

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Thursday, 5 February 2009

(Extract from book 1)

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

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

Professor DAVID de KRETZER, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

The ministry

| | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Premier, Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Multicultural Affairs | The Hon. J. M. Brumby, MP |
| Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing | The Hon. R. J. Hulls, MP |
| Treasurer | The Hon. J. Lenders, MLC |
| Minister for Regional and Rural Development, and Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation | The Hon. J. M. Allan, MP |
| Minister for Health | The Hon. D. M. Andrews, MP |
| Minister for Community Development and Minister for Energy and Resources | The Hon. P. Batchelor, MP |
| Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and Minister for Corrections | The Hon. R. G. Cameron, MP |
| Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Small Business | The Hon. J. Helper, MP |
| Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission, Minister for Water and Minister for Tourism and Major Events | The Hon. T. J. Holding, MP |
| Minister for Environment and Climate Change, and Minister for Innovation | The Hon. G. W. Jennings, MLC |
| Minister for Public Transport and Minister for the Arts | The Hon. L. J. Kosky, MP |
| Minister for Planning | The Hon. J. M. Madden, MLC |
| Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs | The Hon. J. A. Merlino, MP |
| Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, and Minister for Women's Affairs | The Hon. M. V. Morand, MP |
| Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Senior Victorians | The Hon. L. M. Neville, MP |
| Minister for Roads and Ports | The Hon. T. H. Pallas, MP |
| Minister for Education | The Hon. B. J. Pike, MP |
| Minister for Gaming, Minister for Consumer Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier on Veterans' Affairs | The Hon. A. G. Robinson, MP |
| Minister for Industry and Trade, Minister for Information and Communication Technology, and Minister for Major Projects | The Hon. T. C. Theophanous, MLC |
| Minister for Housing, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs | The Hon. R. W. Wynne, MP |
| Cabinet Secretary | Mr A. G. Lupton, MP |

Legislative Assembly committees

Privileges Committee — Mr Carli, Mr Clark, Mr Delahunty, Mr Lupton, Mrs Maddigan, Dr Naphthine, Mr Nardella, Mr Stensholt and Mr Thompson.

Standing Orders Committee — The Speaker, Ms Barker, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Langdon, Mr McIntosh, Mr Nardella and Mrs Powell.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Batchelor, Mr Cameron, Mr Clark, Mr Holding, Mr McIntosh, Mr Robinson and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mr P. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Jennings, Mr Lenders and Ms Pennicuik.

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Beattie, Mr Delahunty, Mrs Maddigan and Mr Morris. (*Council*): Mrs Coote, Mr Leane and Ms Mikakos.

Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr Crisp and Ms Thomson. (*Council*): Mr Atkinson, Mr D. Davis, Mr Tee and Mr Thornley.

Education and Training Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Dixon, Dr Harkness, Mr Herbert, Mr Howard and Mr Kotsiras. (*Council*): Mr Elasmarr and Mr Hall.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr O'Brien, Mr Scott and Mr Thompson. (*Council*): Ms Broad, Mr P. Davis and Mr Somyurek.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Duncan, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Ingram, Ms Lobato, Mr Pandazopoulos and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mrs Petrovich and Mr Viney.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Noonan, Mr Perera, Mrs Powell and Ms Wooldridge. (*Council*): Mr Finn, Mr Scheffer and Mr Somyurek.

House Committee — (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Ms Beattie, Mr Delahunty, Mr Howard, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Scott and Mr K. Smith. (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), Mr Atkinson, Ms Darveniza, Mr Drum, Mr Eideh and Ms Hartland.

Law Reform Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Clark, Mr Donnellan and Mr Foley. (*Council*): Mrs Kronberg, Mr O'Donohue and Mr Scheffer.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Green, Mr Hodgett, Mr Nardella, Mr Seitz and Mr K. Smith. (*Council*): Mr Elasmarr, Mr Guy and Ms Hartland.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Munt, Mr Noonan, Mr Scott, Mr Stensholt, Dr Sykes and Mr Wells. (*Council*): Mr Barber, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr Pakula and Mr Rich-Phillips.

Road Safety Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Eren, Mr Langdon, Mr Mulder, Mr Trezise and Mr Weller. (*Council*): Mr Koch and Mr Leane.

Rural and Regional Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Marshall and Mr Northe. (*Council*): Ms Darveniza, Mr Drum, Ms Lovell, Ms Tierney and Mr Vogels.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Carli, Mr Jasper, Mr Languiller and Mr R. Smith. (*Council*): Mr Eideh, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Peulich and Ms Pulford.

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly — Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Mr R. W. Purdey

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Dr S. O'Kane

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

Speaker: The Hon. JENNY LINDELL

Deputy Speaker: Ms A. P. BARKER

Acting Speakers: Ms Beattie, Ms Campbell, Mr Eren, Mrs Fyffe, Ms Green, Dr Harkness, Mr Howard, Mr Ingram, Mr Jasper, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Languiller, Ms Munt, Mr Nardella, Mr Seitz, Mr K. Smith, Dr Sykes, Mr Stensholt and Mr Thompson

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier:

The Hon. J. M. BRUMBY (from 30 July 2007)

The Hon. S. P. BRACKS (to 30 July 2007)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. R. J. HULLS (from 30 July 2007)

The Hon. J. W. THWAITES (to 30 July 2007)

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

Mr E. N. BAILLIEU

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

The Hon. LOUISE ASHER

Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. J. RYAN

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. L. WALSH

| Member | District | Party | Member | District | Party |
|---|--------------------|-------|---|------------------|-------|
| Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie | Bendigo East | ALP | Lindell, Ms Jennifer Margaret | Carrum | ALP |
| Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael | Mulgrave | ALP | Lobato, Ms Tamara Louise | Gembrook | ALP |
| Asher, Ms Louise | Brighton | LP | Lupton, Mr Anthony Gerard | Prahran | ALP |
| Baillieu, Mr Edward Norman | Hawthorn | LP | McIntosh, Mr Andrew John | Kew | LP |
| Barker, Ms Ann Patricia | Oakleigh | ALP | Maddigan, Mrs Judith Marilyn | Essendon | ALP |
| Batchelor, Mr Peter John | Thomastown | ALP | Marshall, Ms Kirstie | Forest Hill | ALP |
| Beattie, Ms Elizabeth Jean | Yuroke | ALP | Merlino, Mr James Anthony | Monbulk | ALP |
| Blackwood, Mr Gary John | Narracan | LP | Morand, Ms Maxine Veronica | Mount Waverley | ALP |
| Bracks, Mr Stephen Phillip ¹ | Williamstown | ALP | Morris, Mr David Charles | Mornington | LP |
| Brooks, Mr Colin William | Bundoora | ALP | Mulder, Mr Terence Wynn | Polwarth | LP |
| Brumby, Mr John Mansfield | Broadmeadows | ALP | Munt, Ms Janice Ruth | Mordialloc | ALP |
| Burgess, Mr Neale Ronald | Hastings | LP | Napthine, Dr Denis Vincent | South-West Coast | LP |
| Cameron, Mr Robert Graham | Bendigo West | ALP | Nardella, Mr Donato Antonio | Melton | ALP |
| Campbell, Ms Christine Mary | Pascoe Vale | ALP | Neville, Ms Lisa Mary | Bellarine | ALP |
| Carli, Mr Carlo Domenico | Brunswick | ALP | Noonan, Wade Mathew ⁵ | Williamstown | ALP |
| Clark, Mr Robert William | Box Hill | LP | Northe, Mr Russell John | Morwell | Nats |
| Crisp, Mr Peter Laurence | Mildura | Nats | O'Brien, Mr Michael Anthony | Malvern | LP |
| Crutchfield, Mr Michael Paul | South Barwon | ALP | Overington, Ms Karen Marie | Ballarat West | ALP |
| D'Ambrosio, Ms Liliana | Mill Park | ALP | Pallas, Mr Timothy Hugh | Tarneit | ALP |
| Delahunty, Mr Hugh Francis | Lowan | Nats | Pandazopoulos, Mr John | Dandenong | ALP |
| Dixon, Mr Martin Francis | Nepean | LP | Perera, Mr Jude | Cranbourne | ALP |
| Donnellan, Mr Luke Anthony | Narre Warren North | ALP | Pike, Ms Bronwyn Jane | Melbourne | ALP |
| Duncan, Ms Joanne Therese | Macedon | ALP | Powell, Mrs Elizabeth Jeanette | Shepparton | Nats |
| Eren, Mr John Hamdi | Lara | ALP | Richardson, Ms Fiona Catherine Alison | Northcote | ALP |
| Foley, Martin Peter ² | Albert Park | ALP | Robinson, Mr Anthony Gerard | Mitcham | ALP |
| Fyffe, Mrs Christine Ann | Evelyn | LP | Ryan, Mr Peter Julian | Gippsland South | Nats |
| Graley, Ms Judith Ann | Narre Warren South | ALP | Scott, Mr Robin David | Preston | ALP |
| Green, Ms Danielle Louise | Yan Yean | ALP | Seitz, Mr George | Keilor | ALP |
| Haermeyer, Mr Andre ³ | Kororoit | ALP | Shardey, Mrs Helen Jean | Caulfield | LP |
| Hardman, Mr Benedict Paul | Seymour | ALP | Smith, Mr Kenneth Maurice | Bass | LP |
| Harkness, Dr Alistair Ross | Frankston | ALP | Smith, Mr Ryan | Warrandyte | LP |
| Helper, Mr Jochen | Ripon | ALP | Stensholt, Mr Robert Einar | Burwood | ALP |
| Herbert, Mr Steven Ralph | Eltham | ALP | Sykes, Dr William Everett | Benalla | Nats |
| Hodgett, Mr David John | Kilsyth | LP | Thompson, Mr Murray Hamilton Ross | Sandringham | LP |
| Holding, Mr Timothy James | Lyndhurst | ALP | Thomson, Ms Marsha Rose | Footscray | ALP |
| Howard, Mr Geoffrey Kemp | Ballarat East | ALP | Thwaites, Mr Johnstone William ⁶ | Albert Park | ALP |
| Hudson, Mr Robert John | Bentleigh | ALP | Tilley, Mr William John | Benambra | LP |
| Hulls, Mr Rob Justin | Niddrie | ALP | Treize, Mr Ian Douglas | Geelong | ALP |
| Ingram, Mr Craig | Gippsland East | Ind | Victoria, Mrs Heidi | Bayswater | LP |
| Jasper, Mr Kenneth Stephen | Murray Valley | Nats | Wakeling, Mr Nicholas | Ferntree Gully | LP |
| Kairouz, Ms Marlene ⁴ | Kororoit | ALP | Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay | Swan Hill | Nats |
| Kosky, Ms Lynne Janice | Altona | ALP | Weller, Mr Paul | Rodney | Nats |
| Kotsiras, Mr Nicholas | Bulleen | LP | Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur | Scoresby | LP |
| Langdon, Mr Craig Anthony Cuffe | Ivanhoe | ALP | Woodridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling | Doncaster | LP |
| Languiller, Mr Telmo Ramon | Derrimut | ALP | Wynne, Mr Richard William | Richmond | ALP |
| Lim, Mr Muy Hong | Clayton | ALP | | | |

¹ Resigned 6 August 2007

² Elected 15 September 2007

³ Resigned 2 June 2008

⁴ Elected 28 June 2008

⁵ Elected 15 September 2007

⁶ Resigned 6 August 2007

CONTENTS

THURSDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2009

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| CONDOLENCES | |
| <i>Hon. Frank Crean</i> | 171 |
| BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE | |
| <i>Notices of motion: removal</i> | 171 |
| <i>Adjournment</i> | 172 |
| PETITIONS | |
| <i>Water: charges</i> | 171 |
| <i>Police: Red Cliffs</i> | 171 |
| <i>Walpeup research station: future</i> | 171 |
| <i>Rail: Mildura line</i> | 171 |
| DOCUMENTS | 172 |
| MEMBERS STATEMENTS | |
| <i>June Goudie</i> | 172 |
| <i>Julie McDonald</i> | 172 |
| <i>Knox Leisureworks: warm-water pool</i> | 172 |
| <i>Kilsyth: basketball stadium</i> | 172 |
| <i>Legislative Council: vacancy</i> | 172 |
| <i>Val Lawrence</i> | 173 |
| <i>Rail: Shepparton line</i> | 173 |
| <i>Road safety: school zones</i> | 173 |
| <i>Children: disability and inclusion support</i> <i>program</i> | 174 |
| <i>Health: services</i> | 174 |
| <i>Government: performance</i> | 174 |
| <i>Australia Day: Yan Yean electorate</i> | 175 |
| <i>Federal member for Gippsland: comments</i> | 175 |
| <i>Police: Ballarat</i> | 175 |
| <i>Roads: regional and rural Victoria</i> | 176 |
| <i>Australia Day: Narre Warren South electorate</i> | 176 |
| <i>Electricity: supply</i> | 177, 178 |
| <i>St Albans Connect project</i> | 177 |
| <i>Monsignor Joseph Takchi</i> | 177 |
| <i>Water: irrigators</i> | 177 |
| <i>Greensborough: swimming pool</i> | 178 |
| <i>Planning: Greensborough development</i> | 178 |
| <i>Rail: Stony Point line</i> | 178 |
| <i>Harold Johnston and Hal Hobbs</i> | 178 |
| <i>Victoria University: campus closures</i> | 179 |
| <i>Bruce Marshall and Daniel Webb</i> | 179 |
| <i>Bayswater cricket and football clubs: water tank</i> | 179 |
| ANNUAL STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS | 179, 210, 221 |
| GAMBLING REGULATION AMENDMENT (LICENSING) BILL | |
| <i>Statement of compatibility</i> | 203 |
| <i>Second reading</i> | 206 |
| ABSENCE OF PREMIER | 212 |
| QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE | |
| <i>Rail: infrastructure</i> | 212, 214, 216, 218 |
| <i>Bushfires: community preparedness</i> | 213 |
| <i>Hospitals: government performance</i> | 215 |
| <i>Schools: funding</i> | 217 |
| <i>Children's Week</i> | 218 |
| <i>V/Line: communications system</i> | 219 |
| <i>Employment: regional and rural Victoria</i> | 219 |
| SUSPENSION OF MEMBER | |
| <i>Member for South-West Coast</i> | 221 |
| EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AMENDMENT (GOVERNANCE) BILL | |
| <i>Second reading</i> | 227 |
| <i>Third reading</i> | 229 |
| CRIMINAL PROCEDURE BILL | |
| <i>Second reading</i> | 229 |
| <i>Consideration in detail</i> | 229 |
| <i>Third reading</i> | 231 |
| ACTING PUBLIC ADVOCATE..... | 231 |
| ADJOURNMENT | |
| <i>Water: Target 155 campaign</i> | 232 |
| <i>Racing: Living Country Racing program</i> | 232 |
| <i>Ambulance services: Cobram and Yarrowonga</i> | 233 |
| <i>Manufacturing: south-eastern suburbs</i> | 233 |
| <i>Breast cancer: digital mammography</i> | 234 |
| <i>Mordialloc Creek Bridge: naming</i> | 234 |
| <i>Schools: integration aide funding</i> | 235 |
| <i>Brothels: illegal</i> | 236 |
| <i>Bass electorate: health services</i> | 236 |
| <i>Child care: Port Melbourne</i> | 237 |
| <i>Responses</i> | 237 |

Thursday, 5 February 2009

The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 9.34 a.m. and read the prayer.

CONDOLENCES

Hon. Frank Crean

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the house of the death of the Honourable Frank Crean, member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral districts of Albert Park from 1945 to 1947 and Prahran from 1949 to 1951.

I ask members to rise in their places as a mark of respect to the memory of Frank Crean.

Honourable members stood in their places.

The SPEAKER — Order! I shall convey a message of sympathy from the house to the relatives of Frank Crean.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of motion: removal

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the house that under standing order 144 notices of motion 32 to 34, 138 to 143 and 207 to 220 inclusive will be removed from the notice paper on the next sitting day. A member who requires the notice standing in his or her name to be continued must advise the Clerk in writing before 2.00 p.m. today.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Water: charges

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the recently implemented Melbourne Water waterways charge imposed on residents in the Western Water billing area.

The petitioners register their opposition to the charge on the basis that residents will be billed by Western Water even though they do not receive any service from Western Water.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria remove this charge on properties that do not fall within a water service district of Western Water.

By Mr BAILLIEU (Hawthorn) (19 signatures).

Police: Red Cliffs

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of residents of Red Cliffs and surrounding communities in Victoria draws to the attention of the house the need to increase police presence in our district.

The petitioners register their dismay after a weekend of vandalism with damage estimated to be in excess of \$60 000 to the local bowling club and private and public property.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria take action to increase staff levels at the Red Cliffs police station as a proactive step in ensuring that this criminal activity is not repeated.

By Mr CRISP (Mildura) (32 signatures).

Walpeup research station: future

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the impending closure of the Walpeup research station as a result of a restructure of the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI).

The petitioners register their opposition to the closure of Walpeup research station, on the basis that it will result in job losses, and have serious ramifications for the community, services and environment.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria rejects the DPI restructure and calls on the state government to keep the Walpeup research station as a fully funded and functional DPI facility.

By Mr CRISP (Mildura) (18 signatures).

Rail: Mildura line

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of the citizens of the region known as Sunraysia, primarily in the state of Victoria but including cross-border citizens of New South Wales centred on the city of Mildura, brings to the attention of the house the many promises to return the Melbourne–Mildura passenger train, without delivery.

The undersigned petitioners therefore ask the Legislative Assembly to bring forward the reinstatement of the said Melbourne–Mildura passenger train, especially in view of:

1. the many undelivered promises;
2. the urgent need to promote public transport in a global warming context;
3. the pressing need to connect remote Mildura to both Melbourne and the national rail network; and
4. The geographic distance now requiring a rapid service (very fast train) to be competitive.

By Mr CRISP (Mildura) (73 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Hawthorn be considered next day on motion of Mr McINTOSH (Kew).

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

DOCUMENTS**Tabled by Clerk:**

Gambling Regulation Act 2003 — Report of the Gambling and Lotteries Licence Review Panel to the Minister for Gaming in Relation to the Review of the Second Phase of the Regulatory Structure and Associated Arrangements for the Operation of Gaming Machines, Wagering, Approved Betting Competitions and Club Keno and the Funding of the Racing Industry that are to Apply after 2012 under s 10.2A.11 — Ordered to be printed.

Statutory Rule under the *Crimes Act 1958* — SR 1.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Adjournment**

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday, 24 February 2009.

Motion agreed to.**MEMBERS STATEMENTS****June Goudie**

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — I rise to congratulate Knox citizen of the year, June Goudie. June is one of our true local community heroes, having spent most of her life volunteering in roles that help others. For more than 40 years June has provided dedicated service to both the Country Women's Association of Australia and the Angliss Hospital Ferntree Gully auxiliary, while for nearly 70 years June has mentored thousands of young people through the brownies and girl guides. June is a most deserving winner.

Julie McDonald

Mr MERLINO — Congratulations to Shire of Yarra Ranges citizen of the year, Montrose resident Julie McDonald. Through Julie's extraordinary

commitment, vision and leadership, a small children's park in Montrose was transformed into an outstanding adventure playground — the Montrose community playground. Not only was Julie acknowledged at the shire's Australia Day awards, the wonderful group of people who worked with her on the Montrose playground committee were also rightly awarded the 2009 community group of the year. Julie and her committee's tireless and passionate work resulted in around 1000 local residents coming together over five days to build the playground, which is now hugely popular.

Knox Leisureworks: warm-water pool

Mr MERLINO — Over \$1 million will go towards the new warm-water pool at Knox Leisureworks, following a tireless campaign by local resident Joe Sinclair and his team. The warm-water pool will mean more local people can enjoy aquatic exercise programs all year round and will allow 100 extra hours each week for therapeutic and rehabilitation programs for people of all ages and abilities.

Kilsyth: basketball stadium

Mr MERLINO — The Kilsyth basketball stadium will also undergo a major expansion thanks to a \$500 000 grant from the Brumby government. The project is the vision of Grant Wallace and Ben Turner from Kilsyth Basketball, and it will see two new courts added to the stadium to cater for the continuing growth of basketball in our region.

Legislative Council: vacancy

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — The Liberal Party and The Nationals opposed Labor's Constitution (Parliamentary Reform) Bill 2003 which amended Victoria's Constitution Act. Amongst other things, The Liberals and The Nationals were concerned that the bill entrenched a method of filling casual vacancies in the Legislative Council by an act of Parliament. Good or evil, workable or unworkable, practical or impractical, these amendments now require a referendum of Victorians to change or alter parts of our constitution. We voted against it.

However, the Liberal Party and The Nationals both understand that while we may have opposed the bill, the Victorian constitution as amended is the law. We, no less than all other Victorians, are obliged to obey the law. The law prescribes the method by which a casual vacancy created by the departure of a member of the Legislative Council is to be filled. The casual vacancy created by the resignation of Mr Thornley, a member for Southern Metropolitan Region in the Council, could

have seen 400 000-odd voting Victorians of Southern Metropolitan Region not fully represented in the Victorian Parliament. They, no less than Victorians in the other seven regions, are entitled to be fully represented.

I sincerely congratulate members and staff of Parliament for the expeditious, dignified and courteous way they enabled that casual vacancy to be filled by Tuesday's joint sitting. This was the first time that Parliament had invoked the new constitutional laws and held a joint sitting to fill a casual vacancy in the Legislative Council.

Val Lawrence

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Mental Health) — I am delighted to congratulate all those in Bellarine and Geelong who recently received Australia Day honours. In particular I would like to mention Val Lawrence from Queenscliff, who was awarded an Order of Australia medal (OAM). Val has been honoured for her contribution to local government and the community. Val has been a well-known and respected local identity on the Bellarine Peninsula. Her enthusiasm and commitment have been appreciated by many individuals and groups whom she has worked with and supported as a volunteer and as a longstanding councillor.

Last year Val retired after 10 years service as a councillor with the Borough of Queenscliffe. As a councillor Val dealt with a wide range of issues and concerns. Some of these have been contentious and complex, and she has demonstrated a capacity to manage competing interests and facilitate positive outcomes for the community. This was particularly evident during her term as mayor from March 2001 to November 2004. She was a fine representative of the Borough of Queenscliffe in the broader local government environment and represented the concerns and needs of her community as a director of the G21 regional alliance.

Val has also been a member of the Geelong-Otway Tourism Board, the Australian Red Cross and the Barwon Health Ethics Committee. She was a director of the Geelong Community Foundation and was involved with the Grace McKellar Centre board from 1994 to 1998. She has also been involved with and contributed to the Queenscliffe Lighthouse Theatre Company, the Fort Queenscliff Ladies Association and the Queenscliff Australian Army Command and Staff College. My congratulations to Val on her OAM and my best wishes for her new and exciting role heading up the Australian Red Cross in the Barwon region.

Rail: Shepparton line

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I have received many complaints from angry and frustrated people travelling by rail from Melbourne to Shepparton. The Shepparton railway station is closed at 5.30 p.m., so when people arrive on trains or buses after that time there is no-one to help them on to other destinations, which many of them are travelling to, or to order and pay for tickets. I ask the Minister for Public Transport to increase the staffing levels at the Shepparton station and other regional stations to provide customer service and allay safety fears after 5.30 p.m. when the station is not manned. Last Friday I received complaints from passengers who told me that their train left Melbourne with the air conditioning working in its four carriages, but from Seymour the air conditioning in three carriages failed. It was the hottest time of the day, and on that day it reached 44 degrees Celsius. It was the busiest day of the week, and also on that day the government provided free travel.

I continue to get complaints about trains running late. On 19 January the train from Melbourne to Shepparton was supposed to leave Southern Cross station at 6.30 p.m., but it did not leave until 7.15 p.m. The train had no air conditioning — it was 40 degrees Celsius that day — and to make matters worse the platform the train was advertised to leave from was changed from platform 1 to platform 5, which meant people had to rush to the other platform with their luggage. This practice makes it difficult for older, frail people, disabled people or parents with prams and small children. Public transport is meant to be efficient, reliable, comfortable and safe. Sadly Victoria's public transport system is a shambles.

Road safety: school zones

Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) — I rise to speak about Victoria's most precious resource: our children. This week in my electorate of Tarneit 723 prep students attended school for the first day of a journey that will spark their imagination. There are many obstacles that they will have to overcome, but one of the most ever-present dangers is the threat of speeding cars, and that is why I would like to remind all road users to be aware of children in and around school zones. Children are unpredictable road users, so it is extremely important that motorists take care and slow down when driving through school zones. Since lower speed zones around schools were introduced in 2003 we have seen a 27 per cent reduction in accidents within the school zone.

The Brumby government has installed three electronic speed signs in Tarneit at Bethany Catholic Primary School, St James the Apostle Primary School and Thomas Carr College as part of a \$13.6 million investment to ensure our children are safer when travelling to school. Education remains the Victorian government's no. 1 priority. We are providing over 43 500 prep students with a free welcome-to-school library bag to make their first day as much fun and as exciting as possible. I wish every student starting school this week a safe and exciting new school year.

Children: disability and inclusion support program

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — I call on the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development to conduct an urgent review of the program for students with a disability and the kindergarten inclusion support service. There is obviously a serious lack of funding for both programs. Parents who have been refused funding for their children are being told there is only a fixed amount of money to be shared between many needy students. This is highly discriminatory, grossly unfair and unacceptable. Those who do not have the assistance of an aide in kindergarten or school will be disadvantaged forever as they slip through the cracks never to recover or get the best possible start in life through education that every young person is entitled to.

Applications under the kindergarten inclusion support program must be lodged in September. Parents were advised of the outcome just before Christmas. An appeal process is available to parents but, given the Christmas break, parents are faced with the prospect of either their child starting without the assistance of an aide, which is impossible in most cases, or waiting on the outcome of the appeal. Surely this process can be streamlined so that the appeals can be lodged and finalised prior to Christmas and parents can know exactly where they are placed for the start of the kindergarten year. The assessment criteria are weighted far too heavily towards a child's risk to self or others rather than taking into account a child's capacity to integrate, which can be measured by their communication, physical or sensory impairments. The minister must immediately make the necessary changes to ensure that parents who are already dealing with very difficult situations are given the support that they and their children are entitled to in a timely manner.

Health: services

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Health) — Last week's extreme temperatures throughout Victoria were

difficult and challenging for all of us. Many agencies, including health services, played an important role in protecting and caring for Victorians. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many individuals working right across the health system, including our doctors, nurses, ambulance paramedics, allied health staff, volunteers and a not often recognised group, our engineers and maintenance staff, who frankly did an outstanding job. All those listed did a fantastic job of supporting and caring for some of the most vulnerable members of our Victorian community.

Last Friday I took the opportunity to visit the ambulance call taking and dispatch centre and witnessed firsthand just one example of the extraordinary efforts made by our health professionals, call takers, dispatchers and ambulance clinicians in their professional and dedicated role to support some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Many people across our health system undertook additional measures and put in that extra effort to deal with what was an extreme weather event. There was unprecedented demand for services, including ambulance services, in terms of emergency departments and also in terms of other services such as Nurse-on-Call.

Finally, I again express my appreciation and the appreciation of all Victorians for the outstanding effort of all those involved in the provision of our health services right across Victoria.

Government: performance

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — I find it difficult to comprehend that any member of this house seriously believes that this government is in any way competent when we look at the mess it has made of Victorians' lives over the past few months. Be it in the area of job security, power supply or simply allowing people to get home on the train at night, the fact is that this government has comprehensively failed in providing even the most basic of services to the people in our communities. In no area have I been more appalled than in the area of community safety.

For those in this place who persist in running the line that violent crime is down and that our absent police minister is doing a good job, my advice is to read the papers, watch the news or listen to their constituents. Government members cannot deny the fact that hardly a day has gone by since last Christmas when there has not been another report of a violent assault or bashing in metropolitan Melbourne or throughout Victoria, with three more people going to hospital just last night as a result of a stabbing. If there are members in this place

who cannot see the effects this violence is having on our community and continue to refuse to acknowledge the government's responsibility to ensure public safety, those members do not deserve to be here. Violence is spiralling out of control, and this government's response has been to lurch from one ill-conceived idea to another as it reacts to media stories and increasing public concern.

There is absolutely no evidence that any of the government's initiatives are working. The harsh reality is that this government has proved that it simply does not know what to do. Instead of denying there is a problem, our self-proclaimed action man Premier and his do-nothing police minister need to open their eyes and ears to the violence going on around them and show some leadership in taking back our streets.

Australia Day: Yan Yean electorate

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — Australia Day was again a great opportunity to get together and celebrate the achievements of our community and welcome new citizens to what is a great country and into our local communities. It is also an opportunity to celebrate and reward the fantastic tireless volunteers who make up the wonderful fabric of our community. I would like to congratulate in particular those in my electorate who received awards. I make particular mention of Gayle Corr, who received an Medal of the Order of Australia. Gayle is the heart and soul of Arthurs Creek. She edits *Arthurs Creek News* and is very involved in Landcare and the CFA. If it happens in Arthurs Creek, Gayle Corr is in the middle of it.

Shire of Nillumbik Citizen of the Year was Tom Crothers; Senior Citizen of the Year was Mary Robertson; Young Citizen of the Year was Taiyo Takizawa; Volunteer of the Year was Peter Gebert; and Community Group of the Year was Nillumbik HomeBiz Network.

In the city of Whittlesea the Citizen of the Year was Herbie Mason; Senior Citizen of the Year was Charlie Ball; Junior Citizen of the Year was Adrian Spinelli; and Environmental Class of the Year went to class 4JC of Mill Park Heights Primary School. I would also like to congratulate Pamela Rix, who received a Jagajaga community Australia Day award.

There is an also an Australia Day committee in the city of Whittlesea and its Citizen of the Year was Charles Castles. The sports star award went to Faizan Ahmed and the award for volunteer work to Betty Dwyer. Primary School Student of the Year was Toni Anderson; the Nick Ascenzo memorial award recipient

was Sylvia Schultz; and the Community Event of the Year award went to the Country Women's Association Diamond Valley Group.

Federal member for Gippsland: comments

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I rise today to congratulate the federal member for Gippsland, Darren Chester, on his support for two issues on which I have been a long-time campaigner. I do this honestly and sincerely. One of the issues concerns the Mitchell River dam. It is the policy of the coalition in this state to build a dam somewhere in Victoria. Darren Chester has made it very clear in media statements that he opposes this because of its impact on the Gippsland Lakes. He is joined by Mr Philip Davis, a member for Eastern Victoria Region in the Legislative Council, who has made similar comments. I congratulate both of them for standing up for their Gippsland constituents.

This is a very important issue, and I would like to think that other coalition members, particularly the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of The Nationals, will also see sense and realise that taking water out of Gippsland is not going to be a popular decision.

Another issue that came as a bit of a surprise was Mr Chester's support for the recreational fishing-only zones in Lake Tyers and at Mallacoota. Members who have been in this place for a while would know how vehemently the Liberals and The Nationals opposed the creation of these recreational fishing-only zones. This initiative has been incredibly successful, and hence Mr Chester's comments about Lake Tyers. He is reported as saying that the recreational angling community had warmly welcomed these recreational fishing-only zones. They have been very successful.

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

Police: Ballarat

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — Since it was elected, this government has worked hard to improve community safety across the state, and that of course includes Ballarat. I well remember that police morale was low ahead of the 1999 election, with droves of police leaving the force and many on stress-related leave. I am pleased to see that since being elected the Bracks and Brumby governments have invested heavily in our police force, with 1500 additional police now back on the beat and another 250 to be added over this term of government.

In Ballarat we have seen an increase of over 28 per cent in the number of front-line police, and since 2001 the

crime rate has correspondingly fallen by 8 per cent. There have been other initiatives, such as the introduction of the single-unit crime desk which has also seen the response to crime in Ballarat improved, as has the introduction of the domestic violence unit. The recent introduction of banning powers by this government to address late-night crime incidents happening around licensed premises in the central business district will further help.

It is therefore disappointing, though not surprising, that our political opponents attempt to misrepresent the facts about policing in Ballarat. Most recently a member for Western Victoria Region in the Legislative Council, John Vogels — rarely sighted in Ballarat — put out a press release suggesting that a lack of available police was the reason for a slow response to a brawl which occurred recently. Had Mr Vogels sought the facts from police superintendent Allen, he would have found that plenty of police were on hand.

