

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

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(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Tuesday, 22 August 2006

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Tuesday, 22 August 2006

The SPEAKER (Hon. Judy Maddigan) took the chair at 2.03 p.m. and read the prayer.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER — Order! I welcome to the gallery a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation from Great Britain. Welcome to our Parliament!

I told the delegation that this is an exemplary Parliament and that answers and questions are heard in silence. Delegation members were very impressed, and they are looking forward to seeing it.

HEARING AWARENESS WEEK

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise the house that this week is Hearing Awareness Week. I have approved a request for two interpreters from the Victorian Deaf Society to sign from the Hansard box and for two screens for language captioning to be placed at the rear left and right of the chamber for deaf and hearing-impaired visitors to see during question time today.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Government: advertising

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Why will the Premier not stop taxpayer-funded advertising 60 days before the fixed election date and instead direct the funds to reducing hospital waiting lists and providing patients with much-needed surgery?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. One of the things that we on this side of the house do not want to do is to have more people die on our roads; one of the things that we on this side of the house do not want to do is to have more people die in workplaces; and one of the things that we on this side of the house — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for South-West Coast!

Mr BRACKS — One of the things that we on this side of the house do not want to happen is to have water

wasted in Victoria. We want to continue with conservation.

There are some important messages that Victorians obviously have supported over a long period of time. We support vigorous advertising to ensure that road rules are accepted and supported. We want to ensure that people come home safe from work, and we want to ensure that we continue, as we have — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask members on my left to cease interjecting in that manner and allow the Premier to be heard.

Mr BRACKS — At a time of continual dry periods such as we have had over the last seven to eight years, it is very important that the message to save and conserve water in this state continues. These are important messages which will continue under this government.

Daylight saving: extension

Mr LOCKWOOD (Bayswater) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to the government's initiative to extend daylight saving and ask him to detail to the house the potential advantages of such a move.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the member for Bayswater for his question. As most members would know, at the recent Council of Australian Governments meeting, which was a very successful meeting for the nation, the Prime Minister raised with state and territory leaders, particularly on the eastern seaboard of Australia, the prospect of synchronising the daylight saving periods in those states and territories with the Tasmanian system.

It was noted, of course, that regrettably the Council of Australian Governments was unsuccessful in convincing Queensland to be part of daylight saving. Despite our persistent efforts and strong advocacy we were not able to convince it of our case.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRACKS — Yes, that is right. But there was an in-principle agreement that this would be pursued and that I would take the opportunity to write to other state and territory leaders in relation to that.

I have written to other state and territory leaders in relation to a plan to extend daylight saving for a total of 35 days each year, which would bring the total amount of daylight saving to about six months per year. That would synchronise Tasmanian, Victorian and

Australian Capital Territory daylight saving — and also South Australia, recognising and acknowledging the time zone difference in South Australia. That would mean that the earliest date on which daylight saving would start under this proposition would be the first Sunday in October, going forward 1 hour, and the date on which it would finish would be the first Sunday in April, going back 1 hour.

I believe this would have significant benefits in relation to the transaction of business between the states. You are talking effectively about 70 per cent of Australia's population and economy if you are talking about Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. Also it would have significant benefits for families. As we know, many people already enjoy the opportunity. Spending more time with their families after work and after school times has been a great success which many people have enjoyed.

This will be something which, I hope, will be supported by my colleagues interstate. If that is the case, whilst it will not be able to come in on this occasion this year because of the need to look at train and other timetables around the country, it would be available and ready for the summer period in 2007.

Water: authority dividends

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the \$1.6 billion of dividends received from Victorian water authorities by the government over the past seven years. I also refer to the ongoing dry conditions in rural and regional Victoria, which have seen water allocations slashed throughout the state. Will the government compensate regional water authorities this year to avoid their having to charge customers for water allocations that they will never receive?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. The amount of resources that the government spends on water and water sustainability far outweighs any dividend the government receives at any point in time. We are actually spending more than any dividends received. Dividends are also set on a case-by-case basis depending on the circumstances in place. That has always been so since time immemorial.

One of the issues we are dealing with, as you would expect, is the continual dry period we have now. We will look at supporting communities, water authorities and water boards in this very difficult time.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — I think there are other supplementary questions going on, but I will answer the Leader of The Nationals. The dividends will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Obviously at a time when there are continual dry periods you would expect the dividends would be minimised. We will be spending and allocating much more money than any dividends from water authorities would ever allocate. We will also work with water authorities, which is part of the question the member raised with me, in ensuring we can get through these difficult times with very low water allocations to make sure they are supported and assisted in their role.

Melbourne Markets: relocation

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — My question is to the Minister for Transport. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to providing certainty for Victorian business, and I ask him to detail for the house how the plans for Melbourne's port, including the relocation of the wholesale fruit and vegetable market, will promote jobs and economic growth in Victoria.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I want to thank the member for Yan Yean for her question, because she knows how important the manufacturing industry is to the people of the northern suburbs, and she also knows how important —

Mr Crutchfield interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for South Barwon!

Dr Napthine — I raise a point of order, Speaker, with regard to anticipation. There is a bill listed under government business on the notice paper, the Channel Deepening (Facilitation) Bill, which has been there for two years. The government has done nothing with it.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for South-West Coast to take his seat.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Premier!

If the member for South-West Coast has a point of order, he is welcome to address the house on it but not to debate issues.

Dr Napthine — As the question was deliberately addressed to the Minister for Transport, I would suggest the question is anticipating discussion of channel deepening, which would be contrary to the rule of

anticipation, as we have a bill that has been languishing on the notice paper for two years dealing with this very issue, which the government could bring on for debate at any time.

Mr BATCHELOR — On the point of order, Speaker, the member for South-West Coast is clearly out of his depth. The Channel Deepening (Facilitation) Bill is about facilitating the channel deepening project. He might find that strange, but it has nothing to do with the intermodal facilities at the Dynon yard and the relocation of the wholesale fruit and vegetable market — although channel deepening is an important project, which this government supports, unlike the opposition.

The SPEAKER — Order! As I have ruled before, members are allowed to discuss general policy issues and general policies in relation to matters raised so long as they do not discuss matters relating to specific clauses in legislation that might be on the notice paper.

Mr BATCHELOR — I understand the member for South-West Coast is going to resign because of the leadership tensions.

The member for Yan Yean highlighted how important the relocation of the wholesale fruit and vegetable market is going to be in securing the future of the port of Melbourne. It is also important for the future development of this \$300 million project. The relocation of the market to Epping will underpin the future of the fruit and vegetable industry here. It will also free up crucial space for the development of a world-class intermodal freight hub within the Dynon precinct adjacent to the port of Melbourne. This is a win-win for the Victorian economy; it is a win-win for Victorian jobs. It is supported by people who truly understand the strategic importance of freight and the wholesale fruit and vegetable market to the Victorian economy.

Mr Bracks — Just like the federal Treasurer.

Mr BATCHELOR — That is right, Premier. This is strongly supported by the federal Treasurer, Mr Costello. That is because the plan to relocate the wholesale fruit and vegetable market, which was outlined in the recently released discussion paper, the *Melbourne Port@l* document, shows the government's vision to develop the port into a world-class intermodal freight hub.

The *Port@l* document has been many months in the making. We have been talking with industry groups and leaders. Consultation has been widespread, and there has been widespread knowledge of its impending

release. Some members will have read details of it in the newspapers last Tuesday. They reported the strategic importance of the *Melbourne Port@l* document and the port's strategic development plan. We are highlighting how important it is to plan for major trade growth through the port of Melbourne.

Leaders of industry understand this. Even the federal Treasurer, Mr Costello, told ABC radio last night that good port management is absolutely crucial to Australia's export performance. He was not alone. The Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry had a very interesting comment to make about our plans to grow the port of Melbourne. Mr Coulson — some on the other side might know him, some might not: they do not have much dialogue with industry these days — said:

With strong trade and population growth likely over the next 30 years, it makes sense to present now an overall vision of how the port and surrounding freight infrastructure will operate, and plan and invest accordingly.

It is the correct course to maximise efficiencies at Swanson Dock with improved infrastructure and intermodal access ...

The Victorian Freight and Logistics Council also made some very relevant comments.

Mr Wells interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Scoresby!

Mr BATCHELOR — Its chairman, Mr John Begley, when commenting on the opposition's backflip to keep the wholesale fruit and vegetable market at Dynon, said:

This would be a poor result for the fresh fruit and vegetable industry as well as the freight and logistics sector ... Not only would the market and its supply chain customers and suppliers miss out on a strategically improved location and vastly improved facilities but the vital infrastructure improvements for Victoria's port-rail interface would be compromised.

That is what industry is saying about our plan.

The federal government supports us, not only through the comments of the federal Treasurer, Mr Costello, but also through contributing \$110 million of its own money towards building this vision at the port. The federal Liberal government is contributing \$110 million to support our vision against the opposition's vision. They do not like your vision, and they are giving us \$110 million!

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister has been speaking for some time. I ask him to conclude.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind members, including the member for Murray Valley, to be quiet while the Speaker is on her feet. I ask the minister to conclude his answer without assistance from members on my left.

Mr BATCHELOR — This project is of strategic importance to the Victorian economy and the national economy, because the port of Melbourne is Australia's leading container port. The Treasurer made reference to maintaining the economic viability of the port of Melbourne. That is why the Treasurer has refused to back the plans of the opposition not to relocate the markets.

For once the federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, is talking about and looking after the interests of Victoria. The only concern we have is about why other members of the Liberal Party do not fall in line and support it.

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, this is not an appropriate response by the minister. As you have ruled before, question time is a time for ministers to comment on government business and government administration. The minister is now entering into a debate on the matter and is also attempting to drag the opposition into his response. That is inappropriate according to your previous rulings, and I ask you to bring him back to order.

The SPEAKER — Order! Has the minister concluded his answer?

Mr BATCHELOR — Yes.

Rail: warning system

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to the faulty train protection warning system and ask: has the Premier received advice as to the fault? What was the advice, and will he guarantee the safety of train travellers on the four so-called fast train corridors?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the member for Polwarth for his question. Safety is always paramount in the introduction of new services and new lines. We are introducing — I think it is — 401 extra rail services around regional Victoria; it is about a 41 per cent boost. They are better trains which are more reliable, faster and safer with the new early warning systems in addition to the current safety arrangements. That is being rolled out; the calibration is being done and we expect it to be done on time.

Mr Mulder — On a point of order, Speaker, and on the matter of relevance. Not once did the Premier refer to the faulty train protection warning system. Not once did he mention the advice that he has got.

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

Small business: government initiatives

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — My question is for the Minister for Small Business.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask members to be quiet to allow the member for Narre Warren North to ask his question.

Mr DONNELLAN — My question is for the Minister for Small Business. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to provide —

Mr Mulder interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Polwarth will cease interjecting in that way or I will remove him from the chamber.

Mr DONNELLAN — I refer the minister to the government's commitment to provide certainty for Victorian businesses and ask him to detail for the house what the Bracks government is doing to help make Victoria a great place for small business to thrive.

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Small Business) — I thank the member for Narre Warren North for his question. I particularly thank him as the leader of the government's small business task force and thank members of that task force for the consultation they undertook in the preparation of the government's small business statement *Time to Thrive — Supporting the Changing Face of Victorian Small Business*.

There are some 330 000 small businesses in Victoria which comprise 96 per cent of all businesses in the state. But the face of small business is changing, in particular when we note that around two-thirds of those businesses are home-based businesses and that we have very substantial growth in the ranks of independent contractors, people who perhaps in the past worked for a company or for a larger business and who are now effectively doing the same work as independent contractors. The government has put together a \$98 million package of initiatives to meet the changing needs and demands of small business to enable small

business to thrive, as it has been doing, well into the future, and we have undertaken extensive consultation on this.

The statement has four key themes: firstly, creating more time for business; secondly, skilling small business for growth — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Doncaster! I ask the Leader of the Opposition to cease interjecting in such a loud voice.

Mr HAERMAYER — Thirdly, a fairer deal for small business; and fourthly, cutting the cost of doing business. Some of the major initiatives in this statement include \$18 million for the world-class service initiative, which is about giving business a single point of access for any sort of information or transaction it wants to have with government at virtually any level, and that is particularly useful to home-based businesses and to rural businesses.

There is also \$10.6 million to assist small businesses to address skill-shortage issues and to enable them to more effectively deal with issues of work force planning and to attract and retain skilled employees. There is \$5 million to enhance the small business counselling and mentoring service, particularly in rural areas, and to improve support to businesses in their start-up phase.

Also there is a boost to the budget of the small business commissioner, and we have expanded his role. It has been an extremely important initiative on the part of this government to put somebody on the side of small business at a time when issues of fairness between big versus small are becoming increasingly salient to small business. We have also provided for far better access for small business to government procurement, including putting a small business person on the Victorian Government Purchasing Board and expanding our Fair Payments policy to all major government agencies. Those have also been extremely successful initiatives.

What does the business sector have to say about this statement? I quote Tim Piper, who is the Victorian director of the Australian Industry Group:

The Australian Industry Group is pleased the state government recognises the need to assist small businesses to develop and welcomes *Time to Thrive*. Planning for, and access to, skilled workers for small manufacturers is vital for the development of the Victorian economy, and the \$11 million provided to address this is welcomed by industry and especially manufacturers.

David Edwards of the Australian Retailers Association said:

The ARA congratulates the Victorian government on its small business statement, *Time to Thrive*. In particular it welcomes the focus on skilling small businesses. Too many small retail start-ups fail because of the owner's lack of business skills. The ARA also welcomes the increased funding for the small business commissioner, who provides an invaluable mediation service for small retailers which is both effective and accessible.

I have quite a few more quotes, but I will not go into those. Suffice it to say that this government has a plan for small business, and we think it is an effective plan. Other than abolishing the very popular small business commissioner and the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, we want to know what the opposition's plan is.

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister has now been ranting on for over 5 minutes, and I ask you to bring him back to order and sit him down.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask members when they are raising a point of order to do so in the proper form. The minister has concluded his answer.

Water: Geelong supply

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — My question without notice is to the Premier. Given the water crisis now facing Melbourne will the Premier abandon Labor's plan to send Melbourne's water to Geelong via an expensive pipeline?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the member for South-West Coast for his question. I can assure the member that the one thing we will not do is dam the Mitchell River, which is the Liberal Party policy. It is a great and pristine river — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Bulleen. If he persists in interjecting while the Speaker is on her feet, I will remove the member from the chamber. I ask members to cease interjecting in that manner and remember to use language which is appropriate in Parliament.

Dr Naphthine — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is deliberately misleading the house. The Liberal Party will not dam the Mitchell River. Our comments on this are public in the *Sunday Age*. Read the *Sunday Age*; it was in the *Sunday Age*.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for South-West Coast knows full well that that is a privilege issue. I ask the member for South-West Coast to withdraw his comments. If he does not wish to — —

Mr Perton interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Doncaster will be quiet.

An honourable member interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The charge of deliberately misleading the house is a serious — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I understand from the member for South-West Coast that he does not wish to withdraw.

Dr Napthine — No.

The SPEAKER — Order! Thank you. I will deal with the matter later.

Mr BRACKS — In relation to water security for Geelong, the government has in Our Water Our Future plans for consideration. Those plans will be further announced in detail very soon. They include access to other water supply systems for Geelong for long-term security. One thing that we have through Our Water Our Future is clear plans for the future, and those plans will be announced by us in a very short time.

Hazardous waste: management

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Environment. I ask the minister to detail for the house how the government's plans for hazardous waste reduction and containment of residue will help the environment — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for Keilor to sit down. I warn members on my left — —

Mr Cooper interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Mornington. If members continue to behave in that manner, I shall remove them from the house without further warning. I ask members of the opposition to assist the Speaker to allow question time to continue in an orderly manner.

Mr SEITZ — I will start again. My question is to the Minister for Environment. I ask the minister to detail to the house how the government's plans for hazardous waste reduction and site containment of the residue will help the environment and give certainty to the Victorian manufacturing industry. As the Tullamarine facility was in my electorate of Keilor for many years, I know the local people are concerned with issues such as how government treats hazardous waste.

Honourable members interjecting.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

The SPEAKER — Order! I suspend the member for Warrandyte from the house for interjecting in an unparliamentary manner while the member for Keilor — —

An honourable member interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I suspend the member for Warrandyte for — —

Mr Honeywood — For what?

The SPEAKER — Order! I beg your pardon! It is for interrupting and interjecting in an unparliamentary manner when I had already given a warning that I would remove members if they did so. I ask the member to leave the house immediately for half an hour.

Honourable member for Warrandyte withdrew from chamber.

Questions resumed.

The SPEAKER — Order! I could not hear the end of the member for Keilor's question due to the level of interjection, and I ask him to repeat it. But apparently the minister could hear it.

Mr Perton — On a point of order, Speaker, I was sitting next to the member for Warrandyte and the member for Warrandyte did not say a word before you suspended him.

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

Mr Perton — I ask you to withdraw your mistaken ruling.

The SPEAKER — Order! I call the Minister for Environment.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Environment) — I thank the member for Keilor for his question. The Bracks government is committed to the effective reduction of hazardous waste, to storing the remainder effectively and to protecting the environment. Victoria relies on the manufacturing industry for much of its prosperity, and many of the everyday goods that are manufactured here in Victoria result in hazardous waste, which must be safely managed. Our manufacturing industry, whether it is making cars or paints or recycling, relies on having confidence that hazardous waste will be safely stored. That is what this government is doing — giving manufacturers that confidence.

Our government has a clear policy to reduce industrial waste and where possible to recycle it. I am pleased to report to the house that since 2000 Victoria has reduced the amount of hazardous waste from over 122 000 tonnes to about 89 000 tonnes in 2005 — a reduction of some 27 per cent. This reduction has been aided by the hazardous waste levy and programs that work with industry to reduce waste.

Our government has now announced that landfill levies for hazardous waste will be increased fourfold — to \$130, starting from next year. All the funds from that increase will go into the environment fund and help industry to cut waste. Some people oppose that policy.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr THWAITES — Some people — and presumably they oppose the waste reduction programs that go with it. Yet those same people somehow imagine that hazardous waste will magically disappear. It is just as though you go zing! — and it just disappears.

Unfortunately even with maximum waste reduction and recycling there will be some residual waste. No Australian state, nor indeed any other country in the world, has completely eradicated all industrial waste. It is estimated that there will be residual waste of between 15 000 and 25 000 tonnes per year. These are wastes such as the end products of metals recycling and the residual wastes from that, or chemicals from refineries in making plastics. Even the mayor of Mildura has been quoted as saying that any suggestion that Victoria does not need a hazardous waste facility is ‘fairyland stuff’.

The Bracks government has been prepared to make the tough decisions on long-term containment. We are not going around Victoria trying to fool people; we are not

going around Victoria making up policy on the run — three policies in three weeks. We are not doing that. We are not talking about magically making all hazardous waste disappear. We are not talking about Tullamarine — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to not hold papers up in the house.

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister has now been speaking for well over 4 minutes and I ask you to get him to round up and sit down.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to conclude his — —

Mr Lim interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Clayton will be quiet. The minister, to conclude his answer.

Mr THWAITES — We do not have a secret plan to build a facility within 100 kilometres of Melbourne without naming the site. We do not have that. What we are about is delivering — delivering certainty for business and the community. We are not trying to deceive the people by saying one thing in one place, another in another; one thing one week and another the next.

Water: Melbourne restrictions

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the fact that Melbourne water storages have fallen — —

Mr Nardella interjected.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Leader of The Nationals to wait for a moment. I ask the member for Melton to not interrupt, and I ask members to show some courtesy to members when they are asking questions.

Mr RYAN — I refer to the fact that Melbourne water storages have fallen below the trigger point for the introduction of the next stage of water restrictions, and I ask: why will the government not, in accordance with its own policy, immediately introduce stage 1 water restrictions in the metropolitan area?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. The Minister for Water announced at the start of this month that if there was not

rainfall to prevent the trigger operating — and that is, water restrictions coming in at stage 1 at the next month — then at the end of this month those water restrictions would come in. I should add that the revised stage 1 restrictions would come in, which are more severe than the old stage 1 restrictions because of the new permanent water rules. The minister indicated quite clearly and publicly announced that if no significant rainfall had fallen by the end of this month, then automatically those stage 1 restrictions would apply because the trigger would also require them to be in place.

Government: financial management

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the government's commitment — —

Mr Ryan interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of The Nationals should show the same courtesy to other members as he would like for himself.

Mr ROBINSON — I refer the Treasurer to the government's commitment to managing the state's finances prudently and providing certainty for business and ask whether he can provide the house with any recent independent assessments of the state's performance.

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — I thank the member for Mitcham for his question. Although the Victorian economy faces some challenges, such as rising interest rates, high petrol prices and the effects of the mineral commodities boom, our economy remains strong and is good for business. Since we were elected close to seven years ago, our policy for Victoria has been about creating certainty for business in this state. We have been pro-business, pro-investment and pro-jobs. These policies have led to some outstanding results for our state.

We have seen record building approvals — the highest of any state in Australia in 2005–06 and more than New South Wales, which has nearly 2 million more people than we have. We have \$15.8 billion worth of building approvals, and over the last 12 months Victoria also generated more new jobs than any other state in Australia. We have witnessed a participation rate in Melbourne which is the highest for 16 years, and we currently have a participation rate in country Victoria which is the highest since the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) started collecting data.

Our policy is about business certainty, it is about investment and it is about generating jobs. Our policy has been to show leadership by, for example, relocating the Melbourne wholesale markets to Epping. We announced this policy two years ago. We have selected the site, we have acquired the land and the relocation is taking place.

Mr Smith interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Our policy is about investment certainty and about generating jobs.

Mr Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Bass. If I hear his voice again, I will remove him from the chamber.

Mr Donnellan interjected.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

The SPEAKER — Order! I suspend the member for Narre Warren North from the chamber for 30 minutes for speaking while the Speaker is on her feet.

Honourable member for Narre Warren North withdrew from chamber.

Questions resumed.

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — Our policy is about a long-term plan for the port, it is about a long-term plan for the markets and it is about generating investment and jobs for Victoria.

We have a policy for the Transport Accident Commission, which is to move it to Geelong. Our policy is about good business management, about good decision making for the TAC and about generating jobs in Geelong. Our policy is about jobs!

We have a view, of course, about EastLink. We have supported EastLink, which has now spent more than \$1 billion. EastLink is about generating jobs. We have seen three policies from the opposition: there was no tolls, there was half tolls and now there is full tolls — and I do not know what the fourth policy is!

We have supported policies in science and innovation. We have supported Australia's first synchrotron, the largest investment in new scientific infrastructure in

Australia for two decades, yet all we have heard from the opposition is whingeing, whining and carping.

We have a plan for long-term hazardous waste, because if we want our manufacturing industries to invest with confidence, they have to know there is a plan for waste. So our policy is a plan for waste.

Mr Baillieu interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — People are asking what your plan B is.

Mr Baillieu interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — What is your plan B?

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Leader of the Opposition to cease interjecting in that manner, and I ask the Treasurer to address his comments through the Chair.

Mr BRUMBY — We also have a policy on renewable energy.

An honourable member — We know you have.

Mr BRUMBY — You've got a policy on renewable energy?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order!

Ms D'Ambrosio interjected.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

The SPEAKER — Order! I suspend the member for Mill Park for 30 minutes for interrupting while the Speaker is on her feet.

Honourable member for Mill Park withdrew from chamber.

Questions resumed.

The SPEAKER — Order! I will ask the Treasurer one more time to direct his answer through the Chair, otherwise I will sit him down.

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — We have a policy on renewable energy, because Victoria and Australia need alternative sources of energy. We need renewable energy. We have a plan. It is a plan that will generate 2000 jobs, and it is a plan that will lead to \$2 billion

worth of new investment in this state. We have policies which are about creating business certainty, about business investment and about creating jobs for this state. People talk about policy on the run from the opposition. It is not policy on the run, it is policy on the walk!

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, it is inappropriate for the minister to use this question as a vehicle to attack the opposition. That, Speaker, is in accordance with your previous rulings. I ask you to bring the minister back to order.

The SPEAKER — Order! I uphold the point of order. The Treasurer has been speaking for some time now, and I ask him to conclude his answer.

Mr BRUMBY — I have been asked about independent assessments of Victoria's performance. I am pleased to advise the house that last week, on 17 August, Standard and Poor's, in its annual assessment of the Victorian economy, again confirmed its AAA rating for our state. What it said was that Victoria's credit strength remains strong and that:

The state has a strong economic base, low debt levels and there is an ongoing commitment from the government toward maintaining its track record of fiscal prudence.

So we have a great record on the economy. We also have a great record in terms of balance sheet management. I am also pleased to advise the house that Access Economics — —

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister has now been speaking for well over 6 minutes. I ask you to sit him down.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have asked the minister to conclude his answer. I ask him to finish off in the next sentence.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — No full stops, please! There is also the Access Economics report, *Fiscal Transparency — Australian States and Territories*, which shows that Victoria is one of only two states — Victoria and Western Australia — in Australia to receive an A grade for fiscal transparency ratings, and that is again a great endorsement of the economic and financial management of our state, full stop.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Notices of motion: removal**

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the house that under standing order 144 notices of motion 85 to 86, 173 to 176, 295 to 297 and 375 to 392 will be removed from the notice paper on the next sitting day. A member who requires a notice standing in his or her name to be continued must advise the Clerk in writing before 6 o'clock today.

NOTICES OF MOTION**Notices of motion given.****Mr RYAN having given notice of motion:**

The SPEAKER — Order! I believe part of that notice of motion is out of order. I will get the Clerk to check it.

Further notices of motion given.**ROAD LEGISLATION (PROJECTS AND ROAD SAFETY) BILL***Introduction and first reading*

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to make further miscellaneous amendments to the Road Safety Act 1986, to amend the Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986, the Chattel Securities Act 1987, the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Children and Young Persons Act 1989, the Sentencing Act 1991, the Melbourne City Link Act 1995, the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997, the Road Management Act 2004, the Children and Young Persons (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2005, the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and the Infringements Act 2006 and for other purposes.

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — Will the minister provide the house with a brief explanation?

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I prefer the Attorney-General's answer! This is an omnibus bill dealing with road matters, particularly road safety and project management matters. It has a number of separate elements. Many of them deal with changes to the road safety laws, ensuring that penalties increase for repeat drink-driving and drug-driving offenders. There are provisions dealing with the rebirthing of vehicles, the Road Management Act and

who has responsibility for irrigation channels and drainage channels. There are also other matters relating to the way in which this government will progress the redevelopment of the Monash–West Gate freeway improvement project, amongst other things.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

CITY OF MELBOURNE AND DOCKLANDS ACTS (GOVERNANCE) BILL*Introduction and first reading*

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Environment) introduced a bill to amend the City of Melbourne Act 2001 to return the Docklands area to the municipal district of the City of Melbourne and to establish a Docklands Co-ordination Committee and to amend the Docklands Act 1991 and other acts and for other purposes.

Read first time.

STATE TAXATION LEGISLATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL*Introduction and first reading*

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to make miscellaneous amendments to the Duties Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Pay-roll Tax Act 1971, the Public Authorities (Dividends) Act 1983, the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and the Valuation of Land Act 1960 and for other purposes.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I ask the Treasurer to provide a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — The major purpose of the bill is to implement the remaining budget measures for land tax reform, which include the enhanced objection rights to valuations. The bill also clarifies some exemptions in relation to the Duties Act, particularly in relation to the transfer of interest from a trust to a beneficiary. Finally, there are some technical amendments to the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust relating to the proceeds of surplus funds and the future arrangements in relation to the public-private partnership and the new convention centre.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

SENTENCING (SUSPENDED SENTENCES) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) introduced a bill to amend the Sentencing Act 1991 with respect to suspended sentences of imprisonment and for other purposes.

Read first time.

JUSTICE LEGISLATION (FURTHER AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to amend the Associations Incorporation Act 1981, the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General Act 1972, the Casino Control Act 1991, the City of Melbourne Act 2001, the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) (Enforcement) Act 1995, the Confiscation Act 1997, the Corrections and Sentencing Acts (Home Detention) Act 2003, the Council of Law Reporting in Victoria Act 1967, the Credit (Administration) Act 1984, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances (Amendment) Act 2006, the Equal Opportunity Act 1995, the Estate Agents Act 1980, the Fair Trading Act 1999, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, the Infringements Act 2006, the Introduction Agents Act 1997, the Judicial College of Victoria Act 2001, the Juries Act 2000, the Legal Profession Act 2004, the Magistrates' Court Act 1989, the Motor Car Traders Act 1986, the Professional Standards Act 2003, the Second-Hand Dealers and Pawnbrokers Act 1989, the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004, the Travel Agents Act 1986, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998, the Victorian Law Reform Commission Act 2000 and the Working with Children Act 2005 and for other purposes.

Mr McIntOSH (Kew) — I ask the Attorney-General to briefly explain the purpose of the bill.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — Surprisingly this is an omnibus bill. It does a whole range of things, including, for instance, under the classifications legislation, create an arrangement in which arts institutions such as the Australian Centre for the Moving Image can be exempted from the national classification scheme in certain circumstances. The confiscation amendment deals with implications of a recent Court of Appeal decision in relation to the restraining order scheme — the Navarolli case, of which the shadow Attorney-General would no doubt be aware.

An amendment to the Casino Control Act clarifies compulsory training requirements for gaming venue

staff. The equal opportunity legislation updates a number of definitions to reflect case law and changes to the Workplace Relations Act. Amendments to the Legal Profession Act reflect amendments to the national model provisions and make technical amendments to that legislation. The Legal Profession Act — —

Mr Baillieu — On a point of order, Speaker, the Attorney-General is reading from a document, and I wonder whether he would be able to table it.

The SPEAKER — Order! Is the Attorney-General reading from a document or using notes?

Mr HULLS — I am using notes.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Attorney-General is reading from notes. There is no point of order.

