initiatives. Speaking from a purely personal point of view, I am very proud that we have been able to save the Wombat Forest. We have brought logging back to sustainable levels in all of our state forests, but my particular interest is in the Wombat Forest. The policy document that underpinned those changes is *Our Forests Our Future*. It is a fabulous document that shows this government's commitment to our environment.

In the area of planning, the Melbourne 2030 action plan is designed to stop urban sprawl. The government is committed to changing the way our city has developed over many years. We want to make sure that Melbourne and all of our towns remain great places to live, and Melbourne 2030 is part of that plan.

We could not forget water at this particular time. *Our Water Our Future* is a fabulous document. It outlines a long-term plan for the sustainable use of this very limited resource — a resource that all indications suggest will become even more limited in the future. We know that we cannot continue to do the things we have done in the past. We cannot keep building dams. We already have loads of dams: anyone who flies over Victoria would see a proliferation of dams across the state. Unfortunately there is only one way to fill a dam, and we know that predictions are that there will be less rainfall in the future.

The opposition criticised the government over this document, but I have no doubt that it will form the basis of future water policy in this state for many years to come. I am very proud of the fact that this government does not decide to do things in an ad hoc way, making an announcement here and an announcement there, which is what we saw the opposition do at the last state election. Rather, we have a long-term plan. It is interesting to see Malcolm Turnbull, the federal

Minister for Environment and Water Resources, on the television from time to time. He is desperately trying to distinguish between what the federal government is saying it wants to do and what we have planned in Victoria. He knows that ours is an excellent plan, that there are no other short cuts and that we need to plan what we do with water very carefully.

The government has also invested in social capital. I think the opposition planned to abolish the Department for Victorian Communities, but the government is bringing government departments together to focus on what matters — that is, people. The DVC is an attempt to break down the silos of government and gives great support to our communities. We have invested not locally but across the state. We have invested in towns and in sporting clubs and the people who support them through volunteer grants and our support for volunteers generally. Cutting the cost of train fares has been a fantastic initiative for people in regional Victoria. A 20 per cent cut in fares is an investment in our social capital and an investment in and support for our communities increasing their mobility. Increased investment in public transport makes it not only more accessible but also more affordable.

As a government, we have done a lot but we recognise that there is so much more to be done. We are faced with increasing challenges on a daily basis. The previous bill was an amendment to existing legislation. We want to make sure that this chamber continues to meet the expectations of our community and to respond to issues as they arise.

I am proud to be a part of a government which is working and investing in Victoria, not just in the short term and not just for the next four years, but for the long term. This can be seen in our water policies, our environment policies and our transport policies. We have set an agenda for the next 10 years in this state. It is challenging, but this government is putting its money where its mouth is. I continue to look forward to being part of a government that does that, so that this state, including the electorate of Macedon, is a great place to live and raise a family. We often get criticised for saying that, but that is exactly what this government, and I believe any good government, should be about.

I look forward to continuing to work for the people in the Macedon electorate. I look forward to continuing the rollout of gas in towns like Riddells Creek, Romsey and Lancefield. We are about to turn the gas on in Gisborne. These are towns that would never have received it had it not been for this government's \$70 million investment in the rollout of gas. I also look forward to seeing improvements and further investment

in our roads and further extensions of bus services in many areas in rural and regional Victoria and in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. Over many years transport has not kept up with the pace of growth. We, as a government, recognise this and are investing to ensure we address those issues.

This government is a great government. It has a good record, which has been proved by our re-election for a third term by the people of Victoria. To be re-elected for a third term is a difficult task for any government to achieve. We have done this very well. I appreciate the confidence the people of Victoria have in us, and specifically the confidence the people of Macedon have in me and in this government. It is my commitment to continue to work hard to address their concerns and to make sure that their interests are served in this place and that the government and I, as their member of Parliament, are fully aware of the needs of the people of Macedon and continue to support them.

I would also like to pay tribute to the great members of Parliament who unfortunately were not re-elected at the last election. I have some great friends amongst those people. Every single one of them was a hardworking member of Parliament.

Politicians are often much maligned. Their job is seen as a difficult job and politics is seen as a dirty business. Being a politician is certainly a difficult job. It is very challenging, but it is also one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. I know I express the views of many members of this house. It is a great privilege and honour to serve in this place. I look forward to continuing to do that and working hand in glove with the Bracks government.

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I am pleased to make a contribution to the address-in-reply debate in the Legislative Assembly. I note that the Minister for Tourism has unfortunately left the chamber. I have responsibilities for tourism as a part of my role with The Nationals. I will talk about that in the latter part of my address to the house.

I also welcome the fact that the member for Richmond has been appointed as the Minister for Local Government. I congratulate him and assure him that I have a close working relationship with the local governments operating in my electorate of Murray Valley. They are the Rural City of Wangaratta, the Shire of Moira and the Shire of Indigo. I will be making representations directly to the minister to seek assistance for those municipalities. I am sure that he will respond in a positive way to the representations I

make on behalf of the constituents of Murray Valley and the municipalities in my electorate.

The election in the latter part of last year produced a great result for The Nationals. It was interesting because of all of the dire predictions that were made prior to the election. They included: The Nationals were on the decline; The Nationals would end up with only two seats; and the member for Murray Valley and one other member would be the last of The Nationals members in this Parliament. When I entered the Parliament in the late 1970s those sorts of dire predictions were around. Some people believed then that the members for Rodney and Murray Valley would be the last two standing members of the National Party in the Parliament.

The results from this election were great. I need to put on record that support for The Nationals in the seven seats in Legislative Assembly we held prior to this election increased from 35 to 46 per cent. We also picked up the seats of Mildura and Morwell. When we came back into this house we had nine seats. I think that is a great result for The Nationals. I congratulate the Leader of The Nationals for his leadership. He is one of the greatest leaders we have had for a long period of time. He rates very highly in being able to lead us and the party to represent country people. If you have a look at the map of Victoria showing the electorates of the lower house, you will see that a huge part of Victoria is now represented by The Nationals. We will continue to work hard to make sure we represent country Victorians to the best of our ability and to assist in the greater development of Victoria generally.

The result for The Nationals for the seat of Murray Valley was enormous. I was returned by an absolute majority, and there were four candidates against me.

Mr Wynne interjected.

Mr JASPER — It was a great absolute majority, a majority in my own right. I pay tribute to the people who supported me. It was a great majority in a two-party preferred vote — I received approximately 75 per cent of the vote. That is a great tribute to the representation The Nationals give and seek to give to the people in country Victoria.

I will continue to represent the people of Murray Valley to the best of my ability. I make no bones about saying this to members of the house: I am parochial about my electorate. Most members are of course, but I am very parochial about Murray Valley. I seek to ensure that members of Parliament understand the great difficulties

that we experience in country Victoria and indeed in the northern part of the state.

The northern boundary of my electorate is the Murray River. One of the issues I regularly talk about concerns border anomalies. It is pleasing that the Premier responded positively to my continuing and direct representations after the suggestion had been made in late 2004 that the Border Anomalies Committee should be abandoned. I had meetings with representatives of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, which resulted in a meeting at Echuca in June 2006 involving the secretaries of the premiers' departments in New South Wales and Victoria, about 30 high-ranking bureaucrats; I was able to attend that meeting for part of the time. Now we have an ongoing organisation that seeks to address the massive number of border anomalies that arise, particularly for people living on the state border, but which should also concern all Victorians.

I thank the people of the Murray Valley electorate who have supported me. The electorate has a highly professional organisation supporting The Nationals. When it came to election time that team got into gear and worked extremely hard so that my party was able to present a strong case on local issues and was able to increase its vote in the area.

Across the Murray Valley electorate constituents have not missed out. I have worked hard with whoever has been in government to get results right across the electorate — for example, to get funding for schools, hospitals and the police. The electorate has achieved positive results. Somebody asked me recently whether I had been able to increase my vote because of the funding I got for the electorate. At the November election the Labor Party vote dropped by about 6.5 per cent, the Liberal Party dropped its vote by about 5 per cent and Family First and the Greens polled less than a combined 9 per cent, but The Nationals increased its vote. Why was that?

People are saying that governments at both the state and federal levels have got money, and they are spending it in Melbourne and in country Victoria. My electorate has been the recipient of funding on a large range of issues, some of which I have mentioned. I could mention other sorts of funding being provided, but my constituents have certainly benefited to a great extent. Why were The Nationals able to increase their vote in Murray Valley and increase their penetration across country Victoria?

The Minister for Local Government should contemplate why that has happened. I have a list of the reasons why I think my party was able to increase its

vote. The key point to be made is that although funding has been provided, the government does not understand some of the key issues that affect country Victorians. One important issue was the government's removal of stock from the high country in Victoria. The government's unilateral decision that cattle would be removed from the alpine areas and other Victorian national parks became a huge issue for people in the country.

Another issue that affected the people of north-eastern Victoria was the proposed decommissioning of Lake Mokoan. People saw that as a decision taken without appropriate consultation or a recognition of the importance of Lake Mokoan, which could have been used more efficiently without the need to decommission it. I understand that the government is reconsidering its decision on Lake Mokoan.

The other issue that caused concern was the declaration by the government that water would be removed from north-eastern Victoria and piped to Ballarat and Bendigo. People in the northern part of the state regarded that proposition as the government simply removing water from the area so as to service the residents of Ballarat and Bendigo when other things should and could have been done to underpin the water supply into those two major centres — —

Mr Nardella — Like what?

Mr JASPER — I would like to get into a discussion about water, but time precludes me as there are many other issues I would like to mention. However, I am happy to privately discuss that with the member for Melton so that he may get a better understanding of that issue.

My community also did not support Parks Victoria as the appropriate organisation to manage national parks and state parks, and I have plenty of evidence to support that statement.

Another issue of concern in my electorate was the need for additional funding for the fencing program. That might be a minor issue to some people but the program has been oversubscribed. There is a waiting list for people to access funding for replacement of fencing.

One issue which may be regarded as minor by metropolitan members of Parliament is the removal of the foxtail bounty. That was one of the great success stories as it was important in minimising the numbers of foxes in country Victoria, yet the government has said it will remove the bounty. They are just a few of the issues that the government could consider and why my party's vote increased in country Victoria. The

lesson to be learned by the government is that those are examples of the sorts of issues people do not talk about too much; they may not speak out publicly on those issues, but they have a psychological effect on people in country Victoria.

The government has responded positively to the great problems being experienced by people in north-eastern Victoria because of the severe drought conditions — in fact, things are absolutely desperate up there. Not only is the drought now affecting the farming community but it is also affecting rural cities and towns. I have noticed a lack of confidence in the communities, a lack of sales or a lack of economic activity generally. I will not say that is common across the board but that is the feeling I get.

Other issues of concern to people in my electorate included smoke damage from bushfires and the demise of the tobacco industry, not forgetting the frosts in September 2006 that devastated the stone fruits, particularly across the Goulburn Valley and into north-eastern Victoria. The government has provided funding, and I do not oppose the government as it looks at where it can support north-eastern Victoria because of the horrific problems there.

I applaud the fact that the Premier, the Deputy Premier, and the Minister for Regional and Rural Development visited north-eastern Victoria and said that the government needs to provide assistance. But how do we get that money to the people? What we really need to consider is whether direct grants are made. That becomes difficult, because how does one assess who should get a direct grant? If the government said to small business, 'Here is \$5000 in assistance', the business community would greatly respect the government. However, there are so many rules and regulations involved in somebody seeking access to funding that often they cannot access the funding or support and do not even bother applying for it.

People say, 'It's too hard. We won't bother doing that'. What I say — and I hope the Minister for Local Government will take this on board — is that we should be continuing to put money into local government. When the government announced the allocation of \$300 000 to a large range of country municipalities for the funding of projects I applauded that, because three shire councils within my electorate of Murray Valley — the Shire of Moira, the Rural City of Wangaratta and the Shire of Indigo — were each recipients of that \$300 000.

There were no particular strings attached, but they had to put forward projects that the funding would be spent

on. I think the government has had a great result by saying to the shires of Indigo and Moira and the Rural City of Wangaratta in my electorate, 'We will put that money into your areas and you can spend it on projects', because those municipalities will ensure that the money is efficiently spent, that the money is spent in their communities on particular projects and that the money goes around. That is an issue that should be looked at — how we can efficiently get this money out into the community.

Great play has been made of the money that has been provided to tourism. Again, what is important is how that funding is provided. The government's actions in relation to the Mount Buffalo Chalet are an indictment of the government. What it should be doing is coming out and saying, 'We will fix it. We will make sure that the people who have been operating that facility over a period of time are given an extended lease and that we support them in what they do'. That chalet is one of the great icons of north-eastern Victoria. The government says, 'We are coming out and putting money into country Victoria', but it is those little things the government does that people do not like. They ask, 'Why isn't the government coming out and just negotiating and getting a result?'. I think that is what the government should be doing. Tourism is a big area of concern.

In closing I want to indicate my great concerns about the problems of passenger rail services in north-eastern Victoria, which I spoke about earlier this week, and the important issue of water, which I have mentioned twice in contributions this week in relation to building Big Buffalo Dam and Lake William Hovell. The government must do that! We need to underpin the water supply down through the King and Ovens rivers and be able to provide an adequate supply of water to Wangaratta and, indeed, to be able to underpin the supply down through the Murray system. If we have the water there it can be used for irrigation, town supplies and even environmental flows. I mention that again as being tremendously important.

Another issue The Nationals have been following recently is the road network in country Victoria. That is another area where the government could say, 'We will put more money into country Victoria through municipalities for the road system'. In many areas, including the three municipalities I have mentioned, we have huge and horrific problems with our roads, and we need more money coming into those areas. Yes, the state government has put money into roads with its black spot program, and we have the federal Roads to Recovery funding coming in, but we need to concentrate on how that money is spent. If it is spent on

contractors and others, then it will come into the community. Whilst there are funding programs that have been provided for country Victoria, they need to be extended.

I will finish with an issue I raised in a debate last year — that is, overregulation. We are overregulated. We have to look at reducing regulation. Business and industry are sick to death of overregulation within the state of Victoria, and it needs to be addressed. Finally, the government needs to look at this automatic increase in charges on 1 July every year. The state government must change this practice every year of increasing the thousands of charges it has by the consumer price index. It must change, and I believe it will in the future.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — I would like to begin my contribution by thanking my campaign workers, my residents and especially my wife, Lyn, for their support of me and the great Australian Labor Party at the last state election in the electorate of Melton. A number of very hardworking people were part of the team that assisted us in that quest.

I want to put on record that we missed a long-term party member in Ned Johnson, who passed away before the election. He came from Footscray and was a meat worker. He used to get there at the beginning of the poll and stay there the whole day. He was just terrific, and we miss him dearly. The people who helped out were people like Nib De Santis, Shirley Rowan, Coralie Cartwright, Arthur Coelho, Russell McGregor, Arthur and Pat Clegg and Chris and Donny Mitchell. Donny Mitchell is really amazing. He stays on the Myrning polling booth all day, and he has done that for a long time — and Chris did the same out at Rowsley. They are the stalwarts of the party, as are people like Marion and Chris Ingram, Graham Proctor, Leo and Elaine Johnson, Del Leggett and Bruce and Dev Rowan, who opened up a polling booth for me. I thank all members of the team in the Melton and Bacchus Marsh ALP branches, Chris Papas, John and Verna Reed, Andrew and Yen Nugara and Bob and Jean Rau.

On both sides of the house we rely on our supporters and party supporters for our success and our party's success. I am sure I have missed out quite a number of people, but they are all valuable to me and I really do sincerely thank them.

I also want to thank the community volunteers who do a lot of work in the community without griping, who really take pride in the work they do and who take the community forward — people like John and Jill Bentley, and Ian Dempsey, who is a terrific community worker who also works in the Lions. The disability

work that he does in Lions with the disability walkers is just amazing. When you see one of these kids walk for the first time, you just start bawling because of the impact that will have not only on that child's life but also on their family. Ian does a great job. I also thank people like Graeme Mann, Ken Missen, who is also another great community worker, and Lyn and Simone Holdsworth. Lyn picked up the Citizen of the Year award in Melton this year — she is a terrific community worker. She set up the Friends of Toolern Creek group and is now part of the face of Melton and its environment.

I thank Barry Leslie, OAM, and Jill Leslie. Barry, through his work in the Red Cross, and Jill, through her work in other community groups and Probus, are really the stalwarts of the community. I also thank Ron Rintoul, Trevor King in the scouts, Glenda Hutchison and June and the team at the Melton Historical Society, of which I am a member. I thank business people like Claire Sutherland, who manages the Melton and Bacchus Marsh McDonald's but who is always there for us and for the community when we hold a function. She is also the chair of Ronald McDonald House. I honestly do not know how she does it. She is just an amazing woman!

I also want to thank the team on the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee: Sean Coley, the executive officer, Keir Delaney and Natalie-Mai Holmes. The work they did during the last term of the government — we received on Tuesday the government response to our last report — was amazing. People outside this place do not understand the work that the officers do to assist not only us but also the community. Sean, Keir and Natalie really put in and made sure that we were serviced as members of Parliament, and I want to thank them for the hard work they have done.

It goes without saying that the other officers within the Parliament — the attendants, Hansard staff and the protective services officers — make our life and our job easier, along with the Clerk, Ray Purdey, and his team, who really helped me when I was the chair of the Privileges Committee and who continue to assist every member of the Parliament in their role.

One of the major issues I want to raise in this address today is the issue of looking after members of Parliament who have been defeated. Since 2002 MPs have been and will continue to be in a different situation after election compared with MPs at every previous election because of the changes to a number of things we have put through this house. Whether that be for good or bad, whether Mark Latham was doing the

right thing or whether the reaction by John Howard at the time was right, that is all irrelevant. What is relevant is that the changes to the superannuation scheme and the timing of the election have made the position of former members of Parliament and their staff difficult. It hit home to me last time round.

The election is held just before Christmas and is followed by the holiday period in January. In my time in this place I have seen probably 70 or 80 MPs come and go. People must understand that there are some long-term members but that MPs are usually in this place for under eight years, or two terms. The turnover is massive. But if you are a defeated member of Parliament, it is extremely hard to get a job. I am not being partisan when I say this.

There is also the situation where MPs are uncertain about their status because they might be counted in or counted out. They do not get paid, but they cannot go back to work or look for a job. For two and a half weeks after the last election the former member for Ferntree Gully, Ms Anne Eckstein, did not know if she had been elected or not, and she did not get any money. That is the reality of the situation. I am saying this in a non-partisan way because it does not matter who the person is. We need to look at the situation and to implement a system to deal with members of Parliament who find themselves in similar situations. It is not only the former MPs who are affected, it is also their families and, to a large degree, their friends. We need to have a look at a system that deals with them.

In other walks of life when someone loses their job or livelihood they get counselling and there is job search assistance and advice. This should happen to both Parliamentary electorate officers and former members of Parliament. We demand it of big companies and other corporations within our society, yet we do not look after the people we love most dearly, with whom we become friends and colleagues, and we miss them sincerely. People feel lost when they lose their seats. Members from both sides get depressed, which is one of the real difficulties. Unless you go through this it is hard to imagine, even for somebody like me.

I have spoken to staff from the Department of Parliamentary Services, including staff from the committees, who went out and did office audits. They closed their offices and ended up being counsellors to the electorate officers and the former MPs. We have to do it better. We have to make sure that we look after our friends, because we demand it in other walks of life. I put out that challenge because the Howard government has tried to deal with this issue, whether it is appropriate or inappropriate. Because of the time of

the election and other factors it is critical that we do it, because the security and safeguards that we used to have in the past are not there.

I now turn to the state election and to the benefits to my community and to the west generally. Today I have heard other members talk about how the Bracks Labor government does not look after the west or after anybody. Other members have been critical of our policies and the government yet are happy to say they have achieved the school, hospital and transport upgrades as well as a reduction in the public transport fares which are to be implemented on 4 March. They are willing to take all the achievements but are not willing to recognise the work that is done to look after all Victorians, regardless of where they are in the state.

Sometimes that can be frustrating for somebody who has lived, worked and grown up in the western suburbs, because there is always pressure on us as local members of Parliament to say, 'When are we going to be looked after and why does the Labor Party not do more for us?'. The record is a fine record and one that covers all of Victoria.

We do not go out of our way, like the previous Kennett government, to disadvantage areas that did not and continue not to vote for the Australian Labor Party. Out my way we are getting 12 new dental chairs and an upgrade of the Bacchus Marsh railway station car park, which is fantastic. There is the \$180 million upgrade for the Sunshine Hospital, including an X-ray bunker, so people in the district do not need to travel to the city or go to Ballarat. Henry, who is one of my constituents, has made representations to me on that particular issue. That is part of a continuing and necessary development of that campus.