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

Roads: regional and rural Victoria

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — Victoria is bigger than Melbourne, and this state government stands condemned for its failure to invest in and maintain country roads, which are its responsibility. I have been contacted by truck and car drivers upset and concerned about the maintenance and safety of our country roads,

Many B-class and some C-class roads in western Victoria have stressed pavements and are breaking up and rough. Over the last couple of months I have travelled over many kilometres of these roads, including the Henty, Glenelg and Wimmera highways, where many sections are not up to scratch. But last week as I was travelling on the Wimmera Highway to Bendigo I saw firsthand long grass so high that it was difficult to see the white posts. Not only is this unsafe, in this extreme fire season it is not good enough. I witnessed a fire that had started on the Western Highway only 2 minutes before I arrived. The fire down at Branxholme could also have been started by a cigarette butt thrown from a vehicle.

Our rural roads are a vital network which connect our rural communities, and they need to be adequately maintained for safe and efficient freight and community transport, but the June 2008 edition of the state and regional indicators, released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, shows that the number of distressed roads in Victoria has risen dramatically. Even last year the Victorian Auditor-General recommended that the

government commit an additional \$100 million to road maintenance in country Victoria. People in Melbourne would not put up with this standard of road maintenance and neither will we in country Victoria. Spending money on country roads saves country lives.

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

Australia Day: Narre Warren South electorate

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — On Australia Day it was a pleasure to attend a citizenship ceremony in Cranbourne. To the many people and their families who attended it was truly a special day. Becoming an Australian citizen on Australia Day has extra significance; somehow the flags, the lamingtons and the happy smiles look so much more celebratory.

Congratulations to all those from so many lands who have decided to call Australia home. This is still the land of opportunity, and I can only hope — and give my support to achieve it when needed — that success, peace and happiness will be enjoyed. It is a great Australian tradition that each subsequent generation tries to do a little better for their children. It was my parents' and their forebears' belief, and it is mine, too. The new citizens of Narre Warren South also have that admirable aspiration.

The annual Casey Citizen of the Year award winners and the Australia Day study tour award recipients were announced at a special ceremony by the new mayor, Cr Geoff Ablett. I thank the award winners for all the extra work they do for and kindness they give to the local community. Their efforts are truly outstanding. It was a thoroughly deserving acknowledgement and a fine example for others to follow. Our new citizens could not have better role models.

Citizen of the Year was awarded to Roman Nowak, Young Citizen of the Year went to Danielle Di Carlo, Senior Citizen of the Year was Sue Hughes and Non-resident of the Year went to Gary Saunders. Congratulations to our wonderful citizens.

The Australia Day study tour award winners were Adam Boswell, Eumemmerring College; Stacey Colebrook, St Francis Xavier College; Ahmed Ibrahim, Eumemmerring College; Lauren Johnson, Berwick Secondary College; Kyesha Keleher, Hampton Park Secondary College; Eden Lovejoy, Hillcrest Christian College; James McAllister, Eumemmerring College; Kathryn Morison, St Francis Xavier College; April Watson, Cranbourne Secondary College; and Hafiza Zahidee, Lyndhurst Secondary College. All those

students are very impressive young people and our future community leaders. I look forward to introducing them to the wonderful world of parliamentary democracy, one of Australia's greatest assets, when they visit the grand Victorian Parliament as part of their prize. Advance Australia fair!

Electricity: supply

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — Last week Victoria sweltered through some of the hottest weather on record. It was not exactly a surprise; for years we have been warned that change was coming. The government has had more than enough time to be prepared. Nowhere is the lack of preparedness more apparent than in the increasing frequency of power failures in this state. The government has a responsibility to all Victorians to make sure that a reliable power supply is maintained. What have we heard this week? The government claims that improved communication is the answer so that people will know when their power is going to fail! That is exactly what I would expect from this government. It is trying to explain away the problem instead of fixing it.

This is not a trivial issue. Large areas of Mount Eliza were without power, without warning, for more than 14 hours. In Mount Martha a constituent with two elderly parents, both of whom require oxygen, was without power for over 2½ hours, which meant only one parent at a time could access oxygen and then only because of the emergency arrangements they had made. This was despite the parents being registered with United Energy as having critical needs. Being a good citizen, my constituent did not wish to make any unnecessary demands on the already overstretched public health system. Thankfully on this occasion tragedy was averted — with no thanks to the government. When my office contacted United Energy on her behalf, we were advised that 8500 people had their power off because too much power was being used. We were also told in no uncertain terms that the Minister for Energy and Resources was to blame for the problems with the system. They got that right.

I call on the Premier and his minister to explain to the people of Victoria why they have failed them so spectacularly.

St Albans Connect project

Ms KAIROUZ (Kororoit) — On 23 January I had the pleasure of attending at an announcement by the Minister for Community Development of \$600 000 of state government funding to go towards the St Albans Connect project. The \$1.2 million St Albans Connect

project is a partnership between the Brumby government and the City of Brimbank council to promote and support community development in plans to further improve St Albans. This is a Victorian first project aimed at boosting economic and social activity in St Albans. As the local member I was very proud to be part of the announcement and I congratulate the Brumby government for taking action to make St Albans a better place to live, work and raise a family.

Monsignor Joseph Takchi

Ms KAIROUZ — On another matter, I rise as a member of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria to congratulate Monsignor Joseph Karim Takchi. On 26 January 2009, Monsignor Joseph Takchi was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in recognition of his service to the Maronite and Lebanese community as a parish priest.

Monsignor Takchi is a loved and respected mentor, friend and spiritual leader to many in the Lebanese and Maronite community, and has been instrumental in building and delivering St Paul's Hostel, Our Lady of Lebanon Church and a Maronite school. I also wish to extend my personal thanks for the support he has given me over many years.

Water: irrigators

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — The drought and commodity prices have exhausted some growers in my Mildura electorate. The Prime Minister announced a small block irrigators exit grant package some months ago and sorted out the details with South Australia in November to allow South Australian small irrigators to access the Murray-Darling Basin small block irrigators exit grant package. Unfortunately cooperative federalism has not worked for Victoria in this matter, with Victorian irrigators waiting until last Tuesday to be able to access the package.

Victorian irrigators now have only a short period during which they can access the package. They must apply for a pre-assessment through Centrelink, consider the implications and conditions, and submit their water via a tender process by 30 April. Most of those who are interested in the exit package are currently involved in the harvest. It is the busiest time of the year and for the next four to six weeks they will not have time to submit, consider and reflect on a pre-assessment by 30 April. I call upon the Brumby government to insist the federal government grant Victorian applicants an extension to apply for the exit grant.

Electricity: supply

Mr CRISP — On another matter, I would like to pay tribute to the community of Red Cliffs. After a damaging power surge on 23 January, most of Red Cliffs suffered damage, mostly to air conditioners. Members of the community have pulled together and have been caring and compassionate to their neighbours during this crisis. I pay tribute to those people and to the tradesmen who tackled this emergency.

Greensborough: swimming pool

Mr BROOKS (Bundoora) — I wish to commend the Banyule City Council for deciding on Monday night to reopen the Greensborough swimming pool. The Greensborough swimming pool was opened in 1964 following a community fundraising effort to establish a pool for local families to enjoy. However, last year, in anticipation of the proposed redevelopment of the eastern part of the Greensborough activity centre, the council closed the pool despite warnings that that closure was premature. With the redevelopment delayed last year until the middle of 2009, the council did not act to get the pool reopened. Following a campaign by locals, the council has now decided to reopen the pool this summer. This decision will help to strengthen community support for the Greensborough redevelopment, which will see Banyule and its Lend Lease partner renew the east side of the centre with a retail, civic and aquatic development.

Planning: Greensborough development

Mr BROOKS — I have also noticed recently that Mr Guy, a member for Northern Metropolitan Region in the other place, has made a couple of inaccurate comments regarding my support for this project. I understand the importance of this upgrade to the north-eastern suburbs, having been one of the councillors at Banyule who initiated the early stages of this redevelopment. For this reason I have worked to secure funding from the Brumby government for this project.

While Mr Guy and the Liberals have delivered nothing to this project, the Brumby government with the support of local members has allocated a massive \$7 million and has acted swiftly on planning scheme approvals. The people of Greensborough, however, will remember that it was the Liberal mayor, Wayne Phillips, and a Liberal ward councillor, who incidentally works for Mr Guy, who closed their pool for the first time in 44 years.

Rail: Stony Point line

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) — I have been approached by numerous constituents experiencing frequent and lengthy delays as a result of cancelled services on the Stony Point line. The 5.37 a.m. and 6.18 a.m. services on the line are replaced every weekday with buses because of concerns about lighting at the Frankston rail yard fuelling point. My constituents have expressed anguish that this situation makes it impossible for them to meet their connecting trains at Frankston station.

Passengers who would normally catch the 5.37 a.m. service cannot meet the connecting 6.18 a.m. service, and those who would catch the 6.18 a.m. miss the 7.01 a.m. service which runs express from Cheltenham to Caulfield and Caulfield to South Yarra. Missing connecting services has resulted in my constituents experiencing substantial delays in reaching the city. In these times of economic uncertainty and burgeoning job losses, the last thing many can afford to do is be late for work.

Unavoidable delays on a public transport system are bad enough, and we all know that the Minister for Public Transport and the Premier have made blaming everyone and anyone else for mistakes into an art form. However, it is unforgivable that the Brumby government has known about the situation for months and that there is a straightforward fix but has failed to act. Temporary lighting is available. It would fix the problem and would have the trains back on the tracks immediately. However, the minister has mumbled, bumbled, stumbled and failed to act. Passengers have been told that permanent lighting may not be installed until May. It is unacceptable for the government to treat these Victorians so poorly. Unfortunately this whole situation is reflective of the Brumby government's inability to deliver basic services to Victorians and its response to the problem is indicative of a tired and arrogant government that simply does not care. The rate of cancellations across the board on the Stony Point line has reached ridiculous proportions and is now 13.8 per cent.

Harold Johnston and Hal Hobbs

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I wish to congratulate two recipients of the citizen of the year awards in the City of Boroondara. Firstly, I congratulate Harold Johnston, who received a special commendation. Harold was chief executive officer of a dairy company for some 25 years and subsequently set up a foundation which has supported many organisations. Since his retirement some 20 years ago

he has been a volunteer for Meals on Wheels and has been involved in community committees. Harold convened the initial meeting to set up a new aged-care home in Ashburton and successfully led the fundraising and building drive. He continues with his strong community involvement, supporting Samarinda Aged Care Services and the establishment of an Ashburton community bank.

I also commend citizen of the year Hal Hobbs, who used to work for a former Minister of Education, the late Lindsay Thompson. Since his retirement Hal has been a tireless worker for the community, including the Camberwell Central Bowls Club and Meals on Wheels, where he has been a driver but also a mentor of new people. He chairs the Ashburton Support Services and has a passion for a new respite home in the local area for which he is seeking support. He has also been a member of the Ashburton Community Bank Steering Committee. Last year he and I and many other locals spent countless hours — rain, hail or shine — at local street stalls in Ashburton seeking support for a new Ashburton community bank, which was successfully opened in October last year.

Well done, Hal and Harold. Your community congratulates you.

Victoria University: campus closures

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — I call on chancellor Frank Vincent and vice-chancellor Professor Liz Harman to withdraw the court action against Jamie Doughney, who rightly analysed and commented on the Victoria University plans and decisions that were being taken late last year. I still call on VU to reconsider the closure of both the Melton and Sunbury campuses and to work with the community and local MPs to reinvigorate these important community assets.

I do, though, want to thank Professor Harman and Chancellor Vincent for reversing their decision to have 270 compulsory redundancies and converting them to voluntary redundancies. The matter was raised by me in the Parliament last year, and the community and staff have been campaigning strongly around this matter, and I thank them for this humane change.

Bruce Marshall and Daniel Webb

Mr NARDELLA — I congratulate Bruce Marshall on receiving his Australia Day award, which is well deserved. He worked with me and the community on the Melton super-clinic and on the rebuilding of the Bacchus Marsh hospital accident and emergency centre. I also wholeheartedly congratulate Daniel Webb

on receiving the Melton Young Person of the Year award. He deserves his award.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — The member for Bayswater has 34 seconds.

Bayswater cricket and football clubs: water tank

Mrs VICTORIA (Bayswater) — I congratulate the management of Siemens, the executive of the Committee for Bayswater and members of the Knox City Council, who have worked collaboratively on the innovative water transfer and storage tank for the Bayswater cricket and football clubs. Many hours have been put into this project, and it has become a reality. Thanks also to Knox council for having the foresight to give us permission to go ahead with this fantastic project.

ANNUAL STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS

Debate resumed from 3 February.

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — When on Tuesday the second annual statement of government intentions was introduced, the Speaker boldly called for the doors to be opened so that members from the other place could be admitted to the chamber. The doors were swept open with a flourish, the house stilled, and with all the expectation of a great act of pomp and circumstance, all eyes turned to the doorway to watch the parade, and we waited and waited, and we watched and waited. Acting Speaker, as you also painfully know, no-one came through the doors. How symbolic that moment was!

The government's first statement of intentions last year was billed as a major reform. MPs were summoned from both houses to witness the landmark event, and came they all obediently did, cramming into the chamber, jockeying for a seat close to Prince John. But as it turned out, the statement then was a complete and utter fizzer. It was widely seen for what it was — a limp exercise in self-promotion by the Premier, and by the end of the year it had proved to be a complete and utter flop. But more of that later.

This statement is more of the same. We have heard it all before. After nearly 10 years and more than \$250 billion we have yet another statement from the Premier full of the same old platitudes and empty promises.

As we observed last year, the Premier's rhetoric has waned over the years. The declared aspirations he used to utter in his budget speeches have dissipated. I will not go through them all again, but this is a Premier who knows the government has blown the good times. In the absence of anything else the Premier now wants to — and I quote — 'transform Victoria'. There is an admission of guilt if ever there was one. He has been running the show for nearly 10 years but now it has to be transformed. It is not hard to conclude what the problem is. He has turned back to the weary proclamation about Victoria being the best place to live, work and raise a family — but, as my colleagues have observed many times, under this government it is the best place to raise taxes.

Reflecting on the Premier's priorities, you can see that not much has changed. We have heard again this week in the Parliament that education is the no. 1 priority, despite the fact that Victoria spends less per head on education than any other state. Then we heard in the house that the no. 1 priority was jobs, jobs, jobs. This is despite the fact there has been no manufacturing strategy in the state for years. We heard in the statement that the focus this year would be on four priorities: jobs, families, communities, and climate change and water. But looking back at last year's statement, they were the priorities declared in last year's statement too. Who really knows what this government's priorities are?

What we know is that this government has failed comprehensively to deliver across the board, but most importantly it has failed to deliver basic services to Victorian families and businesses. Let us just look at some of those basic services Victorians received in the last few weeks. In regard to transport, over 1000 trains were cancelled last week; hundreds were cancelled the week before. Late, overcrowded and unreliable trains have become the norm. It is a basic service on which people rely. This is not a new problem. We have been raising it for years. It featured in this debate last year. What did commuters get last week in response? They got a bottle of water and an icy pole! They got endless excuses.

We have never seen anything like that list of excuses. Let us just have a look at a few. We have been keeping a list of excuses offered by the minister, the Premier and the Acting Premier for this debacle. Our list currently stands at over 40, but let me remind members of the house of just a few. Of course the previous government was blamed. Connex has been blamed. The union has been blamed. The culture of Victorians has been blamed. The failure of points has been blamed. Air conditioners have been blamed. Sick passengers, mirrors, buckling tracks, population growth and the

strategic closure of lines have been blamed — and don't the people who have had their lines closed love that! A shortage of drivers, the heat and even the opposition have been blamed. Ungrateful commuters have been blamed by the Deputy Premier. Sun glare has been blamed. The one that I love most of all is the claim that it was no-one's fault. Never once — not one single time — has the government said, 'We got it wrong'. It has been warned for years, but it has done nothing. In January the Deputy Premier, who was the Acting Premier at the time, said that the minister was doing a fantastic job. This is nothing less than the normalisation of incompetence.

Regarding power supplies, for the fifth summer in a row Victorians have suffered destructive blackouts. Last week was perhaps the most devastating. Up to 1 million were blacked out in random rolling outages; it is estimated that \$100 million is down the drain in lost wages, lost stock, lost sales, massive inconvenience and chaos in the city. The Premier's response was to tell Victorians to do what? Stay home! After nearly 10 years and \$250 billion he said, 'Stay home'. In this house the Premier gave an explanation reminiscent of the famous quote of Tony Sheehan, a former Labor Treasurer, who notoriously said in the dark days of the Cain and Kirner administrations, 'We do not have a financial problem in this state. We just do not have enough revenue'.

Our Premier told the house that when it comes to power we have more supply than demand, it is just that the supply failed — more excuses. This government had been warned. After previous blackouts, inquiry after inquiry made a series of recommendations, all of which have been ignored. The Essential Services Commission warned about the impact of hot weather; it was ignored. Basic services that are relied on by families and businesses are taken for granted by this Premier. Once more incompetence is the norm.

The failure to plan for basic water supplies in this state is now legendary. Country Victorians are forced to wear harsh restrictions, and have done so for years, while Melburnians are treated differently. The latest public relations stunt is the Target 155 campaign, with of course lots of advertising. An unenforceable limit of 155 litres per person per day has proved to be unsuccessful, perhaps because the government continues to allow extraordinary exemptions such as the one given to the Victoria Racing Club. The Labor government withdrew funding that would have allowed the VRC to use recycled water and then granted the club an exemption, and it wonders why members of the public are fed up. The government is normalising incompetence and a lack of basic services.

In the last week we have again seen shocking incidents of violent crime in the city and elsewhere. The toll has been long and in many cases tragic. We have been highlighting it for years, but only in recent months has the Premier acknowledged the problem. What has been the response? Shift police from one area to another. This is not a problem that is confined to the city or the central business district. What is needed is more police and more police on the street. The government has fumbled around with ill-thought-through stunts, such as the 2.00 a.m. lockout which collapsed. It is simple — we need more police and more police on the street.

On education, this week we saw the Auditor-General release his report on the government's literacy and numeracy programs. It was damning. Over \$1 billion has been spent in six years and there is nothing to show for it. The Auditor-General slammed the outcomes. This educational equivalent of myki has gobbled up taxpayers money and produced nothing. What was the Premier's response to the house? Ignore the Auditor-General; he got it wrong. Pretend the report never existed. The minister's response was, 'We are looking to do better in the future'.

The doozy excuse of all time, the finest piece of buck-passing from this government, came when the minister said yesterday that it is a global trend. We should relax, illiteracy is a global trend, and we are up there with the best. Find the lowest common denominator and aim for it, that is this government's approach. Find the lowest common denominator and make them a minister! This is the normalisation of failure. This is the most basic of education services in the government's self-declared no. 1 priority, and the Auditor-General gave it a fail.

What an irony that the Premier has declared this year to be the year of action and delivery. The self-proclaimed action man — or as one wag described him recently, SPAM — will solve the problems he helped to create. Where has he been? He promises action and delivery. Where has he been for 10 years? What were all those other years? The year of gloating? The year of stealing water from the country? The year of sitting on his proverbial? The year of breaking promises? The year of blaming others? The years of making it up as they went along? The years of myki? The year of the EastLink backflip? And the year of the endless government advertising? Finally, we have the year of action and delivery. That is what the Premier wants Victorians to believe, but who is he kidding?

Suddenly the Premier says he has plans. Apparently the old ones did not work, if he ever had them. It took more

than nine years, but in December the Premier cobbled together a transport plan and then an industry strategy.

Mr Nardella interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! The member for Melton will be quiet.

Mr BAILLIEU — The transport plan was wheeled out in December — as late as possible to minimise scrutiny.

Mr Stensholt interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! That goes for the member for Burwood, too.

Mr BAILLIEU — It is more a case of transport trickery. It is not clear whether it is \$38 billion or \$39 billion, but who in the government cares these days? What is a billion dollars here or a billion dollars there? The plan consists of billions of dollars of previously announced but still undelivered projects, projects that this government had previously specifically rejected, projects that will not be built for decades — the never-never list — and no funding. The government is unable to say when any of these new projects will start, how long they will take, how much they will cost or where the money will come from. There it is in this statement, tucked away in the back of the document, and I quote:

The ... transport plan ... includes \$25 billion of state funding over the next 12 years ...

It is guesswork and trickery. The con is on. It took the government nearly 10 years to deliver the document and it now wants Victorians to believe that it can deliver the projects. More effort was made in rolling out the advertising campaign that followed the release of the plan.

The industry plan was meant to be the manufacturing strategy. It took two years to put together. It was cobbled together, riddled with mistakes, bundled together with some of the — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! The Premier was heard in relative silence on Tuesday, and I ask everyone here to hear the Leader of the Opposition in a little silence.

Mr BAILLIEU — This plan was cobbled together. It is riddled with mistakes. The government has bundled together some old documents and included some vague commitments to manufacturing, but it has

focused on three plans. The first was a services plan. What was the services plan? It was a plan to have two new plans — a plan for education and one for finance. The second was a manufacturing plan. It included \$120 million, but \$50 million was in a transition fund to in effect see industry out of manufacturing. It reduced minimum local content from 55 per cent on train contracts. The current contract has a 55 per cent minimum and 80 per cent for maintenance, but this is now down to 40 per cent. The third angle was a red tape plan for a 15 per cent reduction in red tape in three years and 25 per cent in five years. This is exactly the same plan as was announced in 2006. In 2008 the bipartisan Public Accounts and Estimates Committee concluded that that is was unable to quantify the benefits.

This is not a game for Victorian families and businesses. There is little interest in empty promises; Victorians have heard it all before. These are difficult times and many Victorians are struggling with daily challenges and basic requirements, but this government has been making life even more difficult for many Victorians. The last several weeks have provided them with a clear reminder of Labor's legacy. It is now clear that Victorians find themselves running short of water, running short of power, running short of trains, running short of police, running short of hospital beds and running short of basic services. At the same time they face running short of jobs and running short of money.

There are consequences for these failures of government. Victorians cannot get home to their families on time. They cannot get to work on time. Our roads are more congested than ever. There is a shortage of water and energy. Violent crime has reached record levels, and the health system is in crisis. A collapse in our basic services does not just happen overnight, because we have had a few hot days or because we have a few extra people in Victoria, or for any of the dozens of excuses the Premier constantly dreams up. It happens because of long-term neglect, massive waste and incompetence.

Unemployment is rising and many businesses are struggling, but huge tax windfalls have seen this government's budget double from \$18 billion to \$37 billion-plus. That is double the budget for the Premier, John Brumby, but we have worse services than ever for Victorian families and businesses. Why after years of record revenue do Victorians have to put up with some shameful shortfalls? Where has all the money gone? So much taxpayers money has been wasted on TV advertising, self-promotion, media and public relations advisers, travel, swank offices and billion-dollar white elephant projects like the myki

ticketing fiasco. Now there is not enough money for basic services because a fortune has been spent to prop up Labor instead of developing and investing in our state.

It is the same pattern with Victoria's economy. A decade of neglect by the Brumby government has seen its share of national goods exports slump from 20 per cent when it came to office to only 10 per cent today. Our share of manufacturing investments has slumped from 37 per cent to 20 per cent, and infrastructure investment has gone from 17 per cent in 1999 to 11 per cent today. This reflects a decade of neglect of Victoria that now leaves our state vulnerable and exposed to world economic downturns and rising unemployment. The Premier's preoccupation with clever public relations has seen this government lose sight of the basics. Governments that cannot deliver even basic services rely on excuses, endless self-promotion and promises into the future.

These are the fundamental obligations of any state government: the provision of basic services on which all Victorians rely. Victorians look to their government to fix the fundamentals first. It is not what they have been getting. There are no excuses for not delivering basic services. If this government cannot manage the basic services, how will it ever manage the challenges? There are major challenges: the drought, the prospect of additional costs associated with the introduction of the emission trading scheme, and the financial crisis.

Country Victorians have felt it perhaps more than anybody. Years of successive droughts, particularly north of the Divide in Shepparton, Mooroopna and Kyabram and through to Swan Hill and other regional cities have affected grape growers and stone fruit growers and there has been a growing disconnection between country and metropolitan communities. It is not that Melburnians do not care, but they do not know; they do not hear the stories and the government is not highlighting them. Country communities are being left to fend for themselves. A lack of water certainty, rising costs for farm inputs — fuel, fertiliser, labour, compliance — falling commodity prices and rising personal debts are real personal consequences for country Victorians. The drought has had a shocking social impact on communities and families. What is the government's response? This is the only government in Australia that is spending money to take water out of the Murray-Darling Basin. It is a crisis that the government seeks to sweep under the carpet.

The emission trading scheme and its consequences are still delayed. There is no indication of its impact — no indication of its cost to industry or to families. The

government has been slow to move on the financial crisis. Between 18 months and two years ago we raised issues regarding subprime investment. This government sought to ignore it. It has made a series of — let us say — curious investments through the Victorian Funds Management Corporation. It still will not explain its investments in the so-called Queensland death fund. There has been a total lack of transparency. The Premier still will not provide forward estimates on revised budget figures, he will not rule out new taxes, and he will not rule out increasing taxes. Throughout all this the government has continued to ignore basic services.

As you might expect, at the end of last year we made an assessment of that year's statement of government intentions. The findings said much about this government. In short, the analysis showed that the Premier had failed to deliver more than one-third of the legislative changes he promised at the start of the year. In that first statement the Premier promised 64 bills, but at least 22 of them never appeared, 3 were incomplete and 12 are still in progress. If the government cannot deliver on its own legislative agenda then it is no wonder that it cannot deliver basic services. Rightly or wrongly, promised bills that never made it to the house included bills regarding transport, road safety, water, metropolitan retail water reform, drug and alcohol treatment, climate change, Victoria Police, and university reform — and of course there were many others.

Needless to say the government did its own review of last year's statement, and it has manipulated that. It was another wonderful exercise in unaccountable spin, focusing instead on a fictional percentage of priorities identified. Even in that exercise the Premier has sought to fudge, to mislead and to con. This year the Premier promises 30 new bills, and makes yet another promise to reduce red tape, just like the previous promises that are still without results. Once again there is no mention of the Water Amendment (Critical Infrastructure Projects) Bill which has now languished on the notice paper for more than two years. It was so critical that in December 2006 the house was recalled just before Christmas to deal with it. Is it the case that there is no critical water infrastructure, or is it the case that the legislation was unnecessary and just another public relations stunt in the first place? Either way it is an embarrassment.

As I mentioned, last year we welcomed some of the promised debate and legislation. It is my view that last year the Parliament handled a number of contentious pieces of social legislation with considerable dignity. Both sides of the house extended personal and

conscience votes to members, and they were a tribute to all involved. Equally, there are initiatives flagged in this statement that we are keen to debate. We will be looking with interest at moves to address issues involving excessive drinking and violence, the cancer action plan, mental health services, post-secondary standards and the education of international students. Like the Premier I have met with a number of groups around these issues including the very focused and inspiring young men and women who, in the name of James Macready-Bryan, a tragic victim of random street violence, started the Step Back Think initiative. I trust their message — one for young people by young people — is not undermined by the application, no matter how well intended, of the processes of government.

We will assess keenly the government's proposed respect campaign. Mutual respect is a fundamental attribute of a decent society, but it is a quality that cannot be simply demanded or legislated. It is earned and demonstrated by example, not by fiat or advertising.

There are many omissions from the Premier's statement of government intentions. Almost everything we highlighted last year has again been ignored. Let me mention just a few. I have already mentioned the support for drought-stricken communities in rural and regional Victoria. In health, the Box Hill Hospital gets a mention; there is no funding for it but the hospital gets a mention. But where is the mention of the Bendigo Hospital? What do the people of Bendigo make of the fact that it did not get a mention? Dental care, ambulance paramedics and the shortage of medical professionals are not mentioned and neither is education or language training.

Last year the opposition raised the issue of literacy and numeracy, and it has now been highlighted by the Auditor-General, but it does not get a mention. Also last year we highlighted transport — the ticketing fiasco, overcrowding and cancellations — but again they are not a focus of this government. The freight and logistics strategy has been cobbled together, and there is no meaningful strategy whatsoever in the transport plan.

On tax and the economy and the land tax burden, small businesses are facing increasing land tax this month and next month when they get their assessments based on December 2007 valuations. They are likely to have increases at the very time that their revenues are falling. There is no mention of increasing problem gambling or the impact of the subprime collapse which the Premier sought to ignore, and of course, still no mention of an independent broadbased anticorruption commission.

Last year in the equivalent response to this I noted also what we thought should be in the statement. I do not intend to repeat that prescription this year, but each and every item to which I referred last year is as relevant today as it was then. Each would truly contribute to putting Victoria back on top of the table and make it a state of excellence and first choice with basic services to the fore, from addressing language skills through to a genuine freight and logistics strategy.

Among the promises made last year the Premier invited Victorians to join the increased consultation opportunities that the government was offering. He committed to providing a website as an opportunity for Victorians to have input. Its address was www.yoursay.vic.gov.au. It was a brand-spanking-new website to engage Victorians. It has gone; it did not last the year. If you google the site now, the page simply states, 'This website is not available'. There is no link, no redirection and no apology — it has just gone. This statement suggests that any feedback should be directed to www.premier.vic.gov.au. There you have it. As the member for Warrandyte observed, 'Last year it was your say; this year it is the Premier's say'. Surely it was not removed because of a lack of interest. There are many things this government could be doing immediately to assist in the area of basic services. In the area of water, the government should be moving to slash — —

Mr Nardella — What's your policy on water?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — If the member for Melton would listen, he might find out. I ask for a bit of quiet.

Mr BAILLIEU — The government could be moving immediately to slash the price of recycled water. With power supplies it could be moving immediately to embrace a demand-supply response program that has been offered by the industry and ignored. It could be providing generation capacity for government building displacement. It could be providing additional drivers for our transport system. It could be ordering new trains. It could be replacing air conditioners on trains. In policing it could be shifting police from the desk to the beat. It could be providing programs to address issues raised by the Auditor-General on country roads, stormwater and water pipes. Honourable members saw it all last week when that water pipe exploded in Northcote. Basic services and basic infrastructure have not been maintained. When it comes to the economy, this government could be putting an end to the endless, painful, self-promoting advertisements that it continues to use.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! Especially the Deputy Premier.

Mr BAILLIEU — There is one, very telling omission in this statement — an omission that sums up this government and this Premier. In last year's statement of government intentions the new Premier declared front and centre his intention to 'strengthen the trust the community places in the government'. It was right there in the second paragraph of the Premier's message. But it is now gone. There is no update on this goal, no reconciliation, no accounting. Trust has simply disappeared. That intention has vanished; the word does not appear once in this year's statement. In fact, except for a reference or two to some veritable institutions, since making that declaration the Premier has never mentioned the word once in this house. It is as if the Premier knows, because there has been no action and there has been no delivery on basic services. The community knows it, the Premier knows it, and frankly no-one believes this government any more. There simply is no trust, and this statement does nothing to re-establish it. Victorians want services not ads. No wonder on Tuesday that no-one came rushing through that door!

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — Here was a chance for the Leader of the Opposition to come in here and actually give us some policy, but tragically he is like wet gunpowder — he just does not go off. So 10 out of 10 for lack of policy in the areas of water, energy, transport, environment, education, health, justice, housing, planning, rural and regional development. Ten key areas with no policy. What a shame!

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! We will just have some order if we could. A little bit of banter in between is fine, but this constant yelling is not on.

Mr HULLS — That was one of the most pitiful efforts I have ever seen in this place. One can only conclude that that was actually written by the member for Polwarth.

The statement of government intentions is an iconic Labor initiative. Building on the success of the first annual statement, it simply outlines how the government's priorities will be put into action in 2009. By doing this, by inviting Victorians to voice their opinions about it, and then by refining major proposals to reflect those opinions — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! The member for Warrandyte!

Mr HULLS — As you know, Acting Speaker, we are making the parliamentary process more transparent. It is not brain surgery, yet there are some who struggle to grasp what it is all about! Let me help them. Let me make it as clear as I possibly can. What you do is you tell people what you plan to do. That is the first thing you do. You tell the Parliament, tell the community, tell the media, tell the opposition and tell the minor parties. You tell them what legislation you will introduce, what policies you will implement, what future you will continue to build. You tell people how you will focus on jobs — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! I ask all members just to behave in a reasonable manner. It is ridiculous the way that they are carrying on. Members should give the Deputy Premier a chance to say what he wants to say. As I said before, a little bit of banter is fine, but what is going on at the moment is not good enough. I ask members to behave like parliamentarians.