Mr HULLS — This bill amends a range of different pieces of legislation, and these are mainly technical amendments.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

PUBLIC SECTOR ACTS (FURTHER WORKPLACE PROTECTION AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HULLS (Minister for Industrial Relations) introduced a bill to amend the Public Administration Act 2004 and certain other acts consequentially on that act, to amend the Audit Act 1994, the Commonwealth Games Arrangements Act 2001, the Commonwealth Powers (Industrial Relations) Act 1996, the Ombudsman Act 1973, the Parliamentary Administration Act 2005 and the Public Sector Employment (Award Entitlements) Act 2006 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

PETITION

Following petition presented to house:

Preschools: accessibility

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the undersigned residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house that preschool education in Victoria

needs urgent reform to ensure every Victorian child can access high-quality preschool education.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria recognise that preschool is the critical first step of education and move responsibility for preschools to the Department of Education and Training.

By Mr RYAN (Gippsland South) (57 signatures)

Tabled.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 9

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) presented *Alert Digest No. 9* of 2006 on:

- Charities (Amendment) Bill**
- Conveyancers Bill**
- Coroners and Human Tissue Acts (Amendment) Bill**
- Crimes (Sexual Offences)(Further Amendment) Bill**
- Electoral and Parliamentary Committees Legislation (Amendment) Bill**
- Funerals Bill**
- Human Services (Complex Needs)(Amendment) Bill**
- Murray-Darling Basin (Further Amendment) Bill**
- Surveillance Devices (Workplace Privacy) Bill**
- Water (Governance) Bill**

together with appendices.

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 — Section 17DA Orders granting under s 17D leases over Geelong Botanical Gardens and Recreation Reserve (two orders)

Financial Management Act 1994 — Report from the Minister for Health that she had received the 2005 annual report of the Psychologists Registration Board together with an explanation for the delay

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

- Ballarat Planning Scheme — No C100
- Benalla Planning Scheme — No C17
- Cardinia Planning Scheme — No C75
- Golden Plains Planning Scheme — No C21
- Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme — No C65
- Greater Dandenong Planning Scheme — No C46
- Melbourne Planning Scheme — No C113
- Mildura Planning Scheme — No C33
- Mornington Planning Scheme — No C68 Part 1
- Mount Alexander Planning Scheme — No C35
- Port of Melbourne Planning Scheme — No L38
- Southern Grampians Planning Scheme — No C12
- Stonnington Planning Scheme — No C60
- Surf Coast Planning Scheme — No C30
- Warrnambool Planning Scheme — No C49
- Whitehorse Planning Scheme — No C50 Part 1
- Whittlesea Planning Scheme — No C67
- Wyndham Planning Scheme — No C75

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994 — SR No 101

Supreme Court Act 1986 — SR No 102

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Minister's exemption certificate in relation to Statutory Rule No 101.

The following proclamations fixing operative dates were tabled by the Clerk in accordance with an order of the house dated 26 February 2003:

Transport Legislation (Further Amendment) Act 2006 — Section 16, s 17, s 20 (except sub-sections (2)(b) and (3)), s 21 (except sub-section (2)(b)), s 24(3) (except paragraphs (b) and (c)), s 25 (except sub-section (2)(b)), s 26 (except sub-sections (2) and (3)(b)), s 27, s 28 (except sub-sections (2) and (3)(b)), s 31(1), s 31(2), s 35(1) and s35(3) and Schedule 1 on 8 August 2006 (*Gazette S199*, 8 August 2006)

Transport Legislation (Further Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2005 — Section 41 and ss 43 to 47 on 8 August 2006 (*Gazette S199*, 8 August 2006)

Veterans Act 2005 — Remaining provisions on 21 August 2006 — (*Gazette G33*, 17 August 2006).

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent on 15 August to:

Children, Youth and Families (Consequential and Other Amendments) Bill

Corrections and Other Justice Legislation (Amendment) Bill
Courts Legislation (Jurisdiction) Bill
Courts Legislation (Neighbourhood Justice Centre) Bill
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances (Amendment) Bill
Evidence (Document Unavailability) Bill
Gambling Regulation (Further Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill
Health Services (Supported Residential Services) Bill
Long Service Leave (Preservation of Entitlements) Bill
National Parks and Crown Land (Reserves) Acts (Amendment) Bill.

APPROPRIATION MESSAGES

Messages read recommending appropriations for:

Conveyancers Bill
Funerals Bill
Human Services (Complex Needs) (Amendment) Bill
Murray-Darling Basin (Further Amendment) Bill
Water (Governance) Bill.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Program

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I desire to move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 4.00 p.m. on Thursday, 24 August 2006:

Catchment and Land Protection (Further Amendment) Bill
 Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust Bill
 Heritage Rivers (Further Protection) Bill
 Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill
 Murray-Darling Basin (Further Amendment) Bill
 Owners Corporations Bill
 Surveillance Devices (Workplace Privacy) Bill
 Transport (Taxi-cab Accreditation and Other Amendments) Bill.

The government business program for this forthcoming parliamentary week comprises some eight pieces of legislation. In the context of the number and nature of these bills, it is the government's view that this is an entirely achievable task by 4.00 p.m. on Thursday. In that context we are certainly planning at this stage to sit the normal sitting hours of the house. It is our expectation that that should provide sufficient debating time for almost all members who wish to speak on these bills.

In addition to the bills that are on the notice paper there will be the privileges debate, which will need to be dealt with on Wednesday, notice of which I gave today. Accordingly I recommend this government business program motion to the house for its consideration.

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — The opposition does not oppose the government business program. We agree with the minister that the program is attainable, and that explains our lack of opposition to it.

There are a couple of matters that I want to address. The first is the funeral in Geelong on Thursday of Neil Trezise. I just had a brief conversation with the Leader of the House in regard to that matter. I was hoping that there could be some rearrangement of the way in which the house operates on Thursday to allow as many members as possible to attend the funeral. I am aware, certainly on this side of the house — and I am sure it applies right throughout the house — that Neil Trezise was very highly regarded as an individual, a minister, a leading sportsman and as a person. There would be many here who would want to go and pay tribute to him.

I understand the government does not propose to make any alterations, which creates a difficulty. I would ask the Leader of the House to give some reconsideration to that. The opposition is certainly prepared to see question time moved from 2.00 p.m. which is the time of the funeral, to, say, 11.30 a.m. so that members could make their way to Geelong for the funeral and then come back to the house later in the afternoon. I would ask the minister to consult with the Premier and any others in the executive of the government who would be interested to try to facilitate that. On this side of the house I am aware that there is a minimum of five and possibly seven members of the Liberal Party who would like the opportunity to attend the Trezise funeral. Hopefully that will be given some thought.

Moving on from that matter I want to make the comment that after the end of this week there will be five sitting days of this Parliament left. That may be greeted with joy by some but sadness by others.

Ms Asher — Which ones? Tell us.

Mr COOPER — I am not prepared to divulge that. I had a conference with my colleague the member for Benambra before, and we came to the same conclusion — but I will not tell you what that conclusion was.

However, in those five sitting days there will be 14 bills on the notice paper: 6 of those bills are sitting there now, 6 were introduced today and there are a further 2 which we would hope will be coming up for debate. I refer of course to the great chestnuts which have been there for so long, and they are the Channel Deepening (Facilitation) Bill and the Courts Legislation (Judicial Pensions) Bill. I want to put on the record again the fact that the opposition is keen to debate both those bills.

Some allegations and inferences were made during question time today in regard to the Channel Deepening (Facilitation) Bill, and certainly we want to refute those. We want to debate that bill at length, because it is important to the future of this state. The fact that the government has left it on the notice paper for so many months and has given no indication of any willingness to debate it should be raising question and eyebrows throughout the commercial communities of the state. We again urge the government to put this on the agenda for debate during the five sitting days that are left after the end of this week. We think Victorians deserve to have that legislation debated. I am sure the judiciary would be very interested in the judicial pensions bill. Maybe I will get a surprise about that, but I would have thought the judiciary would be very interested in seeing the Courts Legislation (Judicial Pensions) Bill debated as well.

We will not be opposing the motion by the Leader of the House, but with regard to ex-minister Trezise's funeral, I ask that consideration be given to the way in which the house operates on Thursday to enable people to attend.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — The Nationals will not be opposing the government business program. It is a reasonable program The Nationals can easily accommodate this week.

I want to support the member for Mornington's comments regarding the Honourable Neil Trezise and the state funeral which will be provided for him on Thursday. Like the member for Mornington, when I first came to this place I served with the Honourable Neil Trezise. He was very highly regarded on both sides of the house, and as the member for Mornington rightly commented, if possible a number of

members on this side of the house would like the opportunity to attend that funeral. There has been general agreement that on Thursday the opposition parties will work to ensure there are no quorums or divisions so that at least the leaders can go to the state funeral. But there are others who have high regard for Neil Trezise and who would like to attend the funeral, if it is at all possible. I can assure the Leader of the House that we would cooperate in having question time earlier as the member for Mornington suggested so that those who want to attend the funeral could do so. I support the member for Mornington's comments.

Likewise with the channel deepening bill, which is a hardy — —

Mr Langdon — It comes up every week!

Mr MAUGHAN — It is amazing, it does come up every week! But I note it has been sitting on the notice paper, and I have the latest copy of the status of bills list with me. It was second-read on 9 December 2004 — —

Mr Cooper — When?

Mr MAUGHAN — On 9 December 2004. That is coming up to — —

Mr Cooper — Its second birthday!

Mr MAUGHAN — We will get the bridge in Echuca built! So it is coming up to its second birthday, and one wonders why the government does not want to debate it. The Nationals want to see this legislation go through; it is a very important piece of legislation. It is important to the port of Melbourne, and it is important to the exporters of this state in country Victoria whom members of The Nationals represent. We are ready to debate it; we are ready to support it. I suspect there are some divisions in the government which it does not want to expose prior to the election.

Mr Batchelor interjected.

Mr MAUGHAN — Bring it on and show the divisions!

Mr Batchelor interjected.

Mr MAUGHAN — They might well be. Bring it on and let us have a look at where the divisions are.

This week is going to be an important week. I can assure the government that it will get the cooperation of The Nationals in working through the business program.

Mr Delahunty interjected.

Mr MAUGHAN — You be good, Hughie! I think it is a reasonable business program, and we can cooperate with the government to achieve it in normal sitting hours and hopefully allow longstanding members of the house to pay their respects to the Honourable Neil Trezise at his state funeral.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Westgarth cinema

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for the Arts) — Last week a grand lady was reborn in Northcote with the reopening of the wonderful Westgarth theatre after a five-month rejuvenation. The significance of this is that the Westgarth is the oldest operating cinema in Melbourne, having opened its doors in 1921. I am delighted to see that the refurbishment has retained the art deco theme while moving the cinema into the 21st century by expanding from its original single screen to a three-screen complex. The Westgarth has long been an icon in the area — and beyond from what I can hear across the chamber. In fact many residents have told me they had their first date at that cinema and speak of it very fondly.

The survival from the era of the silent screen through to the digital age is a credit to the foresight and passion of its owners and the strength of the local community. It is remarkable that the Westgarth has had only two owners since 1921, Ernest Yeomans and Peter Yiannoudes and his family, with the cinema business being sold to Palace Cinemas just last October. Palace Cinemas undertook this fabulous refurbishment, and I congratulate it on that. The Yiannoudes family still owns the building. Welcome back to the Westgarth! Alongside the revival of the Northcote town hall as a cultural and community hub and the success of the Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre in Bell Street at the southern end of the electorate, the refurbished Westgarth cinema completes a stunning cultural trifecta.

Melbourne Markets: relocation

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I call on the government to release its so-called business case for the closure of the Footscray fruit and vegetable market. The government refers to the business case as justification for moving the market against the wishes of the traders.

On 7 August I was advised following my freedom of information application that the business case was prepared for the expenditure review committee and was

of a commercial nature. That was the basis for the application being refused. I call on the government to release that business case; it is a fundamental document. I also make the point that keeping the fruit and vegetable market at the Footscray site is completely compatible with port expansion. The government document to which the minister referred during question time — the port development plan for 2006–2034 — is in fact a consultation draft, and the government is saying that it is seeking public comment on it.

Furthermore, within that document there are 10 precincts of the port being developed. Nine of the precincts have nothing to do with market land; the one precinct which has something to do with market land is the subject of three alternative proposals. Again the opposition wishes to make the point that if the government wants to pursue this, it is completely compatible to have the market on site and have port development. More importantly, the government should release its business case for moving the Footscray fruit and vegetable market.

Graeme Breydon

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Tourism) — The tourism industry in Victoria received some very sad news overnight. Last night, at the age of 54, Mr Graeme Breydon passed away. Graeme Breydon was chair of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board, which has responsibility for the operation of one of Melbourne and Victoria's most popular tourist attractions, the Puffing Billy railway.

Mr Breydon became involved with Puffing Billy as a 14-year-old back in 1964, when he joined the Puffing Billy Preservation Society. In 1989 he became a member of the board, and since November 1999 he has been chair of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board. For the past eight years Mr Breydon was also a member of the Great Train Race committee, which organises the annual Great Train Race in which runners race Puffing Billy in a fun run.

During his time as a member of the board Mr Breydon was a driving force behind many developments to Puffing Billy and the surrounding area, and I would just like to mention a few of those. The first is certainly his leadership in the redevelopment of the Belgrave railway station to improve its appearance and its services to the public as a key point for visitors to Puffing Billy. Then there is the promotion of the extension of the line to Gembrook and the delivery of that line. Now it is a great trip all the way out from Belgrave to Gembrook. The locomotive workshop at Belgrave has been

upgraded, as well as the historic G42 locomotive, which was recently restored.

At a national level Mr Breydon was involved in the development of the national rail safety regulations as they pertain to tourist railways such as Puffing Billy. For his involvement in that process Mr Breydon recently received an individual award for excellence from the Australasian Railway Association. All of this great work was done by Mr Breydon on a voluntary and honorary basis. He was dedicated to Puffing Billy, and all the thoughts of the people from Puffing Billy are with his family.

Water: irrigators

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — I wish to inform the house of the severe situation for irrigators in the Goulburn, Campaspe and Loddon irrigation areas of northern Victoria. Last Thursday Goulburn-Murray Water announced that irrigators supplied by the Goulburn system would only receive 7 per cent of their entitlement, Campaspe irrigators would receive 0 per cent and Loddon diverters 0 per cent. This represents one of the worst ever starts to the irrigation season. We pray that there will be substantial rain to enable these record low allocations to be increased, but the signs are not positive. Customers will be required to pay their water rates even if they do not receive an allocation this year. This will cost their businesses between \$10 000 and \$40 000 depending on their entitlements.

Many have not recovered financially from the drought of 2002 and will need assistance from the government. I urge that the Minister for Water and the Minister for Agriculture be fully briefed on this looming crisis. The people of the region do not want spin. They do not want government advertisements. They do not want blame duckshoved onto the federal government. It is not a time for name calling. They want genuine assistance from the Victorian government in what the New South Wales Department of Natural Resources last week called 'the worst drought since Federation'.

State Library of Victoria: Spanish donation

Mr LANGUILLER (Derrimut) — In July 2006 the Consul General for Spain in Melbourne, Federico Palomera, made a substantial donation to the State Library of Victoria on behalf of the Spanish government. The donation consists of 16 large illustrated volumes of the *Real Expedición Botánica del Nuevo Reino de Granada* published in Madrid between 1954 and 2004.

The volumes represent the first-ever publication of the botanical work carried out by the Spanish natural historian José Celestino Mutis, who lived from 1732 to 1808. As early as 1763 Mutis had petitioned the King of Spain to fund an expedition to explore the botany of northern South America. The work of the expedition produced more than 6000 illustrations of some 2700 plant species.

The multi-volume work is testimony to Mutis's great 18th century expedition and the generous donation of a set to the library by the Spanish government is an important addition to the library's fine collection of books on botanical art and history. It is also fitting that the donation has been made in the year that celebrates the 400th anniversary of the voyage of Spanish navigator Captain Louis Vaéz de Torres through the strait that bears his name.

Carols by Candlelight

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — I raise a matter for the urgent attention of the Premier. Over the weekend I heard some very disturbing news regarding Carols by Candlelight, which is held at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl every year. I hope these rumours are false. I was advised that the Victorian government is planning to initiate a number of minor changes over the next few years. Over the coming years Christmas carols will give way to songs of peace, understanding and tolerance in the belief that this will include all members of the Victorian community. There will be one or two songs initially, increasing year by year in the hope that people will become accustomed to the changes.

I also spoke to the Manningham City Council to see if anything similar was planned for the Manningham carols by candlelight that have been held at Ruffey Lake Park. I was advised that there were discussions for some changes but the concept was dropped due to the opposition of certain councillors. I commend those councillors for their stance and support to maintain the Christmas spirit and Christmas tradition.

I have now heard of a plan to dilute Carols by Candlelight at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl. As I said earlier, I hope this is not true and there are no plans to dilute this major event in Victoria's calendar. I therefore seek from the Premier an assurance and a guarantee in Parliament that the Labor Party will not dilute and interfere with this special and unique event. Christmas carols are Christmas carols, and they do not need to be adjusted, changed or distorted simply to please a few people in the Labor Party. I urge the Premier to allow the 30 000 people who attend every

year and the many more who watch it on TV to continue to celebrate Christmas — —

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

Crime: incidence

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — Victoria is becoming a far safer community in which to live, work and raise a family, and that is particularly so in the Maribyrnong local government area. On Monday of last week I had the pleasure of being present when the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Chief Commissioner of Police visited Footscray to announce that Victoria's crime rate had fallen another 2.1 per cent and Maribyrnong's had fallen a massive 20.6 per cent — the largest fall in the state. This included a 23 per cent reduction in crime against property and a similar reduction in drug offences. Since 2000 crime against property has fallen 36.3 per cent and drug offences 38.6 per cent.

In addition excitement is growing in the community as the new \$15 million Footscray police station approaches completion. It will accommodate around 200 officers — a far cry from the time in the 1990s when there were fewer than 100 officers based in Footscray. The innovative Reassurance Policing project in Braybrook is also engaging the community in dealing with the perceptions of safety. The Footscray police team is doing an outstanding job, and the results are there for all to see. It has been a pleasure to work with it over my time in this place.

Crime: incidence

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — This statement condemns the Bracks Labor government and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services for misleading Victorians in relation to the level of violent crime and the number of front-line police in this state. The latest Victorian police crime statistics reveal that violent crime against persons has increased by a disturbing overall 29 per cent since Labor was elected in 1999. These figures confirm that Victorians are now living in a more violent community and violent crimes have skyrocketed since Labor came to office.

Since 1999 assaults are up an alarming 46 per cent, homicides up 36 per cent, abduction and kidnap up 27 per cent and rape up 19 per cent. There was also a record number of victims of violent crime. There were 34 275 victims in 2005–06, which is an increase under Labor of more than 8200 victims or a staggering 32 per cent. The minister's rhetoric on Victoria being a safe

state just does not wash with the record number of victims of crime in this state. The violent crime epidemic has been occurring since Labor came to power and since it has been boasting of increased police numbers and new 24-hour police stations being built. One wonders exactly where all the extra police are, because clearly they are not on the front line actively patrolling our streets and neighbourhoods.

Labor has failed to stem the rise in violent crime, and Victorians have had a gutful of the rhetoric. Labor's rhetoric simply does not add up.

Building Bridges program

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — Last sitting week students from the Building Bridges program addressed the government's Compass luncheon. We undertook to place their wisdom on the public record. Here is the address of Maliha Siddiqui, a year 11 student at the Australian International Academy, previously known as the King Khalid Islamic College, in my electorate. She said:

Throughout 2005 I, along with my classmates, took part in the interfaith Building Bridges program. Around 60 students from three faith-based schools ... all gathered together for around 4 hours every two to three weeks to work together and dispel any prejudices and stereotypes we ... have had.

When Maliha first signed up for the program she did not know what to expect. Maliha has many friends of other faiths, Christian, Jewish et cetera, and she said:

... the experience of sitting down with them and talking about our religion and the common misconceptions people have was new to me. The idea of finding out what my fellow Australians thought of me and my faith, as well as the aspect of finding out about other faiths and mixing with students my age to share common interests, was intriguing. So I went into the first meeting with an open mind ... not ... knowing what to expect.

The first couple of —

moments was awkward —

because I was well aware of the bombardment of negative stereotypes about Muslims in the media, and I thought that the people around me were affected by it ... However, once it was established that I did have hair under my scarf and it did not affect my hearing at all, we all got along very well.

She went on to say that they learnt that they all liked Australian TV shows — —

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

Water: recreation facilities

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) —

'It's keepin' dry, no doubt.
We'll all be rooned', said Hanrahan,
'Before the year is out'.

Last Friday St Brigid's College had a discussion forum on 'Our dry continent' with this poem as the theme. I was a member of the panel, which also included representatives from farming, banking, teaching, the media, a scientist and a water authority.

Following this forum, and after discussions with other groups in western Victoria, including local government, I call on the Minister for Water and the government to assist Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water to investigate all available water sources and to develop strategies to provide water for some sporting and recreational facilities such as ovals, tennis courts, bowling and croquet greens, and council pools.

Lack of rainfall and water shortages are a major worry for all in western Victoria, but for the mental health and wellbeing of our community we must do everything possible to allow groups to come together to support each other. One of the best ways to achieve this is through sport and passive recreation. I call on everyone to conserve water and for Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water to implement greater water restrictions. But for the morale of the community the government must show leadership and assist in the provision of some safe recreation facilities in western Victoria.

As we pray for rain, the people want government support, not more spin and not more government ads. They want genuine assistance. Victoria is bigger than Melbourne, so the government should come out and view the problems we have and speak to people about improving the morale of western Victorians.

Liberal Party: Clayton candidate

Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) — I have been reading a political blog written by Kevin R. Beck, who has some loopy ideas. He has made inane and racist comments about the member for Clayton, and much of his criticism of the member for Clayton is repeated word for word in a letter on page 8 of the *Monash Journal* of Monday, 21 August 2006. This letter has in fact plagiarised Beck's blog, which is gross dishonesty. This disgraceful letter is signed by Michael Carty, the Liberal candidate for Clayton. I call on the Leader of the Opposition to sack his candidate for Clayton. Mr Carty is dishonest, guilty of plagiarism and not fit for public office. The *Monash Journal* has been duped

and should send the Liberal Party a please-explain notice.

Mr Beck criticised the member for Clayton in the context of an ALP preselection process. He is a former member of the ALP. He has also criticised the state opposition leader and federal MPs Alexander Downer, Philip Ruddock and John Howard. In these circumstances it is pretty dopey of Michael Carty to steal Beck's writings and to put his own name on them. The Liberal Party would improve the gene pool of its candidates if it sacked Mr Carty. The sorts of comments that Mr Beck has made on his blog include:

What a disappointment Ted Baillieu is.

But this is the source that Michael Carty, as a Liberal candidate, has put his own name to in a letter to the *Monash Journal*. If he does not resign, he should be sacked by the Leader of the Opposition.

Rural and regional Victoria: infant hearing tests

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — This week is Hearing Awareness Week. The early diagnosis of hearing problems and early intervention, especially where children are concerned, are absolutely critical. The early detection of hearing problems provides a great opportunity for children with moderate or minor hearing loss to have assistance to develop good language skills and strategies to deal with their hearing problems. Children with more serious hearing problems can be assessed for cochlear implants or have other action taken.

The problem is that, despite this government's promises, neonatal hearing screening tests are still not available in many hospitals in country Victoria, including Warrnambool and Portland in my electorate. At the same time, the traditional tests done by maternal and child health nurses have been stopped. This means hundreds of children born in south-west Victoria may not have any hearing test until they reach kindergarten or prep school. In May 2004 the government stated that neonatal hearing screening would start in Melbourne hospitals, and it has started. But two and a half years later the supposed rollout to country hospitals has still not occurred. That means that country babies are missing out and being treated as second-class citizens. All children need and deserve this test.

This city-centric government must immediately cut its government advertising of \$80 million a year and spend that money on ensuring that all Victorian babies are tested, including babies in Portland and Warrnambool and those born throughout regional and rural Victoria.

Francis Mayson-Smith

Ms McTAGGART (Evelyn) — On Friday, 18 August, I had the pleasure of launching the web site Smythical.com. This web site highlights 42 years of artistic creativity in painting, performance, character animals design, Moomba floats, political statements, pop music and much more.

It celebrates one of Mount Evelyn's well-known, charismatic, tenacious and talented characters, Francis Mayson-Smith. Frank and his family migrated to Australia in 1952. In 1965, at the age of 18, he exhibited his first art works. A year later he enrolled in the Walter Dennis-Foley school of painting and graduated from RMIT in fine arts.

Frank and Leonie were married in 1970 and have two lovely children, Justin and Lydia, and have just become grandparents of Alexander. The early 1970s saw Frank exhibiting many of his works, and in 1977 he created Karmai, the Giant Earthworm and festival, wrote and illustrated children's books and then went on to write a song for Rolf Harris. The late 1970s and the 1980s saw many more exhibitions and educational appointments for Frank. All of these are outlined on the web site.

It was the impact of teacher sackings and cuts to services in the seven dark years of the Kennett government which led to an attempt by Leonie to take her own life. Frank's art documented his suffering and that of Leonie in a series of paintings depicting his attacks of artistic anxiety.

As a resident of Mount Evelyn for over 25 years, Frank is well known for his commitment to our great town, and this was evident in the testimonials I read out at the launch. Never seen as a shrinking violet, Frank is quick to protect our town from mobile phone towers, supermarkets and any other intruders who do not have the wellbeing of Mount Evelyn and its residents at heart. Well done to Joy Carrick and the team at the Design Den for their contribution to this fantastic web site.

Planning: Frankston precinct

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — There is widespread outrage in Frankston over the decision by the Minister for Planning to approve a new bulky goods zone near the intersection of Cranbourne Road and McMahons Road. This ministerial decision is contrary to the views of the majority of Frankston councillors, who were elected late last year with opposition to this proposal as a key element in their election policies.

A significant majority of Frankston residents made it quite clear with their votes in that council election that they do not want this project, but the Minister for Planning has arrogantly stepped in and dictated that it will go ahead. In a television interview last Friday the minister advanced a raft of false claims to justify his action, and in doing so he heaped insults on councillors who are not only keeping faith with their community but also trying to protect the neighbourhood character and amenity of their city.

This bulky goods zone proposal will see a 43 000 square metre development placed on prime residential land. This will add to the already bad traffic congestion in that immediate locality. Two local Labor Party stalwarts in Frankston, Mark Conroy and Rogan Ward, are major supporters of the rezoning, and no-one has to be exceptionally clever to understand why. There are questions that need to be answered about this smelly issue by the Minister for Planning and the very silent member for Frankston. Frankston people are keen to know when both those people are prepared to come clean about the real reasons why the Bracks government has overruled the strong views of the local community.

Swinburne University of Technology: First Stop centre

Ms BEARD (Kilsyth) — On Friday, 18 August, I was pleased to visit the First Stop youth resource centre at Swinburne University of Technology in Croydon, together with the Minister for Education and Training and the member for Bayswater. First Stop recently won the Victorian training award for the training initiative of the year. The centre has operated for two years at the Croydon campus. It is a youth employment, education and training resource centre for young people, especially those at risk of dropping out of school or work. The Outer Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network is a major partner in the initiative. In 2005, 340 young people accessed services from the centre, many of them having being out of school for some time — some since early secondary school.

First Stop is a free service that helps young people make decisions about further education, training and employment options. It acts as the first point of contact for those who require personalised assistance and information in a youth-friendly and relaxed atmosphere. As well as industry training and career information, support is offered with résumé writing and job searching. First Stop now has another site at Swinburne's Prahran campus, which will be officially launched in September. As a result of winning the

training initiative of the year award, the Swinburne Croydon First Stop team was presented with a \$10 000 cheque and a trophy. I would like to thank and congratulate Fiona Purcell for her ongoing support and assistance to First Stop and thank and congratulate Trevor and his team.

Jean King

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — I rise to pay tribute to Margaret Jean King, who passed away recently and whose funeral I attended. For many years Jean was a keen musician, giving public performances at more than 200 festivals. As the musical director for the Australian Pioneers Group and a volunteer with the City of Casey, Jean was an unsung treasure, proudly teaching many hundreds of budding artists, always full of energy and enthusiasm.

I also had the pleasure of seeing Jean King play an active role in Australia Day celebrations in Cranbourne year after year, alongside her husband, Lindsay King. She was a true community worker who made a huge contribution to the Cranbourne community. Jean was loved and admired by all who knew her, and she was dearly loved by her family.

My sincerest condolences go to Lindsay King, Jean's proud spouse of 60 years. Jean was a terrific and caring mother to Linette, Gail and Des. Jean was also adored by her grandchildren and great grandchildren. I would like to have noted in this house my offer of sincere condolences to her family and loved ones. May she rest in peace.

Frankston electorate: volunteers

Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) — Unlike the grubby and dishonest contribution just made in this house by the member for Mornington, I would like to inform the house of some terrific developments in Frankston.

Volunteers are an important thread in the fabric of any community, and at Frankston it is no different. Recently I had the pleasure of welcoming the Minister for Victorian Communities to Frankston to announce a grant for Frankston City Council of \$256 000 for community development projects across the city. Of that \$81 696 will purchase a new community bus to take isolated people to community events and will also allow support for Frankston volunteers. Community buses connect people to services and allow more people to get involved in activities at community centres and neighbourhood houses.

An amount of \$175 000 will be used to establish the Frankston Volunteer Partnership, a one-stop shop for

people in Frankston wanting to donate some of their time to volunteer throughout the city. A happy constituent recently wrote to me saying:

I would like to thank you in your support to get us a new community bus ... Thank Mr Steve Bracks for me.

On behalf of the people of Frankston I thank the Premier and also give a very special thanks to the Minister for Victorian Communities for providing this bus for the Frankston community.

The main key to cohesive communities is the work of volunteers, and without the outstanding contribution of these priceless people some organisations would no longer be able to operate. Frankston is lucky to have many volunteers to assist with important community organisations, such as the Frankston Community Support and Information Centre and other various charity organisations. The Bracks government continues to make Victoria a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Millwarra Primary School: achievements

Ms LOBATO (Gembrook) — I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Millwarra Primary School for its ongoing success in its educational outcomes and its commitment to its community.

Millwarra Primary School has two campuses, located at Millgrove and Warburton East, both backing onto the Yarra River. Over the past couple of years morale and educational success has improved enormously under the leadership of both Rob Clark and acting principal Carol Rasmussen. All students now love going to school because of the broad educational opportunities provided by the school.

The school has a close relationship with the River Valley Church. This relationship has assisted not only the school but also the wider community. Millwarra has also been a keen partner with other Millgrove community organisations such as the very effective Millgrove Residents Action Group and the Millgrove Environment Restoration Group. The students have joined in on many occasions planting hundreds of trees along the river and have become very protective of their local environment, appreciating their own precious assets.

