

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

15 October 2002

(extract from Book 3)

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FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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The Hon. S. P. BRACKS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. J. W. THWAITES

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The Hon. D. V. NAPHTHINE (to 20 August 2002)

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

The Hon. P. N. HONEYWOOD (from 20 August 2002)

The Hon. LOUISE ASHER (to 20 August 2002)

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Mr B. E. H. STEGGALL

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Burke, Ms Leonie Therese	Prahran	LP	Maddigan, Mrs Judith Marilyn	Essendon	ALP
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Campbell, Ms Christine Mary	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Maxfield, Mr Ian John	Narracan	ALP
Carli, Mr Carlo	Coburg	ALP	Mildenhall, Mr Bruce Allan	Footscray	ALP
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Langdon, Mr Craig Anthony Cuffe	Ivanhoe	ALP	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Wantirna	LP
Languiller, Mr Telmo	Sunshine	ALP	Wilson, Mr Ronald Charles	Bennettswood	LP
Leigh, Mr Geoffrey Graeme	Mordialloc	LP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

¹ Resigned 3 November 1999

² Elected 11 December 1999

³ Resigned 12 April 2000

⁴ Elected 13 May 2000

CONTENTS

TUESDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2002

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

<i>Standing and sessional orders</i>	561
<i>Program</i>	571

BALI: TERRORIST ATTACK

561

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

<i>Austin Repatriation and Medical Centre</i>	564
<i>Bali: terrorist attack</i>	565
<i>Melbourne Market Authority: Freshchain</i>	566
<i>Insurance: bush nursing hospitals</i>	566
<i>Saizeriya project</i>	567
<i>Drought: government assistance</i>	567
<i>Melbourne 2030 strategy</i>	568
<i>Tertiary education and training: specialist centres</i>	569
<i>Minister for Education Services and Minister for Housing: conduct</i>	569
<i>Workcover: building industry</i>	570

PAPERS

570

ROYAL ASSENT.....

571

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

<i>Eastern Freeway: extension</i>	572
<i>Lockwood Security Products</i>	572
<i>Drought: government assistance</i>	572
<i>Victorian Electronic Records Strategy Centre of Excellence</i>	573
<i>Eltham: roads</i>	573
<i>Spanish and Latin American art exhibition</i>	573
<i>Roads: black spot program</i>	574
<i>North Shore Football Club</i>	574
<i>Melbourne–Geelong road: upgrade</i>	574
<i>Ballarat: ICT jobs</i>	574
<i>Thompsons Road, Cranbourne: traffic control</i>	575

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA BILL

<i>Second reading</i>	575
-----------------------------	-----

NATIONAL PARKS (BOX-IRONBARK AND OTHER PARKS) BILL

<i>Second reading</i>	617
-----------------------------	-----

ADJOURNMENT

<i>Drought: stock feed</i>	623
<i>Disability services: Shepparton</i>	623
<i>Crime: Greater Bendigo</i>	624
<i>Drugs: government policy</i>	624
<i>Rail: Noble Park crossing</i>	625
<i>Rural and regional Victoria: government vehicle sales</i>	625
<i>Leopold Primary School</i>	626
<i>Consumer affairs: motorhome</i>	626
<i>Melbourne 2030 strategy</i>	627
<i>Mansfield: seniors activities</i>	627
<i>Housing: Warrnambool tenant</i>	628
<i>Keilor Plains: fire prevention</i>	628
<i>Responses</i>	629

Tuesday, 15 October 2002

The SPEAKER (Hon. Alex Andrianopoulos) took the chair at 2.05 p.m. and read the prayer.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Standing and sessional orders

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — By leave, I move:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended today so as to allow —

- (1) precedence to be given to a motion of condolence to the families of the victims of the Bali bombings; and
- (2) at the conclusion of the consideration of the motion the house to proceed with question time followed by formal business and other business as set out in the notice paper.

Motion agreed to.

BALI: TERRORIST ATTACK

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — By leave, I move:

That the following resolution be agreed to by this house —

We, the Legislative Assembly of Victoria, offer our deepest and sincere condolences to the families of the victims of the Bali bombings and the survivors of this brutal atrocity and join the people of Victoria in expressing shock and outrage at this senseless waste of life.

The attack in Bali last weekend was both brutal and cowardly. We still do not know the extent of those people who have lost their lives or who are casualties. At this stage, and at this time in this Parliament, we understand that some 160 persons are still missing as a result of that brutal and murderous attack on innocent people in Bali.

Kuta Beach, where this attack happened, is as much a part of Australia as is any coastal resort in Australia. It is known worldwide as a place where Australians from all walks of life go for holidays — Australians who might go on their honeymoon and Australians who might have that special amount saved up for a special holiday once in their life. It is a place where end-of-season football trips occur, and we all know they have occurred in the past, and a place where annual breaks are often taken by Australians from all walks of life.

It is inconceivable that it was not known that this was a place where predominantly Australians would congregate to holiday and enjoy themselves. Therefore,

Mr Speaker, you have to conclude that the events that happened in Bali at Kuta Beach were events that were conspired and designed to have an effect on Australia and be an attack on Australia itself. I do not think any logical conclusion could conclude anything else but that. The sympathy of this house, and certainly the sympathy of the government, and the people of Victoria, go to the families of those who were killed. Of course at this stage we do not yet know how many people will be on the death toll by the end of this tragic event.

Our sympathies also go to the hundreds of people who were injured and those parents whose sons and daughters are still missing. Just imagine — and I think all of us in this house could imagine it as we have an association with friends, children, and family members — the position we would be in if we knew that our sons and daughters or friends were missing and unaccounted for, and how we would feel about that. Our sympathy, thoughts and prayers go out to those families who are obviously in the situation of not knowing what has happened to their loved ones and not knowing what the outcome will be long term.

We also acknowledge and extend our deepest condolences to the people from other countries who are also caught up in this senseless act of terrorism and of violence which occurred at the Sari Nightclub at Kuta Beach. The people from other countries were from the United Kingdom, the United States, countries across Europe, and of course the Balinese themselves, who were also victims of this dreadful tragedy and are also feeling the angst and hurt from this dreadful event.

Many, many stories are being told of people who had an association with the tragic events which occurred last weekend.