Mr HULLS — You tell people you will focus on jobs, families, communities and the environment. Explain to the community how you have prioritised issues in the context of the financial challenges that are facing the world. You should be open about your determination to ensure prosperity, to create new jobs, to deliver health, education and a fair social infrastructure for families of every description, to strengthen those factors that make our communities such vibrant and rewarding places to live, and of course to secure a sustainable future and healthy planet for our kids.

You tell them how you will help deliver major infrastructure projects and speed up development approvals, to help implement the Victorian transport plan. You tell them how you will create four new red gum national parks, how you will slash red tape and help accommodate a projected population of 5 million by 2030.

This is the sort of transparency that is consistent with Labor's record. After all, it was Labor that enshrined the independence of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Auditor-General. It was Labor that opened up freedom of information laws and Labor that made the Legislative Council more representative. It was Labor that re-established the Victorian Law Reform Commission and strengthened the equal opportunity

commission. However, I imagine that this accountability and emphasis on open democracy is not quite as titillating as the cloak-and-dagger stuff to which some are so partial.

Telling the community what you think would be total anathema to those who yearn misty eyed for the slash-and-burn days of the previous conservative government when services were cut on so many fronts that Victorians did not know where to look. That is what we have just witnessed in the response from the Leader of the Opposition — absolutely no vision, absolutely no policies and absolutely no ideas.

The statement of government intentions stands as a polar opposite to the view that it is better to keep the community in the dark. Sadly there are some who have not bothered to post any new ideas on their website since 2006, yet behind closed doors actually boast claim to government. Sadly there are some who do nothing but talk Victoria down as they emerge from the Portsea surf just long enough to shake a tousled head and label this great state 'Third World'. After all, it is easier to gloat quietly about difficulty than to produce any positive ideas. It is easier to harbour hopes for disaster than to collaborate with government in such a challenging global environment.

Thankfully there are some on the other side of politics, such as the current Lord Mayor of Melbourne, who are prepared to put aside the politics and work with the government on key issues. He has a plan and he is prepared to share that with the people. The fact that he has a plan is not lost on those on the other side who have despairingly sat there watching the performance of the current Leader of the Opposition. His lack of conviction and direction is causing people to start beating the drum, and that beat is to bring back Robert Doyle.

The fact is that this is a great statement of government intentions. My focus is on the justice and racing portfolios, where some exciting legislative and policy reforms are afoot. Under the banner of the justice statement mark 2, our map for the future and the next stage of what has already been a quiet revolution in the law will focus on reducing the cost of justice and creating a unified and engaged court system. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) is the future. People want their disputes resolved more quickly and more easily, and ADR is the future. We will focus on ADR, including judge-led mediation.

As we all know, the Criminal Procedure Bill is the most substantial overhaul of criminal procedure in this state's history. We will also embark upon significant plans to

promote indigenous-led economic development. We will implement reforms to laws and services for victims of family violence and sexual assault and continue increasing community safety by strengthening laws relating to serious sex offenders and confiscation of assets from crime. We will improve protections from stalking, create new offences to target identity crime and continue to help offenders break the cycle of crime.

In relation to racing, the plan for the racing portfolio laid out in the statement of government intentions is yet another example of the government's wholesome support for the industry. Since coming to office we have provided funding totalling \$44.1 million through the Racing Industry Development Fund and the Living Country Racing program. There is an additional \$45 million as part of \$86 million of funding through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. We will also implement the Gordon Lewis reforms in relation to integrity for the industry.

These are economic stimulus packages that will provide jobs in rural Victoria which come on top of the \$42 billion package that is being discussed in Canberra right now as we speak by the Premier and premiers from around the country. It is incumbent upon all those opposite during their contributions to this very important debate to declare their support or otherwise for this very important \$42 billion package. The Premier is meeting right now with the Prime Minister in Canberra, and it is my responsibility to inform him whether he has bipartisan support in this state for the \$42 billion package. Failure by those opposite to declare a position in relation to this package will be interpreted as standing shoulder to shoulder with Malcolm Turnbull and turning their faces from Victorians in need. The fact is that the Leader of the Opposition in this place obviously stands shoulder to shoulder with Malcolm Turnbull and wants to kick Victorians in the guts by not supporting this very important \$42 billion package.

It is interesting to note that everyone on the other side is silent on this issue because they now have the opportunity to stand up against Malcolm Turnbull and for Victorians. They have a chance to get on the blower to Malcolm and say, 'Malcolm, you have done the wrong thing by Victorians; backflip and support the package'. Now is their chance. They should get up and support Kevin Rudd and his package.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — Hans Christian Andersen would have loved the Premier's speech the other day. There was the emperor parading before the adoring throng. The only problem in Victoria is that no-one on his side of politics has the guts to tell

him he has no clothes on. Therein lies the essential problem that Victoria faces. The Premier's own message, as it is set out in that document, is the usual grab bag of tiresome rhetoric. We have seen and heard it all before, the trail of the so-called action man. He has no clothes on. That is his problem.

One-third of what the Premier said last year has not been delivered and does not look like being delivered. In addition, for country Victorians this statement is an absolute shocker. It is unbelievable, but nevertheless a statement of fact, that in the whole 10 pages read out to this Parliament by the emperor — the man with no clothes — the expression 'country Victoria' does not appear. He does not even mention country Victoria. There are all sorts of buzzwords — 'regional', 'provincial' and all the contemporary stuff the Labor Party goes on with — but 'country Victoria' is not part of the Labor Party lexicon now. In all 10 pages of the statement 'country Victoria' does not appear. I believe that is a reflection of what this government believes about country Victorians.

I can tell the Premier that it is certainly a reflection of country Victorians and what they believe about him. These people believe rightly that they are being ignored and disenfranchised. That is reflected in the contemporary electoral map of Victoria. Labor has gone from within a 150-kilometre radius of Melbourne. It is out and finished. Labor members have been cleaned out of Gippsland entirely, with the rest yet to come. That is entirely reflective of what country Victorians and those in the regions believe about this government.

The last time this was put to the test was in the Gippsland by-election last year, only nine months ago. Under the 'capable' hands of the state secretary of the Labor Party, Mr Newnham, Labor conducted a campaign running out the same old tiresome rubbish and idiotic statements. Labor members ran a campaign even to the point where they had statements on big banners on all the booths. There were all the usual comments — and what happened? They copped an absolutely unmitigated flogging. People lined up with baseball bats and whacked them. I will tell you what, Acting Speaker: it is coming again, because country Victorians are sick to death of this emperor with no clothes and the throng that he purportedly leads.

The simple fact is that country Victorians have every right to be proud of what they do and what they contribute to this great state. These are people comprising communities built around families and small-to-medium enterprises — the small business sector on farm and off farm and all the elements

associated with it. There is agribusiness in all its forms, so it is not about only what these people grow and produce, it is about what they then move into the big regional centres and the things they manufacture. They compete in global markets with no protections. They are not like those mad people in Europe who even now are wanting to put up subsidies. We have heard worrisome commentary from the new president of the United States about what he might do by way of protectionism. Our people in country Victoria are out there competing in these markets proudly. They are masters of the use of technology and innovation and I, for one, who live among them am very proud of them, as we on this side of the house certainly are.

But that is not the case with the government, not with this Labor Party. What people in country Victoria want, quite properly, is to be treated with the respect and support they deserve. This statement shows that Labor has lost its way. There are no plans, and it has no more excuses. It has had 10 years and \$250 billion to get it right, and sadly it has got it wrong. Certainly it has got it wrong on behalf of country Victorians, and most assuredly also on behalf of Victorians at large. I have just described the effect that is likely to have electorally, but it applies in respect of various other elements as well.

Let us take the issue of water and refer to the commentary by the Attorney-General. I heard him say that the intent of this statement is to give the government the opportunity to tell Victorians what it is going to do. In 2006 it told country Victorians it would never pipe water from northern Victoria to Melbourne, and it lied. It absolutely lied. When the Attorney-General makes a statement like that in the face of what we now know to be the facts, how can he expect he and his government to be believed? Certainly he will not be believed by country Victorians.

The people of the north in particular are desperate for water. What the government does not understand — and I know this to be a fact — is that people up there now do not get their entitlements. If they have an entitlement to 1 megalitre of water, their actual allocation is roughly speaking about 40 per cent of that this year. How would it be in the streets of Prahran if people were getting billed for the total amount of water which is apparently to be allocated to them but were only getting 40 per cent of that allocation? We would have riots in the streets. But this government perpetuates the myth that it is doing work in relation to the food bowl modernisation scheme and that somehow or other people in the north of the state are going to have a situation which is better for them.

The government is taking water from people in an area which cannot supply its own needs at the moment — it is nowhere near it — and this is at the core of the opposition of those people to what the government is seeking to do. There are 14 000 Goulburn-Murray Water ratepayers up there and \$9 billion worth of production, most of it for export, and this government is going to kick a hole in it. It talks about jobs being created through its project, but what about the opportunity lost in the jobs that can be created by the expansion of those great industries? That is driving the concern of those people.

There is also the desalination plant fiasco. The Attorney-General talked about telling people what the government is going to do. Originally members of the government bagged the proposition of having a desalination plant. They said it was an expensive hoax, and yet now they are doing what they are doing. They told people they would consult. If you look at the way they have gone about it, you realise it is an utter disgrace.

I move on to the other issues touched upon in the government's statement. There is the issue of education. We are falling behind in country Victoria. School completion rates in country Victoria are nothing akin to what is happening in the metropolitan area. The situation is similar with the uptake of university places. Young country Victorians are not coming to university with anything like the regularity of their metropolitan colleagues, and the awful worry of it is that the gap is growing. They are taking up more apprenticeships but much of that is driven by a situation of need. Their families have to have income. The kids have got to go out and get an apprenticeship and get work because many of our communities are affected by the horror of the drought.

Only yesterday we read in the Auditor-General's report that the actual outcomes associated with expenditure by this government are falling well short of appropriate benchmarks. The government cannot even run the system properly. The same applies in country Victoria. A recent Productivity Commission report stated that the government underspends in Australian terms on education in Victoria — and bear in mind that this is the government's no 1 priority. I say this is all about the government having had 10 years — and there are no excuses.

The health system is in perpetual crisis right across the state, and no less so in country Victoria. I refer to the situation at Leongatha in my own electorate. When the minister paraded through South Gippsland just a week or two ago he went to the Leongatha hospital and had a

look at the place. The government is knee-deep in reports about the terrible state of the facilities and the infrastructure there. The department knows about it; it has been aware of it for years. It is absolutely beyond me how the magnificent staff in that place continue to provide the services they do. It is a great tribute to them. The government has to step up to the plate and fund this facility.

When members of the coalition parties were in Bendigo only last week they saw the uncertainty that reigns in that great city about what this government proposes to do with regard to a hospital there. What is the government doing? Why is it not involving people of that centre in what its future plans are? The government has been in power for 10 years and it has no excuses. In the area of policing, there are no troops out in the field. I go to police stations regularly, not only in my electorate but beyond, as I tour around Victoria. The first thing the police ask you once you get past 'G'day, how are you?' is, 'Where are the troops? We do not have the troops to get out there and do the job'. This is happening in Melbourne and it is happening in country Victoria. Ten years — no more excuses!

There is the infrastructure issue. We have had a report from the Productivity Commission recently saying that Victoria has fallen behind the rest of the nation in relation to its per capita expenditure on infrastructure. And what about the operation of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, about which I spoke yesterday? Let us have a quick look at it. A total of \$585 million has been allocated in a 10-year budget which is due to expire next year. The minister put papers before the house last year saying there was then about \$400 million of the fund 'committed'. The actual expenditure was \$272 million. The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is telling this minister, 'You are going to have to accelerate your programs'. Where is the evidence that that is happening? In this day and age why can the government not publish a rolling website informing the public of what the approved projects are and what amount of expenditure is actually occurring?

Then there is the Small Towns Development Fund, which is funded by the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, and again I have spoken about this at length recently. We have a situation where some \$30 million has been committed to the Small Towns Development Fund in two grants, one of \$25 million and then a further grant of \$5 million. In total, \$30 million has been granted to this fund since 2005–06, and what are the statistics on it now? We have had \$14.36 million committed, but the actual spend out of \$30 million is \$8.117 million. This

information is based on FOI inquiries. These are the government's own figures.

It is an absolute disgrace! Is it any wonder people are worried about the lack of infrastructure spending in country Victoria? We have had 10 years of this — no plans, no excuses.

Then there is the issue of drought. Anybody who wants to see it in all its pain should have a look at the front page of the *Weekly Times*, which contains a commentary on how tough it has become. The government had to be dragged to the table to discuss its package for drought assistance. Eventually it was produced. This insidious cancer of drought is a strain on our country communities, but their resilience is nothing less than amazing. If the government proclaims programs to help these people, it is obliged to deliver on them, particularly at these times.

I turn to the Small Town Development Fund. A total of \$10 million was allocated to this fund by the government for drought-related initiatives. That happened in 2006 and 2007 when \$5 million was allocated in each year. Of that money, as at November last year \$6.5 million of the \$10 million had been committed but only \$1.5 million from the total \$10 million for drought-related initiatives had been spent. In talking about \$10 million, it would not pay for the foyer of the new Melbourne Recital Centre opened by the Premier last week. I ask rhetorically: how can the government and the minister justify why only \$1.5 million has been spent from the \$10 million which has been set aside for drought relief in programs dedicated to the small towns of our great communities? It is utterly scandalous, and again, after 10 years, there are no more excuses.

On the issue of power, we saw the circus last week — and what an appalling state of affairs it was with the blackouts and power shedding. Over the last 10 years I have stood in this place many times and implored this government to get its act together and facilitate the development of additional productive capacity in our power grid, and to do it before we got caught. Time and again I have raised that in this place, and then we saw what we saw last week — absolute and utter disaster.

As it turns out, the emperor was wrong. On the Tuesday when he called together all the people responsible for emergency services delivery in this state, he was telling people he had been assured all was well in relation to the power industry. There he was on the TV screen saying, 'She'll be right, boys and girls; don't worry about it'. History now tells us what happened. What an unmitigated disaster.

People in metropolitan Melbourne were stuck in lifts for hours. What a horrific experience to be stuck in a lift. In country Victoria I have had a multitude of calls from people in dairies who were halfway through milking when the power went off — it was gone just like that. How can the state possibly operate in circumstances where the government of the day cannot, firstly, guarantee, as it said it would in 1999 in its pledges, that we would have a security of supply; and secondly, how can it possibly allow this to happen apparently at random?

How can the government conceivably allow the situation where those responsible for this, the National Electricity Market Managing Company included, can go about the process of deciding where it will cut the power, and then not tell the people who were going to be subject to those cuts? What is this bunch doing? As I understand it the government has to tick off on the organised arrangements for power shedding. How is it conceivable that it cannot have an arrangement in place to give proper warning to those people who are going to be caught by it? It is nothing less than disgraceful. Again I say, the government has had 10 years to do this; there are no more excuses.

On the subject of transport we saw that chaos reigned last week caused by maintenance issues. These are issues that have been in the making for the last 10 years. We could go further back. Over the last 27 years in Victoria we have had Labor governments for 20 years. Those Labor governments have failed miserably in relation to the all-important maintenance issues. Of course the heat was a contributing factor, we all acknowledge that, but it is nothing less than disgraceful for the government to allow the situation to be degraded to the point we saw last week. The government has had 10 years to fix it; there are no more excuses.

The simple fact is that across the country areas of Victoria people have had an absolute gutful of this government. When they look at this statement from the Premier they see that it is all the things not in it that are more important to them. They are sick of these self-congratulatory statements by a government which spends an utter poulitice of public money telling everyone what a great job it is doing. We had to put up with it again with the statement the Premier read out the other day, and people are absolutely sick of it.

On top of all that, we have had the unseemly, undignified business over summer of Mr Theophanous, a member for Northern Metropolitan region in the Council, and all the saga that surrounds him. Mr Thornley, who was a member for Southern

Metropolitan Region in the Council, was a bloke with the chance to go into the cabinet, and he turned his back on it. It was like when the doors were opened in the Assembly chamber the other day and the members from the other place did not front. The big moment came for Mr Thornley — and there was no appearance, Your Worship.

On top of that there were the so-called negotiations on the — what is it called? — stability package. Is it any wonder the government cannot run the state properly when its members spend their time fighting with each other like scalded cats, sharing the spoils, dividing up the electorates amongst their own and treating people in Victoria as they do? Is it any wonder that we then have the sorts of outcomes we saw last week?

There are no more excuses. In times to come other people are going to have to pick up the pieces. There are young students who come to visit this Parliament. Sometimes the students from grade 6 at the Poowong Primary School come to see this Parliament in action. It is wonderful to see them here, because they are the next generation. They are going to be amongst those who offer leadership for this great state. For us, it is our time, we are here, but for those young students in grade 6 at Poowong primary, their time will come soon enough. I am sure they look at the events of last week and wonder what in the name of creation went wrong. I hope Mr Brumby issues another statement that explains it all to them, because he should. The Premier owes an apology to the children of Poowong primary and all other schools across Victoria. He owes an apology to all the people of Victoria. He should accept the blame that is due to him, and he should apologise to Victorians. For 10 years the government has had the opportunity to make the plans and had \$250 billion at its disposal.

We now have the global financial crisis (GFC) upon us. The Premier is trying every other day to sheet home the problems we have on the GFC. The GFC without a doubt is a contributor, but the simple fact is this government has had a decade to make the appropriate plans to properly withstand this crisis, and it has failed, utterly and miserably.

This government should treat country Victorians with respect, get them back into the lexicon of government and at least be prepared to talk with them and stop destroying their history and culture. It started with the mountain cattlemen; it is now being carried on with the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council issues and the destruction of jobs that we are seeing across the country parts of the state. Melbourne is surely one of the great cities of the world. It can look after itself and

provide for itself. Country Victoria is one of the great engine rooms of this state, and if this government were doing its job, not only would country Victorians contribute more than they do now, but they would do it in their own right and on behalf of Victoria at large.

Mr LUPTON (Pahran) — One thing that the primary school students of this state would like to hear is a guarantee from the Liberal and National parties, both here in Victoria and also in Canberra, that they will support the economic stimulus package that is being put together today in Canberra by the Prime Minister with our Premier, John Brumby, and other premiers from around Australia. That stimulus package is one of the most important things that will guarantee the futures of our primary school students in this state and around the country, and it will secure the future of jobs and skills and all of the other things that we need to face up to during this significant world economic downturn.

The basis of the statement of government intentions this year is to outline to the Parliament and to the people of Victoria the way in which the government intends to proceed on the most important themes of jobs, families, communities and the environment. The second annual statement — that is the one we are debating this year — builds on the programs and performance outlined when the Premier delivered his statement of government intentions program last year. Prior to last year's statement there was no process for the government to outline its plans on any regular basis to the people of our state. All we had previously was the Governor's speech at the beginning of each four-year parliamentary term.

The statement of government intentions is designed to give the Parliament and the people of Victoria a greater understanding and involvement in the major initiatives that the government intends to pursue in the following 12 months. These documents do not simply stand alone; in the first instance they build on the preceding year's statement of government intentions — we have two so far. We also find that the statement builds on a range of other policy proposals, themes and statements that the government is pursuing. As I said earlier, the major themes are around jobs, families, communities and the environment.

Jobs are really a central and important issue at the moment. The world economic downturn is clearly placing pressure on employment. As a government, a Parliament and community, we need to come together to support the initiatives, the economic stimulus and the other changes in processes that will enable us to drive jobs growth so that we can secure every job we can in

Victoria and create every new job that we are capable of creating.

The initiatives for families which are contained in the statement cover those important areas of education, health and involvement and participation in the community. There is nothing more important to our young people than a good education, and to the broader community, including the young people, it is about being healthy and having a healthy community. The initiatives in the statement cover those important areas.

The theme of communities involves the broad issues of planning to make sure that we have well-planned and connected communities, so that people are able to get from one part of the city or the state to another, and secure communities so that people have safe streets, safe homes and a secure environment in which to live.

The fourth theme, that of the environment, is a continuing challenge in relation to climate change and water, the effects of the drought and our important policy responses to all of those issues.

All of those four particular broad themes are going to be dealt with through major pieces of legislation and also major policy statements that will be made during the course of the year. They are described in detail in the statement. We will see legislation dealing with major projects to facilitate the delivery of major infrastructure and, through the process, speed up development approvals. That is important not only for its own sake, but also for the importance of creating jobs and securing jobs at this time. We will also be bringing forward legislation to assist in the implementation of the \$38 billion Victorian transport plan.

There will be important pieces of legislation around implementing the Attorney-General's justice statement, too, including new legislation to replace and update the equal opportunity laws in Victoria. There will be important legislative changes to implement government policies on gaming, racing and liquor reforms. Of course those liquor reforms are designed to make sure that we continue to have a vibrant and diverse entertainment and lifestyle in this state and to make sure that it is well regulated and safe.

We will be moving forward with the creation of new national parks, in particular four new red gum national parks — Barmah, Gunbower, Warby Ranges-Ovens River and Lower Goulburn — and we will complete the reserve system by including old growth and icon sites in East Gippsland.

We will be moving forward with particular reforms to urban planning. The Premier and the Minister for Planning made some very important announcements in relation to that yesterday. Planning processes will be made more efficient and speedy, and people will still be able to have their say but will not have such lengthy, drawn-out and expensive proceedings to go through. We will end up with better planning and protection in those areas.

There are also going to be some very particular major policy statements through the course of the year, and these are also outlined in the statement. I will mention some that are of particular importance. They are the green economy, the jobs action plan, a very important statement on mental health, a regional growth blueprint, the Victorian integrated housing statement, and the one I am particularly involved in is the respect agenda to tackle the culture of excessive drinking and violence and to promote volunteerism and make sure our community is a source of strength. I think that is one of the most significant things we as a Parliament are going to be called upon to do.

There will also be important statements on early childhood development, on future energy, on our international education strategy, on financial services strategy, on the implementation of further matters in the blueprint for education and early childhood development, and on significant issues in health, particularly putting in place new funding agreements arising out of Council of Australian Governments reforms to promote health, especially the new cancer action plan and further controls on tobacco.

As we can see, there are very significant legislative and policy matters dealt with in the statement. It gives all Victorians an opportunity to be involved. I want to take a couple of moments before I conclude to make mention of matters raised in the speeches of the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of The Nationals, and say to people around Victoria: you can have your say; you can have your say via the Premier's website. The Premier's website was redeveloped last year to give people the ability to comment on and be involved in the statement of government intentions directly. It is an even better, easier and more interactive site now than it was when we first developed it.

The comments of the Leader of the Opposition just show that the opposition continues to be bereft of ideas. The opposition stands for nothing and is clearly in want of a leader. There is no doubt that the opposition has simply been unable to come up with one idea through the course of this entire process or to put anything to the people of Victoria. Then we heard the Leader of The

Nationals coming in here and make a swaggering, arrogant, insulting speech in which he showed not only no ideas but a complete lack of understanding of such important matters as the issues around power generation and supply. He clearly told the Parliament of Victoria he had no idea what the real reasons were for the power difficulties and outages last week. He claimed it was a matter of power generation, but he simply does not know. I support this statement of government intentions. It is one that shows great promise for the year ahead, and I commend it to the house.

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — I rise to join the debate on the annual statement of government intentions. I stress for the benefit of the Deputy Premier and the member for Prahran that it is a statement of intentions. This debate is not about what the opposition's views are, this is about the government's intentions. The government could change the name of this statement so it referred to the 'Parliament's intentions' or could give it some other name, but it is focused on what the government intends to do. The Labor government has been in power for 10 long, dark years. I have to say — let us give credit where credit is due — that no one can make excuses like the current Brumby government. Government members are experts at making excuses. Do you know what? I have never heard one minister say, 'I will take responsibility'. Never once have I heard the words, 'I am the minister of the Crown for this portfolio, and I will take responsibility for what has happened'.

We have had a government strategy, the first part of which is to say, 'Let us make excuses, excuses and then more excuses'. The second part of the strategy is to say, 'Let's fill the papers and TVs with ads to try to deflect attention from the complete and utter muck-up we have created'. The third part of the strategy is to blame everybody else. Government members have blamed the Kennett government, the Howard government, the Rudd government, petrol prices, the drought, the GST, climate change, the environment, the heat, the cold, the wind, the global financial crisis, power generators, Connex, rail tracks, the Australian dollar going up, the Australian dollar going down, population increases and banks. And when they run out of people to blame they blame the opposition. That demonstrates that the government has run out of ideas and is desperate for new ones. The fourth part of the strategy is to never admit responsibility. We now have a situation where we do not believe anything the Premier says.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Members of the public gallery should not lean over the rail. They should sit back.

Mr WELLS — It is their keenness to listen to what is being said. It is quite obvious to me that we do not believe what the Premier has to say any more. Could we believe it at the start of last week when he said we had more power than was required and that we had 5 to 10 per cent in reserve? We do not believe him. People from all over Victoria had power blackouts. What the Premier said was blatantly wrong.

Page 28 of the statement of government intentions has the heading 'Delivering sound financial management'. What a joke! When it comes to sound financial management, the budget update at the end of December said:

Despite the weakening global economic outlook, the Victorian economy is well positioned to meet the economic and financial challenges. This largely reflects strong population growth and a strong fiscal position.

Over the page it says:

The 2008–09 Budget Update confirms that Victoria's financial performance remains sound despite the effects of the weakened global economic conditions.

Mr Robinson — We are with you so far.

Mr WELLS — Great! You are with me so far. The document then says:

The government is on track to achieve its target of an operating surplus of at least 1 per cent of revenue each year.

Where is the Minister for Gaming and where is the member for Melton? What happened? Is the Minister for Gaming still sticking by it? Yesterday the Premier had to backtrack on that rock solid promise and say, 'We are now not going to be able to do that. Sorry, we have misled the people. We have got it so wrong. It will only be \$100 million. We are going to slash the surplus to \$100 million'. In December the government put that in print. It was rock solid. The Minister for Gaming and the member for Melton were with me up to that point. They both even acknowledged the global financial crisis but still got it wrong.

I will just make one other point. In the *Australian Financial Review* of 14 January the Premier confirmed that the government would stick to 1 per cent of revenue, or about \$380 million, being the surplus. Yet on the same day that the Premier made the announcement, the *Age* reported that the Treasurer's office confirmed that the government was going to commit to a surplus of 1 per cent of revenue. The Premier is saying one thing and the Treasurer's office does not have a clue what is going on. He has been cut out of the loop.

This is a second example. The power problem was something we were told was going to be fixed. We have had numerous occasions in black and white, including in the government's own documentation, that the government will be rock solid about the surplus; it could not even deliver on that straightforward promise and even acknowledge it would be able to stick to that surplus promise.

Where do we stand? The fact is that the Premier in his statement of government intentions is all over the place and we have massive uncertainty. The sound financial management section of the statement reports \$1.4 billion worth of tax cuts for families and in business costs. But the facts are quite different. If you look at them, you find that since the Labor government has come into power payroll tax has gone up 80 per cent. The payroll tax cost to business has gone up. Do members know why? It is because the threshold has not moved. It is the lowest threshold in the country; it is \$550 000. More small businesses are being caught up paying payroll tax in this state. That is a fact.

Land tax has increased by 144 per cent. Stamp duty on land transfers is up 279 per cent. Gaming taxes are up by 24 per cent. Insurance on the fire services levy is up by 124 per cent. In the 1998–99 budget, which was the last budget of the previous government, the tax bill was about \$8.776 billion. In the 2007–08 budget the actual figures are \$12.8 billion. That is an increase of taxes slugging Victorian families. It is slugging Victorian businesses, when we want them to grow and to invest. The government has slugged Victorian businesses and families an extra \$4.0861 billion, which is an increase of 46.6 per cent overall. Just for the record, the consumer price index increase for the same period is 33.74 per cent.

After 10 long, dark years of this government, what do we have to show for it? We have lots of excuses, no-one ever accepting responsibility, no guarantee of power supplies, no guarantee of water supplies and no guarantee of public transport. We have roads which are gridlocked. What has the government done with the more than \$250 billion of taxes, charges and GST coming to this state? The government looks for excuses; then it looks for more excuses; and it never accepts responsibility. That is why we are in the mess we are in.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — We have just heard a contribution from the shadow Treasurer. In that contribution he admitted the real position of the Liberal Party when he said it was not the government. That is right. It is not. He said that the Liberal Party is the opposition. That

means it is not even the alternative government. It is not ready for government. That is clear from what the opposition said today. It has not got an idea. It has not got a suggestion to make. It is lazy, it is empty and it is vacuous. That sums up the opposition here today. That is all I want to say about opposition members because they are a despicable, lazy lot.

We know that this year because of the economic crisis that the world is facing that life is going to get economically tougher. It is going to get tougher in Victoria, and it is going to get tougher right across the country. It is important that in these times when things get harder that governments, individuals and communities do more. What do they need to do more of? They need to help each other more. The helping of one another will be what gets us through this. Some groups and some places in our community will be more vulnerable to this economic downturn. That is true whether you are in the suburbs or in country Victoria. That is why this year the Brumby government will be redoubling its efforts to make sure that Victorians are not left behind.

Over the last few years the Victorian government has developed a new approach to dealing with disadvantage. We have been using the approach of social inclusion to tackle the problem of social disadvantage. Through this, our policy aims to encourage people to participate and to contribute to life and to their communities. Our plan, which was first introduced in 2005, is known as A Fairer Victoria, and it involves long-term investments to reduce this social and economic inequality. It remains unique in Australia. We want other states and the federal government to take this up. Here in Victoria to date we have invested more than \$4 billion in our social policy, A Fairer Victoria. We will be doing more again this year, particularly in the key areas of mental health, family violence and child protection.

Inevitably these tough times will hit some places harder than others. That is why we have a community renewal program which focuses on those most disadvantaged places. Community renewal is an \$11.5 million program working with eight urban neighbourhoods that are struggling with a range of social disadvantage indicators, such as rising unemployment, physical decline and poor access to transport and other key services. Our community renewal program is a partnership program. It is a partnership between government, local people, community organisations and local businesses. They are all working together to develop local solutions for their communities. These are their communities, they are their ideas and they are working in partnership with the Brumby government. It

is true that it has only been going for a short time, but in that short time more than 1500 residents have volunteered their ideas, given up their time and provided resources, energy and creativity to make their neighbourhoods better places to live.

The respect strategy is exactly the kind of spirit that we want to see fostered, where people respect one another, where they respect their community and where they get involved in local activities that support their community. This respect strategy was foreshadowed by the Premier. It will particularly try to encourage young people to show that they care. Young people do care. They care about their community and we want them to increasingly show that care by volunteering. They can do this in a number of really important and helpful ways. They can help organise a local street party to get to know their neighbourhoods. They can be part of a friends group, they can help their local environment or they can lend a hand to an elderly neighbour. This sort of community activity builds self-respect and is something that individuals can be proud of. It was summed up really well in a letter written by Helen Hillas that appeared in the *Herald Sun* of 15 December last year. I quote from the *Herald Sun* of that date:

Real satisfaction comes from having basic things, from contributing to society in a meaningful way and from having worthwhile goals.

Mr Brumby is spot-on regarding his proposed campaign to steer young Victorians into key fire, rescue, welfare and community groups.

I could not agree more, and I do not think any member of this Parliament would disagree with those sentiments. Of course many Victorians are already volunteering. About one-third of the population makes a wonderful contribution through volunteering. But equally nearly one-quarter of Victorians say they have thought about it but they have not converted that thought into action; they have not followed through. To help them turn that desire, that ambition into action, we will launch a community awareness campaign to encourage more Victorians, especially young Victorians, to join volunteer and community organisations.

Strong communities need volunteers. They also need vibrant and diverse community groups. It is volunteers and community groups together that really make our communities more resilient and stronger. Since last year we have seen the establishment of the Office for the Community Sector which has been implementing our action plan to strengthen organisations. We want to help them, so last year, for example, we introduced two bills into the Parliament to reduce red tape for

community groups. This year we want to establish community foundations in areas which are doing it tough.

We are also working to provide portable long service leave for the community services sector. This is designed to help retain skilled, experienced and valuable staff within this sector. This year we will be implementing the rest of the 25 actions in that plan to make our community groups stronger, more resilient and better able to withstand the tough times that no doubt we are facing.

Climate change and energy are looming challenges we and the whole world face. It is getting hotter, it is getting drier, and this is all because of climate change. We saw this only too clearly last week, and it reinforces the need to act.