Recently at my suggestion the school enthusiastically undertook to become a model school participating in a healthy eating program with Dorothy Edgelow from the Children's Whole Health Foundation. The program is resulting in many happier and healthier children enjoying learning and sharing their knowledge with

their families. Millwarra is thriving in its success and showing it off to the community in its fortnightly assembly rightly titled 'Celebrating our success', which I had the immense pleasure of attending last Friday — and the Warburton East Campus celebrates it in its 'Week of work' assembly. Not only are these celebrations beneficial for the students and teachers who get to show off their success, but also it is a time for the overwhelming number of parents who attend to continue to — —

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

Vietnam War: Long Tan commemoration

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine) — On Friday I was privileged to attend and represent the Premier at the Vietnam Veterans Federation of Victoria's memorial day observations and services held at Fort Queenscliff in Queenscliff. This event has been held on the Bellarine Peninsula for the last six years.

This year's Vietnam veterans memorial day had special significance as the 40th anniversary of the battle of Long Tan. The memorial day provides us all with an opportunity to reflect on and remember those who made the supreme sacrifice in the service of their country and those who have since passed on. The memorial day also enables us to honour those who served and brought the scars of service home with them. In the years since 1972 we have come a long way in healing those wounds, but more can be done.

The Vietnam War was Australia's longest, spanning 10 years, with more than 50 000 men and women involved, 520 Australians losing their lives and some 2400 wounded. The battle of Long Tan saw 18 young Australians killed and 24 wounded in a fight against overwhelming odds. It was one of the most significant actions during the Vietnam War and one that honoured the tradition and spirit of Anzac.

I pay tribute to those who served our country in Vietnam. I have been privileged to meet and talk with many veterans over the last few years, and I thank them for sharing their experiences with me. It has given me a greater insight into what they had endured, and for some, continue to endure, in the service of our country.

Interclub, Ballarat

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — I recently had the pleasure of opening a refurbished social club for people with a disability in Ballarat. Interclub provides a relaxed and informal atmosphere where members can visit at no cost at any time during the five

afternoons it is open every week. The facilities include eight ball, darts, basketball, TV with videos, music and karaoke, computers, cards and cooking. Interclub members continue to enjoy a range of successful social functions organised by the coordinator, Maggie Iafate, who has done a marvellous job there working with the club committee of management to ensure that members get the maximum benefit from the club.

A vibrant part of Interclub is the North Ballarat Knights Australian football team. The Knights are a member of the Victorian Football Integration Development Association. The team enhances players life skills and self-esteem, which extend beyond the game. Since 2000 the Knights have won three premierships. They brought home the 2005 premiership after a season of great commitment and effort by players and support staff alike. Well done to the Knights, and I wish them all the best this year.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! The Leader of The Nationals has 22 seconds.

Water: irrigators

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — Last week I met with representatives of the Macalister irrigation district to hear their concerns about the prospective problems arising from the shortage of water in the region. The initial allocation is only 30 per cent of what is otherwise the total. The community is understandably very concerned about the prospect of a repeat of the sorts of — —

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

COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH (VICTORIA) PROPERTY TRUST BILL

Second reading

Order of the day read for resumption of debate.

Declared private

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! The Speaker has examined the Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust Bill and is of the opinion that it is a private bill.

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Community Services) — I move:

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

Motion agreed to.**Debate resumed from 19 July; motion of Mr HULLS (Attorney-General).**

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — Before I start I extend my deepest sympathy and condolences to the families who lost family members and friends in yesterday's train crash in Egypt. A passenger train collided with a second train, killing at least 80 people and injuring more than 163. It was Egypt's worst train disaster since 2002. The collision occurred in the morning in the town of Qalyoub, about 12 miles north of the capital. I ask His Grace Bishop Suriel to pass on our condolences to the Australian Egyptian community.

It is a pleasure that I stand to speak on the Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust Bill. Firstly, I would like to say that the opposition will be supporting this bill.

I thank the government officials and public servants for the briefing they provided, which I found very informative. I would also like to thank His Grace Bishop Suriel for his hospitality, friendship and advice. He has shown to be a leader with compassion and great understanding and someone who cares about his community. I would also like to thank Father Victor Raphael, who was the first parish priest. If you saw him today you would think that he was just as young as he was when he first started. I also wish to thank Father Macarius Wahba and Father Tadros Sharobeam for their support and advice on this bill.

Australia, and indeed Melbourne, is truly cosmopolitan. We have people from over 200 different backgrounds, and we have people who practice over 100 different religions. Our cultural and linguistic diversity is one of our greatest strengths and one of our greatest assets. One of the communities that make up a unique Australian society is composed of Australians of Egyptian background. Almost all of the original immigrants from Egypt to Australia are Coptic Christians. The Coptic population of Victoria is estimated to be between 10 000 and 15 000, mainly from the urban centres of Cairo and Alexandria.

The Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the oldest apostolic churches worldwide and one of the largest Christian denominations in Africa and the Middle East. It is based on the teaching of the Apostle Mark, who introduced Christianity to Egypt in the first century AD. It is referred to as a member of the oriental Orthodox churches that include the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Armenian Church. The clergy of the Coptic Orthodox Church is headed by

the Pope of Alexandria, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, and includes bishops who oversee the priests ordained in the dioceses. Both the pope and the bishops must be monks, and they are all members of the Coptic Orthodox Holy Synod council which meets regularly to oversee matters of faith and pastoral care of the church. The pope of the Coptic church is highly regarded by all the Copts. Today there are 60 Coptic bishops governing dioceses inside Egypt, as well as dioceses outside Egypt such as in Jerusalem, Sudan, Western Africa, France, England, the USA and Australia.

The first schism in the apostolic church occurred in 451 AD when the Coptic church split from the so-called One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. This occurred years before the Great Schism of 1054. The schism appeared to be the result of a dispute between the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Western Roman Catholic churches regarding the nature of Christ. There are many reasons, but I am not going to go into them at this time. It is interesting to note that His Holiness Pope Shenouda III said:

To the Coptic church, faith is more important than anything, and others must know that semantics and terminology are of little importance to us.

Today the Coptic church is a full member of the World Council of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches, the All African Council of Churches, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, the Canadian Council of Churches and the Australian Council of Churches. Under the leadership of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III the church has indeed flourished. He has developed a unity of faith between Orthodox churches and patriarchates such as Moscow, Romania and Constantinople. As a result, a full communion between them is on the table for consideration.

In 1973 His Holiness was the first Coptic Orthodox Pope to visit the Vatican in over 1500 years, signing a common declaration on the issue of Christology and an agreement to establish joint commissions for dialogue on unity. Today there are about 50 million Coptic Orthodox Christians in the world, with over 8 million in Egypt, which has a population of approximately 60 million people. Ethiopia has roughly 38 million, over half of its population. Eritrea has about 2 million, and there are a significant number in North America, Europe, Australia, Sudan and Israel.

The word 'Coptic' describes the Egyptian Christians and is taken from the Greek word 'Aigyptos', meaning 'Egypt'. The Coptic church was also the predominant faith of the Egyptians. This, however, changed in about

632 AD with the arrival of the Arabic population who brought with them the Islamic faith. The Coptic population decreased from 9 million at the time of the conquest to approximately 700 000 in the early 1900s. Despite the hardships, the changes and the many challenges over the past 1400 years, the Coptic church remains one of the largest Christian faiths in the Middle East, flourishing and spreading Christianity worldwide. It has sent missionaries to the people of Africa, particularly Ethiopia, where the Coptic Orthodox Church is the predominant faith. Worldwide, Copts have reached prestigious academic and professional stature. One such individual was of course Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the sixth Secretary-General of the United Nations.

In December 1999 His Grace Bishop Suriel was enthroned in Melbourne and is the bishop for Melbourne, Canberra, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific islands. In June 2002 His Holiness Pope Shenouda III officially ordained His Grace Bishop Daniel. He is the first bishop with jurisdiction over the Australian states of New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory and over North and South-East Asia. There are approximately 50 000 Copts in Australia and, as I said earlier, about 10 000 to 15 000 of them live in Victoria.

The Coptic church in Australia was established in 1970 when 20 Coptic families formed an association and found a permanent home for their church in Sydney. Since then numerous churches, a nursing home, monasteries, primary and secondary schools have been erected throughout Australia. In Victoria, for example, in the suburb of Coolaroo, the church established St Mary's Coptic Orthodox College which provides both primary and secondary education. It is the first Coptic Orthodox school outside Egypt. The school aims to provide an education in a safe and clean environment, guided by the Christian teachings and traditions of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

At a time when many traditional churches are struggling to attract and retain links with young people, the Coptic church has provided an example by maintaining its link with young people. The school was opened in 1991 by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III who left a message in the school's visitors book in which he said:

I am very glad to visit our Coptic school in Melbourne. It is the first Coptic school in all Australia. I admired its discipline and method. I wish for the headmaster, the teachers, the pupils and all working in it all success. May God use this school to witness to his kingdom.

It is signed by His Holiness Shenouda III.

A second school, St Anthony's Coptic College, was established in Frankston North in 1995. In September 2000 the diocese purchased a property in Coburg and established a Coptic centre incorporating a theological college. In 2001 a property in the heart of the city called Whitefriars Park was purchased. It was a monastery and has now become the Melbourne diocese of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

When Coptic leader Pope Shenouda visited Melbourne in 2002, it is estimated that over 90 per cent of Copts aged between 15 and 35 attended the meeting, which shows the magnetism and the strength of His Holiness. As I said at the time, the leadership of His Holiness and His Grace Bishop Suriel have incorporated and embraced the younger members of the community. I have to say, having met His Grace and a number of the parish priests, that I am astonished at the enthusiasm with which they are trying to help many members of the community.

The Coptic Orthodox Church now has plans to expand the Coptic Village Hostel, which is located in Hallam. The church will make a submission to the commonwealth for 57 beds and for a capital grant. I support its application, and I hope the commonwealth government will provide the money for this. As I said, this is just an example of how active His Grace and the church have been over the years in meeting the needs of the community.

The bill before the house helps to restructure the diocese to make sure things are run efficiently while ensuring a good return in terms of services to the Copts of Melbourne and Victoria. The purpose of the bill is to establish a corporate trustee for the Coptic Orthodox Church within the diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions and to cancel the registration of certain associations. His Grace has requested this legislation to assist him with the smooth administration of the church's assets.

We have received a copy of a letter from the lawyers of the Coptic Orthodox Church indicating that this legislation is required and that they are supportive of the bill. Their letter states:

We are instructed by His Grace Bishop Suriel bishop of the Coptic Orthodox diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions, that the above bill addresses all the matters that the diocese has sought to be addressed.

His Grace has also asked that we express his gratitude and the gratitude of the Coptic Orthodox community in Victoria to you for the assistance that you and your government have provided by agreeing to introduce this bill into the Parliament.

The bill as it stands is supported by the community, by the church and of course by His Grace.

The associations whose registrations will be cancelled are listed in schedule 1 of the bill. They are: the Coptic Orthodox Church diocese of Melbourne in Donvale; the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate in my electorate of Bulleen; the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate in Oakleigh; the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate of St George's Church in St Albans; the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate of St Mina and St Marina's Church in Hallam; the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate of St Mary's Church in Kensington; and the Coptic Orthodox Church of St Mark's in Preston.

The schools will be run independently of this trust, but the land on which the schools are located will come under the trust itself. Again, I received a letter from the lawyers advising me that that will be the case. The trust will consist of not less than three members, one of whom must be the bishop. The function of the trust will be:

- (a) to acquire, hold, deal with and dispose of real and personal property as trustee for, or for the purposes of, the Church;
- (b) to act as trustee under express trusts for the purposes of the Church created by gift or will;
- (c) any other functions conferred on the Trust by this Act.

The general powers will be to:

- (a) acquire or hold property in its own right, as joint tenant or as tenant in common;
- (b) enter into a scheme of co-operation with another denomination;
- (c) mortgage, charge or otherwise encumber trust property;
- (d) invest or lend any trust funds held by it in accordance with the terms of any trust to which the funds are subject;
- (e) accept appointment, and act, as an administrator, executor or trustee;
- (f) give guarantees and indemnities.

This bill is good for the church, and it is good for the Australian Coptic community in Victoria. It will assist His Grace to ensure that the needs of the community are met.

Once again I have to pay tribute to the work of the parish priests, of His Grace and of the whole community. They have done wonderful work to ensure that our young people are educated. I have been to the school at Coolaroo and have seen first hand the

excellent educational instruction that the students are provided with. I have seen the school operate during the day. It is a school that the teachers and parents should be very proud of. This has not come about without hard work. People have worked very hard to ensure the school has grown. It started off with only a handful of students, and today it boasts, if I am not wrong, close to 600 students. You do not send a child to a school if that school is not doing well. It is a tribute to the bishop, the church and members of the community, who have united and worked together to ensure that they meet the needs of the community as a whole.

As I said, this bill is a way forward for the church. I wish His Grace well, and I wish the Coptic parishes and all the schools all the best for the future. The Liberal Party is supporting the bill and wishes it a speedy passage.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — The Nationals also support this legislation. Although it is relatively brief in compass, it is very significant in its effect. After the usual preliminary clauses, in part 2 it sets out the mechanisms whereby the property trust is to be established. That part also describes the general functions, powers and administrative arrangements which will be accorded to the trust.

Part 3 effects the relevant transfers to the trustee from the existing church associations and from His Grace. As my colleague the member for Bulleen has fully and eloquently described the history of the church in Australia and the many facets of its current presence, I do not intend to go over the same things. Suffice it to say that the church, having been established in Victoria in the 1970s, has become an absolute cornerstone of the faith life of those of the Coptic Orthodox faith. It is of course fundamental to the Coptic community, and from The Nationals perspective we are very pleased to see and be supportive of the legislation which is now before the house. We also wish it a speedy passage.

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) — I am also equally pleased to rise and speak in support of the Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust Bill. As has been said, the Coptic Orthodox Church has had an organised presence here in Australia since the 1970s, catering very well, may I add, to the religious needs of its more than 10 000-strong membership, many of whom live here in Victoria.

This private bill goes a long way towards establishing a more modern system for dealing with the church's assets and property on behalf of that significant number of its followers. This private bill will establish a corporate trustee structure for the Coptic Orthodox

Church diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions. The bill will provide, as I said, a modern and unitary mechanism for the administration of the properties that belong to the diocese. The corporate trustee arrangements will also give perpetual succession to the trust to hold the assets of the church on behalf of all its practitioners.

The church is currently structured in a variety of ways, including through several incorporated associations and bodies of trustees. It makes sense for what is now a significant religious denomination in Victoria to have these arrangements recomposed into a seamless and unified structure. We have had many bills before this house which have contained provisions for the enhancement of transparency, accountability and efficiency, if you like, in relation to the public that we serve. They are very admirable qualities. It is also the case that the public's expectation of these qualities being enhanced has been deemed by Parliament to have increased in recent years. It is therefore commendable that the followers and leaders of the Coptic church here in Victoria have found it worthwhile to rearrange their assets and administrative processes to provide greater clarity and easier management of those assets.

This private bill has been requested by the bishop of the diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions of the church, and this has occurred — to my knowledge and going by the evidence — after lengthy consultation and with the full support of the church hierarchy and all followers of the church. I certainly commend the leadership of the church for the process it has adopted to get to a successful conclusion of this question of the management of properties and assets under one unified system.

It is a tradition of this Parliament that assistance is given to religious and charitable organisations where there is a public benefit to be achieved. From time to time private bills come before us, and each one of us, as members of Parliament, have to revisit the question of what the meaning of a private bill is. It does not take long to answer it on those occasions — and they are occasions rather than regular occurrences — when we come across gems such as what we have before us today. A community — a body within society — has come before us requesting assistance to give it greater ability and flexibility to manage its own affairs in a way that delivers a greater good to the public and certainly to the followers of the Coptic Orthodox Church. That is the example we have before us today, and this bill certainly fits the criterion; it fits it very well.

Longer established churches such as the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church — of which I am

a member — and the Presbyterian Church have had acts passed by this Parliament because of a recognised public good at the time of their enactment. The Coptic Orthodox Church joins this long-established tradition. As I have already said, the church is quite significant in size in Victoria and has followers throughout Australia. It is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world. It certainly has very good credentials, if I may add that without being flippant.

The church has His Holiness Pope Shenouda III as its head and a Holy Synod based in the heart of the church in Alexandria, Egypt. This international church — and that is indeed what it is — is well represented in Victoria, adding to our rich culture. I am very proud to see this private bill before us today, because to me it tells us a very good story. It tells us that Victoria has a very good record not only of embracing diversity of culture and diversity of societies but of seeing our diverse communities embracing the instruments available to them, whether they be acts of Parliament or any other instruments within the state, in order to take full part in the life of our community. I commend the church for embracing that opportunity that is available to it.

This is a strong multicultural state, and I think it is a real measure of our success in embracing diversity that we have such a bill before us. There is clearly a strength in our diverse communities and the confidence to make full use, as I said, of our state instruments. I will really enjoy seeing this private bill join those put forward by the long-established churches that have had private bills enacted through this Parliament over many decades.

While we can say that this bill may be seen as a fairly narrow example of our strength and diversity of culture, nevertheless it tells a very good and positive story, and I think it sends a very good and positive message to all of Victoria and all of Australia, especially in these times of crisis and of a great test of the faiths of the world. It gives us in Victoria a healthy example of how we can manage many faiths and many views in a harmonious way. I commend the bishop and the other leaders of the church, some of whom are with us in the gallery today, for bringing their private bill to the Parliament.

Just returning to the nub of the private bill, the trust that will run the properties and assets of the church will comprise the bishop and no fewer than two other members of the church. The new trust arising from this bill will commence on a date to be announced by the bishop after due public notice is given through the *Government Gazette*. Upon the bishop's pronouncement the existing incorporated associations which currently hold properties will cease to exist, and

all those properties and assets will become part of the one system of administration.

This bill has the full support, I understand, of all the parishes and all the followers of the church. It is a very good sign that what may have been difficult discussions within the church about how to come to a unified way of dealing with property — and the Coptic church holds a lot of property — have been had in a way that to my knowledge has been very unifying and has drawn the broad support of all of the church's followers. I again congratulate the leadership of the church for undertaking a process that has been very strong in consultation. It has been a great pleasure to be able to speak in support of the bill.

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — I rise to say a few words on the Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust Bill. In doing so I refer mainly to my time as Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs under the Kennett government in the 1990s. I know the then Premier, Jeff Kennett, was a great supporter of the Coptic Orthodox Church, and we did some very good work together.

For any church to survive and flourish it must be at the heart of its community. One of the great advantages and treasures of the Coptic church here in Victoria, and indeed in Australia, is that it has embraced the younger generation as well as taken care of the elderly. In so many churches nowadays — and not just in churches but in many other community groups — there is a generation gap between the older members of a church and the younger ones. Although the Coptic church of Victoria would be a small church compared to others, the participation of the young, the middle aged and the old is very much to its credit. That has happened because the church leaders, led by His Grace Bishop Suriel, here in Australia, have been able to ensure that everybody is included in church activities.

I know this is something that His Holiness Pope Shenouda III is a strong believer in. I had the privilege of meeting His Holiness on two occasions, once when I was a minister here in Victoria and once when I went to Egypt with Stephen Seif, who organised the first visit there, and we visited His Holiness the Pope at his papal see in Alexandria. What I love about His Holiness is that he has a wonderful twinkle in his eyes. He likes to know about every part of the worldwide diaspora of his church. He has been here at least five or six times that I know of, and he has opened up new schools and assisted the diocese.

I should also point out that, quite apart from being at the heart of its community, this is a church that has

withstood thousands of years of repeated persecution and of having to stand up for itself. We are very much advantaged by the fact that a very large proportion of the Egyptian community in this state are of the Coptic faith, because they strongly believe in educating their children and making them study hard and in their being good citizens. They also strongly believe in supporting the church financially. The church gives back to them through wonderful schools and facilities, including the Coptic Village Hostel in Hallam. I understand that the church is making a submission to the commonwealth government for 57 beds and a capital grant. I am sure the member for Bulleen will do everything he can to encourage our federal Liberal minister to assist in providing the grant by bringing to the minister's attention the benefit to the Coptic community of expanding this hostel in Hallam.

Some of the land involved in this piece of legislation is in and next door to my electorate. In my electorate the church owns lot 2 Minter Court, Park Orchards. It is a beautiful environmental area, and the church has supported that location for some years. Just as importantly, some 100 metres outside the boundary of my electorate and inside the member for Doncaster's electorate lies a piece of significant acreage in Park Road, Donvale. Formerly a Roman Catholic monastery and theological centre, the land was going to be subdivided into small housing allotments. The local residents were most concerned, because the land is next to a green wedge. I am proud to say that the Coptic church purchased all of the land. It has protected the land and kept the trees, and it is being used as the church's headquarters. What a beautiful gift to the people of the area. Not having this land subdivided into small housing allotments is a wonderful example of land ownership by the church.

I also congratulate the church on its care in ensuring that its church, hostel and school properties are geographically located close to where its communities live — and that is all over Melbourne, not just in one location. Some churches with small communities are often located only in one area, but the Coptic church has made a clever decision to ensure its properties are all over Melbourne — in the south-eastern, eastern and western suburbs — so that its communities can have easy access to the properties and the services that the church is able to provide.

On behalf of the Liberal Party I am proud to say that we are supporting the bill. I wish His Grace good luck in having become a land manager. When I was the minister responsible for universities and schools I could not believe the number of property documents I had to sign because as minister I was legally the owner of

those properties. An interesting coincidence is that Paul Hoy, who has prepared this legal documentation by Gadens Lawyers, was and maybe still is the education department's property lawyer. He has done well, because the business of land titles is very complicated. I wish His Grace good luck in being a large property manager for his community in our state of Victoria.

I am pleased that all parties are supporting this very important change in the administration of the church. It is a change that the whole Coptic community wants to happen because of its love of and support for the church.

Ms BARKER (Oakleigh) — I am pleased to speak on the Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust Bill, which establishes the Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust, a statutory body corporate with the power to acquire, hold, deal with and dispose of real and personal property as the trustee for the Coptic Orthodox Church within the diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions.

The arrangements for the vesting of the property held by various associations within the diocese in a central statutory trust entity are generally similar to those statutory arrangements in place for other churches in Victoria. Of course there is already an act in New South Wales facilitating a property trust, as this bill will do, for the Coptic Orthodox Church for the diocese of Sydney and affiliated regions.

This bill has the full support of the individual parishes that form the Coptic Orthodox Church in Victoria. There have been letters forwarded expressing support from all those individual parishes for this bill. Similarly, I have had expressions of support for this bill from the Coptic Orthodox community in the Oakleigh electorate.

The trust that will be established will have as members the bishop of the diocese and not less than two other members appointed for a period specified by the bishop. The properties of the Coptic Orthodox Church within the diocese that are currently vested in the bishop will now vest in the new trust with the trust commencing on the day to be specified by the bishop. This commencement can only occur once this bill is passed and following a notice published by the bishop in the *Government Gazette*. On that appointed day the various incorporated associations, which are currently within the community and in which certain properties have been vested, will be cancelled.

The Coptic Orthodox Church was formally established in Victoria in the 1970s. It is estimated that the current total congregation of the church community within

Victoria is approximately 10 000. I have the great pleasure of having a very strong and dedicated Coptic Orthodox community in my electorate. The Archangel Michael and St Anthony's Coptic Orthodox Church in Drummond Street, Oakleigh, and community were established almost 26 years ago. I had the great pleasure in October last year of attending their silver jubilee dinner.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the community for establishing such a strong presence in Oakleigh and in particular for all the other considerable work it has done in establishing much-needed facilities for the community. As has been referred to, it built the Coptic Village Hostel in Hallam to care for its elderly residents and there are colleges in Frankston and Coolaroo.

The congregation in Oakleigh works very hard to help one another without any particular need for recognition or praise. The youth groups and activities, the weekly functions to assist the community, particularly older people, and the continuing work of many members of the congregation caring for and upgrading the facilities which they have developed in my electorate are continuing examples of its hard work and commitment to its faith and community.

What you see when you visit the Archangel Michael and St Anthony's Coptic Orthodox Church in Oakleigh is what we as a government and I am sure as a Parliament would hope to see in all communities — strong families, a great sense of community and importantly a role for everyone to play in their particular community. While we are able to offer some very small support through the Victorian Multicultural Commission organisational support grants, this community is self-supporting and does the majority of its work through the generosity of its own community.

I want to take this opportunity to formally recognise the hard work of this community and thank it for its contribution to our society. In formally recognising this hard work I note the exemplary work of the authorised committee of deacons of the Archangel Michael and St Anthony's Coptic Orthodox Church: His Grace Bishop Suriel; parish priests Father Mina Rizkhalla and Father Daniel Ghabrial; Joseph Shehata, who is the Sunday school coordinator; and Emad Farag, assistant treasurer, and Adel Zayed, committee member. I want to particularly acknowledge Michael Ziada, the treasurer and secretary. Michael is one of those delightful gentlemen with whom I have a great deal to do who always has a smile on his face and is very willing to talk to me and let me know what is happening with the congregation.

This congregation is strengthened by its faith. It is committed to its faith and community. It is an important and integral part of our local community. The Coptic Orthodox community is certainly a very important and integral part of broader Victorian society and its cultural fabric. I know that both the community in Oakleigh and the broader Coptic Orthodox community of Victoria are very supportive of this bill and have been working towards its implementation. They see that this bill will provide considerable benefit to their community.

I am very pleased that the bill has now been introduced and will be treated as a public bill, therefore dispensing with the fees that would be required should it have continued as a private bill. I am sure it will enjoy a speedy passage through both houses of this Parliament so that the Coptic Orthodox diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions can facilitate a more efficient method of administering its property and funds and certainly so it can continue to do the exemplary work it does in my community and the broader Victorian community. I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — It is a great pleasure to join my colleagues and say just a few words about the Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust Bill. I too take the opportunity to express my condolences and sympathies to those families who lost loved ones in that horrific train crash in Egypt where 80 people lost their lives. I sincerely hope none of those present here today were so affected by this tragedy.

It is lovely to see within our Parliament His Grace Bishop Suriel and his party. It is reminiscent for me, because as shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the last Parliament I was able to meet a large number of very different groups within our community and got to appreciate the enormous diversity of Victoria and the fact that in our state some 200 countries and over 100 religions are represented.

We are an amazingly culturally and linguistically diverse state. My own seat of Caulfield is one of the most diverse in this state. There is a high proportion of people of the Jewish faith who represent a large number of Holocaust survivors. There is also a large number of people of other faiths. It is my responsibility as the member for Caulfield to represent all those groups within this place, as indeed do all my colleagues when we come here.

Australian members of the Coptic Orthodox Church are mostly Coptic Christians who have migrated from Egypt. As I said, they are a very important part of our community and contribute a great deal to our society.

My colleague the member for Bulleen told me a little more about the church and its members. He told me the Coptic Orthodox community in Victoria is made up of some 10 000 to 15 000 people, which is a very significant community indeed. As I understand it the Coptic church is one of the oldest apostolate churches in the world. It is based on the teachings of Mark, who introduced Christianity to Egypt in the first century. Today there are something like 8 million people of this faith in Egypt in a population of 60 million. I was fascinated to hear that there are 38 million members of the church in Ethiopia, representing about 50 per cent of its population. This religion has flourished in that country and elsewhere in Africa. This is the result of the strong missionary work of the Coptic church.

The Coptic Orthodox Church clergy is headed by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III in Alexandria. Some 60 Coptic bishops govern dioceses across Egypt and in other places such as the Sudan, western Africa, France, the UK, the USA, Australia and, interestingly, Jerusalem. The church is also very ecumenical by nature in that it is a full member of the World Council of Churches and many other ecumenical organisations across the world. As I said there are 10 000 to 15 000 members of the church in Victoria and 50 000 in Australia, so it is well established in this country. It started in 1970 with a small group of just 20 families. That is a similar background to those of a large number of communities in Australia. They start off with a small group of families and then flourish and have children, and so the generations move on.

As has been mentioned, St Mary's Coptic Orthodox College is a very fine Coptic school in Victoria — and the member for the Bulleen mentioned some other colleges. The Coptic church is to be congratulated on its capacity to attract young people. Many other religions have found that difficult, but obviously His Grace has some talent in attracting the young. He is to be congratulated on this achievement.

The church also importantly aims to meet the needs of older people. I wish the church well in its application to the commonwealth government for 57 aged care places. I am sure it will find many parliamentarians offering their support for its application. We wish the church every success with that. The one thing I have learnt not only from having much to do with multicultural affairs but also from looking after ageing parents is the importance of looking after aged people in a way that is sensitive to their cultural needs. Very often people lose the use of their second language, which is often English, as they get older, so there is a need for great understanding and sensitivity in the support that is

offered to older people who can no longer look after themselves. This is very important.

This legislation was brought in at the request of His Grace. It will help restructure the diocese and ensure the smooth running of the church. To that end I congratulate the Coptic Orthodox Church on auspicing this piece of legislation. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Debate interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kotsiras) —

Order! Before I call on the next speaker I acknowledge in the gallery His Grace Bishop Suriel from the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Debate resumed.

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — It is a pleasure to rise to speak on this bill, particularly now that you, Acting Speaker, have acknowledged our important guest in the gallery.

The Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust Bill was prepared at the request of the Coptic Orthodox Church for the purpose of establishing a corporate trustee with perpetual succession to take the place of previous arrangements under which several properties of the church have been held by a number of different trustee bodies. It is no small feat to bring such a diverse range of people together in one mind and hopefully one heart as part of bringing this legislation before the house. There is strong bipartisan support for the bill, as there should be. The work of the Coptic Orthodox Church enhances Victoria, and we are all immensely grateful for it.

Earlier speakers have outlined the origins and history of the Coptic Orthodox Church internationally, in Australia and in Victoria. I do not intend to repeat what they have said, other than to say that this, the day on which this legislation has come before the house, must be an extremely proud day for the many Victorian Coptic communities. We have heard of the vibrant faith of the church members, be they young, old or in between.