Amanda Fisher, a 26-year-old tourist from Carrum Downs who is now regrettably a patient, is here in the gallery today with her cousin, Peta Trinder, and their families. I say to them, obviously on behalf of the Parliament, that we pass on our deepest sympathy and condolences for the hurt they have suffered. Of course we are resolute in ensuring that we support the national effort to ensure that terrorism is eliminated across the world and certainly in our region.

I must say that it was touching and moving to be out there, to see the tributes on the front of Parliament House today; to see tributes from many people from many walks of life and to see the emotionalism from Amanda and Peta as well as seeing that so many people had offered those condolences. We saw it from people from everywhere in Victoria. The tributes included

flowers from the Balinese community, which was represented on the steps of Parliament House. That is an acknowledgment that the hurt we feel is also being felt in Bali itself and by the people of Bali.

I welcome the federal government's call for a day of mourning and commemoration this Sunday, which Victoria will be observing and commemorating as well. Steps have already been taken in Victoria to have the appropriate commemoration of this tragic event. Flags are being flown at half mast. They were yesterday and they will be today, as the commonwealth has decided that today is a day that flags are to be flown at half mast.

I know that all members of Parliament from all parties as well as the Independents would want to know that we can do something to assist, to support and to recognise the hurt that has been done. We are resolute that we will move on from this and make sure that we will not cower because of the things that have happened. Therefore I have asked the protocol section of the Department of Premier and Cabinet within two days to issue condolence books to all members of Parliament and to key government sites so that people can register and record their concern about what has happened and their commitment to a tolerant, peaceful society in the future.

Of course the state will organise an appropriate service in the future. This is not the right time as we are yet to know the full extent of the tragedy which has occurred and the effect on individuals of that tragedy. Once that is better known steps will be taken to do just that.

On behalf of the Parliament, Mr Speaker, I thank the presiding officers of the Parliament — you and Mr President — for allowing the steps of Parliament House to be used today and over the coming days for members of the public to lay flowers and wreaths as a symbol of their concern for what has happened. I am sure the support of the house is also there for the decision you have made on that matter.

On behalf of Victorians I express my horror at this terrible event. These things do change nations: it has changed Australia; it will change our attitude, but it will not change at all our commitment not to cower to terrorism, and to ensure that the peaceful and tolerant way of life we enjoy here will be maintained in the future. We certainly will redouble our efforts as part of an international security arrangement around the world. We will also do everything in our power to support those who are victims of this terrible crime, the families of the victims and all Victorians, to support them in this

very tragic situation which has occurred in a place we could almost call Australia.

Mr DOYLE (Leader of the Opposition) — On Sunday Australians awoke to the sickening news that terrorism had arrived on our doorstep. The terror attack in Bali brings home to us all that Australians are as vulnerable to these atrocities as anyone else.

Our first thoughts reach out to those Australians, those Victorians, who have been directly affected. Amanda and Peta, I join the Premier in assuring you that our thoughts are with you and I thank you for being here.

Our thoughts also reach out to those who have lost loved ones, those who have been injured, and the families and friends affected. As the Premier said, we think in particular of the families who are suffering the terrible uncertainty of not knowing the whereabouts or the fate of family members or friends who were in Bali when this atrocity occurred. The prayers, the thoughts and the sympathies of this Parliament and the Victorian community go out to those suffering families at this most tragic time. And of course those prayers also go out to those from the other 12 nations who have been affected, who have also been struck, by this act of barbarism.

As the Premier has said, the latest reports indicate that up to 20 Australians have died in this attack, up to 115 have been injured, and up to 220 are still missing. We can only hope that throughout the coming days the list of those still missing shrinks, and that they are returned to their families alive.

This attack impacts on all Victorians, all Australians, all peoples: it strikes us all. It unites us in our grief and sympathy for those families that are directly affected by this shocking attack and, as the Premier said to those families in Bali and around Indonesia that have lost loved ones, the people of Victoria stand with you and share your grief.

But it was not just an attack on our neighbour Indonesia; it was an attack on values that we all hold dear. It was an attack, not on what we have done, but on who we are. As Victorians, as Australians, we must not be diminished by these cowardly attacks. We must stand united in our condemnation of those who hold the lives of innocent humans in such contempt. Those responsible must be pursued and brought to justice. No effort should be spared, and I am sure none will be.

However, we must not let this act of terror override our sense of community. It must not divide us on religious or ethnic grounds. As Victorians and Australians, we are one. Our acceptance of our society's diversity is one

of its great strengths, and is part of the fabric of our community. We must not let an attack of terror undo our society, our tolerance, and our compassion.

In concluding, I would like on behalf of the Liberal Party to extend my thanks to those Victorians who, as we speak, are already working with or standing by to assist those families directly affected — our fine professionals and an army of volunteers. I am sure as the days go by we will hear stories of self-sacrifice and bravery. We should make those stories an anchor to remind us of what humanity and compassion can achieve even in the face of evil.

Again, our prayers and our sympathy reach out to those stricken families who have suffered first hand from this barbarous act. We join with the Premier in expressing our outrage at those who perpetrated this murderous attack. Further, we extend the support of the Liberal Party to next Sunday's day of mourning for all Victorians, so we can mark with respect the losses to us all and, I hope, begin the task of healing.

Finally, we join with the Premier in expressing our condolences to all those families that have lost loved ones, to those who have suffered injuries, and especially to those still awaiting news.

Mr RYAN (Leader of the National Party) — I rise on behalf of the National Party to join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in extending our deepest sympathies to the families and loved ones of those who have been killed or injured in this most barbaric of events that unfolded in Bali over the weekend.

Even as I speak, I understand that there are still some 220 people missing. One can but hope that, with the passage of time, some of those will be located. I understand 184 bodies have been recovered from the horror of this wreckage.

It can truly be said that 12 October has become, in a sense, the Australian equivalent of 11 September, because one cannot help but feel that these events were planned in a way to do maximum damage to so many of the nations which were represented in the areas where these explosions occurred, but very particularly with regard to Australians.

For those who have lost loved ones, and for those whose losses have been identified, this is a terrible event. In a sense, it is even worse for those who are still missing, as there is still uncertainty as to what has transpired in relation to them.

Frankly, when the news of this event started to come through I confess to feeling a sense of apathy. I heard initially — I was in western Victoria — about a bomb having gone off. In a sense, it is a commentary upon the world in which we live that I thought of it, in the first instance, as another bomb having gone off in a place far away, in those areas where we are all too used these days of hearing such tragedies unfold, across in the Middle East. Of course, it rapidly became apparent that the bombs had exploded in Bali and, furthermore, many nations had been the victims and that, most particularly, from our perspective, many Australians were dead and missing.