Over the last seven years I have spoken in this chamber about school upgrades. Those upgrades will continue with Coimadai Primary School being upgraded, which was announced just before the last state election, and there are others to come. It is a real commitment to working-class families and working-class kids. That is one of the things I can be proud of as I stand here today and say to members and the community that, without the Labor Party and the Labor government, working-class families, be they from Rockbank, Melton, Bacchus Marsh or any of the townships in my electorate, would be more disadvantaged today than they would have been under any other government.

Also, their life chances, as Weber said, will be markedly improved by the work that we have put in, such as by providing more teachers, better school facilities and assistance to communities and

organisations. That sets us apart from the work that the opposition does and certainly sets us apart from the federal government, which is missing in action, is not around in the Western suburbs and has, as I said before, disadvantaged the west compared with its marginal seats or Liberal Party-held seats. I thank everybody for a terrific result, with special thanks to the Premier and his team.

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — It is a pleasure to respond to the Governor's speech, and in doing so I wish to highlight this government's neglect of the residents of Manningham, especially the residents of Bulleen. The government, once again, has ignored them as it has ignored them over the last seven dark years that the Labor Party has been in government.

I also wish to highlight this government's arrogance, hypocrisy and cheap political point scoring in the area of multicultural affairs. It has been a disgrace. Rather than using our cultural diversity as an advantage, this government is using it to score cheap political points and in trying to pit one group against another.

It is very sad that the government does not put policies in place — instead of the hollow rhetoric, which it does not follow up — that would make a difference and look after the wellbeing of all Victorians. I will get to that later.

I turn to my electorate of Bulleen. As I said at the commencement of my speech, the government has ignored my electorate. The Labor Party candidate standing for Bulleen grew up in the area but on numerous occasions unfortunately refused to say whether he lived in the area! Secondly, the Labor candidate was not able to set out any policy, any initiative or any view on what should be improved in education, roads and the environment in the area. In a letter that he wrote to constituents he said:

In this area Labor will give priority to modernising and upgrading the Doncaster Secondary College and East Doncaster Secondary College.

Unfortunately both these schools are in the Doncaster electorate, and not the Bulleen electorate. As I said, he did not even understand which schools fell in his own electorate, but he was asking voters to vote for him. Fortunately, they saw him for what he was and refused to vote for him.

There are a number of other issues in Bulleen that are urgent. One is roads, and I refer to Templestowe Road and King Street. I had hoped the Labor Party candidate would give a commitment to upgrade Templestowe Road and King Street. I thought he was keen and

wanted to win the election and therefore would get the government to wake up and provide funding for the upgrading of Templestowe Road and King Street. However he was silent on these two important roads.

Other issues included two dangerous intersections. The residents who live near those dangerous intersections have been crying out for the installation of traffic lights. Every single resident in Manningham and Bulleen understands that the intersections are very dangerous not only for the elderly and for students but for all residents. The Liberal Party made the commitment to install traffic lights at these two intersections, but the Labor Party candidate refused to do the same, and he was reported as saying so in a local newspaper:

Neil Campbell said he did not believe the Liberals' proposal was the solution that people wanted.

If he had spoken to people they would have told him that the installation of traffic lights was exactly what they wanted. The local newspaper report also states:

Mr Campbell made no promise that the Labor Party would devote funds to Templestowe Road or the intersections.

Once again, he had no vision or plans for the electorate of Bulleen and for Manningham in general. When the Liberal Party announced the tramway extension to Doncaster shopping centre, he was silent. For seven long years this government has continued to ignore the people who live in Manningham, which is a pity. I thought that perhaps this time the government felt it had the chance to win the seat and so it might have spent some money and made some commitments, but that was not meant to be. The government ignored the residents and ignored the area, hoping that people would vote for the Labor Party without it promising anything or showing that it cared.

I briefly turn to the issue of multicultural affairs. I know there are some members on the other side who are sincere in this area. I have seen them at functions and spoken to them and heard what they have had to say. Some of them actually believe that cultural diversity is one of our greatest assets. To those people I say that I hope they speak in their party room and make sure that all Victorians are catered for, because every one is a Victorian and should not be ignored.

I say to this government that for four years it has failed to ensure that all Victorians are catered for. The Governor's speech refers to cultural diversity, but unfortunately it lacks detail and vision and does not tell me what the government plans to do over the next four years.

The Labor Party has had seven years in government. When Labor came to office in 1999 there was the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (VOMA) and the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC), so there were two different groups within the Department of Premier and Cabinet. I will ignore the fact that the government moved VOMA to the Department for Victorian Communities. VOMA was meant to provide information and advice to ministers; the Victorian Multicultural Commission was meant to be the bridge between the government and the community. As a non-political organisation it was there to advise the government on what communities wanted. Unfortunately the director of VOMA and the chairman of the VMC refused to speak to each other. Policy was now on the run. No-one knew what the other unit was doing, and there was a complete breakdown in communication.

As a result, because the minister has been unable to manage his own area the government has now decided to merge the two groups into one unit. That is politicising the Victorian Multicultural Commission. It will be a rubber stamp for this government. It will not introduce any new initiatives that cater for the needs of all Victorians but will be simply a mouthpiece of the government, nothing more.

Over the last seven years it had an office with more than 18 staff. As well, outside consultants were employed at a cost of about \$160 000. Each year \$1.2 million was spent just on the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs. At one stage a speechwriter was paid \$2000 to write a speech for the minister. All up the speech cost \$2062, and when you count the number of words in the minister's speech it worked out at \$1 per word. With 18 staff members and five or six advisers there was not one person in the minister's office who was able to write a speech for the minister. I am not blaming the minister, but I am saying that it had an office with 18 staff and yet it had to employ an outside consultant to write a speech for the minister costing \$1 per word.

After six years in government the department decided to have a planning program so all the staff could get together and decide on the roles of the people in the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs. There was a two-day planning seminar which cost close to \$15 000, just so the secretary of the department could tell the 18 staff what the role of VOMA was and what the role of the VMC was. At the end of the two-day planning seminar the participants were given a survey, and even after those two days — and after six years — 38 per cent said they had little knowledge of the objectives of what they had to deliver. So even after six years, and

even after the two-day program, they were not able to say why they were employed.

How can any government ensure that it has policies and programs in place to cater for all Victorians when a unit within a department is unable to advise it or give it options for what it should do. The government's solution is to combine the two groups into one. What it is doing is going back to the Cain-Kirner years, when multicultural affairs was politicised and funding went to groups mainly on the basis of where the Labor Party could get the most votes and not on the basis of who actually needed the money and could provide services. That is very unfortunate.

There is a new minister, and I hope he takes on board the fact that he is there to serve all Victorians and not particular groups simply because they belong to a particular party or are part of his branch structure or because he wishes to secure more votes.

I refer to the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV). Although it is independent from government, this organisation has never criticised the Labor government in Victoria. It will always put out press releases criticising the federal government, but over the past six years it has never put out a statement criticising the Labor government.

Mr Nardella — Who has not?

Mr KOTSIRAS — The ECCV. However, when we released our multicultural affairs policy it put out a media release saying that it welcomed the policy because it was a policy of substance and it knew exactly where we stood on multicultural affairs. The media release states:

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria has welcomed the Liberal Party's Multicultural Affairs policy and several of its commitments.

'ECCV appreciates the increase in funding of \$3 million for language services for new and emerging communities which we have called for ...

'We also welcome the commitment to provide more funds to after hours ethnic schools which are struggling to make ends meet ...

We offered \$20 extra per student for them to learn a second language. Three weeks later the government also offered \$20. It is a matter of it following the leader rather than coming up with its own policies and own ideas. The media release goes on to say:

The decision to establish an ethno-specific aged-care unit within the Department of Human Services is welcomed so that the department can focus more on the needs of our

growing numbers of ethnic seniors. However, more funding for ethnic aged-care services would also be appreciated.

Here we have a group which normally does not support the Liberal Party putting out a press release saying that it supports the policy we took to the last election. We had a vision, we had programs and we had a policy — unlike the Labor government. It came out with a policy to combine the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Victorian Multicultural Commission and to upgrade Lonsdale and Lygon streets. I have to say they are good ideas, but I doubt whether the upgrades will happen.

I know that at every function he went to the Honourable Theo Theophanous, the Minister for Industry and State Development in the other place, would stand up and say, 'This is our policy on multicultural affairs. We are going to upgrade Lonsdale Street and Lygon Street'. That is great, it is fantastic, but what about the needs of refugees for health services and language services. There are not any policies that will cater for current refugees who are coming out. That is unfortunate. That has been taken away from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, where the Premier had the influence and control.

We have a Premier who is the Minister for Multicultural Affairs but who is now hands-off in respect of his portfolio. We have a minister assisting the Premier, we have a parliamentary secretary to assist the Premier and we have a Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Communities. There are so many people overlooking this, yet there is no vision and no policies and no initiatives to cater for all Victorians.

Over the next four years the government will try to continue to score cheap political points, which is a shame. As I said from the start, there are a few on that side who believe in cultural diversity. I just hope they voice that in the party room. I hope they do not use our cultural diversity for political gain but to ensure that policies and programs are put in place to meet the needs of particularly recent arrivals, and especially refugees, so that they feel happy and proud that they are also Victorians and that they live in Victoria. I just hope that this government supports the Liberal Party's policy on multicultural affairs.

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I am pleased to speak in the debate on the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. I was pleased to hear the speech made by the Governor — his first speech in Parliament. I want to congratulate him not only on that speech but also on his first year in office. Over the last year he has been in my electorate on at least two occasions, when he has met with constituents in the Moorabool and

Hepburn municipalities. He has been very well received on those occasions, and I congratulate him and Mrs de Kretser on the way they have related in such a natural way with the community.

I also congratulate the Speaker on her elevation to her office, as I do the Deputy Speaker.

I am certainly very pleased to be back here in this Parliament, having been re-elected to be part of the Bracks government and to deliver for my electorate for a third term. As was outlined in the Governor's speech, this government has an extensive plan for this term in government and ongoing beyond that. It has already delivered so much in the last seven years, and I have been very pleased to be a part of that. One of the things that I noted the Governor mentioned in his speech was the immediate concern across parts of my electorate and across the broader community with regard to the recent bushfires and the ongoing drought.

From my perspective as somebody who lives in a rural community and is a grazier on a property, I can relate to both of these. In the week before the election we experienced a fire through our property. It was a pretty challenging experience, especially for my wife, who was home with our two preschool-age children when the fire suddenly came upon our property. She had to act very quickly. With the support of neighbours and, as time went by, of Country Fire Authority crews, she was able to save our house from being burnt, although approximately half of our property was burnt out. Eventually that fire was put out by the Elvis sky crane supporting the CFA crews.

Through that experience I was able to learn of the challenges that individuals who face this experience have to deal with: both the anxiety and the many semi-sleepless nights, even following the fire, worrying about whether they did the right thing and what they would do on another occasion; and reliving some of those experiences. There are huge challenges, and I think of the other people in the east of Victoria who have faced those challenges. Day after day they saw smoke in their area without knowing exactly when the fire would be upon them. It was a significant challenge for them, but it was very well dealt with by the government services — the CFA and Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) crews — who tried to keep local communities informed as to the best way to deal with the issues. I certainly commend the CFA and DSE crews for the work they have done in recent times. Clearly there is follow-up work this government recognises it needs to do to support individuals and whole communities who have been affected by the fires.

We also know that with the ongoing drought there are significant challenges for people in rural communities, including those farmers who are dealing with challenging decisions, who lost crops last year and who were not able to harvest fodder in areas like my own. Clearly they are worrying about the autumn ahead of us because it could make a significant difference in how serious the drought becomes. If we get good autumn rains at least the graziers should be able to see their way through, but if we do not, the drought will become even more serious.

I am pleased that the government has worked in a very proactive way with people across my region who have been drought affected, as well as with people across other regions of Victoria, to try to address the broad range of those people's needs. It has worked in conjunction with the federal and local governments to provide funding directly to land-holders and for communities to address issues. It recognises not only that physical assets need to be built up again but also the mental challenges that are faced by individual farmers, who in some cases are suffering from depression.

The government has been able to pick up on that and ensure that counselling is available to deal with that and to work with whole communities. For example, next week I will be pleased to be in Newlyn, where the Hepburn shire is having a family fun evening associated with the drought. It is trying to bring together families to provide useful information to them, but it is also running positive events so those in the community can feel good and support each other through these challenging times. There are some terrific things happening, and I am pleased our government is at the forefront in offering support in that broad range of ways.

We see that urban communities are also affected by the drought. The population of urban Ballarat and the surrounding region is significantly affected. The area has gone on to stage 4 water restrictions. For some time we have recognised that these unprecedented low spring rainfalls have seen very limited flows into our reservoirs and that action needs to be taken to look at the short-term issues associated with that. Those issues are being addressed in a number of ways by our government through a plan — and that has not been just a recent plan.

Ever since the 2002 election we have said that water would be a prime responsibility of this government and that we want to plan for the future. In 2004 we brought out the *Our Water Our Future* document, in which we looked at planning ahead. We looked at the range of

things that need to be done in urban communities, where residents could consider various ways of saving and recycling water where possible. It involves industry in assessing its water needs and determining how they can be met more efficiently. It recognises that irrigation is a substantial use of surface water and groundwater across the state. The document looks at ways that irrigation water could be saved and used more efficiently.

Our state government has been pleased to support programs such as the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline project, which of course will save a huge amount of water when open channels are no longer used as they have been. The member for Rodney is nodding because he has seen projects in his own region where now water is piped instead of open channels being used as in the past. Many other measures are being introduced that will result in more efficient use of irrigation water. It is appropriate that making savings and recycling water wherever possible be looked at.

With regard to planning for the future, people in industry in and residents of Ballarat are saying, 'We need to see that we have a plan for the future that will see us through not just the next two years but many years beyond'. When looking at water availability in the future, we recognise that Ballarat is essentially reliant on the Moorabool catchment area to the east of Ballarat. We realise that it is not appropriate to keep all our eggs in the one basket, as it were.

The Liberals jumped up with a plan that they pushed for many months ahead of the election, saying that because Geelong gets a significant proportion of the water from Lal Lal Reservoir we need to claim that back for Ballarat and the government should find other ways of providing water to Geelong. That was a plan the government considered early on, but we recognised that the Moorabool catchment plan was not going to be Ballarat's solution. As the events of the past six months have shown, that is certainly the case. There has not been an entitlement to Geelong out of Lal Lal Reservoir, and the reservoir has very limited water resources that cannot be relied on in the future.

The alternative was to look at areas where surface water was available. The Goulburn–Eildon system was looked at as solution to providing water for Bendigo and, once that pipeline was laid, bringing the water from the Waranga channel. That will provide a good, secure way for Ballarat to move forward. I am very pleased to see that works are commencing. The government has made a substantial financial commitment of more than \$100 million. I trust that very soon the federal government will acknowledge that it has good reason to

support that project and that it will have full support at both state and federal government levels to ensure the security of Ballarat's water supply into the future.

In his address the Governor outlined many other plans which will affect not just the electorate of Ballarat East but the whole state. We have ongoing economic prosperity and we have clear targets for creating additional jobs in regional Victoria as well as in Melbourne. We are building on our exports. Obviously we want to get our agricultural industries rebuilt after the drought so that we can continue to rely on good exports for our milk products and other areas of agriculture as well as a range of other high-tech exports.

The government continues to recognise education as a key area for commitment. We have committed to a 10-year plan of rebuilding and modernising all state schools. The students in my electorate at Ballarat Secondary College — East Campus, Daylesford Secondary College, Trentham District Primary School and Langley Primary School have been advised that they are first in line in the staging of that process. They are looking to have their new schools provided very soon, and I will be working with the schools to see that that happens.

I am also pleased to support other improvements that will see young people getting into trades and meeting the skills shortages that we are facing in our region. I am pleased that a new technical education centre will be established in Ballarat later this year. A lot of work is being undertaken at the moment to ensure that that happens. I am pleased also that the government continues to invest in the technical and further education area, which is very important. The skills shortages we are facing are being addressed, and there are good, smooth pathways for young people to go into trade and other areas associated with the TAFE sector as well as going into university courses.

I am also very pleased about the transport links. The government is supporting the transport links between Ballarat and Melbourne. We have seen the fast rail projects undertaken. My electorate goes across to Kyneton. With both the Ballarat and Bendigo lines completed there is a much more modern service that will keep public transport from those centres to and from Melbourne in a good state for many years to come. We are backing that up not only by providing good, sound, modern services but with the fares coming down in March. The 20 per cent reduction in fares will be not just on the trains but also on V/Line buses. I am very excited about that and so many other things that the government will deliver.

In the last minutes of my speech I want to thank the people who have supported me to get back in this Parliament for another term. I need to thank my wife, Dianne, who has been a terrific support to me over many years and who at times when I am not there continues to have to battle through at home with our young family — and against fires, as I indicated earlier. She has to take on all those challenges when I am often absent. I also thank my electorate office staff, Jason and Julianne, and others who worked towards my re-election. I thank Jeff Roots and all the other people who supported my campaign. It is clearly not a job that one individual does; it is one where you rely on much support, and I appreciate that support.

In being re-elected, I consider it important to focus on why I first wanted to become a community leader. I believe there is a significant role of leadership in our community, not by acting in politically expedient ways but by looking at the things we want to achieve and see in our community. I certainly have a strong view about creating a society that is compassionate and supporting people in our community who are in need, whether they are in minority groups or are facing hard times. I want to work to ensure that we have an ethic across our community so that we are prepared to recognise that people in our community have difficulties, whether they are in minority groups, have disabilities or whatever. We should work to support them, whether they live around the corner or are in other parts of our community. That is a significant issue that I want to work on.

I want to keep my feet on the ground in my electorate to ensure that I get a feeling of the issues that are out there. That is certainly a significant challenge for me, as it is for all of us, in plotting a path ahead into the future and showing real leadership for our communities and working with them to ensure that we make our communities a better place to live. I am confident that as part of this government I can do that.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — As a new Parliament begins and the Bracks government enters its third term, it is timely to ask ourselves how history will look back on and characterise this first decade of the 21st century. In particular, how will history characterise what we have done — what we have done globally, what we have done nationally and what we have done in this state — and what we have failed to do with the circumstances and opportunities we have?

In many respects we are living in a golden time. We are enjoying the fruits of more than two decades of reform, with the ideas that were laid down in the mid-1970s and the ideas that were implemented under the Hawke

government and the Keating government, under the Kennett government and under Prime Minister John Howard and Treasurer Peter Costello. We have seen economic deregulation, microeconomic reform, reforms of government administration, tax reform and labour market reform. We are in a period of general prosperity and opportunity and a period of rising living standards, albeit at the expense of long and demanding work hours. At the same time there are pockets of suffering and misery, largely as a result of broken families, unsustainable lifestyles and drug addiction.

It also needs to be recognised that we are living under the cloud of two huge international problems — the threat of terrorism and other forms of violent extremism and intolerance, and the threat of climate change, with its potentially devastating effects on the environment around us. How will history judge us? I very much hope it will not be forced to pass judgement that at a global level the world put its internal and self-centred preoccupations ahead of recognising and tackling the serious external threats it faced and embraced policies of isolation and appeasement that brought the terrible long-term consequences of spreading violence, totalitarianism, repression, killing and suffering, made even worse if accompanied by appalling environmental degradation and consequent economic disruption.

If we are fortunate enough to escape that global judgement, history is almost as certain to say of us in Victoria that we squandered our opportunities — that we could have achieved so much more than we did with the enormous resources we were given. We will be seen as the grasshoppers that frittered away the opportunities we had to implement lasting achievements for future generations. We live in strong national economic times, we have revenue flooding into the coffers, and the government has control over more of the institutions of power than any other government in the state's history. All of this could have allowed the Bracks government to achieve so much in terms of improved services, better infrastructure, lower taxes, a more efficient economy and a more open, engaged and responsive government. We need to ask ourselves: why have we failed to achieve these results? Has Victoria had the misfortune to be landed with a particularly inept government or is there a wider and more systematic explanation?

I believe there is a wider explanation, and it is called New Labor. Labor in Victoria and around Australia has consciously modelled itself on Britain's New Labour. Labor used to proudly boast about how it was following in the footsteps of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and now the vices we are suffering in Victoria are exactly the same vices that Britons have to suffer. We,

and Britain, have governments that spin, manipulate, conceal and give priority to appearances over results. Here and in Britain this movement has created a bloated bureaucracy and inundated the public with slick and glossy publications but it delivers results in a manner that is slow, tortuous, convoluted and expensive.