I think it is important that this Parliament place on the record its appreciation of the many individuals who have worked so hard to ensure that when we pass this legislation we will do so knowing that it has the wholehearted support of the community. In making that comment I acknowledge the information that has been

presented to me by way of support from the various church communities. Support for the legislation has been expressed by Father Thomas Abdelmalier, from the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate in Keilor Downs; Father Attala, from the St Anthony's Coptic Orthodox College in Frankston North; Father Mina Isaac, from the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate Anba Bishoy and Anba Shenouda Church in Donvale; Adel Hanna, from St Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church in Gilbert Road, Preston; Father Tradros Hanna Sharobeam, from St Mary's Coptic Orthodox College in Epsom Road, Kensington; and Father Abenoub Attalla, from the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate in Patterson Lakes. From the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate at Glen Waverley there is a letter that has been signed by Milad Guirguis. I am sure members of the gallery are laughing at some of my pronunciation, but never mind!

At Donvale we have the headquarters of the Coptic Orthodox Church diocese of Melbourne, which I drive past every time I visit my sister. I endorse the comments of the member for Warrandyte about how well that site is cared for. I want to record this house's appreciation of Bishop Suriel. I also refer to the Coptic Village Hostel out at Narre Warren, and I have a letter from there signed by Emad Farag. Finally, as the member for Oakleigh has acknowledged, from Bentleigh East there is Michael Ziada. Many people other than those who have signed letters supporting this legislation should be acknowledged, and I am sure each individual I have mentioned would say there are many fine parishioners behind them and with them on this legislation. This Parliament can pass the legislation knowing that it has the broad support of the faith community.

In highlighting some of the contents of the bill I point out that it will enable the Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust to establish a body corporate with perpetual succession with the power to acquire, hold, deal and dispose of real and personal property as trustees for the Coptic Orthodox Church. As outlined by others, the members of the trust are the bishop of the diocese — or in his absence or during a vacancy in the see a person for the time being entitled to perform the functions of the bishop according to the rules and customs of the church — and not less than two other members appointed by the bishop. The bishop and one other member are to constitute a quorum at meetings of the trust unless the trust otherwise determines.

We have heard how the trust has the power to hold property as a joint tenant or tenant-in-common, to enter into a scheme of cooperation with other denominations and to invest funds, including the investment of trust funds in a common fund. That aspect of the legislation

is something about which Victoria can be particularly proud, because many countries would not have the spirit of cooperation and partnership which exists in the multicultural, multifaith Victorian community. It means that you can have, as part of the thinking of a dynamic church and therefore as part of legislation, a provision that says that the trust has the power to hold property as joint tenant or tenant-in-common.

The other point worth mentioning relates to the Associations Incorporation Act. This bill will cancel the registration of certain associations incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1981 that formerly held property on behalf of the church. Finally, the trust is to be the successor in law of the cancelled associations, thereby ensuring that any future gifts, bequests, dispositions and trusts do not fail but have effect in favour of the trust. I hope the 10 000 members of the Victorian Coptic Orthodox Church feel proud that they have worked so hard to pull this legislation together. They have given us clear advice and unified representation. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — The Australian nation, following the first Australians, has been marked by successive waves of migration, and the membership of this legislative chamber has reflected the countries of origin of the people who have migrated to this country. A number of issues have confronted the migrants who have travelled here, and the motivating reasons why they travelled here can be predominantly summarised as seeking opportunity, fleeing tyranny and wanting to provide a future for their children.

In the case of the Egyptian Coptic community, following some tensions in Egypt over the past century and more recently over the last 30 years or so, there has been a significant level of migration to Australia. There are some 10 000 members of the community in Victoria who in settling here have sought to reflect their life and faith worship. The bill before the house reflects their settlement progress and their establishment. It also provides a framework for the ownership of their church property.

The purpose of the bill is to establish a corporate trustee for the Coptic Orthodox Church within the diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions to hold property for the benefit of the Coptic Orthodox Church in that diocese, to provide for the vesting of certain property in the corporate trustee and to cancel the incorporation of certain associations. Twenty-five years ago my wife and I lived in Oakleigh, not far from the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate Archangel Michael and St Anthony's Church in Drummond Street. We followed the early progress of the church community as

it renovated a building that had come in part from the Uniting Church. It was interesting to observe the workings of that particular community and the way it went about the renovation. I understand it has prospered in that precinct over the last 25 years.

The Victorian community is also marked by a number of other orthodox communities. In my former role as Liberal spokesperson for multicultural affairs it was a great privilege to visit different faith communities, ranging from the Russian Orthodox and the Rumanian Orthodox churches through to the Syrian Orthodox, the Armenian Orthodox and the Ethiopian Orthodox churches, where there are some linkages as well. On one occasion I attended a function in Carlton which had been convened by the Coptic Orthodox community. There was a great outpouring of its evangelical work into Fiji and the South Seas. It reflected an engagement by all levels of the community, including its younger members, parents and senior members, together with the clerical leaders. It is a tribute to their work not only that they have established their church so strongly in Australia but that the church has had this evangelical purpose to move further afield.

Interestingly there are a number of lions around the ceiling of this chamber which I understand reflect the Judaeo-Christian heritage of this nation, given the symbolism of the lion of Judah and the House of Judah, which is amplified more fully in the parliamentary library.

The object of the legislation is to make the ownership of church property more functional by its transfer into the efficient, working trust that is to be established. The trust will have no less than three members: one must be the bishop, and the others must be people appointed by the bishop, the appointments being for the tenure specified by the bishop when they are made. It will be a small working trust, and I am sure it will be able to achieve its aims. I also understand that the bill has the support of the different church associations, which include the Coptic Orthodox Church diocese of Melbourne, the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate Anba Bishop and Anba Shenouda church, the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate Archangel Michael and St Anthony's Church — which, as I mentioned earlier, is in Oakleigh — the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate St George's Church, the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate St Mina and St Marina's Church, the Coptic Orthodox patriarchate (parish of Victoria) St Mary's Orthodox Church, and the Coptic Orthodox St Mark's Church.

There is an extensive list in schedule 2 of the bill of the land to be vested in the trust, and that shows the vision and the commitment of the members of the Coptic

Orthodox community in this state to the work of the church and the foundation it is providing for the future.

I pay tribute to His Grace Bishop Suriel, the Bishop of Melbourne and affiliated regions, which include Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, the Australian Capital Territory and the Pacific. I also pay tribute to the work of the community in establishing in Victoria some eight churches, a nursing home, a theological college in Donvale, two primary/secondary schools in Coolaroo, St Mary's and St Anthony's in Frankston, and its ongoing work in the provision of aged care and other services in catering to the needs of its members in this state.

Victoria is richer as a consequence of the contributions of the many different faith communities in this state. The cohesiveness and constructive work of the Coptic Orthodox Church sets a high example which many other churches in this state could follow.

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — I join my parliamentary colleagues from both sides of the house in supporting the Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust Bill. The bill was requested as a private bill by the bishop of the diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Victoria is a multicultural, multifaith society, and its strength is our diversity. Therefore it is incumbent upon the government to assist different faith-based communities to strengthen the operation of their valuable institutions. Victorian legislation contains various acts that establish special statutory church trusts — the Roman Catholic Trusts Act, the Anglican Trusts Corporations Act and the Presbyterian Trusts Act — to mention a few. Therefore it really makes sense to treat this as a public bill and to dispense with the fees. It is a commendable move by the house.

The bill establishes the Coptic Orthodox Church (Victoria) Property Trust, a statutory body with the power to acquire, hold, deal with and dispose of real and personal property as trustee for the Coptic Orthodox Church within the diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions. The new structure will better protect the assets of the Coptic Orthodox entities in Victoria and facilitate the spreading of resources, helping all the resource-hungry entities of the church. This will also provide a better hierarchical structure, with the bishop at the helm of affairs providing for all the entities across Victoria.

The Coptic Orthodox Church in Victoria has grown significantly since its establishment in 1970 as a result of the growing migrant settlement of Egyptian

Christians. According to the census figures there were 33 370 Egypt-born persons in Australia in 2001. The largest professing faith of Egypt-born Australians is the Coptic faith. My understanding is that the Coptic Orthodox Church community in Victoria has seven churches and operates two schools and a hostel.

One of the schools, St Anthony's Coptic Orthodox College, is in Frankston North within my electorate of Cranbourne. The school was started in 1995 and now has a student population of around 330. It caters for primary to Victorian certificate of education students. This is the church's only school in the south-east of Victoria. The other one is in Coolaroo in the western suburbs. St Anthony's school owns 13 buses. Except for 10 to 12 local students, the rest of the students are picked up and dropped off daily by the school buses. What a fantastic service the school provides.

St Anthony's also provides a great service to the members of the south-eastern community, who prefer to have their children educated in a Coptic Orthodox faith-based environment. The school is open to members of all Christian denominations, so there are a few students from other denominations. The school has a multicultural student population. There are kids from Serbian, Croatian, Russian, Sudanese, Iraqi and Iranian backgrounds. I congratulate the great leadership role played by the Reverend Father Daniel Ghabrial, who managed the affairs of the St Anthony's Coptic school in Frankston North in an excellent manner. I also congratulate His Grace Bishop Anba Suriel for his initiative in getting this trust established in statute.

This is good legislation that will assist the Coptic Orthodox community in Victoria. This bill complements the Coptic Orthodox Church (NSW) Property Trust Act 1990, providing similar arrangements to the New South Wales church community. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — I would like to congratulate the Attorney-General on introducing the legislation into this house. As my association with the Coptic community goes back well over 30 years, I will not talk about facts and figures but about my personal association with the church and the community.

I met Basil Morcos when I was teaching in the former Altona North Technical School in Millers Road. I did not know or ask what his religion was, but he kept telling me he was Egyptian. Eventually I found out that he was from the Coptic Orthodox Church. During our lunch breaks he started to teach and explain to me the history of the church. There were other Egyptian teachers at the school. The second person I knew was

Morcos Abdel Messih, another Coptic man who came to live in St Albans, where we met and worked together in those days.

It is nice to hear about the achievements of the church. Father Tadros started his mission of getting all the Coptic community together in the church. When the church was leased in High Street, Preston, we organised prayers following Pope Shenouda's house arrest. There was help from and multifaith prayers said by all the Christian leaders who attended. I was one of them, and I was urged to attend. There I met Father Tadros and his extended family, who are still living in my electorate. Basil Morcos still has a business in my electorate.

The church then endeavoured to get building permits. It was not aware of the planning schemes, nor did the planning schemes spell things out the way they do today. We tried for one in Preston. We bought a petrol station and wanted to build a church there. It took quite some time — and lobbying by me — to convince the council to issue a building permit for the church on that site within the neighbourhood for the Coptic community.

We faced the same situation in St Albans. We had to once again purchase in an industrial area. Every weekend volunteers worked to build that church and turn that factory into a church they are now proud of. I met with Pope Shenouda on several occasions before he appointed Bishop Suriel. I was at the ceremony for that big celebration and saw the jubilation and pride of the forefathers in the community — the older people — and also the young people. It really shows the ongoing life of the church in this country that the young people are active participants in church activities.

Every time I attend a Coptic function I find that the young people are the ones doing all the work, organising where you are sitting, what you are doing, where you are parking. The facilities are fantastic. I said to Pope Shenouda when we had a bit of opposition in St Albans, 'Religion has lived many thousands of years before and will be here after we are gone. Don't worry, the opposition in St Albans will be gone'. Now they have purchased all the land around the church and extended. They have also purchased another factory as a community hall and are developing and running Sunday school and many youth activities in my area, which I am very proud of.

I know that time is limited and I am getting the message to wind up, but I want to once again congratulate everyone concerned in the Coptic community. As I said, with my 30-year association with the community,

I am personally very pleased to be in this house to see this legislation pass, because it means recognition of the Coptic community. It is pleasing to hear all my colleagues now recognising and accepting the Coptic community in this state, which is virtually coming to fruition now. We have developed and changed as a country, and I hope the Coptic church will receive the same treatment in all the other countries it is working in and where its members are practising their religion as it has here in Victoria and Australia.

Once again I congratulate the Premier, the Attorney-General, Bishop Suriel and Father Tadros, who was of course part of the beginning of the Coptic church leadership and getting people together here in Australia.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — In summing up I want to thank all members for their wholehearted support for this very important legislation. I also want to acknowledge His Grace Bishop Suriel for being here and indeed for requesting this important bill, and I am more than happy as Attorney-General to have introduced this legislation into the house.

As we know, the Coptic Orthodox Church was formally established in Victoria in the 1970s, and I acknowledge the contribution of my parliamentary colleague the member for Keilor, who has had a very long association with the Coptic church, which was established here with the growing migrant settlement of Egyptian Christians. It is estimated, as other speakers have said, that currently the total congregation of the church community within Victoria numbers about 10 000, and I know that it is certainly growing. Based on the last census figures — we have just gone through filling in the most recent census forms — there were over 33 000 Egyptian-born persons in Australia. The largest professing faith for Egyptian-born Australians is, as we know, the Coptic faith.

This legislation comes about at the request of His Grace Bishop Suriel and the diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions, with the agreement of the various associations and parishes that form that diocese, and the purpose of the bill is to establish a statutory trust corporation to hold and deal with property on behalf of the diocese. As we know, the property of the Coptic church in Victoria is held on behalf of the parishes and other organisations of the diocese by individual associations that are incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act. They represent those parishes and organisations. This very important piece of legislation, which I repeat has been requested by His Grace Bishop Suriel, will facilitate a far more efficient method for the church to administer its property and

funds through a single trust entity, with perpetual accession, and that is very important for the Coptic Orthodox Church.

I am very pleased to have introduced this legislation into the house. Property held by various associations within the diocese will be vested in a central statutory trust entity generally similar to the statutory arrangements that have been put in place for other churches in Victoria. I have also introduced legislation on behalf of other churches. The bill, as I understand it, has been settled on with the full support of the individual parishes. I want to congratulate His Grace the Bishop on the consultation process that has been undertaken in relation to this very important piece of legislation.

In concluding, I thank all members for their support. This bill will now pass this place and will move to the upper house in a very short period of time, and I hope there is also fulsome support in that place as well. On behalf of the government, it is with the greatest of pleasure that I wish this bill a very speedy passage.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY (VICTORIAN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 14 June; Ms KOSKY (Minister for Education and Training).

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — The Liberal Party is supporting the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill 2006. I wish to make a few points about this bill and what it proposes to do, the reaction to it and a bit of the history.

The bill will repeal the Victorian College of the Arts Act 1981. It will abolish the Victorian College of the Arts, which I will refer to as the VCA. It will designate Melbourne University as the college successor in law and transfer all of the VCA's assets and liabilities to Melbourne University. It will also ensure that any gifts and trusts for the college continue in favour of Melbourne University and will transfer the VCA staff to the university on terms and conditions that are in aggregate no less favourable than those they currently

receive. It is very important that the staff are comfortable with this and that there is no disadvantage for them. It will also transfer the non-award students to the university and amend the Melbourne University Act 1958 to establish a faculty of the university called the faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts — in other words, the VCA will no longer exist as a separate entity. It will be integrated into Melbourne University, and quite cleverly, I think, integrated as a stand-alone faculty of the university. That is what this legislation aims to do.

Heads of agreement have been reached on the merger and the college will be represented on the university council. One of the outgoing current members of the Victorian College of the Arts council will be included on the university council, and the current director will become the dean of the new faculty — another very neat fit. That will be Professor Andrea Hull, who is the current director of the VCA.

The legislation will come into place from the start of next year. The work going on behind the scenes will ensure that that happens from 1 January 2007. Any ongoing gifts and gifts which would have previously been donated to the VCA will now go on to and be able to be used by the Melbourne University faculty created by this bill.

There has been a lot of consultation not only with staff but also, importantly, with students as well as former students, because the VCA has been quite an icon in Melbourne. Many people who gained qualifications from the college are proud of their qualifications and where they got them from. It is important that staff and students are comfortable with and will not be disadvantaged by the change. Consultation has taken place and everyone has agreed that it is a good thing. Furthermore, the alumni of the VCA will transfer to the association of the university.

The VCA is partly on university land but also partly on Crown land. The Crown land on which it is situated is zoned for public purposes and not designated as education land. That might be worth pursuing in the future. Some of the land on which the VCA is situated is still used by the Victoria Barracks for police purposes. Once things settle down it may be worth looking at that and clearing up that small mess so far as zoning is concerned. There are also some beautiful heritage buildings as well as some heritage overlays on the land. Some of the beautiful buildings, of which many members would be aware, are certainly worth preserving. They are integral to the history of the arts in Melbourne, and Melbourne is renowned for its arts.

As of last year the VCA had about 1000 students, of which 750 were undergraduates and 250 were taking postgraduate studies. Its overall budget for last year, the size of which I was surprised at, was in excess of \$23 million, which supported 98 academic staff, a number of administrative staff and also a significant number of sessional teaching staff. The nature of an arts college is that it has sessional teachers, particularly of musical instruments or other facets of the arts, who come in, take sessions and then move out. A lot of people have worked and are working at the VCA, and they will move across to be part of the Melbourne University staff.

In its current form the VCA consists of six schools — in art, dance, drama, music, film and television, and production. It has two associated centres: the Centre for Ideas and the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development. Within that environment the VCA offers both undergraduate and postgraduate course work and research degrees and diplomas. The VCA is about the arts and as such a very comprehensive curriculum is being offered and will continue to be offered as part of Melbourne University.

The college was established back in 1972 with its own act of Parliament, which will no longer be on the books from 1 January next year. We have an unusual thing here in Victoria where each university has an act of Parliament which covers basically the governance of that university. That is about where the Victorian government's interaction with universities stops, because the majority of the funding and most other aspects associated with universities are really federal matters. But they are creatures of the Victorian Parliament and as such each has an act of Parliament. The VCA act, which was established in 1972, will finish at the end of this year.

The foundation school was the National Gallery of Victoria art school, which dates back to 1867, so it has a long history as being part of the arts in Melbourne. It was opened as the VCA School of Art in the first term of 1973 following the legislation in 1972. In 1992 the Swinburne School of Film and Television became part of the VCA. On Sunday I will attend the open day at the Swinburne campus with my son, who is looking at studying film and television. I am very interested in seeing what it has to offer.

The Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School is also formally associated with the college. That has been a particularly exciting venture. The government has announced that that school will be enhanced with some new buildings and facilities. It is important that we have these specialist-type schools which expose our young

people, who excel in every area of the curriculum, to excellent and intensive studies in their skill areas and that there be appropriate levels of staff and funding to support them. They can then go on and share that in the wider community.

I will refer to some of the alumni of the VCA. Some of the names in my briefing notes do not mean a lot to me because I am a bit of a philistine as far as the arts are concerned, but the VCA is proud of these people and it is worthwhile reading their names into *Hansard*. There is Patricia Piccinini, who was at the school of art in 1991 and has won a number of awards. Pdraic Savage, who was at the school of music in 1992, is co-principal of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London. That is worthy of mention. There is also Shannon Birchall, who attended the school of music in 2004 — and I will not go any further, because there are complex band names and what have you and I would not like to get them wrong, other than to say that these people are alumni and very famous in their field.

Phillip Adams, from the school of dance — not Phillip Adams the journalist: when I saw his name I thought, 'There's a name I know', but I do not know this one — is well known on the New York scene. There is also Adrienne Chisholm from the school of production in 1996; Justin Kurzel and Tim Jolley, who have won awards for films in Australia; and also Andrew Bovell from the school of drama. He wrote the film *Lantana*, which even I know is one of the better films that has been produced in Victoria.

I think we all know about the Melbourne University. Established back in 1853, it was the first university in Victoria and the second in Australia. It is probably the leading research university in Australia and has an incredible and growing international reputation. It is consistently in the world's top 20 universities. It has had some wonderful leadership over the years, including that of its present vice-chancellor. It seems to be at the forefront of university development and research. Looking at innovation, we see the Melbourne model that is being discussed at the moment, which is pretty exciting and certainly worth pursuing. It is indicative of Melbourne University and the work it does in this state.

The university is based at Parkville and has an enrolment of 42 000 students, of which 8000 are international students, and 6000 academic and general staff. One of the things Melbourne University is proud of is that each year it helps about 1000 students from disadvantaged backgrounds to undertake and complete their studies through its excellent special access program. The faculties of Melbourne University

include architecture building and planning; arts, economics and commerce; education; engineering; land and food resources; law; music; medicine, dentistry and health sciences; science; veterinary science; a school of graduate studies and the Melbourne Business School. We now have a new faculty, with the VCA being added as one of the faculties of Melbourne University.

What I wish to illustrate in my next few remarks is the fact that there has been a close relationship between the VCA and Melbourne University for 15 years now; it is not something that has come about suddenly. Neither party is coming cold to the arrangement this bill is facilitating. In 1991 the VCA became an affiliated college of Melbourne University. Under that affiliation VCA courses and the awards it conferred were approved by the university's academic board. VCA students have been to all intents students of the university, and the degrees they have received have been conferred by Melbourne University, so a fairly close relationship has existed since 1991. Since then the university has been receiving commonwealth funding that is specifically reserved for students of the VCA. The funding went directly from the federal government to the VCA, not via the university.

In 1999 the relevant federal department acknowledged that high costs were involved in providing these sorts of arts courses, and at the end of a review process there was a small increase in funding for the VCA and students at the college. However, the Higher Education Support Act 2003 changed the mechanism of funding for universities. Essentially the funding was based on a per capita type of grant and did not really recognise the differences and the more intensive costs associated with providing the sorts of courses the VCA had been offering and was offering at that time. The VCA wanted Melbourne University to fill the gap, which amounted to \$6000 per student — quite a large amount when you look at the number of students who were part of the VCA. Melbourne University could not work with that model, and the VCA could not continue in that form without severely compromising itself. That really precipitated talks between the two bodies, resulting in the merger we are talking about today. They were forced into it, but both sides have recognised the benefits of the integration facilitated by this bill.

Firstly, it is going to provide the VCA with a secure future. It will know where it is and it will know where it is going, and the funding issue will be solved to a large degree through this arrangement. It will also have a framework for moving forward. The bill will create an expanded VCA because it will be a new faculty within the University of Melbourne, and being closely associated with that university will really be a plus for

the VCA. It will expand the capacity of the university to provide broader based visual and performing arts training and education. It will be possible to provide those services to practitioners in other disciplines as well, so that rather than being a stand-alone college, as the VCA has been in the past, it will become an integral part of the university. It will build closer links with other faculties, and that is a positive not only for students of the VCA but also for students of other disciplines. This arrangement will also enhance the international standing of the University of Melbourne, because it is offering something else which is special, which is longstanding and which is world class. It will bring a whole new area to Melbourne University on which it can further build its international reputation.

The integration of these two bodies also fulfils the potential of the VCA's Southbank site to become an internationally recognised precinct for training, education and research in the visual and performing arts. That is a great thing that is happening at Southbank, and it has taken a long while. A lot of people still do not recognise Southbank as an arts precinct. They are fixated on St Kilda Road, with the National Gallery, the Arts Centre spire and the theatres, but there is a lot more going on behind the scenes in the side streets and main roads in Southbank. It is a wonderful precinct, and a lot more people in Melbourne need to discover that. It is not pedestrian friendly, and it is not an easy area to walk around because of its narrow footpaths and busy roads, but it is an area of which Melbourne can be very proud and an area that is worth expanding. In the end there will be savings to be made by this integration, and one area in which this should happen is administration. This should help both parties to the agreement.

Finally I want to quote from the joint media release issued by the University of Melbourne and the VCA in November last year when they announced the integration introduced by this bill we are debating today. The second paragraph of the media release says:

This decision has been taken to ensure the long-term financial viability of the VCA — one of only three institutions in the world with all major art forms under one roof — and will enable the college to continue and enhance its role as Australia's pre-eminent provider of visual and performing arts training and education.

Professor Glyn Davis, AC, the vice-chancellor of Melbourne University, said in the media release:

The VCA is an internationally significant arts education body and the university is proud to have it as a faculty. The university now has the exciting prospect of developing and growing its visual and performing arts areas and of pursuing synergistic teaching and research activities between VCA

disciplines and university areas such as music, creative arts, cinema studies and arts education.

In the same release VCA director Professor Andrea Hull, AO, is quoted as saying:

Most importantly, the university and the VCA share a commitment and a joint vision to protect the VCA's staff and students and our totally unique artistic educational offering. While we initially came to this process as a consequence of federal government policy, both institutions are totally committed to developing a framework that enhances and protects the strengths of both institutions.

Their words summarise the feelings of both bodies, the staff, the students and former students of both entities and anyone who has an interest in the importance of the arts within Victoria.

The Liberal Party supports this legislation and wishes the bill a speedy passage, and it certainly wishes this new faculty of Melbourne University all the best for the future.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — I am pleased to speak on the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill and to indicate that The Nationals will also be supporting it. The Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), as members will be well aware, is a highly respected educational institution in this state. We are very proud of our arts scene in Melbourne in particular, and the Victorian College of the Arts has been a very important part of that going back a long, long way — I think going back to 1867 when it first started.

Certainly it has had some very distinguished graduates in the arts scene itself. In painting, people like McCubbin, Roberts and Arthur Boyd were all graduates of the college in its very early days. As has already been indicated there are other very notable graduates from the school of music, arts, dancing and production. It has really made a great contribution to the cultural diversity of Melbourne and Victoria of which we are so proud. I support the notion that the VCA is Australia's pre-eminent provider of visual and performing arts training in this country, and it is widely acknowledged as such.

The bill that is before the house essentially does two things, and I read from clause 1, where its purposes are listed:

- (a) to provide for the integration of the Victorian College of the Arts with the University of Melbourne; and
- (b) to establish a faculty of the University of Melbourne to be called the "Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts".

I have no problem with that, except to argue that it need not have happened this way. It is a good solution to the funding problem that has beset the VCA, where essentially it has been underwritten by the University of Melbourne for some time now. I commend the University of Melbourne council for being prepared to underwrite the VCA so that it could continue providing its excellent service. But clearly that has been at a cost to some of the other functions of the university — in research and teaching in other faculties and so on.

It is easy to say, and some people will put the argument, that the problem was that the commonwealth reduced funding to the VCA and that has triggered the difficulties. I accept that, except that I would put the argument that the Victorian government should well have stepped in and filled the bill. As I say, the government is proud, as we all are, to trumpet the achievements of the arts scene here in Melbourne. We have a wide diversity in terms of music, dance, theatre and the arts generally; there is a very vibrant arts scene here in Melbourne. If we are going to talk about the importance of the arts, as we do from time to time in this house when we say how proud we are of the arts in Melbourne, then I think it behoves the government of the day to follow that up with some funding. It was not a huge amount of funding that would have been required to fill the gap to allow the Victorian College of the Arts to continue as it was, as essentially a separate entity down in Southbank.

I agree with the opposition spokesman on this issue that we have a very vibrant arts centre in St Kilda Road and at Southbank, and I agree with him that many people just do not realise the activities that are going on in that area. It is a pity that to some degree the VCA is losing that autonomy because the Victorian government was not prepared to fill that gap that was left by the commonwealth.

Be that as it may, this is an excellent solution to the problem. There has been a close relationship between the VCA and Melbourne University that goes back to 1991 or thereabouts. Under the terms of an agreement between the VCA and the university, the college essentially maintained its identity but the college students were deemed to be students of Melbourne University.

In terms of the funding, as I have already indicated, representations were certainly made to the commonwealth government by the college, the university and others to alter the funding allocation, but they were unsuccessful. Again, I compliment Melbourne University, which has been putting in something of the order of \$4.5 million per annum to

enable the Victorian College of the Arts to continue to do the great work it was doing. That has been at a cost to some of the faculties; there is absolutely no question about that. The college of the arts really did have to sort out what it was going to do. There has been this very amicable relationship between the college and the university so that the college could become a faculty of the university along with all the other faculties, like law, engineering, science and so on. That has been a very positive outcome.

The governing councils of both the VCA and the university, as I understand it, have requested the government introduce this legislation to make the necessary legislative changes. We have certainly spoken with both the university and the college. My colleague in the upper house the Honourable Peter Hall, a member for Gippsland Province, contacted the university and received correspondence back from Professor John McKenzie, who at that time was the deputy vice-chancellor, in which he said:

Thank you for your letter to Professor Glyn Davis dated 26 June seeking the views of the university council with regard to the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill recently introduced in the Victorian Parliament for debate. I respond on the vice-chancellor's behalf.

The University of Melbourne and the Victorian College of the Arts have been fully consulted throughout the process of drafting the bill. I have sought the views of the chancellor and chair of the university council, Mr Ian Reynard, who advises the council fully supports the legislation in its current form.

Likewise with the VCA. My colleague in the upper house has spoken with Professor Andrea Hull, who has indicated that this is a necessary step, that other states have supported arts training institutions, that it would have been nice to receive some state support in this case but that under the circumstances it is not forthcoming, and that therefore the VCA is quite prepared to go ahead and supports this arrangement.

It is a relatively simple piece of legislation. It goes one step further to formalising the arrangements that have been in place for some time. It will ensure the long-term viability of the VCA. It is great for the University of Melbourne. It will extend its influence into the arts, extend the number of faculties that it now has, and will certainly extend the breadth and diversity of the University of Melbourne, which is not only a pre-eminent university in Australia but highly regarded around the world. It will provide a secure future for the Victorian College of the Arts. Because of that, and because of the importance of the arts to Victoria and to the Victorian economy, The Nationals will be supporting this legislation that has been introduced by the government.

Ms BARKER (Oakleigh) — I am very pleased to speak on the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill of 2006. As has been indicated, the bill formalises an agreement between the Victorian College of the Arts and the University of Melbourne, enabling these two great institutions to integrate. The bill was drafted at the request of the college and the university, and the decision to integrate was taken to address the college's funding shortfall, which resulted from changes to the commonwealth government's funding arrangements for the tertiary sector. The integration will ensure the long-term financial viability of the college and ensure that the very important contribution that it has made to the arts in Victoria will continue.

As the member for Nepean indicated, the Victorian College of the Arts was created on 30 November 1972, and initially comprised the school of art, which was formerly the National Gallery of Victoria art school. The values of what was the national gallery art school, which was established in 1867, were preserved in the objects of the college when it was constituted under an act of the Victorian Parliament in 1981. They can be best summarised as the provision of intensive, specialist, studio-based training and education for outstanding and emerging artists. There has, of course, been considerable growth in the operation of the college over the years, and now it has all disciplines of the creative and performing arts, which makes it unique in the world.