We will be developing a future energy statement to be released in 2009. It will outline how Victorians can move to a clean, secure, reliable energy supply for the state. The statement will build on our past investments and reforms. It will help Victoria reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the most cost-effective way. People want to do this. They want to make a contribution, they want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but at the same time they want to do it in the most cost-effective and efficient way, and this government is here to help them do that. We will do this by investing in lower emission technology, by supporting renewable energy, by encouraging greater energy efficiency, and by helping to establish and support the commonwealth government's national emission trading scheme.

All of these actions are designed to provide assistance and support to help communities, whether it is in looking after one another or whether it is in the energy field to help them be more efficient and resilient. The cornerstone of our energy initiative this year is our energy saver initiative. It started on 1 January this year and delivers the first mandatory energy efficiency target in Australia. We are leaders in this. We were leaders in renewable energy targets, we are now leaders in energy efficiency targets. This scheme is expected to cut average household power bills by around \$45 a year.

The full transformation of Victoria's energy is likely to take several decades, as is planned under the commonwealth's carbon pollution reduction scheme, but working with Victorians, with communities and with government policies we are sure that we can make Victoria a better place to live, work and raise a family.

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — Most people in Victoria are not interested in the government's

intentions; they are interested in what it is going to do. They are sick of the 10 years of excuses made by the government for it not having done anything at this stage. If you look at the document the Premier spoke about on Tuesday, you will see it talks about Victoria's plan for water. We have had 10 years of wasted opportunity from this government when it comes to water management in Victoria. We have seen that all the government wants to do is rob Peter to pay Paul. It wants to pipe water from drought-stressed areas to areas of higher rainfall. It wants to pit one community against another community over who is going to get that water.

We have seen the government use water restrictions as a political tool. In recent times we have seen changes to water restrictions that bear no resemblance to the supply available to those towns, because the government knows it is on the nose with water restrictions. People have water restriction fatigue. Instead of basing water restrictions on fact, this government is effectively now basing them on its polling.

More importantly, we have seen the Victorian non-metropolitan water authorities being forced to go into huge debt to pay for this government's promises of action. If you compare the annual reports from 2007 to the annual reports of 2008, you will see that Wannon Water, for argument's sake, has increased its debt by 103 per cent. In one year the debt has gone up by 103 per cent to pay for this government's 10 years of inaction. Goulburn Valley Water's debt has gone up 46 per cent. Turning to Coliban Water, Bendigo and the super-pipe, according to the member for Bendigo East at the last election, Bendigo was going to become the garden city of Victoria. Coliban Water's debt has gone up by 60 per cent in the last 12 months to pay for the government's 10 years of inaction.

While all of that has been going on we have seen the Brumby government take billions of dollars out of the same water authorities in public sector dividend taxes. On the one hand the government is taking the taxes and on the other hand it is saying, 'You have to go into debt to pay for the infrastructure' that it should have been putting in over the last 10 years 'to guarantee the water supply for Victoria'. Under the Australian constitution one of the core functions of any state government is to manage water to make sure its communities have a reliable, quality water supply.

We are aware of the national water initiative. We have heard the Minister for Water and the Premier constantly talking up how they are going to support farmers through the whole process, but neither the minister nor

the Premier have been walking the talk. They are the Judases when it comes to sticking up for farmers in Victoria. They have been making promises constantly and then selling out the irrigators. Before the 2006 election they promised, 'We will never take water from north of the Great Dividing Range and send it south of the Divide because Melbourne has other options for its needs'. What happened? As soon as the government was elected it broke that promise.

The Premier and the minister promised categorically that the 4 per cent cap on trade from water businesses would not be lifted. What happened? The Premier went to the Council of Australian Governments and went to water. He came back and said, 'I have accepted an aspirational statement to lift the cap to 6 per cent'. It was the straight breaking of a promise. Now we have seen the Minister for Water agree to a review of the 10 per cent cap of water ownership by non-land-holders. He stood here before Christmas and said, 'I am going to stand up for Victorian farmers. We are not going to do this'. What has happened? He has agreed to a review, and in my mind that is code for the fact that he will cave into the federal Minister for Climate Change and Water, Penny Wong. He said, 'I will be Penny Wong's lapdog. I will do as she says. I will sell out Victorian farmers for cooperative federalism. I will cave in'. It will be all over for Victoria's irrigators in the north.

With regard to the no-dams policy the minister says they do not create new water. What do people in Victoria think we have been drinking for the last 10 years through the drought? It is water that comes out of dams.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr WALSH — For the benefit of the member for Melton I say again that the water comes from our dams. Back in 1914 the Murray River ran dry because there were no dams on the river at the time. We have water in Victoria because we have dams, but this government would not build dams. Under this government we would not have dams to deliver water.

One of the other items in the statement of government intentions is an amendment to the National Parks Act 1975 to create four new national parks along the river red gum region of Victoria. It is the most appalling process I have ever seen.

Mr Nardella interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — The member for Melton will have his opportunity.

Mr WALSH — The government appointed the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to look at it. The council produced a draft report, one of the key statements in which was that the costs would be borne by those who live in the area but the benefits would accrue to those who live outside the area. That is a fantastic result for northern Victoria! I think not.

Another key comment in the report was that it would condemn people in communities such as Picola, Nathalia, Koondrook and Cohuna to what VEAC described as intergenerational welfare dependency. Where is the care from this government for people who live in country Victoria? There were something like 9000 submissions against the draft report. The overwhelming majority of the submissions said, 'We do not like what is in there. Why don't you do this, this or this?'. What happened? VEAC did not listen. There were 9000 submissions but VEAC did not listen and nothing was changed in the final report.

The government realised it had some challenges. It set up a community engagement panel to talk again to the community, and again it did not listen. The government was smart. Craig Cook was appointed to chair it. He is a very good political operator, and a former chief of staff for Mr Brumby. He was put in to manage the political process so the government could try to sneak it through — and it did try to sneak it through. When did it release the report?

Mrs Powell — Over Christmas?

Mr WALSH — It was released between Christmas and New Year. It was a great strategy. The government said, 'Let's slip it out between Christmas and New Year. Let's destroy the Christmas holidays for all those people who live in northern Victoria, for all those people who rely on the industries who will be condemned to the dustbin by this report'.

Mrs Powell — Santa did not come to them.

Mr WALSH — Santa did not come to them. A lot of people said it was very insensitive. I would say it showed callous disregard for those people in northern Victoria, because the government put out the report between Christmas and New Year to try to bury it in the rush. What is even worse is that the report contains a supposed support package for the red gum industry, but it contains no detail. People have been told, 'You are going to lose your industry. You are going to lose your job. We will help you, but we are not going to tell you how we will do it'. The people in that industry will have to wait for several months before there is any detail as to how they will be helped. They were told

during the Christmas holidays that they would be out of a job. They were told that they would get help but they were not told when or how they would be helped in the future.

Later this year legislation will be introduced to set up the parks, but the changes will happen before the legislation comes in. The timber industry's licences expire at the end of June. No matter what happens with the legislation, the red gum industry is going to be condemned to the dustbin by this government. That industry has been here for 150 years, and it has been sustainable over that time, otherwise there would not be forests there now to put into a national park. It reinforces the government's philosophy that if you change the sign on the gatepost of a park, you will increase the environmental outcome. If you lock it up and leave it, somehow it will be better off. I think most people are now starting to realise that you must actively manage the public estate if you are going to achieve good environmental outcomes. This government seems to think that if it changes the sign on the gate and calls it a national park that you will get a better outcome.

What a success the future farming strategy is! The government says it will put in \$200 million of rebadged money and help agriculture. The strategy says it is a new phase in supporting farmers. What did we see after it was released? We saw the Department of Primary Industries close research institutes. We saw it close DPI depots and sack 70 staff. What a fantastic way to have a new phase in supporting farmers! The government said, 'We will close the research institutes. We will sack the staff'. That is how this government believes it is going to support agriculture into the future.

Mr ROBINSON (Minister for Gaming) — At the commencement of my response to the statement of government intentions, which by its very nature alludes to the aspirations of all Victorians to help build an even more prosperous Victoria, I want to acknowledge the tremendous hardship being experienced by families in Gippsland who have lost homes in the fires in recent days. Whatever Melburnians might have cause to complain about in recent days, nothing compares with the loss of your house. I am sure the angst Gippslanders are experiencing is aggravated severely by the strong belief that that fire was deliberately lit. The government assists with recovery in cases like this, but the truth is that those Gippslanders will gain enormous support from family, friends and their local communities, and we all wish them very well in what will be a long recovery process.

There is another bushfire, an economic bushfire of dimensions unprecedented since the 1930s, which is

also threatening the state of Victoria. Its origins lie in the greed of financial institutions, principally in the US and Europe.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — You are getting on very well with the *Age*. I will talk to you about that later.

I saw the former federal Treasurer pontificating on *Lateline* the other night, offering his wisdom on how we should recover from an economic condition which is in part the consequence of his lack of stewardship of the Australian economy and what financial institutions were getting up to.

I have previously spoken in this house about the rise of a company called Fincorp. This all happened on the former federal Treasurer's watch. It was a company set up by a former vacuum cleaner salesman. I know the Liberal Party is all about opportunity, but putting a former vacuum cleaner salesman in charge of financial organisations that suck up \$300 million from the hard-earned savings of Australian families and watching that person walk away from that entity is not my idea of competent economic stewardship. Perhaps the former Treasurer would be better served by thinking about what he did not do in that period of time.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — He could do a lot better than start to pretend that none of these things happened on his watch. Right around the world we are now reaping an economic whirlwind.

I am disappointed that in his contribution the Leader of the Opposition paints Victoria as an instigator of the economic travails which are now confronting this state, this country and the world. Obviously he prepared his notes before he read the *Australian Financial Review* editorial earlier this week. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has long insisted to me, as a more recent entry into this place than she, that I should pay more attention to the *Financial Review*. I am starting to think she is right, because the editorial earlier this week says:

In Victoria, where finances are probably in the best shape — that is compared to all other states in the country —

Premier John Brumby has been most active in measures to counter the recession, announcing packages for things such as skills and manufacturing that will cost close to \$1 billion over the next few years. He is also pressing ahead with a plan to double infrastructure spending.

Anyone reading that editorial would be left in no doubt as to the competence of the economic management in

this state. The editorial goes on to suggest that all states should spend a lot more. I am not sure that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition would actually support all that is in that editorial, but she is right: I might spend more time reading the *Financial Review* and its editorials.

That editorial appeared a day before the federal government announced its further stimulus package, a massive \$42 million package which will go a long way, in the views of members of the government in Victoria and I think all reasonably minded Australians, to addressing some of the worst aspects of the likely consequences of the slowdown we are experiencing. The additional funding for schools will be greatly welcomed. The additional funding and support for smart energy measures through the ceiling insulation retrofit program will be greatly welcomed. Support for families, for students and businesses is all very worthy of support. I know that all government members are astounded by the goings-on in Canberra, by the utterances of the leader of the federal opposition where somehow for short-term political gain he thinks it is a smart thing to oppose blindly this visionary move by the federal government.

In the Mitcham electorate we will see great benefits flow through in 2009. Principal of these is the work to carry on the commitment to remove the Springvale Road level crossing. We look forward to work commencing in the coming months. That of course is a project we are going to do in partnership with the federal government. Let it be said there is no state that works as well with the federal government at this point in time than the state of Victoria. This is a very exciting project, and it will be the second project of its type in the Mitcham electorate. We some time ago completed the Middleborough Road project which has delivered huge benefits and reduced traffic congestion enormously through parts of the eastern suburbs — a project that I might say was described by the Liberal Party as a dud. That was its view of that \$70 million project. We look forward to what its thoughts on the Springvale Road project might be.

This year we will see further work continue on schools in the Mitcham electorate. We will see the completion of works at Antonio Park, we will see upgrade works at Springfield Primary School, we will see Box Hill High School largely complete its massive rebuilding work right by the Middleborough Road overpass and we will see the Blackburn High School continue its planning for its major rebuild. All of it is very exciting and is greatly welcomed by people throughout the Mitcham electorate.

In the portfolios I hold there is also great progress. At the time of the delivery of the first statement of government intentions in 2008 we were anticipating and looking forward to some degree of progress with the commonwealth government on the national reform program for consumer affairs. I have to say that in 2008 we exceeded all expectations in what was achieved. We reached an agreement on a single consumer law that will incorporate Victoria's very powerful unfair contract terms provisions. We reached agreement on product safety, on how states will work with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission via the commonwealth on a more robust system of product safety and product bans. We saw through the Council of Australian Governments function a historic agreement that credit will be transferred to the commonwealth, something that a lot of current ministers and probably former ministers think should have happened some time ago.

In 2008 we have seen significant reform in prostitution law, and we are seeing far more effective response capacity being developed which in recent weeks has shown very promising results in terms of responses to claims of illegal brothels. That is to be welcomed. Major reform programs are under way and will continue in response to liquor. We have had a licence fee review which gets to full cost recovery, and more work continues. That of course fits into the alcohol action plan. In consumer affairs we are taking a modernisation and repeal program of a dimension not previously seen.

In gaming a continuing reform exercise is under way following last year's April decision to end the gaming duopoly. I look forward this year to finding out what the opposition's position is on that — whether it supports a venue model or would like to see a duopoly continue. That will be a very exciting part of 2009; we might actually find that out.

Of course we will be undertaking further work on problem gambling initiatives. We have taken the lead in Australia with our decision to remove ATMs altogether from gaming venues, and we were the first state to commit to a precommitment standard. Those things have been greatly welcomed, and they will require further work this year.

Throughout their contributions this morning, members of the opposition have maintained that this is all just about the government. To a point that is true, but of course the opposition has a role in this place: it participates in debates and it is occasionally consulted on legislation — —

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — It is. Last year, my office and the department put in a huge effort to try to satisfy the opposition on a gaming bill. Some 17 separate drafts of legislation were developed, and at the end of that time the Liberal Party had not moved one inch. It has a role to play. We will be more constructive if it wants to play that role constructively, but I will not hold my breath.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! The member's time has expired. I call on the member for Brighton.

Mr Nardella — Hear, hear!

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — Gosh, I am worried! I will make a couple of comments in relation to the annual statement of government intentions for 2009. I thought I would commence by looking at the Premier's message in the statement delivered last year and contrasting that with the Premier's message this year.

I note that in 2002 the former Premier said that water was the no. 1 priority; in 2006 we were told that education was the no. 1 priority and in 2008 the Premier said:

In 2008 — the government's priorities are families, communities, jobs, water and climate change.

Looking at the statement delivered this week I see that the government's priorities have remained virtually static in four areas, but one area has been omitted. This year's statement says:

To achieve that goal, the government will take action around four major themes: jobs, families, communities and the environment.

The question is: what was dropped? What were the five priorities last year to the four priorities this year? The answer is water. It is very clear to me that the government has abandoned its responsibilities on water.

I also want to refer to the message from the Deputy Premier. I quote the extraordinary statement that comprises the second paragraph of his message:

In addition to outlining the major proposed legislative proposals, the 2009 statement of government intentions foreshadows major statements, reviews and exposure drafts and the release of major discussion papers on which the public, interested groups and stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide comments.

I am all for consultation, but it appears to me that that is the sort of statement you would expect to hear from a government that had just been elected. The fact of the

matter is that the government has been in power for 10 years — —

Mr Nardella — Nine.

Ms ASHER — It is almost 10. You would expect it to have a program of action. That is what the Premier says it has, whereas the Deputy Premier is focusing on reviews, statements and exposure drafts.

I wish to look in particular at areas that relate to my portfolio responsibilities. Last year, under the heading 'Ensuring water supply' — and what a joke that is! — the government indicated it would bring two pieces of legislation before the house. The first related to so-called reform of the metropolitan retail sector and the second related to water entitlements. Neither of those pieces of legislation ended up before the house, which is scarcely surprising.

I also want to draw attention to the analysis of water that the government has placed in this statement of government intentions. I note that on page 13 of the statement the government makes the claim at point 18 under the heading 'Water and agriculture' that:

... securing Victoria's future water supply is an ongoing priority that includes the completion of a number of major infrastructure projects, supporting water conservation and recycling, and helping Victoria's farmers to become even more productive and competitive.

The Premier's preface drops water as a priority, but on page 13 the government insists that water is a priority.

The problem for the government is that if you look at the projects mentioned in the statement, you see a reference to the desalination plant, which is not due for completion until 2011, and to the upgrade of the eastern treatment plant to provide recycled water, which will not be completed until 2012. These projects — for 150 gigalitres of water from the desalination plant and up to 100 gigalitres of water from the upgrade of the eastern treatment plant — are not set out within the 2009 intentions or even within this Parliament's intentions; they will not come on line until the next Parliament. This is not a statement of government intentions for this year but a statement for the next Parliament.

I also refer to a section of this statement called 'Green jobs'. Again, I pick up the rhetoric of this week in the Parliament — that is, that the government now claims everything is about job creation. If it lays a pipe, it says it is creating jobs; if it builds a school, it is creating jobs. Previously building a school was about getting an educational outcome, but now the government has adjusted its rhetoric so that whatever it does, it creates

jobs. I specifically quote from a section entitled 'Water efficiency and water markets', in which the government observes that:

... the rapid growth in demand for water tanks, greywater systems and other water conservation measures has already impacted on the typical work of plumbers, with a rapid growth in plumbers specialising in water efficiency.

The absurd argument is posited by the government that although it has failed on water supply — with dire consequences for the country and damaging consequences for the city — it has created jobs for plumbers! That is the government's take on its failure in water supply. The statement goes on to say:

The Our Water, Our Future plan will generate many other jobs in construction as a result of the \$4.9 billion allocated to major infrastructure projects —

including the desalination plant, the irrigation system upgrade and so on. The government then makes the point on page 18 of the statement that these projects will:

... create green jobs across the water capture, storage, use and reuse system.

I ask the government: what about the jobs that the government has sacrificed through its failure to manage water? What about the fact that 90 per cent of the turf industry has been laid off? What about those jobs? The government making a virtue of job creation out of its classic inability to manage water is pushing the public's credulity of the government's perspective well beyond any possible interpretation. So this is it! This is a plumber-led recovery. 'We have absolutely stuffed up on water', the government is positing to us, 'but we are helping plumbers'. Fantastic! The government needs to look at farmers, at the gardening and turf industries and at a range of other jobs that it has destroyed through its mismanagement of the water portfolio.

I also want to make mention of the fact that last year the Minister for Small Business had responsibility for one bill — a bill about business name registration reform — and that bill did not come before the Parliament for a range of reasons. However, I note that bill has been taken away from him. Under the heading 'National business regulation reform' on page 26 of the annual statement, the responsibility for red tape reduction has been handed to the Treasurer as lead minister and to the Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission. Again I make the observation that the Minister for Small Business is so hopeless that his one bill from last year, which he did not deliver, has now been taken away from him. I look forward to the Treasurer delivering on what the government claims is

a major goal — that is, to reduce red tape and regulation in the Victorian business sector.

My overall comment is that last year we saw 64 bills flagged, 22 of which have not been implemented. We have a range of excuses, and they have been listed on page 89 of the new document. 'It is not our fault; it is the commonwealth's fault', is the theme of many of those excuses.

I conclude in territory where most of my colleagues have been. This government has been in power for 10 years and has failed to deliver basic services. It has failed to invest in the good times to provide Victorians with services. There are no excuses after 10 years. The public is not interested in who this government wishes to blame. The government has blamed the Howard government, the commonwealth government, the previous Kennett government and it is now blaming the Rudd government as the reason some of these bills have not come before the house. There are no excuses after 10 years.

Labor has governed for 20 of the last 27 years. In the good times we have seen two Labor governments of 10 years duration, and neither of them has invested in the future for Victoria. They have not invested in the future. They have put out documents, rolled out pamphlets, advertised, made statements, issued budget updates and made quarterly reports. They have done a range of things, but they have not invested in the good times. The key characteristics of both those Labor governments which had 10 years in power is that they were in power in the good times. They were in power in very good times in that first tranche of 10 years, and they did not invest in Victoria's future. After 10 years there are no excuses. The government is running out of time. The statement was a stunt last year, it is a stunt this year, and no-one is convinced by it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — The member's time has expired.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Regional and Rural Development) — I am delighted to make my contribution on the 2009 annual statement of government intentions and to outline some real action and real delivery that the Brumby Labor government will undertake over the course of 2009. The interesting thing about this document — and this is what the opposition really hates about it — is that we are being open and transparent with the people of Victoria. We are spelling out what is going on with our intentions for 2009 and we are being open with the community of Victoria.

A number of actions are outlined in the statement concerning my portfolio. There is the implementation of our government's \$316 million skills reform package. It is the single biggest investment that has ever been made in vocational education and training in this state, and we are getting on with the job of delivering that in 2009.

We are continuing the modernisation of our university legislation, and we will be working with our colleagues in Canberra to support our university system in Victoria. The delivery of a new international education strategy will ensure that Victoria remains a destination of choice for students from around the world. We will be developing a new green economy and jobs action plan to make sure that we seize the opportunities that are going to be present from the new green economy here in Victoria.

Finally, there is the outline of a blueprint for regional growth, which is going to be one of our top priorities for 2009. The new blueprint is going to drive the next era of regional growth and set out the next generation plan to ensure that our state's regions — every rural community, every country town and every regional centre — is well placed to grow and thrive. It is about making sure that we build on the strong foundations that we have had in place over the past nine years. It is about positioning our regions to be productive, sustainable and livable, and it is also about preparing our communities for the projected 477 000 new residents who will be living in our regions by 2036. Most importantly we could not be delivering this blueprint if it was not for the strong foundations which we already have in place and which have been built by this Labor government over the past nine years. It is only because of those foundations that we are able to embark on this next generation strategy.

It is vital that we make this investment. It is in strong contrast to the cuts to services, the closures of schools and hospitals and rail lines that we experienced in the 1990s. Over the past few years we have made the crucial investment in schools, roads, health services and train lines. All of these areas were under attack by the previous Liberal-Nationals government, but we have reinvested and today is a different story. As a result we are seeing more people choose regional Victoria as their home. We are seeing more jobs flow to our regions and, critically, more investment.

Over the past nine years we have seen that investments of over \$10.4 billion have flowed to rural and regional Victoria that have directly created more than 17 000 new jobs. That is as a result of government-facilitated investment alone. Those jobs

are just some of the 126 000 new jobs in our regions today, jobs that were not there in 1999.

However, we know that each region, every town and every community is unique, and so too are some of those challenges. That is what will be picked up in this blueprint for regional growth. It will be about measures to boost our towns and cities even further, looking at the new jobs and new investment.

It is on this point that I want to strongly emphasise that we have already been working closely with our local communities. We have heard from them directly about their plans for the future development of their areas, about how they want to see the jobs come and how they want to support new people and residents in their communities. They want to make sure that we provide services that support the older members of our community and help keep young people in country areas and in regional centres. This is about a long-term plan that is providing a clear vision for our state over the past decade. As I said, it is being developed in close consultation with our regional communities. A ministerial task force has been established, with me as its chair and a group of ministers who are dedicated to this task of developing the next regional blueprint.

It is on this point about consultation with our communities, listening to what people's priorities are and turning that into government action that I pick up on some of the comments from earlier today from the Leader of The Nationals. He continues to be exposed for his hypocrisy. Day in, day out, he trots in and out of this chamber with the latest round of hypocrisy about regional Victoria. He came up with an extraordinary analysis earlier today when he said that the whole problem with the statement of government intentions as delivered by the Premier earlier this week was that the word 'country' was not mentioned once. He was outraged and ranted that the word 'country' was no longer part of the government's lexicon.

Speaker, you and I know quite well that the Country Party walked away from the country quite some time ago. We remember when The Nationals used to be called the Country Party. They shed those shackles pretty quickly and decided they would call themselves the National Party. They were not too comfortable with that moniker either. They got a bit tired of that, so they had a brief period when they were called the Vic Nats, and the Vic Nats were going to deliver for regional Victoria.

They ended up walking away from that, just as they continue to walk away from regional and rural Victoria. They have now gone back to being called The

Nationals and they have gone one step further and decided to jump straight back into bed — straight back into a coalition — with the Liberal Party. Once again, in both name and deed, The Nationals have walked away from country Victoria. They have walked away from every rural community, every country town, every regional centre — and people know exactly what The Nationals are like. I make this point because once again in the house today, and yesterday and in previous sitting weeks, we have seen how the Leader of The Nationals takes a divisive approach to policy when it comes to regional Victoria. He chooses to go out into the regional areas, supported by his colleagues, and continue to peddle mistruths and misinformation about the true nature of the government's programs in this area.

I say to members of The Nationals and the coalition that those on this side of the house reject this divisive approach. We reject the way members of The Nationals speak with a forked tongue. We reject the way they say one thing to the community of Mildura, another thing to the community of Bendigo and another thing to the communities in Melbourne. That was demonstrated recently with the member for Mildura's comments on the issues around water — one of the most important, if not the most important, issue that our regional communities face. The Nationals and the coalition continue to play divisive politics, trying to instil fear in the hearts of Victorians at exactly the time we should be pulling together as a community.

This is something else that the Leader of The Nationals talked about. He talked about showing country Victorians the respect they deserve. How about showing some respect and telling the truth? How about the Leader of The Nationals and his colleagues in both The Nationals and the Liberal Party telling the truth to regional Victorians? Do not go out there and peddle misinformation about government programs like the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and the Small Towns Development Fund whose staff are out there working in local communities. We have officers of the department with sleeves rolled up working to support local communities on vital infrastructure that supports those towns. This is particularly so in the case of the Small Towns Development Fund. These small communities know full well that this is an important fund that is dedicated to services and infrastructure in their areas. This was reinforced recently by the East Gippsland Shire Council. The mayor of that shire wrote to me saying how grateful it was for the support given for such a broad range of projects in East Gippsland and the wider Gippsland region. In her letter the mayor said:

We particularly acknowledge the interest shown in our area following the fires and floods of 2006 and 2007 ...

This is the sort of action that we on this side of the house take. We take an approach of collaboration, consultation and working with communities, rather than the divisive approach that the Leader of The Nationals articulated earlier, which is all about instilling fear and putting out misinformation about the true nature of what is going on in regional Victoria. We have to put a stop to this sort of behaviour. We know that 2009 is going to be a challenging year. The economic circumstances are very challenging in our regional towns, particularly when we know that we have to work very hard to support jobs and to create new jobs. We know that we have to work together to address the very challenging issues that are coming before us with a changing climate. Whether it be extreme heat or extreme periods of cold, they are all going to be difficult issues for us to address. Importantly we have to work together so that we have a new agenda that is about looking at growth for the whole of Victoria — every rural community, every country town, every regional centre. It is only by working together that we can achieve this aim, and it is only by working together that we can make sure regional Victoria stays a very important part of it.

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — As the shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services I say at the outset that I acknowledge the people of Gippsland who have suffered recently through a very serious and traumatic fire. As the emergency services commissioner, Bruce Esplin, briefed us the other day, the loss of 29 homes over the recent bushfire period is a most significant property loss in one day since the Ash Wednesday fires. It was a significant event for Gippsland. I pay tribute to the people of Boolarra and elsewhere in relation to this matter. I also pay tribute to those volunteers in the CFA (Country Fire Authority) and the SES (State Emergency Service) and others who participated — staff from Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria and of course the people of Gippsland — in dealing with this traumatic experience. I hope they are able to make a full recovery.

I also want to acknowledge the work of Bruce Esplin. He certainly kept the opposition fully briefed on the fires. My sincere thanks go also to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services who provided the opportunity to be fully briefed on this matter. The Leader of the Opposition and I were able to spend a considerable amount of time in the SES Victorian state incident coordination centre, and I know that the Leader of The Nationals as a local member and the member for

Morwell spent a considerable amount of time in their local communities dealing with this issue.

We are certainly not out of the woods by any stretch of the imagination. We all know that we have another period of significant fire risk approaching in the next few days, and hopefully we will get through it without a repeat of what happened last weekend. I am confident after talking to people like Bruce Esplin and having the opportunity to visit the SES incident coordination centre that the resources are available to deal with this matter, but we can only hope we get through the next few days.

In relation to the annual statement of government intentions there are a number of statements on issues relating to law and order and promoting respect in the community for those participating in voluntary organisations like the SES and the CFA. All of these things are laudable, as is promoting respect through the schools and the community, as well as the Victorian alcohol action plan. All of these things may contribute to a reduction in violent crime in this state, but it will take a significant amount of time. Every credible commentator will tell you that the only immediate action you can take in relation to an exponential growth in violent crime in this state is to have front-line police.

Police need to be visible. That is the greatest deterrent to crime, and in relation to violent crime it is a significant step that we need to take in this state. I am really very concerned that in the annual statement of government intentions, apart from a glib line about more police resources, there is no concrete proposal about what is going to be done.

We certainly know from the last election that the government committed to an additional 350 police on the front line. In the last 12 months it has reiterated that commitment, but it is an old commitment. It has acknowledged a problem in the central business district (CBD). It has certainly acknowledged problems in and around Chapel Street, Prahran, but those are not the only places that experience violent crime. We know that in places like the city of Yarra and throughout our regional centres like Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Shepparton, for example, there are significant problems, but it is occurring all around this state. It is not just about solving a political problem in the CBD. It is about delivering police services all around the state.

A matter of profound concern is that, frankly, the Premier and the Labor government just do not get it. The government has failed utterly to put enough police on our streets to properly protect Victorians from violent crime. Indeed our police force seems to have

been bled. The really tragic thing is that this government knows this is the solution. We were told that the recent New Year's Eve in the CBD was the safest for years. It was achieved by the government draining resources from the suburbs, regional centres and country Victoria by paying overtime to get hardworking police officers to work extra hours to protect Victorians in the CBD, where there were 300 000 people on New Year's Eve, which is 12 times the normal number of people in the CBD. So of course the government can proudly say that it was the safest New Year's Eve in years. But we still have a significant problem, which arose again as recently as last week. We still have victims, and we still have families having to deal with family members who are victims of violent crime.

The government has to acknowledge that it has a significant problem, not just in the CBD but also all around the state. The growth in violent crime in our regional centres like Ballarat and Geelong far exceeds the growth in violent crime in the CBD of Melbourne, but what do we get in Geelong? It appears that in Geelong and on the Bellarine Peninsula and the Surf Coast some 200 police are missing from the front line. In Ballarat something like 60 police are missing from the front line.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr McINTOSH — How do we know about these matters? After progressing fighting and kicking through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal process, Victoria Police finally released its rosters for November 2007. It is still bucking about releasing the rosters for November 2008, but the rosters for the previous year were finally released. Those rosters clearly demonstrate the establishment strength of each and every one of the more than 300 police stations around Victoria, from one-man country stations to stations in the CBD of Melbourne. The figures clearly demonstrate that we are undermanned in our establishment strength front-line — uniformed police officers — by 1500. It makes a complete mockery of this government proudly saying, 'We have added 1400 extra police', when it is now 1500 police that are missing from the front line all around this state. That is a matter of profound concern.

This government knows what the solution is. The government keeps parroting things such as, 'We are going to teach respect in the schools; we are going to have an alcohol action plan', but the only immediate solution to this matter is more police on the front line. The government knows it, but it is doing nothing about

it. And there is just one glib line in this statement of government intentions.

Mr Nardella interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — The member for Melton should cease interjecting.

Mr McINTOSH — Perhaps the government ought to have the member for Melton standing out in the most violent section bellowing like that; at least it might attract some of these violent criminals to take things out on him. The fact is that people are being traumatised by violent crime in the city, in our suburbs, in our regional centres and around country Victoria.

I recently spoke to one of Melbourne's leading neurosurgeons. He will tell you — he cannot demonstrate it by statistics — that he is extremely alarmed by the rise in violent crime and the consequences for the community. The number of people he is treating who have acquired brain injury as a result of violent crime is growing exponentially. A report in the *Herald Sun* as recently as Monday demonstrates that the Alfred hospital acknowledges formally that the number of people it is treating for serious assaults — another matter of concern is that the injuries are being caused by blunt instruments as well as sharp instruments — has risen in the last five years by 250 per cent. I got a copy of the draft report — it may have to be changed — and it is even more alarming. Of the victims of serious assaults involved in that increase of 250 per cent, only 20 per cent will actually make a full recovery within six months. That means there are going to be hundreds of those people who will suffer a permanent disability as a result of violent crime, and their families will suffer too. The only solution to this is more front-line police officers. The government is doing nothing about it. It knows what the solution is, which it demonstrated on New Year's Eve, but it is not delivering in relation to this matter for the people of Victoria. That is a serious indictment of a government that professes to be a government of action. It has done nothing for the last 10 years. It needs to do something now desperately quickly.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms MORAND (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

GAMBLING REGULATION AMENDMENT (LICENSING) BILL

Statement of compatibility

Mr ROBINSON (Minister for Gaming) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Gambling Regulation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2009.