I expect that over time there will be the same sort of intensive assessment, analysis and critique of the inherent flaws and failings of New Labor as there has been of the flaws and failings of communism and socialism. However, the corrosive effects of New Labor on standards can be summed up by comparing two British comedy series — *Yes, Prime Minister* and *Absolute Power*. *Yes, Prime Minister* was a gentle, witty and charitable expose of the foibles and inefficiency of old Labour and old Tories of the 1980s. A generation later, *Absolute Power* is a brutal and cutting satire of the degradation and abuse of standards of New Labour in Britain. Over the 20-plus years between these programs, Britain and Victoria have lost terribly in the erosion of standards of debate, democracy and decency.

Let us look at some specific aspects of the consequences the New Labor approach is having for Victoria and compare what is happening or not happening with what could and should be happening. Energy is an area in which Victoria faces profound and far-reaching issues and decisions, because it is at the forefront of our response to global climate change. Here we see New Labor at its worst. Global climate change is an issue about greenhouse gas emissions. Pollution control, including control of emissions levels, is primarily a state responsibility, yet the state government is long on talk and long on calling on the federal government to do something, but chronically short on taking efficient and effective action itself.

The recent announcement of Victoria and other states that they will introduce a state-based carbon trading scheme in 2010 if the commonwealth failed to act is a disgrace. Given the gravity of the possible consequences of climate change, for the states to sit on their hands until 2010 is appalling. Once again state Labor is willing to put political games ahead of actually solving problems — trying to get rid of the Prime Minister takes precedence over trying to reduce global warming.

Carbon trading schemes have the potential to be a useful tool in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but they are a means to an end. It may have escaped New Labor, but the fundamental requirement to reduce human contributions to greenhouse gases is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. You cannot implement a

carbon trading scheme unless and until you decide by how much greenhouse gas emissions are to be reduced and on whom the primary obligations to reduce emissions are to fall. It is only once these decisions have been implemented that a carbon trading scheme can actually take effect to allow emission reduction obligations to be transferred from the party primarily responsible to the party able to make the required reduction for the least economic cost.

By all means let us develop a carbon trading model in parallel with reaching decisions on emissions reductions, but the emissions reductions have to be decided on and mandated before anything can actually be put into practice. We thus need the Bracks government to live up to its responsibility for emissions control and spell out to the public what the options are regarding this profound community decision. What level of emissions reductions does the Bracks government propose that Victoria achieve? How can the primary obligations to make these reductions be allocated? What are the consequences of the various options for families, business and commerce generally, for electricity generation and for our export industries?

In my view the community has little idea of the possible extent of the changes needed for Victoria to pull its weight internationally in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and the Bracks government also has little interest in putting the full facts before Victorians. In true New Labor mode, which our Deputy Premier, the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change, has fully mastered, the aim is not to actually solve the problem but to create a perception that there is a problem which New Labor has a deep and sincere commitment to act on. Thus we have the visual imagery of the black balloons wafting into the sky, but the public is given little or no idea or concrete information about what reduction in greenhouse emissions they are required to achieve or what steps they need to take in order to achieve the required reductions.

There are other important issues in the energy sector where New Labor has failed to pull its weight. We look at the recent supply interruption that this state suffered. We need some explanation about what VENCORP's role was in that interruption. It certainly has a role in risk assessment. What role did it play on that day? What decisions did it take? What did it recommend? What information did it give to the government? I think there are two clear take-outs from that interruption. Firstly, there needs to be better ongoing risk assessment during the course of the day when there are unfolding events, such as raging fires; and secondly, we need a much better scheme to get an instant switch-off of lower

priority uses in order to minimise the extent and impact of widespread blackouts.

The second area which needs attention is the management of demand peaks, as peaks are the greatest factor responsible for the need for additional generating capacity. So to the extent to which we can smooth demand peaks, we can avoid the cost and potential environmental consequences of increased generation capacity. We had the minister the other day talking about the deployment of interval meters, or smart meters. That was something which was on the cards and the implementation of which was being planned when the Bracks government came to office. Seven years later we are still talking about a pilot scheme.

We need to look at potential arrangements like those that South Australia is examining, such as the coordinated switching off of air-conditioners for short periods of time. We need to look at other options for commercial demand response and demand signals. If we can do that, we can dramatically reduce the future generation capacity needed. When we come to the point where we do need additional baseload capacity there needs to be regulatory certainty, and that is one of the other consequences of the failure of the Bracks government to live up to its responsibilities for emission control.

Finally, of course, we have the laudable endeavours, where money has been committed, to find better and cleaner technology for burning coal. We need to get a far better idea of what has been achieved, and we need to see what avenues we have for renewing our efforts.

I will talk briefly about industrial relations, where the Bracks government is again making mischief, which threatens to bring us back to the bad old days of cumbersome and inflexible work practices. We have benefited enormously in Australia from far more flexible work practices, through both black-letter law and changed attitudes to flexibility, yet that has been put under threat both federally and at a state level. We have seen remarkable improvements in the building industry in Victoria as a result of federal government reform which are also being put at risk.

If we look at the area of information and communication technology, New Labor's proudest boasts are that it has achieved a consistent internal directory of public service staff and that it has renegotiated the supply of communications services to the government on better terms than the previous contract. The first of these is a basic measure that should have been put in place as a matter of course, and not as a matter for boasting. The second is a

no-brainer — if you cannot achieve better terms for your communication services supply in an era where telecoms prices are falling around the world, there is something seriously wrong.

We have also had bungles such as the mobile data network, a project which rolled out Windows 98-style technology in 2006. Most recently we have had the sudden and unexplained disappearance of the Office of the Chief Information Officer. The former minister boasted that that office was fundamental to the government's strategy for proper whole-of-government management of information. After the election the office disappeared. The chief information officer herself has been shunted to a corner of the bureaucracy. There has not been a single news release or a single word of explanation. This vital aspect of the government's strategy has just disappeared.

Let me briefly say a few words about the Attorney-General's portfolio. The Department of Justice has had the worst increase in bureaucracy of all the departments under the Bracks government. The Attorney-General has been eager to portray himself as a great law reformer, but the beneficial results have been few and far between. It took him until 2004 to produce a justice statement of the sort that should have been issued in the first few months of government. Even then it was a combination of turgid jargon, sweeping appeals to worthy principles and a long list of things that the government was going to do. However, the reality of New Labor justice is far different from the rhetoric.

How long, may I ask, would one consider it reasonable to wait for the prosecution of an alleged wrongful death to go ahead when a worker has tragically fallen to his death and co-workers are being accused of having alleged roles in that death? Is one year a reasonable time to wait? Two years, perhaps? In fact in the County Court last week there was a case that had been waiting for almost three and a half years to come to trial, yet it was adjourned for a further year because there was no judge available to hear it. That is the reality of New Labor's commitment to justice, where those accused workers have this threat hanging over their heads and have enormous legal bills, and where the family of the deceased worker is unable to get certainty and a resolution of the tragic death of their loved one. That is the reality of justice under New Labor.

It is only by breaking away from the vices of New Labor that we can bring better government to Victoria. The notion of being frank and open with the electorate is alien to New Labor, but it is fundamental, the sine qua non, to further improvement in public administration and decision making. The public needs

the facts to weigh and judge options on policy issues that need decision; they need the facts about what the government will actually do, and when, in order to make their own plans accordingly; and they need facts about government performance so as to make decisions about whether to return or change a government.

One of the few organisational advantages that a government has over other bodies is that the vast bulk of its activities do not take place in a competitive environment. A corporation may need to be limited in what it tells shareholders lest it reveal vital information to its competitors. Yet a government ought to be able to be frank and open with the citizens it represents in relation to almost every aspect of its activities.

The absence of systematic and factual accountability to the public is the biggest single impediment Victorians face to having a state government that takes full advantage on their behalf of the opportunities we have in order to achieve so much more than we are.

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — It gives me great pleasure to make a contribution to the address-in-reply debate today.

Firstly, I would like to express my thanks to the people in the electorate of Cranbourne who supported and had confidence in me by electing me for a second term, resulting in a swing towards the ALP against the electoral tide in the south-east.

Secondly, I would like to thank the equally important people, if not more so, who primarily made possible my presence here for a second term. I refer to the members of the ALP in the electorate of Cranbourne — the members of the Carrum Downs, Frankston North and Cranbourne ALP branches — who overwhelmingly delivered a 92 per cent vote for me at the Labor Party preselections.

Thirdly, I could not have got here without the hard work and overall commitment of my staff, campaign team, volunteers, donors, supporters and family, who have immensely contributed in so many different ways to delivering a very effective campaign that achieved a fantastic result. It is a privilege to be elected to this dignified office in the first place. It is one of the best feelings in my life to observe that my constituents fully endorsed me by re-electing me with an increased margin after I had been their member for four years.

The third term agenda of the Bracks government is very exciting, with new challenges. New building blocks will be erected on the firm foundation laid during the government's previous two terms. Eighty per cent of the current electorate of Cranbourne was in the

previous electorate before the boundary change in the lead-up to the 2002 election. The electorate of Cranbourne had 10 years of Liberal representation prior to 2002 — —

Mr Clark — And a good member too.

Mr PERERA — Yes, we are going to see that! Investments made in the electorate during that period were far less than what we have delivered in the past four years. Schools were starving for funding. Some main roads were like goat tracks. Public transport was appalling. It is very ironic that opposition MPs should suddenly become champions in shedding crocodile tears on service delivery when they sacked 800 police, teachers and nurses during their time in government.

The bus network in the Cranbourne electorate and the through services — Frankston–Dandenong and Cranbourne–Frankston — have been improved. I am only too pleased to inform the house that from next year there will be a SmartBus operating on regular short intervals from Frankston to Ringwood, through Dandenong, and passing my electorate.

My office has been a public office in the true sense of the word 'public'. Local community groups, business groups, sporting clubs and other organised and non-organised groups work in tandem with my office to initiate, drive and deliver activities such as community kitchens, local business networks and other projects which have been well received by the electorate. We held a number of successful community kitchens. The food for the first couple of community kitchens was provided and cooked by Mr Satvir Singhe, his wife, Kamaljit Kaur, and their friends the Charnjit family, who were assisted in cooking by volunteers and later with support from the trainee hospitality students from the William Angliss Institute of TAFE under the stewardship of Phil Sealey.

We have managed to make strong partnerships with the staff of the local National Australia Bank, the William Angliss Casey cafe, the Cranbourne Uniting Church, St John's Anglican Church, Mahogany Neighbourhood Centre, Roma Foods of Carrum Downs and many other great community champions who are committed to delivering for our challenged constituents. Our Christmas community kitchen in December last year served 550 meals with a visit from Santa and his helpers. We have formed some very worthy partnerships. Recently we successfully lobbied the AFL, which was so kind as to send us over 300 AFL packs, which we duly handed out to the young people of Cranbourne in a Christmas-in-July event. This event was well received.

The business forum organised by my office in conjunction with the Carrum Downs community sport group has been a tremendous success. The concept behind the forum is for businesses, sporting organisations and schools in the Carrum Downs–Skye area to communicate with each other for mutual benefit. The idea is to help local businesses which could potentially provide jobs and traineeships to local youths and probably contribute to local community and school projects in the future.

During its previous term the Bracks Labor government constructed a new, state-of-the-art secondary college at a cost of \$15 million in Carrum Downs. This was long overdue in the growing area of Carrum Downs and its surrounds. The Kennett Liberal government had turned a blind eye for far too long and had ignored the educational needs of my community.

The Bracks government had to rescue the former Monterey secondary college site which had been sold to a developer by the Kennett government after it had ignored the local community's request for an open recreation area. Fortunately the Bracks government was able to buy that site and hand it over to Frankston council. Now it is a beautiful place that the local community can visit and enjoy. We are just waiting for the toilets to be constructed.

Community safety is high on the agenda in the electorate. Since the election of the Bracks Labor government, an extra 41.2 uniformed police service my electorate. That represents a 41 per cent increase in the number of uniformed police.

A \$6.7 million state-of-the-art 24-hour police station has been built in Cranbourne. During this term of government a state-of-the-art police station will also be built to service the Carrum Downs and Langwarrin areas. It is my understanding that the station will cost over \$14 million.

Since 2001 the crime rate in the city of Casey has fallen by 13.1 per cent. Since 2000–01 the crime rate in the city of Frankston also has fallen, by 9 per cent. Only the Bracks Labor government is delivering a sound community safety agenda for the constituents of the Cranbourne district. The Bracks government is also getting on with the job of investing in schools.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Helper) — Order! This would be a good time to break for lunch. The member will have the call when the debate resumes.

Sitting suspended 12.59 p.m. until 2.02 p.m.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Gaming: parliamentary inquiry

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Minister for Gaming. I refer to the fact that the member for Dandenong has advised that he will appear before the parliamentary probity inquiry into gaming, and I ask: will the minister also cooperate with the parliamentary probity inquiry?

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Gaming) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. This question and the witch-hunt established by the Legislative Council yesterday have absolutely nothing to do with probity and everything to do with politics. Under longstanding conventions I will not be appearing before the inquiry. In relation to these matters, whether it be the public lotteries licence review or a range of other matters, I will not be appearing before the inquiry.

A number of questions have been asked about the public lotteries licence review, and I simply reiterate what I have said on a number of occasions. In relation to the public lotteries licensing process and the work of the steering committee, the probity auditor in these matters, Pitcher Partners, has signed off on the work of the interdepartmental steering committee on three separate occasions — not once, not twice, but on three separate occasions!

Those opposite, including the member for Malvern, the Leader of the Opposition and others, are intent on trampling all over the commercial and legal frameworks that have been established under this process. I am not, and therefore I will not be participating in this inquiry.

Employment: rural and regional Victoria

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to the government's commitment to make regional Victoria a great place to work, live and raise a family, and I ask him to detail for the house the most recent independent data that demonstrates the government is delivering on that commitment.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the member for South Barwon for his question. As the member for South Barwon knows, as do most members of this house, the last six months has been a difficult period for regional Victoria. In fact it has been a difficult period for the whole of country and regional Australia. We have seen one of the worst droughts in the history of this country, which has affected large parts of the

farming community right across Victoria. We have seen as a consequence dry climatic conditions leading to bushfires, including, as I reported to the house yesterday, some 18 starts yesterday and others overnight from lightning strikes that extended from Ballarat right across to Mildura — and they started some other fires which are still being worked on by the Country Fire Authority and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Despite the difficult seasonal conditions and other difficulties that communities right around Victoria face from drought and bushfires, I underline today the results from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which show the robustness of country and regional Victoria in relation to job growth. Today's ABS figures show that Victoria's employment growth for the year from January 2006 to January 2007 was 4.4 per cent. That is above the national average for regional Australia and bettered by only one state — that is, regional Queensland, which had 4.6 per cent growth because of the resource-rich Queensland regional economy. We in Victoria had the second highest employment growth of any region in any place in Australia over the last 12 months.

Two regions stand out in relation to employment growth: Loddon Mallee, which had 15.6 per cent employment growth over the last 12 months, and — as the member for South Barwon, who asked me the question, would know — Geelong and the south-west, which had growth of some 6.4 per cent over the last 12 months. You can see it in Geelong, you can see in Portland and you can see it in Warrnambool: you can see the buoyancy of the economy and the job and economic growth of the state.

Unemployment in regional Victoria over the year has also fallen by 0.9 per cent to 5.5 per cent. Currently we have regional unemployment —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRACKS — I reiterate that our employment growth is higher than the national regional employment growth. On any comparison with the rest of the nation we are shown to be doing better. We are the second highest in the country. What we are saying is that, comparatively, Victorian country areas are doing better than the country areas around the rest of Australia.

Unemployment has fallen to 5.5 per cent, down 0.9 per cent from the figure for the previous 12 months. Compare that to the double-digit unemployment figure which occurred in the years preceding 1999 when our government came to office. Remarkably the

unemployment level in regional and country Victoria during the previous government's period of office was 13.8 per cent — one of the highest for Victoria's regions ever recorded. It is not surprising to see why this strong growth has occurred. You need only look at the last three weeks; you need only look at what happened in February.

On 1 February, as the Minister for Regional and Rural Development has pointed out publicly, Unilever Australia invested \$58 million in the expansion at Tatura, which is leading to 134 new full-time jobs. It is being hailed as a saviour in that region. On 8 February I was with the members and ministers from Bendigo to announce that we had a replacement for AAPT. Excelior, a division of the Skilled group of companies, is running call centres in Shepparton, which was planned, and it is now running one in Bendigo. More than 300 jobs have been saved and will continue in the future. On 9 February Salesforce started a call centre in Geelong near the member's electorate, creating 402 new jobs. That has happened just in the last three weeks.

In the past seven years we have seen 109 000 new jobs created in Victoria. In the seven years before we came to government it was less than half of that for job growth around the state. We will continue to govern for all of Victoria. We want to continue to ensure that regional Victoria performs well against the nation, and we want to continue to ensure that we have high job growth in regional and country Victoria.

Boating: life jackets

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Minister for Roads and Ports. I refer to the minister's media release of 20 December 2006, and I quote:

Boaters are required to wear a life jacket ... on human-powered vessels such as canoes, kayaks and rowing vessels.

Does the minister really intend police to use this nanny-state regulation to fine the many people who, right now, old and young, are rowing on the Yarra while not wearing life jackets?

Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. Can I indicate that the government is of the view that this is critically important and that the wearing of life jackets is a necessary safety step for the purpose of avoiding unnecessary deaths on our waterways.

It is certainly our view that the coroner has demonstrated and indicated to the government that we need to take proactive steps in order to ensure that the users of our waterways are adequately and safely protected. Certainly in Victoria the number of deaths on our waterways has appreciably reduced. Indeed since the introduction of these mechanisms — the requirements to wear life jackets — we have seen a substantial community uptake and a recognition amongst boat users that these are safety initiatives that are well worthwhile. There has been a take-up of over 75 per cent amongst water users in terms of the use and appropriateness of these measures. We make no apology for putting safety first in this government. We are proud of our record on water safety, and we are proud of the initiatives we have put in place.

Industrial relations: WorkChoices

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — My question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations. I ask the minister to detail for the house the latest efforts by the Victorian government's workplace rights advocate seeking to assist Victorian workers struggling with the federal government's extreme industrial relations regime.

Mr HULLS (Minister for Industrial Relations) — I thank the honourable member for her excellent question. I am very pleased today to welcome an inquiry by the Victorian workplace rights advocate looking at the impact of WorkChoices on workers and employers in the hospitality and retail industries. I am sure that everybody in this house would agree that they are very important industries. This will be the very first time since the introduction of WorkChoices that an inquiry has targeted specific industries. The workplace rights advocate will conduct an inquiry by way of seeking written and verbal submissions from across the state and consulting with a whole range of industry groups, unions and employers. A final report is expected later this year. So there will be consultation with a whole range of groups, including unions, employers and other stakeholders.

Members on this side certainly are aware that WorkChoices is producing a raft of Australian workplace agreements (AWAs) which strip away historic entitlements. Last year — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HULLS — It is not just me saying that, because last year the federal government's own employment watchdog released data showing that significant numbers of AWAs actually deprived workers of

protected conditions such as overtime and penalty rates, dramatically reducing the take-home pay that Victorian families rely on. It is no surprise that, after the release of these disastrous figures, the office has not provided any further data. The federal industrial relations minister, Joe Hockey, confirmed today that information on AWAs would now be kept secret. This, we believe, is a disgrace. It does not pass the hairdryer test, and indeed it is a sign of just how bad things really must be.

Workers in the retail and hospitality industries are particularly vulnerable under WorkChoices. In fact 33 per cent of AWAs signed in the last 10 months affect workers in either of these two very important industries. An academic study by the Griffith Business School released this week shows that every single month 20 000 workers are being stripped of their award entitlements under AWAs.

One of those 20 000 workers is retail worker Ms Bernie Gloury. She contacted the workplace rights advocate shortly after commencing work at a service station. She rang for advice about the AWA that she was being asked to sign. The advocate investigated that AWA and found that, when compared with the applicable award, the AWA offered to Ms Gloury removed entitlements including Saturday and Sunday penalties, a loss of \$7.10 an hour. It also precluded overtime pay, paid rest breaks, annual leave loading and penalty rates for public holidays. This is a system supported by those opposite. They say, 'No doubt she got some sort of remuneration in return'. She did indeed! In return she was offered a measly 7 cents an hour increase in her ordinary hourly rate, which then went from \$14.33 to \$14.40 — and as a result, she lost all those entitlements.