You struggle to give it a sense of your own relativity. In my case I thought of my own daughter, who is travelling the world. You cannot help but wonder about the sort of impact this event has had upon so many families who at this moment do not know. The worst thing to come to grips with is that you cannot even term it an act of mindlessness, because what happened here is that someone or some people actually came together at some stage and planned this. By their act they intended that they would cause the horrific outcomes that we see unfolding around us on television screens, in newspapers or in articles written in papers such as John Hamilton's article in the *Herald Sun*, which is compelling reading. That is the part of it that we all find so difficult to come to grips with.

How can someone actually plan to wreak this sort of havoc in an area that is renowned for the fact of being representative of peace and tranquillity, and doing it in a way that was intended to maximise the destruction that was wrought upon the people who were caught up in this? It was an act of infamy in the most literal sense — a horror — and all of it planned by people in a way that, for my part at least, absolutely escapes me.

In many ways it is another aspect of the end of innocence for this nation. In Victoria we saw it in another way with the Angela Taylor bombing at Russell Street headquarters, the bombing at the Turkish embassy and other events that have occurred, but very infrequently, in this nation, it must be said. Here we have an event that was carefully planned to cause the maximum damage, and it did.

If I may echo the sentiments of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, one of the things we owe those who are no longer with us or those who have been injured is to remain steadfast in the face of this. It cannot be that we run from this cowardly act. It would be a commentary upon all of us if that were the case. Rather, it is so important, as has been said, that we assemble our various resources to do whatever possibly

can be done to hunt down those responsible for this and bring about justice in the way we understand it to be. In that sense I commend the government for its response so far and the many Victorians who even now are directly involved in the investigation of the crime scene and the ultimate determination of the guilt of those who are responsible for this event.

On behalf of the National Party, I convey the deepest sympathy of my parliamentary members to those who have died, the families of those who are missing and those who have been injured. I also reiterate the comment of the Leader of the Opposition that it is a time to be balanced in reaction. Certainly the initial response is one of grief, but it can very easily pass into one of anger. It is very important at this time that our various ethnic groups are respected for the fact that across our communities they have reacted with just as much horror as have we to this terrible act. I hope that across Victoria we understand that to be the case and that we conduct ourselves accordingly.

The National Party will also participate in the national day of mourning on Sunday. I say again, on behalf of my party I convey our deepest sympathies to those who are caught up in this appalling tragedy.

Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) — I rise to speak in support of this condolence motion. I would like to offer my deep and sincere condolences to the families of the victims of the Bali bombings and to the survivors of this brutal atrocity, and I join the people of Victoria in their shock and outrage at the senseless waste of life. I know my Independent colleagues share these sentiments. I grieve for the individuals whose lives have been cut short so brutally. We are all grieving for those who have been affected, whether directly or indirectly through their families, friends or the wider community.

Bali has been, and I hope will remain, a very special place for many Australians, including me. The Balinese people, with their warmth and kindness to visitors, play a very important part in making Bali such a special place, so I am also very sad for them. I hope that this awful tragedy helps to bring our communities closer together rather than driving us apart. I hope that we can all help each other to get through this particular time.

There have always been individuals and groups in the world who can somehow remove themselves from the realm of humanity sufficiently to be prepared to deal only with death, murder and destruction. We have to condemn anyone who chooses that path. There is nothing that can excuse these murders. We all have to say no to that kind of nihilist violence. I hope that this

government and other governments do everything possible to help the Indonesians find the perpetrators of these crimes and punish them. We have to work together to reduce the threat of more of these terrible events happening. We also have to do everything possible to put more hope, more education, more warmth and more care into the world, not more tragedy and more suffering.

For the moment, however, we need to focus on those who have been hurt so badly by these events. Times like this reinforce the notion that life is very precious and that we should cherish each moment we have with those we love and care about. We have to make sure our loved ones know each day that we love them. We have to make sure we appreciate all the blessings we are given. Above all, we have to look after each other.

My message to those affected is that we are thinking about you, we are sorry you hurt so much and we offer our care and our support.

Motion agreed to in silence, honourable members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre

Mr WILSON (Bennettswood) — I refer the Minister for Health to the Labor Party's pre-election costing of \$155 million for the redevelopment of the Austin hospital and the minister's subsequent admission that the cost had blown out to \$365 million, and I ask: what is the government's estimate of the cost to complete the Austin project?

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — Is it not amazing that the criticism the government seems to be receiving from the opposition is that it should not proceed with the Austin hospital development, the biggest hospital development in Australia. I point out that this of course was a hospital that the previous government committed to rebuild but did nothing — not a brick! Nothing was done at all.

All I can say is that honourable members on this side of the house are very proud of the fact that this government has committed to rebuilding the Austin hospital and providing more than 400 beds. The new Mercy hospital is also coming on board. This demonstrates one thing — that is, if the opposition is ever in power in this state again it will cut that proposal. It will close hospitals as it did in the past.

The question related to the costs of this project. I am very pleased to say that we on this side of the house have ensured that we are providing the funds necessary to have the very best building at the Austin hospital. As I indicated some three months ago when this was publicly announced, there have been some increases in building charges because of the boom in the Victorian economy. We are seeing a situation in this state where building is at record levels, and building costs have risen significantly in recent times. At that time I said the project would cost a maximum of \$40 million extra. That was all said at the time, this has all been in the press, it is an old story. I can again confirm that that remains the situation, although it may well be that the final cost is considerably less than that.

Bali: terrorist attack

Ms BEATTIE (Tullamarine) — Will the Premier advise the house of what action the government is taking to help the victims of the Balinese terrorist attack and their families and to reduce the risk of such terrorist attacks in Victoria?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for Tullamarine for her question. As was mentioned in the condolence motion, the Bali bombings were a direct terrorist assault on Australia, and the Victorian government stands ready to do everything in its power to help. I must say from the outset that I welcome the support of the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the National Party and the Independents for this resolute action in Victoria in support of the national effort to counter terrorism and address some of the casualties of this event in Bali.

Our first priority is to offer every support to the wounded and to comfort the bereaved, and then to help find those responsible and bring them to justice. Victoria has offered resources — personnel, crime scene investigators, forensic experts, medical teams and counsellors. Some of those people are working now and undertaking the activities required, particularly under the medical Displan, which has been in place since Sunday; others are awaiting advice, in particular from the Australian Federal Police in Bali, as to whether they are required as part of the crime investigation work.