In my opinion, the Gambling Regulation Amendment (Licensing) Bill 2009 (the bill), 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 the bill

The objectives of the bill are to amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 (the act) to:

- (a) substantially restructure the gaming industry by —
 - (i) providing for a new licence for the monitoring of the conduct of gaming; and
 - (ii) providing for the creation and allocation of gaming machine entitlements under which gaming by means of gaming machines will be permitted; and
 - (iii) imposing certain ownership and related person restrictions in relation to licensees and persons on the roll; and
- (b) authorise the conduct of a betting exchange; and
- (c) make further provision in relation to simulated games and simulated racing events; and
- (d) otherwise improve the operation of that act.

Human rights issues

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

Section 13: privacy and reputation

A person has the right —

- (a) not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with; and
- (b) not to have his or her reputation unlawfully attacked.

The bill inserts a new division 4 in part 4 of chapter 3 of the act. Division 4 is entitled 'Monitoring Licence'. The new division 4 establishes a regime for the minister to invite applications to apply for a monitoring licence. A number of the proposed provisions will allow the minister to seek information and to refer each application to the secretary for a report. Whilst the applicant for a monitoring licence will not

be a natural person, the minister may require information concerning natural persons including an officer, servant or associate of the applicant.

Proposed section 3.4.44 provides that the minister may grant a licence only if he or she is satisfied that the granting of the application is in the public interest taking into account, amongst other matters, whether each associate of the applicant is of good repute, having regard to character, honesty and integrity and whether each executive officer of the applicant and any other person to be concerned in or associated with ownership, management or operation of the applicant's monitoring business is a suitable person to act in that capacity.

The division provides for transfer or amendment of the monitoring licence. Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.56, the minister may require similar information from the licensee or the transferee, including information concerning associates and executive officers and any other person concerned in or associated with the ownership, management or operation of the transferee's monitoring business.

Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.58 the minister can refer to the commission any application to transfer the monitoring licence and the commission must give a written report to the minister.

Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.59B the monitoring licensee may request the minister to amend the monitoring licence. The minister may require the licensee to provide any further information or any documents to the minister in connection with their request. This information may include personal information of natural persons. For similar reasons, while all of the above provisions may engage the section 13 right, they do not limit the right to privacy because the interferences with privacy are proportionate and not unlawful or arbitrary.

The new division has certain provisions relating to the publication and tabling of information. The proposed section 3.4.53 deals with the publication and tabling of the monitoring licence, the proposed section 3.4.59A deals with the publication and tabling of the transfer of a monitoring licence and the proposed section 3.4.59C deals with the proposed notice of amendment. The tabling and publication of the various documents will probably not engage the section 13 right as the information is unlikely to be personal information because the licensee can only be a company. Companies do not have rights protected under the charter.

The bill provides for a temporary monitoring licence if the original monitoring licence is cancelled or suspended under the new division. Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.59I, the minister may issue a temporary monitoring licence only if satisfied that, amongst other things, the temporary licensee and each associate of the temporary licensee is of good repute, having regard to character, honesty and integrity and each executive officer of the temporary licensee and any other person concerned in or associated with the ownership, management or operation of the temporary licensee's monitoring business is a suitable person to act in that capacity. If the minister is considering issuing a temporary monitoring licence, pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.59J, the minister may request the commission to give a written report to the minister on those matters. These provisions relating to the temporary monitoring licence may engage the section 13 right, they do not limit the right to privacy because

the interferences with privacy are proportionate and not unlawful or arbitrary for the reasons as already stated.

Pursuant to the proposed section 4.2.9 the wagering licensee must give the commission the names and addresses of agents accredited by the licensee and of any other agents and contractors to be used by the licensee in conducting wagering and approved betting competitions. Pursuant to the proposed section 4.3A.34N on the written request of the commission or a controlling body, the wagering and betting licensee must provide the commission or the controlling body with a list of registered players.

Both these provisions engage the section 13 right but the interferences with privacy are proportionate and not unlawful or arbitrary. The commission is tasked with the monitoring of conduct of gambling and the information is necessary to ensure that gambling is conducted honestly and is free from criminal influence and exploitation.

The bill inserts a new division 1C in part 4 of chapter 10 to enable investigation of persons for suitability for invitation to apply for the monitoring licence (possible invitees) and persons who have been invited to apply for the monitoring licence but have not yet done so (pending applicants). Pursuant to the proposed section 10.4.7Q the secretary can request the commission to carry out all investigations and inquiries that the commission considers necessary to enable the secretary to report to the minister on a possible invitee or a pending applicant or the minister to properly consider whether to invite a possible invitee to apply for a monitoring licence or, if a pending applicant applies for the monitoring licence, whether to grant the monitoring licence to that person.

Proposed section 10.4.7R provides for the commission to require a related party of a possible invitee or pending applicant who is a natural person to consent to have his or her photograph, fingerprints and palm prints taken by the commission if it is satisfied that it is necessary for the purposes of an investigation under the proposed section 10.4.7Q.

Proposed section 10.4.7S provides for the commission to refer to the Chief Commissioner of Police a copy of the request of the secretary and any photograph, fingerprints and palm prints obtained under proposed section 10.4.7R. The secretary may also request the commission to refer any other information regarding a possible invitee, pending applicant or related party to the Chief Commissioner of Police.

The bill inserts a new division 1D for the investigation of applications for a monitoring licence. The powers in division 1D are similar to the powers in division 1C. I refer to the proposed sections 10.4.7Z, 10.4.7ZA and 10.4.7ZB.

While all the above provisions may engage the section 13 right, they do not limit the right to privacy because the interferences with privacy are proportionate and not unlawful or arbitrary.

The interferences with privacy are not unlawful as they are provided for in the bill and occur in precise and circumscribed circumstances. The interferences with privacy are not arbitrary because of the safeguards provided in the act. In addition, the minister, the secretary and the commission are all subject to the provisions of the Information Privacy Act

2000 in relation to their collection and handling of personal information.

The act currently provides important safeguards against the disclosure of personal information. Sections 10.1.30–10.1.32 of the act are secrecy provisions which regulate the confidentiality of personal information and make it an offence for a person to disclose the information without the authorisation of the minister or the person to whom it relates or as specifically permitted by the act.

In all cases where information is required from a person, a request will be confined to information which is relevant to the application or which relates to the applicant or the applicant's associates.

The requirement for information can be justified as it is integral to the maintenance of the high probity standards required of gambling service providers that the minister, the secretary and the commission have the necessary information to be able to conduct probity checks on any associates and to enable the proper consideration of an application.

Proposed sections 10.4.7R and 10.4.7ZA may constitute interference with the bodily privacy of a person but the legislation specifies the circumstances under which interferences with this privacy made be permitted. Further, the decision to interfere with the privacy is to be made on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the merits of each case.

Section 15: freedom of expression

Every person has the right to freedom of expression.

This right to freedom of expression includes a right against forced expression. A number of proposed sections provide for the provision of information.

Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.59M the secretary, by notice in writing, may require an interested person to provide any information or records that are relevant to the consideration of the licence application. Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.59N, that information is required to be updated.

Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.59O the applicant must give the minister any updated information regarding licence application. Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.59P if a change occurs in any relevant information before an applicant for transfer of a monitoring licence is granted, the monitoring licensee must give the minister written particulars of the change.

Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4A.12 the commission may require the venue operator to provide further information or documents to the commission in connection with a request for an amendment of geographic area condition or venue condition. This information may contain personal information.

Pursuant to the proposed section 10.4.7T the commission may require further information, any information that is relevant to an investigation. Pursuant to the proposed section 10.4.7U that information needs to be updated.

Pursuant to the proposed section 10.4.7ZB the commission may require an interested person to provide any information or any records that are relevant to an investigation of an application for the monitoring licence.

Pursuant to the proposed section 10.4.7ZD the interested person must update that information.

Pursuant to the proposed section 4.3A.34E the commission or a controlling body for a brokered betting event may request the wagering and betting licensee to give any information for the purpose of ensuring that probity of the brokered betting event or any other purpose determined by the commission or controlling body.

While all of the above provisions may engage the section 15 right, they do not limit the right to expression because the interferences with the right are not unlawful. Special duties and responsibilities are attached to this right and the right may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary for the protection of public order. The requirement to provide information is reasonably necessary to ensure compliance with the act.

The scheme of the act regulates gambling and other activities. The monitoring licence will be a part of this regulation. To that end to seek a monitoring licence is by choice and understanding that the applicant will be subject to investigation.

The proposed section 3.5.34AA prohibits a person on behalf of a venue operator or a casino operator publishing any gaming machine advertising outside either the venue or a casino. The proposed section 3.5.34AB prohibits similar action in relation to a gaming operator.

While the above provisions may engage the section 15 right, they do not limit the right to expression because the interferences with the right are not unlawful. Special duties and responsibilities are attached to this right and the right may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary for the protection of public order.

The scheme of the act regulates gambling and other activities. The prohibition of gaming machine advertising is a reasonable regulation.

Section 20: property rights

A person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law.

A deprivation of property is in accordance with law when the deprivation occurs under powers conferred by legislation and the law is precise and not arbitrary.

The bill inserts a new part 2A into the act entitled 'Ownership and Related Person Restrictions'. The part 2A provides that, for example, venue operators and related persons cannot be an associate of the holder of a monitoring licence. Whilst part 2A restricts the holding of certain interests, the part does not engage the right.

The proposed section 3.4.27A provides that a gaming machine entitlement held by a venue operator whose venue operator's licence has been suspended or cancelled does not authorise the conduct of gaming while the venue operator's licence is suspended or after the venue operator's licence has been cancelled. Although this proposed section interferes with an operator's business, the section 20 right is not engaged as a venue operator is not a natural person.

The bill inserts a new division 2A of part 4 of chapter 3 entitled 'Venue Operators and Venue Agreements'. The

proposed section 3.4.28C provides that a venue operator must not enter into or be a party to a prohibited venue agreement and proposed section 3.4.28D makes such an agreement void. The prohibited profit sharing agreement is defined in the proposed section 3.4.28A. Whilst the venue operator is not a natural person the other party to a prohibited profit sharing agreement could be a natural person. Although this proposed section could deprive a natural person's property, the deprivation occurs pursuant to law and the law is precise and not arbitrary. The proposed section ensures that gaming at the venue is transparent and the venue operator is not open to improper influence.

With proposed section 3.4.28E the commission may, by notice, direct that venue operators give it copies of reviewable venue agreements. Proposed section 3.4.28A defines reviewable venue agreements. Disclosure of contracts to the commission could breach a confidentiality clause and thereby interfere with a property right in the contract. Such interference could only occur if the other party to the reviewable venue agreement is a natural person. The interference is lawful precise and not arbitrary. It ensures that gaming at the venue is transparent and the venue operator is not open to improper influence.

Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.59F, the minister may take disciplinary action which includes either amending, suspending or cancelling the monitoring licence. This section does not engage the section 20 right as the monitoring licensee is not a natural person. Further, the proposed section 3.4.59G allows the minister to suspend a monitoring licence. Again, this does not engage the section 20 right.

The bill provides for a temporary monitoring licence. Pursuant to the proposed section 3.4.59K, a temporary monitoring licensee may enter into any arrangements that are approved by the minister with the former licensee. Further, the former licensee must make available to the temporary licensee on reasonable terms any assets of, or under the control of, the former licensee. The section 20 right is not engaged as the former licensee is not a natural person.

Proposed section 3.4A.10 provides that a gaming machine entitlement is held by a venue operator subject to the exercise of any power or the performance of any function by or on behalf of the state. Although this proposed section interferes with an operator's business, the section 20 right is not engaged as a venue operator is not a natural person.

The proposed sections 3.4A.24, 3.4A.26 and 3.4A.27 all relate to the forfeiture of gaming machine entitlements. The section 20 right is not engaged as the venue operator is not a natural person.

The proposed section 3.4A.28 extinguishes any interest right or privilege, in or to which an entitlement is subject (other than any state's interest right or privilege), where that entitlement is forfeited to the state. Whilst the venue operator is not a natural person if a natural person holds the interest, right or privilege then section 20 is engaged. Although this proposed section could deprive a natural person's property, the deprivation occurs pursuant to law and the law is precise and not arbitrary. The proposed section ensures a robust regulatory scheme where an entitlement only operates as an authority to possess gaming machines and conduct gaming on one machine in an approved venue.

Extinguishment is clearly signposted in the bill. A natural person taking an interest right or privilege in entitlements does so knowing that:

the entitlement is held by the venue operator subject to the exercise of any power or the performance of any function by or on behalf of the state;

the entitlement will forfeit to the state on certain legislated circumstances;

if an entitlement does forfeit to the state all rights other than the rights of the state are extinguished.

The proposed section 4.2.11 allows the commission to direct the wagering and betting licensee to terminate certain agent agreements. Further, the proposed section 6A.2.4A provides that the commission may direct the keno licensee to terminate certain agent agreements. Whilst both proposed sections engage the section 20 right, the deprivation of the agreements is in accordance with law. It is precise and not arbitrary because the commission has to be of the opinion that the agent or, in certain specified cases, an employee of the agent, has contravened the act or the regulations.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities because although it raises human rights issues it does not limit those human rights.

Hon. Tony Robinson, MP
Minister for Gaming

Second reading

Mr ROBINSON (Minister for Gaming) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

In 2004, the government took the decision to formally review Victoria's existing gambling licences to deliver the best outcomes for future generations of Victorians, through the gambling licensing arrangements that will apply beyond 2012.

This government has conducted the most significant review in Victoria's history of the regulatory structure and associated arrangements for the state's major gambling licences. The government concluded the lotteries licensing phase of the gambling licences review in 2007, with the granting of two separate lotteries licences, ending the previous 54-year monopoly.

The government's gambling licences review adhered to the highest standards of probity and the review process was overseen by an independent review panel chaired by retired Federal Court judge, Ron Merkel, QC.

On 10 April 2008, the government announced new industry structural arrangements for wagering and betting, keno and gaming machines after 2012.

Legislation to implement the changes to the industry structure for keno and wagering and betting was passed by Parliament in 2008 and has commenced operation. Through the new structure, licences to operate keno, and wagering and betting, will be opened up to competition for the first time in the state's history.

I am pleased to say that the implementation of the competitive licensing processes for the new keno licence and wagering and betting licence is well under way, with the government releasing the notice calling for registrations of interest in the keno licence on 17 September 2008 and, more recently on 5 November 2008, the registration of interest for the wagering and betting licence. Honourable members will also be aware of the government's recent announcement of a \$45 million infrastructure package to be matched by a contribution from the three racing codes of \$41 million, together with a 60 per cent drop in wagering taxes post-2012 to secure the long-term future of Victoria's racing industry.

On 3 November 2008, the government announced that as part of its commitment to a 'no less favourable' outcome for racing industry funding, it would undertake a review of the parimutuel tax rate in 2012 based on actual data. The terms of reference for the tax review are currently being discussed with the racing industry.

The bill before the house implements the next phase of the government's announcement, namely the regulatory arrangements for the post-2012 gaming machine industry, as well as introducing further refinements to the wagering and betting industry structure and keno licence. Under the new arrangements, Victoria will transition from the current duopoly gaming operator system to a venue operator system. The decision reshapes the gaming machine industry for the next generation by empowering local venue operators to make local decisions about their gaming operations. A venue operator system allows for a greater spread of benefits to be returned to the community.

This government continues to be committed to responsible gambling measures. To align with the 2012 gaming industry structure, the government has announced a range of landmark measures that will be introduced in future legislation before 2012. These include banning ATMs from all gaming venues by the end of 2012, subject to any reasonable exceptions for venues in regional Victoria, and mandating that gaming machines contain new precommitment mechanisms that will allow a person to preset time and loss limits before they commence play. These measures place

Victoria at the forefront of the fight against the harm caused by problem gambling.

The government is also currently considering the advice of the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council regarding proposals for an appropriate model for the community advocate project and the government will be making an announcement on this project shortly.

I will now turn to the provisions of the bill.

Honourable members will be aware that the bill was released as an exposure draft for public consultation on 11 December 2008 for a period of four weeks. A number of submissions were received from industry bodies, community groups, local government as well as individual venues and clubs. The government is pleased with the response to the exposure draft, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who provided valuable input into the process. As a result of the submissions process, the bill incorporates a number of changes where it was considered necessary to clarify the application of some of the provisions. Overall, however, I am pleased to say that the majority of submissions supported the measures in the bill. A number of submissions did raise some issues which the government will be considering further in the next couple of months, with a view to dealing with those policy issues in either legislation to be introduced into Parliament later this year or in proposed regulations which will supplement the provisions in the bill.

This government is committed to ensuring that the highest standards of probity and regulatory oversight are maintained under the new structure and the bill before the house will provide for a strengthened Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation. The commission will continue to approve and regulate venue operator licensing. This approval process will also continue to require a planning permit and involve a social and economic impact assessment.

The bill before the house will amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to put in place the legislative provisions to support the new venue operator industry structure. Following the expiry of the existing gaming operators' licences in 2012, the state will not issue any further gaming operator licences. Rather, approved hotels and clubs will be able to bid directly for 10-year gaming machine entitlements, which will authorise venues to possess and operate gaming machines.

The state will allocate gaming machine entitlements to approved venue operators through a competitive bidding process, which is expected to be completed in

2010. Only persons holding a venue operator's licence will be permitted to bid for gaming machine entitlements. Gaming machine entitlements will operate for a term of 10 years from 2012. At the end of the term of the new entitlements, the government may extend the term for up to a further two years to ensure a smooth transition.

The bill provides for the term of all venue operator licences to be extended from a current term of 5 years to 10 years to bring them into line with the term of gaming machine entitlements. This will also implement the government's policy of reducing the regulatory burden on business by streamlining the administrative processes for venue operators.

The amendments also provide that venue operators' licences will only be granted to applicants who are not natural persons. This change will bring venue operators' licences into line with the other major types of gambling licences, none of which may be held by a natural person.

The bill sets out a robust framework for the regulation of gaming machine entitlements. The government proposes that venue operators will be able to pay for their entitlements by way of instalments. To this end, the bill provides for venue operators to enter into an agreement with the state at the time of the allocation of the entitlements that will, amongst other things, set out the terms and conditions of payment. If a venue operator fails to make payments to the state in accordance with the agreement, the bill provides that the state can take back the entitlements for reallocation.

The state will also impose conditions on gaming machine entitlements, following allocation, that will specify the geographical area and the type of venue in which the entitlements may be used. This mechanism will allow for the continued implementation of the ministerial directions under the act that regulate the placement of gaming machines throughout Victoria.

The bill includes prohibitions on profit-sharing arrangements between a venue operator and certain participants in the gaming machine industry. A profit-sharing arrangement is one whereby a person provides services to a venue operator in return for a share in gaming revenue. Prohibiting these types of arrangements will maintain the integrity of the venue operator model.

In addition to these restrictions, the Melbourne casino licensee will not be allowed to operate gaming machines outside the casino. Nor will the casino

licensee be permitted to apply for the monitoring licence.

The government wishes to ensure a fair and competitive gaming industry that allows for a broad distribution of gaming machines to all interested parties. To this end, the bill places a restriction on the ownership of hotel gaming machine entitlements so that no-one will be able to own more than 35 per cent of hotel gaming machine entitlements. This policy will be further developed through regulations which will set out the types of relationships which will be taken into account in formulating the 35 per cent restriction. The government proposes to publicly release those regulations later this year.

While the not-for-profit nature of clubs limits the ability for concentration of ownership to arise, the government will monitor the trends in club ownership of gaming machines and take steps to address this issue should the need arise.

The bill provides that venue operators will be able to transfer their gaming machine entitlements to other licensed venue operators. The government will be further developing the rules and processes for the transfer scheme which will be the subject of further regulation and information to the industry in the coming months.

To deter speculative bidding in gaming machine entitlements, the bill provides that, from the period following the initial allocation of entitlements in 2010 until six months after the commencement of the new industry structure, a venue operator who transfers their gaming machine entitlements for a profit will be required to pay a tax of 50 per cent of the profit made.

This policy will also be bolstered by a 'use it or lose it' scheme which will provide that any gaming machine entitlements which are not used in the approved venue within six months of the date that gaming machine entitlements come into operation in 2012 will be taken back by the state for reallocation. The six month 'use it or lose it' scheme will also apply to those venue operators who acquire their entitlements after the commencement of the new industry structure. Venue operators will have the ability to apply to the commission for an extension of the time in which they must use their entitlements where special circumstances arise. These measures will prevent speculators from buying entitlements with the intention of selling them on for profit rather than using them in their own venue.

In addition to the circumstances that I have already outlined, the bill provides that gaming machine

entitlements will be taken back by the state for reallocation where the venue operator's licence is cancelled as a consequence of disciplinary action or where the licence is surrendered by the venue operator. Of course, any venue operators in these circumstances can transfer their gaming machine entitlements to another venue operator at any time before their licence is cancelled or expires.

The bill also provides for a progressive tax structure for gaming machines. To ensure that the legitimate financial benefits of gambling are fairly distributed to the Victorian community, the taxation revenue collected from gaming machines will go into the Hospitals and Charities Fund to support Victoria's public health system.

The government currently releases statistical information about gambling expenditure on a monthly basis. The government is committed, as part of the competitive bidding process, to the provision of venue level data, and will announce shortly the format and means of this data release.

An independent monitoring function will also be established by this legislation to monitor gaming machine transactions in venues and ensure the integrity and transparency of gaming venues. The bill provides for a new monitoring licence, which ensures that gaming machine monitoring services are provided independently of venues. The processes set in place by this bill are designed to ensure that this licence will be granted to a person who will conduct their business with the highest probity and integrity, and who can demonstrate that they have the technical expertise required for the function.

The independence of the monitor from venues will be backed up by a number of legislative restrictions that will ensure that the monitor cannot hold a venue operator's licence or be a manufacturer of gaming machines at the same time. These restrictions are designed to prevent concentration of ownership, domination of a supply chain within a product market, and a potential weakening of the integrity of the gaming machine industry. Similar restrictions will apply to venue operators and persons listed on the roll of manufacturers, suppliers and testers.

Responsible gambling measures

As part of the government's ongoing commitment to responsible gambling, a number of important measures are included in this bill. The bill includes amendments that will tighten up the laws against advertising that, either directly or indirectly, promotes the playing of

gaming machines. The prohibition in the bill will provide for a complete ban on gaming machine advertising by the current gaming operators. Venue operators and the casino operator will also be banned from gaming machine advertising; however, the bill will allow for exemptions for those operators to be provided for in regulations. The intent of the ban is not to prevent venue operators from promoting their venues to the broader community, but to ban advertising that is associated with gaming machines.

The bill includes a prohibition on gaming operators from conducting trade promotion lotteries. A six-month grace period will apply for this prohibition to allow the gaming operators sufficient time in which to comply with the legislation. Venue operators and the casino operator will be able to conduct trade promotion lotteries; however, the bill will prohibit them from counting spending on gaming machines as part of any eligibility requirement for entry into a trade promotion lottery.

The wagering and betting licence and keno licence

The government recently announced a major investment of \$45 million for infrastructure funding in Victorian rural and regional racing venues, and a 60 per cent drop in Victorian wagering taxes post-2012.

Further to that, in the announcement of the commencement of registrations of interest for the wagering and betting licence, the government has provided for the successful post-2012 wagering and betting licensee to establish and operate a betting exchange in Victoria, and also provided the right to offer approved simulated racing games.

These decisions add value to the wagering and betting licence and, as stated, reinforce this government's commitment to a growing and viable racing industry in Victoria.

Allowing the post-2012 licensee to operate simulated racing and a betting exchange provides opportunity for further development of racing products. A Victorian-based betting exchange will also ensure that any economic benefits are retained in this state for use by the Victorian community. This bill will implement those decisions by providing for the statutory framework for a Victorian-based betting exchange to be operated by the wagering and betting licensee post-2012.

Simulated racing products will be able to be provided by the successful licensees under both the wagering and betting licence and the keno licence. The wagering and betting licensee will only be able to conduct simulated

horse, harness and greyhound racing games. Oversight of these products is ensured by requiring both licensees to apply to the commission for approval of these games before they can be offered to the public under the relevant licence.

The bill also implements the government's announcement of a 60 per cent drop in wagering taxes post-2012, when the gaming and wagering licences will be separated. The rate for parimutuel wagering will be reduced from 19.11 per cent to 7.6 per cent and the rate for fixed betting will drop from 10.91 per cent to 4.38 per cent. These tax reductions will replace the industry's revenue from electronic gaming machines and are a key component of the government's commitment to the funding arrangements being no less favourable.

Finally, the bill provides for further amendments relating to the engagement of agents by the wagering and betting licensee and the keno licensee. The bill ensures that the commission will have greater oversight of the practices of agents and be able to investigate complaints from consumers about the conduct of keno or wagering and betting.

Whilst the bill before the house will implement many of the decisions necessary for the new venue operator industry structure, the government proposes to introduce further legislation later this year that will supplement the broad framework put in place by this bill.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 19 February.

ANNUAL STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS

Debate resumed from earlier this day.

Ms MORAND (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a contribution on the statement of government intentions and our plan for the year ahead. The year ahead is obviously going to be one of great challenges as well as opportunities. Those challenges include the global financial crisis and the ongoing drought. But I am looking forward to the year in terms of my own portfolio responsibilities and the actions we are going to take which affect women and children in Victoria.

The government priorities for 2009, as articulated in the statement of government intentions, are jobs, families, communities and the environment. Children and families are very much at the centre of what we are trying to achieve this year. Investing in Victorian children and families is one of the best investments that a government can make in any state, any territory or anywhere in the world.

Later this year the Premier and I will be making a ministerial statement on early childhood development. The statement will partly report on the progress we have made with the blueprint, but it will also outline our ongoing reforms being implemented, as a part of the blueprint, for education and early childhood development. There is a focus on early childhood development because we know how important the first few years of life are and how much those first few years of experience impact on a child's future.

It is a very significant time to be involved in early childhood policy and developing a way forward for early childhood policy and development across Australia. Australia is leading the debate on policy. This includes leading the development of the early learning framework on behalf of the commonwealth. One early learning framework will be developed for 0 to five-year-olds which will be transitioned later this year and then be rolled out across Australia. I am pleased that Victoria has been able to lead that work.

It is a great opportunity to work with the commonwealth government on implementing strategic reform across the early years with a particular focus on participation in a year of early learning in the year before school commencement. I welcome also the massive investment in schools that the commonwealth announced a couple of days ago. We are really demonstrating how we can work with the commonwealth in implementing reforms in education and early childhood development.

Three national partnerships have been agreed to in the area of early childhood. One of those is to provide funding for 15 hours of universal preschool access for every child across Australia. We know that studies have shown the great importance of that year. We know what the difference is between participating and not participating in a quality kindergarten program. Studies have shown that children who participate in a quality program — and that quality is measured by the quality of the teachers providing the program and also the ratios of staff to children — make a tangible difference to the outcomes regarding reading ability at year 2. There have been plenty of studies that have demonstrated that investment does make a difference.

We understand the importance of investing in kindergartens and in the early years. Since 1999 when we took office we have increased kindergarten funding by 158 per cent. This increase in investment has included significantly increasing the kindergarten fee subsidy which is provided to disadvantaged families to make sure their child is able to participate in a kindergarten program. When we came into government that subsidy was \$100; this year it is \$750. That is a clear demonstration of the increased investments we have made in ensuring that children from disadvantaged families have the opportunity to participate. This year we expect around 16 000 children to be the recipients of that fee subsidy, and that represents about 25 per cent of all children attending kindergarten this year.

We also know that the investment in the refurbishment and renovation of children's services is very important. Over the time we have been in government we have made a massive investment in that area. Last year, for example, I announced \$10.7 million in grants for renovation and refurbishment for children's services and minor upgrades for kindergartens and children's services across Victoria. Almost 950 kindergartens and child-care centres across the state are recipients of that funding, and now they are reaping the benefits of that upgrade money.

We have also worked very effectively and very well, I think, with local government. Since 2003 we have had a new policy of investing in integrated children's services. We are committed to funding 95 children's services in that period. Already we have 45 of these up and running, and 21 centres are in the planning or construction stages. There are more to come. We know that providing all of these services together under the one roof is a very effective way of providing services for children and families. Most of the centres have kindergarten, maternal, child health services and early childhood intervention services together under the one roof. Some of the centres have also included occasional care and, in some cases, adult training as well.

Victoria is experiencing a baby boom, with 73 700 babies having been born last year. That is obviously a demonstration that Victorians think that Victoria is the best place to live, work and start and raise a family. We have 10 per cent more babies being born than three years ago and 15 per cent more than seven years ago. That amounts to around 10 000 more babies being born every year than there were seven years ago.

We are investing in services to meet that demand. We invested nearly \$55 million extra in maternal and child

health services in the last budget. In fact we have doubled maternal and child health services since we came into government. In doing that we have increased participation rates to the point where 97 per cent of all new babies born are seen by maternal and child health nurses at the 724 centres right across metropolitan, rural and regional Victoria.

We understand the importance of supporting children with a disability or developmental delay. The investment we are making is greatly increasing access to these services. In the last budget we funded 1000 extra places for early childhood intervention services. I have already announced 500 of those, and another 500 will be rolled out this year. These services make a very big difference to families who have a child with a disability or developmental delay.

I want to mention the regulations, which we will continue to consult on. We released the draft regulations a few weeks ago. In them I proposed that we reduce the ratio of staff to children in the 0 to 3 age group from 1 to 5 to 1 to 4. We would also like to see a degree-qualified teacher in every long day-care centre in Victoria and to have a minimum standard of certificate III for every person working in a children's centre. We are doing that because we know that parents want to be sure that, no matter what children's service they leave their child at, it does not just run to a minimum standard but is a place where there is a high-quality care and learning environment. Every time a child is in long day-care, kindergarten or whatever other service they might be attending, they are in a learning environment. They are learning every single minute of the day, so the quality of the staff supporting those children is very important. Also this year we will develop a 0 to 8 framework. I have mentioned the national framework, but we are also developing a Victorian framework for 0 to 8.

I want to finish by talking about the government's intentions in women's affairs this year. Last year we celebrated women's suffrage and the 100 years since Victorian women got the right to vote. We want to build on that and the achievements we have made during the time we have been in government. As part of that we wanted to increase the number of women appointed to government statutory boards and committees. We have done that by increasing from 30 per cent to 40 per cent the number of women we place on government-appointed boards and committees. This year we are announcing that we would like to increase that to 50 per cent of new appointments. We are doing this not only because women make a valuable contribution to those boards and committees but also because it provides those women with the skills and

experience needed for them to be considered for the non-government sector, which sadly is still lagging significantly behind in terms of the representation of women on boards and committees. An Australian Stock Exchange survey of the top 200 companies last year showed that only 9 per cent of board members are women. In providing women with experience on our boards we are helping to make sure they are considered for non-government sector boards. We also have the women's register, which any company can look at and see that there are many women who have the skills and experience to contribute to their board.

Finally, I want to mention the ongoing work we will be doing in family violence reform. We have had significant achievements in terms of responding to violence, but this year and in the future we would like to focus more on prevention. This year we will be developing a state prevention plan, one that will really focus on the primary prevention of violence in the home and the community.

This year will be another year of action for women and children and families. We have an ambitious plan on jobs, families, communities and the environment, but it is a plan that we will deliver on.

Sitting suspended 1.01 p.m. until 2.03 p.m.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

ABSENCE OF PREMIER

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the house that the Premier is absent from question time today. Any questions for the Premier will be answered by the Attorney-General.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Rail: infrastructure

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer to leaked departmental documents showing that 53 700 sleepers a year should be replaced on the metropolitan rail network but that in 2007–08 only some 27 000 sleepers were replaced, and I ask: will the minister now accept responsibility and admit the government's failure to invest in basic maintenance of basic transport services has resulted in buckling rails and widespread chaos in the public transport system?

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Public Transport) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Of

course it would help if he had done his homework properly. In our system we have 1.1 million sleepers on the mainline network and 150 000 of those are full-depth concrete sleepers at the moment — that is, 13.5 per cent of them. We no longer install wooden sleepers on the metropolitan network. We have not done that since 2006. We replace them with interspersible concrete sleepers that have now been developed to intersperse with the wooden sleepers in the system, and they had to be designed and approved.