At present the college comprises the schools of art, dance, drama, film and television, music and production. The college also houses the Centre for Ideas and the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development. The members of the teaching faculty of the college are outstanding artists in their own right. There have of course been many successful students of the college, some of which the Minister for Education and Training mentioned in her second-reading speech, including Adam Elliot, the winner of an Oscar in 2004. Other outstanding students have been Sarah Watt, the award-winning writer, director, producer and animator; actor Vince Colosimo, who is well known to all of us; and the 2004 winner of the Australian dance award for outstanding performance by a female dancer, Larissa McGowan — and they are just a few of them. I note also that in the second-reading speech the minister highlighted the members of the fantastic Melbourne band the Cat Empire, which of course featured at the Commonwealth Games.

This bill ensures that future generations of Victorian artists will continue to benefit from the high-quality teaching programs which are offered by the Victorian College of the Arts. As many members know, there

have been a series of major changes in the tertiary education sector in recent years. Despite those changes — which are in some ways challenges — to the Victorian College of the Arts, the uniqueness and independence of the college have been preserved.

In 1991 the college entered into an affiliation agreement with the University of Melbourne that preserved the independent status of the college. Under that affiliation the college has maintained its special principles, some of which we are all aware of — namely, the talent-based entry policy and the means by which the college maintains its teaching quality, which is the high teacher-student ratio. However, recent changes to the commonwealth funding arrangements, which were touched upon by the member for Nepean, have threatened the survival of the college of the arts. The college has worked in partnership with the University of Melbourne to address those funding issues for the long-term while preserving its core mission.

It is important to outline the responsibilities of the commonwealth and the states in regard to tertiary education, because as I have said they have had an impact on the college of the arts. In 1974 the commonwealth government assumed full funding responsibility for tertiary education. While the state and territory governments retained the legislative and regulatory responsibilities, the responsibility for financially supporting universities was transferred to the commonwealth. By 2004 only 31 per cent of the revenue of Victorian universities was provided by the commonwealth government, and in recent years there have of course been further negative revisions of funding for the very important tertiary education sector.

In 2003 the commonwealth government enacted new arrangements which cancelled six specific funding agreements that the college had previously negotiated with it. These arrangements recognised the high costs associated with the specialised training in visual and performing arts which the college provides. As has been mentioned, the revised funding guidelines resulted in a shortfall of more than \$6000 for every student of the college. The commonwealth government instructed the University of Melbourne to make up this funding shortfall, which in 2005 resulted in the university having to divert \$4.6 million of its funds to the college.

Although the college and the university had been affiliated since 1991, it was not until the commonwealth government issued that directive that the university had any financial responsibility for the college. After the commonwealth made it clear that the university would have to continue to make up any shortfall for an indefinite period, the college and

university — to their credit — set about developing a long-term strategy that would ensure the college's financial viability. In late 2005 a heads of agreement was signed which proposed that the college be integrated as a faculty of the university with secure funding arrangements to ensure that the commitment which the university and the college shared to provide quality education in the creative and performing arts could continue. The heads of agreement recognises the status, uniqueness and reputation of the college and retains its important components, such as the talent-based entry policy for students.

The identity of the Victorian College of the Arts and its objects are enshrined in this legislation, which will enable the college, as a faculty of the university, to continue to provide high-quality education and training to young artists. Importantly the legislation will also ensure that the Victorian College of the Arts will continue to contribute to our dynamic and vibrant arts community in Victoria. This is a piece of legislation which is supported by both sides. Regrettably the commonwealth government had a severe impact on the college by changing its funding arrangements, but I am sure the University of Melbourne and the Victorian College of the Arts will continue their excellent provision of education to the arts community — in particular to our emerging artists and to students and teachers of the arts in Victoria. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I too wish to make a couple of observations about the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill, which the Liberal Party supports. I am interested in speaking on this simply because I am a former member of the Victorian College of the Arts Council — I held that position in my first term of Parliament as the then local member — and I have a great degree of respect for the work the college does. The bill sets up a new regime for the college and the university from 1 January 2007. The bill, in essence, allows the integration of the Victorian College of the Arts as a faculty of the University of Melbourne.

I draw the attention of the house to a number of useful web sites, which also cover the desire of the college, the government and the university to integrate — that is, for the college to be a faculty of the University of Melbourne. Members may be interested to refer to www.vca.unimelb.edu.au and the history and integration sections of that web site.

I also want to make reference to the second-reading speech. I refer in the first instance to a statement that appears at page 1:

This bill has been prepared at the request of the college and the university and will ensure the long-term financial viability of the college. In addition, the integration will guarantee that the college's role as Australia's pre-eminent provider of visual and performing arts training and education can continue.

Indeed other members of the house have referred to that aspect of the second-reading speech. The VCA University of Melbourne web site expresses a similar view. It states:

This decision was taken in late 2005 to ensure the long-term financial viability of the VCA ... Integration will enable the college to continue and enhance its role as Australia's pre-eminent provider of visual and performing arts training and education

The second-reading speech then goes on to give a bit of history about the college:

The origins of the Victorian College of the Arts date back to 1867 when the first students were admitted into the college's foundation school, the school of art. Throughout its early years the school of art produced many famous and celebrated artists, including Fred McCubbin, Tom Roberts, Arthur Boyd, Clara Southern and Joy Hester.

Indeed the web site to which I have just referred makes the same point:

... foundation school, the school of art, was originally the National Gallery of Victoria Art School, which admitted its first students in 1867. The school's graduates went on to become some of Australia's most significant artists and include Fred McCubbin, Tom Roberts, Rupert Bunny, Arthur Boyd, Clara Southern, Margaret Preston, Joy Hester ...

I note the member for Oakleigh picked up on this reference in the second-reading speech as well:

In recent years a number of graduates of the college have been internationally recognised for excellence in their fields. Honourable members will recall that in 2004 Adam Elliot won the Oscar for best short animation for his film *Harvie Krumpet*. Musicians Harry Angus, Carlo Barbaro, Kieran Conreau, Ross Irwin and Ryan Munro feature in the hugely successful Melbourne band The Cat Empire ...

Oddly enough the web site makes reference to that as well:

The catalogue of national and international successes by VCA graduates is extensive and covers every area of artistic endeavour in Australia. In 2004 Adam Elliot won the Oscar for best short animation for his film *Harvie Krumpet* ... Musicians Ross Irwin, Ryan Munro —

and the others are then named —

feature in the hugely successful Melbourne band The Cat Empire.

I think we are beginning to get the point here. Again the Minister for Education and Training said in the second-reading speech:

On 1 July 1991 the college became affiliated with the university. Under the terms of the affiliation agreement the college maintained its unique character and mission; however, the college's award courses were approved by the university's academic board, the college's award students were classed as students of the university and their degrees were conferred by the university.

The minister went on to say:

As a consequence of the affiliation arrangement, the university received a discrete amount of funding from the commonwealth which was identified specifically for students of the college and was channelled directly to the college.

The web site carries a similar sentiment. It states:

On 1 July 1991 the Victorian College of the Arts became an affiliated college of the University of Melbourne. This affiliation preserved the distinctive character and mission of the VCA whilst extending its capacity to fulfil the special role that it has within Australian higher education.

Under the affiliation agreement VCA award courses were approved by the university's academic board, VCA students are students of the university and their degrees conferred by the university.

And I continue quoting the web site:

Since then the university received a discrete amount of funding from the commonwealth identified specifically for VCA students, which it channelled directly to the VCA.

There is an amazing unanimity on the role of the commonwealth. The second-reading speech states:

In 1999 the commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs recognised the high costs associated with providing the specialist training offered by the college. Accordingly the commonwealth approved a reduction in the student load for students of the college from 2000 to 2002 without decreasing their operating grant. Had this arrangement continued, the 2004 level of commonwealth funding for the college would have been \$19 000 per student.

The web site states:

In 1999, following discussions with the university and the VCA, DETYA acknowledged the high costs involved in the provision of intensive, specialist training at the VCA ... and approved a reduction in the VCA component of the university's student load over the period 2000–02 without a decrease in the operating grant. Under a continuation of these arrangements the 2004 level of commonwealth funding for the VCA would have been \$19 028.00 per student.

Again we go on and see that the second-reading speech states:

Representations by the college, the university, the Victorian government, the opposition and minor parties urging the

commonwealth government to alter the funding allocation were unsuccessful. Instead the then federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, instructed the university to top up the college funding from its own resources. It was estimated that approximately \$4.6 million of university funds were diverted from teaching and research to the college in 2005, with future years requiring at least equivalent amounts to be diverted from university activities.

The web site states:

Despite representations to the commonwealth by the university, the VCA, the Victorian government, the opposition and the minor parties, the commonwealth maintained the new funding basis for VCA students.

In late 2004 the federal minister for education instructed the University of Melbourne to make up the shortfall of funding to the VCA from its own funds for an indefinite number of years ...

The result was that approximately \$4.6 million of university funds were diverted from teaching and research to the VCA in 2005 with at least equivalent amounts to be diverted in future years.

There are other examples. I make the point in the course of this debate that the second-reading speech is three pages long. The first two pages of the education minister's second-reading speech have been plagiarised from the Victorian College of the Arts University of Melbourne web site. This is the minister for education. The third page outlines clauses in the bill which is legitimate. There are two explanations for this. The first one is that the minister for education has plagiarised the University of Melbourne; the second one is that the University of Melbourne and the Victorian College of the Arts have plagiarised the minister's second-reading speech.

The problem for the minister is that there is a document called *Integration of the Victorian College of the Arts with the University of Melbourne* dated 15 November 2005 where the authorship is very clearly the University of Melbourne and the Victorian College of the Arts. The web site is clearly based on that particular document. The minister of course did not make her second-reading speech until 14 June 2006 in the Legislative Assembly.

I make this point: the minister for education has special responsibility for the Victorian certificate of education and for plagiarism and ensuring that students do not cheat. This minister has plagiarised a web site for her second-reading speech on this bill. A second-reading speech is one of the most important speeches ministers ever make before the Parliament. Quite frankly, I do not think that is acceptable conduct for an education minister. We have seen ministers in this government reading wrong second-reading speeches; we now have

a case of an education minister, of all ministers, providing a plagiarised piece of work to this Parliament when she herself has responsibility for ensuring plagiarism does not occur in Victorian schools.

I conclude by referring to an item, again on a web site, about the Minister for Education and Training, the Honourable Lynne Kosky, opening an information and communications technology building at the University of Melbourne. It is a \$60 million information and communication technology building in University Square. She was shown research projects on plagiarism detection. I am more than happy to let this minister know that we on this side of the house can detect —

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

Ms BEATTIE (Yuroke) — I am pleased to rise in support of this bill which formalises the agreement for the integration of the Victorian College of the Arts and the University of Melbourne, both great institutions.

The bill was drafted at the request of the Victorian College of the Arts and the university and it provides for the college to be integrated as a faculty of the university. The bill will ensure the long-term financial viability of the college in an environment that has changed in recent times because of the commonwealth funding arrangements. By way of background I will briefly outline some of those funding arrangements that have changed. I will talk about the responsibilities of the commonwealth and the states in relation to tertiary education and its funding.

Honourable members may recall that in 1974 — besides recalling that we were all a lot younger — the commonwealth government assumed full funding responsibility for tertiary education. State and territory governments retained legislative and regulatory responsibilities but responsibility for financial support of universities was transferred to the commonwealth. By 2004 only 31 per cent of the revenue of Victoria universities was funded by the commonwealth.

Continuing in this disgraceful and shameful pattern, in recent years the commonwealth has further revised funding arrangements for the tertiary education sector in what I feel is a very negative manner. In 2003 the Howard government enacted new arrangements which cancelled six specific funding agreements that the college had previously negotiated with the commonwealth government. These agreements recognised the high costs associated with providing specialist training in visual and performing arts. We all know it is a very specialised area.

The revised funding guidelines resulted in a funding shortfall of more than \$6000 for every student of the college. The commonwealth government then asked the university to make up this funding shortfall. That was after the commonwealth made it clear that the university would indeed have to make up that shortfall for an indefinite period. The college and university together set about developing a strategy to ensure the college's financial viability in the long term, and that leads us to where we are with this bill.

The college and university have been affiliated since 1991. Prior to this directive the university had no financial responsibility for the college. In late 2005 the college and university signed a heads of agreement proposing that the college be integrated as a faculty. The college and university have a shared commitment to quality arts education and indeed have achieved that. I have been to some of their concerts and they are amazing. They have a shared commitment to quality arts education, as does the Bracks government. This history is good ground for the performing arts.

The university's faculty of music, which was established in 1891, is the oldest and one of the two largest music schools in Australia. The faculty has a highly selective entry policy and is highly competitive. Currently it encompasses about 700 students, including more than 120 graduate students, and more than 100 specialist staff. The university's school of creative arts, established in 1995, offers both undergraduate and postgraduate programs in academic and professional arts studies.

We have seen many terrific entertainers, performers and artists come out of the Victorian College of the Arts. Some of those have been named previously. I want to talk a little bit about Adam Elliot, who won an Oscar in 2004 for his animated film *Harvie Krumpet*, which most members would have seen. I was a guest at a function at which Adam was the speaker. As well as showing us his famous film, *Harvie Krumpet*, he regaled us with stories about being prepared for the Oscars — having to have his teeth whitened and his skin tanned so that he would look good on the night. Not only was he obviously a very talented man but he is a great comedian in the making as well, regaling us with those stories.

The integration of the Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne University is a happy marriage. I am told that there are no issues about the land on which the VCA is located although I understand that some police horses are stabled on the grounds. One of the reasons that they are is so that they can make a speedy dash to Government House, should the Governor be under any

threat at all. Nobody wishes to see our new Governor, Professor David de Kretser, harmed, but should somebody take that view, those horses are out there within a short speedy gallop of Government House.

This is a good bill. It suits all the stakeholders and all the parties concerned. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — In rising to make a brief contribution to the debate on the bill, I point out that all members can play the blame game when it comes to funding for tertiary institutions. I do not intend to belabour the point, but it would be fair to say that if one looks at the support on a per student and capital funding basis given by the previous Keating federal government for the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) vis-a-vis its support for the National Institute of Dramatic Arts, one can see that the previous federal Labor government was very Sydney-centric. I am sure that members opposite will recall that the former Prime Minister, Paul Keating, saw Sydney as the arts capital of Australia and treated Victoria as a very poor second cousin.

Ms Allan — You should have been at the history conference! This is revisionism!

Mr HONEYWOOD — I take up the minister's interjection. It is not revisionism; it is actually pointing out the facts. Too often members on the other side claim a mortgage on the arts in terms of both funding and emotional support. However, when one looks to what was achieved by the previous Kennett government one sees that great contributions were made not only by the member for Brighton, who was a member of the board of the VCA, but by others. I recall that when I was the Minister for Tertiary Education and Training I appointed Lorraine Elliott, the then member for Mooroolbark, as one of my representatives on the board of the VCA. She made an outstanding contribution and was a great advocate to the Premier at the time, Jeff Kennett, in ensuring that the VCA got some special support where that was required.

Through all of this, of course, Andrea Hull has done a magnificent job as the director. When I was the Minister for Tertiary Education and Training Andrea travelled with me to Vietnam. Despite severe funding restraints she went out of her way to offer two scholarships, as I recall, to young Vietnamese ballet dancers to try to give a real boost to their careers. At that time Vietnam was only just coming into the whole area of dance training, including ballet. Andrea went above and beyond the call of duty by not only having me sign a memorandum of understanding with the national Vietnamese ballet company but also actually

offering financial support, even though she really did not have the wherewithal from the college at the time to do as much as we would have liked.

It behoves members to consider how the chronology of events has probably affected the VCA to the point that we are at. Interestingly enough, if one looks at the National Institute of Dramatic Art web site and compares it with the VCA web site, one can see that NIDA, which is based in Sydney, has come out of an interesting arrangement. The Old Tote Theatre, as I recall, was established at the University of New South Wales and operated by NIDA. Very early in NIDA's history, which dates back to 1959, the people at NIDA very clearly identified themselves as a separate, independent organisation. By ensuring that they were out on a limb, almost, they were able to assist their lobbying exercise to federal and state governments to gain financial support.

In Victoria, where we like to think we administer things well and on a comprehensive basis, the chronology of events that have led us to the situation we now have with VCA governance was quite the opposite. An act of this Parliament created the VCA. It is interesting to note that we really tried to nurture the VCA from day one back in 1972. There was a foundation school, the National Gallery of Victoria Art School, which dated back to 1867, but that very quickly transformed itself into the VCA school of art at the beginning of its first term in 1973. The school of music was formed a year later, the school of drama followed in 1975 and the school of dance in 1979, and the Swinburne school of film and television became part of the VCA in 1992. I was a member of the governing council back then, and I recall how much aggrieved we at Swinburne were to lose the wonderful school of film and television to the VCA. Swinburne lost part of its culture as a result but it made sense to try to bring all the different arts together under the one umbrella.

I think, though, we were the victims of trying to do the right thing because in effect we did not leave the VCA in the same situation as NIDA was perhaps left in, where the federal government had to intervene and had to set up a separate funding stream. So fairly early in its development NIDA was able to beg, borrow or steal enough funds from the commonwealth to create a precedent whereby it now receives direct funding from the commonwealth. In Victoria we have allowed the VCA, as part of its evolution, to finish up not being reliant on direct funding from the commonwealth but having to get its funding through other mechanisms, including what this bill involves — that is, through the University of Melbourne. It seems to me that we have been the victims of trying to go a different way from

NIDA. I guess some would argue that there can be only one national institute of arts. I think some in Victoria would argue that there can be two.

I believe strongly that, for example, the recent development in the world of opera, where now we have wonderful support for our own renewed state opera company, the Victorian Opera Company, is just one example of how people in this state can, when they get together, do wonderful things — whether it be Jeannie Pratt or others who have done a great job in bringing our own opera company back to the fore. Of course, we still benefit from having Opera Australia come to Melbourne and regional Victoria, and my wife and I thoroughly enjoy their productions. The recent development of having our own opera company is indicative of the fact that Victorians are able to do their own thing. I would like to think that the passage of the bill will ensure that even though we are sort of officially passing the VCA on to the much larger University of Melbourne there will be opportunities for philanthropists and the wider community to support the VCA as a quasi-independent organisation.

Notwithstanding all that, I think all members would agree that the University of Melbourne has the runs on the board when it comes to arts administration. There could not be a better mentor or sponsor organisation than the University of Melbourne, whether it be its wonderful faculty of music or the Melbourne Theatre Company, which the University of Melbourne has done a fantastic job of nurturing over the years.

We hope that with the passage of this legislation there can be far more of a nexus between the Melbourne Theatre Company and the school of dramatic arts at the Victorian College of the Arts. I have been to a number of performances by the graduating students of the school of drama at the VCA premises. They do an outstanding job for their profession as young actors. Hopefully, auspicing of the Melbourne Theatre Company by the University of Melbourne can have some wonderful spin-offs for the school of drama associated with the VCA as well.

So to Andrea Hull, who has given long and very good service to this outstanding organisation, I say, 'All power to you, Andrea'. I also thank the current board. Board members come and go, but some have made wonderful voluntary contributions over the years. Regardless of which party has been in government at the federal level, unfortunately there has been a bias towards Sydney. There was not just the recurrent funding that former Prime Minister Paul Keating provided with a special deal for the National Institute of Dramatic Art in his home town but also the capital

works money the Keating government put into NIDA, ignoring the needs of Melbourne and the VCA in the process.

Ms BEARD (Kilsyth) — It is a great pleasure to join the debate on the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill 2006, which I am pleased to say has the support of all members of the house. The bill enables the integration of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) with the University of Melbourne as a faculty of the university to be known as the faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts. The bill will repeal the Victorian College of the Arts Bill 1981 and amend the Melbourne University Act 1958. It will transfer all assets, liabilities, functions and responsibilities of the VCA to the university. The bill makes provision to ensure that the staff of the college become staff of the university on terms and conditions which are no less favourable in aggregate than those they currently have, which is great news for the staff.

In 1974 the federal government took responsibility for funding tertiary institutions. However, in 2003 the commonwealth government introduced the Higher Education Support Act, which revised the funding guidelines for our tertiary institutions. As a result of the 2003 legislation the college of the arts has experienced a shortfall of funds of \$6000 per student. The commonwealth government advised the University of Melbourne that it should make up this shortfall. The college of the arts and the university have agreed on the basis for this transfer of responsibility. The governing councils of the college of the arts and the university contacted this government in November last year requesting the necessary legislative provisions to facilitate the integration.

It is always heartening to hear about the esteemed graduates of the Victorian College of the Arts. On a personal level Melbourne University is thought of very fondly by my family because it is where my husband Ted received his bachelor of commerce degree many years ago. It was also interesting to read in the papers recently that Melbourne University is one of only two Australian universities to be ranked among the world's leading universities. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr LIM (Clayton) — I rise to join with other members to support this bill. It is pleasing to hear that the opposition also supports it. It is one of the many happy bills the government brings into this chamber from time to time that all the affected parties agree upon. It follows a long period of negotiation and discussion with the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), Melbourne University, staff, students and other concerned parties. The Bracks government has come up

with a bill that gives all those involved exactly what they wished for.

The purpose of the bill is to effect the amalgamation of the college of the arts with Melbourne University. In this respect it is rather like a marriage taking place between a couple who have already been cohabiting for a number of years, as the college has been a de facto part of the University of Melbourne since the 1990s. Indeed since 1991 most students of the college have also been students of the university.

The Victorian College of the Arts has a long and distinguished history, as the minister pointed out in her second-reading speech. Some of our most respected and popular entertainers, directors and theatrical administrators trained there, and the college has a reputation for excellence that extends far beyond this state. The University of Melbourne also has a long and distinguished history and a reputation for being one of the finest academic institutions in the world. May I remind the house that Melbourne University stands at no. 19 on the list of the best universities in the world. Being no. 19 means it is no. 1 when compared to the other universities in Australia. Members of this chamber are very proud of the University of Melbourne. I cannot imagine more compatible prospects for amalgamation than these two institutions.

This bill makes a number of amendments to the Melbourne University Act 1958 to facilitate the integration, and it repeals the Victorian College of the Arts Act 1981. The college will therefore cease to exist and its council will be abolished. In place of the college of the arts the bill establishes a new faculty of the university, the faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts. In a similar manner to the old college the new faculty will provide for education in the creative, performing and other arts, and will also organise and conduct public performances, exhibitions, conferences, lectures and the like. Incidentally, if any members should be so moved, I would highly recommend going to see some of the student productions that the VCA puts on at the Grant Street Theatre — they have a reputation both for excellence and for daring innovation.

Once the bill becomes law Melbourne University will become the VCA's successor in law and all assets, rights, liabilities and obligations of the college will be transferred to the university. Non-award students of the college will also be transferred to the university. The VCA's staff will become staff of the university and their terms and conditions will be preserved or become more favourable than those they currently enjoy. This is indeed a very worthwhile bill that will bring about real

benefits to education in Victoria, and I commend it to the house.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — The purpose of the bill before the house is to provide for the integration of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) with the University of Melbourne and also to establish a faculty of the University of Melbourne to be called the faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts. Melbourne has a very rich tradition and history in the arts which goes back well over 100 years. In the 1870s and 1880s Melbourne was referred to as ‘marvellous Melbourne’ and one particular aspect that earned that description was the city’s vibrant arts regime. Mark Twain was a traveller who visited the city of Melbourne and marvelled at seeing such a great city unfold before his eyes. He eloquently conveyed his insights in written form.

Likewise, the University of Melbourne has an extraordinarily rich history and tradition that underpins the intellectual life of Melbourne and Australia. Its researchers have made significant contributions in myriad fields of development. Victoria has a pre-eminent role in a range of fields including pharmaceuticals, biomedical research and food technology and food production. The University of Melbourne has produced numbers of graduates who have made outstanding contributions to various fields of research both in Australia and overseas.

The Sandringham electorate also has a very rich tradition. Sandringham Secondary College has contributed to a number of casts and productions, with its graduates having moved through both to the Victorian College of the Arts and directly into actual fields of performance and production.

I pay tribute to those staff in the state system who conscientiously and diligently over several decades contributed to the development of outstanding programs. The Sandringham Secondary College has recruited students not only from around the state but also from interstate because of the vibrancy of its arts program. A former teacher at the school for some 20 years or thereabouts was Charles Slucki who was Victorian teacher of the year in 1995. Charles Slucki headed the drama program and, along with Dr David Taylor and a number of other teachers at the school, contributed to a very rich experience for students. They undertook tours to South Australia, the United States of America and also to England to enrich the development and the experience of students at the college.

At the present time the school is actively preparing for the production of *South Pacific* and it is expecting some

outstanding results. The school is also the beneficiary of some very wise minds. A member of the current school council, John Paxinos, has a key role as an arts administrator in Melbourne. He has been active along with Heather Fehring, who is the principal of the Highett campus, and other people on the council in developing the performance facilities at Sandringham college. In terms of human movement and performance there are also other outstanding programs, and students at Sandringham college would regularly be judged among the best in the state for their contributions.

Schools such as those within my electorate and some from further afield provide a feeder for the Victorian College of the Arts. Through its creation as a centre of excellence students have had the opportunity to perform with their peers and develop their skill sets. I also understand, although I stand to be corrected, there are some secondary programs that have been conducted out of the VCA which have enabled young secondary students with outstanding aptitude in a particular field of endeavour to continue their secondary education with an increased or enhanced emphasis on the arts.

The opposition supports the bill. I would like to join with the member for Warrandyte in paying tribute to Andrea Hull and other people who have guided the destiny of the VCA during its distinguished history. We wish the bill a speedy passage.

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — I also rise to speak in support of the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill. I will give some background on how the bill came about. In 2003 the commonwealth government introduced the federal Higher Education Support Act which established revised funding guidelines for tertiary institutions. With the introduction of the Higher Education Support Act in 2003, the specific funding agreements of the college were cancelled and therefore, as has been mentioned by other speakers, in 2004 there was a funding shortfall of more than \$6000 for every student at the college.

Petitions from the college, the university, the state government and other parties were presented to the commonwealth government asking for it to reconsider cutting the level of funding for the college, but those petitions were unsuccessful. The university was instructed by the commonwealth government to top up the college funding from its own resources at a cost of \$4.6 million, which is a lot of top up to come from the university’s own resources.

Strategies to address the funding shortfall in the long term had to be looked at. Late last year the college and the university signed a heads of agreement enabling the

college to be integrated as a faculty of the university so as to overcome those funding difficulties. In November 2005 the director of the college and the vice-chancellor of the university wrote to the government requesting the necessary legislative provisions be made to facilitate the integration, and that is why we are here this evening speaking on this bill. Extensive consultation has taken place with the college, the university and all state government departments, including Arts Victoria and Industrial Relations Victoria. It is also pleasing to see that the bill has bipartisan support in the house.

Other speakers have mentioned the withdrawal by the federal government of education funding. By 2004 only 31 per cent of the revenue of Victorian universities was funded by the commonwealth. I am a member of the parliamentary Education and Training Committee which has looked extensively at funding arrangements and the provision of tertiary institution places in Victoria and which has seen how difficult it has been for Victoria. We are very focused on education and there are a lot of young people who want to continue their tertiary education. We are finding it increasingly difficult as a result of the withdrawal of support by the federal government. One of the opposition members mentioned before that it seems to be Sydney-centric and it is causing difficulty for our educational institutions.

I also mention the contrast between the federal government and the state government in its support for education. Part of that support is the recently funded \$21 million Victorian College of the Arts secondary school which will be built in South Melbourne. That will be a new school with a few hundred students that will hopefully feed through to the Victorian College of the Arts and provide our next generation of performers and artists, which I think is truly wonderful.

I particularly mention that the state government has provided record levels of funding for education in Victoria and will continue to do so. One of the most important functions of a state government is to provide funds so that young people get a great education. I fully support that. I also support the Victorian College of the Arts and the new Victorian College of the Arts secondary school, which will be a wonderful innovation for Victoria.

I also particularly mention the Monk family in my electorate, which included some wonderfully artistic children. They attended our local schools and were very good at playing instruments, drama and dancing. Two of those children subsequently went through to the Victorian College of the Arts secondary school and then on to the Victorian College of the Arts tertiary

institution. That shows that this institution provides a wonderful pathway for our talented young people to follow so they can do things of interest to them and excel at what they do best. I am very pleased that quite a few of those pathways are being provided by the state government through the different forms of education that are being made available to them.

This bill will provide certainty in the funding for the Victorian College of the Arts. It is a way forward, and it is a good fit. It has broad support from all the institutions and from both sides of this house. I believe it is a really good bill, and I have no hesitation in commending it to the house.

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — I rise to support the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill, which dissolves the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) and its council and provides for the integration of the college as a faculty of the University of Melbourne. This bill has been prepared at the request of the college of the arts and the university and will obviously ensure the long-term viability of the college. It will also guarantee the continuation of the college's role as Australia's pre-eminent provider of visual and performing arts training and education.

The history of the Victorian College of the Arts, or the VCA, as it is known to many, dates back to 1867. In its early years the college produced many famous and celebrated artists, one of whom was one of the most well-known — Arthur Boyd. In recent years a number of graduates of the college have been internationally recognised for excellence in their fields. Perhaps the most notable recent graduate of those is Adam Elliot. We have heard many members speak of their admiration for his short animation film, *Harvie Krumpet*, in 2004, and for the character and personality that Adam is. I am very lucky that I know Adam personally. He is probably one of Haileybury College's most famous and celebrated ex-students, and being from the arts, that is very unusual. Adam and his partner, Dan, are well known for their support of the arts, and Adam is terrific for the work he continues to do in acknowledging the roles that past supporters have played.

The Victorian College of the Arts and the University of Melbourne became affiliated on 1 July 1991. Following discussions between the college of the arts and the university over the past six years it was resolved that the integration of the college as a faculty of the university was the best long-term strategy to ensure that it had a secure, certain and sustainable framework in which to operate. The governing councils of the college and the university asked the government to make the

legislative changes necessary to effect the integration, and the government agreed to do so. The bill was prepared in consultation with the college and the university, and both have expressed their support of the bill.