The Australian Federal Police officers deployed to Bali will report back on what particular resources may be required from Victoria Police, but we have identified the sort of support we can give. The Department of Human Services has put in place its medical disaster plan and the Alfred hospital burns unit is ready to receive patients once they have been stabilised for travel. Most honourable members would be aware that

seven of those patients arrived on a Hercules aircraft at 10.45 this morning. Two further patients are due to be treated in Victoria — one arrived at 5.45 this morning and the other will arrive at 5.00 p.m. today. We expect there will be more patients transferred to Victoria and treated in our hospitals once they are stabilised in Darwin.

Department of Human Services staff are giving personal support and referrals to people as they return from Bali. We have staff at the Tullamarine and Essendon airports, where that is appropriate, who are giving information through a help line and through information to health services and counselling and support services. That help line is providing referrals for victims, witnesses and families.

These are practical ways in which we can help, and they have been put into action. However, Victorians also want to know what we are doing to heighten vigilance against terrorism. First let me say that while we are deploying additional security resources, Victoria has not been notified of any increased threat to security in the state following the bombing in Bali. But the bombings at Kuta Beach were a direct attack on innocent Australians, and we are on high alert, as we have been since 11 September.

The Victorian government has taken long-term and short-term actions to significantly improve our capacity to respond to terrorist threats. Some of these measures, if I can outline them to the house briefly, include: a security review of all major facilities in Victoria, which has been completed; an analysis of the security of supply of electricity generation and other essential services in the state; a full-scale national counter-terrorist exercise involving the defence forces, state police and emergency services agencies, which has been completed, and completed successfully, in Victoria; and a review of emergency management coordination and the ability to respond to a major attack or series of attacks.

Yesterday I called a meeting of the major incidents committee of cabinet that was attended by the Chief Commissioner of Police, the Emergency Services Commissioner and the heads of government agencies to discuss our response to the Bali tragedy.

Victoria is well prepared, but while we have strengthened our police capabilities and toughened our laws to defeat the methods of terrorism, none of us, of course, can assume that this makes us immune from terrorist attack. By their very nature terrorists strike unpredictably, looking for soft targets — and in an utterly planned way, as the Leader of the National Party

mentioned. So we must not leave any stone unturned, and we must recommit to those arrangements here in Victoria and across Australia. That is why I have also written to the Prime Minister, giving support to the efforts that are happening around the nation and also offering him support in Victoria's case — and, I assume, in the case of other state governments and territory leaders — for an out-of-session Council of Australian Governments meeting to urgently address Australia's preparedness for terrorism in the wake of the Bali bombings. It does not need to wait for the next COAG meeting for that to occur.

There are some protocols still to be determined. They are due to be determined at the end of November, but they can be determined out of session. Certainly on Victoria's part we are prepared to deal with that as a matter of priority, and I will be writing to other premiers and territory leaders on the same basis.

The carnage on our doorstep at Kuta Beach has inevitably heightened our own sense of vulnerability. We are terrorist targets, so we cannot be overprepared. We must continue to rally together, to care for victims and to rededicate ourselves to defeat terrorism across our region and across the world.

Melbourne Market Authority: Freshchain

Mr RYAN (Leader of the National Party) — I ask the Minister for Agriculture to explain how the Melbourne Market Authority spent \$13 million of taxpayers' money on a failing fruit and vegetable marketing dot-com company called Freshchain, of which at least \$12 million was spent after approval by the minister?

Mr HAMILTON (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the Leader of the National Party for his question, but it would have been more helpful if he had got his facts correct. There has not been 1 cent of taxpayers' money used in the promotion and pursuance of Freshchain. It is an organisation which has been supported and established by the Melbourne Market Authority.

I would hope the honourable member would understand, given that he must have done some research before he asked this question, that the Melbourne Market Authority has been pursuing an electronic marketing system to move into the 21st century for some time — indeed, since 1998. Freshchain is still being promoted and worked on by the board of the Melbourne Market Authority. The problem has arisen in that the attracting of finance to support Freshchain has been more difficult than was

certainly the belief of the board during the past few years.

The government's involvement has been to monitor it closely and to have the Auditor-General look at the Melbourne Market Authority in terms of the prudent management of its funds — or more importantly, the funds of the people who operate within that market — and indeed the Auditor-General has given it a clean bill of health following his investigations.

In summary, the government has not committed any taxpayer funds to this venture. The government has seen that it is important that the wholesale fruit and vegetable market moves into the 21st century and that it adopts the latest technology and marketing available to the industry. It is a vital industry to the state and to growers, wholesalers and retailers. We would hope that the Melbourne Market Authority is successful in pursuing Freshchain to its potential in providing an essential service. Taxpayer funds are not and were never part of this project, which was a responsibility of the Melbourne Market Authority.

Insurance: bush nursing hospitals

Ms ALLEN (Benalla) — Will the Minister for Health inform the house about a recent government initiative which supports bush nursing hospitals in providing vital health services to smaller rural communities?

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — The Bracks government recognises the vital role that bush nursing hospitals play, particularly in small rural and remote communities. One of the significant challenges that bush nursing hospitals have faced recently is the increase in insurance premiums. Some have reported increases of 50 per cent or 60 per cent in the past year; some increases have been much larger. I am therefore pleased to be able to advise the house that the Bracks government will provide to bush nursing hospitals an insurance package that will save them hundreds of thousands of dollars in insurance costs.

From 1 January next year, bush nursing hospitals in rural and remote locations across the state will be able to purchase medical malpractice and other insurance coverage through the Department of Human Services (DHS) health care agencies program rather than through the existing commercial and increasingly expensive private insurance market.

The new insurance arrangement should represent savings of more than 50 per cent in current costs for most bush nursing hospitals. For example, Yackandandah Bush Nursing Hospital has reported a

threefold increase in insurance costs from \$19 500 to \$57 500. Through this scheme it is anticipated that its insurance premium through the DHS health care agencies program will be in the range of \$20 000 to \$30 000, saving around \$30 000 a year.

I am also pleased to announce a \$250 000 financial assistance package which will be available to those bush nursing hospitals that propose to enter this scheme from 1 January to compensate them for any penalties incurred through cancellation of existing commercial arrangements.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the peak body for bush nursing hospitals, the Victorian Association of Health and Extended Care, for its work with the department in putting this package together. This is another example of the Bracks government commitment to providing better health services for regional and rural Victoria.