Like Ms Gloury, thousands of workers, and in particular retail and hospitality workers, stand to lose important rights and entitlements and important protections under the federal government's industrial relations changes. I certainly welcome this inquiry by the workplace rights advocate, and I hope that those members opposite, whilst on their boot camp, sitting around the camp fire toasting marshmallows and singing *Kumbaya*, give some real thought to workers like Ms Gloury.

Gaming: public lotteries licence

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the Premier's Christmas present to Tattersall's of a 12-month extension of its public lotteries licence, and I ask: why was no premium payment sought from Tattersall's for this extension, as provided for under the act, and how much did Victorian taxpayers lose as a consequence?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The taxpayers of Victoria have not lost anything from that arrangement. That is a facility under the act to continue the arrangements until a new tender is called. It was taken up appropriately by the government under the existing arrangement; and in that case good value for money will be gained by Victorians, as it was under the original contract.

12th FINA World Championships: planning

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — My question is to the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. Will the minister update the house on planning for the 12th FINA World Championships?

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — I thank the member for her question. The 12th FINA World Championships will be the biggest aquatic event Australia has ever hosted. It will be bigger than the aquatic program at the Sydney Olympics and five times bigger than the aquatic program at the Commonwealth Games. The event will further enhance Victoria's reputation as Australia's events state and will be the largest worldwide event in the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics.

The championships will be held from 17 March to 1 April and will involve 2000 elite competitors from up to 175 nations, with competition in five disciplines — swimming, open-water swimming, synchronised swimming, water polo and diving. More than 1000 international media will take the host city to 1 billion spectators worldwide. The championships will provide a significant boost to the Victorian economy, with 12 000 interstate and international tourists.

The event will be so large that it will require five pools. Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre will be fully utilised for the duration of the event with the water polo and diving competitions, hence the need for temporary pools, as was the case for previous world championships. A temporary pool is being installed as we speak at Rod Laver Arena for the swimming and synchronised swimming competitions. This will allow more than 11 000 spectators to enjoy those events. Importantly the water used for the competition pool and the warm-up pool will be recycled for the benefit of the Royal Botanic Gardens and Melbourne's heritage trees. St Kilda Beach will host the open water event.

To date over 65 000 tickets have been sold for the whole event. FINA has advised that this is the fastest selling world swimming championships in history — that is, in the period to date we have sold more tickets

than were sold for any previous world championships. There was a spike during the Australian swimming trials in December, and as we see developments such as the installation of the temporary pool at Rod Laver Arena and other milestones, we can expect that demand for tickets will greatly increase. Eight thousand tickets have been made available to Victorian school students as part of the school education package. I can inform the house that schools are already taking up this special ticket offer as part of that education package at a fast rate, with 47 per cent of the special school tickets having been snapped up.

Spectators will be able to see the best aquatic athletes in the world at the 12th FINA World Championships for as little as \$20 and no more than \$198 for the best seats in the house. The opening ceremony promises to be a spectacular show, reflecting our affinity with water, and it will set a high standard for the remainder of the championships. A tribute to Ian Thorpe will play a special role in the opening ceremony. Tickets to the opening ceremony have been priced so that they are affordable for the general public, in particular families. Single ticket prices range from \$28 to \$68, and a family ticket for two adults and two children can be purchased for \$100.

A key legacy of the event will be providing additional local aquatic facilities to encourage the next generation of Australian stars. The pools' modular design allows them to be relocated as permanent facilities throughout the Victorian community. As part of the legacy of hosting the event, four pools between 25 and 50 metres will be provided to the communities of Frankston, Geelong, Bentleigh and Sunshine.

The FINA world championships represent an absolutely fantastic opportunity to see the world's greatest aquatic athletes at the world's best venues at affordable prices. The successful delivery of the event will continue to reinforce why Melbourne is considered to be the events capital of the world and enhance our growing reputation as the world's most livable city.

Gaming: public lotteries licence

Mr O'BRIEN (Malvern) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Gaming, and I ask: did the Solicitor-General advise the government that the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation's probity assessment of Intralot was inadequate and denied the company natural justice?

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Gaming) — I thank the member for Malvern for his question. As I have consistently said, I am not going to run a public

commentary on a process that is ongoing. Let us be very clear about this: a request was made by the interdepartmental steering committee in September last year to extend the time provided to complete the important public lotteries licensing process. More time was sought, and more time was granted. The person who is appropriately charged with determining the probity of the work of the steering committee is the probity auditor. The probity auditor has, on three separate occasions, signed off on the work and decision-making of the interdepartmental steering committee — —

Mr Baillieu — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. The Premier very clearly said that scrutiny was available in the lower house. The minister has refused to answer the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister has been answering this question for under 1 minute. I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr ANDREWS — As I was saying, the person who is appropriately charged under a probity plan with determining and signing off on the probity of the work of the steering committee is the probity auditor. He has done that not once, not twice, but three times! I made it clear yesterday, and I have made it abundantly clear over a number of weeks now, that it would be wholly inappropriate for me to run a public commentary on an as yet incomplete process. Those opposite and the witch-hunt in the other place are all about trampling all over the legal and commercial frameworks that have been established under this process. As I have said, I will not do that. I will not jeopardise the integrity of this process by doing that. It is not a complete process yet.

Mr McIntosh — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be relevant to the question. The question went to legal advice. We do not need to hear this diatribe. Just answer the question, Minister, and be relevant.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The minister, to answer the question.

Mr ANDREWS — I will simply conclude by saying that this government is absolutely committed to getting an outcome in relation to this process that has probity, integrity and is in the best interests of all Victorians.

Hospitals: waiting lists

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to reducing elective surgery

waiting lists. I ask the minister to detail for the house the most recent government initiatives delivering on that commitment.

Ms PIKE (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for Ivanhoe for his question. Since 1999, when our health system was in fact on the critical list, the government has rebuilt almost half of our major health facilities. This year we will admit over 300 000 more patients than we admitted in 1999. Labor, in government now for the third term, will continue the very positive reform of our health system that it has been undertaking over the last seven years, modernising our services and being a lot smarter about how we use our health dollars, which of course are continuing to grow, and wanting to make sure that our patients get the best possible treatment when and where they need it.

A number of national reports affirm that the directions we have been taking have been bearing fruit, and we certainly rank as the best in the country in many areas. Labor will ensure that more patients are treated sooner. We will continue to reduce cancellations for elective surgery, and we will invest in our hospitals to recruit and train the kind of workforce that we need to deliver quality health care into the future.

That is why I can announce today that an additional 2500 patients will undergo elective surgery over the next six months as we extend our blitz on the waiting lists for surgery in public hospitals. Today's \$12 million funding boost also enables a further 1800 people to get outpatient appointments for orthopaedic procedures. We have invested an additional \$40 million particularly in the elective surgery blitz to treat an estimated 10 000 additional elective surgery patients.

This blitz is not a one-off. In addition we went to the election last year with the commitment to allocate \$115 million over the next four years to open two new elective surgery centres and increase the capacity at our existing hospitals to treat an additional 16 000 elective surgery patients. Victorians liked our plan; they affirmed our plan and our commitment to invest in health. It is a very significant priority, and that is why they asked the Bracks government to continue governing the state for this term.

Victoria's waiting list is the lowest it has been since 1998. There are almost 4000 fewer people on our waiting list. That is in spite of the fact that there has been an astronomical increase in the number of people who were admitted. Three hundred thousand more people have been admitted, yet the waiting list has been

steadily going down. That shows that we have a productive and efficient health system.

We recognise, however, that there is always more work to be done. That is why we built the Alfred Centre for elective surgery; and as I said, we are committed to opening two more dedicated elective surgery centres — one at St Vincent's Hospital, where I visited today, and the other at the repatriation hospital site in Heidelberg. The elective surgery list is always something of great public interest, but it is important to know that people are being taken off that list all the time. Some 65 832 patients were admitted off the waiting list during the first six months of last year. This additional \$12 million will continue that work of getting more people off, particularly people in category 2 and category 3. The money will be allocated right across the system to our major hospitals and also to regional Victoria. In addition each of these hospitals has submitted plans that will take as many people off the list by providing physiotherapy and other services.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition said she is yawning while listening to my response to this question. I believe the public of Victoria are concerned about health care. That is why we consider it a very important priority. That is why we have been turning around our health system, a system that was on its knees in 1999. We are investing in treating more patients.

Gaming: public lotteries licence

Mr O'BRIEN (Malvern) — My question is to the Minister for Gaming. Is it a fact that lotteries bidder Intralot has advised the government that it will be seeking compensation for the costs associated with the government's bungling of the lotteries tender?

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Gaming) — I thank the honourable member for Malvern for his question. Let me again make it perfectly clear: it would be wholly inappropriate for me to provide a running commentary on a process that is not yet complete. The probity auditor has signed off on the work of the steering committee on three separate occasions, and, as I have said, I will not comment on an ongoing process. I will leave the trampling all over of the commercial and legal frameworks under this process to those opposite. It would be totally inappropriate for me to do that.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS — I will not, but rest assured that this government will deliver an outcome that has

probity, integrity and represents best value for all Victorians.

Mr Baillieu — On a point of order, Speaker, this question required a simple yes or no about a matter outside even the matters that the minister — —

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The minister has concluded his answer.

Economy: performance

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the government's commitment to making Victoria a great place to work, live and raise a family and ask him to update the house on the recent evidence of the strong performance of the Victorian economy?

Mr K. Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Bass!

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — I thank the member for Narre Warren North, the Parliamentary Secretary for Treasury and Finance, for his question. I can advise the house that the Victorian economy is performing strongly. As I indicated yesterday, and as the Premier indicated today in answer to a question asked of him about employment in country Victoria, jobs growth in the Victorian economy has seen 70 500 new jobs over the last 12 months — an extraordinarily strong performance and second only to the resource-rich state of Queensland in terms of the overall number of new jobs being generated. I can also say that in relation to the unemployment rate — 4.9 per cent — as the Premier indicated today we have seen jobs growth of 4.4 per cent over the last year in regional Victoria.

On population growth, last year Melbourne added more people than any other capital city in Australia. The population growth rate was 1.36 per cent for Victoria as a whole, compared with the national average of 1.31 per cent.

As I mentioned earlier in the week in Parliament, the state with more building approvals in the last year than any other state is Victoria, with \$17 billion in building approvals. Queensland has \$15.5 billion and New South Wales, \$15.5 billion. There has been a lot of debate about housing affordability. It is a big issue right across Australia, particularly with the interest rate rises over the last two years. I am pleased to say that Melbourne is the most affordable capital city on the eastern seaboard, and that Victoria has the highest

proportion of first-home buyers of any state in Australia.

Retail trade has also been strong for us. The retail confidence figures were out yesterday, and Victoria is above the national average. Retail trade has been good. Marshmallow sales are up. The word around is, 'Get in now and get your marshmallows before there is a rush on them next week'.

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — I don't know — how are you going to go?

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr BRUMBY — Through you, Speaker, how is the member for Brighton going to go? Will she be in a tent or a bunkhouse?

The SPEAKER — Order! The Treasurer will return to answering the question.

Mr BRUMBY — Tourism has been solid in a difficult environment, but again we expect to see a big jump in those statistics in the next week or two with camping trips really boosting the tourism statistics.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — Obviously there are people on the Liberal side who are competing to get stories in the newspapers about the camping trips they have coming up, but that is a matter for you and not me.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Treasurer will answer the question.

Mr BRUMBY — Just a few days ago the *Herald Sun* published an article headed 'State builds on boomtown stats'. It refers to the chief executive officer of the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Neil Coulson, saying that the Victorian economy was well placed and in a stronger position than most states. Just last month Moody's reaffirmed Victoria's AAA credit rating and noted:

Victoria's sizeable and diversified economic base amply supports its financial obligations ... Population gains spurred by international migration contribute to growth.

Finally, Access Economics, which reports on the economic performance of the Australian economy in each of the states, last week released its December quarter assessment of the performance of each of the states, and I think it is worth noting in this house.

Access Economics describes Victoria's economic performance as 'magnificent' in the context:

... of the onslaught of the Australian dollar, interest rates and drought.

All of that has not happened by accident. We have had the right policy mix. We have had the right support and a business-friendly environment. We have been reducing the levels of business taxation. We have reduced land tax from a top rate of 5 per cent. When the Leader of the Opposition was the state president of the Liberal Party the top rate of land tax was 5 per cent. We have reduced it to 3 per cent, and we have reduced payroll tax as well. If you put all of that together, plus our huge capital investment program and the investment we have made in skills and education, the result of that is an economy which is pulling above its weight and performing well. As Access Economics said, it is a magnificent performance.

Mr McIntosh — On a point of order, Speaker, during the course of the Minister for Gaming's answer in response to a question from the member for Malvern a matter was raised that goes to the very heart of what we do here as members of Parliament.

The Minister for Public Transport yelled across the house to the member for Malvern the words, 'You be careful! You'll be sued. I hope you get sued'. Indeed that amounts to intimidation, and I ask you to caution the Minister for Public Transport about intimidatory behaviour in this house.

Mr Batchelor — On the point of order, Speaker, this is a nonsense claim by the member, because as all of us would know, comments that are made in the house are subject to privilege and are not the subject of judicial review.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. I am not in a position to hear such comments across the table. I am happy to — —

Dr Napthine interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for South-West Coast.

I am happy to discuss this further after question time, but I will not take up the time of the house at this moment.

The time set aside for questions without notice has expired.

Mr K. Smith interjected.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

The SPEAKER — Order! Under standing order 124 I suspend the member for Bass for 1½ hours.

Honourable member for Bass withdrew from chamber.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed.

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — Since 1999 there have been 138 more teachers employed in Cranbourne schools.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Doncaster cannot walk between the person speaking and the Chair.

Mr PERERA — Since 1999 the average prep-to-year 2 class size in the Cranbourne electorate has been reduced from 25.5 to 20.8 students. This is an average decrease of 4.7 students in every class.

We are investing in school infrastructure. This includes a brand new special school, Marnebek School Cranbourne, the modernisation of Mahogany Rise Primary School and the modernisation of Cranbourne Secondary College, as well as a strong investment in all of our schools in the electorate. This term will see the construction of a new primary school for north-east Cranbourne, the planning of a P-12 college in Cranbourne east, the further modernisation of Cranbourne Secondary College and a modernisation of Cranbourne West Primary School. This is a result of millions of dollars of investment in schools.

We are also investing in arterial roads. Since 1999 the Bracks Labor government has invested over \$46 million in roads in the electorate, including the part duplication of Cranbourne-Frankston Road. Stage 3 has now been announced for the duplication of Centre Road right up to the Western Port Highway. The \$21 million part duplication in Sladen Street is also well under way, and completion is due this year. The duplication of the Clyde Five Ways Road is also well under way. During this term of Parliament we will also see the duplication of Thompsons Road from the Mornington Peninsula Freeway through to the Dandenong-Frankston Road and the duplication of Thompsons Road from the South Gippsland Highway through to the Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road. This project is a \$52 million investment.

The Bracks government is also a strong contributor to the health system in Cranbourne. Locally we have seen the building of the \$100 million Casey Hospital. There has also been an increase of 38.6 per cent in the number of nurses in the local area. During this term will also see a \$45 million redevelopment of the Frankston Hospital.

The Bracks government has also delivered on our local environment. A total of 202 hectares have been gazetted around The Pines. Flora and fauna will flourish in the area, which is proudly situated in Frankston North. I am also looking forward to the delivery of a \$700 000 management plan that will clearly go a long way in supporting this great land.

Frankston North is an integral part of my electorate, with over 3000 households. It is unfortunate that the federal government is simply walking away from the elderly, the most marginalised of the residents who proudly live in Frankston North. It has come to my attention that a \$25 million, 180-bed aged-care facility is to be constructed in Frankston North. The local council has advised me that only 25 of the 180 beds will be concessional beds. This is a grave concern in the local area, especially because the region has a shortage of 264 beds. I have been advised that this proposal is going ahead without the developer having the 180 bed licences approved by the federal government. This proposal has a lot of holes in it, and I hope the local council and the Bracks government lobby the federal government for many more concessional beds for this proposed facility, because it should be an industry leader.

I also hope that the councillors of the Frankston City Council request an independent audit of all the ins and outs of this proposal. It is unsure if the senior council officers have been true, clear and transparent from day one. It simply does not sit well with the ratepayers and constituents from the local area.

I am very proud to be part of a government that is not only delivering on the needs of my constituents but delivering for every region, every suburb and every town in Victoria. I look forward to being part of the Bracks government for the next four years and to making sure that we continue to deliver for the constituents of the electorate of Cranbourne as well as for the whole of Victoria.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — It is a pleasure to speak on the address-in-reply motion. I am particularly pleased to have been re-elected to my seat of Caulfield, my fourth election to this place. At the 2002 election there was a decline in my margin, so I was very pleased

that my majority of the vote at the recent election increased quite substantially. There was a swing of over 5 per cent to the Liberal Party in the seat of Caulfield, and the Labor Party's support dipped dramatically below 30 per cent. I am sure that the Labor Party will bear that in mind when it next tries to win the seat of Caulfield. I would like to thank my campaign team, and particularly my campaign manager, my staff, the branch members and the other supporters who contributed to the campaign in Caulfield.

However, there are a number of issues in the Caulfield electorate on which, despite the rhetoric and the claims about how much has been done for our hospitals, our schools and the elderly, the Bracks government has failed to deliver. I will continue to bring up those issues in this place in order to have them addressed.

The first issue concerns the Caulfield General Medical Centre. The centre, as everybody knows, is attached to the Alfred hospital. It is a very important hospital in the Caulfield electorate, and it has a lot of local support. In fact the local community has contributed greatly to the development of this hospital.

A former Minister for Health, the member for Albert Park, launched a master plan for this centre in 2001. However, between 2001 and 2006 absolutely nothing was announced in relation to funding that plan for the Caulfield centre. Finally, on the eve of the election there was an announcement, albeit of just \$22 million for only one building for the Caulfield General Medical Centre. The estimated cost of this redevelopment is \$160 million to \$180 million, so at that rate if this government were to deliver only one building each term in order to tell the people of Caulfield it is doing something, it would take eight terms of a Labor government — that is some 32 years — before Caulfield General Medical Centre could be redeveloped.

Another issue that needs the attention of this government is the schools in our area. I am really hoping that the new Minister for Education, given that he is now the upper house member for this area, might visit some of those schools, particularly those in Caulfield, to see just what is needed. It is estimated that in maintenance alone over \$2 million is required to bring these schools up to just a basic standard. Caulfield Junior College — one of the finest schools in the electorate in terms of the children, the staff and their dedication — probably has the worst buildings of all the schools in my electorate. To see that school literally rotting in its place is very sad, and the school has almost given up, in a sense. At the height of its popularity just a few years ago there were over

500 students attending that school; now the numbers are down to about 350 students. I think parents are genuinely concerned that this school has been long forgotten by the Bracks government. We had to make a big fuss just to get the toilets up to a standard so that the children would actually use them. Some small children were refusing to go all day, and I think that is appalling.

The train services for Caulfield residents on the Sandringham and Frankston lines continue to be appalling. This government is very good at the rhetoric and talking about extra lines and so forth, but the fact is that people trying to go to work from Caulfield are very hard done by if they try to use the train service. Those lines have the worst record of cancellations and late trains of any line in Victoria.

The next issue I want to raise, because it has been a very thorny issue and I believe one that this government has totally failed to deliver upon despite making a lot of promises, is U3A — the University of the Third Age. Before the 2002 election a huge amount of money was promised to allow U3A to purchase back from the government what is in a sense government land. The government promised \$850 000 so that U3A Glen Eira could purchase from VicTrack the land that the university building sits upon. U3A is still waiting. The money was promised before the 2002 election, but the issue is still ongoing and U3A still has not had the land delivered to it. The money is presumably still sitting there in government coffers.

The Liberal Party in the run-up to this election promised U3A an extra \$500 000 so that, if it finally got the land, it would be able to redevelop the building. The member for Bentleigh failed to comprehend the significance of our promise, and embarrassingly told the local paper he thought it meant less money would be going to U3A if our promise was delivered on. Fortunately the members of U3A knew exactly what I was talking about. They knew they were going to get extra money if we won the election and that they would benefit greatly from that. I do notice, however, that the new Minister for Aged Care has announced extra money for the expansion of U3As around the state. I looked down the list but, sadly, did not see the Glen Eira U3A, so I suppose the government is firm in the belief that it will never deliver to the U3A in Caulfield.