A member of the opposition who spoke earlier mentioned that he considered \$6000, which was the funding shortfall for every student at the college following the introduction of the federal Higher Education Support Act in 2003, which negated the funding agreements with the college previously instigated by the commonwealth government, was not a significant amount of money. I am really not sure on what planet he resides, but here on planet Earth we actually consider \$6000 to be a significant amount of money. If the member ventures outside and speaks to some of his constituents, he will realise that they too consider \$6000 to be a significant amount of money. I hope the information that he gains by talking to people, possibly for the first time, will not prevent him from wishing to live here on Earth with the rest of us. That having been said, I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — It is an honour to speak briefly on the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill 2006, which gives the Victorian College of the Arts a strong and sustainable future. I think above all else that Melbourne University is probably the appropriate institution to assist with the management of and work with the Victorian College of the Arts in taking over its role, so I commend the bill to the house.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Education Services) — I am pleased to sum up the debate on the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill and to thank the members for Oakleigh, Yuroke, Kilsyth, Clayton, Mordialloc, Forest Hill, Narre Warren North, Nepean, Brighton, Warrandyte, Sandringham and Rodney for their contributions.

As can be seen, it is a bill that is supported by all sides of the house. Every member has spoken quite glowingly of the role that the Victorian College of the Arts plays in developing and nurturing young talent in the state. This bill provides for the practical, operational matters that need to be dealt with in integrating the Victorian College of the Arts with Melbourne University. I commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

Sitting suspended 6.30 p.m. until 8.01 p.m.

TRANSPORT (TAXI-CAB ACCREDITATION AND OTHER AMENDMENTS) BILL

Second reading

**Debate resumed from 20 July; motion of
Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport).**

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — The Transport (Taxi-cab Accreditation and Other Amendments) Bill originated from the Essential Services Commission inquiry into the taxi industry, and in particular into the structure of taxi fares. It discovered that a number of depots and operators held their documentation in many different ways. When the Essential Services Commission tried to pull the information together to finalise its report, it found it very difficult. I was told that some of the records were kept in shoe boxes, some were kept in bags and some were written out, that some operators did not have records at all and that others had very modern and up-to-date computer systems for their record keeping.

The issue of accreditation was put forward, and I know that issue was discussed by the taxi working party that the minister put together back in 2002 — I will say a bit more about that further into my contribution. The bill provides for the accreditation of depots, including 100 regional depots and home and secondary depots, which are used when someone calls for one of the more elaborate taxis, usually from a mobile phone. The bill also provides for the accreditation of taxi operators and the holders of taxi licences. When at the briefing I raised the issue of taxi licence holders being accredited and asked what would be achieved by it, I was told that it was designed so that the taxi licence holders would get some additional information, particularly about what their take from the industry meant to the industry and how much drivers earned, as well as issues relating to assignment fees. I think the idea of that is to try to tweak their consciences so that they are a little more generous with their arrangements.

It appears that just about everything in the taxi industry will now be accredited. Details of the accreditation will be established by the industry and the department via the Victorian Taxi Directorate (VTD). The amendments in the bill other than those that provide for accreditation

will enable police to issue on-the-spot fines for transport offences.

The bill contains provisions that allow fees to be charged for accreditations and audits. However, the industry has informed me that it has had discussions with the government and that even though those provisions are in the bill the government has agreed that there will be no charge to the taxi industry for accreditations or indeed auditing. While that may be the case now, it is very hard to imagine that this high-taxing Labor government will allow the taxi industry to continue with an accreditation and auditing process courtesy of the government of the day. You can imagine that the licence fee that taxi operators pay of about \$447 a year will no doubt rise under a Bracks Labor government to pick up the additional cost of the auditing and accreditation process.

The work will be carried out by the VTD. One only has to look at the record and reputation of the VTD within the taxi industry to know that it is grossly understaffed, performs poorly and has a poor working relationship with the Victorian Taxi Association (VTA) and the drivers. When at the briefing we asked questions about what it would cost to run the scheme, the answer we got was, 'We have no idea'. There will be various levels of accreditation for different participants in the industry, but no-one knows what those details will be. This is enabling legislation which will allow a lot of that information to be pulled together in the form of an accreditation scheme once the legislation has gone through. As I have said, there are scant details about the benefits of accrediting licence-holders, other than that they will be kept abreast of industry costs.

One matter that was picked up under the part of the second-reading speech dealing with other measures is that only police and not authorised officers will be able to issue on-the-spot fines. This came about as a result of authorised officers who were issuing on-the-spot fines for transport infringements being beaten up. The decision was made that rather than issuing on-the-spot fines, authorised officers and the police would just take the details and the Department of Infrastructure would issue the infringement notices. The decision has since been made that police will be able to issue on-the-spot fines and that authorised officers will still go down the path of taking the details and then providing the details to DOI, which will go ahead and issue the fines. Their position of not handing out on-the-spot fines has not been changed by the provisions in this bill.

The VTA is already concerned about the whole issue of working out the details later. It more or less has an attitude that the bill is going to go through anyway. We

will deal with that matter when we discuss it with the minister. However, in the past that relationship — and I will go into this further in my contribution — has not worked out all that well and there have been a number of problems with it.

I wish to advise the house of a proposed opposition amendment to the bill and request that it be circulated.

Opposition amendment circulated by Mr MULDER (Polwarth) pursuant to standing orders.

Mr MULDER — When you talk about the taxi industry you only have to remember that recent incident outside Parliament when members of the taxi industry came together to voice their frustration and concern with the government of the day, with the Minister for Transport, with the Premier and with the Victorian Taxi Directorate (VTD) about the death of yet another taxidriver. It was interesting to see how that situation was handled.

The Premier, who saw the gathering, darted inside a side door and would not come out and face the taxidrivers, while the Leader of the Opposition was only too happy to make himself available and move among the crowd. He was actually successful in getting them to do the right thing and to move off the road and stop causing interruptions to traffic on that evening. I know that was greatly appreciated by the taxi industry, and since then we have had a huge amount of correspondence from drivers who are at least happy now that they have somebody they can come and talk to about their problems.

The minister reacted, as he always does, following that situation. With an election looming he would have been beaten over the brow by the Premier who would have said, 'Get out there and do something about this and try and settle this matter down'. What does the Minister for Transport do? He calls a meeting and invites all the taxidrivers to come along and raise their concerns. Once again the Leader of the Opposition and I were at the meeting. We saw taxidriver after taxidriver walk up to the microphone and relay to all who attended, including the police and members of the VTD — the director of public transport was also there — that they had had a gutful of the racial slurs and assaults by passengers. They were very concerned about the lack of enforcement on cars using the Tullamarine Freeway taxi lane and on touts at Melbourne Airport. They were unhappy about the problem of runners who do not pay the fare being treated by police as a civil matter that the driver must deal with. They are being told that it is not a problem for the police, it is their problem if someone does not pay. The driver loses out if he picks up a

runner and has to pay half the total amount on the meter to the operator at the end of the day. Taxidriviers were having a fairly good old go and a dig at the minister.

I spoke to one of the drivers after the demonstration. He had a very large cut across his eyebrow as a result of a recent assault, and he told me exactly what happened and how taxidriviers are treated in the industry. He first went to a police station to report the assault. He was bleeding profusely and was told that he should not stay there but go and get the wound treated. He went to an emergency centre and had to wait for a long period of time before he was treated. He ended up having to go back to another police station because it had been recommended that he go and report the assault. By the time he got to the VTD so that it could download the images of the assault and perhaps identify the person concerned so that they could be charged, the images in the machine had been overridden and were lost.

He was absolutely distraught that he had not been given the level of protection those cameras are supposed to offer. He had not been given the level of support he believed he was entitled to as a member of the public, but most importantly as a taxidriver. As they say, they never get any respect. They never get any consideration for the number of elderly people they pick up and drive around or the number of disabled people they pick up as part of the multipurpose taxi program. They never get recognised for quite often being put in a position of trust when they are asked to transport children around. They feel that all we ever hear are the bad stories about taxidriviers. I can understand their concern and their frustration.

There were calls at the meeting for distress lights to be put back in the cars and for screens to be installed. There was also discussion about the taxi industry being left out of the smart card technology, and that is an issue I have raised in the past. How on earth could the Minister for Transport enter into a \$500 million tender and leave what is a very important element of the transport system out of the smart card operation? It will apply to buses, it will apply to trams and it will apply to trains, but the taxi industry once again has been left out.

One of the things I was told is a small thing that you would not expect to hear at such a meeting, and it is certainly something I was not aware of. The basic diet of a very large proportion of the drivers is curry. They spend a lot of time at Melbourne Airport, and they are forced to eat junk food. They have asked on several occasions whether the airport could do something about this for them, and I am sure their dietary problems would have been relayed to the minister. I do not know whether he has done something or whether he intends

to, but that is the sort of thing about which the minister of the day should be able to talk to food vendors at Melbourne Airport and say, 'There is a great opportunity for you if you are prepared to provide what these people want to eat. There is possibly an opportunity to make some money out of it' or perhaps a new shop could be set up to cater for their needs. That is one of the things the taxidriviers raised.

It was very interesting to hear the minister's summing up. I must say that I felt for the taxidriviers even more at the end of the minister's summing up than I had before, because at the end of his summing up they actually applauded. They did not know or understand what it meant to deal with the Minister for Transport and the Bracks Labor government. I did an analysis of what the Minister for Transport promised the taxi industry. Firstly, he offered free legal advice — basically it was on how to set up a union. The government made sure it had a few of its union mates there to fly the union flag, and it was heading towards providing legal advice to set up a union.

Secondly, he promised a trial of screens. After all the murders and bashings that have gone on over the years the minister had to be dragged out to Flemington racecourse in front of a huge number of taxidriviers to promise that finally he would offer a trial. Thirdly, he promised a survey of cabbies to be carried out by the VTD; fourthly, an industry safety task force, followed by a review of the issue in relation to distress buttons and cameras. Finally they were promised a web site and a newsletter. Hell, the minister was generous on that day! Not a thing was said or done about enforcement. They got advice, a trial, a survey, a task force, a review, a web site and a newsletter.

Mr Baillieu — Thank God for the newsletter.

Mr MULDER — Thank heavens for the newsletter.

Mr Baillieu — They got their names taken.

Mr MULDER — And do you know what, they were interactive!

That is what they got from the Minister for Transport on the day. As I said, what taxidriviers were wanting from the Minister for Transport was information about what he was going to do to protect them, look after them, to make sure they could go about their work on a day-to-day basis and get themselves home in one piece. They got absolutely nothing. In actual fact when you look at some of the safety measures that are provided in the taxis today, you find they were put in by the industry.

I can recall, going back to when the change of government had just occurred, the previous government had set up 100 M80 licences, I think from memory, at \$60 000 each, the money and the proceeds of which were to go into safety upgrades in taxis. Do you know where that money went? It went straight into the pocket of the Treasurer. The industry itself had to pay for the installation of cameras in those cars.

Cameras have been installed in almost 90 per cent of the Victorian taxi fleet. The issue is that there are areas around country Victoria where the taxis do not have them. When I have had discussions with country taxi operators, they say, 'The reason we do not have them is that we do not get any service at all out here from the VTD. If there is an incident out here, it will not come out and help us'. I think cameras have been installed in taxis in Melbourne and Geelong, and I believe also the Shepparton operator has put in his own cameras. They possibly act as some form of deterrent if people think they are in the taxis, but in terms of any form of support for country and regional operators from the Minister for Transport, there is none — there is no support there at all.

When you look at this issue of the downloading of images — if there is an issue — the paper I have on this, which I believe comes from the web site of the Department of Infrastructure, says that 'only a limited number of Victorian Taxi Directorate are authorised to download the images from the cameras'. That gives you the idea that it actually controls the amount of work and the amount of support it gives to the taxi industry by starving the VTD and ensuring it does not have enough officers to do the work necessary to support the taxi industry. That was clearly demonstrated by the issue that I raised before when I spoke about the gentlemen who went through the horrendous process, after being beaten up, of going to hospitals, going to the police and going to the VTD, only to find that the images were lost.

I wanted to propose a couple of amendments to this bill, but only one of them is before the house. I understood after that meeting out at the Flemington racecourse that doing a runner from a taxi was a civil offence, a civil matter. The taxi operators and taxidrivers have been saying to me, 'When we go to the police they tell us "Go, get on your horse and get out of here. It has nothing to do with us, it is a civil matter"'. And yet what I find is —

Mr Batchelor interjected.

Mr MULDER — I do know that is wrong, because police are authorised to prosecute this offence under

section 229 of the Transport Act, so I just cannot understand. This must have been going on for a long time. It is actually theft, but no-one takes it seriously. That is what it has got down to. That is why taxidrivers themselves claim, and I think rightly so, that no-one respects them. When they go into the police station and ask for support, they are told it is a civil matter. As I get a little further into my contribution, members will understand why the police say this is a civil matter and why they do not go ahead and pursue it.

But the amendment we propose — and it goes to the heart of this issue of only a limited number of Victorian Taxi Directorate staff being authorised to download images from the cameras — will allow Victoria Police to download the images. If a taxidriver has had a runner or if a taxidriver has been beaten up and abused, he should be able to go to a nominated police station and have that image downloaded immediately; and the police should take a statement and should act immediately on that matter, whether it is abuse or whether someone has done a \$20 or \$30 fee, jumped out of the car, sworn at and abused the taxidriver and left. Those people should be dealt with immediately, and this is what the amendment will provide for.

On behalf of the thousands of taxidrivers around this state, I ask the Minister for Transport and the government to support my amendment, because it will do an awful lot and will send a very clear message out there to the runners, the abusers and the bashers that this is now a police matter and the police will deal with it. I say to the minister, if he is fair dinkum about assisting and looking after taxidrivers, then he will support this amendment in the Parliament tonight. If he wants to turn his back on them again, as he has done in the past, then he will not support the amendment put forward by the Liberal Party.

I will just go on to give members a bit of an understanding of what we are dealing with here. I have had discussions with the Victorian Taxi Association (VTA) about this issue of runners. They are thieves. The Minister for Transport knows they are thieves. They engage taxis, they get in and they take a ride; they get out at the other end, hurl abuse at the driver and they refuse to pay. This is very interesting. There are about 3000 taxis on the road in and around the metropolitan area at any given time. The association said a taxidriver cops about three runners a week — that is, three people who refuse to pay, who get out and run. We are talking there about 9000 acts of theft going on out there each week. The Minister for Transport is aware of it; he knows it is going on, but he is not prepared to do a single thing to help those taxidrivers. As one driver said to me, 'When that happens to you at

the end of the night with a big fare, your heart sinks and you just want to pack up and go home’.

Let us have a look at the crime statistics that are put together by this government. In 2004–05, theft (other) — that is the category that this sort of theft would fall under — totalled 55 345, and in 2005–06 it was 55 182, an improvement of 0.3 per cent. Start adding your 9000 thefts a week to that and see what you come up with! Then have a look at the crime statistics and you will have an understanding as to why people are driving away from service stations without paying for petrol and why people are getting into taxis and getting out at the other end and refusing to pay.

What the government is doing is nurturing crime in this state. It is sending a clear message to people out there in the community, mostly to young bucks late at night, that you can beat up taxidriviers, you can racially abuse them, you can insult them and you do not have to pay — and it does not care. That is the message that is being sent out by this government, and those statistics do not lie. How dare the government put out these figures about theft in this state when it knows very well that it is simply covering it up, and it has no intention whatsoever of helping the taxidriviers here in Victoria!

As I said, we have had an awful lot of contact with the taxidriviers. They have come to the Liberal Party asking for help. Do you know why they have asked us for help? They can remember back to the days of the former Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, and the work he did with the taxi industry in Victoria. He gave them a sense of pride. He worked with them; he talked with them; he met with them. He did not hide away from them, like this Minister for Transport does.

What about the Minister for Transport and his implementation working party panel from 2002? I think that consultant has got about \$300 000 or \$400 000 out of us. The Minister could probably tell me later on in his contribution how much the consultant got. But I have talked to the people who were on that panel and they told me, ‘In the last week we just all got up and walked out. Last year everyone just quit — absolutely hopeless and useless’. I asked what they had achieved throughout that entire period from May 2002 up until around the middle of last year, and the answer was that nothing was achieved. All that the rollout of more green-top taxi licences has done — which is crippling the industry out there at the moment — is dilute the revenue base for the taxidriviers who are out there struggling away now.

What the minister wants to do — or it is what he thought he was going to do — is to drive down the

value of taxi licences by flooding the industry with these green-tops. That was the plan. The government could not reform the industry; it could not get away from the fact that people had invested in taxi licences and they were worth about \$300 000 or \$400 000. The old socialist came out in him: ‘How dare these people have that sort of wealth and money? We are going to beat them down, and we are going to fix this industry. We cannot take the value of the licence off them, so we are going to devalue it by flooding the industry with more green-top taxis’. To give you some notion of his idea of how the marketplace works —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! The honourable member will address the minister by his correct title in this chamber.

Mr MULDER — To give you an idea of how the Minister for Transport understands the real world and commercial dealings in the market, what he did not realise is that when you flood the industry with green-top taxis you dilute the revenue base for those poor people who are out there now — the people who are getting abused, the people who are getting robbed and the people who are getting beaten up. They are now being robbed by the Minister for Transport because of his bumbling and fumbling and the fact that he has totally and utterly ruined the industry. They never ever saw him at any of the panel meetings that were held; he never ever turned up. He sent his poor old parliamentary secretary along to do all the dirty work for him. He would not even turn up and make a contribution to the taxi industry or help the people who are involved in the taxi industry.

As I said, in his summing up the minister will, I am sure, detail to us how much money the consultants — from memory I think there were two of them — got for helping to run these taxi working parties. It is amazing how the government continues to set up these little frameworks — meetings, consultancies, task forces and trials — yet you never hear of any real action.

The former Premier of this state took the taxi industry off its knees. People were proud to work in it and loved working in it. He got the cars colour coordinated; he got the drivers in uniform; he had them all enjoying coming to work; and he continually promoted and talked up the taxi industry, talking highly of it wherever he went. Industry members know that and still talk about the great contribution that was made to the industry through that period. They contrast that to the fumbling and bumbling, the task forces and the reviews, the trials, the free advice, the newsletters and the interactive web site of the Minister for Transport, and they say, ‘We have been duded, absolutely duded by this

government. It does not care about us. The Minister for Transport is happy to stand back and let us get abused and bashed up. He does not care, and he is not going to do a thing about enforcement’.

Our amendment is a first step in recognising the plight of the taxidrivers in Victoria. It is a first step in improving their lives, in making their lives safer and making them feel good about coming to work and knowing they have a better chance of going home at night without getting beaten up and robbed. As I said, this amendment would make a bit of a difference in some areas. It would once again show up the lack of police numbers in this state, because if the police were to download these images every time these reports are made, they would really have to go down the path of taking a statement from the driver involved. They would then have to look at the images, and there would have to be work done to locate those people.

Can you imagine the result if you were to let the community know that this was going to happen? I would say that almost instantaneously you would have a number of people out there who would think twice about punching a taxidriver in the head. That is something the Minister for Transport is prepared to turn his back on. If people knew that their images were going to be downloaded by the police and that there was a good chance they would be published, they would think twice before they beat up a taxidriver.

It is about time to show some courage. We have had the trials. We have had the reviews. We have had the newsletters and interactive web sites. Now it is time for action. Stand up for the people you are supposed to represent, Minister. Stand up for the taxi industry, and stand up for the drivers. Support the Liberal Party’s amendment, and show a little ticker for once in your life!

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — I rise to speak on behalf of The Nationals on the Transport (Taxi-cab Accreditation and Other Amendments) Bill. The Nationals recognise the good intent of the bill. We have consulted widely with the taxi industry, whose members have expressed some concerns to us. In my presentation I want to put the bill in context, especially from the country taxi operator’s perspective. In his second-reading speech the minister stated:

Taxi services play a vital role in Victoria’s social and economic life. There are some 32 million taxi trips per year in Victoria.

Taxis are a major part of the general mix of public transport within metropolitan Melbourne and perform a unique role in regional Victoria.

Further on he said:

Victorians therefore deserve and expect safe, reliable and efficient taxi services.

I would like to expand on that from the country Victorian perspective. I draw on the words of Joe Basten, a taxi operator from Wonthaggi, who at a taxidrivers rally last year commented on the question ‘What is a taxi?’:

It is the family car when it is not available or you don’t have one.

It is that extra car when it is needed.

It was the wedding car ...

It is the transport to allow you to have a drink on a special night out ...

It is your car when you can no longer drive. (Either due to age or health or wealth.) —

or lack thereof —

It is tourist transport with local knowledge for our visitors ...

It is emergency transport for blood and other medical emergencies. (Transport of choice because it is often quicker than the ambulance.)

It takes your kids to school when you can’t, and it picks them up as well.

It does that emergency shopping for you ...

And it goes on. Taxicabs in country Victoria are part of the community. They are small businesses operated very often by owner-drivers, who, as I said, are part of the community and are often very closely intertwined with the community they serve.

In north-east Victoria Allan Bemrose, the operator of Shepparton Taxis, is a fellow whom I coached a long time ago at the Shepparton Football Club. Equally, David O’Donoghue, who operates the Benalla taxi service, is a fellow whom I play tennis with, and his wife is on a community trust foundation with me. Then you have Margaret and Jerry Wilson at Bright, who are integral parts of the local community; and their daughter, Rebecca, and her husband at Myrtleford are also integral parts of their community.

Taxi operations in country Victoria are often well-run small businesses. Certainly Andrew Kuhne from Horsham is a good example of someone operating a well-run local business and trying to carve out an income in a tough environment. Wayne and Jan Ubergang of Hamilton — they have eight cabs there now — are doing it well, but they are confronted with a lot of challenges, which I will expand on later. Jenny

Trewin at Sale is doing a good job along with the rest of her staff, but she is finding it tough because there is a crisis in country cabs.

Country taxi operators are practical people. In confronting the crisis they have to come up with practical solutions. Hans Zonneveldt from Cobram has offered a series of practical solutions, which I will come back to. Equally Dale Sudholz from Heathcote has come up with practical solutions, as has Jo Baston. Leigh Tait from Rochester and Ian Strang from Wangaratta are practical people who want to address the problems they can see and achieve commonsense outcomes.

The key thing is that the majority of country taxi operators are part of their communities. They belong there and do their darnedest to provide safe and enjoyable transport — they are the only means of public transport in many small communities — for the clients they service.

There are a number of key aspects of the bill from The Nationals perspective, the first of which involves tightening up the accountability and responsibility of taxi depots. It includes a new accreditation scheme that will identify the key roles of those involved in the industry — that is, the taxicab licence holders, the taxicab licence operators and the providers of taxicab network services. The bill establishes that it will be an offence for any of these industry participants to undertake a range of activities without accreditation.

The bill also makes a clear distinction between regulating the number of taxis and regulating the business and service standards that will include the probity and professionalism of the people who provide the service. The bill gives the minister the power to set standards for the taxi industry across a wide range of areas, including the safety of taxicab drivers, customers and members of the public, and customer service and complaint-handling processes. As a broader issue the bill indicates that the minister must consult with the industry in formulating these standards.

Three concerns have been identified for The Nationals by the Victorian Taxi Association. First, a perfectly innocent taxi operator could be left out in the cold in the event that their assigned taxi licence was suspended through no fault of their own; second, the bill could remove the ability of taxicab network owners to make commercial decisions regarding the desirability of having different operators affiliated with their company; and third, the drafting of the definition of 'taxicab network service' is considered clumsy by my colleagues.

After the Victorian Taxi Association raised these three issues with us, we raised them in the ministerial briefing. My colleague in the upper house the Honourable Barry Bishop, a member for North-West Province, also wrote to the Minister for Transport and raised these concerns. The minister responded by indicating that he would provide the Parliament with an assurance that the Victorian Taxi Directorate will quickly provide assignees who have had their licences suspended through no fault of their own with short-term licences. Hopefully that will address our initial concern about driver continuity in the event that a licence is suspended.

Secondly, in relation to the affiliation or employment of taxi operators, the minister has provided an assurance that the term 'reasonable excuse' will be applied. Whilst we are waiting for the definition of 'reasonable excuse' we will take in good faith the proposition that the network operators and the drivers will be treated fairly and reasonably in the implementation of this legislation.

Thirdly, in relation to the drafting of the taxicab network service the minister has indicated that the situation will be monitored and that, if our contention that it is clumsy is confirmed, hopefully remedial action will be taken.

I would like to comment on some of the recent reforms that have been undertaken by the government and identify additional reforms that need to be undertaken. In the second-reading speech the minister indicated that:

This bill represents both a completion of the major 2002 round of taxi reforms and the beginning of further industry improvement and reform. The government will continue to introduce improvements designed to deliver better taxi services to Victorians.

The minister further undertook:

... to address the financial hardship faced by many taxi operators in provincial Victoria and to ensure that regional communities continue to enjoy the benefit of a local taxi service.

I turn to the package of reforms that the minister has referred to. In recent times we have had a review of the country taxi industry. Some of the positive outcomes of that review include recognition of the appropriateness of flexible trading hours — for example, allowing taxi operators in small communities to not provide a 24-hour service early in the week while ensuring that the service is available on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, provided that it is done in consultation with the local industry. That reform is welcomed by the taxi

industry. Equally welcome is the cut in licence fees from about \$400 per cab down to about \$44. There are also practical commonsense adjustments to the requirements governing where roadworthy certificates can be done to keep cabs on the road.

However, a number of issues were identified in the review of the industry that are yet to be addressed by the government. A major issue — perhaps the major issue — of concern to the taxi industry is fare increases. After years of their fares being pegged whilst taxi operators interstate have had progressive fare increases, eventually the Victorian taxi industry has had a fare increase on the formula of the consumer price index minus one. That means that after five or six years of no fare increases the taxi operators are going to get a fare increase of about 2.5 per cent in September this year. I think that is called going backwards. It is going even further backwards if you look at the cost of implementation and modifying the taxi meters. I think the taxi operators believe they will have to work for about three months just to recoup the cost of adjusting their meters.

A second major issue that is yet to be addressed by the government is wheelchair-accessible taxis. This is again in a context where country taxi operators have quite simply been screwed. Country taxi operators, being caring members of the community, were prepared to provide wheelchair-accessible cabs to their clients, whereas their metropolitan colleagues, a little bit more greedy and perhaps with more business opportunities, were reluctant to provide the same access to wheelchair-bound clients as they did to able-bodied clients. The government saw fit to provide incentives to the metropolitan cabs such as booking fees and an amount of \$100 per car per four weeks of operation on the booking depot's books. Those enticements were not offered to country taxi operators.

The government is attempting to address that by providing country taxi operators with a \$3 million fund which will be made available in the form of a grant to cover the cost of the replacement of a normal cab at about \$30 000 with a wheelchair-accessible cab at about \$60 000. It sounds fine. There are about 75 wheelchair-accessible cabs in country Victoria. They turn over about every three to five years, and \$3 million is sufficient to ensure a grant for each and every cab. I repeat, the \$3 million is sufficient to ensure a grant for each and every cab in country Victoria. However, when you look at the fine print you see that the government has required that a financial-capacity-to-pay criterion be imposed on country operators — in other words, it is a means test. If the country operator's taxicab business is perceived to be financially viable without that grant,

then stiff bikkies! No grant. I do not consider that fair and equitable. That is an example of Melbourne-based operators getting taxpayer-funded encouragement regardless of the financial status of the business; country operators have to prove that they are going to the wall before they can access that money.

It gets even worse — and I have raised this issue with the member for Brunswick, the parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Transport. I should say he has a great appreciation of the issues affecting country taxi operators and I believe he is genuinely committed to improving the situation. He is grappling with some of these tasks at the moment and attempting to convince his colleagues in the government of the injustices that prevail. I wrote to the Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure on 31 July in relation to the proposed eligibility criteria for wheelchair-accessible taxi (WAT) grants including financial capability — that is, taxi businesses needing to demonstrate financial hardship to qualify for WAT grants. I said:

I am concerned that this approach will disadvantage communities currently serviced by viable taxi operators but whose management believe that WATs per se do not contribute to the financial viability of their businesses. In fact, several successful country taxi businesses argue that their WATs are cross-subsidised by other more profitable parts of their business.

Without access to WAT grants, successful country taxi businesses may choose to not increase WAT numbers or worse still, reduce WAT numbers. This would leave the people the government is trying to help worse off.

I went on to request that the parliamentary secretary investigate the matter and address that apparently inequitable situation.

Another issue that requires addressing in line with the minister's commitment in his second-reading speech is that the multipurpose taxi program needs to be further finetuned. We had the ludicrous situation a couple of years ago of a cap being put on the multipurpose taxi program because \$45 million was being fraudulently removed from the system by taxi operators who did not play the game. Unfortunately, in bringing in a cap, the government used a sledgehammer to crack a nut. The cap of \$545 imposed unfair and unreasonable hardship on genuinely needy people. The government heard the message from the needy people out there, heard the message in Parliament from The Nationals and the opposition, and under sufferance that cap was increased back to \$1000. But there is still a cap of \$30 per trip. That unfairly discriminates against country people who have to use taxis because a 50 per cent subsidy of \$30 per trip still limits how far a person needing a taxi can go in country Victoria.

There are also other issues concerning eligibility criteria. In particular the absence of other forms of public transport in country Victoria is not considered part of the eligibility criteria to qualify for the multipurpose taxi program. That is clearly discriminating against people who do not have access to their own vehicles in country Victoria. There are other issues with the application form.

There is also another major issue in relation to community transport, in that community transport arrangements unfortunately often take away the bread-and-butter employment opportunities of cab operators in small country communities. The cab operators are then expected to pick up the activity in antisocial hours without having benefited from the 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Monday-to-Friday activity. The government has made a commitment — and again I commend the parliamentary secretary for his personal commitment — to encourage community transport coordinators to better integrate taxi operators into their systems. But there is still a long way to go.

Instead of empire building amongst community transport coordinators, we need to see genuine commitment to the funds that are made available to community transport being used to buy transport, not to buy vehicles. I should say that organisations such as Central Access Ltd in Benalla have made the shift in mindset and now are spending a lot of their transport money on using country cabs, because they know that is the best value for money. Another issue of concern is advertising on country cabs. The point has been made to me by Andrew Kuhne from Horsham that the savings for his business on reduced licence fees are of the order of \$2000 per year but the losses associated with losing the ability to advertise are of the order of \$6500 per year. So there is work to be done on that front. The member for Murray Valley might touch on the situation in Wangaratta in relation to advertising.