Saizeriya project

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — I refer the Premier to the Saizeriya project. Given that the government has expended taxpayers' money and appointed an industrial relations consultant and a scheduler and that your own chief of staff, Tim Pallas, and adviser, Simon Fenby, were intimately involved in negotiating a remedial industrial relations package to ensure completion of Saizeriya by 31 August, can you explain why the project has not been completed and what your government has been doing since 31 August?

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the honourable member to rephrase the latter part of that question and to direct it to the Premier through the Chair.

Mr McINTOSH — What has the government been doing since 31 August to ensure completion of this project, and why was it not completed by 31 August?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for Kew for his question. The government has stood by Saizeriya and investment in it in Victoria. It has stood by it in the industrial relations commission, in this case against the union involved. It has also worked with it to ensure that the project can be completed so that it can operate in the value-added food market around the world, and the government is very excited by the prospect of that. My understanding is that the building has been completed, the fit-out is under way, and it will be up and running very soon.

Drought: government assistance

Mr HELPER (Ripon) — Will the Minister for Agriculture please update the house on the drought conditions in northern Victoria and inform the house of what steps the government has taken to manage these difficult circumstances?

Mr HAMILTON (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the honourable member for Ripon for his question and for the keen interest he has taken in supporting his constituents during this drought period.

It has been a strangely subdued question time, and rightly so. I express my dismay at the incomprehensible events that took place in Bali, and I congratulate my Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the National Party and the honourable member for Gippsland West on their contributions to the debate on the condolence motion. It is indeed moving, and I think very appropriate, that this house has recognised the importance and sadness of this day in terms of this Parliament's actions.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will come back to answering the question.

Mr HAMILTON — In due deference to succinctness in my answer, I will not refer to the weekly update on the dry seasonal conditions, which I trust is emailed to every member of Parliament. I hope that honourable members who represent city electorates take note of this report, which I am sure all honourable members who represent the country electorates do as a matter of importance.

There is no doubt that, even given the dreadful and horrible circumstances of the weekend, life must go on; and given the fact that we have a very serious drought across most of the northern parts of Victoria, life must go on. Indeed, it has been one of the great strengths of farmers and rural communities — because drought affects everyone, and it is not just the farmers but the communities as well that are affected — that life does go on. They are working in partnership with the government, the finance sector and the farming organisations to make sure we get through this drought.

As people who follow the regular weekly reports would know, the conditions at the moment are such that in parts of Victoria crops have failed and in other parts it is a week-to-week proposition. The dreadful water restrictions in the Goulburn, Glenelg and Wimmera irrigation systems are causing great distress. The government has been working properly with the community and with the task force through these difficulties. It has been listening and then acting so that

the results in Victoria are leading the way in how drought conditions should be responded to. Indeed there have been over 500 applications or inquiries for the government's cash assistance package, and that is something of which this government should be very proud.

It is a package which has been directed at making sure that the areas are targeted, that the farmer stays in control of his own future and that he can address the best business outcomes, the most sustainable outcomes, for his farm business into the future. That has been a very important part of the philosophy that was supported very strongly by farmers, farming communities and local government areas in this part of Victoria.

The government has recognised that rural communities are impacted upon and has put together a \$400 000 package so it can provide support and forums and have input so that the communities which are suffering equally during this drought period can have access to information, advice and assistance. One of the highlights of that occurred last week when the Victorian Farmers Federation, with the sponsorship of this government, introduced a Softnet program, a communications program done through the schools televideo network. That was a very important part of working with the community.

What we have been very careful of as a government is that these drought conditions are addressed responsibly, sensibly and in partnership, with an end result that we all know. We have been through droughts in this state and in this country ever since we have been here. We will survive this drought, we will move on.

It is of great importance to every Victorian that there is not cheap rhetoric about assistance packages which have not been thought through, the partnership and the — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister should conclude his answer.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HAMILTON — Honourable Speaker, this is a very serious matter. We need to avoid the cheap shots and cheap point scoring and move on as a community in partnership, working with one another to resolve the issues and get our way through this very trying time for all rural Victorians.

Melbourne 2030 strategy

Mr BAILLIEU (Hawthorn) — Can the Minister for Planning explain to the house what projected figure for additional households in Melbourne is correct? Is it the 620 000 households announced last week, the 730 000 promoted in March this year, or the 1 million households advised in the minister's own media release in June this year?

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Planning) — I thank the honourable member for Hawthorn for his question, which we were expecting. You see, we received another confidential email on this side of the house which had the question in it!

Victoria is absolutely booming at the moment. We have had building approvals of around \$13.01 billion. We have had house prices going up by between, depending on which suburb you are in, anything from 30 per cent and 80 per cent, so there is a building boom going on. This state is enjoying net migration increase, so a lot of people want to live, work and build in this state and in this city.

But let me go to the specific question, which is not without notice, as I said, because it came on the email. If the honourable member had accepted the briefings as offered and had read the full document — I know it is a big document, and I know the Liberal Party is light on detail, with no policy — he would have seen that the projections by the Department of Infrastructure have said very clearly it is 620 000 in what we call the metropolitan region of Melbourne, but if you include one of our key directions of metro strategy — that is, network cities — you include the regional areas of Bendigo, Ballarat and the Latrobe Valley, which brings the projections up to the 730 000. If the honourable member had read the document he would have seen the variation. But what can you expect from a party whose only planning document was the contemptuously named *Good Design Guide*, which was open slather for any sort of development?

To conclude, I will read from a press release by Victoria's peak planning industry body. It has given the thumbs up for the state government's new metropolitan planning project. It has said that the values, the principles and the key directions of Melbourne 2030 are right on for the target, for the challenges facing Melbourne's future growth and development. But it said something else in this press release. The press release says:

The institute's president called on the state opposition to get behind the plan and give it support.

And it further says:

Planning the future of our cities and the state is too important to be distracted by short-term political agendas and requires a long-term bipartisan commitment.

Does the Liberal Party stand for anything? I do not think so!

Tertiary education and training: specialist centres

Mr LONEY (Geelong North) — Will the Minister for Education and Training inform the house of progress made under the ministerial statement on knowledge and skills in the allocation of seed funding for the establishment of specialist centres?

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Education and Training) — As many in this house are aware, the Bracks government has invested very heavily in the training system across Victoria. It has ensured that training facilities in metropolitan Melbourne as well as in regional and rural centres have been looked after, and it will continue to do that.