Opposition members, shadow ministers and spokespeople on this side of the house are invariably accused of whingeing, whining and carping if we raise issues of importance in relation to the poor performance of this government in the delivery of services to needy Victorians — an accusation we hear every day, in fact. So in preparing for today's response I sought the views

of other commentators, shall I say, who write in our daily papers and who are not seen as being particularly partisan. In the more general and perhaps most telling article one commentator claimed that cabinet ministers of the current government complain that they are most unfairly viewed with excessive cynicism by the public. I am sure those opposite me do not offer that complaint. In any event this commentator concluded that:

By its words and actions since its election triumph last November, this government has forfeited the right to be taken seriously if ever it voices such complaints again.

In other words, the public has every right to view the Premier and his ministers with cynicism, because the reality is that actions or deeds speak louder than words. All the rhetoric and all the spin delivers nothing in terms of actual deeds when one really looks at them.

I turn to some examples of those government actions after the election. Just the Friday night before Christmas there were two dumped news items — two significant news items. One of those was the extraordinary decision to extend the Tattersall's licence for 12 months. Now we find the government is very embarrassed over this entire issue, and it looks like there will be an upper house inquiry. I suppose my comment to the government would be, 'What goes around comes around'. I think that will be a very interesting inquiry.

The second piece of news that was scurrilously dumped on that Friday night was the report into the crisis within Rural Ambulance Victoria (RAV). This report, which disgracefully was timed to be completed after the election, should have been completed before the election. The first report was called for in April of last year, and this report was stretched out until after the election because what we had seen in the operation of Rural Ambulance Victoria was evidence of bullying, sexual harassment, mismanagement, poor performance and poor resourcing — in other words, a very scurrilous situation. The report on RAV made it clear that under this government's watch the organisation had become totally dysfunctional. Under huge pressure, as I said, the government agreed to an inquiry in April of 2006 but failed to deliver.

Then in January, with no hint of embarrassment, the Bracks government adopted two Liberal policies that it had vigorously campaigned against during the election campaign. One was the desalination plant, and of course we are hearing a lot about that in this place. The government said it was too expensive and would use too much power, but suddenly — remarkably — after the election it is said to be just the answer that is needed. Of course the second occasion was the

breath-taking about-face on the plans for a toxic dump. During the campaign the government said Victoria needed a toxic dump.

Ms Kosky interjected.

Mrs SHARDEY — You wait and see. I will give you a hint. After the election, once the seat of Mildura had been lost, all of a sudden the government believes Victoria does not need a toxic dump — and cabinet ministers and premiers wonder why the community is cynical about Labor's spin and rhetoric! We are hearing a little more of it across the table just now.

Let us look briefly — it will have to be very brief — at the Governor's speech to see if the claims and the promises made are reflected in the deeds of this government. The government says it believes in a health system where every Victorian has access to first-class health services. Of course plenty of Victorians cannot afford private health insurance so they rely upon the government to provide a first-class health service in our public system. I will give some examples of people who are affected by that service. The Minister for Health has claimed today that she offers a first-class health system, so what does she say to the mother whose baby was born in the toilet at Monash Medical Centre? That was an absolutely disgraceful situation.

What does she say to the family of a man who was sent home from an emergency department because there were not enough beds in the hospital and who died six hours later? What does she say to the family of the mental health patient who spent two days in Maroondah Hospital because there were no beds? What does she say to the family of two little children who spent 11½ hours in two of Melbourne's hospital emergency departments and whose father was forced to transport these desperately ill children between hospitals in his own car once the staff had taken the drip out of their arms? And what does she say to the thousands of patients who continue to wait on outpatient waiting lists, despite the government's promises and claims?

We have heard more of those promises and claims today. The government promised 200 000 extra outpatient appointments, and today we have had this huge announcement by the government that it will provide an extra 1800 appointments. That is a little less than 200 000! Is the Bracks government really able to tell those people they have access to a first-class health system? I think not.

In fact, I strongly believe that since the election, the quality of care in our health system has declined. Now that the pressure seems to be off and the election is over, hospitals are now openly saying that they cannot admit patients from their emergency departments because they simply do not have the beds. People who are ill and should be in hospital are nevertheless being discharged and sent home. This is a very worrying situation and is one I will not leave alone.

Victoria's elective surgery waiting list was about 40 000 for the two years after the 2002 election. Just prior to last November's election it fell, as it did just prior to the 2002 election. Tragically the major way this has been achieved, although some operations were done in the private sector, was by keeping people on the outpatient waiting list. The Auditor-General was scathing about the way the government had performed in this area. One example was a Geelong hospital where, although the waiting list for elective surgery went down, the waiting list for outpatient appointments went up by more than a commensurate amount. That is fiddling with the figures — fiddling with the books, as they say — to make things look better. The reality of this government's management of hospital funding is now becoming very clear.

Under weighted inlier equivalent separations (WEIS) 13, the casemix system, we see a cut in funding particularly for patients suffering stroke, heart failure or dementia. The Australian Medical Association has issued a scathing press release attacking the government over this. Today an announcement was made of extra money to get people off the elective surgery waiting lists. I think that has been achieved by cutting funding to patients who suffer stroke, dementia, heart failure and other disease — that is, those who are our oldest patients, those patients who need the most assistance.

The government claims it will also focus on mental health. I could list six or seven huge areas where it has been demonstrated that the government has failed in this area. Having a mental health minister is a good idea, but the government has to deliver a whole lot more. I could talk a lot more about these problems, including the promise by the government of 1000 extra doctors, nurses and medical staff, but I do not think it can deliver any of it.

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — I congratulate you, Acting Speaker, on your appointment to that position and on your appointment as Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Innovation. Through you, I ask you to pass on my congratulations to the Speaker on her appointment. We have already seen the quality of the

Speaker in question time and on parliamentary procedure. She is already enjoying the trust and confidence of the house.

In commenting on the address-in-reply today I want to focus in particular on innovation. His Excellency referred on a number of occasions in his speech to the importance of innovation, to the significance of medicine and scientific research, and to the agenda of the government in ensuring that we have a strong and flourishing innovation agenda and innovation economy in our state.

During the last few years we have been putting in place an innovation policy which really has three main objectives. The first is to build an information-driven economy where Victorian ideas can be turned into new products and services which translate into more sustainable, highly skilled and highly paid jobs. The second objective is to back Victoria's life, science and healthcare sector through major investments in new medical research infrastructure; and the third policy vision was really to create a broader environment in which innovative businesses could flourish, could commercialise Victorian-led research and translate it into products and services, as well as develop markets around the world.

It is fair to say that since the election of the Bracks Labor government in 1999 and the creation of the innovation portfolio some years ago we have made great strides in positioning our state as a genuine innovation economy. We identified a number of the key driver industries in terms of the innovation agenda: innovation technology, biotechnology, advanced manufacturing, design and, of course, environmental technologies. Each of these areas is significant in our quest to be Australia's innovation leader.

Victoria has invested more in the innovation agenda than any other state. Since our election in 1999 we have invested something like \$1.8 billion on our innovation agenda. Some of the projects that we funded with that investment were obviously the \$157 million Australian Synchrotron project which you, Acting Speaker, are very familiar with. This is the largest piece of new scientific infrastructure being built in Australia not just in the last generation but in the last two generations.

What I am most pleased about is that the building is now complete and the beam lines are being installed. We now have 10 partners including the states of New South Wales and Queensland; in fact, all the Australian states plus New Zealand are now contributors. I thank the New Zealand government for its decision to contribute \$5 million towards the beam lines, plus the

Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, the CSIRO and the Association of Medical Research Institutes. This is an extraordinary partnership. We look forward to the Commonwealth government's contribution in due course.

This is a great Australian investment in science. I have no doubt that as we look back to the decision to build the synchrotron, the completion of the building and the commissioning of the beam lines over the course of the next year, people will say that this was genuinely the most significant scientific decision that Australia has taken and one which has supported the extraordinary talents and abilities of our scientists who presently are suitcase scientists and have to jump on a plane and go overseas to use a synchrotron.

There is also the science technology and innovation program where the government has invested \$310 million over the last five years; the \$209 million for medical research institutes and further funding for research and development projects — projects such as the Australian Stem Cell Centre, a partnership with the federal government; the Bio21 Molecular Sciences and Biotechnology Institute at Melbourne University; and in the energy sector, where there is an increasing focus by governments at all levels, the \$103.5 million Energy Technology Innovation Strategy.

I want to mention in particular Victoria's biotechnology achievements because this is one area where we have a goal of being in the top five in the world by 2010. When we first launched our strategic plan in 2000, the Premier and I did this in San Diego at the World Biotech Conference. I think it is fair to say there were a lot of sceptics about whether we were being too ambitious and that it was out of the question for us to be in the top five in the world by 2010. As I will point out in a moment, we have made extraordinary progress. We have shown that with the right people, the right infrastructure, the right policies and the right financial support from government we can compete with the very best in the world, and we do hold genuine hopes of being within the top five by 2010.

We set out a five-year plan in 2000. So successful was that that by 2002 the government had already achieved many of its targets and then put in place a new plan in 2004. That plan involves a target of corporate biotech research and development expenditure of more than \$500 million per annum by 2007. I am pleased to say we are very much on track to achieve that. We also set a target of deals in partnerships totalling over \$1 billion by 2007. I am pleased to say that to date we are up to nearly \$700 million and I believe we will achieve that target as we move through this year.

We have also emerged as a genuine global biotechnology hub, and now Victoria is home to 130 biotech companies. That is more, of course, than in any state in Australia — more than 40 per cent of Australia's biotech companies are located in Victoria. One in every two people who work in the biotech industry in Australia are employed in Victoria. The market capitalisation of our biotech industry — led, of course, by companies such as the CSL Group — now exceeds \$21 billion, an increase of 45 per cent from 2005. The sales last year of our life sciences companies were almost \$6 billion. We have the highest amount in research and development of any state in Australia and, as I said, we remain on track to meet our \$500 million annual R and D by 2007.

Most pleasing is a 50 per cent increase over the past year in clinical trials sponsored by Victorian biotech companies. Now 38 trials are either under way or planned. That is not the sum total, of course, of clinical trials in Victoria. They are just the life sciences clinical trials and are in addition to the huge number of clinical trials sponsored and undertaken by international pharmaceutical companies. Clinical trials are important. They give us access to the —

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — The growth in clinical trials?

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Yes, it was our plan.

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Yes, look it up on the internet.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Lupton) — Order! The discussion across the table is disorderly.

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Lupton) — Order! The member for Bulleen!

Mr BRUMBY — I do not know which seat the opposition member who is interjecting from the table represents, but he is embarrassing the Liberal Party.

Last year the government also launched its \$230 million life sciences statement, *Healthy Futures*. As you, Acting Speaker, know, that statement has been extraordinarily well received by the science and medical research community. If the aggregate of the third party contributions from the institutions themselves, the commonwealth government and philanthropic organisations are added up, that

\$230 million translates to \$713 million of aggregate investment in the life sciences sector.

It will mean, for example, that the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research will virtually double in size and research capacity, making it clearly the largest — and, I might add, the best — scientific and medical research institute in Australia. It will also see the foundation in Parkville of the Australian neuroscience institute, replacing the Howard Florey Institute. That will be not only the largest neuroscience institute in Australia but the largest single research institute of its type in the Southern Hemisphere. We also put \$35 million towards the Australian Regenerative Medicine Institute at Monash University and, of course, the Burnet Institute, which will become Australia's largest infectious diseases research institute — and it is a wonderful research institute.

Victoria can claim a place in the top five leadership group in a number of cutting edge areas. Firstly, we can claim it in the fight against influenza, where Melbourne's World Health Organisation Influenza Collaboration Centre is one of only four. CSL is developing the pandemic flu product, one of the few available for scale up in the event of a pandemic. GlaxoSmithKline is recommencing production of Relenza in Boronia. Secondly, we can claim it in relation to stem cells. *Forbes* magazine describes Australia as a 'surprising' leader in the stem cell field. When people refer to Australia, they are really referring to Victoria, because that is where stem cell activity is undertaken. We announced the Victoria-California stem cell initiative at BIO2006. That brings together two of the world's leading stem cell research hubs into a huge partnership to advance the field.

CSL developed the technology for Gardasil, a cervical cancer vaccine that is being acclaimed as one of the biggest vaccination breakthroughs in recent years. Gardasil is a great Australian innovation and medical research story. The original research was undertaken by Professor Ian Frazer in Queensland, was commercialised by CSL and now is distributed worldwide. It will save the lives of literally tens of thousands — probably hundreds of thousands — of women around the world, by giving large-scale protection against cervical cancer. It is a great Australian story.

In bionanotechnology, Starpharma has been awarded US\$20 million by the US National Institutes of Health for phase 2 clinical trials of a leading anti-HIV product, VivaGel, which is at the front of a whole range of product lines internationally and has been named as one of the top five nanotechnology breakthroughs in 2004.

Finally, I think we are in the top five in the world in diabetes research. Melbourne is home to the Diabetes Vaccine Development Centre, as selected by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, a powerful US advocacy group. Most recently you, Acting Speaker, were able to announce on the government's behalf a further \$5 million contribution to the International Diabetes Institute for a relocation to better facilities and to continue the great work of Professor Paul Zimmet and his team in fighting diabetes. As I said, Victoria is now recognised as a leading biotechnology location around the world.

In conclusion, in this state we have created the best environment for innovation businesses. In 2003 Victoria became the first state to make significant reforms to limited partnership laws, beating New South Wales and Queensland to the post. We removed barriers to investment, and that facilitated growth in the venture capital sector. Those changes, coupled with our natural R and D strengths, have resulted in Victoria now leading all Australian states in venture capital investment per capita, which currently represents around one-third of the total national pie. Those changes have also seen Melbourne become home to two of Australia's early-stage venture capital firms, the Starfish Technology Fund 1 and GBS Venture Partners. Most recently, the leading international biotechnology investment group, Intersuisse Bioscience Managers, is currently raising the IB Australia Bioscience Fund 1, which we hope will be a \$100 million expansion-stage venture capital fund, also based in Melbourne.

As you are also aware, Acting Speaker, earlier this month at the Australian venture capital conference I announced a new medical research commercialisation fund, supported by the Victorian government, that will provide \$30 million for leading Victorian biomedical research institutes. That fund, which will be located at the Alfred Medical Research and Education Precinct, will address a market gap between R and D funding and commercial investment and will improve commercialisation skills within the research institutions.

As I said, there is a great story to tell about the transformation which has taken place in this state over the past seven years. We have always had great people and great minds in this state. We have been able to back them with government policy and significant resources — and the results are plain to see.

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — Acting Speaker, congratulations on your elevation. Please pass on my congratulations to the Speaker as well. I wish to congratulate the Governor on his speech and also on the

work that he and his wife are doing in their very important roles in Victoria.

I welcome the members newly elected to this place. It is a great honour to be elected to this place, but as well as that it is also a very exciting job and one where, if you go along for the ride, you get a lot out of it. I congratulate also all the members returning to this place. It is good to see some of the faces here but not so good to see some of the others — but I will not name them!

Before I move on to some thank-yous, I want to refer to a major event which has happened since the Governor's speech, and that is the bushfires in Victoria. The worrying aspect of the bushfires is the conditions leading to mega-fires such as the one we had in 2003 and obviously the one this year, which hopefully is under control. We need long-term solutions; we cannot tackle the problems overnight.

I pay tribute to all those who have been fighting the fires throughout the summer period, including at Christmas time, when families are usually together. Not only the families of volunteers but also those affected by the fires have had an awfully disrupted and harrowing experience during that time when they should have been relaxing with their families. I pay tribute to all the volunteer and paid firefighters who have worked so hard.

Next week, along with my colleagues, I will be heading up into the bushfire areas to have some briefings from the locals, those who fought the fires and others who experienced the fires, to see and hear what it was like and also to get some sort of understanding of them and to discover what lessons are to be learnt, including what went wrong and what can be done to change what went wrong. I did that of my own accord in East Gippsland after the 2003 fires. Some of those lessons have been learnt, but some of them have been neglected. Hopefully the cumulative knowledge from the last two large bushfires will help us in the future.

One interesting aspect that has not been much mentioned — one of the newsreaders brought this issue up very early in the piece — is that on three occasions that I can remember Victorians were warned that the coming weekend or the next day — whatever it might have been — was going to be the worst in Victoria's history. On all three occasions that did not happen. The rains came, or there was heat but no wind, or there was wind but no heat. Some people are saying there is a bit of the boy who cried wolf about this. One day we might be going to experience the worst conditions ever and people might just take the warning for granted and say,

'Yes, we've heard that before'. That is something we need to be very careful about. I know we have to warn people, but I think we have to be very careful and very sure of our facts before these sorts of pronouncements are made.

In my electorate of Nepean my margin went from 0.1 per cent to 9.4 per cent, and I was very happy with that result. I would like to thank a number of people, because it was a team effort. I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition and also the team at Liberal Party headquarters at 104 Exhibition Street for their wonderful help and support. Nothing was too much trouble. The Leader of the Opposition visited my electorate on a number of occasions, and those visits ran very smoothly. I appreciate their support, and I also appreciate the wonderful policies that the Liberal Party put forward, which made us a real choice in the electorate of Nepean.

I wish to thank my branch members and all the campaign team for their ongoing support, not just during the campaign but in the months and years leading up to it, through their fundraising, their letterboxing and all their work on polling day. As I said, it was a team effort. I could not have done it on my own. I am just one member of the team, and I thank them sincerely for what they did.

I would like to especially thank Ken Bickley, my electorate chairman and also campaign manager, who is stepping down after seven years; Jackie Hamill and John Whitlock, my core team; and my electorate officers Barbara Walker and Meredith Cassidy. They put in an unbelievable amount of work over those four years, and the result, I think, reflected that.

Finally I would like to thank my family for their wonderful support, especially my wife, Chris, my daughter, Julia, and my son, Martin, who also had a harrowing year, doing his Victorian certificate of education. The Dixon household was an interesting place to be late last year.

Most of all I thank the voters of Nepean for the trust they have put in me for the fourth time. I promise not to let them down. I promise to continue to fight for the issues that are very important to them, which I am going to talk about, because they are issues that not only are very relevant to my electorate but have wider implications for the state.

I would like to mention one other person before I move on, and that is my late father, who died suddenly in January. Dad was a great supporter of mine in everything I did in politics, although I think he voted

for the Democratic Labor Party in the upper house, which was a bit of a worry.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr DIXON — I'm sure the preferences went to the Liberal Party.

Dad was the right-winger in the family; I am the moderate. My brother, Christopher, who was in the gallery this morning listening to the member for Ivanhoe talk about dad, was a member of the socialist left of the Labor Party, so we had a very interesting Christmas at the Dixon household. We did not know it was our last one together, but it was very peaceful and dad, at 91, was out there playing cricket, as he usually did on Christmas Day.

Dad received an Order of Australia medal. He was a large contributor to the commonwealth superannuation scheme. He worked for Australia Post and was a great contributor to that organisation. So at 91, and with over 400 people turning up for your funeral, you have led a good life.

I would like to congratulate my local Liberal colleagues. It is great to see a blue peninsula, with Neale Burgess taking the seat of Hastings and David Morris taking the seat of Mornington, and Ed O'Donohue getting a seat as a member for Eastern Victoria Region in the other place. I have known them all for a long while and worked with them. It is great to see them here, and I look forward to working with them again.

I also wish to recognise the former member for Mornington, Robin Cooper, not only for the great contribution he made to the Liberal Party but for the things he did for the community of Mornington and indeed the Parliament. He was one of the elder statesmen of this Parliament and contributed a lot to it. He is no doubt enjoying his retirement, although I think his wife might have other thoughts on that issue.

I would also like to welcome Mr Ian Pugh to the Liberal Party fold. Mr Pugh was a Labor candidate who ran against me in 1996, and since then he has seen the light and joined the Liberal Party. He was a great support to me during the campaign, and there was a lovely front-page article about Ian joining the team in the last week of the election campaign, which I think was a great help.

Ms Kosky interjected.

Mr DIXON — I do not think he contributed the full 9 per cent, but I am sure he contributed something to that.

I pay some tribute to my Labor opponent, who actually spent some money and did some work during the campaign, to no fruition. It was a pretty fair fight, although she did insist on calling herself the member for Nepean, which the Victorian Electoral Commission took a slight issue with. It is interesting that after the election she told me that she would be waiting for me to deliver on my promise to provide a pensioner rebate on car vehicle registrations. She has a lot to learn. It is not for me to do that. I will fight for it, but it is the government of her party that needs to deliver on those sorts of things. I think she will be waiting in vain on that, because I do not think that will happen. But it was a huge issue in my electorate. I think, too, the people of Nepean and many electorates want local candidates. I was the only local candidate, and I think that certainly played a part.