In the last couple of minutes I would like to acknowledge further commonsense propositions put to me by members of the taxi industry about what the government needs to do to overcome the country taxi crisis in the future. That action needs to be taken sooner rather than later. Dale Sudholz from Heathcote outlines his concerns about ongoing meetings, bloody meetings, where much is discussed but little is achieved on transport proposals. He also outlines the very high cost of Transport Accident Commission cover. He says that it costs him 350 per cent more to have TAC cover than it costs the local real estate agent, who drives more kilometres per year, and that the situation with WorkCover is similar. There are injustices in relation to those aspects.

Hans Zonneveldt from Cobram has also been very vocal and constructive in his proposals. He is arguing for a 15 per cent fare increase to recognise the particular issues for country taxi operators, which include a large number of dead kilometres and relatively low fares for each trip that is made. He makes comments also about the need to simplify the multipurpose taxi program application forms and identifies issues with border anomalies that are yet to be addressed. Jenny Trewin from Sale has identified her frustrations with continual involvement in talk fests in the Let's Get Connected project meetings, which have little outcome. Jan Ubergang of Taxis of Hamilton has identified what she considers the inappropriate style of investigation of road worthiness. With those few remarks, I indicate that The Nationals will not be opposing the bill.

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) — I rise in support of this very important bill which deals primarily with the issue of accreditation in the taxi industry. First, I want to make a few comments about the very positive role that the member for Benalla has played in the country taxi review and in making the country taxi issue a matter for the government to confront.

It is really important to recognise the importance of the taxi industry not only in country Victoria but right throughout Victoria, including metropolitan Melbourne, particularly for the most disadvantaged people in our community. It is easy to think of taxis as being used mainly by business people or nightclubbers late at night. In fact an extraordinary number of the passengers of the taxi industry right throughout Victoria are our most vulnerable people. They are the disabled, the poor — including the transport poor — and people who are very isolated. The taxi industry is a tremendously important part of public transport in this state. That is why accreditation is so important.

In 2002 the government announced 17 areas of reform of the taxi and hire-car industries. There was an number of reasons for that. One was to create opportunities for career drivers and new entrants into the industry because the industry was restricting the opportunity for new people to come in. It was also to ensure the sustainability of the industry, because a whole lot of factors were threatening its sustainability. A taxi working party, which I chaired, was set up to work with the industry. Over four years more than 30 meetings were conducted to implement the reforms in the 17 areas. I suppose one of the really difficult parts of the taxi industry is that we are dealing with a whole lot of groups that have competing, and in many cases conflicting, interests. There are the licence-holders, the operators, the drivers, the depots and the secondary

depots — a whole lot of players in the industry who do not have common but rather conflicting interests even though ultimately they all work to provide and maintain a taxi industry.

Accreditation is the last of the 17 areas of reform. It ensures that the responsibility rests with the appropriate element of the industry, that we no longer have the buck-passing that is so common, with the depots blaming the operators, the operators blaming the drivers, and the drivers blaming the licence-holders. It is about ensuring that we have business and service standards that operate among all the players, including the licence-holders, the licence operators, the depots and the important secondary networks — that is, the cell or informal networks that have emerged as a response to market demand, particularly in metropolitan Melbourne. Now they are an important player in the industry and yet they are completely unregulated, with no service standards.

The reforms are about ensuring that each player shares their part of the responsibility to improve service quality and that genuine information is provided to the government to allow for planning in the industry. At the moment we know very little about the taxi industry, other than the numbers and types of taxis and where they are distributed. At best the information is not very good. Part of the purpose of the reforms is to ensure that we get good information, particularly out of the depots. The bill is also ultimately about improving customer service, which is the centre of the reforms. It is also about the operators and drivers who are part of the depots. So the bill is an important reform and it is very much part of a broader package.

The member for Polwarth has circulated a reasoned amendment. His suggestion is that the police be given full responsibility for downloads. I suppose a series of issues arise out of that proposition. First, up to now the police have been satisfied with the Victorian Taxi Directorate (VTD) doing the downloads, partly because it protects the images and partly because there is the issue of who in the police station is trained. We are talking about different cameras and somewhat different software. Not everyone can be trained if we want to protect the images. That is why there is a limited number of authorised officers in the VTD. It is not feasible or possible to expand it to include all police. It may be possible to provide for some areas of download, particularly in country Victoria, but certainly it is not feasible to train the entire police force to be able to provide images at police stations when drivers show up — as was suggested by the member for Polwarth. It is also unnecessary because images can be preserved by the VTD.

One of the things that came out of the tragic death of Mr Joga the other week was a series of commitments by the government to tackle the issue of driver safety. There is nothing new in that. The government has been dealing with and confronting the issue for a long time. That is why cameras were introduced in taxis and also why the government has accredited screens. The installation of screens is not a simple issue and that is why the government has taken a decision to trial 15 screens. There is a series of reasons why the issue is not a simple one. One is that a large part of the industry is resistant to screens, particularly the daytime drivers. There are concerns about the usefulness of screens in managing passengers and their effectiveness in terms of airconditioning and the use of the cameras. One thing that the government wants to do is trial the screens, particularly over the summer period, to get the drivers to try them out. There used to be screens in taxis in Melbourne and there have been screens in Sydney taxis but they have been reducing in number. The evidence has been that cameras are the most effective deterrent.

The government wants the task force to review the screens and to determine whether better and more effective screens are available. The task force will also look at the issue of downloads and the role of the police and decide whether they should have a role or whether it would be most effective if that remains a VDT responsibility.

The task force will also investigate and assess crime-related risks in taxis, and that goes not only to assaults but also to runners. The issue of runners is not new, and solving it is not simple. Part of the problem is that it is a criminal act, but even if the police find the person who committed the act and they are fined, as things stand the fare does not get paid, so many drivers are reluctant to stop work and seek police support when they do not get the fares. Part of the job of the task force will be to look at whether there are other ways to better confront the issue of runners from taxis and whether the criminal sanctions that currently exist are the best possible approach. It will also look at initiatives in other jurisdictions and at how those jurisdictions confront the personal safety of drivers.

The intention is to recommend to the Minister for Transport a package of sustainably effective steps to improve the safety and wellbeing of drivers. This builds on the work we have done for a number of years now to improve the sustainability of the industry and safety within the industry. It is a difficult industry to work in. It is an industry that is dangerous, and internationally it is considered very dangerous. In Melbourne we have a very safe industry in world terms, but it certainly could

be better — and the government is committed to making it better.

Mr Mulder — Weren't you at the meeting?

Mr CARLI — I was at that meeting. The people at the meeting were very clear about where they saw the problems. The problems were identified as being stereotyping in the media, the — —

Mr Mulder interjected.

Mr CARLI — The member for Polwarth was there. What did he do, and what did he commit himself to? All he wanted to see were police downloads. The member for Polwarth has no idea of how the taxi industry works. He has not put up any serious proposals for the taxi industry. He showed up at a meeting which was very supportive of this government and which clapped the Minister for Transport. Clearly the people at the meeting want to work constructively with this government. We are committed to providing support to the association. All the member for Polwarth could do was condemn that association and call its members trade unionists. He calls them members of a trade union, as though it is a term of abuse. They are drivers who are committed to the wellbeing of the industry. There is nothing coming from the member for Polwarth.

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

Dr NAPTHINE (South-West Coast) — I stand to speak on the Transport (Taxi-cab Accreditation and Other Amendments) Bill. I particularly want to support the member for Polwarth's sensible and logical amendment, which would improve safety in an industry that is crying out for some assistance from government in terms of safety for drivers and operators. All of us give credit to those people who service the community through the taxi industry, which is an integral part of our public transport system. Whether you are in metropolitan Melbourne or regional or rural Victoria, the taxi industry provides a vital service for people who need transport. It provides a particular service for those who are disabled and who have difficulty accessing other public transport services.

I record my support for and recognition of the enormous improvements made to the taxi industry by the previous Kennett government. In particular, former Premier Jeff Kennett personally took a great interest in the taxi industry and significantly improved standards in terms of the training and presentation of drivers and of drivers understanding their responsibilities. He also improved safety within the industry both for passengers

and operators. It is to the great credit of Jeff Kennett that the taxi industry was seen in Melbourne and Victoria as absolutely outstanding and one of the best in the world. Wherever you travelled in the world, people would comment on the professionalism and the outstanding service provided by the taxi industry in this state.

Unfortunately I think it has deteriorated in recent times. There has not been the same commitment from this government to the taxi industry, to the detriment of the service providers. It has also been to the detriment of the operation of the taxi industry in terms of its viability and the safety of the drivers and operators. Many of the people I talk to in the taxi industry — and I use taxis quite regularly both in my own electorate and when I am in Melbourne — call for somebody like Jeff Kennett to take charge of this state and lift the standards of the industry.

I want to raise a number of issues on behalf of the rural taxi operators. Just recently I talked to a number of operators in Portland and Warrnambool about this legislation. Their overwhelming comment was to ask that the government — whichever government is in power — use commonsense in regulating the industry and understand that the operation of taxis in regional and rural communities is different from their operation in the city of Melbourne. You cannot impose the same high-cost regulations on rural taxis as you may need to impose on taxis in the metropolitan area. In country areas the taxi operators know most of their customers and have an intimate relationship with their communities. Over-regulation and high-cost regulation will severely impact on the viability of the taxi industry and the services they provide in regional and rural areas, particularly in smaller country communities. If you over-regulate the service in a one-taxi town, you will drive that service out of business and everybody will be worse off.

The government has to be very careful about the direction in which it goes with these sorts of regulations, because the taxi industry is important in country Victoria. In many country towns there are no public transport services — no bus services, no tram services and no train services between country towns — so people rely on taxis for their only form of public transport, especially after hours. In a time when we encourage people not to drink and drive and in a time when we encourage young people to use a taxi rather than putting themselves at risk by hitchhiking or being out wandering the highways and byways late at night, it is important to have a commonsense approach to regulating the taxi industry so that it is viable.

I want to refer to a letter I received from Stan Gliszczynski, who is the manager of Taxis of Portland Pty Ltd. He said:

Thank you for your correspondence regarding the taxi accreditation regime ...

The major concern is the financial and administrative burden to be placed upon the smaller country and regional depots in attempting to comply with the requirements. The fixed costs are much higher per car to maintain a standard of service for clients and provide a safe and stress-free environment for drivers.

As an example: at present our base hours are 8.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. Monday to Friday, and Friday and Saturday nights 6.00 p.m. to 4.00 a.m. the following morning. This wage bill is around \$60 000 with superannuation and WorkCover. Per car this equates to \$7500 p.a. for a 52.5-hour dispatch service. To that must be added administration and bookkeeping costs.

Further he said:

Secondly, I hope the legislation will require the same stringent conditions for drivers and owners who take jobs 'off the phone' and operate their own networks within networks.

I also want to raise an issue brought to my attention by Graeme Deal from Warrnambool Taxis. One of the concerns he has is that when he is seeking to employ new drivers there is now a significant delay in those drivers being able to start work and so keep his taxis on the road because of the requirement for police checks.

Mr Deal agrees with police checks, as we all agree with police checks for taxidriviers, but he says the time taken for those police checks to go through is often weeks upon weeks, which means that often if he is desperate for a driver the taxi is off the road, there is less service in the Warrnambool community and somebody who desperately wants to work a taxi is unemployed. He also raises concerns, as many country taxidriviers do, about fuel costs.

In the last couple of minutes I have left I also raise the significant impact on regional and rural communities of the government's harsh, heartless and cruel cuts to the multipurpose taxi program, which was absolutely the most despicable thing that I have ever heard any government do, and particularly a government that purports to care about the disabled.

One only has to look at the figures to see how the cuts introduced by the government have hurt people with disabilities. In 2002–03, according to the budget papers there were 5.1 million trips under this service; in 2003–04 there were 5 million trips. After the introduction of these harsh cuts there were only 4.1 million trips in 2004–05 and 4.2 million trips in 2005–06. The cuts have fundamentally hurt the frail

aged and have kept them locked up in their own homes, stopped them accessing the community, stopped them accessing their local health services and stopped them using local taxis to get around for social interaction. These cuts have cut deeply and cut too harshly.

I urge the government to look at their multipurpose taxi program and to lift the cap on the use of this program, particularly in country areas where people with disabilities depend on the multipurpose taxi program to be able to get around.

Ms Beard — They do not have a cap!

Dr NAPHTHINE — It is all right for the members of the Labor Party, who are yelling and screaming and trying to defend their government's cruel and heartless cuts to the multipurpose taxi program, resulting in reduced access for people with disabilities and the frail aged. I say to the government, if it has a heart, if it does care, if it does understand the needs of people with disabilities and the frail aged, it will immediately lift all caps to access the multipurpose taxi program so that people with disabilities will be able to move around their community with freedom and dignity and will not be confined and locked up in their own homes, as they currently are.

In conclusion, I urge members on both sides of the Parliament to support the amendment from the member for Polwarth, which is a sensible, commonsense amendment that will improve safety. I urge members to adopt a commonsense approach to the taxi industry.

Ms BEARD (Kilsyth) — What a pleasure it is to follow the member for South-West Coast and dispute some of the claims the member has made. The member obviously is not in touch with people in the taxi industry. People with disabilities and particular illnesses do not have a cap on their taxi card. I would also like to dispute the comment the member made when he said that people in the country do not have any public transport, only taxis. If the member were in touch with the taxi industry he would know that those involved in the industry regard themselves as part of the public transport system. Just ask them!

It is an extraordinarily rare occasion when I can say to the house that I know more about this bill and about this industry than anyone else in here, but since 1989 I have held a taxi licence. I have a current taxidriviers certificate and am also the owner of a taxi licence.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms BEARD — It is interesting to hear the jibes from the opposition because at a public forum in my electorate the member for Warrandyte referred to me as ‘only a taxidriver’, and I presume that is the attitude of most members on that side of the house. Those members had not had any contact with taxidrivers until the election was looming, and suddenly they became the taxidrivers greatest friends.

Let us look at the Kennett era. Mr Kennett had great dealings with the Victorian Taxi Association when he introduced the yellow taxis and uniformed taxidrivers, and what was the pay-off? The trade-off was self-regulation of the taxi industry; that was the pay-off for wearing uniforms and having yellow taxis.

I would like to thank and congratulate the overwhelming number of taxidrivers in the industry who do such a fantastic job. Anyone who speaks to people who catch taxis regularly will know they are satisfied with the trips they make.

Mr Mulder interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The member for Polwarth is out of his place.

Ms BEARD — It might interest the member for Polwarth to know that I have actually been the victim of violence in taxis. It might also surprise him that the police were right on the spot, the police supported me, the police convicted the person responsible and I was given compensation. I have heard member after member from the opposition saying that the police will not support them. Any taxidriver knows that unless they go to the police station and report their loss of income, they cannot claim it as part of their earnings, but obviously the opposition does not know that about the taxi industry. I know it because I check the figures that come in to me each week.

An honourable member — Does the member have an interest in this and has she declared it?

Ms BEARD — Yes, I have declared it.

This government has a great record of supporting taxidrivers. This was the government that introduced the amendment to the metering of taxis whereby the person who drives the taxi in the middle of the night — the person who does the hard work — receives a surcharge for that work and not the taxi owner. That does not benefit me as the taxi owner.

Mr Mulder interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The honourable member for Polwarth is out of his place.

Ms BEARD — The surcharge goes to the person who does the work. It is not much fun driving in the middle of the night, and you are entitled to some acknowledgment for that and some compensation.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms BEARD — Most taxidrivers out there do a fantastic job. Most passengers are extraordinarily happy with the trips they take. It is the drivers’ job to carry all sorts of people. It does not matter what condition they are in when they go to pick them up; it is the job of the taxidriver to pick them up. I support this bill, and I wish it a speedy passage through the Parliament.

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — It has been an interesting debate. The one thing that is common amongst the speeches this evening is that under this government the taxi industry is not what it was. There has been a substantial loss of respect in the industry, and that has been a two-way street. Sadly, it has been a downward spiral that probably commenced with the fraud in the multipurpose taxi program, which the government failed to investigate and failed to prosecute. There has been an unhappiness that has developed since that has not been good for passengers, for drivers or for the regulators, and it has not been good for our visitors.

The sadness of recent events is that on 8 August a young student, Rajneesh Joga, was murdered, having gone to the assistance of another driver — a cab driver whose life was taken as he was trying to help somebody else. On 10 August, on the night of the last time this house sat, on the front steps of Parliament a spontaneous gathering of young drivers took place. I was here at a function and other members were here as well. I went outside at about quarter to 10. There were probably 50 or 60 drivers there at that time. They were there out of solidarity for their friend and colleague, Rajneesh Joga, who had been murdered. They were there because they were passionate; they were there because they were afraid; they were there because they were genuine. I asked them at one stage, ‘Why did you choose to make this protest’, as it turned out to be, ‘on a Thursday evening?’. I was out there at about quarter to 10, and they in their innocence indicated that they had no desire to disrupt the community. They were there out of genuine solidarity and a concern.

It was a word-of-mouth gathering. By the time I left at around midnight there were probably 500 or

600 drivers there. During the course of that evening I spoke with many of them. They were passionate. They were there to discuss things amongst themselves, and through the course of the evening they gathered themselves into a formidable group. Their concerns were expressed with clarity and conviction, and the member for Polwarth has outlined many of those.

I just mention the removal of distress lamps, the M13 buttons and the concern that they do not attract any attention when they are pressed. The basic matters they raised were the duress buttons; a lack of screens; the abuse and violence they have suffered; the theft they have suffered; the assaults they have suffered; the inability of police to download from the security cameras; the lack of enforcement in cases of non-payment after dark — what have been described in the debate so far as ‘runners’; the lack of respect for drivers; and the lack of respect from the government and the Victorian Taxi Directorate (VTD) in particular. It is clear to me that the drivers were both genuine and legitimate and very passionately concerned. As it turned out they spontaneously gathered again on Friday, 11 August, in Flinders Street. Others have spoken about that demonstration.

I have met since with operators. I attended the rally at Flemington, and I have also attended a brief acknowledgment ceremony that other drivers and friends had for Rajneesh Joga. Their concerns have not abated in the last 10 days. They are just as passionate. They know the solution has to be mutual. They know there needs to be an elevation of respect in the industry. They want to see driver safety as a paramount issue. They want and need distress lamps returned to the cars. I have had experience with distress lamps myself. I have followed a driver who had a distress lamp activated. I followed the driver for some distance, called police and waited until the police arrived. They can and do work.

The drivers want screen options. They want the police to have the capacity to download. My understanding is there are some 150 downloads by the VTD every year, and given the sorts of statistics the member for Polwarth was indicating previously, where there may well be up to 9000 runners/thefts every year, 150 downloads is a relatively small number. There are continuing concerns about prepayment and enforcement issues. These drivers are very proud. They want to work in the industry. They are committed to their jobs, and the sort of responsibility they displayed on the Thursday evening in front of the steps of Parliament was quite extraordinary. They have demonstrated that commitment since in attendance at the rally at Flemington and at other events.

I pay tribute to many of those who have contributed to keeping the drivers organised and together. I mention by way of their first names Nitin, Sohail, Rehan, Uma, Danish, Sachin, Gupter, Rahul and Haseeb, with whom I have had some contact in the last little while. Their passion remains; their concern for their murdered colleague remains; and I note that the operators and the drivers have not only expressed their concerns for themselves but also for Rajneesh’s family, and they have gathered together funds to send to Rajneesh’s family in his home country with the purpose of assisting them to repay the loans that allowed Rajneesh to be here as a student. I have urged them to maintain their interest in their campaign, and I am sure that will happen.

Victorians want a good and respected, clean and presentable, safe, reliable and affordable taxi service. They have had it in the past, and it made a great difference to this city and to this state. I have taken the opportunity in recent weeks to also talk to taxidivers in country areas. Perhaps they enjoy different circumstances. Perhaps they do not need all the facilities drivers in Melbourne need, but they share the concerns, and they also recognise that after-dark work represents a different level of concern. I am sure members opposite would recognise, given their own taxi experience, that after-dark work can be that much more dangerous. But if we engage in an exercise where everybody responds — passengers, drivers, regulators and the government — then we all stand to benefit.

The member for Polwarth has put forward a first-step amendment which would allow police to download from the cameras. As has been said, the concern amongst the drivers is that download time can wipe out a night’s takings for them because the car has to be set aside. When they attend at the police, the police direct them to the VTD and the VTD requires the car to be taken off the road. It is no wonder that there are only 150 downloads every year. There is much to do in this industry, and there is much to gain if we can get it right. A first step would be for the government to support this amendment, and there are plenty of other things the government could pick up as well.

The member for Polwarth has very clearly and aptly described the softness of the government’s response to the Flemington meeting. I urge the minister to do more. I urge the minister to take this opportunity, where there is a galvanised industry of passionate and caring drivers and an industry where the operators are just as concerned, to advance the industry to everyone’s benefit. I know that drivers will welcome the involvement of the government and will welcome the changes. If they are willing to do their bit, the

government has to make an effort and do its bit. I am sure that Victoria can benefit as a consequence.

Ms BUCHANAN (Hastings) — I rise to speak in support of the Transport (Taxi-cab Accreditation and Other Amendments) Bill. I will certainly not be supporting the amendment put forward by the opposition.

From the outset I acknowledge the great work that has been done by the Minister for Transport, and in particular the Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, the member for Brunswick. They have done exemplary work, working through these issues with both the Victorian Taxi Association and the Victorian Taxi Directorate to ensure that the reforms we started in 2002 — this being the last major amendment to address those 17 points that were put up — go through and that we have a taxi system that we can all be very proud of and happy to work and travel in across Victoria.

The intent of this bill is very clear. It is to introduce a contemporary accreditation scheme for the industry to improve safety, competency, professionalism and service quality. Many other members have talked about the fact that 32 million taxi trips are taken in Victoria every year. That is an astounding number and, as the member for Kilsyth pointed out, an integral part of our public transport network, both across the metropolitan interface and rural parts of Victoria. It is also important to acknowledge that the accreditation reforms with this bill are not about more accreditation of taxidriviers; they relate to the taxi licence operators and operators at depots and what are classified as secondary networks.

I want to talk about a scenario that happened in my region recently, which was the terrible attack on a fantastic taxidriver, Bill Hunt. He was working for Frankston Radio Cabs, a service that covers the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula region and is well managed by a fantastic bloke, Kevin Dunn. He has a great team at his office which is based at Seaford and with whom I interact on a regular basis.

It is interesting to note that when we talk about the issue of what happened during the Kennett years, the word that comes to mind is 'self-regulation'. Whenever the word 'self-regulation' comes into it, there is absolutely no regulation at all. It is interesting to note that Bill Hunt, who has been a taxidriver for quite a few years, actually came into a cab that had a screen, but some of the older drivers were not happy and felt uncomfortable with them, so the screens were removed. In hindsight, since his attack Mr Hunt has publicly acknowledged

that he wished he had never gone down the path of requesting that the screens in his taxi be removed.

If we are looking for the opportunity for greater accreditation through the system, through administration and a better focus on occupational health and safety, then this bill will address that. If we want to make sure there are future recommendations in relation to greater safety for taxidriviers — and I will also say greater safety for taxi commuters and any other members of the public — then this is the pathway we need to go down. We will get away from self-regulation and all the nastiness which goes with self-regulation, which is no regulation at all, and go back to a proper accreditation process where everybody is on the same level playing field, which is what this bill provides for.

In closing, I would like to briefly talk about some issues that other members have commented on in this debate. For many people taxis are their lifeline. They are their way of communicating with the other people in their townships; they are the only way they get to their medical appointments. They are their lifeline. Many local regional taxi providers deliberately make sure that they are booked in to take the same passengers to their regular weekly appointments. That is the sort of relationship and rapport that many taxidriviers build up with their regular patrons. That is quality that you cannot put a measurement on in any way, shape or form. With the regulatory framework that we are putting in for the administrators of taxidriviers we want to make sure that the standards of service will be second to none in this state.

I am happy with the concept of the Victorian Taxi Directorate continuing to be the only body with authority on the issue of downloading from cameras, for the salient reasons outlined by the member for Brunswick. It needs to stay that way. In the case of Bill Hunt images were downloaded and were on the nightly news. The two assaulters of Mr Hunt were apprehended within the space of 24 hours. That is how the system works. It works well at the moment; let us keep the good system working as it is. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — In commenting on the Transport (Taxi-cab Accreditation and Other Amendments) Bill I would like to make a number of general remarks.

Firstly, a million trips per year have been ripped out of the system for the frail and the unwell as a consequence of the changes to the multipurpose taxi scheme. As the member for South-West Coast noted earlier in his contribution, in the years 2002–03 there were around

5.1 million trips per year, and by 2004–05, after the government reforms kicked in, only 4.1 million trips were taken. It was an issue that raised enormous rage against the Bracks government within my electorate, as people who used the multipurpose taxi scheme to get their weekly hot meals or visit spouses in hospital faced being unable to do so as a consequence of the government's reforms. The reforms cut too deeply and too heavily on a sector of the community that was not well equipped to absorb the impact of those changes.

The second comment I would like to make relates to the number of acts of theft per week. The shadow minister outlined to the house the fact that there are 9000 acts of theft per week affecting taxidriviers in the form of runners. If it is a sizeable fee, you can imagine the dismay for the drivers.

A number of years ago Rajmohan Ghandi was invited by the Victorian government to address a Victorian coastal conference. As he travelled from his accommodation in Melbourne to the conference venue at the World Congress Centre down on the Yarra he marvelled at the range of drivers that transported him from his place of residence to the conference. It was a matter of great interest to him that one day it might have been an Italian driver and on the way home a Greek driver, and the next day it might have been an Indian driver, followed by a Sudanese or Ethiopian driver. The taxi industry has provided a great springboard for people to gain access to work with flexible hours. I am sure there are more members in this chamber who have driven taxis other than just the member for Kilsyth who spoke earlier. I note that the member for Mornington spent some 18 months as a taxidriver, working significant hours and gaining notable experience and an understanding of the industry.

The next comment I wish to make relates to the proposed amendment by the shadow minister. The amendment proposes that after section 158B of the Transport Act 1983, which has six subsections relating to offences concerning security cameras and privacy of passengers, an additional amendment be included after subsection 6, which reads:

- (6) Nothing in this section —
- (a) applies to prohibit anything done by a member of the police force in the course of his or her duty that would be lawful apart from this section ...

The amendment inserts:

- (ab) without limiting paragraph (a), applies to prohibit anything done by a member of the police force in the course of investigating an offence involving

violence or the threat of violence alleged to have been committed in a taxi-cab ...

Rather than taxidriviers being subject to significant down time through the process of the images being downloaded at another venue, it gives the police the chance to download an image and take action to apprehend someone who has been involved in committing an act of violence or threatening violence. That reform proposed by the opposition is reasonable and might give greater security to taxidriviers who are out there trying to earn a living to support their families.

The Sandringham electorate has been served by many fine taxidriviers. From Sandringham to the airport is a great circuit and a number of drivers have made a strong livelihood from that area. I refer to Michael Sullivan, to Mike McGuire, who has won a number of taxi awards and has taken great pride in his profession, and to John McMillan, a former St Kilda ruckman, who in his later years was one of Melbourne's more highly accomplished taxidriviers. All these drivers took great pride in their work and in their efficiency and sought to provide a valuable service to Melbourne.

A number of years ago there was a taxidriver who regarded himself as an information service on wheels for visitors to Melbourne. Those kinds of taxidriviers are a very good front line in promoting Melbourne and branding it for the rest of the world. They serve a very useful role in promoting investment and tourism.

With those remarks I wish to conclude. I commend to the house the amendment proposed by the shadow Minister for Transport.

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine) — I am pleased to rise and speak in support of the bill before the house. As we have heard this evening, taxis are an absolutely essential part of our overall public transport system, with 47 million passengers annually using taxis. Some of the biggest users of taxis are people with disabilities. In my community Bay City Cabs and its drivers provide a fantastic service to families and people with disabilities in getting them to and from their service providers.

We have heard a fair bit about the multipurpose taxi program this evening. In my work with disability agencies and people with disabilities I have found that any person with a disability who needs it is getting the service they actually require. People with disabilities are not being left behind. The changes that have been made by the government to the program have ensured that those who require it are getting the service they need.

In the last couple of weeks there has been much debate about the taxi industry. Taxidriviers have also initiated debate on their demands around the issue of providing a safe working environment. I certainly commend taxidriviers. I am sure theirs is a very challenging job, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights, because they are picking up people who have been drinking. There have been some tragedies recently that have certainly highlighted this particular issue. In this debate we have also heard that there are discussions in the community about people wanting to improve professionalism within the industry.

What this government is trying to do is tackle both those things, because it is in the interests of drivers and in the interests of the community generally to have a professional, reliable and safe service. The steps we are taking in supporting taxidriviers and establishing a representative group will be very important. Members of the opposition have been fairly savage about that proposal, saying it is about some sort of union. There are about 13 000 active drivers in Victoria, and the opposition leader met, I think, five of them. That is clearly representative!

An honourable member — At most.

Ms NEVILLE — That's right. This is an attempt — —

An honourable member interjected.

Ms NEVILLE — In fact in my office I have had 20 at any one time. I am not claiming to speak for drivers, but what I am saying is that this government is attempting to provide an avenue for drivers to come together and resolve issues. For example, in respect of screens, on the radio all during that week we had one lot of drivers saying they wanted them and another lot saying they did not. We need to be able to work together. The drivers need to have a strong voice and an opportunity to share ideas and find the best way forward to improve safety for them and improve the service they deliver to customers. This bill meets some of those demands, and I commend it to the house.

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I am pleased to join the debate on this legislation, and I note the comments that have been made. I listened with a great deal of interest to the contributions of the member for Polwarth and the member for Benalla, who presented the views of The Nationals. I want to take up the comments of the member for Polwarth about the taxi industry during the 1990s. The former coalition government can take a lot of credit for what was done for the taxi industry and for the changes that were

introduced at the time. What the former government sought to do was bring the industry into line and get it to be uniform in what it was doing. We saw the Victorian Taxi Directorate established in 1994, and in fact great changes occurred in the industry over that time.

Like other members I have talked to taxi operators in my electorate, and I have been able to secure a lot of information about the difficulties industry operators face, particularly in country Victoria, in getting an appropriate return for the services they provide. I give some credit to the government for listening to the representations that have been made in recent years. We have seen changes implemented to increase returns for country operators so that their businesses are more viable propositions. It has been recognised that they operate in areas which are often sparsely populated and in which there is not the same demand for taxis that there is in metropolitan Melbourne. So there have been great changes implemented over that time.