In my recent ministerial statement on knowledge and skills I identified that we were well on track with the existing training needs but that we needed to put in extra resources to and put an extra focus on emerging new skill areas in order to meet the challenging training needs of the innovation economy. As a result of this ministerial statement and this focus on emerging needs we have provided \$5 million for skills for specialisation.

Today I am pleased to announce to the house that specialist centres will be established and that some specialist training will occur across Victoria to demonstrate that we are really putting the dollars in and the focus on where they are needed.

The Victorian food processing industry at the Shepparton campus of the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE will receive \$350 000 for specialist skills; the Werribee campus of the Victoria University of Technology will receive \$143 000 for transport and distribution; the Hawthorn campus — I am sure the honourable member for Hawthorn will be interested — at Swinburne University of Technology will receive \$450 000 for advanced manufacturing; and the Brunswick campus of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology will receive \$230 000 for an international centre for graphic technology. The government is also providing money for development projects which will lead to specialist skill centres in the future. Again, these will be right across the state.

The Holmesglen Institute of TAFE will receive \$324 000 for environmentally sustainable building and construction; Swinburne University of Technology, in conjunction with South West and Sunraysia TAFE institutes and the University of Ballarat, will receive \$600 000 for sustainability; and the Geelong campus of the Gordon Institute of TAFE will receive \$225 000 for environmental resources.

There are other organisations: Wodonga TAFE will be receiving \$250 000, and the South-West Institute of TAFE at Warrnambool, \$254 000. All of this funding is designed to develop new skills in emerging areas, including specialist skills that will very much be required to meet not only the needs of today but the needs of the future in the innovation economy.

Mr Honeywood — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, on the issue of relevance, if this is federal — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Will the house come to order to enable me to hear the point of order!

Mr Honeywood — On the issue of relevance, if we are talking about federal government money, should this question not be asked in federal Parliament rather than in state Parliament?

Mr Batchelor — On the point of order, Honourable Speaker, the minister has finished the answer, and it is not possible to take a point of order after it.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The minister has concluded her answer.

Minister for Education Services and Minister for Housing: conduct

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — I direct my question to the Minister for Housing. What contact did the Minister for Education Services and her staff have with the Minister for Housing in December 1999 concerning a priority application for public housing for a family named White, and what action did the minister take as a result of this contact from the Minister for Education Services and her office?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Housing) — I thank the honourable member for Caulfield for her question. This really is a rather monumental day, because this is the first time in nearly three years that a question has been asked by the honourable member on the matter of housing. So great is her passion that I can only conclude that it has been sheer embarrassment that has

held the honourable member back from coming forward and asking a question about this portfolio. Of course the opposition left this government with a monumental maintenance bill. It neglected public housing. I am extremely proud that it has been the Bracks government — —

Mr Perton — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the minister is debating the question — or if she is not debating it, she is not being relevant to the question. The question was quite simple. It asked about a meeting and a transaction. The minister ought to just answer that question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to come back to answering the question.

Ms PIKE — Honourable members in the house are in the same situation. As Minister for Housing I get numerous approaches regarding constituents who have made their way through the front doors of various members' offices. Lots of people from both sides of this house make such requests of me. The process is always the same: I listen to the request, I forward the request to the Office of Housing, the particular constituent is invited to lodge an application, the matter is assessed, and then the department determines whether or not the person is eligible and the matter proceeds from there.

This is the exact process we went through with the particular request from the minister's office that the honourable member refers to.

Workcover: building industry

Ms GILLETT (Werribee) — Will the Minister for Workcover inform the house of how the government is working with Victorians to reduce workplace injuries in the construction industry?

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Workcover) — I thank the honourable member for Werribee for her interest in community safety, particularly in relation to workplace safety. This is a pertinent question given the extent of the building industry in Victoria, where we see significant building approval increases across the whole of the state, both in country Victoria and in metropolitan Melbourne.

Mr Speaker, you will be aware that as part of the focus on workplace safety the Workcover Authority has a Worksafe division. Part of its work involves identifying a number of key areas, including the construction industry, as areas where there are far too many injuries. Considerable work has been done with employers and employees in a tripartite way. We have seen targeted

initiatives in the fields of electrical safety, structural collapse, powered equipment and falls from heights. There is also the Foundation for Safety group, which is working very well.

Four years ago in the construction industry the frequency rate — that is, the number of claims per million dollar remuneration — was 0.88. In the last financial year it was 0.66, which is a 25 per cent improvement. This is good for workers, because they are not being injured. It is good for business, because businesses are not having to deal with the absence of workers as a result of injuries. By continuing to work together and striving to work together, which is occurring, we can reduce this even further — and that is what we all have to be determined to do.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Anderson's Creek Cemetery Trust — Report for the year 2001

Ballaarat General Cemeteries Trust — Report for the year 2001

Bendigo Cemeteries Trust — Report for the year 2001

Cheltenham and Regional Cemeteries Trust — Report for the year 2001

Falls Creek Alpine Resort Management Board — Report for the year ended 31 October 2001

Keilor Cemetery Trust — Report for the year 2001

Lilydale Memorial Park and Cemetery — Report for the year 2001

Mildura Cemetery Trust — Report for the year 2001

Mount Buller Alpine Resort Management Board — Report for the year ended 31 October 2001

Mount Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board — Report for the year ended 31 October 2001

Necropolis Springvale — Report for the year 2001

Preston Cemetery Trust — Report for the year 2001

Recreational Fishing Licence Trust Account — Report on Revenue and Disbursements for the year 2001–02

Templestowe Cemetery Trust — Report for the year 2001

Wyndham Cemeteries Trust — Report for the year 2001.

The following proclamation fixing an operative date was laid upon the Table by the Clerk pursuant to an Order of the House dated 3 November 1999:

Environment Protection (Resource Efficiency) Act 2002 — Sections 34, 35, 36 and 37 on 15 October 2002 (Gazette G41, 10 October 2002).