Under the current program 103 000 low-profile interspersible concrete sleepers will be installed by mid-2009. In the original franchise agreement the obligation was to replace 38 000 timber sleepers a year with timber sleepers. The Department of Infrastructure and Connex agreed to delay the installation of the timber sleepers — that was the replacement of timber sleepers with timber sleepers — so that a new concrete sleeper could be developed. As I said, it had to be designed and it had to be capable of being interspersed with timber.

The design of the new interspersible concrete sleeper was approved in late 2006. Orders were placed and manufacturing commenced in 2008. By the end of this franchise period — —

Mr Baillieu interjected.

Ms KOSKY — There are safety issues relating to sleepers.

Dr Napthine interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for South-West Coast. I will not have that constant interjection.

Dr Napthine interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I agree that the member for South-West Coast has a very early choice to make.

Ms KOSKY — Of course the design needs design approval and safety approval and that is done by the safety regulator. By the end of this franchise period the obligation for the number of sleepers to be replaced will be totally met. But of course most will be replaced with concrete sleepers. We have met the obligation — —

Mr Baillieu interjected.

Ms KOSKY — You should have read the detail. You are not good on detail.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Minister for Public Transport will make her comments through the Chair.

Ms KOSKY — Now the concrete sleeper has been designed and the obligation of sleeper replacement from previous years has been met, the sleeper replacement program will be almost doubled to a minimum of 62 000 sleepers a year. This is an important program. Every jurisdiction around Australia is moving to concrete sleepers, but we have to have a sleeper which is designed to be interspersible with timber sleepers. They had to be designed and developed for our system. There was no point in continuing to replace timber sleepers with timber sleepers, which would have just perpetuated the difficulty we have with timber sleepers and buckling on our system.

We have done the right thing, and we have done it in conjunction with Connex. The program going forward will be undertaken strategically. Initially one in every five sleepers on straight track sections will be concrete, with 100 per cent on bends. By 2015 over 50 per cent of the track will be complete with concrete sleepers. We have been doing the right thing in terms of replacing sleepers with the most modern technology, the concrete sleepers. They are suitable for our system. We have a sleeper replacement program, unlike those who just rip up the sleepers.

Bushfires: community preparedness

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — My question is to the Attorney-General in his capacity as Acting Premier. With temperatures predicted to exceed 40 degrees this Saturday and fire services — —

An honourable member interjected.

Ms GREEN — This is serious! With temperatures predicted to exceed 40 degrees this Saturday and fire services warning of an extreme fire risk, can the Attorney-General update the house on emergency arrangements in place to support Victorians?

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I thank the honourable member for her question. As the house would know, bushfires have already impacted Victorian communities this summer. Sadly people have lost their homes and possessions. Affected communities are now beginning the long and difficult task of recovery, supported I might say by our government.

Unfortunately we are not out of the woods yet. The end of this week sees a range of weather factors coming together that could have very serious consequences. The bureau of meteorology is forecasting temperatures in the high 30s and low 40s for Friday and Saturday, with very strong winds of 50 kilometres per hour

gusting up to 100 kilometres per hour as well as extremely low humidity. This is extreme fire weather.

After enduring more than four days of above 40-degree temperatures last week, Victoria is extremely vulnerable to even more fires this week and on the weekend. Experienced fire chiefs have said that the conditions predicted, especially on Saturday, will be the worst they have seen in Victoria's history. The extreme heat predicted for this Saturday, the very high winds and continued lightning activity mean that Victoria's emergency services are on very high alert.

The Country Fire Authority, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade are appealing to all Victorians to understand the situation as we progress through the first week of February, traditionally Victoria's warmest month. Those agencies and the government want Victorians to take critical steps to ensure that they are prepared. Victorians should make sure that they and their families have their bushfire survival plan ready and know what they will do if fire threatens. People should make the decision now about whether they will leave their property if fire threatens or whether they will stay and defend.

The agencies are also urging people who might be travelling around the state on the weekend to take extreme care in what will be extreme conditions. People may want to reconsider their travel plans if that can be done and if that is appropriate in their individual circumstances. We also request that if anyone sees fire activity, they report it immediately. Fire crews will be focused on prevention and first attack to ensure they can get on top of the fires.

On behalf of all Victorians I want to thank our firefighters and emergency service workers for their tireless efforts in tackling the recent fires in Gippsland. I also want to also thank them for the unseen work they have continued to do this week, blacking out areas and tackling smaller fires across the state. I thank them in advance for the work they may have to perform over the coming days. I ask for understanding from employers who may see some of their employees called into volunteer emergency action this weekend.

On behalf of all Victorians I also want to warn any potential arsonists that they will certainly feel the full force of the law should they deliberately start any fires. Our emergency service agencies are well prepared, and the latest advice from the National Electricity Market Management Company is that maintenance crews have been working around the clock to ensure that the energy network is as robust as possible. It predicts appropriate

power supply for the weekend; however, bushfires and other catastrophic events do have the potential to threaten transmission.

We ask all Victorians to be prepared for these upcoming extreme conditions. We ask that they have emergency contact numbers at their disposal, and we ask that they take time to check on neighbours, the elderly and the vulnerable.

Rail: infrastructure

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer to leaked department documents which recommend the replacement of 22 crucial switch points and track crossings per year in the metropolitan rail system, but reveal that only one-third of these works were carried out each year.

Mr Stensholt interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Burwood need not interject in that manner.

Mr Batchelor — On a point of order, Speaker, in his question the member for Polwarth referred to a document which he is allegedly basing his claims upon. The Leader of the Opposition also referred to a similar document, and it was shown that the claims he made in the question were false and misleading. Given that the opposition uses particular questions to feed out false and misleading information, we ask that the document he is referring to be made available.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister has asked whether the member is willing to make the document available.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member is not quoting from a document. There is no point of order. The member for Polwarth, to continue.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I will not tolerate that behaviour from the Minister for Energy and Resources or the member for Polwarth.

Mr MULDER — I refer to leaked department documents which recommend the replacement of 22 crucial switch points and track crossings per year in the metropolitan rail system but reveal that only one-third of these works were carried out each year, and I ask: will the minister now accept responsibility

and admit that the government's failure to invest in basic maintenance for basic transport services — —

Mr Batchelor — On a point of order, Speaker, I am aware that the member for Polwarth is not quoting from a document, but he is asking the Minister for Public Transport to refer to that document and to make comments on documents to which he has asked her to refer. He started his question in exactly the same way twice, and the Leader of the Opposition did likewise. He said, 'I refer you to a document' that he has, and he is deliberately withholding that from the Parliament and from the minister. It should be made available. I am well aware that he is not quoting from it, but if he wants this question time to be fair dinkum and for us to believe he is not making this up, that he is not distorting it, that lies are not being told, then he should — —

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to resume his seat.

Mr Stensholt — On the point of order, Speaker, I refer to your ruling at page 76 of *Rulings from the Chair*, which says:

Members should bring with them to the house a copy or relevant extract of any document they intend to quote from during debate —

in this case it is a question —

to ensure that ... they can make those documents available to the house.

I ask that the documents be made available.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I am aware that all members have a view. I do not uphold the points made by the member for Burwood in raising his point of order because the member for Polwarth was not quoting from a document. I do, however, believe that it is appropriate that the member asking the question can be asked to substantiate the claims in the question insofar as the member is happy to substantiate those claims.

Mr Herbert interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Eltham is warned, and I warn all members that the next person to be called to order for interjecting will be suspended.

Mr Thompson — On a further point of order, Speaker, generally it is not practice to require prima facie proof of authenticity. Under the rulings the obligation is not so much to substantiate a document, but, in a slight nuance of meaning, it is more to vouch

for its accuracy. That should be what the member for Polwarth is required to do.

The SPEAKER — Order! I think that is where we had got to. I ask the member for Polwarth to repeat the question for the benefit of the Chair, who was unable to hear it.

Mr MULDER — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer to leaked department documents which recommend the replacement of 22 crucial switch points and track crossings per year in the metropolitan rail system but reveal that only one-third of these works were carried out each year, and I ask: will the minister now accept responsibility and admit that the government's failure to invest in basic maintenance for basic transport services — —

Mr Batchelor — On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to ask the member for Polwarth to substantiate the alleged facts he is laying before the Parliament, and if he does not have a copy of the document he is prepared to show us, to identify its source.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Batchelor — I do not intend to be yelled down by the opposition today. All that the member for Polwarth need do is say the name of the document and provide its source so that we can subsequently identify whether it exists and whether or not the statements by the member for Polwarth are true. We can only assume they are false and not true, as was demonstrated in the answer of the Minister for Public Transport to the Leader of the Opposition's first question.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. There is no need for the member for Polwarth to repeat the entire question. I have the question up to the very last part of it.

Mr MULDER — And I ask: will the minister now accept responsibility and admit that the government's failure to invest in basic maintenance for basic transport services has resulted in widespread train cancellations and delays on the public transport system?

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Public Transport) — I thank the member for his question. Given that he is unable to identify exactly which document he is referring to, including the date of the document, it is difficult for me to respond to the detailed issue, because I cannot. We have many documents in the department. I am not sure whether it is an accurate document, and I do not know how old it is. What I can say — and I think it was clear from my previous answer — is that a lot has been done in relation to maintenance right

around the system. Often to select information at a particular point in time can be quite deceiving because it does not provide the full picture of the works that we have done around the system. I think I demonstrated that in relation to concrete sleepers.

We spend around \$80 million through Connex to maintain the system. That is in addition to all of the infrastructure funding that we provide. So \$1 billion — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition knows not to enter into interjections across the table in that vein. I ask for some cooperation from the Minister for Community Development as well.

Ms KOSKY — We spend around \$80 million per year on maintenance. That is in addition to the infrastructure works that are being carried out. This year there are \$1 billion worth of infrastructure works around the system, in addition to the \$38 billion announced in the Victorian transport plan. We will be increasing that maintenance spend by almost 50 per cent in the new franchise period, so we are committed to maintenance. Throughout the entire period we have been in government we have invested in the system.

We have only to look back at the period prior to Labor getting into government to see that \$200 million was ripped out of the system every year. We had to put \$1 billion back as an increased investment in our public transport system, and we will continue to do that. We have plans with all of the operators. They put in plans about what they want to do in the next 12-month period. We commit to those. The operators also identify future issues. Of course the opposition had a plan too, and that was to close down the system.

Hospitals: government performance

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the government's commitment to making Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: can the minister outline to the house recent government initiatives to improve the capacity of our public hospitals?

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Health) — I thank the honourable member for Cranbourne for his question and for his ongoing interest in and commitment to health services for his local community. As honourable members know only too well, this government has increased recurrent funding for our health system by 112 per cent since it came into office in 1999. What is

more, we have ensured that each and every health service has received a funding boost in each and every year of our term in government. That extra funding means that we are treating an unprecedented number of patients.

We have hired additional staff: nearly 9000 extra nurses, more than 800 additional ambulance paramedics and 2500 additional hospital doctors. I could go on and on about the detail and about the depth of the investments we have made right across the public health system. We have always indicated — and I have always been clear — that in health there is always more to do, and we are committed to doing it. We are committed to ensuring we are absolutely committed to ensuring that our dedicated health professionals right across the public health system have the resources they need to treat more patients, to provide better care, to meet the health challenges of today and to set us up to meet the challenges that will come in the years ahead.

The member for Cranbourne asked about recent initiatives the government has taken, and I draw his attention and the attention of all honourable members to salient examples. Just before Christmas, as part of a settlement with the AMA (Australian Medical Association) and a fair, reasonable and balanced deal with the hospital doctors I was very pleased to be able to announce a boost in the capacity of our health system in the form of \$321.5 million to open 276 additional beds right across our health system. These are not just beds in one part of the system but beds across the system for acute care, critical care and step-down care. In each of the important parts of the system there will be a boost in order that our dedicated health professionals can treat additional patients and deal with the pressures and demands they face.

There are many examples of that additional funding allocation. This is ongoing funding, not one-off funding. It is in the base going forward and represents a permanent boost to the capacity in so many of our health services. I can give a couple of examples. Southern Health has received a very important boost, with 51 additional beds at a total cost of \$12.7 million.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS — There is criticism from those opposite. I am talking about 51 beds at a cost of \$12.7 million, It is ongoing funding. Thousands of people in Melbourne's outer south-east will benefit from those additional resources. At Austin Health we are funding 34 extra beds, representing \$7.9 million in ongoing funding. Latrobe Regional Hospital, an important hospital for the people of Gippsland, has

been not only saved but has been supported by this government. It will receive nine additional beds at a cost of \$2.1 million. I was at the Latrobe Regional Hospital very recently to open an expansion of its very busy emergency department. Again, the support has come from this government, with more than \$400 000 to fund three additional treatment spaces that have been welcomed by staff and welcomed by the patients who need those services.

Right across the health system we are providing additional beds and additional recurrent funding to treat additional patients and provide them with better care. That is an important and great example of our ongoing commitment to achieving better health outcomes right across Victoria.

I also advise the member for Cranbourne that just before Christmas the Premier and I also released the Victorian cancer action plan. This is a \$150 million plan that not only includes comprehensive action in many important areas, but for the first time has a target of increased survival rates to save lives.

Whether it is in terms of ongoing funding for employing more nurses, more doctors and more ambulance paramedics, whether it is in terms of growing capacity or whether it is in terms of making sure we have made the investments we need to continue to support our workforce and to support patients and their families, this government is getting on with the job of ensuring that our health system has the resources it needs for the future. The government has a plan, in stark contrast to those opposite.

Rail: infrastructure

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer to leaked department documents revealing Connex claims of an increase in broken and faulty rails and the conclusion that the current rail replacement program — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind members again that every member has a right to take a point of order.

Mr Hudson — On a point of order, Speaker, if the member for Polwarth is not willing to identify the name or the date of the document, could he at least identify the page number?

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order.

Mr K. Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Bass! There is no point of order. The point of order was bordering on the frivolous.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not need the support of the opposition or the government.

Mr MULDER — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer to leaked departmental documents revealing Connex's claims of an increase in broken and faulty rails and the conclusion that the current rail replacement program is symptomatic of a system in an unsustainable condition, and I ask: will the minister now accept responsibility and admit that the government's failure to invest in basic maintenance for basic transport services has resulted in widespread train cancellations and delays on the public transport system?

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Public Transport) — I thank the member for his question. As I indicated before, we do have plans that are developed by Connex in conjunction with the department. Connex forwards these plans each year to the department and then agrees on the items to be developed. The reason for doing that is to identify exactly the maintenance issues that have to be responded to. As I have also indicated, we will increase the maintenance funding of over \$80 million by 50 per cent to ensure that we are maintaining the system, as well as investing in the infrastructure of the system.

As members know, we recently opened the Clifton Hill duplication. We have infrastructure works under way at Laverton, Westall, Craigieburn and various other locations around the state and the metropolitan area. We are continuing to invest in our system, and that is before we commence on the unbelievable investment we are making through the Victorian transport plan. We do have a plan for the rail system.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Polwarth that I will not have interjections of that nature across the table.

Ms KOSKY — We do have a plan for public transport, we have a plan for the rail network and we are investing record amounts in the system. We are seeing the benefit of those improvements, but as I have made clear to this house, the works will take some time. We are making significant investments in maintenance, and far greater investments than were made by the other side when it was in government. The only plan the

opposition member has is a plan for becoming Leader of the Opposition.

Schools: funding

Mr BROOKS (Bundoora) — My question is to the Minister for Education. I refer to the government's commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: could the minister update the house on how the federal government's stimulus package will complement the Brumby government's unprecedented funding for renovating or rebuilding every public school in Victoria?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Education) — I thank the member for Bundoora for his question. I know he is looking forward to the opportunity of being part of openings of many new facilities for schools in his electorate in the future and that he will proudly stand up and say he was on the side of those who supported the initiatives to roll out extra capital to make them a reality.

I have explained on other occasions that the Brumby government is undertaking the biggest ever renovation, rebuilding and extension of our infrastructure within education that has been seen in the history of this state. I am very pleased to say that we are well over halfway through the first tranche of \$1.9 billion which is being rolled out for the Victorian schools plan. Therefore we are already doing this work and are very pleased to welcome the federal government's announcement of an additional \$14.7 billion right around the country, of which Victoria will get a very significant share. This is really putting some further flesh on the bones of the education revolution and will help bolster our significant capital investment program.

The building the education revolution announcement demonstrates that the federal government is genuinely interested in working with the states and territories on plans that are already under way, not just investing in the long-term capital that is required for the education system in this country but also creating local jobs and opportunities in these times of global financial uncertainty. We are very pleased to be able to tell the Prime Minister that we are ready to go, that we have plans for our schools that are already well and truly under way — —

Mr Dixon interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Nepean.

Ms KOSKY — We are well placed to make sure the essential construction and maintenance work the

additional dollars will provide will be done as quickly as possible and will have the greatest impact on job creation.

There are three key elements of the federal plan which have implications here in Victoria. First of all, \$12.4 billion to build or refurbish large-scale infrastructure in primary schools, K-12s and special schools. This is particularly focused on libraries, where there is a lot of new technology and innovation being applied, multipurpose halls, gyms, and other types of facilities. There is also \$1 billion to build 500 science laboratories or language learning centres, and this further complements our plans.

When you put the federal dollars with the significant state dollars, you see quite a transformation of the capital infrastructure. The commonwealth has also said, and it is utterly consistent with our plans and proposals, that these facilities must be available for broader community use. They must be multipurpose facilities, and we already know the benefit of shared facilities. That is very much part of our agenda and our plan. There is a simple choice. We can either support the federal government's efforts to protect families and jobs, to boost education and to invest in the long-term infrastructure in our country, or we can put politics first and Australians last, as some are doing.

The Premier is meeting the Prime Minister today. As I said earlier, because of the success of the Victorian schools plan, all the hard work and all the planning that we have undertaken, we are telling the federal government that we can move very quickly. We are well organised. The schools are ready. The schools already have a great sense of anticipation about what they will do, and we do not want anything to stand in their way.

I would not want to be the local member who has to visit their local schools and tell the families and people in their schools that they should not receive funding. I would not want to be that local member. It would be a pretty uncomfortable place to be.

We all need to do the right thing. Victorians need to stand up for our schools, for our education system and for this stimulus package, because we know these dollars will go to Victorian families. They will provide essential services for our young people.

Rail: infrastructure

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer the minister to leaked department documents showing that the

government has completed just one-third of the recommended ballast replacement works on the metropolitan rail network, and I ask: will the minister now accept responsibility and admit that the government's failure to invest in basic maintenance for basic transport services has resulted in rotting sleepers and widespread cancellations on the public transport system?

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Public Transport) — I thank the member for Polwarth for his question and for his sudden interest in maintenance of the public transport system. As I have indicated, we spend \$80 million a year in maintenance on the system. It is difficult to respond directly to the allegation that has been made by the opposition member given that he will not provide the document and is just referring to a 'leaked document'. As I have said, we spend \$80 million a year on maintenance, and we will be increasing that.

Ms Asher interjected.

Ms KOSKY — The question from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is, 'What is the outcome?'. In 2008–09 the projected spend by Connex on asset management will be on track, \$43.8 million; structures, \$17.8 million; signals, \$18.7 million; and power, \$15.9 million. There was \$900 000, as I understand, spent on ballast last year, and there is much more in addition to that. We are investing in every aspect of maintenance right around our system. As I have already indicated to the house, Connex provides plans. We sign off on those plans, and we do the works.

The difficulty with the question from the member is that he is referring only to an element of a supposed document without providing the detail of the outcome of that, which I am only too happy to provide to the house if I can get the proper question and the identification of the document. Otherwise it is difficult to provide the detail that I would love to provide to this house.

Children's Week

Ms RICHARDSON (Northcote) — My question is to the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. I refer to the government's commitment to making Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask the minister to outline how the government is supporting Victorian children through its commitment to Children's Week.

Ms MORAND (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — I thank the member for

Northcote for her question. As a parent of young children I know she has a particular interest in Children's Week. The Brumby government knows that children are our future. We want to make sure that every child has every opportunity for a healthy and successful future. Some events over the past few weeks have made us all focus on how precious every child in our community is. That is why we celebrate and focus on children during Children's Week in Victoria and throughout Australia in October every year.

In the last week of October we celebrate Children's Week. This year it will be held from 24 October to 1 November, and it is a great way for all of us to focus on children — their unique attributes, talents and achievements — and on the rights of children and young people. It is a great opportunity for parents to take time out and to intensely focus on their children for that week.

We always start Children's Week at the Melbourne Zoo. A range of activities and programs are conducted at the zoo, including Dorothy the Dinosaur. I invite all members in the chamber to join me in October — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms MORAND — It is 25 October. Members should put it in their diaries. We would love to see the member for South-West Coast there in October this year. It is surprising that opposition members find this amusing when we are talking about celebrating children.

Ms Asher interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order!

Ms MORAND — The Deputy Leader — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition would ensure a much smoother running of question time if she did not persist in interjecting across the table.

Ms MORAND — So apart from the opening in October — again, join me at the zoo — the rest of the week is a whole program of activities funded by the Brumby government throughout metropolitan Melbourne and rural and regional Victoria. I invite all honourable members to participate in the activities.

I want to reflect on one activity I went to in Ballan with the member for Melton, where the Moorabool Shire Council had organised for the whole council to participate in a Let's Read program. The whole street was involved in activities and programs, and it was a fantastic event.

We have a proud record of supporting families, which includes investment in children's services and in children's centres. We have committed to 95 centres, and we have already opened 45 which are up and running. Another 21 are under construction or in planning. They are fantastic children's centres, integrating all children's services and early years services under the one roof. We are committed to children's centres. We have also doubled funding for kindergartens, for maternal and child health services and for early childhood intervention services. We have the commitment, and we have put the funding into it. We want to focus on children this year. Again I remind everybody of Children's Week this year. Come and join me, and let us focus on and celebrate our children in the community.

V/Line: communications system

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer to leaked documents advising that V/Line's non-urban train-to-base radio system, which enables drivers to speak with train controllers, is life expired, is unsupported by its manufacturers and has lost the confidence of its users, and I ask: is the minister waiting for a major train collision in rural Victoria before V/Line's key communications system with its trains is upgraded?

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Public Transport) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. As I think he knows, I take safety in the transport system very seriously. In Public Transport Safety Victoria we have an independent investigator which ensures that the system is operating in a safe way, so I do not accept the assertion that has been made by the Leader of The Nationals. Having said that, I add that if he had done his homework, he would know we are investing in train control systems to improve those systems so they operate in the metropolitan system and so there is proper radio control around the system. We are investing in that among many other investments we are making in infrastructure at the moment. We will continue to do that, because we are committed to public transport in this state.

Employment: regional and rural Victoria

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — My question is to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. I refer to the government's commitment to making Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask the minister: what is the government doing to secure jobs in regional and rural Victoria, and is there any need for additional measures?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Regional and Rural Development) — I thank the member for Ballarat East for his question. Like the member for Ballarat East, all of us on this side of the house are very proud to be part of a government — the Brumby Labor government — that is taking action on creating jobs in regional Victoria and right across the state. Absolutely central to this job creation activity of this government has been our Regional Infrastructure Development Fund.

This fund has created on average 4000 jobs in every year of its operation — 4000 jobs have been created every year thanks to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. The Brumby government has now invested a total of \$611 million in the fund, increasing our investment in regional infrastructure and jobs.

I am very pleased to detail to the house a few investments we have made in the last few months. We have announced more than \$5 million in funding for new job-creating regional projects. They include \$2 million in funding from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund for Biodiesel Producers Ltd, an area I know the Minister for Energy and Resources is very interested in. A new blending and storage facility is being created, supporting jobs and opportunity in this important industry. I also announced funding to support 24 new jobs in Bendigo as a result of to a \$48 000 grant to a company called Spoutvac to assist it in a \$400 000 expansion of its manufacturing facility. That in turn is creating those 24 jobs.

I was also very pleased before Christmas to announce 150 new jobs at Strathmerton through a multimillion dollar industry agreement between Bega Cheese and Kraft Foods. There has been a lot of support for these initiatives. I would like to share with the house just one letter of a number we have received. It is a letter from the mayor of Moira shire, David McKenzie, who wrote to me following the announcement of 150 new jobs in Victoria. It says:

This is a wonderful outcome for the people of Moira and indicative of the Brumby government's significant investment in water infrastructure in northern Victoria.

This investment and this support is on top of the record investment we are making in infrastructure in a number of areas. Whether it is in water, whether it is in roads or whether it is in rail, we are seeing vital projects creating hundreds of jobs across the state. This is particularly important as we go through these tougher global times.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms ALLAN — You may take my word for it; others may not. But do not just take my word for it:

regional communities are strongly endorsing this approach by the Brumby government. In the *Herald Sun* just yesterday the Wimmera Development Association's executive director, Philip Sabien, had this to say about the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline:

These projects help enormously with employment and spending and sustaining economic activity...

Because of this, we've survived the worst drought in 100 years.

The *Herald Sun* went on to report that:

... businesses in the Wimmera–Mallee region have managed to survive despite debilitating drought, due largely to a government-funded pipeline project.

I suggest that those opposite may wish to take note of these sentiments — obviously from their comments they may not — particularly the Leader of The Nationals, who may like to take particular note of the \$611 million that we have invested in the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund.

I was asked by the member for Ballarat East about the need for additional measures to do with this funding. There may need to be some additional educative measures regarding the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. Some inaccurate claims have been made about this fund, which has led some to call for a Target 585 campaign. I wonder if this campaign includes the 585 nurses who were sacked every year during the previous government's term in office — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The Minister for Regional and Rural Development knows full well that she is not allowed to attack the opposition when answering a question.

Ms ALLAN — Victorian communities right across the state know the success of this approach. In terms of investing in infrastructure, whether it is in projects like water projects or through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, Victorian communities know that this is the approach to take, particularly as we grapple with some of the difficult challenges, be they things like bushfires or the global financial crisis. We know we have to make major investments like this to provide jobs to support regional communities. That is why the Brumby Labor government is taking this approach and why we see the Rudd federal Labor government making these major investments. We have to make sure that those opposite, whether here or in Canberra, do not stand in the way of jobs being created in our regional communities.

Mr McIntosh — On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to some of the points of order that were taken during question time, I ask you to examine the *Hansard* record and look at the number of points of order which were made by the Leader of the House and the member for Bentleigh and the context in which they were made, because the points of order seemed to be going down in descending order of frivolity ending with a request for a page number.

I ask you to do this, Speaker, particularly because you had referred to you rulings from the Chair to indicate the obligation of the member for Polwarth to verify the document he was speaking about, and most importantly to cut out these frivolous points of order in the interests of this house and to prevent ministers from leaping to their feet to enable other ministers to be given time to think when questions should be without notice. I ask you over the break to look at the *Hansard* record and make some sort of authoritative ruling that will prevent the Leader of the House from making such frivolous and pointless points of order.

Dr Napthine — On the point of order, Speaker, I wish to strongly support the point of order raised by the member for Kew. It is clear that not only were the points of order in most cases frivolous but they were purely politically motivated. As the member for Kew suggested, I also ask you, Speaker, to look at the *Hansard* record and note that the members who raised the points of order — government ministers, the Leader of the House and government backbenchers — deliberately waited until the context and the nub of the question had been relayed to take a point of order so that the minister who is embattled, the minister who is under pressure, the minister who is struggling with her portfolio and the minister who cannot deliver trains on time —

The SPEAKER — Order!

Dr Napthine — had time to think, knowing the question. It was a politically — —

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for South-West Coast

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not accept that the member for South-West Coast did not know that I was on my feet. I suspend him under standing order 124 for deliberately ignoring the authority of the Chair. I suspend him for 30 minutes.

Honourable member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Questions resumed.

The SPEAKER — Order! The question of frivolous points of order was raised earlier this week by the Leader of the House. It is my full intention to look quite clearly at the number of points of order that have been taken this week. On many occasions they have been quite serious points of order. In any sense of interpretation points of order should be made and considered. Frivolous points of order need to be looked at in their full context. But as the member for Kew is fully aware, this matter is being discussed at the Standing Orders Committee, and it is a very difficult issue to give a definitive ruling on because so much of it depends on the ebb and flow of debate in the chamber. I will review the points of order that have been taken. There have been far too many over the course of this week. I agree with the member in that sense. The time set aside for questions has expired.

ANNUAL STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS

Debate resumed.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — I will make my contribution on the statement of government intentions 2009. Despite the hype of the much anticipated annual statement of government intentions last Tuesday, what we found in the shadow portfolio that I have responsibility for was yet another rehash of health announcements and initiatives dressed up to look like something brand new.

After nearly 10 years of Labor in government, and it having played the blame game at every opportunity, it is sad to think there is such a lack of substance for the health portfolio in this statement. But in my view Victorians will not be fooled by an out of touch and very arrogant government which cannot even provide basic services, particularly for the growing number of older and sick Victorians who are in great need.

Hidden amongst the 90 pages of hype and spin was an embarrassingly meagre offering of only 5 pages of health statements, all of which have already been announced or will not be implemented until later years. The Brumby government's statement claimed that:

In 2009 the government will implement the Victorian tobacco control strategy ...

That strategy was announced before Christmas and it has been noted by those not fooled that none of the headline actions are due in 2009 — for example, the point of sale ban will be introduced in 2011 and the smoking in cars and temporary outlet bans in 2010. No matter how supportive we are of these bans, none of them will be introduced this year. What does that leave the so-called action man, the Premier, to deliver in 2009?

The statement also demonstrates a heavy reliance on commonwealth funding, with the Premier crowing about \$181 million of federal money for a cancer precinct. That is very laudable, only he had to admit in the next line that this will be subject to Council of Australian Governments negotiation.

Some of Labor's claims about Victoria being the best performing state for elective surgery are not only puzzling, they are not even true. According to the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2009*, published last week, Queensland outperformed Victoria, and Victoria was above the national average for some patients waiting for category 3 elective surgery. The Productivity Commission report also revealed that Labor's recurrent spending on public hospitals is the lowest in Australia, and that Victoria has the lowest number of beds per 1000 head of population. The report shows that from 2003 to 2007 there was a steady increase in the number of days sick Victorians spent waiting for elective surgery and that one in five people on the elective surgery waiting list had been waiting for an extended time. Additionally Victoria has a higher readmission rate to hospital than the national average, and the second highest number of sentinel events reported as the average number of reported adverse events because of hospital system and process deficiencies which result in death or serious harm to the patient.

However, elective surgery waiting lists are not the only indication of a health system in crisis under this government. The Productivity Commission's report showed that Victoria's ambulance service receives less government funding per head than the national average, that the ambulance workforce is the oldest compared to other states, and that the state relies more on mixed paid and volunteer staff to fill vacancies.

The government's claim in this statement that Victoria is rated second in the country for emergency treatment within the recommended time needs to be seen in the context of the number of presentations to emergency departments (EDs). In fact Victoria has the second

lowest proportion of its population accessing EDs at 271 per 1000 weighted population, which is lower than the national average of 311 per 1000. But the Brumby government would have us believe our EDs have been unexpectedly flooded beyond their capacity to cope or plan. Even this government's *Your Hospitals* report to the community shows that Victorian hospitals failed five out of nine government performance targets in the last report. The majority of these failures were in the emergency departments and were for timely treatment and hospital admission.

Additionally the Auditor-General was scathing about the Brumby government's management of the demand for hospital services and the poor excuses made by it. He said the failure to plan and manage patient flows had led to an access block in emergency departments, elective surgery cancellations and excessive waiting times. All of this has been exposed through overcrowded emergency departments, hospitals being continually on ambulance bypass, poor ambulance response times, increased hospital-initiated postponements, increased numbers of patients walking out of EDs before treatment and hospitals running at overcapacity with too few beds. The Minister for Health talked about Southern Health getting so many beds, but Monash hospital, which has waiting times and elective surgery waiting lists that are blowing out, got only four beds none of which were acute beds. Three were beds for assessment in the emergency department and one was a neonatal intensive care unit cot. The closure of maternity units across Victoria — 21 in fact — has led to tragic events. This has been complicated by a failure of the rural ambulance service, as we saw last week. In the eight reporting periods from 2004 to 2008 our hospitals have failed to treat category 2 semi-urgent patients on time. We have also seen the failure of public hospitals to meet their own benchmarks.