The major reason for my victory in the seat of Nepean is the fact that there were four big issues. One was the channel dredging issue; another was the water issue, especially the upgrade of the eastern treatment plant and the Gunnamatta outfall; public transport was a big issue; and also, as I have mentioned, the pensioner rebate on car registration. My electorate has the oldest age profile of any electorate in Victoria, so obviously it was a huge issue, and it bit more deeply every year the car registrations came through.

The dredging is a massive issue, because most of it is physically happening off the coast of my electorate. It will affect the tourism industry in my electorate and obviously will affect the general amenity of the area. We had a taste of that during the \$32 million trial dredging, and we did not like what we saw — and that was only over three to four weeks, whereas we will have 18 months to 2 years of dredging if this project goes ahead. I am sure the project will go ahead because between the two environmental studies and the trial dredging that has already occurred, close to \$60 million has been spent, and I do not think the government will turn its back on it.

The dredging will cost a lot of money; that has come out of newspapers today. One of the indicators shows that the \$500 million or \$550 million cost that has been put on this project is way out of whack because that is based largely on the cost of the actual dredge. Recently a dredge was done in the Adelaide harbour, and the cost of that per cubic metre is double what it is estimated the dredging in the Port Phillip Bay will cost. The dredging in the Adelaide harbour was minor compared to the

complication of the Port Phillip Bay, so that \$550 million figure will blow out from there.

I have often mentioned in this place the eastern treatment plant and the need to upgrade it to A class so the water can be recycled and re-used not only throughout the Mornington Peninsula but also in the Latrobe Valley or any other area for which the pipeline will work. That has to happen. We on the Mornington Peninsula have on one side the muck and sediment from the channel dredging, and on the other side we have 42 per cent of Melbourne's sewage being dumped on one of our back beaches as well. In this day and age in relation to all the issues with water that just cannot continue. The government has promised for a third time now to upgrade the eastern treatment plant to A class. It has to do that and it has to start immediately. The technology is there and I hope the political will is there. It was a huge issue for the people of the Mornington Peninsula.

In the future we will have challenges. The sorts of issues I am flagging now that I will tackle are the dredging and the effect it will have on the tourism industry and the amenity of my electorate. As I said, most of the dredging is happening off the coast of my electorate, and if all goes well and the whole project has absolutely no problems I think that will be good for Melbourne and Victoria in general, but there is no direct benefit to the Mornington Peninsula and my electorate. If anything goes wrong all the problems will be on the doorstep of my electorate. It will affect the environment and the bay's amenity and it is a huge risk that my community and I will have to wear.

As I said, I will be holding the government to account on its promise to upgrade the eastern treatment plant. It has to happen immediately. I hope it is third time lucky and the government fulfils its promise, and we can then aim for the closure of the outfall at Gunnamatta. Once the treatment plant is upgraded to A class, people will come and industries will come and there will be more and more uses for that water.

Planning is a developing issue. It was a major issue in the seat of Mornington, with the government and the Minister for Planning at the time insisting that Mornington and the Mornington Peninsula was part of Melbourne and therefore part of Melbourne 2030. There was a 10 per cent swing against the government in that seat, and the community very roundly said it was a major issue, that the Mornington Peninsula is not part of Melbourne, should not be subject to Melbourne 2030 and needs a separate planning scheme.

With all the issues that were faced by people in Mornington, Rosebud as the next designated activity node is now on the drawing board, and the people of Rosebud and the Mornington Peninsula do not want to see any sort of high-rise and intensive development of Rosebud. It just does not have the infrastructure for that; it does not have the transport infrastructure. For goodness sake, it is not even sewered yet. We just cannot go down that line. As I have said, the Mornington Peninsula needs its own separate planning scheme.

Public transport was a big issue. The government said it would not include the Mornington Peninsula within the Met as such. It said it will halve the fares, and that goes some way to alleviating the cost of transport. It remains to be seen, when we actually see the fares and the fare structures, where that will go. I have a suggestion. I think now that we have a critical mass perhaps we should be looking at some sort of express bus service from the southern peninsula to Frankston, rather than a service stopping all stations, which takes an hour. There is enough critical mass and enough population to do that. It is no good having Rosebud as an activity node if you are not going to have the public transport to support it.

Roads were a huge issue. The roads were totally blocked again this summer, and emergency vehicles had to go down the wrong side of the road. We certainly need the government to consider an extension to the Mornington Peninsula Freeway. There are many other issues, like the Nepean wastewater project and delivering on schools and education in my electorate. Unfortunately I do not have the time to deal with them.

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I am also very pleased and, as all other members would be, very proud to be making a contribution to the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. First and foremost I record that I see it as a great privilege to be once again representing my electorate of Geelong in this house. I have worked hard for the electorate since being elected to this house in 1999. I feel very humbled that the people of my electorate saw fit to provide me with this third term as their member of Parliament. I can assure this house and the electorate of Geelong that I will continue to work hard as a local member of Parliament to make sure my electorate is represented well, effectively and efficiently within this Parliament and that we as a government continue to deliver on our promises to the greater Geelong region and of course to Victoria as a whole.

As you are well aware, Acting Speaker, during its second term the Bracks government delivered across Victoria on all its promises made from 2002, including

the greater region of Geelong, hence the return of all the government members from Geelong at the recent 2006 state election. Following the 2002 state election, the *Geelong Advertiser* in its wisdom printed a list of all of the Bracks government promises to the region and challenged its readers to keep a check on those promises and, in its words, 'to be the judge in four years time' — which was the state election held in November 2006.

Acting Speaker, I can assure you and other members of this house that every one of those promises reported in the *Geelong Advertiser* was delivered very effectively. For example, in the important areas of health and education not only were our promises delivered but in many instances they were exceeded.

In education the government promised and delivered by upgrading schools right around the region, not only in my electorate of Geelong but right around the Greater Geelong region. This has to be compared to the previous government, which, as you are well aware, Acting Speaker, closed schools and sacked teachers. In my electorate there used to be a number of schools such as Swanston Street primary school. This government has built new schools and completely refurbished hundreds across the state. To be exact, we have refurbished nine primary schools and three secondary colleges in my electorate alone.

During the last term of this government we rebuilt the Barwon Valley Special School in Geelong. From the outset a number of members of Parliament, including the member for South Barwon, in which suburb the school is now located, and I have been heavily involved in the relocation of the Barwon Valley Special School. I was very proud when that school was completed early in 2006. It was a magnificent project which moved the school out of my electorate and into the Belmont area, as I said, in South Barwon. It was welcomed not only by the school community but also by the wider community of South Barwon, the people who live in and around the school. Barwon Valley Special School is special. I know it will serve Geelong for many decades to come.

Another example of the Bracks government's commitment to education in Geelong is my former school, the great Geelong High School. It reaped the benefits of numerous government announcements over the last term of government. Geelong High School is now a magnificent education facility, serving the eastern suburbs of my area including East Geelong, down into St Albans Park and even some areas of Newcomb and Whittington. Geelong High School is a magnificent facility, and I know it will be a great

institution that will service the eastern suburbs of Geelong for many decades into the future.

Around the Greater Geelong region the people of Geelong also saw the Lara Secondary College being built. I must commend the previous member for Lara, Peter Loney, for his work over 10 or 11 years to ensure that that school finally came to fruition for the benefit of the people of Lara. The Newcomb Secondary College in Bellarine is also being rebuilt. Much of the credit for that should go to the member for Bellarine. She has also put a lot of work into the Newcomb Secondary College. The college not only serves the Bellarine electorate but also in many instances serves the constituents of my electorate. And there are numerous primary schools across Geelong that have been upgraded during the last term of the Bracks government. One can see that the Bracks government has been committed to education across Victoria. It has been busy and has worked hard to deliver on education in Geelong and across the Greater Geelong region.

Health is obviously another priority of the Bracks government. Barwon Health has reaped the rewards of working closely with the Bracks government. The Bracks government, and particularly its local members, have worked closely with the management of Barwon Health to ensure that its institutions, such as the Geelong Hospital and the Grace McKellar Centre — and the list could go on — continue to provide a first-class health service to the people of Geelong.

The Grace McKellar Centre is now a magnificent 21st century rehabilitation and aged-care facility, which, I can assure you, Acting Speaker, the people of Geelong are very proud of. Compare that with what happened in 1999 when the Kennett government ran the place down. That government had it earmarked for sale; it was going to flog it off to the highest bidder. In 2007 the Grace McKellar Centre continues to grow and expand to ensure that the people of Geelong are serviced by this wonderful health facility, which the people of Geelong have a great attachment to.

The Andrew Love Cancer Centre has also been fully refurbished to the tune of \$26 million. I understand the new facility will be opened in the coming weeks. It has new modern technology, new cancer treatment equipment and two new bunkers. I was very pleased to be working with various organisations and community groups in Geelong, such as the Geelong Cancer Aftercare Group, which has raised literally millions of dollars for the Andrew Love Cancer Centre over many years. I know that group warmly welcomes the Bracks government's commitment to the Andrew Love Cancer Centre at the Geelong Hospital. Funding has also been

allocated for a new accident and emergency centre, and the construction of that centre is beginning as I speak. And we have not sacked nurses in the wards; we have employed more than 160 extra nurses over the seven years we have been in government, ensuring nurses are on the floor in the wards.

In relation to transport, the Western Ring Road at Geelong is now under construction. After 40 years of government procrastination — in fairness, when I say 'government procrastination' I mean governments from both sides — the Bracks government has finally delivered this vital piece of traffic infrastructure. The fast rail service is also now up and running, as is the upgraded and extended public bus system in the region. Important transport infrastructure, such as the Western Ring Road and numerous other projects in Geelong, continue to grow and service the people of Geelong.

The list of promises reported in the *Geelong Advertiser* and delivered by the Bracks government goes on. Numerous infrastructure projects in law and order; the arts; sport and recreation, including the upgrade to Skilled Stadium to the tune of \$13 million for the new Reg Hickey stand; and the environment have all been delivered during the second term of the Bracks government. Now as we move into the government's third term the major infrastructure projects are continuing to be delivered, including the relocation of the Transport Accident Transmission to the former Bow Truss building site in Geelong. The TAC's move to Geelong will ensure that we provide more than 400 to 500 jobs for the local economy, and that was very warmly welcomed by the people of Geelong.

It is easy for me to stand up here today and say that the Bracks government has delivered to Geelong in its second term, but for a third-party endorsement of this statement I turn to an editorial that appeared in the *Geelong Advertiser* on election day, 25 November 2006. Bear in mind that it was the *Geelong Advertiser* which asked its readers in 2002 to keep the government honest by ticking off promises that we made at that time. It has also been the *Geelong Advertiser* which has pretty much filled the void created by the lack of an opposition over the last four years — or I should say it has served as the opposition, given that we have had no opposition members in Geelong since 1999. It has been relatively critical of the Bracks government. However, the editorial under the heading 'A future you want awaits your vote' stated:

As voters in Geelong and surrounds go to the polls today they enter knowing that, in the main, the Steve Bracks-led Labor government has delivered to this area over two terms.

As I said, the *Geelong Advertiser* has filled the void left by the lack of opposition, but that is a glowing endorsement of the Bracks Labor government's commitment to Geelong. The endorsements came not only from the *Geelong Advertiser*. An editorial that appeared in the other newspaper in Geelong, the free weekly *Geelong News*, on Wednesday, 22 November, in the week before the election also stated in its summary:

It is this newspaper's opinion that the Bracks government deserves to be acknowledged for having delivered on its 2002 commitments.

Many people are critical — sometimes rightly so — of governments promising but not delivering during their terms of government, but I know it to be a fact that since 2005 the Bracks government has well and truly delivered on its promises to the people of Geelong and the rest of Victoria. Following the 2006 election the *Geelong Advertiser* again challenged readers to keep tabs on the government's delivery of promises to the Geelong region. I cut this out and put it on the fridge in my electoral office. Once again, as I said, all the boxes in 2002 were ticked. I am now looking forward to the 2006 list. We have a raft of promises, and I can assure this house that by the time we get to the 2010 election once again every box will be ticked off.

I will not go through the whole of the article that the *Geelong Advertiser* has asked people to put on their fridges, but it includes education; the consolidation of the Western Heights Secondary College, which is an important project; capital funding for numerous schools throughout the region, including the Geelong South and Tate Street schools in my electorate; and health services, including a \$2 million master plan for a further expansion of the Geelong Hospital. As I said before, it also includes accident and emergency services and police and emergency services, such as building new fire stations at Geelong and Geelong West, both of which are in my electorate, and an upgrade of the Geelong State Emergency Service unit. It includes numerous community infrastructure projects, jobs and tourism developments, a commitment of \$62.5 million to begin the first part of stage 4 of the Geelong bypass, relocating the TAC, which I have alluded to, and of course water.

As you are aware, Acting Speaker, water was the no. 1 issue for the people of Victoria, and I can assure you it was also the no. 1 issue in Geelong. We have a 50-year strategy plan that will deliver first-quality water to Geelong over the next 50 years and beyond. I look forward to the next four years: I look forward to working with the community of Geelong, and I look forward to working as part of the Bracks government

on delivering for Geelong from 2006 to 2010. I also look forward to working within this house over the next four years.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms GREEN (Yan Yean).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

WATER AMENDMENT (CRITICAL WATER INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 13 February; motion of Mr THWAITES (Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change).

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — To sum up on behalf of the government, I thank honourable members for their contributions. This is a fantastic bill that is essential as we go about delivering critical water infrastructure for Victoria. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 77

Allan, Ms	Languiller, Mr
Andrews, Mr	Lim, Mr
Asher, Ms	Lobato, Ms
Baillieu, Mr	Lupton, Mr
Barker, Ms	McIntosh, Mr
Batchelor, Mr	Maddigan, Mrs
Beattie, Ms	Marshall, Ms
Blackwood, Mr	Merlino, Mr
Bracks, Mr	Morand, Ms
Brooks, Mr	Morris, Mr
Brumby, Mr	Mulder, Mr
Burgess, Mr	Munt, Ms
Cameron, Mr	Naphine, Dr
Campbell, Ms	Nardella, Mr
Carli, Mr	Neville, Ms
Clark, Mr	O'Brien, Mr
Crutchfield, Mr	Overington, Ms
D'Ambrosio, Ms	Pallas, Mr
Dixon, Mr	Pandazopoulos, Mr
Donnellan, Mr	Perera, Mr
Duncan, Ms	Richardson, Ms
Eren, Mr	Robinson, Mr
Fyffe, Mrs	Scott, Mr
Graley, Ms	Seitz, Mr
Green, Ms	Shardey, Mrs
Haermeyer, Mr	Smith, Mr K.
Hardman, Mr	Smith, Mr R.
Harkness, Dr	Stensholt, Mr
Helper, Mr	Thompson, Mr
Herbert, Mr	Thomson, Ms
Hodgett, Mr	Thwaites, Mr
Holding, Mr	Tilley, Mr

Howard, Mr
Hudson, Mr
Hulls, Mr
Ingram, Mr
Kosky, Ms
Kotsiras, Mr
Langdon, Mr

Treize, Mr
Victoria, Mrs
Wakeling, Mr
Wells, Mr
Wooldridge, Ms
Wynne, Mr

Noes, 9

Crisp, Mr
Delahunty, Mr
Jasper, Mr
Northe, Mr
Powell, Mrs

Ryan, Mr
Sykes, Dr
Walsh, Mr
Weller, Mr

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Consideration in detail

Clause 1

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I advise the house that because the member for Brighton is proposing to delete the clause, she does not have to formally move amendment 1 in her name. However, it is the Chair's opinion that if this clause is agreed to, the member for Brighton cannot move her remaining amendments, because they are all dependent on the clause being omitted. Accordingly the Chair's view is that the member should address the principles of her amendments when talking to clause 1.

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — The principles of the amendments moved in my name are about allowing a greater public opportunity for comment on land that is to be compulsorily acquired under the changes put forward in the Water Amendment (Critical Water Infrastructure Projects) Bill. Five of the amendments are consequential. The key one is my amendment 4, which calls for the omission of clause 5. In my contribution to the debate on the second reading I made it very clear that the opposition wishes to remove the amendments to the Land Acquisition and Compensation Act. There are already compulsory acquisition provisions under this act, but what this bill seeks to do is remove the opportunity for people whose land is to be acquired beyond the existing provisions to have some say in the acquisition.

The section the government is seeking to delete allows a land-holder at this stage to have a say when the land is first reserved by or under a planning instrument for a public purpose. The essence of these amendments is not to allow the government to have unfettered access to private land under the compulsory acquisition powers but to allow some public discussion and some public opportunity for people to have a say. I have to say that

these amendments in particular were prompted by the events of last week when, under the existing compulsory acquisition powers, a number of farmers had land acquired for the pipeline from Colbinabbin to Bendigo. That land was compulsorily acquired under the existing act and the regulations for public roads and easements. It is the opinion of the Liberal Party that the government, in the form of both the Premier and the Deputy Premier, did not even allow those farmers to convey a view to the government.

These amendments before the house seek to stop the government doing what this bill would make possible by at least allowing a formal public process for farmers in this instance to have a say before having their private land compulsorily acquired by government for so-called critical water infrastructure projects. The powers given to the Premier under this legislation are very broad. Whatever the Premier deems to be a critical water infrastructure project will be so deemed, provided the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change, the Minister for Planning and the Treasurer agree and the declaration is gazetted. Basically anything the Premier wants to call a critical water infrastructure project will be so called; there will be no checks by Parliament and no balance. This bill goes even further in expanding compulsory acquisition powers over private land. We think it is going too far, and that is the reason why we have circulated these amendments.

Can I indicate my thanks to the government for allowing the opposition to put its case on this. We hope there are more of these opportunities over the course of this Parliament.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change) — Let me make it clear that the government does not support the amendment. The legislation is critical: we are facing the most dire circumstances as a result of the drought right across the state. Just to put it in context, the stream flows that we experienced in Melbourne through spring, for example, were 40 per cent below the lowest ever before recorded — not 40 per cent below the average but 40 per cent below the lowest we have ever had. In the winter-spring period in Ballarat the percentage stream flow into the Lal Lal Reservoir was about 2 or 3 per cent of the average flow, and the stream flow into the Murray–Darling Basin is way below the lowest ever experienced. That means that we need to have in place a measure to fast-track projects and ensure that we can get water projects up without delay.

Can I emphasise, though, that this legislation does not remove people's rights under the Land Acquisition and Compensation Act. All it does is enable notices to be

served under that act without there first being a planning scheme amendment over the land. That planning scheme process can take some time, and there is no reason for a land acquisition process to be delayed while the process is going on. People can still have a say through the planning process, if there is going to be a planning process. They will not lose that say. People will still be able to mount their points on land acquisition. They will still be able to argue and debate and still have all the normal rights they have on land acquisition — not after the land is acquired, but during the process. The process for land acquisition will not change at all. This legislation allows for some fast-tracking, but it does it in a way that preserves people's rights. It does it in a way that ensures that people will still have all the rights they would have had under the land acquisition act.

The member for Swan Hill referred to the grand prix in his contribution on the second reading. There are huge distinctions between this legislation and the grand prix legislation that was introduced, not the least of which was that people's personal rights to claim damages were removed. There was a whole raft of other matters. This is a very limited change, but it is an important change to get these projects up and running.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived. I am required to put the following questions. The question is:

That clause 1 stand part of the bill.

House divided on omission (members in favour vote no):

Ayes, 52

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

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

Seitz, 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
Naphthine, 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

Amendment defeated.

Clause agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That clauses 2 to 6 be agreed to, the bill be agreed to without amendment and the bill be now read a third time.

House divided on question:

Ayes, 76

Allan, Ms
Andrews, Mr
Asher, Ms
Baillieu, Mr
Batchelor, Mr
Beattie, Ms
Blackwood, Mr
Bracks, Mr
Brooks, Mr
Brumby, Mr
Burgess, Mr
Cameron, Mr
Campbell, Ms
Carli, Mr
Clark, Mr
Crutchfield, Mr
D'Ambrosio, Ms
Dixon, Mr
Donnellan, Mr
Duncan, Ms
Eren, Mr
Fyffe, Mrs
Graley, Ms
Green, Ms
Haermeyer, Mr
Hardman, Mr
Harkness, Dr

Languiller, Mr
Lim, Mr
Lobato, Ms
Lupton, Mr
McIntosh, Mr
Maddigan, Mrs
Marshall, Ms
Merlino, Mr
Morand, Ms
Morris, Mr
Mulder, Mr
Munt, Ms
Naphthine, Dr
Nardella, Mr
Neville, Ms
O'Brien, Mr
Overington, Ms
Pallas, Mr
Pandazopoulos, Mr
Perera, Mr
Richardson, Ms
Robinson, Mr
Scott, Mr
Seitz, Mr
Shardey, Mrs
Smith, Mr K.
Smith, Mr R.