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent to:

Agricultural Industry Development (Further Amendment) Bill
Juries (Amendment) Bill

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Program

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I move:

That, pursuant to sessional order 6(3), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 4.00 p.m. on Thursday, 17 October 2002:

Regional Development Victoria Bill
National Parks (Box-Ironbark and Other Parks) Bill
Control of Weapons and Firearms Acts (Search Powers) Bill
Sentencing (Further Amendment) Bill
Business Licensing Legislation (Amendment) Bill
Murray-Darling Basin (Amendment) Bill
Travel Agents (Amendment) Bill

The government's legislative program of seven bills is achievable. In addition to those bills I have just listed in the motion, it is the government's intention to deal with order of the day 11 on amendments of the Legislative Council to the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill. The amendments are extremely technical and are not required to be listed in the business program. The government believes the bills can be dealt with in a timely fashion and without the house sitting beyond the normal hours. In listing one more bill than was listed last week, the government still believes it is a reasonable workload.

I point out for the information of honourable members that notice has been given for the second reading of three bills on Thursday, because the bulk of the bills were second read last week. Parliament will not be sitting late on Thursday. The Speaker has indicated that there is a function in Parliament on Thursday evening, and the government has acceded to the Speaker's request that it proceed. I do not know why we could not have proceeded with the second-reading speeches on those bills, because Parliament must go on, but we have

accommodated the wishes of the Speaker on this occasion.

Dr DEAN (Berwick) — Luckily the program is not out of control, as it was last week when a couple of bills were removed and honourable members were here until all hours debating others. Nevertheless, Parliament still has seven bills to debate, including the Regional Development Victoria Bill, the National Parks (Box-Ironbark and Other Parks) Bill, the Control of Weapons and Firearms Acts (Search Powers) Bill and the Sentencing (Further Amendment) Bill. They are major bills, and it will be difficult for the opposition to say everything it would like to say on them.

Again we are disappointed that the government has not allowed proper time for debate. Nevertheless, we will work as hard as we can and be as cooperative as we always are to ensure that the program is met. However, we believe the program is too large and that the government is running contrary to all the things it said in opposition about allowing appropriate time to debate bills.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — One could be forgiven for thinking that there might be an election not so far away given the number of bills that were dealt with last week — initially eight bills, with six finally being dealt with. Parliament had an interesting debate on the Gippsland pylons last week, and I thank the Leader of the House for allowing that, even though Parliament sat for ridiculous hours. I welcome the assurance that we will not repeat that exercise this week.

Last week the house dealt with important legislation such as the public liability bill, which the government had been sitting on for some 12 months. I was pleased to see that pass through the house. A good debate was held on the Basslink pylons, and there was a very interesting debate on the reform of the upper house, which did not go the way the government expected. Some of the extreme language used by the Attorney-General in that debate demonstrated that the government believed it would pass this house and go to the other place and be rejected, as it certainly would have been if it had gone there. It was an interesting development that surprised the government.

This week seven bills have been listed on the government's business program. The National Party wants some time to debate the Regional Development Victoria Bill, because it is important to country Victoria. The National Party has been waiting for the National Parks (Box-Ironbark and Other Parks) Bill for some considerable period, and we want to express our

views on that. There are important bills dealing with weapons, sentencing and travel agents, as well as the Murray-Darling Basin (Amendment) Bill, which is also very important for people in northern Victoria.

I note that last week Parliament sat until 3.18 a.m. on Wednesday and 1.34 a.m. on Thursday, and then from 9.30 a.m. to 8.18 p.m. on the Thursday. What about the family friendly hours that the Labor Party trumpeted in opposition? It is great to say these things in opposition; but the government has had the chance to implement family friendly hours, and I would have to say it is no better than any previous government. The Independents who supported the charter on family friendly hours have been very quiet on this issue. I hope that we will have more sensible hours so that members can do their work and that country members in particular can drive home, often taking 3 or 4 hours, without the risk of running off the road because they are exhausted with the work they have done.

The National Party will not oppose the business program and, like the Liberal Party, will do its best to cooperate with the government to facilitate it. I look forward to not sitting beyond midnight on Tuesday or Wednesday this week and hopefully getting away from this place no later than 5 o'clock on Thursday afternoon.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Eastern Freeway: extension

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) — I raise the issue of the lack of new projects in Victoria, as released by the Treasurer last week. One of those new projects should have been the Eastern Freeway tunnels. What has happened demonstrates what is wrong with the government. There have been delays in tenders, rearrangements, re-tenders and the like, and despite denials by the minister that it would cost \$400 million, it is now at \$400 million and climbing. The program was cancelled and then added to the Scoresby freeway, and collectively it will now cost in excess of \$1.8 billion. Three years later the government has no idea of how to do it, and it looks like employing the failed director of the regional fast train project's funding arrangements to be responsible for it.

The people of Mitcham were promised this by the Bracks Labor administration, but they have got nothing. All they will get is the three consortiums involved in this tender process seeking up to \$40 million in compensation for having been forced to no longer

participate in the project. The tunnels and the beginning of the Scoresby freeway are good examples of where the Bracks government is not going. The people of Mitcham know it; everyone knows it. What has the local member for Mitcham done about it? Absolutely zero!

Lockwood Security Products

Ms BARKER (Oakleigh) — It is my great pleasure to place on record a very significant achievement by Lockwood Security Products, which is located in the Oakleigh electorate. Lockwood Security is part of the global Assa Abloy group of companies and is Australia's leading manufacturer of locking system. It manufactures some of the finest locking solutions in the world.

The manufacturing process requires the use of selected chemicals and metals, and while the company has always worked hard to ensure the environmental processing of solid waste and chemicals, it has wanted to implement an environmentally sustainable process. After 12 months of work with Honeywell Pacific and Clean TeQ, a revolutionary \$1.5 million waste water treatment plant was opened recently. The plant recycles plating materials on site and eliminates the chemicals and solid waste produced in the manufacturing process. The plant minimises Lockwood's landfill waste, saves water and energy, and cuts running cost.

Lockwood has set an industry benchmark as the first user of this revolutionary technology, which has attracted significant interest worldwide. I would like to congratulate and thank Mr Brian White, manager, and Mr Wally Grivins, manufacturing controller at Lockwood Oakleigh, for their work in implementing this innovative technology.

Lockwood has always been committed to best practice in manufacturing. With this technology it has also committed itself to world's best practice in new standards for waste water treatment in environmentally sensitive industries. Good for business, good for the environment, developed in Victoria for Victorians and the world. Congratulations again to Lockwood Security Products in Oakleigh.

Drought: government assistance

Mr DELAHUNTY (Wimmera) — I call on the government to honour its commitment to look after the whole of country Victoria. The recent drought declaration and the cash support are appreciated, but the dryland farmers of the Rural City of Horsham and the

Shire of West Wimmera have contacted me expressing their disbelief and frustration at not being included.