This wonderful opportunity for the government to announce some innovative initiatives, particularly to fix the public hospital system, has gone. That opportunity has been squandered on health statements, all of which have already been previously announced. The cancer action plan, the tobacco action plan and the national registration and accreditation of health professionals have all been announced before. The same can be said of the government's stalled WorkHealth program which, despite being announced in July last year, was only partly rolled out three months later. I also understand that some parts of it have been dropped.

Apart from providing some funding for already announced initiatives and highlighting some budget items, there is not one new initiative for health in this

entire announcement, and there has been a failure to deliver on some basic promises for the treatment of cancer. I note that on 27 October 2006 the Labor government announced that breast cancer screening services for women living in rural and regional Victoria would be upgraded to state-of-the-art digital technology, allowing for faster and more accurate results. It said that country women would be among the greatest beneficiaries of the \$10 million upgrade statewide. Disgracefully, neither the \$10 million nor digital mammography have been delivered.

The one announcement I was pleased to see was a commitment to fast-track major projects. In that context I ask the Minister for Health, who is very keen on interrupting, to tell us if this includes the HealthSmart IT program which even the Auditor-General has described as a shambles. The Premier does not appear to be in the house today, but I would like to ask him if it includes the upgrading and redevelopment of the very long list of hospitals, particularly those in country Victoria, which have languished in a state of disrepair for so many years under this government and this Premier's watch. Many of these hospitals are on drip feeds or have had funding promised but not committed. In particular I ask if this fast-track includes hospitals like the Bendigo hospital. The Premier mentioned Box Hill Hospital but we have still not seen the money for that hospital, and Bendigo hospital did not even rate a mention in this statement of government intentions.

In summary, this Labor government has had nearly 10 years and \$250 billion in revenue but it cannot deliver basic health services. The problem that is emerging now is that Labor failed to invest, particularly in hospital and health infrastructure, in the good times — times provided mostly by the former Howard federal government and the Kennett government. There was a lot of revenue flowing into the government's coffers in the good times, but that time has passed and there is a big black hole in infrastructure in Victoria in terms of our hospitals. I wonder what the future holds for those hospitals and those communities, many of which are sick and tired of this Labor government and would like to see a government that can manage the economy properly.

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Health) — It is always a great pleasure to be lectured by the member for Caulfield, and to be lectured on how we are not doing enough in terms of tobacco control by people who take donations from big tobacco. It is great to be lectured on tobacco control by those who amended the Tobacco Act just once in seven years.

If my memory serves me correctly that was done only to implement a Council of Australian Governments change anyway. Those opposite have not lifted a finger on tobacco control for decades. It is always great to be lectured by people with that sort of track record.

It is also always a pleasure to be lectured in terms of the capacity in the health system and to be criticised for boosts at the Monash Medical Centre and Southern Health by people who did not increase capacity in our hospital system when they were in government but in fact reduced it. It is interesting that they criticise how many additional beds there are at the Monash Medical Centre when the real question is: how many beds are there in the 12 hospitals that those opposite closed? The answer is that there are none, because those hospitals have been boarded up. Those communities lost their health services. They had their health services ripped away by those opposite. It is a pleasure and a delight to be lectured by the member for Caulfield. In so many matters she is confused and muddled.

It is also a pleasure to be lectured about capital works and investment in health infrastructure. As a government we have invested nearly \$5000 million in health and hospital infrastructure in our term in office, with clear plans to continue to invest in upgrades in terms of the fabric and facilities across our health system. It is a great pleasure to be lectured by those whose record can best be summed up like this, in just one project: the Royal Children's Hospital — a project opposed root and branch by those opposite. We have done more in health capital works than those opposite did in the seven long, dark, neglectful years when they sat on this side of the house. A theme is emerging. It is always a pleasure to be lectured by the confused and muddled member for Caulfield.

Turning to the statement of government intentions, I am absolutely delighted to speak in support of the document. It is a clear plan which outlines a number of investments, actions and different initiatives that we will take further to our commitments to providing the very best health care to each and every Victorian.

Rather than commending the \$150 million cancer action plan, a few moments ago the member for Caulfield basically bagged it. She accused us of rehashing it. The plan was launched before Christmas to the acclaim of most informed commentators — indeed perhaps all informed commentators — in the cancer community. Funnily enough, the member for Caulfield is opposed to the plan. I put it to you, Acting Speaker, that her criticism of the cancer action plan is perhaps more a reflection of her than it is of the cancer plan. Regardless of the confused criticism of the

member for Caulfield, as detailed in the statement of government intentions, we will work hard this year and going forward to deliver the Victorian cancer action plan, because cancer control, cancer prevention and cancer treatment is a key priority for me as the Minister for Health and for the government. That is why the \$150 million plan was released just before Christmas. It is new money, extra money across four action areas in the city, the suburbs and rural and regional communities. It is a substantial boost to translational research, the workforce, prevention and screening, and supportive care — supporting cancer patients right across the community.

Cancer is everybody's business because every year 10 000 Victorians lose their lives to cancer, and each and every day 70 people in our state are diagnosed with it. One in three of us will be touched directly by cancer by the age of 70. We can and must do more, and the statement of government intentions recommits this government to the full implementation of our cancer action plan, coming as it does on top of the \$600 million in recurrent funding we invest each and every year in cancer care across Victoria. It is a great shame that we do not have the support of every member of this house for that. Rather than joining with us in the fight against cancer and these extra efforts, we get ill-informed, confused and muddled nitpicking from the member for Caulfield and others.

On from that is tobacco control. We take this matter very seriously. This is the third or fourth wave of tobacco control under our government. I was proud and delighted to be able to release the Victorian tobacco control strategy just prior to the end of last year. Again, I think it was welcomed by Quit, public health advocates, the Australian Medical Association, the Cancer Council and a litany of experts. Funnily enough, the member for Caulfield, who could never claim to be an expert, seems to oppose elements of the tobacco control strategy. What more would you expect from people who come in here and claim to run a commentary on the tobacco control strategy in the very week when Australian Electoral Commission returns showed that those opposite continue to accept donations from big tobacco companies? What a disgrace! When the bills come before the Parliament we will see whether those opposite have the courage to support them. We know they have never had an idea in relation to tobacco control reform, but perhaps they will at least have the decency to support the plan put forward by this government.

Other matters mentioned in the statement of government intentions include a range of different commitments going on from cancer and tobacco control

including in relation to the implementation of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act which was passed last year. It is a very substantial challenge for us and a very big part of our agenda going forward. There is also the full implementation — the rollout — of the additional capacity that I announced before Christmas, and which I alluded to during question time and that the member for Caulfield could only criticise. According to her there are not enough extra beds at the Monash Medical Centre. Again, it is a commentary on her, not on this government's investment at Southern Health. It contains a series of health facilities that she would be lucky to find with a map. This government, and I as the minister, will not be deterred. We will continue to invest and we will continue to ensure that we engage in policy debate and that we support our dedicated staff.

Despite the ill-informed and muddled commentary of those opposite, we will continue to work as hard as we can to ensure that our dedicated clinicians and those others who work in our health system continue to be supported. It is our job to ensure that they have the resources they need to treat more patients and provide better care, and it is our job to support them to find new and improved ways of delivering better care. That is what we have done, that is what we are doing and, despite the carping — opposition members are never happier than when they are unhappy — we will continue to support our dedicated health and hospital staff right across the state, not in one location but in every health service.

Mr Clark interjected.

Mr ANDREWS — The member for Box Hill wants to know about Box Hill Hospital and a range of things. This government has a record of investing in health capital works, and we will continue to invest in them. The member for Box Hill knows that only too well, as do other members on that side of the house.

Whether it is relation to capacity in the system, tobacco control or cancer prevention and control, which is fully funded under the Victorian cancer action plan, or whether it is in relation to the Public Health and Wellbeing Act or supporting rural communities — in particular in terms of maternity services through the rural maternity initiative, no doubt opposed by the member for Caulfield as well — we will not be deterred by the ill-informed criticisms of those opposite. We will continue to work as hard as we can to deliver the very best health care to every single Victorian.

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — It is a pleasure to rise to say a few words about the annual statement of government intentions. Time and again the government

has told us, in every glossy brochure you can find, that education is its no. 1 priority. Of the 88 pages of the document — which I will not hold up because it is a prop and probably would be taken from me — you would think education would take up about one-quarter. But no, there are two pages about schools and what the government intends to do in schools over the next year. That is a bad start for the government.

Chapter 6.1 is the section about schools. It talks about the government's blueprint, the regional network leaders, the national reporting approach, the Victorian version of the Teach First program, the executive class principals, the Victorian Institute of Education, educational leadership, the Victorian schools plan, the ultranet, public-private partnerships, the maths and science strategy, the John Monash Science School, and science and maths specialist schools. That is the full gamut of the section. Every single one of those sections has already been addressed, launched, relaunched, advertised and had a brochure written about it by this government. There is absolutely nothing new in the chapter about school education in the state. The whole lot is a rehash of stuff that is already out there.

I will go through them briefly one by one. First, I refer to the blueprint. The government has been dining out on the blueprint for the past two years. We all know about it. Wherever it can it talks about the blueprint and what it is going to do in the future. There is nothing new about the blueprint.

There have been two launches of the regional network leaders, or a launch and then a relaunch. An announcement was made of who they were last year. Then the week before school started they were all dressed up again as strike teams. It was exactly the same group of people doing exactly the same job. It has been announced and reannounced, and it was relaunched the week before the children went back to school.

National reporting has been on the books and talked about for years and years. There have been no new initiatives this year from the government on national reporting because it is already in place.

The government has talked about executive-class principals. It is interesting to note that the first executive-class principal was appointed last year. The legislation to enable the appointment of executive-class principals was also introduced. It is funny, but that is the way it worked. School has now started and there are no more executive-class principals out there, even though we have the legislation for them. I cannot work it out; it just does not make sense. The government has

talked about that, so perhaps we might see some of them this year, at least more than the one who is already out there.

The Victorian Institute of Educational Leadership has been launched and relaunched, and there is another mention of it here.

On the Victorian schools plan, the government likes to talk about its rebuilding of the schools that have fallen into disrepair. We hear about it all the time. The government is pleased with the bailout it is receiving from the Rudd government in terms of the money it will receive for the maintenance of schools. It should have been fixing up and rebuilding the schools that have fallen to pieces over the last 10 years, but it has done nothing. Today at question time the minister was talking about how grateful they are to receive all that money. I hope it is not going to be at the expense of the money that this government should have put in. This is new money to fix the mistakes; it is not instead of all the money that the government should have put in.

The Auditor-General brought out a scathing report a few months ago and said that the capital funding and maintenance funding of schools in Victoria was full of secrecy. No-one had any idea how it worked; it seemed to come out of the heavens. There was no plan, there was no process, and it was a secret. But the minister is here saying to Mr Rudd that we are more than ready to go with our \$3.3 billion bailout for schools. She is saying we have got a system. That is a system of allocating money, and the Auditor-General has said it is totally secretive and is not working. I would warn Mr Rudd that the \$3.3 billion bailout he is going to throw Victoria's way is going to be put into a system that the Auditor-General has said does not work and is secretive.

The government has talked about the ultranet. Again we have seen a launch and a relaunch; not only that, but we have had a tender and a re-tender. Every time it is reannounced, the parameters of the ultranet are reduced and reduced — it is just about a website now. We notice too that of the five or six companies that have been short-listed to provide the ultranet for Victorian schools, not one is an Australian company.

Public-private partnerships have been launched relaunched. We had the announcement; it was relaunched; we had the short-listing, and then we have had a successful tenderer, so we have had four or five mentions of that — nothing new there.

The maths and science strategy has been talked about for a long while. It is something I will refer to in a

moment. The Auditor-General picked up mathematics as something that is sorely needed in our schools. The John Monash Science School has been talked about since the 2006 election campaign when it was part of the government's election promises. There have been announcements and reannouncements, but no launches because it has not been built yet. It is the same with the science and math specialist centres. All the projects I have mentioned are all reannouncements.

I will not hold the document up of course because it is a prop, but further into the statement there is a chapter on respect. That is a good approach from the government. There is one paragraph that talks about respect in schools, and I think that is worthwhile. It is not something that can be left up to schools; we should be following a community-wide approach. Schools are part of the community, and therefore they should be part of the approach. But this government has got to start by respecting schools, by giving them the power and trust to do the things they think are best for their local community, not only in terms of curriculum but in terms of behavioural standards and what is expected by that local school community of the local schoolchildren.

Late last year the government announced that it is going to take away the powers of the principals to suspend and expel students they think should be suspended or expelled. A faceless bureaucrat in a regional office is going to take that over. No-one in the regional offices would know the history of the family, the history of the child, the relationship with the teacher. They will not know the broader information. This government is not going to trust principals to make those decisions. It has taken the decisions away from them. If this government wants to trust in schools, it has to trust schools.

This week the Victorian Auditor-General's report on literacy and numeracy was released. What does it say about the government? I have a couple of quotes here that I just have to share with the house. The Auditor-General said:

It is clear that in order to make a difference, both the nature and scale of the literacy and numeracy strategies currently being applied need to be thoroughly reassessed.

This is the Auditor-General telling this government to go back to the drawing board as far as literacy and numeracy are concerned because of the dreadful results of our schools. This government likes to say it is governing for all people and stands up for people who are in lower socioeconomic areas. This government has failed miserably on that in education. The Auditor-General said:

The achievement gap between students from high and low-SES schools was considerable at all year levels and had not narrowed over time for either literacy or numeracy.

The lowest achieving students were well behind their higher achieving counterparts.

I could go on for ages about the Auditor-General's report, but I am running out of time.

In a bad week for education for this government we have had the productivity commissioner reaffirm that this government is the lowest funder of government and non-government education in Australia. In 2006–07 this government spent \$120 less per child than it did the previous year. The Australian Bureau of Statistics said that at a time when Victoria's population was increasing, government school numbers dropped by 724, and non-government school numbers rose by 3304. That was the third consecutive year in which that trend has occurred.

We had the second-worst student-teacher ratio in primary schools, and retention rates are dropping not only in year 10 to year 12, but most disturbingly from years 7 and 8 to year 12. Therefore we have students in early secondary school who are starting to drift away from our schools. We are losing them. This is what the Auditor-General said in his report. He said that any gains children might make in literacy and numeracy in the early years are going away as they hit late primary and secondary school. That is why the retention rate is what it is. I could talk more about education. It is not the government's no. 1 priority.

One other issue in the annual statement of government intentions — and again I stress that I will not hold up the document — is the completion of Point Nepean National Park. This was in the statement of government intentions last year. The government said it would bring in legislation to enable the last area of the park to be handed over from the federal government to the state government, but that still has not happened. We were getting updates all last year: it was another month, then another month and then yet another month. It looks as if it will probably not happen until the middle of this year, when the previous federal government was originally going to do it anyway.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

**EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AMENDMENT
(GOVERNANCE) BILL**

Second reading

**Debate resumed from 4 February; motion of
Mr HULLS (Attorney-General).**

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — In summing up on this bill I thank all members for their contributions to the second-reading debate. I am proud that this bill will provide a modern and effective governance structure for the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission that will enable the commission to carry out its functions for the Victorian community. It is a structure that provides leadership, clear lines of responsibility and accountability and more robust provisions for removing commission members and the commissioner.

Let us be clear: there are some serious deficiencies with the current model. It is an unwieldy structure that has the board actually dealing with complaints. There is clearly confusion about the various roles people play within the commission, such as the role of the chief executive officer (CEO), who is also the chief conciliator, and the role of the chairperson. It is neither a modern nor an efficient structure.

Mr Julian Gardner himself identified the weaknesses in the current model, noting that the limitations of the current structure include lack of clarity around the respective roles of the chairperson of the commission and the chief conciliator or CEO, lack of clarity around the roles of commission members as a board and the fact that the structure has not been updated to reflect the range of functions that the commission undertakes. This structure was a relic of the Kennett government. It is important that we update and modernise this structure and bring it into the 21st century.

Let us be clear about what the structure proposed in the bill does. It provides clear lines of responsibility and accountability; it creates the position of commissioner to provide leadership to the commission; it establishes a board that will provide strategic oversight of the commission's operations; and it provides more robust provisions for the removal of board members and the commissioner.

A number of extraordinary claims have been made by the members of opposition in their contributions to this debate. Contrary to opposition claims, the model is consistent with what Julian Gardner recommended in his report. In particular it is consistent with the following recommendations. Recommendation 88

makes it clear that a full-time position of commissioner should be created and that the commissioner should chair a board of between five and seven members. The bill provides for exactly that.

Recommendation 89 is that the board should have a clear strategic oversight function, and the bill provides for this. Recommendation 90 is that:

The commissioner should delegate operational powers to a chief executive officer who is not a member of the board.

The bill enables this delegation to occur.

My office has consulted with Mr Julian Gardner in about his recommendations, particularly the recommendation about the chief executive officer. Mr Gardner has indicated that he never envisaged the CEO position as being a statutory one and that the model that has been proposed in the bill is consistent with his recommendations.

I will correct some clear misunderstandings that the opposition has about the bill. It was alleged quite falsely by the member for Malvern that I as Attorney-General would appoint the CEO of the commission. Any CEO or chief operating officer will be appointed by the commissioner. It is absolute nonsense for the member for Malvern to be saying this.

The bill is consistent with Julian Gardner's recommendations. Power will not be concentrated in the hands of the commissioner. The bill clearly provides for a board, and the commissioner's administration of the commission will be carried out in accordance with the policies, priorities and strategies determined by that board.

Finally, the bill will not provide wide-ranging powers for the commission. I think the member for Malvern indicated in his very high-pitched contribution that the bill would provide wide-ranging powers for the commission to search premises and seize items, for goodness sake!

Mr O'Brien interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Howard) — Order! The member for Malvern is not in his seat.

Mr HULLS — The bill is simply about good governance to facilitate the commission in the performance of its current functions.

The government is very proud to be taking action to encourage full participation by all Victorians in the economy and the community by removing barriers to that participation. Having a modern and effective

governance structure for the commission is a critical part of achieving this. It will enable the commission to effectively carry out its functions on behalf of the Victorian community.

Many contributors from both sides of the house went back in history to remind members about the history of the commission. Some referred to Moira Rayner, the former equal opportunity commissioner, and what happened to her under the former Kennett government.

Dr Napthine — Crook!

Mr HULLS — The member for South-West Coast has called something out. I bet he does not have the guts to say what he just said in this place outside the house. It is important to make this point, because it was the Kennett government that sacked the equal opportunity commissioner. You only have to go back to many past newspaper articles about Moira Rayner to see that.

I refer to the *Age* of 27 October 1993 and the headline ‘Moira Rayner’s job axed in revamp’. We all know what the views of those opposite are in relation to equal opportunity. It is a bit like in *Groundhog Day*. Members of the opposition want to go back to the past and get rid of any semblance of equal opportunity in this state. But, worse than that, the member for Malvern in his contribution accused Ms Rayner of acting corruptly. That is what he said. He actually accused her of acting corruptly. The fact is that the member for Malvern well knows that Ms Rayner has never been found guilty of acting corruptly at all. In fact she was charged with an offence and acquitted by a court of law. That is an unequivocal fact.

In light of those accusations the member for Malvern should be reminded of the privileges in this Parliament and that those privileges carry with them great responsibility. We must always take care not to abuse the privileges of this place. As parliamentarians we are entitled to vigorous advocacy in our contribution to debate, but there are some clear and appropriate limits. I am advised that the member for Malvern is a former member of the Victorian Bar. As a barrister he would know that making statements of this kind — in effect, if you like, misleading the court — constitutes a very serious breach of professional and ethical duties. Such breaches have led to barristers being struck off the roll.

The member for Malvern has a choice. He can go outside this place and make that accusation — and by the look on his face he does not have the guts to do it — or he can stand up in this place and make a personal explanation and say that he was wrong in his

accusations against this particular person. He knows that Ms Rayner was found not guilty by a jury. He knew that to be the case when he came into this place yesterday and accused her of acting corruptly. He is a disgrace to his profession if he is not prepared to repeat this outside the house and take the risk of being sued. He is too gutless to do that. Not only that, if he had made such accusations while at the bar, he would have been struck off. The fact is this man is a disgrace to the legal profession, a disgrace to this Parliament and he does not have the guts to stand by what he said. We can only see if he will stand up this afternoon and make a personal explanation.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Howard) — I remind the member for Malvern and the member for South-West Coast that they are out of their places and that interjections are unruly.

Mr HULLS — It is beyond the pale for the member for Malvern to make the accusations that he made in the house yesterday. He should apologise to Ms Rayner for his grubby slur on her reputation. He should apologise to the Parliament for his outrageous conduct. If he is not prepared to repeat the accusation outside this place, then he should retract those remarks immediately and make an unreserved apology to Ms Rayner. I call on him immediately to make a personal explanation in this place in relation to those matters. But you can bet London to a brick that he will not be prepared to do it, because he wants to hide here in cowards castle and make what he knows to be false allegations. It is worse for him, because apparently he is legally trained.

The fact is that this was not accidental. This was a deliberate slur. It is not the sort of slur that the shadow Attorney-General would make. The shadow Attorney-General and I might have our differences in relation to these matters, but there is no way that he would make such a slur. Even the former shadow Attorney-General would not do so. We have had our differences in the past on a whole range of issues, but he understands the law and ethics and knows that such a slur is false, misleading, outrageous and defamatory if made outside this place. He would not be prepared to make that accusation, but the grub from Malvern is more than happy to. He knows that what he said is wrong, false and defamatory, but he has not got far to go. It is probably about 30 or 40 metres. That is all he has to do: he can walk 30 or 40 metres outside this place and make the accusation, but he will not do it. Anything he says in relation to this bill is a nonsense. This is a very important and appropriate reform. We do accept the allegations that have been made in relation to

the governance structure that have been put by the opposition, and we fully support this new governance structure.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 51

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Allan, Ms | Kosky, Ms |
| Andrews, Mr | Languiller, Mr |
| Barker, Ms | Lim, Mr |
| Beattie, Ms | Lobato, Ms |
| Brooks, Mr | Lupton, Mr |
| Cameron, Mr | Maddigan, Mrs |
| Campbell, Ms | Marshall, Ms |
| Carli, Mr | Merlino, Mr |
| Crutchfield, Mr | Morand, Ms |
| D'Ambrosio, Ms | Munt, Ms |
| Donnellan, Mr | Nardella, Mr |
| Duncan, Ms | Neville, Ms |
| Eren, Mr | Noonan, Mr |
| Foley, Mr | Pallas, Mr |
| Graley, Ms | Pandazopoulos, Mr |
| Green, Ms | Perera, Mr |
| Hardman, Mr | Pike, Ms |
| Harkness, Dr | Richardson, Ms |
| Helper, Mr | Robinson, Mr |
| Herbert, Mr | Scott, Mr |
| Holding, Mr | Seitz, Mr |
| Howard, Mr | Stensholt, Mr |
| Hudson, Mr | Thomson, Ms |
| Hulls, Mr | Treziase, Mr |
| Ingram, Mr | Wynne, Mr |
| Kairouz, Ms | |

Noes, 32

| | |
|---------------|----------------|
| Asher, Ms | Northe, Mr |
| Baillieu, Mr | O'Brien, Mr |
| Blackwood, Mr | Powell, Mrs |
| Burgess, Mr | Ryan, Mr |
| Clark, Mr | Shardey, Mrs |
| Crisp, Mr | Smith, Mr K. |
| Delahunty, Mr | Smith, Mr R. |
| Dixon, Mr | Sykes, Dr |
| Fyffe, Mrs | Thompson, Mr |
| Hodgett, Mr | Tilley, Mr |
| Jasper, Mr | Victoria, Mrs |
| Kotsiras, Mr | Wakeling, Mr |
| McIntosh, Mr | Walsh, Mr |
| Morris, Mr | Weller, Mr |
| Mulder, Mr | Wells, Mr |
| Napthine, Dr | Wooldridge, Ms |

Motion agreed to.

Read second time; by leave, proceeded to third reading.

Third reading

The SPEAKER — Order! As the required statement has been made under section 85(5)(c) of the Constitution Act 1975, the third reading of the bill is required to be passed by an absolute majority.

Motion agreed to by absolute majority.

Read third time.

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 4 February; motion of Mr HULLS (Attorney-General).

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — Last night I comprehensively destroyed the arguments from members of the opposition in relation to its proposed amendment, and I will not put them through any more pain. We are not supporting this ludicrous amendment.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Consideration in detail

Clause 1

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, lines 6 to 8, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

This amendment amends clause 1 to remove a reference to time limits applying to the commencement of proceedings against a child for summary offences. It will be a test of a substantive amendment that I am proposing, which is to amend clause 376 of the bill to reinstate the current 12-month time limit for commencement of proceedings against a child for summary offences, rather than the six-month time limit proposed by the government. The commencement of proceedings in this context, as I indicated in my remarks on Tuesday, is when a charge sheet is filed. What we are talking about is the fact the police will be required to have brought a charge within six months of a child committing a summary offence. Otherwise they will not be able to bring that charge without a special application to the court or without the written agreement of the offender.

In his remarks last night, the Attorney-General reinforced the general maxim of the louder the bellowing, the weaker the case. That was certainly so last night. With this amendment the government is proposing to make it even more difficult for our overworked police force to uphold the law against juvenile offenders who commit summary offences. Summary offences include offences carrying a term of

imprisonment of up to two years jail. Common examples would be assault or graffiti.

The government's intention within this bill is to specify that graffiti vandals or gangs of youths who bash innocent citizens can escape punishment if they can avoid being identified or caught for six months. The reason the Attorney-General has given for introducing this new time limit is that he wants to 'put the onus back on the police to commence and complete investigations within a timely period', and further, if young offenders are not charged within six months, 'a whole range of therapeutic justice measures cannot be interacted with that young child'.

The Attorney-General needs to come down out of his ivory tower. He needs to get out and speak to ordinary members of the community and ask them how therapeutic it is for them if they have their front fence or their local park graffitied and then see the offenders escape punishment because the police cannot identify them until they can match their graffiti tags six months later, or until they can track them down, having identified them. Similarly, the Attorney-General needs to ask parents how therapeutic it will be for them when their son is bullied and punched on the way home from school and the gang of young thugs involved is not identified until several months later after they have been filmed somewhere else on closed-circuit camera and not caught until the police can track them down via their school.

What the Attorney-General said yesterday was an insult to hardworking police, who are being overwhelmed by the rising tide of street crime and are struggling to protect the community, despite a desperate shortage of front-line police. Does the Attorney-General think our police are lazy and cannot be bothered to lay charges until months later? Does he not realise the hours of work the police have to put into cataloguing and matching graffiti tags and into identifying and finding offenders, or the long hours they spend staking out graffiti hot spots in order to catch vandals? Does he expect that our police force are going to put off their investigations of burglaries, robberies or drug trafficking and put them on hold while they rush to meet a six-month deadline on filing juvenile graffiti charges?

The Attorney-General claims the bill will have a get-out provision that allows the police to apply to the Children's Court for extensions of time of up to six months. That is an absurd argument. To invoke that so-called get-out provision will pose enormous drains of extra time on both the police force and the Children's Court. Does the Attorney-General not realise that

Victoria's Children's Court already has the longest backlog of cases waiting to be heard of any children's court in Australia? There were 5591 cases waiting to be heard as of June last year, up from 4398 in 2007. How much longer are those backlogs going to become if the court has to spend hours hearing and deciding countless applications for extensions of time. The reality is that in many instances the police will just give up and the offenders will escape scot-free.

The Attorney-General's other claim is that offenders could be charged with more serious indictable offences instead, where time limits do not apply. However such offences are often more complex to prosecute and prove and can be heard only by a Children's Court member who is a County Court judge. To use indictable offences would simply add to costs and delays. It would also defeat the entire point of introducing a time limit in the first place.

The Attorney-General should abandon his foolish and ill-considered proposal and accept the amendment moved by the opposition. If he fails to do that he will only send a further signal to criminals in Victoria that the Brumby government is soft on crime and out of touch with the community.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — No, I do not think the police are lazy, but I think the member who just spoke is lazy, lazy, lazy. Do members remember the scene out of *The Exorcist* when the girl's head just spins round and round? That is exactly what must have been happening to him last night when he realised he had misread the bill, because what he said was that this piece of legislation means that matters have to be reached within six months. Those are his words, not my words — reached — and he was wrong, wrong, wrong!

Mr McIntosh interjected.

Mr HULLS — That is not what he said. He said, 'Reached within six months'.

Mr McIntosh interjected.

Mr HULLS — It is in *Hansard*, so either the Hansard reporters are wrong or the shadow minister is wrong. He said they have to be reached and that is because he was hibernating over summer, did not do the hard work, had the doona pulled over his head thinking, 'Oh, my God, I have to go back into question time and I am going to get mauled in Parliament'.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Could we keep it down a little bit.

Mr McIntosh — On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do not know whether the member is well. He seems to be a bit disturbed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! That is not a point of order.

Mr HULLS — The fact is that the poor fellow has not had any sleep over summer, was dreading coming back to Parliament, realising, ‘I have not done my homework’, or ‘A dog must have eaten my homework’ — because he has not read the bill. He was wrong in relation to his assertion yesterday; he is wrong now.

This is supported by everybody who believes in getting kids before the court at the earliest possible occasion. It is supported by Youthlaw, and members should have a look at the group’s submission. There are opportunities to extend it beyond six months if need be, but it is not about finalising the matter; it is about just filing the charge. That is all it is and we believe that is absolutely appropriate. It is supported by most stakeholders. It is absolutely crucial that we as a community look after our kids. That is what this bill is about.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived and I am required to put the following question. We are dealing with the amendment moved to clause 1. Because this amendment proposes deleting words from the clause, the question is:

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

All those supporting the amendment moved by the member for Box Hill should vote no.

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

Ayes, 49

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Allan, Ms | Languiller, Mr |
| Andrews, Mr | Lim, Mr |
| Beattie, Ms | Lobato, Ms |
| Brooks, Mr | Lupton, Mr |
| Cameron, Mr | Maddigan, Mrs |
| Campbell, Ms | Marshall, Ms |
| Carli, Mr | Merlino, Mr |
| Crutchfield, Mr | Morand, Ms |
| D’Ambrosio, Ms | Munt, Ms |
| Donnellan, Mr | Nardella, Mr |
| Duncan, Ms | Neville, Ms |
| Eren, Mr | Noonan, Mr |
| Foley, Mr | Pallas, Mr |
| Graley, Ms | Pandazopoulos, Mr |
| Green, Ms | Perera, Mr |
| Hardman, Mr | Pike, Ms |

Harkness, Dr
Helper, Mr
Herbert, Mr
Holding, Mr
Howard, Mr
Hudson, Mr
Hulls, Mr
Kairouz, Ms
Kosky, Ms

Richardson, Ms
Robinson, Mr
Scott, Mr
Seitz, Mr
Stensholt, Mr
Thomson, Ms
Trezise, Mr
Wynne, Mr

Noes, 32

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
Napthine, 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; clauses 2 to 385 agreed to; schedules 1 to 3 agreed to.

Bill agreed to without amendment.

Third reading

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! As the required statement has been made under section 85(5)(c) of the Constitution Act 1975, the third reading of the bill is required to be passed by an absolute majority.

Motion agreed to by absolute majority.

Read third time.

ACTING PUBLIC ADVOCATE

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise that, today, the Speaker administered to Philip John Grano, the acting public advocate, the oath required by schedule 3 of the Guardianship and Administration Act 1986.

Remaining business postponed on motion of Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services).

ADJOURNMENT

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Water: Target 155 campaign

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — The matter I have is for the Minister for Water. The action I am seeking is for him to stop wasting taxpayers money advertising the government's Target 155 campaign. The argument that I put forward is that it is legitimate for a government to advertise water restrictions to inform the public about the restrictions themselves because the public can be fined under the water restriction regime. Information that has been provided to me by the minister shows that in the city there are four authorised water officers with City West Water with the capacity to fine, three with South East Water, one with Yarra Valley Water and two with the Western Region Water Corporation, which covers some areas within the city.

I accept it is legitimate for some discreet advertising because people can be fined under water restrictions. However, Target 155 is voluntary. The public cannot be fined. Evidence of this is in a letter I have received from the Minister for Water dated 2 January 2009 where he says:

The Target 155 campaign is voluntary and therefore the government and the water corporations cannot force the community to comply with the target.

He then goes on to say:

However, the aim of the campaign is to encourage everyone to reduce their water consumption and to raise awareness of the amount of water each person is using.