Helper, Mr
Herbert, Mr
Hodgett, Mr
Holding, Mr
Howard, Mr
Hudson, Mr
Hulls, Mr
Ingram, Mr
Kosky, Ms
Kotsiras, Mr
Langdon, Mr

Stensholt, Mr
Thompson, Mr
Thomson, Ms
Thwaites, Mr
Tilley, Mr
Trezise, Mr
Victoria, Mrs
Wakeling, Mr
Wells, Mr
Wooldridge, Ms
Wynne, Mr

Noes, 9

Crisp, Mr
Delahunty, Mr
Jasper, Mr
Northe, Mr
Powell, Mrs

Ryan, Mr
Sykes, Dr
Walsh, Mr
Weller, Mr

Question agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 6 agreed to.

Bill agreed to without amendment.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

**PRAHRAN MECHANICS' INSTITUTE
AMENDMENT BILL**

Statement of compatibility

**Mr WYNNE (Minister for Local Government)
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 Act, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Amendment Bill 2007.

In my opinion, the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Amendment Bill 2007, as introduced in 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 the bill

The bill will amend the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act 1899 to expressly recognise the institute's purchase of property on High Street, Prahran in 1913 and clarify the power of the institute to grant leases, licences and permits in relation to land held by or vested in it.

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 right 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 any human rights issues.

RICHARD WYNNE
Minister for Local Government

Second reading

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Local Government) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Prahran Mechanics Institute is the only mechanics institute in Victoria governed by its own act of Parliament. The Prahran Mechanics Institute is one of the oldest in the state.

The Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act was passed in 1899 to incorporate the Prahran Mechanics Institute and Circulating Library and transfer ownership of the assets and liabilities of the original trustees of the institution to the corporate body. The 1899 act lists in its schedule two parcels of land which were vested in the PMI by operation of that act. That land is located in Chapel Street, Prahran.

The powers of the corporate body created by the 1899 act are set out in section 2 of that act. Those powers do not include a general power to buy or sell real property.

In 1912 the Victorian Parliament passed the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act 1912. This act 'shall be read and construed as one' with the 1899 act. The preamble of the 1912 act states its purpose as follows:

Whereas the Prahran Mechanics' Institution and Circulating Library Incorporated (hereinafter called the Incorporated Body) is desirous of extending its usefulness and with this object of purchasing land and erecting thereon a building so as to extend the Mechanics' Institution and Circulating Library now carried on and for such time as may be deemed —

the PMI's power to grant leases, licences and permits in relation to the land vested in a held by it on such land. I will now turn to the bill and its contents. The bill includes a preamble which sets out the factual background to the bill. Clause 1 of the bill sets out its purpose. This is to clarify the legality of the purchase of land in High Street, Prahran, in 1913 and to clarify the power of the PMI to grant leases, licences and permits

in relation to land held by or vested in it and buildings on such land.

Clause 2 provides that the bill is to come into operation a day after the day on which — —

Mr K. Smith — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister in his excitement has jumped from page 1 to page 3.

Mr WYNNE — I am sorry. At what point?

An honourable member — You have omitted page 2.

Mr WYNNE — I will start again from the beginning of the paragraph.

Whereas the Prahran Mechanics Institution and Circulating Library Incorporated (hereinafter called the Incorporated Body) is desirous of extending its usefulness and with this object of purchasing land and erecting thereon a building so as to extend the Mechanics' Institution and Circulating Library now carried on and for such time as may be deemed necessary to hold technical classes and for such purpose and for the purpose of paying off existing liabilities desires to borrow money upon the security of the land hereditaments and premises vested in it by the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act 1899 or that may hereafter become vested in it ...

By virtue of the 1912 act, money was borrowed, land was purchased in High Street, Prahran, and a mechanics institute was built. A building behind the mechanics institute was also built; such building is currently leased to Swinburne University.

A further act, the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Act 1914, further amended the borrowing powers of the PMI in relation to land purchased for the purposes outlined in the 1912 act.

At the request of the PMI, the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Amendment Bill 2007 has been introduced to recognise the validity of the purchase of the land in High Street, Prahran, in 1913 and to clarify its power to lease land vested in or held by it. These amendments will ensure that the 1899 act correctly reflects the status of the assets held by the PMI.

The bill also clarifies the power of the PMI to enter into leases, licences and permits in relation to such land. The PMI has expressed concern that while the 1899 act allowed for the demanding of 'rents, fees, tolls and charges', this may not extend to the entering into leases. The 1912 and 1914 acts expressly refer to the payment of loans out of the income from rents (suggesting a steady income stream arising out of long-term leasing arrangements). However, to ensure clarity for the PMI, the bill expressly refers to the PMI's power to grant

leases, licences and permits in relation to the land vested in and held by it and buildings on such land.

I will now turn to the bill and its contents.

The bill includes a preamble which sets out the factual background to the bill.

Clause 1 of the bill sets out its purpose, that is, to clarify the legality of the purchase of land in High Street, Prahran, in 1913 and to clarify the power of the PMI to grant leases licences and permits in relation to land held by or vested in it and buildings on such land.

Clause 2 provides that the bill is to come into operation on the day after the day on which it receives royal assent.

Clause 3 amends section 2 of the 1899 act to clarify the power of the PMI to grant leases licences and permits in relation to land held by or vested in it and buildings on such land.

Clause 4 clarifies the power of the PMI to 'demand recover and receive all such rents fees tolls and charges' to expressly provide the PMI with the power to grant leases licences and permits in relation to any lands held by or vested in them or any part of the lands or buildings standing upon those lands.

Clause 5 inserts a new section 17 in the 1899 act. This section declares the validity of the purchase in 1913 by the PMI of the land in High Street, Prahran.

Clause 6 provides that the bill will be repealed on the first anniversary of its commencement.

The Prahran Mechanics Institute is an important part of the Prahran community and the surrounding areas. This bill consolidates the past actions of the Victorian Parliament and provides a clear road for contributions by the PMI to the wellbeing of Victorians in the future.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debated adjourned on motion of Mr K. SMITH (Bass).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 1 March.

PAY-ROLL TAX AMENDMENT (BUSHFIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICE) BILL

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 Act, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Payroll Tax Amendment (Bushfire and Emergency Service) Bill 2007.

In my opinion, the Payroll Tax Amendment (Bushfire and Emergency Service) 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 Payroll Tax Amendment (Bushfire and Emergency Service) Bill 2007 is to amend the Payroll Tax Act 1971 in order to provide an exemption from payroll tax for wages paid or payable to employees who are absent from work on volunteer firefighter or emergency services duty.

The payroll tax exemption is being introduced to compensate those employers who normally pay payroll tax for loss of paid work time, if employees are forced away from their workplaces to respond to emergencies.

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 right 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.

JOHN BRUMBY, MP
Treasurer

Second reading

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The severe fire conditions Victoria has faced for many months now are likely to continue for some time. The Bracks government will continue to work with the

community to ensure we are as well prepared to face these and other emergency situations as can be.

One of the most extraordinary and selfless examples of how our community responds to these emergencies is the number and commitment of our volunteer firefighters. Beyond the bravery and work of these volunteers there are further acts of support and selflessness from the families, friends and employers of these volunteers.

The Bracks government is introducing an exemption from payroll tax for employers who support employees away from work as volunteer firefighters or responding to other emergencies. New South Wales and Victoria are the only states to provide such an exemption. The exemption is designed to compensate employers who would otherwise pay payroll tax for paid work time where those employees are away responding to emergencies. The government appreciates the actions of those employers who demonstrate their community mindedness in this way, especially in the context of the long and difficult bushfire season still upon us.

The exemption will cover Country Fire Authority and VicSES volunteers responding to fire and other emergencies, such as storm damage, flooding, and search and rescue.

It will also apply to other voluntary emergency workers as defined in the Emergency Management Act 1986 which include St John Ambulance, Red Cross, Volunteer Coast Guards and Life Saving Victoria who provide emergency services under the auspices of a coordinated response under the state emergency response plan.

The exemption applies to employees not on official leave such as recreation or long service.

Whilst applicable to all Country Fire Authority and VicSES volunteers the exemption will especially benefit rural and regional employers who are located in bushfire prone areas.

This measure is a small part of the support and commitment of the government to our emergency services and those behind them. Nonetheless it demonstrates the determination of the Bracks government to play its part in applauding and assisting our bushfire and emergency service volunteers and those behind them.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr WELLS (Scoresby).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 1 March.

VICTIMS OF CRIME ASSISTANCE AMENDMENT BILL

Statement of compatibility

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) 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 Act, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Victims of Crime Assistance Amendment Bill 2007.

In my opinion, the Victims of Crime Assistance Amendment Bill 2007, as introduced in 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 the bill

The bill seeks to amend the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996 (the act) by increasing the amount of special financial assistance that may be awarded to victims of crime under the act. The underlying purpose of the bill is to improve responses to victims of crime.

The act authorises the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) to pay certain victims of crime financial assistance, including special financial assistance if VOCAT is satisfied that an act of violence was committed against a person and the person has experienced or suffered a significant adverse effect as a direct result of that act of violence.

Section 8A(5) provides a table which sets out the minimum and maximum amounts of special financial assistance that VOCAT may award for each of four categories of act of violence (A to D). The bill increases the minimum and maximum amounts prescribed in the table for each category.

Human rights issues

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

The provisions of the bill do not affect any human rights protected by the charter.

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

The provisions of the bill do not impose any limitations on human rights protected by the charter.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities because it does not limit, restrict or interfere with any human rights protected by the charter.

ROB HULLS, MP

Second reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Victims of Crime Assistance Amendment Bill 2007 reflects this government's commitment to supporting victims of crime by increasing the amount of pain-and-suffering compensation that may be awarded to them.

Supporting and acknowledging the needs of victims and assisting them to recover from crime are key priorities for this government. Since first being elected in 1999 the government has introduced a wide range of reforms for victims, culminating in the introduction of the Victims' Charter Act 2006. One of the first things we did was to reintroduce pain-and-suffering compensation in 2000, which had previously been abolished by the Kennett government. With this bill, the government aims to build on its record and increase such payments to victims by 30 per cent.

Victims of crime can obtain state-funded compensation under the scheme established by the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996. The legislation establishes the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal, which is the primary source of compensation for victims of crime in Victoria. The tribunal operates throughout Victoria, offering recognition and assistance to victims of crimes involving an act of violence.

The tribunal provides financial assistance for certain expenses that have resulted from the crime, special financial assistance in some circumstances and awards for distress in cases where the act of violence resulted in death. There is no requirement that a person be charged or convicted in relation to an act of violence.

Special financial assistance awards were introduced by this government in 2000 and are similar in nature to pain-and-suffering payments under past legislation. These awards are made in addition to financial assistance awards for items such as medical expenses and loss of earnings. They are made in circumstances where the tribunal is satisfied that an act of violence was committed against a person who has experienced or suffered a significant adverse effect as a direct result of that act of violence.

These awards apply to four categories of violent act, A to D, which are specified in the Victims of Crime Assistance (Special Financial Assistance) Regulations 2000. Category A includes serious sexual offences and attempted murder, category B includes indecent assault and armed robbery, category C includes offences involving threats of death and conduct endangering life, and category D includes offences involving a threat of injury, assault and attempted assault. The act prescribes minimum and maximum awards for each of these categories in a table in section 8A.

The bill implements the proposed 30 per cent increase in payments to victims by amending the current minimum and maximum amounts for special financial assistance awards in the table. This figure is increased slightly to 33 per cent in relation to the most serious of the four categories of violent act for which such payments can be made. The maximum payment for pain-and-suffering compensation will increase from \$7500 to \$10 000.

Entitlements to other assistance under the current legislation will be maintained, including payment for medical, counselling and other expenses, as well as loss of earnings that the victim suffers or is likely to suffer in future.

The increased special financial assistance awards will apply to acts of violence occurring on or after 1 July 2007, and the amending act will commence operation on that day.

In making these amendments to the award amounts the government recognises that no amount of money can make up for the harm that victims suffer from an act of violence. Special financial assistance awards are intended to constitute a tangible expression of the community's sympathy and concern for victims who have suffered from violent crime. The increases to these awards made by this bill reflect the government's ongoing commitment to improving responses to victims of crime and providing them with the recognition they deserve.

I commend this bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr McINTOSH (Kew).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 1 March.

PARLIAMENTARY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

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 Act, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Parliamentary Legislation Amendment Bill 2007.

In my opinion, the Parliamentary Legislation Amendment Bill 2007, as introduced in 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 bill will amend the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 to:

rename two joint investigatory parliamentary committees. It is important to introduce this legislation to ensure that the Parliament has an effective committee structure; and

increase the maximum number of members of Parliament who may serve on joint investigatory parliamentary committees to 10 members.

The bill will amend the Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Act 1968 to:

entitle the leader of the third party in the Legislative Council to an additional salary prescribed by this act; and

increase the additional salary payable to members of Parliament serving as chairpersons of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, and entitle the members of Parliament serving as deputy chairpersons of those committees to an additional salary.

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

This 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 any human rights issues.

HON. STEVE BRACKS, MP
Premier

Second reading

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The proposed bill amends the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 to refine the structure and constitution of joint investigatory parliamentary committees. The proposed bill also amends the Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Act 1968 to increase the remuneration of certain members of Parliament serving in senior positions on joint investigatory parliamentary committees.

The proposed bill will amend the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 to address the current structure of

joint investigatory parliamentary committees to allow the committee system to focus on the government's commitments to the state's economic and infrastructure development and rural and regional Victoria. There will be at least one committee broadly responsible for each government department.

It is important that Parliament has an effective committee structure. Parliament works better with all-party parliamentary committees considering a range of issues of interest to Victorians.

The bill will:

amend the title of the Economic Development Committee to the Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee; and

amend the title of the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee to the Rural and Regional Committee.

The renamed Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee will have the added function of inquiring into infrastructure matters. It is considered timely to enable this committee (which currently inquires into matters related to economic development and industrial affairs) to examine infrastructure matters as such matters are closely aligned with economic development.

The renamed Rural and Regional Committee will continue to undertake reviews that will enhance economic and infrastructure development, investment attraction, job creation and community development in regional and rural Victoria.

The proposed bill will also increase the maximum number of members who may serve on a joint investigatory parliamentary committee from 9 members to 10 members. This will allow for greater representation of the parties represented in Parliament on committees such as the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee.

The Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Act 1968 formally recognises the third party of Parliament, which is a party that has at least 11 members in the Parliament. The leader of the third party in each of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council is entitled to an additional salary under this act. The bill proposes to amend the requirements for the leader of the third party in the Legislative Council to qualify for the annual additional salary prescribed in the act. This change will enable the Leader of the National Party in the Council to continue to qualify for an additional salary of 18 per cent of his or her basic salary. This is

an appropriate recognition of the status of the National Party as the 'third party' of this Parliament.

The proposed bill also recognises the valuable work performed by members serving in senior positions on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee.

The bill proposes to increase the annual additional salary payable to the member serving as the chairperson of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee from 10 per cent to 20 per cent of his or her basic salary. This increase recognises the intensive workload of that committee and the crucial role it plays in ensuring that government is accountable to the Parliament. The bill proposes to increase the additional salary of the chairperson of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee from 10 per cent to 15 per cent of his or her basic salary. The bill proposes to amend the act to entitle the deputy chairpersons of those committees to an annual additional salary of 4 per cent of his or her basic salary. These changes recognise that these committees have a greater workload than other joint investigatory parliamentary committees.

These changes will refine the structure and operation of parliamentary committees to ensure the continued delivery of effective committee processes and outcomes, focused on the government's commitments to the state of Victoria.

I commend this bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr McINTOSH (Kew).

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I move:

That the debate be adjourned until Wednesday, 28 February.

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — On the question of time, Speaker, I believe the adjournment period is inappropriate and that the resumption of debate on the bill should be delayed further. As a consequence, I move:

That the words 'until Wednesday, 28 February' be omitted with the view of inserting in place thereof the words and expression 'for two months'.

This amendment will allow real consideration of the additional benefits that appear to be contained in the legislation. Considering that there is more than one minor party in the other place —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr INGRAM — I am only talking about the Legislative Council. It is important that there is real scrutiny of the reasons for the additional benefits for the third party and whether they are in the best interests of the people of Victoria. It is incumbent on the Parliament to make sure we have some scrutiny, and bringing the bill on in the next sitting week will not allow that scrutiny. I am opposing such a short adjournment period for this important legislation.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Victorian Communities) — I support the original motion and oppose the amendment. This is a simple and straightforward piece of legislation. It is being adjourned effectively one day short of two weeks to the Wednesday of the next sitting week and that is sufficient time for all members to get across the issues. They are not complex issues and members have looked at the second-reading speech and understand what they are. The original intent to deal with them on the Wednesday of the next sitting week is appropriate.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier has moved that the debate be adjourned until Wednesday, 28 February. The member for Gippsland East has moved an amendment that the words 'until Wednesday, 28 February' be omitted with the view of inserting in their place the words 'for two months'. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those who support the amendment should vote no.

All those of that opinion say aye.

Honourable members — Aye.

The SPEAKER — Order! To the contrary, no.

Mr Ingram — No.

The SPEAKER — Order! I think the ayes have it. A division is required. Ring the bells.

Bells rung.

The SPEAKER — Order! I request members to take their allocated seats in the house, and I ask the Clerk to record the votes. Those who support the amendment should vote no.

The Clerk — The member for Gippsland East?

Mr Ingram — No.

The Clerk — The Nationals Whip?

Mr Delahunty — Four ayes.

The Clerk — The Opposition Whip?

Mr Kotsiras — Twenty-three ayes.

The Clerk — The Government Whip?

Mr Langdon — Fifty ayes.

The SPEAKER — Order! The resolution of the house is that the amendment is lost. The member who called for the division may ask that his dissent be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

Amendment defeated.

Mr Ingram — I ask that my dissent be recorded.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until Wednesday, 28 February.

Remaining business postponed on motion of Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Victorian Communities).

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Nursing homes: accreditation standards

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — The matter I raise on the adjournment relates to ensuring that state-owned nursing homes provide a high quality of care. I ask the government, as a significant provider of aged-care services, to give improved leadership and support to ensure the quality of care for residents in state-run homes.

Let me state my total support for and admiration of those who work in Victoria's aged-care sector. Staff at all aged-care facilities work hard in a demanding environment to ensure that the best possible level of care —

Ms Green — On a point of order, Speaker, I ask the member to make it clear which minister she is seeking —

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The member has 3 minutes in which to ask a minister for action.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE — Staff at all aged-care facilities work hard in a demanding environment to ensure that the best possible level of care is made available to residents. But the logical conclusion of this

sentiment is not that the state government should therefore be immune from all criticism. In Victoria 40 per cent of all aged-care facilities in rural and regional areas and 5 per cent of metropolitan facilities are run by the state government. With state-owned homes it is a legitimate — and indeed vital — role of the opposition to hold the government and the relevant minister to account.

The fact of the matter is that over the past 12 months the national accreditation agency has uncovered areas of non-compliance in 15 state-run homes, and 3 homes failed nine of their expected outcomes. To put this in context, 95 per cent of all nursing homes pass all 44 accreditation standards, so not meeting a standard is not a trivial matter. It represents a failure in process, environment or care of the residents. Examples of the identified non-compliance include a home having no process in place to safely manage those who self-medicate, and in another the management of residents in pain was not undertaken in a systematic and timely manner. Residents who are experiencing pain are unable to undertake their daily living activities due to that pain. These examples are just a few of many.

People value their local nursing homes, and the community rightly expects a high standard of care to be provided in those facilities. In the vast majority of cases that high standard is met. However, the minister was dismissive of the agency's findings and stated that none of the areas of non-compliance posed a danger to residents safety, health or wellbeing. The agency's findings clearly contradict that. In fact last year sanctions were imposed on one state-owned home where the federal Department of Health and Ageing, in its report on the operation of the Aged Care Act 1997, identified serious risks which presented:

... immediate and severe risk to the health, safety and wellbeing of residents.

I ask that the Minister for Community Services in another place provide the leadership, policy and support that will ensure that state-run homes provide the high standard of care that the community and elderly residents justifiably expect.