This legislation deals with the new accreditation scheme and provides a lot of information about the changes that are to be introduced. I note also that the taxi industry is looking at a wide range of issues such as compliance with applicable legislation and financial viability. I want to bring to the attention of the house concerns that have been raised with me by taxi operators in Wangaratta. The Minister for Transport and the parliamentary secretary are very much aware of the representations I made last year to the minister about the advertising on taxis. The taxi directorate was established in 1994, but we have a situation where taxis in Wangaratta have been advertising the local radio station on their vehicles under a contract that was signed in 1992.

In that respect I want to read a couple of paragraphs from a letter dated 14 January 2005 and signed by Steve Stanko, the then director of the Department of Infrastructure. The third paragraph of the letter reads:

The 1994 decision allowed for formal agreements in place at that time between individual taxi operators and the advertising company to continue until the expiry of that agreement.

The letter goes on to say:

Consequently the DOI formally notified taxi advertising companies and taxi owners in late 2003 that all forms of external commercial advertising (including boot panels and other similar fittings) were to be removed by 31 January 2004.

I remind the house that in the earlier part of the letter Mr Stanko indicated that those who had legitimate advertising would be able to retain those contracts until

their expiry. There has been a lot of representation, including my taking a deputation to the parliamentary secretary. We have spoken to the people from the taxi directorate and the taxi operators, but the people at Wangaratta radio station 3NE believe its contract is still valid, and they have received legal advice confirming that that is the case.

In summary, the minister wrote to me early this year indicating that, following all the representations which were made in 2005 and the discussions which took place, the direction was that the advertising should be removed. The advertising remained on those taxis until a month or so ago. The Victorian Taxi Directorate told the taxidriviers that if they did not remove the advertising signage, they would face penalties. Radio station 3NE said it would take this issue to court, and it is still seeking to do so to try to get some resolution of the situation.

The taxi operators have had to remove that advertising from their taxis for fear of being penalised by the Victorian Taxi Directorate. Whilst the minister has indicated in earlier correspondence to me that the advertising must be removed, radio station 3NE believes it has a contract with the Wangaratta taxidriviers for them to carry the advertising and, in return, to get their cars advertised on the radio station.

I would like to think there will be a positive response from the minister. He has talked about the development of accreditation through this legislation. However, we have a continuing situation in Wangaratta where 3NE believes it has a contract that was signed in 1992 and will last until approximately 2014. It believes it has a legitimate contract and has legal advice to back that up. It is now looking to take court action, and I believe the minister should acknowledge that it is the only taxi service in the state that still has advertising boards on the taxis. We need to resolve the situation through the minister coming forward and saying, 'Yes, the advertising can remain; these are legitimate contracts'. Otherwise the radio station will certainly take it further. That is why we need to make sure we see a resolution of that situation.

In closing, I indicate that the taxi operators in my electorate perform an excellent job in providing service to country areas. As I said, often it is difficult for people in the smaller country towns to operate the taxis efficiently — although they do so — and get an appropriate return on their investment. The government needs to understand there is a vast difference between operating taxis in country Victoria, particularly in the smaller country centres, and operating taxis in

metropolitan Melbourne. That fact should be taken into consideration.

I also commend the taxidriviers on being able to achieve uniformity with the colour schemes on their taxis and on making sure they are able to provide the best service possible in their areas, recognising that they provide a service not only to the general public but also to the disabled people who they have to shift around in those limited areas. I want to make sure the minister responds to the issues that have been raised and the genuine concerns of the taxi operators within the rural city of Wangaratta.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I thank all the members who have contributed to the debate: the members for Polwarth, Benalla, Brunswick and South-West Coast, the Leader of the Opposition and the members for Kilsyth, Hastings, Sandringham, Bellarine and Murray Valley.

This bill does not apply directly to the regulation of taxidriviers, because we have already dealt with that proposal in the Transport Legislation (Further Amendment) Act 2006. This bill provides a framework to assist and further address the concerns of drivers. It brings taxi depots and secondary networks explicitly into an industry regulation framework for the first time. When I reported this to all the taxidriviers assembled at the Flemington meeting, they thought it was a bloody good idea and responded enthusiastically to it. Depots especially have a major role in determining a range of factors affecting taxidriviers, and this bill will deal with it.

The bill will enable standards to be established which will cover dealings between drivers and depots as well as between drivers and operators. Importantly, these standards will also be able to cover matters of driver safety. The accreditation scheme makes provision more generally for the setting of business and service standards. This bill, for the first time ever, enables laws and regulations to be made about depots and secondary networks.

I am mindful of the time, and we do want to allow for some consideration of the bill in detail, so I will try to be quick. What I want to raise and point out to members is in relation to factual matters relating to runners or fare evaders. That problem is already provided for in the Transport (Taxi-Cabs) Regulations 2005, where regulation 43(5) says:

The hirer of a taxi-cab must pay in full the fare and any additional charges for the hiring at the termination of the hiring unless the operator or the driver of the taxi-cab agrees that payment may be made at a later time.

If you break that regulation, if you are a passenger who does not do the right thing, the penalty is 10 penalty units, which is a very substantial fine. That puts to rest the issue as to whether this is a civil or a criminal matter. It is covered currently in the regulations, and let there be no doubt as to how that should apply or operate.

Also an issue of cost was raised during the debate. It is not proposed to charge additional fees for accreditation. In fact, as part of the government's country taxi review, annual licence fees for operators with less than 10 taxis will be reduced by 90 per cent, so for the bulk of operators in country Victoria this will mean a reduction of some 90 per cent — down from \$444 to just \$44. This is an issue where we have tried to address costs. We are reducing them particularly for those country operators. We do not have a policy for charging accreditation fees; it is not a proposal before us. With those words, I will conclude. I am keen to consider this bill in the consideration-in-detail stage.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Consideration in detail

Clauses 1 to 24 agreed to.

New clause

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — I move:

Insert the following new clause to follow clause 11 —

‘A. Offences relating to security cameras and privacy of passengers

After section 158B(6)(a) of the **Transport Act 1983**
insert —

“(ab) without limiting paragraph (a), applies to prohibit anything done by a member of the police force in the course of investigating an offence involving violence or the threat of violence alleged to have been committed in a taxi-cab; or”.

This new clause deals with the issue of violence in taxis and the fact that at this point in time Victoria Police do not have the ability to download images. Most of the time, with these threats of violence against taxidriviers, the first port of call is a police station, and it is imperative that time is not lost, particularly in detecting and being able to identify those people who are associated with that violence.

Quite often the violence is also associated with runners; people who refuse to pay have a struggle with the taxidriver in getting out of the car. The minister

indicated earlier that there are provisions and regulations to deal with this matter, but this issue quite often deals with violent situations. What I would like to know is how many prosecutions there have been in the last 12 months in relation to people who run and refuse to pay a fare?

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — In speaking to the amendment that has been moved by the member for Polwarth, I have a couple of comments I would like to make before answering his question. The issue of the downloading of the security films is an important issue in the taxi industry. It was one that was raised with me at the Friday night meeting and again repeated at the mass meeting of taxidriviers at Flemington racecourse. It is an issue that they regard as very important because it can help establish an evidentiary basis and facts in relation to crimes that have allegedly been committed against taxidriviers — crimes of violence, crimes of failure to pay fares, crimes of racial vilification and these types of things that taxidriviers find particularly upsetting and repugnant.

To make the use of security films effective, the downloading has to be carried out by a person who has been properly trained and accredited to do that, so we need to make sure that the downloading experience does not jeopardise that evidentiary process. I think the attitude of the police is that they would rather have specially trained people to undertake this task. The issue of police carrying out these downloads will be submitted to the taxi industry safety task force, and if the task force determines that the police are able to carry out the downloads, and then the police agree to do it — and that is the preferable way to go — no amendment will actually be required to achieve the effect of what the amendment of the member for Polwarth would seek to achieve.

What the member for Polwarth is really seeking to do is in line with what the government wants to do — and that is to have an effective way of using security films in the taxi industry to address the issue of criminal activity in a quick and effective manner; and that will be the task that the safety task force will look at.

In respect of the specific question as to the number of prosecutions that have been carried out, I will ask for advice from the taxi directorate and get back to the member in due course.

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — I just wonder whether the minister would address the question of why, if the power exists, there is not

enforcement? That lack of enforcement is the concern of the drivers.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — As I am informed, there is no doubt that the power exists currently; the issue is getting an appropriate and timely way to make sure that this evidence is retrieved and that the taxidriver is not spending a long time getting help in achieving that objective. But as the Leader of the Opposition would know, this is a hot topic of great concern to the taxidrivers, and it is something that this government is committed to trying to help resolve.

House divided on amendment:

Ayes, 25

Asher, Ms	Naphine, Dr
Baillieu, Mr	Perton, Mr
Clark, Mr	Plowman, Mr
Cooper, Mr	Powell, Mrs
Delahunty, Mr	Ryan, Mr
Dixon, Mr	Savage, Mr
Honeywood, Mr	Shardey, Mrs
Ingram, Mr	Smith, Mr
Jasper, Mr	Sykes, Dr
Kotsiras, Mr	Thompson, Mr
McIntosh, Mr	Walsh, Mr
Maughan, Mr	Wells, Mr
Mulder, Mr	

Noes, 52

Allan, Ms	Jenkins, Mr
Andrews, Mr	Langdon, Mr
Barker, Ms	Languiller, Mr
Batchelor, Mr	Leighton, Mr
Beard, Ms	Lim, Mr
Beattie, Ms	Lindell, Ms
Brumby, Mr	Lobato, Ms
Buchanan, Ms	Lockwood
Cameron, Mr	McTaggart, Ms
Campbell, Ms	Marshall, Ms
Carli, Mr	Maxfield, Mr
Crutchfield, Mr	Merlino, Mr
D'Ambrosio, Ms	Mildenhall, Mr
Delahunty, Ms	Morand, Ms
Donnellan, Mr	Munt, Ms
Duncan, Ms	Nardella, Mr
Eckstein, Ms	Neville, Ms
Gillett, Ms	Overington, Ms
Green, Ms	Pandazopoulos, Mr
Hardman, Mr	Perera, Mr
Harkness, Dr	Robinson, Mr
Helper, Mr	Seitz, Mr
Herbert, Mr	Stensholt, Mr
Holding, Mr	Thwaites, Mr
Howard, Mr	Wilson, Mr
Hudson, Mr	Wynne, Mr

Amendment defeated.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

Sitting continued on motion of Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport).

Bill agreed to without amendment.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

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

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Police: numbers

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — I raise a matter of concern with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and ask him to take immediate action to fulfil the 1999 and 2002 election promises — that is, to increase the number of front-line police. The minister has said that there have been 1600 police put on. In a time of increasing violence we want to know where these front-line police are.

Since the Bracks government came to government there has been a 36 per cent increase in the number of homicides, a 19 per cent increase in the number of rapes, a 5.1 per cent increase in the number of sexual assaults, a 45.8 per cent increase in the number of assaults and a 26.6 per cent increase in the number of abductions and kidnaps. While there has been this increase in violent crimes of 29 per cent, where are the police out on the front line?

It is interesting to note that in a document leaked to the *Herald Sun* and others we find that there are now less police on the front line than there were three years ago. The police document identifies that in 2003 there were 7381 police on the front line; in 2004 there were 7474; in 2005 the numbers reduced to 7461; and in 2006 — the year when it really matters when it comes to violence — we are down to 6726. While we have a situation where violent crime continues to climb in this state the government is reducing the number of police on the front line. These facts have been put together by Victoria Police. These are not Liberal Party figures.

We want to know where these police are, because we know that they are tied up looking after prisoners in police cells; we know that they are working on special pet projects. More than ever before Victorian police are

drowning in paperwork. We also have a record increase of 32 per cent in the number of victims of violent crime. As a community we need answers.

Clothing industry: outworker training

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs. A few weeks ago I was with the Minister for Industrial Relations at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Brunswick, where there was a handing out of certificates to outworkers who were being trained to become pattern makers in the clothing industry. Basically the course gave outworkers more skills to work in the industry. The course was supported by the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union, employers, RMIT and the Victorian government. I ask the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs to fund further courses for outworkers to ensure they have extra skills so they are available to work as skilled labour in the clothing industry in Melbourne.

An important commitment of this government is to improve the conditions of clothing outworkers. The ones I met at the course were Vietnamese. Many of them had been skilled clothing workers and tailors in Vietnam, and after coming to Australia had largely worked as outworkers. They now have new protections that were introduced by the Bracks Labor government to protect their working conditions. As part of a one-off pilot scheme with one-off funding, the government looked at trying to give them new skills in the industry so they could have better paying jobs and conditions and meet a skill shortage in the industry.

This is a very good example of government, unions and employers working collaboratively on behalf of an industry. I really want the minister to further fund these courses to ensure we see improved skills amongst these workers and a recognition of those skills. Clearly they are highly skilled already, but we want improved recognition and a new element in the trade. It turns out that there is a shortage of pattern cutters and designers in the industry. Basically the course was a great opportunity to take some workers, give them some extra skills, improve their conditions and meet the demands of industry. It was a win-win situation.

I ask the minister to look very carefully at the pilot scheme that occurred at RMIT in Brunswick and consider allocating further funding to ensure we can provide more skilled workers.

Mr Wynne interjected.

Mr CARLI — At the old textile college. The member for Richmond would remember the battles to get it to Brunswick. It is working brilliantly, and it is providing good opportunities for outworkers.

Water: Wimmera-Mallee

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — I ask the Minister for Water to make available a financial assistance package for the customers of Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water who are enduring a water crisis and will not receive a dam fill this year. The package I seek from the minister would compensate Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water so that its customers who do not receive a dam fill will not have to pay for water they do not receive and can access a 50 per cent rebate on the purchase of tanks to store carted water.

Members do not need reminding that this is the 10th year of serious rainfall deficiency in the Wimmera. The supply in Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water storages has fallen to 7 per cent, which is the lowest level on record for this time of the year. There is only enough water to fill town storages in the region. Town customers will be placed on the highest level of water restrictions — effectively household use only, with no watering of gardens. There is not enough water to fill house dams in the area, let alone the 16 000 stock dams on customers properties. Consider the business loss to the region in productivity, bloodlines and breeding stock if 1.4 million sheep and cattle cannot be maintained. Water for all farm business requirements such as crop spraying and stock drinking will need to be carted by customers themselves. There are 74 intensive industries in the carting area which are supply-by-agreement customers. These poultry producers and piggery and feedlot operators will receive a mere 6 per cent of their entitlement. Those who are still operating will be forced to close down or choose the costly option of carting water.

If the current crisis continues, from October 2006 Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water will be carting 28 000 litres every second month to each of 2300 rural homes for their basic household use, at a likely cost of \$2.5 million. For a household of four people that is a ration of 340 litres a day, or only 85 litres per person. This amount will meet only essential domestic water needs.

So that not a drop is wasted, water must be delivered in tanks, which many customers will need to purchase. Any domestic water that is needed in excess of this will have to be carted at the customer's expense. The people of the Wimmera Mallee desperately need the compassionate and practical support of their state

government. This is a crisis of soul-destroying proportions. I again urge the Minister for Water to compensate Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water so that its customers who do not receive a dam fill will not have to pay for water they do not receive and so they can also access a 50 per cent rebate on the purchase of the tanks they will need to buy to store the carted water.

Multicultural affairs: employment assistance

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs. I ask the minister to take action to help the Vietnamese and other culturally and linguistically diverse jobseekers in my electorate to find ongoing work.

The house would be aware that on a number of occasions I have spoken in the house about the need to support emerging communities, particularly those living in our large public housing high-rise estates. I had the pleasure of being with Bishop Huggins, the chair of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, at a function last week sponsored by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the chair of which is George Lekakis. A seminar was being sponsored to assist culturally diverse communities, particularly emerging communities from the Horn of Africa, to develop leadership skills and learn more about how to access Victorian and federal government assistance programs.

This is a particularly important initiative, because it recognises that if those emerging communities are to form a meaningful engagement with government, it requires the development of not only leadership within those groups but also the learning processes by which people can actively engage with government around submission writing, lobbying and the various other aspects of how to be successful in funding applications.

The corollary of that work is, of course, the important track record of this government in providing job training programs, particularly on the public housing estates. I point to the very successful programs which again were sponsored by the Brotherhood of St Laurence for training unemployed people in the public housing estates in Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond in a concierge program and in handyperson, maintenance, cleaning and various other gardening and associated activities on the public housing estates. These programs provide people with not only employment but also a sense of dignity. They are able to train themselves and get that start again to move into other forms of employment in the future.

My request to the minister is that she provide further action in supporting the Vietnamese and other culturally and linguistically diverse job seekers in my electorate. I very much look forward to her response.

Whitehorse Road–Station Street, Box Hill: traffic control

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I raise with the Minister for Transport the increasing difficulty with congestion and traffic flow at the corner of Whitehorse Road and Station Street, Box Hill. I ask the minister to have VicRoads install more turning arrows and improve the traffic light sequencing to achieve better traffic flow and, in conjunction with the Minister for Planning and Whitehorse council, to get the long-awaited structure plan for the Box Hill transit city completed and then further transport improvements implemented.

Over recent years, traffic flow along Station Street has become increasingly congested. In peak periods, long lines of traffic are forming both north of Whitehorse Road seeking to travel south, and south of Whitehorse Road stretching back through the Box Hill district centre as far as Oxford Street and beyond. Vehicles making turns into and out of Station Street are experiencing ever greater difficulties. With the increasing volumes of traffic, the median areas in Whitehorse Road can no longer hold enough right-turning vehicles to clear the number of vehicles seeking to turn. This means that lines of right-turning vehicles are banking up in several directions, in turn restricting the passage of vehicles seeking to move north or south straight through the intersection.

Clashes between vehicles seeking to complete a turn at a light change and vehicles seeking to move off on the green light are causing further obstructions and delays. As well, pedestrian flow crossing Station Street on the south side of Whitehorse Road is restricting the number of vehicles able to turn left southwards into Station Street from Whitehorse Road, causing delays for both private vehicles and buses as well as slowing westbound traffic in Whitehorse Road.

In 2001 the Bracks government declared Box Hill to be a transit city. As I have pointed out previously, being a transit city was supposed to recognise Box Hill's role as a major transport hub within metropolitan Melbourne and to mean that the government would support it with appropriate transport facilities. However, the only substantial transport improvement in recent years has been the tramline extension initiated by the Kennett government. All we have had from the Bracks government and the City of Whitehorse has been a long series of studies that seem to lead to nothing more than

another study. We have had a connecting transport services study in 2001, an urban design framework study and a Box Hill transport interchange concept design in 2002, and an issues and opportunities study in 2005. When the Whitehorse council released the 2005 study, it was supposed to lead to the exhibition of a draft structure plan in early 2006 for comment. Instead all the council has done is issue a revised version of the issues and opportunities study dated April this year and say that it would issue a draft structure plan in mid-2006. As of today, that statement is still all that is showing on the council's web site.

The issues and opportunities study itself identified the need to improve the layout of the Whitehorse Road–Station Street intersection for improved traffic flow. The government must not use the long-delayed Middleborough Road grade separation as an excuse for inaction, because that is highly unlikely to shift enough traffic from Station Street to solve the problem. The government and Whitehorse council need to get their act together on Box Hill's future and in the meantime the government should at least get on with improving the signalisation and traffic flow at the Station Street and Whitehorse Road intersection. Residents of Box Hill and beyond cannot wait forever while the state government and Whitehorse council play pass the parcel on their responsibilities to finalise their plans and then actually take action to improve traffic flow, parking and public transport around Box Hill.

Small business: government initiatives

Mr LIM (Clayton) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Small Business and in his absence the minister at the table, the Minister for Agriculture. The action I seek is for the minister to ensure that small business operators, especially in my electorate of Clayton, benefit from the whole range of his new policy and work program that he has just launched. With the release last Sunday of the state government's small business statement, *Time to Thrive — Supporting the Changing Face of Victorian Small Businesses*, I would be most grateful if many of these programs could be used to assist small businesses in my electorate directly.

As a member of his ministerial small business task force, I note that the minister has quite often sung the praises of small businesses by acknowledging their contribution to the growth of the state's economy, as they are indeed the engine room of Victoria's economy. This is indeed spot-on when you look around my electorate. Small business operators in my electorate are working hard to keep up with ever-increasing interest

rates and the harsh rises in petrol prices. Therefore any assistance the state government can give these important employers is most welcome.

Small business operators tell me that, while they understand that some level of regulation is vital in a progressive and responsible state such as Victoria, they welcome any government initiatives that cut down the amount of time spent completing paperwork and searching out compliance measures. Small business operators are very complimentary about the policies of the state government, in particular our government's commitment to reducing red tape and decreasing payroll tax and WorkCover premiums. More importantly, the needs of Victoria's 300 000 or so small business operators have changed significantly, particularly with an explosion of home-based businesses and independent contractors — not to mention the fact that one-third of all the operators come from a non-English-speaking background.

I therefore entreat the minister to ensure that the government's initiative of a \$98 million package to cut red tape and the cost of doing business, to provide greater access to bidding for public contracts, to help with skilling and training, to assist with mentoring and to encourage innovation and export growth, does indeed directly benefit the small business community.

Princes Highway: upgrade

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Transport. The action I seek is for the minister to immediately fix the many dangerous sections of the Princes Highway west of Geelong. Particular action is needed to improve the safety and road service at the railway overpass near Garvoc. The highway surface is rutted and despite an imposed 80-kilometre-an-hour safety limit is still very dangerous. Indeed, many users have described it as nothing more than a goat track — which is on the major, no. 1 highway.

Planning should also commence now to duplicate the Princes Highway from the end of the Geelong ring-road to Colac. The minister should also begin a program to install a number of passing lanes on both sides of the highway at appropriate sections along the highway between Colac and the South Australian border. While the minister is at it he should remove the dangerous wire rope barriers, which are far too close to the road between Colac and Camperdown, particularly through the stony rises area, where they abut the road. In that area if one has a breakdown or parks a car on the side of the road there is simply not enough room for other traffic to pass.

The minister also needs to examine the options to duplicate the highway between Warrnambool and Port Fairy. Tragically there have been two fatal accidents in the Tower Hill area recently, which highlight the particularly dangerous section of Princes Highway between Port Fairy and Warrnambool. In addition, throughout the length of the Princes Highway between Geelong and the South Australian border many sections have an uneven surface, with many potholes. The bone-shaking surfaces are very dangerous for road users.

Clearly the Bracks Labor government has ignored the Princes Highway west of Geelong. It is dangerous and needs urgent attention. It is highway no. 1. It is the major route for traffic between Melbourne and Colac, Camperdown, Terang, Warrnambool, Port Fairy, Portland and many places in the south-east of South Australia. It is used heavily by trucks, including B-doubles, by the tourist trade and by local commuters. It is a very important highway to Victoria, yet it has been described by many users as the sort of third-grade road you would see in the backblocks of Bangladesh rather than the sort of highway you would expect in a modern country like Australia. This section of highway between Geelong and the South Australian border needs immediate upgrade.

Yan Yean electorate: small business

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — The matter I raise is for the Minister for Small Business. The action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate and meet local small businesses to make them aware of what state government assistance is available to them.

Victorian small businesses represent approximately 96 per cent of all Victorian businesses and around 43 per cent of the state's private sector work force. As I look around my electorate of Yan Yean I see many small manufacturers; food, wine and tourism operators; private contractors; small trades companies; and growing retail outlets. There is also a growing number of home-based businesses taking advantage of the flexibility this choice offers.

I have been pleased to be part of the minister's small business task force, which has provided advice to him recently. Last Sunday I was pleased to attend the launch of the Victorian government's small business statement *Time to Thrive — Supporting the Changing Face of Victorian Small Businesses*. It was great to hear first hand from three very successful small business operators — the operators of Jimmy Possum Furniture and Koko Black, and Andrew Madigan of Form 2000 Sheetmetal. In particular I admire Jimmy Possum

Furniture, which has only been operating for around a decade. About one-third of its work force consists of apprentices, so it is putting some work into the development of skills in this state. The people at Form 2000 also said that the Growing Your Business program had assisted them to spend more time with their families and to deliver on time with an increased productivity.

Governments at all levels need to ensure that small business remains the engine room of the economy. Competition from China and India, the three interest rate rises since the last federal election and increased petrol prices are placing pressure on small business. The Liberal Party at the federal and state levels is letting small business down — in particular with last week's announcement that it would keep the fruit and vegetable market in Footscray, ripping 10 000 jobs out of my electorate. It is extremely important that this investment goes ahead.

Businesses in my electorate have been extremely disappointed by the federal Minister for Small Business and Tourism, the Honourable Fran Bailey — 'So where the bloody hell are you?' — and ask where the hell she has been. While small businesses in my area are struggling with increased petrol prices and interest rates she has been off on a junket. She has not stated her position in support of the fruit and vegetable market and condemned this opposition for its anti-business stance. I urge the minister to come out and talk to small businesses and tell them how the state government can help them — because the Liberal Party certainly will not.

Disability services: Home First package

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Community Services. I ask her to review the application by Mrs Carmela Imperatrice to receive disability support. I spoke to the minister and advised her that I would be raising this matter in the adjournment debate tonight. I ask the minister to review Mrs Imperatrice's application for a Home First package to enable her to return home.

Mrs Imperatrice suffered a major stroke in 2006 and following discharge from hospital was admitted to the Rowena Private Nursing Home, which is close to her husband, who lives in my electorate of Bulleen. According to the Manningham Community Health Service both husband and wife have a physical disability. However, they have been happily married for 16 years and have lived independent and fulfilling lives in their home during this time. A physiotherapist at the

Manningham Community Health Service has written a letter to the department saying:

Admission to nursing home care has had a significant detrimental effect on her psychological status as such accommodation is unsuitable for a person of her young age.

Although Mr Imperatrice has an existing physical disability he would be capable of assisting in his wife's care if she were to return home and he is very anxious to be given the opportunity to do so.

He is able to drive in his local area to shop and to attend appointments.

I have spoken to him. He can only drive for a period of 20 minutes and no longer, so it is very important that his wife is close to home or at home so he can look after her. The letter continues:

He is able to prepare all meals, do laundry and light household duties. He receives some home care assistance from his local council and would be eligible for increased HACC —

home and community care —

services if required.

It continues:

He feels confident that he would be able to provide physical assistance ...

In addition Mr and Mrs Imperatrice have a number of close family members living in the area who have stated they will assist in providing 'informal' support to the couple if required.

They have made the application now, and the department has responded with a letter stating that it will be considered and they will be notified if money becomes available.

It is a special case. I urge the minister to review the case and have a look at this special, one-off situation and to provide the money for Mrs Imperatrice to come home and live with her husband who she has lived with for the last 16 years. It is unfair for the husband who is unable to drive for more than 20 minutes to have to travel to another suburb — Footscray — because he needs to be driven just to see his wife. I urge the minister to provide the funds to ensure his wife comes home.

Wind energy: New Zealand

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I raise an issue for the attention of the Minister for Environment relating to wind energy. I seek from the minister his agreement to have his department assess recent reports coming out of New Zealand about some innovative approaches to

wind energy production. An article in the *New Zealand Herald* of 24 July refers to the New Zealand Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Morgan Williams, who is reported as saying that:

... roof-top-mountable wind turbines with an output of 1.5 kW could provide between 2000 and 3000 kW hours of electricity a year.

The article then says:

This is equivalent to one-third of the total electricity requirement for the average New Zealand household' ...

Dr Williams used his report, *Electricity, Energy and the Environment* ... to promote a Scottish rooftop turbine which he said could be connected to the electricity supply, or linked to a hot-water cylinder.

He said the award-winning Swift turbines were being installed across Britain. Some UK city councils have called for homes in new subdivisions to be required to generate 10 per cent of their energy needs on site from renewable resources.

In a point which I think would resonate with many Victorians:

Dr Williams made a strong call for New Zealanders to take more control over their own energy needs, particularly in terms of electricity services.

I think all Victorians would strongly agree with that sentiment. It is one of the reasons Victorians very strongly support the emergence of a new wind energy industry. I believe that if the minister were able to get an assessment undertaken as to the viability of this sort of innovation for Victoria it could act as a very valuable supplement to the state's burgeoning wind energy industry.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — I am thinking of the member for South-West Coast because I know he has a lot at stake down in his part of the world in the manufacturing industry that supports the wind industry. I think this would be particularly useful because it would send a message of certainty to the industry and investors that the government is committed to fully developing this valuable renewable industry.

That is in contrast with the policy of the Liberal Party in Victoria. In its recent country Victoria policy the Liberal Party announced that it would implement a moratorium on the consideration of further applications for new wind farms. Not to be outdone, the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Peter McGauran, recently launched an extraordinary attack on the wind energy sector, denouncing wind farms as 'a complete fraud'. That is an interesting position for the

minister to take, because it is totally at odds with his government.

I believe this would be a very useful assessment for the minister to undertake.

Responses

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Environment) —

The member for Swan Hill raised some very serious issues about the water situation in the Wimmera-Mallee region and the likelihood of water carting in that region. He sought support for a range of mechanisms in the region. I have met with a number of representatives from the region. I will be visiting the region next week and meeting with councillors, farmers and community members. This is a matter of great concern. The situation is about as dire as it can be. I will be discussing with those various representatives possible ways for the government to work with the community. Obviously in the longer term the best solution for the region is the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, which is proceeding. It will provide much greater security for farmers and towns. However, in the short term the government recognises the very serious problems faced by the region, and we want to work with people in the region.

The member for Mitcham raised rooftop wind turbines, which have been proposed in New Zealand. I will ask for an examination of the way they may contribute to renewable energy in Victoria. The Victorian government supports renewable energy. We believe renewable energy is an important part of the overall energy mix. It is worth reflecting on the advice we have from the CSIRO that climate change will have a very significant impact on our water situation. The very dire problems we are seeing here in Australia will become worse unless the whole world tackles climate change. The member has indicated one worthy way we should investigate, and we will do that.

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Agriculture) — The members for Scoresby, Brunswick, Richmond, Box Hill, Clayton, South-West Coast, Yan Yean and Bulleen raised matters for ministers, and I will refer those matters to them.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Campbell) — Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 10.39 p.m.