The government is transferring its guilt for its failure to secure a supply of water onto, in this instance, Melbourne's residents. The reality is that it is the government that should feel guilty about its failure to provide water. It should not be wasting taxpayers money telling residents they should cut their consumption to 155 litres when it is clear that this target is voluntary. Melbourne residents will only be fined if they contravene restrictions.

To make matters worse, the government is now running advertisements in the papers and on television to provide a weekly update. The latest ones say:

The weather has been hotter —

Wow! Did we need the advertising to tell us that?

The weather has been hotter, but we all need to work harder to save water.

The government needs to work harder to provide water and the government should have worked harder years ago to increase the supply of water. We should have had a dam. We should have had a desalination plant. We should have had an increased supply of recycled water. All these things could have been done. Instead the government's solution has been to tell Melbourne customers to cut back their water consumption. To make matters worse, what the government is now doing is wasting taxpayers money with spin and nonsense argument. I call on the minister to stop this ridiculous waste of taxpayers money.

Racing: Living Country Racing program

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Racing. The action I request is that the minister ensure that the government supports country racing clubs by continuing the Living Country Racing program. The program is important to clubs in rural and regional Victoria as it helps them to provide facilities that meet the occupational health and safety needs of clubs as well as the amenity expectations of the general community.

This program was first introduced by the government in 2001 and is designed specifically to assist racing clubs that are located in rural and regional Victoria. Clubs have benefited from that program across the Seymour electorate, including Alexandra, Healesville, Yarra Valley and Yea. There are two other clubs in the Seymour electorate — the Kilmore and Seymour racing clubs — which have also benefited greatly from our Racing Industry Development program.

The racing clubs in my electorate provide significant economic and social benefits to their communities, and race days are often an opportunity for people to catch up with friends and family. People come from all over the state, boosting the local economy of those towns on race days through their patronage of restaurants, accommodation, petrol stations and any number of other businesses.

As the minister will be aware, racing clubs across the state are also concerned about the *Victorian Racecourse and Training Facilities Directions Paper* released by Racing Victoria Ltd. In the Seymour electorate clubs are being asked to respond to sustainability test conditions as well as to a proposal by RVL to reduce the number of industry-funded training venues. Clubs and communities no doubt are nervous about the implications if some of the proposals come to bear. It has been disappointing to see opportunistic political

point-scoring from the member for South-West Coast on this issue because country communities know the value of their race clubs. I am sure they will make great submissions to RVL.

I would also like to thank RVL for providing me with the opportunity to put to it some of the concerns of clubs in my electorate and for agreeing to engage with those clubs to ensure that it has a clear understanding of the problems and history of the individual clubs and why they might be considered not as sustainable as Country Racing Victoria might like them to be. I am pleased to say that RVL has already met with representatives from Healesville Racing Club.

The Living Country Racing program will provide racing clubs with the confidence that they will be able to undertake works that will help to make them more sustainable. There have been some great projects across the Seymour electorate. I am thinking of the amenities buildings at Yea racecourse, upgrades to the canteen facilities and installation of a disabled toilet at Healesville, installation of running rails at Yea racecourse, and a number of grants provided across all those different race clubs. I commend the program to the minister and ask that he continue to support country racing clubs by continuing the benefits of this program.

Ambulance services: Cobram and Yarrawonga

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health, and I trust he will come into the chamber to respond. I refer to concern about the unsatisfactory ambulance service in parts of my electorate and the need for action to be taken to upgrade the services provided at both Cobram and Yarrawonga.

I refer to a Mrs Veronica Campbell, who suffered an ectopic pregnancy and who was a patient at the Cobram district hospital, and the difficulties experienced in shifting her to Goulburn Valley Health by ambulance before she died at Goulburn Valley Health on 31 December 2008. The matter is now the subject of a coronial inquiry, and I will not go into details I have in relation to that.

The chairman of Cobram District Health provided detailed letters to the Minister for Health and to the senior executive officer of Ambulance Victoria to make sure that they were clear on what the situation had been as far as Cobram District Health was concerned. I hope the minister will be able to provide some further information in relation to that and to the investigation that is taking place. It was an unfortunate death in unfortunate circumstances in this case.

I add that staffing in the ambulance service at Cobram has been unsatisfactory for a long period of time, and the same is true at Yarrawonga. The minister visited my electorate in the earlier part of last year and met with representatives from the Yarrawonga District Health Service. We presented strong evidence to him that an upgraded ambulance service was needed at Yarrawonga. He indicated that would be investigated and there would be consideration of additional staffing at the ambulance service at Yarrawonga and to assist the hospital. In many cases there might be one ambulance officer available, and they are backed up by hospital staff. The hospital wants to find out what action will be taken by the minister in upgrading the services, particularly at Yarrawonga and at Cobram. Yarrawonga hospital contacted me again recently, because we have not had a positive response from the minister in relation to this issue.

In relation to the provision of a new ambulance station at Yarrawonga, there is concern that it may be built adjacent to the new police station which is to be opened in a couple of weeks time, yet it is also believed it is part of the master plan that the new facility be built at the Yarrawonga District Health Service. I ask the minister to address these issues urgently. We need an upgraded ambulance service in my electorate, particularly at Yarrawonga and Cobram.

Manufacturing: south-eastern suburbs

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Dandenong) — The matter I raise is for the Minister for Industry and Trade in another place. The new minister is well capable and understands industry and manufacturing, given his background as an official in the National Union of Workers, and he understands the south-eastern suburbs and the importance of industry to our national economy and for local jobs. The action I seek is for the minister to join with me in visiting the region and meeting with industry groups, industry leaders, trade unions and members of the workforce in the area to be able to not only hear about issues resulting from the global financial crisis but also to be able to plan and put in place a strategy to help mitigate the potential negative impact that the global financial crisis will have on our great manufacturing industry in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. That industry comprises 40 per cent of Victoria's manufacturing capacity.

Certainly industry has made huge adjustments in the region. It has been going well and expanding and gearing itself to be competitive in the national economy. It has been doing well while the international economy has been strong, but we have problems around the corner — problems that we can mitigate.

That is why I want the minister to come out with me to meet with the workforce and representatives of the industry.

We have had an announcement recently of job losses at Nissan Casting because of the downturn in the Japanese automotive industry. That is just one small thing; there are many other businesses in similar situations. I know the minister wants to be able to go out and see what the patterns will be locally and what the potential job impacts might be locally. If residents of a large portion of the southern and eastern parts of Melbourne work in manufacturing, they most likely work in the Dandenong region, which has a huge industrial capacity.

We have invested heavily and have seen significant private sector investment in the region — for example, the new Jayco facilities — and the planning processes there were supported by government. We now have the biggest caravan manufacturer in the world located in Dandenong South. We have seen a huge amount of public infrastructure created, which recognises the importance of freight and logistics to industry in the south-eastern suburbs. We have seen the immense M1 upgrade — a \$1.1 billion project that will be so important for industry, enabling quick movement of goods, services and members of the workforce. We have seen EastLink open up and there is the Dandenong southern bypass, the Greens Road upgrade, Western Port Highway upgrades and all these sorts of projects.

I ask the minister to put in place a process so that he can visit the region soon. I look forward to working with him. We have a lots of interesting initiatives and proposals in the region, including from the economic development unit of the City of Greater Dandenong. I look forward to him taking action and joining me in visiting workers in the Dandenong industrial area.

Breast cancer: digital mammography

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — My request is to the Minister for Health and I ask him to take action to deliver on the Labor Party's 2006 election promise to introduce digital mammography to Victoria. I cite the 27 October 2006 press release of the then government:

Breast cancer screening services for women living in rural and regional Victoria would be upgraded by a re-elected Bracks government to state-of-the-art digital technology, allowing for faster and more accurate results ...

... country women would be among the greatest beneficiaries of the \$10 million statewide upgrade, which will replace existing analogue mammography systems ...

The government was re-elected but we still have not seen the \$10 million, nor has the program been implemented.

Just by way of background, I would like to inform the house that more than one in eight women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime, and breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer mortality in Australia.

Mammography remains the mainstay for early breast cancer diagnosis and its performance depends on image quality. Mammographic screening has been used for 20 to 30 years. Because of the type of screening used now there is a technical limitation of conventional screen film mammography, or CM, which occurs when there is insufficient contrast in radiographic density between normal breast parenchyma and cancer. About 10 to 20 per cent of palpable breast cancers are not visible on CM for this reason.

As women age, less dense breast fat replaces normally dense breast parenchyma so density contrast limitations have a greater impact on younger women. On the other hand digital mammography has demonstrated superior diagnostic accuracy to CM for cancer detection in women with dense breasts and women under 50 years of age. The evidence exists for its superior demonstration of microcalcifications.

It is very clear that this is a very important program to help fight cancer. I do not wish to detract in any way from the necessity for introducing this program, but maybe the fact that it has not been implemented is more a comment about the minister's own commitment rather than the very disingenuous and puerile accusations he made in his contribution previously about my commitment to the treatment of cancer, which is very strong. The fact that I have raised this yet again in the house is a demonstration that I think this is a particularly important program to be introduced for the benefit of women. The promise was made over two years ago, but it still has not been delivered upon.

Mordialloc Creek Bridge: naming

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — The matter I wish to raise this afternoon is for the attention and action of the Minister for Roads and Ports. The action that I seek is for the new Mordialloc bridge to be renamed the Jack Pompei bridge or Pompei's bridge — whichever is preferred — in honour of our local boat builder, the late Jack Pompei, who received a Medal of the Order of Australia.

On 2 February the Minister for Roads and Ports launched a community consultation process to name the

Mordialloc bridge. The member for Carrum and I are supportive of the community consultation process that has been put in place by the minister. We have also been contacted by many members of our local community, individuals, groups, local business owners, boaters, beachgoers and members of Mr Pompei's family. Our local papers have been filled with letters of support from locals keen to have this honour bestowed on the late Jack Pompei.

The member for Carrum and I are confident that our community supports this naming and, together with Kingston City Council, we believe that Jack should be honoured in this manner. The Mordialloc bridge has recently been rebuilt — it was a \$11.6 million project. Jack was the first person to walk across the new bridge. I thank VicRoads for organising that. I have been told by Jack's family that he was very pleased and gratified by the gesture.

Even though Jack was a very modest man, I believe he would also have been gratified by the bridge being named after him. It would be a lasting memorial to his family name and a fitting tribute to his life of service to our community.

Jack made beautiful individually designed wooden clinker boats. He saved the lives of thousands of boaters who got into trouble on Port Phillip Bay. He saved Mordialloc pier and taught children how to fish. On the day of his funeral Victoria Police stopped the traffic on the Nepean Highway at Mordialloc to allow his funeral procession to leave the church and proceed along Nepean Highway past his boatbuilding works for his final farewell to his beloved Mordialloc Creek. I have never seen the traffic stop on Nepean Highway before.

The renaming of Mordialloc bridge would also have bipartisan support. The member for Nepean is an old friend of Jack's, and he wishes it to be known that he also supports naming the Mordialloc Creek bridge the Jack Pompei bridge or the Pompei bridge after Jack as a tribute to his old friend. This is truly a case of overwhelming support for an action. I urge the minister to facilitate this lasting legacy to a local legend, Jack Pompei, and his family.

Schools: integration aide funding

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the government to adequately fund integration aides, early intervention and professional help for all students in our primary schools, secondary schools and preschools who have learning difficulties or disabilities, speech or language disorders or other

disabilities which impact on their educational opportunities.

The current state government policy discriminates against those students in our education system who are most disadvantaged. The Auditor-General report that was tabled yesterday, *Literacy and Numeracy Achievement*, highlights in recommendation 6.4 that one of the priorities is to:

improve identification and targeting of students achieving well below the expected level in literacy and numeracy in the early years of schooling in all schools, and sustain support for those who need it as they progress through school.

This is an issue I have raised a number of times in this Parliament. It is very concerning. I have had a large amount of representation not only from parents but from families of those young people in our education system who have disabilities. I have also had a number of school principals and teachers expressing their concern. We have recently seen this issue extend also into the preschool system. Those people have outlined exactly how this current policy impacts on their families.

The underfunding of support for students with high needs sets exactly the wrong example and the wrong principle right from the outset. Basically parents have to prove that their children are intellectually disabled to get the support they need in the education system. For students to start in the education system and receive an indication that they are dumb or below the other students actually discourages their learning achievement throughout their experience in the education system. The assessments have to prove that these individuals have severe disorders.

We have had a number of examples and case studies of individual students falling just below the required level. Whilst they are impacted in a number of ways, for example by speech disorders, problems with intellectual capacity and other issues like the reactions from other students, the advice of medical experts is that by the time those students get their next assessment they will reach the criteria. So for two or three years the school does not get funding for the assistance it needs to bring those students through the system. They fall further and further behind.

We have a large number of students falling through the gaps in our education system. The action I seek is for the government to make sure that funding is available so that those students who are the most at need in our education system are given the support they need to reach their full potential in the education system.

Brothels: illegal

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. It is in response to the number of illegal brothels in my area that have come to public attention in the past few years. A number have been raided, but as they are closed new ones seem to appear. The action I am asking of the minister is to ensure there is greater intervention and there are greater controls and a response from Consumer Affairs Victoria and related agencies to these illegal brothels. The illegal brothels not only do not have health checks but are often incredibly exploitative. They often pick on vulnerable young women. A number of them have also been involved with illegal immigrants. We have seen exploitation of women who have been imported, if you like, as prostitutes as part of what is now a worldwide trade in women. I believe it is akin to a form of slavery.

I ask the minister to ensure there is a greater response from Consumer Affairs Victoria. There are unscrupulous individuals who prey on the vulnerable and create these illegal brothels. There are a number of legal brothels in my area. At least they are covered by local government laws that restrict where they can be set up, and they are under an enormous number of controls. One of the brothels in my area was recently prosecuted for having a 14-year-old working as a prostitute for a number of days.

It is important that there is a coordinated response. I applaud the work the minister has done and the work of a former Labor MP, Glenyys Romanes, who chaired the Prostitution Control Act ministerial advisory committee. It identified issues and sought a greater overall response from government. It is important that there is action. This is of great concern to myself, local government, the welfare organisations and the residents as we see these illegal brothels operating in the area. Clearly there is a need for a coordinated response as we weed out those brothels and ensure that vulnerable women are protected. We need to deal with what seems to be a blight on my local community. As I said, I applaud the minister's interest and action in this area.

Bass electorate: health services

Mr K. SMITH (Bass) — I wish to raise an issue with the Minister for Health and ask him to ensure that Bass Coast Regional Health, or the Wonthaggi hospital, is upgraded to a subregional hospital during the next 12 months. There is a drastic need for this upgrade as the Bass Coast area is one of the fastest growing municipalities outside metropolitan Melbourne. The hospital services around 30 000 full-time residents but

this number can be increased to in excess of 100 000 people over Christmas and Easter and during the major events that are held in the shire during the year. Also, there is a huge influx of people every weekend. The hospital is registered as a rural hospital. The closest subregional hospitals are at Warragul, Sale and Bairnsdale, and the nearest major Melbourne public hospitals are at Berwick, Dandenong and Clayton. There are no private hospitals in the Bass Coast area, which puts additional pressure on the Wonthaggi hospital.

Currently the accident and emergency area, which was built by the Kennett government, has capacity for four trolleys and sees a minimum of 11 000 patients over the year, which leads to waits of up to 5 to 6 hours for some people in busy times. I have no complaints about the hospital or the staff who are under extreme stress and perform magnificently. However, although people who have critical problems are seen immediately, there are unnecessary delays in getting treatment. Being in a rural area with a lack of local doctors, the population and visitors suffer with delays of up to two or three weeks sometimes in seeing permanent doctors and go to the hospital to get emergency treatment. Some doctors have in fact closed their books to new patients.

The hospital has 40 multistay beds but no high-dependency beds. Being upgraded to subregional status would mean more of everything and the ability to deal with a higher level of complexity. It would give us some specialists, high-dependency beds and the ability to manage more complex conditions. Currently straightforward joint replacements can be done but if a patient has a heart problem or high blood pressure they have to be transported to a hospital in Dandenong or Clayton, which are 1½ hours travel up the highway. Going to Warragul, Sale or Traralgon is not an option. I understand that consultants have just been appointed to look at the service that will be needed over the next 10 years. Twelve months ago the minister talked about upgrading the hospital at Wonthaggi to subregional status, but as it has taken this long for consultants to be appointed I must ask how long it will take to get things really happening.

Some of the priorities include expanding the accident and emergency department for more doctors and nurses, high-dependency beds, more acute beds, integrated cancer care, more visiting specialists and an on-site specialist. The dreaded desalination plant being forced on the community down there will bring hundreds of extra workers into the area each day. I am asking the minister to look at this at his very earliest possible convenience.

Child care: Port Melbourne

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. The specific action I seek from her is that she take the action necessary to ensure the proposed Port Melbourne family and children's hub proceeds. For the purposes of ensuring the house is aware of this exciting proposal that is in the interests of the residents of Port Melbourne and surrounding communities, might I say that this is an area of particularly high child-care demand and need. This need has been made more acute by the demise of the private child-care company ABC Learning, despite that business being one of the most subsidised businesses in corporate Australia because of massive taxpayer contributions from the federal government.

Two ABC child-care centres in the surrounding community are currently under a cloud following the collapse of ABC Learning. Fortunately the combined efforts of the federal Labor government and the City of Port Phillip saw the pre-Christmas crisis of these centres facing immediate closure pass for the time being, but the time is rapidly looming when their fate will need to be determined. There is increasing concern in my community that there be moves to secure affordable, community-based child-care positions in the community. The Port Melbourne family and children's hub offers the prospect the children, parents and families of this community deserve.

The project that has been identified goes to the use of land in Liardet Street, Port Melbourne, that currently has a dilapidated former private house on one block and the Lady Forster Kindergarten on another. Close by is the former Pickles Street Primary School site. Part of that site was sold off by the former coalition government but the rest was saved by my predecessor, a former Deputy Premier, who was the member for Albert Park, and it went into community use when this government was elected in 1999. This site is now the home of a hospitality employment and training group and St Kilda Youth Services.

Nearby is the former Albert Park College site, which is rapidly becoming the home of a new excellence-based secondary college. The Albert Park College child-care centre which operated at Albert Park College has temporarily relocated to the Port Melbourne Primary School whilst its long-term future is decided. In addition to this, scattered throughout Port Melbourne is a range of early childhood and maternal health services operating in the manner they can best achieve.

This proposal will bring all those facilities together into a state-of-the-art facility that will deliver integrated maternal health, early childhood development, long day-care needs and sessional kindergarten care to ensure our children have the best possible start in life.

Responses

Mr HULLS (Minister for Racing) — I thank the member for Seymour for the matter he raised regarding the Brumby government's ongoing commitment to racing in regional and rural Victoria and in particular the Living Country Racing program. I am very pleased to report that the Brumby government is committed to the Living Country Racing program and that funding is available until 2011. This year will mark the eighth consecutive year of the Living Country Racing program, and I will be releasing this year's guidelines shortly.

Since its introduction in 2001–02 some 96 clubs from rural and regional Victoria have benefited from this program. In addition to the Living Country Racing program, the Brumby government recently committed funding of \$45 million as part of an \$86 million regional racing infrastructure fund to ensure that country racing has the infrastructure it needs to flourish well into the future. This funding represents the most significant single investment by government in rural and regional racing venues in Victoria's history. It is in stinging contrast to what the former government contributed to rural and regional racing which was absolutely nothing. Zilch!

As the member for Seymour would know, there is an independent structure which governs racing in this state. RVL (Racing Victoria Ltd) is independent of government. In 1995 the Victoria Racing Club (VRC) planned to embark upon consultation with the industry in relation to the restructure of the industry. I note a quote at the time states:

It's clear to us that the emphasis the VRC is putting on ... is to ask racing clubs to run their own show and run them well. They say — we are going to set the goalposts ... and then it's up to the racing clubs to perform within that target.

If they met that target they would have a 'bright and rosy future'. If they struggle with that, then you have to question whether they can continue to be a drag on the industry.

The words sound familiar because I have always said there should be an independent structure running the industry, but they are actually the words of the member for South-West Coast which appeared in the *Hamilton Spectator*. They reveal what the opposition thought of country racing when it was last in government. It was more than happy to see country clubs closed down.

Things have not changed. While the Brumby government has backed its word of support for regional, rural, country and picnic racing with action, all the opposition has done is scaremonger and spread misinformation about the racing industry.

It is true that the member for South-West Coast takes an interest in racing, and he took an interest back in 1995 particularly following the release of the VRC's leadership 2000 plan, which he would remember. Among other things it earmarked dozens of country clubs for closure. It was claimed in one newspaper that the then government had its own secret list of clubs to close. The member for South-West Coast is quoted as saying:

Racing was big business employing thousands of people in breeding, training, racing and gambling, but it was facing increasing challenges and competition from other forms of entertainment and support — and particularly other forms of gambling ...

And I absolutely agree with that. He continues:

Therefore it's essential that the racing industry examines how it operates and, if necessary, introduces changes to ensure this great sport is well placed to be successful well into the 21st century.

I agree with that. He is also reported as saying that he supports the concept that racing people should run their industry free from government influence. That is exactly what he said, and I agree with him. That is why we set up RVL, and I am pleased it is supported by all sides of this house. Given these words one would expect the shadow minister to be out there supporting the extensive consultation process now being undertaken by Racing Victoria Ltd and Country Racing Victoria (CRV) on the future of racing, a future which among other things is focused on strengthening the industry and delivering a sustainable future for country and picnic racing.

Despite what he said back then, and despite knowing and being briefed on the details of Racing Victoria's 2020 plan and the subsequent directions paper on Victorian racecourse and training facilities, the member for South-West Coast has been out in rural and regional Victoria spreading misinformation and scaremongering about this issue. In fact he has purposely chosen to ignore RVL's chief executive Rob Hines, who has assured participants that the directions paper does not envisage the closure of any country racetrack in Victoria. The member for South-West Coast does not want to hear that. He chooses to ignore it because deep down he supports the closure of country tracks, as he did back in 1995.

The member for South-West Coast has form. He has form in talking down the industry. He is an expert in making scurrilous allegations in this place while refusing to back them up outside, which we saw last year when he had a go at RVL's director of integrity services. His determined endeavour to continue to talk down the racing industry and spread untruths about it in rural and regional Victoria is quite extraordinary. And it is not just that. I understand that Rob Hines spoke to the *Benalla Ensign* yesterday. He said:

Attempts by Dr Napthine to politicise what is a critical business and community matter for Victorian racing's future is unhelpful and appropriate.

He is wrong and mischievous in suggesting that these decisions are somehow influenced by the racing minister or the Premier.

The current public comments by Dr Napthine are incorrect and unhelpful to the proper conduct of racing in this state.

Accusations have been made by the member that it is the government's decision in relation to country racing, and it is the government's decision about how many meetings should be held at different tracks. That is just a nonsense.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr HULLS — I hear the interjection from the member opposite. The fact is that the member for South-West Coast supported RVL. He supported the independent structure, just as in 1995 he supported an independent structure and said that his views about the industry, as a politician, were irrelevant because the industry had to be run by racing people for the racing industry. That is what he said. That is on the one hand, and yet on the other hand he is now saying that it is the government of the day, and me, that decides what race meetings should be held where. It is clearly grossly hypocritical for him to run around the state saying it is the racing minister and the Premier who decide what race meetings should go ahead and that it is our plan for the future. It was good enough for him to support the industry being run by industry people back in 1995, but now he says it is and should be run by the government, and the government should decide exactly what meetings go ahead.

Today he received a letter from Rob Hines in relation to this matter. Rob Hines makes it quite clear to the member, and I quote:

Your interpretation that the directions paper is proposing to shut down training centres and is threatening the closure of racecourses is incorrect. RVL is fully committed to country racing, but the current fragmented approach to the management and development of training infrastructure is not sustainable.

The letter goes on to say:

Your statement —

that is the statement of the member for South-West Coast —

in regard to ‘putting up irrelevant “sustainability tests” to force ... picnic race meetings to close’ is considered to be an unfair conclusion. RVL places great weight on the community value of picnic racing and we are working constructively with these clubs to refine the tests to assist them establish a stronger foundation for their ongoing operation.

Finally, we refute your implication that the Brumby government is a party to the directions paper and that the Minister for Racing has a means of controlling RVL’s actions.

What the member has been saying is absolute nonsense. Let us remind ourselves of what he said. He said that if country clubs struggle, you have to question whether they can continue to be a drag on the industry. That is what he said back then, and that is what he believes, but he is now running around the place saying, ‘Goodness, the fact is that the government is now making decisions about which clubs stay open and which clubs close. It is all the government’. Yet back then he said that it should have nothing to do with the government of the day. It should be an independent body run by racing people for racing people.

That is what RVL does. That is what the RVL and CRV are doing. They are independent of government, and they are making decisions on behalf of the industry for the industry. They are consulting. If the member for South-West Coast has anything of any value to say in relation to this review, he should get off his backside and make a submission because that is what it is about. Submissions have been called for, and he should make a submission. He knows that a process of thorough consultation is being undertaken. All he has to do is make a submission. If he cannot write one himself he can go off and get someone to do it for him. If he is too lazy to make a submission, he gets an electorate allowance and he can use it to get a consultant to write one for him. He knows that what he has been saying around country Victoria is nonsense.

It is gross hypocrisy when you take into account what the member for South-West Coast said in 1995. He is purely playing politics with this industry. No-one takes him seriously, and you only have to look at what RVL has said to him. If he is going to be consistent he should get out there, apologise to country people, apologise to all those country tracks about which he has been scaremongering, and say, ‘I am sorry, but I forgot to tell

you that I support the process that is being undertaken by RVL because I supported it back in 1995’.

In 1995 he said the industry had to reinvigorate and regenerate, and he supported that process. Back then he said there should be no government involvement in the racing industry. He said it should be run by racing people for the racing industry. He should say that he was wrong, that he lied when he said it was run by the Minister for Racing and the Premier. Rob Hines says they have nothing to do with it and that they are absolutely independent of government. I hope from now on that we are bipartisan on this matter. After he has made his submission the member for South-West Coast should go, tail between his legs, to all those country tracks and apologise for the lies and misinformation that have been spread in relation to the RVL blueprint.

Mr ROBINSON (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — I thank the member for Brunswick for raising a serious issue — that is, the despicable practice of running illegal brothels, sometimes involving people who are brought into this country in circumstances of sexual servitude. I appreciate his longstanding interest in the matter and the interest other members have in the matter, notably the members for Albert Park and Richmond.

In commencing my response I will pick up on a point the member for Brunswick made. I want to join him in commending the outstanding work that has been done over a number of years by a former member of Parliament, Glenyys Romanes, in chairing the Prostitution Control Act Ministerial Advisory Committee. This is pretty thankless work. Prostitution is not a popular issue, and governments of all persuasions have struggled over many years to deal with it. Everyone would rather that it moved somewhere else, but in fact we do have an obligation to establish a legalised industry to maintain standards across the state. The government has been greatly assisted by the work of Glenyys Romanes and members of that committee for number of years. I again thank her for her contribution.

The member for Brunswick has urged me to ensure that further reforms are carried out insofar as Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) works with other agencies to ensure that there is compliance with our laws governing legalised prostitution in the running of brothels in the state. I assure him that we are committed to continuing the reform process that started last year. We have made up some good ground in recent months. The government did acknowledge last year that more needed to be done and that there had been a lack of

coordination between different agencies. We need to address that and to improve the validity of different agencies to work collaboratively to get more effective responses and to crack down on cases of illegal brothels.

The member for Brunswick has alluded to some recent work in cracking down on illegal brothels in his area, and I acknowledge that. I quote an excerpt from the *Moreland Leader* last week which details some of the progress that has been made. The member is probably aware that there was a police raid on a massage parlour in Brunswick on 12 December:

A spokeswoman from the department of immigration, one of five agencies involved, said the department joined the raids to identify 'issues of sexual servitude' and run immigration checks.

No issues of sex trafficking were found —

in this case. But the point we need to make here is that those raids involved a number of agencies. They involved Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV), the Australian Taxation Office, Australian Federal Police and the City of Moreland Council. That demonstrates a heightened degree of cooperation between different agencies. The article continues:

Moreland Inspector Sharon Cowden said two men were arrested and charged during the raids, the result of a month-long investigation by Brunswick police.

A 52-year-old Reservoir man arrested during the Coburg raid ...

has subsequently been charged with being an unlicensed service provider. Those charges will inevitably lead to the necessary actions.

Inspector Cowden —

and I agree with this —

praised Brunswick police for their 'fantastic efforts'.

That media report is the sign of a more positive and coordinated response from the different agencies. As well as that, in the city of Greater Dandenong the CAV has brought a set of charges, and that is positive.

Here, through this multifaceted approach, we are seeing different agencies using their powers in a coordinated way to make a more effective presence among those who might seek to operate beyond the reaches of the law. We are seeing CAV work far more constructively with police and with councils.

Last year we announced that we would reform the law, and I am pleased to say the prostitution control acts

which were passed through the Parliament at the end of last year have allowed the different agencies to undertake prosecutions with a lower threshold than was previously the case. Rather than having to prove that sexual services were actually provided, the test now is that they have to only have been offered. That is a huge advantage to different councils and to CAV and to police.

At the time we also committed to ensuring that there were firmly established memorandums of understanding between the different agencies so that there was no buck-passing as there had been in the past when cases like this arose. I can report that Consumer Affairs Victoria has completed a memorandum of understanding with the Municipal Association Victoria, which has been signed by both parties, and the cities of Yarra, Brimbank, Darebin, Greater Dandenong and Port Phillip have opted for an integrated enforcement pilot program. That is a good thing. The City of Melbourne has opted for it in principle and is completing the necessary administrative arrangements. This will greatly enhance the ability of councils to go out and ensure that at the first possible opportunity when reports are made there is compliance with the law. That fills a gap that has existed previously.

Similarly I can advise the member that Consumer Affairs Victoria and Victoria Police have signed a memorandum of understanding, and that again will remove some differences that have existed over a period of time between those two agencies.

We did commit to further research work, and some further research work has been commenced. A major research project has been planned by Monash University and we will be releasing an issues paper. All of these things are steps in the right direction. We should never forget that, as the member for Brunswick has quite correctly pointed out, some of the real victims in the operations that are mounted by people who want to act beyond the law involve vulnerable and marginalised Victorians, people from other parts of Australia and people from overseas. We should never forget the level of exploitation that can arise if these matters are allowed to proceed in an unchecked manner. We are constructing a far more effective response. There is more to be done, but I am pleased that we have been able to make substantial progress in the past few months and I look forward to that progress continuing.

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Housing) — The member for Brighton raised a matter for the Minister for Water. She raised her concerns about the advertising campaign that is being conducted by the government in

relation to water matters. I will make sure the minister is aware of those concerns.

The member for Murray Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Health in relation to his request for the upgrade of ambulance services in the Cobram and Yarrawonga region. I will make sure the minister is aware of that matter.

The member for Dandenong raised a matter for the Minister for Industry and Trade seeking a visit by the minister to the Dandenong region to meet with industry workers and representatives of the trade union movement to discuss the potential impacts of the global financial crisis, acknowledging that 40 per cent of manufacturing in Victoria is undertaken in the member's region. I will make sure the minister is aware of that request.

The member for Caulfield raised an important matter for the Minister for Health about implementing the digital mammography rollout across Victoria and ensuring that the upgrade from analogue to digital is fully implemented. I say in passing to the member for Caulfield that I am very aware of this issue. The previous director of BreastScreen Victoria, Onella Stagoll, was a great leader in developing many of these initiatives. These are important issues for regional Victoria.

The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports seeking support from the minister for the renaming of the Mordialloc bridge to become the Jack Pompeii Bridge in honour of a recently deceased person of great esteem in Mordialloc and a well-known clinker boat builder in the area. Those of us who are boaties appreciate the work of the late Jack Pompeii.

The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the Minister for Education seeking further support from the minister for student aides and supports for children at both primary and secondary level who are being schooled within the system for speech, language and other disorders. I will make sure that request is presented for the minister's attention as well.

The member for Bass raised a matter for the Minister for Health in relation to the upgrade of the Bass Coast Regional Health service, seeking that the service be upgraded to a subregional level given the increase in population in that area. I will make sure the minister is made aware of that request.

Finally, the member for Albert Park raised a matter for the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development seeking her support for the

implementation and construction of the Port Melbourne children and family hub, which of course is much needed in that booming part of his electorate. I will make sure the minister is aware of that request as well.

**House adjourned 4.59 p.m. until Tuesday,
24 February.**