Chinese community: new year celebrations

Ms MORAND (Mount Waverley) — I raise a matter with the Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs and ask him to provide support for Melbourne's Chinese community for the new year celebrations being held this weekend. As I mentioned in the house yesterday, and as I am sure members are aware, 18 February marks the Chinese new year, which

is a very important time for the Chinese community to celebrate with their family and friends.

I am aware that many Chinese community organisations in my local area and across the state are organising community events to celebrate the year of the golden pig. Some of those organisations are the Federation of Chinese Associations, the Knox Chinese Elderly Citizens Club, the Chinese Association of Victoria and the ethnic school of the Chinese Association of Victoria.

In my electorate many groups and individuals will be celebrating the start of the Chinese new year. The Chinese Professionals Club of Australia is planning to mark it with celebrations at the Clayton community hall on Saturday night. The CPCA is one of the biggest Chinese organisations in Mount Waverley. It has been a highly successful community club for 13 years and now has more than 350 members. The club was founded by a group of local Chinese professionals, and it plays a really important role in the local Chinese community, helping it to communicate, socialise and celebrate its cultural diversity. Like many clubs, the CPCA is run by volunteers, and they are involved in other projects besides supporting their own community. For 12 consecutive years the CPCA has participated in Clean Up Australia Day, and I congratulate those members on supporting that important community event.

I am also proud to say that I represent a very multicultural electorate, with more than one-third of the residents of the Monash local government area and 35 per cent of the residents of Mount Waverley having been born overseas. Those figures are based on the 2001 census. I am looking forward to seeing the results of the 2006 census, because I am sure that now that proportion is even greater. Chinese residents are an increasingly significant part of the growth in the number of new residents in my electorate. I have the opportunity to visit and meet with many different cultural groups in my area. I always greatly enjoy attending their events, and I am looking forward to those associated with the Chinese new year coming up shortly.

Again, all these organisations are run by volunteers. They play a really important role in promoting cultural diversity and providing companionship and support for their members. You only have to attend a function to know how fantastic the groups are and what great times their members have together. Our cultural diversity is what makes Waverley and Victoria great places to work to live, work and raise a family.

In conclusion, I seek from the minister an assurance that he will take the necessary steps to provide funding support for these important Chinese community groups in organising their new year celebrations.

North Shepparton community and learning centre: funding

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Housing, and I thank him for being in the house. It concerns the need for funding for the North Shepparton community and learning centre's new community centre hub. The action I seek is for the minister to provide funding to construct the new community centre hub in one stage, with increased floor space.

I received a letter from Yvonne Elston, the president of the committee of management, and Christine Baschiera, who is the secretary, asking for my assistance. They provided me with a copy of a letter sent by them to the Premier and a response from the Premier's office advising that their letter has been referred to the Minister for Housing for his consideration. The letter to the government, dated 7 November 2006, seeks assistance with funding and with the construction problems the centre has been having with the new community centre hub, which was to have been completed in 2004.

Over the past four years several plans have been drawn up, approximate construction costs have dropped from about \$5 million to \$3 million, and the floor space allocated to it has been cut by 22 per cent. The members of the committee of management are concerned about that cut in floor space. They say that that will mean the building will now not be big enough. Over the past 18 months the number of people who have come through the doors of the centre has increased by 120 per cent, with an overall growth of 47 per cent on last year's number. The figure is expected to increase dramatically due to the 850 houses that are to be built in the immediate area. The centre is located in a high unemployment, low socioeconomic area. The letter states that it is the ninth most disadvantaged area in Victoria.

The centre has been an active participant in the neighbourhood renewal program since its inception in 1999. Currently the people running the centre's programs and services are working out of six locations, and they have been assured that the new centre will combine all their services under one roof. They are concerned that if the proposed plan with its reduction in floor space proceeds, they will have to cut their services and programs. Another concern is that the occasional

care children's services centre is to be built in stage 2. They say it is important that it is built as soon as possible in stage 1. This year the size of the vacation care program has increased from 45 to 60 children per day. With an extra 850 families coming into the area, there will be an increased demand.

I urge the minister to support the funding for the new hub. It is a very well-respected centre that provides much-needed programs and projects and has a committed and hardworking manager in Sue Hackworthy and a great committee of management, staff and volunteers. The centre works with a number of key organisations, including Verney Road Special School, the Goulburn Valley Community Health Service, the Office of Corrections, the Bridge Youth Service, the Salvation Army, Worktrainers Shepparton, the Shepparton police, the Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative, the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE, the Department of Human Services, the TAFE Koori unit and Adult Multicultural Education Services. I urge the government to support the centre.

Nillumbik: sporting facilities

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — My matter is for the attention of the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. The action I seek is that the minister meet with representatives of the Shire of Nillumbik so that they can brief him on their future plans to improve sporting facilities in Diamond Creek and other parts of the shire. I wish to express my pleasure at the appointment of the minister to his portfolio. I know of his longstanding interest in sport and recreation, and his background as a councillor in the Shire of Yarra Ranges is ideal, as he well understands that the delivery of new and improved sporting facilities can arise only through cooperation across all levels of government.

We have a great record of funding and supporting sporting facilities in my electorate and in the Shire of Nillumbik. We have put support into the Greensborough Hockey Club, the Diamond Creek Bowling Club, Coventry Oval and the Panton Hill Football Club, of which I am privileged to be the patron. It is a great club. Go Hillers! — if we ever get a season. Also we funded the recreational needs analysis study for Diamond Creek, on which the council is now basing its future plans. People who live in Nillumbik are great sports — the participation rates are enormous, our kids have lower rates of obesity than anywhere else in the state — and I think the minister will notice this when he comes out. But we have to keep the participation rate up and keep the quality of our sporting facilities up.

I commend Nillumbik council for what it has done in this area in difficult financial circumstances, and it is time that the federal government also started putting in some funds. It is sitting on a bulging wallet, having collected record-high taxes of any federal government, but it has not funded one sporting facility in my electorate, or indeed in the area, in at least a decade and probably longer. It really is time that it started to think about putting some funding into Diamond Creek.

I also want to make comment to the house on the failed councillor, Belinda Clarkson, who was an Independent candidate at the last state election working hand in glove with the Liberal Party — having members of the Liberal Party, including the chair of the Yan Yean branch of the Liberal Party, handing out how-to-vote cards for her — to try to wrest the seat for her party, but it did not work. Their plan did not work. But Ms Clarkson used the issue of the proposed Diamond Creek sports complex in an appalling way. She manipulated youngsters at netball and tried to get them to take material home to their parents and I think the minister should come out and have a look — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired.

Rail: Holmesglen car park

Mr O'BRIEN (Malvern) — I wish to draw to the attention of the Minister for Public Transport an issue of importance for residents of East Malvern who use and live near Holmesglen railway station and Holmesglen Institute of TAFE. I ask the minister to reassess the request of the residents of the Malvern Meadows Estate to provide funding to ensure that safety and maintenance concerns identified by the residents in relation to the Holmesglen railway station car park are addressed.

The car park at Holmesglen station is currently being extended by 59 places. Unfortunately the existing car park is substandard. Local residents of the Malvern Meadows Estate are quite rightly concerned that the problems with the existing car park will be exacerbated by the car park extension. The residents are particularly concerned by the lack of proper safety measures evident in the car park, which is also used as a thoroughfare by cars dropping off passengers to the station and by students attending the TAFE College.

I have visited this car park, and while I may be accused of using a cliché in saying it is an accident waiting to happen, I will not be accused of exaggeration. The car park has no speed control humps. It has no apparent speed limit signs. It has no organised drop-off or

pick-up areas. It has inadequate road markings, it has inadequate lighting, and the road and path surfaces are often unsealed and eroding. The safety of users of the car park must be paid proper attention, and while I acknowledge that the car park is a limited space, much more can and should be done to prevent accidents.

Inadequate car park drainage has caused many problems during periods of heavy rain, including flooding of local homes. While we have had no heavy rain recently, it is important that the car park's drainage infrastructure be updated. Moreover, the car park has been built at such a level that users have a vista directly into the backyards and living rooms of residents in homes abutting it in Argyle Street. This produces two problems — the first being a noise and privacy issue for local residents; and the second being a safety issue, as the lack of any barrier between the car park and residential homes has already seen a car inadvertently deposited into a backyard, fortunately without any serious injury on that occasion, but that was due to good luck rather than good management. In addition the increased traffic flows to surrounding streets caused by the car park extension have the potential to create a traffic nightmare for local residents, particularly those attempting to turn into Warrigal Road during peak hour.

The acting transport minister wrote to one local resident on 25 January this year concerning some of these matters. I urge the minister to review the acting minister's response, which was essentially dismissive of the government's capacity to address the concerns of members of the Malvern Meadows Estate which I have raised here today. There are many other issues of concern to local residents, including general station and track maintenance, that time does not permit me to raise in this debate. However, from what I have already said, it is clear that at Holmesglen station the government can do much better, and I request that it seeks to do so urgently.

Streeton Primary School, Yallambie: defence school transition aide program

Mr BROOKS (Bundoora) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education in the other place. The action I seek is for the minister to make a submission to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for the expansion of the defence school transition aide program at Streeton Primary School, Yallambie, in my electorate.

Streeton Primary School is a great local school that attracts students from around the local area, including from the many defence force families that are stationed at the Simpson Barracks, Watsonia. The defence school

transition aide program is a federally funded program that provides a staff position in those schools where there are a number of children of defence personnel. The transition aides assist the children of ADF families to adjust and settle into their schools, given the highly mobile nature of defence work.

A media release issued on 28 September 2005 by the Honourable De-Anne Kelly, the federal Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence, states in part:

A recent Defence survey found about 90 per cent of military personnel were posted more than 50 kilometres from their family and 60 per cent were more than 1000 kilometres away.

The media release goes on to talk about the commitment to those families and about supporting them.

At Streeton Primary School the transition aide provides an important service to around 100 children and their families, not only integrating children into their new school but helping families to settle into the new community. She helps deal with the stress caused to the family and the children when a parent is sent overseas to places such as Iraq. That position at Streeton Primary School was cut last year from 0.5 of a full-time position to 0.25 of a full-time position. Given the stress placed upon Defence families and the important work of the transition aide, I sincerely hope the state government, through the Minister for Education, can persuade the ADF to increase the funding for that role at Streeton Primary School.

EastLink: construction site

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports about the concerns of local residents who have been adversely affected by the ConnectEast project. I ask the minister to investigate the inconvenience and damage inflicted on them during the ConnectEast construction and call on him to ensure that the residents are adequately compensated.

The residents who live alongside the ConnectEast construction site in Ringwood have had to put up with enormous inconvenience over nearly two years. Attempts to find some level of compromise with the contractor or the government's authority, the Southern and Eastern Integrated Transport Authority (SEITA), have been met with continuing delays and obstruction. None of these residents are EastLink knockers, but their lives have been made a misery by the constant range of unreasonable disturbances caused by the tollway's construction.

Mr John Worswick, for example, has had to fight for over 18 months to have the main driveway into the project relocated. He had lights shining into his living room every night as cars and trucks moved in and out of the site. John has also had to contend with numerous trucks unloading all manner of cargo on his front lawn, ranging from gas cylinders to portable offices. This battle has placed incredible stress on John and his wife.

Then there is Derk Thomasson, an 88-year-old former World War II prisoner of war. He has had a concrete wall erected on his back fence. His expectation, drawn from ConnectEast literature, was that the wall would be constructed of a clear acrylic, allowing him to retain his bushy views. The concrete wall is a constant reminder to Derk of the horrors he encountered while he was incarcerated as a prisoner of war, and this has adversely affected his psychological and emotional wellbeing.

Tim Jones is another resident affected by the ConnectEast project. The ConnectEast operations centre is opposite his house, metres higher than the original drawings suggested, blocking views and causing his house value to plummet. Tim spoke with the Premier on talkback radio just days before the election, asking for his assistance with the many problems that he and other residents were dealing with. The Premier expressed his pre-election concern and promised he would — surprise, surprise! — look into it.

It has taken nearly two months for the minister's office, I assume on the Premier's behalf, to contact these residents. At this stage the result has been yet another person saying that he will get back to them, more delays and no action. These issues are having a detrimental effect on the lives of these residents on a daily basis. I ask again that the minister personally meet with these residents, listen to their concerns and deal with their compensation issues as a matter of some urgency.

Aged care: Frankston North centre

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Community Services in the other place in relation to a proposed aged-care centre to be constructed in my electorate of Cranbourne, right in the heart of Frankston North. The action I request from the minister is to ensure through direct negotiations with the commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing that a fair share of concession beds is provided for this proposed facility.

Frankston North is a proud place. I take the opportunity to open a mobile office at the local neighbourhood

centre once a month. I also take the opportunity to attend local community group meetings, and I am proud to be part of the community consortium that runs a community kitchen for residents of Frankston North. My concern, and that of many residents of Frankston North, particularly the elderly, relates to recent information I have received from the City of Frankston.

An aged-care centre is welcome in Frankston North, but it should be one that will service our fixed-income earners. After writing to the mayor and councillors of the City of Frankston I have been advised by a senior officer of the council that out of the 180 beds in the facility, only 50 will be made available as concession beds. Out of these 50 beds, 25 will be reserved for residents from the Milpara Park residential aged-care facility in Frankston, which it is proposed to close. The news that only 25 out of 180 beds will be concession beds is a kick in the guts to the residents of Frankston North and surrounding areas, especially since the region has a shortage of 264 beds. This is simply unjust. It is a kick in the guts not only for the elderly of Frankston North but also for the region as a whole.

I add that after much investigation I have now been advised that the federal government has not even issued any licences for this 180-bed facility. This is quite surprising, in that senior council officers and the local federal member have publicly championed the facility. More than 1000 local residents are over the age of 65, many of them living in one-bedroom Office of Housing accommodation with no family support and relying on home and community care funding and Meals on Wheels to see them through, day by day.

I hope the mayor and councillors of the City of Frankston will join me and take the opportunity to start campaigning on the ratepayers' behalf, sending the local federal member and the Howard government a strong message — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired.

Brushy Creek, Croydon: flooding

Mr HODGETT (Kilsyth) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change. The action I seek is for the minister to bring forward and complete the works promised to fix the problem of flooding from Brushy Creek into the homes of the residents of Lee Ann Crescent, Croydon.

Many residents of Lee Ann Crescent have suffered severe flooding for many years, and if it were not for the current weather patterns they would no doubt have

had to endure further flooding of their homes. I am informed that some residents of Lee Ann Crescent are no longer covered by their insurance companies. This is a disgraceful situation. Elderly residents live in fear that they will again be flooded when the weather patterns change. Others pray for rain and will rejoice when the wet weather comes, but not the residents of Lee Ann Crescent — they are petrified of heavy rain.

I remind the minister that he made a commitment to my constituency in the lead-up to last November's election to fix the problem. On 18 May 2006 the minister promised \$70 000 towards levee bank works at Brushy Creek. Residents were told that the works would be completed prior to the election and that further works would be undertaken over the next three years. A representative from Melbourne Water's flood plain services told residents in July or August last year that the levee bank works would not fix the creek's flooding problems because at 25 centimetres, as opposed to the 50 centimetres promised in the middle of May, the banks were simply not high enough. The works were supposed to reduce flooding, to quote from a press release issued by the minister, from 'once in five years to once in 20 years'.

I call on the minister to now bring forward the additional works that were promised and to undertake the works necessary to fix the flooding problem. The affected residents of Lee Ann Crescent deserve more than complacency on the part of the minister on this issue and should not be forced to live in fear of future flooding only because of the inaction of the Bracks government. The residents of Lee Ann Crescent are decent, honest and hardworking people who deserve a response from the minister and action by the government.

Responses

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Housing) — The member for Shepparton has raised a matter concerning the North Shepparton Community and Learning Centre, and she has briefed me on some of the issues of concern. A letter sent to the Premier on 9 November from the community and learning centre was subsequently transferred to my office after the election as the project very much falls within the purview of my responsibilities.

The advice I have been given thus far is that the hub project currently requires capital funding of approximately \$3.4 million. In 2003 the Office of Housing allocated \$250 000 in cash through the neighbourhood renewal program, and in April 2006 the previous Minister for Housing also allocated

Commonwealth Games demountables, which is a very good use of those buildings. They will form part of the core of the new community facility.

Similarly the City of Shepparton has committed \$1 million to the project, which is fantastic. A further \$1 million is being sought from the Community Support Fund. Neighbourhood renewal representatives are meeting with the Department for Victorian Communities in support of that bid being worked through.

I have correspondence from the executive director of the local government division of the Department for Victorian Communities, Prue Digby, which I will provide to the honourable member for Shepparton. It was dated a couple of days ago, and hopefully the community organisation will receive it tomorrow or Monday. It contains a suggestion for a further way forward. I will read the last paragraph of the executive director's letter to the organisation. It states:

As you may be aware, the North Shepparton Community and Learning Centre is in a high-needs area and is eligible to apply for capital funding for redevelopment or co-location through the Modernising Neighbourhood House program grants.

Obviously that is in my area of responsibility. The letter goes on:

It is anticipated that the guidelines for the next round of the Modernising Neighbourhood House program will be available in mid-2007.

In other words, there are options. We are certainly alive to all of the key major funding agencies, including the council and the neighbourhood renewal representatives. There are other options that we will explore as we go forward with this project.

I want to reassure the local member that there is strong support for this particular project. A significant application is afoot through the Community Support Fund. That process has to take its course, as the member would be aware. There is the potential for other options to open up through the neighbourhood house funding as well. I look forward to progressing this project over the next couple of months, and I thank the member for bringing it to my attention.

Mr ANDREWS (Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs) — I am pleased to respond to an important matter raised by the member for Mount Waverley. I want to acknowledge her longstanding support for multicultural communities in her local area, which neighbours my local community. She is a strong supporter of multicultural communities, including the

Chinese community, in the city of Monash and her electorate.

As the honourable member for Mount Waverley mentioned, this Sunday many Victorians right across the state — importantly, both metropolitan, and rural and regional communities — will be celebrating the lunar new year, the year of the pig. I will be honoured on Sunday — and I am sure that the member for Bulleen will join me — to attend celebrations coordinated by the Federation of Chinese Associations in the central business district. It is an important event and another opportunity to celebrate the great cultural diversity that makes our state such a great place to live, work and raise a family.

By way of background, before we came to government in 1999 the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) expended about \$750 000 a year through its grants programs. During the seven years of our government we have boosted that to some \$3.1 million. We have gone from the situation where around 900 groups were being supported annually to the situation where some 1600 groups are being supported through that program. It is a great program and works well. It gives proper recognition to those in our community, often volunteers, who do such great work not only to support individual members of ethnic communities but also to celebrate and share the cultural diversity that makes Victoria such an interesting and diverse place to live within the broader community. So it is a way of saying thanks and a way of supporting them in their very important work.

As part of the election campaign last year we announced that the funding would go to \$4 million per year over the next four years. It is an important step forward in supporting multicultural organisations in their work and the important role they play in celebrating and sharing our cultural diversity.

In relation to the specific matter raised by the member for Mount Waverley, I am pleased to inform her that through the second round of the Victorian Multicultural Commission's festivals and events funding for 2007 we will be funding 12 organisations to hold lunar new year events. This will include an allocation of \$30 000 to the Federation of Chinese Associations for their event this Sunday. I take the opportunity, on behalf of the Bracks government and, I am sure, on behalf of the house, to wish members of Victoria's Chinese, Indochinese and South-East Asian communities a very happy New Year and to acknowledge the interest and hard work of the member for Mount Waverley in consistently raising these matters.

I acknowledge the work of the VMC and the value of these very important programs in supporting those in our community who do so much not only to support individual ethnic communities but also to share in and celebrate the cultural diversity that is such a rich part of our Victorian community.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Minister for Gaming, to respond to matters raised for the Minister for Community Services by the member for Doncaster concerning improvements to aged care; for the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs raised by the member for Yan Yean asking him to meet with the Shire of Nillumbik to discuss the needs of sport in that shire; for the Minister for Public Transport raised by the member for Malvern regarding residents' concerns at the expansion of the car park at Holmesglen station; for the Minister for Education raised by the member for Bundoora seeking a submission to the Australian Defence Force school transition aide program as it applies to Streeton Primary School; for the Minister for Roads and Ports raised by the member for Warrandyte concerning compensation for Ringwood residents living near the ConnectEast construction site; for the Minister for Community Services raised by the member for Cranbourne seeking assistance with aged-care beds for the Frankston North facility; and for the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change raised by the member for Kilsyth regarding flood protection from Bushy Creek for residents in Croydon.

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Gaming) — Those matters having been raised, I will be pleased to forward them to the relevant ministers for their action and attention.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 5.18 p.m. until Tuesday, 27 February.