A letter to the Minister for Agriculture from the Kaniva branch of the Victorian Farmers Federation states:

The season is markedly worse in the north of the shire, with crops and pasture failing just as badly as those in the neighbouring Shire of Hindmarsh, which has been declared a drought area.

A letter to the Premier from the Rural City of Horsham states:

Council would like membership of the —

dry season —

task force broadened to include an increased number of people whose immediate responsibility on the committee is to represent the needs of people in rural agriculture, rural businesses and rural supplies ... A broader membership ... would no doubt serve to expand the knowledge and understanding of the committee and increase public confidence and acceptance of the ability of the task force ...

With these requests in mind, I ask that the Wimmera community and particularly those dryland farmers in the Rural City of Horsham and the Shire of West Wimmera be given access to the government's drought package and, importantly, that accurate information be given to the Wimmera community to assist them through this difficult time. That is a bit different to what has been quoted in press releases, which said at the start that all of Horsham Rural City was included. We were then told that it was not in it and now we find that it is still not included. There is great frustration in western Victoria on this drought package.

Victorian Electronic Records Strategy Centre of Excellence

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — The Victorian public sector now has the world's best electronic record system in the best city in the world. Last Thursday I had the honour of launching the Victorian Electronic Records Strategy Centre of Excellence.

A prominent international authority who was present at the launch, Dr Rich Lysakowski, executive director and chief science and technology officer for the Collaborative Electronic Notebook Systems Association and the Global Electronic Records Association claimed that the Public Record Office Victoria's initiative is the best system in the world.

With the rapid obsolescence of software and hardware, the challenge of capturing, preserving, authenticating and retrieving electronic records is great. This Victorian-owned and developed system is a world

leading-edge solution. It has been developed by the Public Record Office Victoria, piloted in the Department of Infrastructure and will now be used across the Victorian public sector.

Congratulations go to Ross Gibbs and his highly acclaimed project team on this very important and significant achievement.

Eltham: roads

Mr PHILLIPS (Eltham) — I would like to call on the Minister for Transport to provide funding for upgrading of roads in the Eltham electorate, which takes in Greensborough, St Helena, Research and Warrandyte. Recently the government announced that it is going to introduce — and has done so — legislation for protection of the green wedge. Statements have been made that the ring road will not be extended through Eltham.

I am asking the minister for additional funds for construction of main roads in the area such as Main Road, Eltham; for roundabouts which are desperately needed at Civic Drive and the end of the Greensborough extension to improve traffic flow, or traffic lights or some other form of drastic measure; the widening of Wattletree Road bridge; and the upgrading of Research-Warrandyte Road, which is dangerous in parts — very hilly and steep with bad bends. We are in desperate need of traffic lights and we finally have a council that is prepared to bite the bullet and make hard decisions to upgrade roads. Former councillors of the shires of Eltham and Nillumbik seemed to believe that people were driving around using horses and carts.

We are a very progressive, go-ahead municipality; a very active car family, and we need urgent funds for upgrading of main roads.

Spanish and Latin American art exhibition

Mr LANGUILLER (Sunshine) — I wish to place on record my congratulations to the magnificent Spanish and Latin American art exhibition which was held at Parliament House for the first time ever. This momentous occasion highlighted the cultural diversity and rich artistic heritage of the Spanish and Latin American communities of Victoria. The event contributed to the spirit of multiculturalism and was a unique and historic occasion which will be recorded in parliamentary history.

It was an honour for me to have the Speaker of this Parliament, the Honourable Alexander Andrianopoulos, host and officially open the event. We look forward to more of these kinds of events in this Parliament.

I congratulate the many talented artists and organisers of the event. In particular I commend the efforts of the Chilean coordinating committee, the Fiesta 2002 committee, the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the Parliament of Victoria for their support for the first ever Spanish and Latin American art exhibition held in Parliament house in September 2002.

Roads: black spot program

Mr McARTHUR (Monbulk) — I call on the Minister for Transport to apologise to the residents of the Dandenong Ranges and to explain to them why not one of the many nominations made by the Shire of Yarra Ranges for black spot funding in my electorate this year was funded — not one!

The Premier's announcement about statewide black spot funding has delivered a fatal blow to safety improvements for local roads in the Dandenongs. Since the previous government introduced the black spot program in 1993, it has been a key component to providing safer road environments for motorists and pedestrians in the hills.

There are a range of local projects that were nominated by the shire and by local residents, including a second pedestrian crossing in Belgrave, and another 11 nominated by the shire, including places such as Kallista at Menzies Creek, and others such as Selby and The Patch. That also includes the much-needed upgrading of Lysterfield Road, which forms the boundary between the Shire of Yarra Ranges and the City of Knox.

None of these projects was funded and the government has given no reason for that. This comes at a time when there are increasing road fatalities and injuries in these areas. The government is raking in an additional \$336 million a year in fines but it is not prepared to spend a cent on improving black spots in my electorate. The Minister for Transport should apologise for his appalling treatment of Dandenong Ranges residents and explain why he cannot do better.

North Shore Football Club

Mr LONEY (Geelong North) — I would first like to express my abhorrence of the bombing in Bali and offer the condolences of the people of Geelong North to the families of all victims.

I wish to recognise the achievements of two outstanding members of the North Shore Football Club, Victoria's finest country football club. Those members are Simon Riddoch and Dale Purcell. In the last game of the season Simon Riddoch completed 300 games

with the North Shore Football Club. He has been an outstanding player with the team, having spent most of those games playing as full-back. He has done that so well that he was recently named in the North Shore team of the century. He played in that position through eight premierships and has been a fantastic contributor to the team; his 300-game milestone has been well earned.

Dale Purcell is another local boy. After 25 years of outstanding service to the club he was given life membership of the club at its presentation night last Saturday. Both of these players were local boys from the start and are well respected leaders at a very successful club. I congratulate them on their achievements.

Melbourne–Geelong road: upgrade

Mr PATERSON (South Barwon) — I would like to convey to the house the absolute frustration of Geelong motorists as they are forced to continue using the Princes Freeway to Melbourne through this extraordinarily botched attempt by the Labor government at building a freeway. If this is any indication of the competence of this Labor government, I would be hard pushed to trust it with any other project.

The Labor government still claims that it will finish the project on 30 November. I think those who have travelled this stretch of road would know that it will not be finished by 30 November. I am sure that come that date Labor will try some stunt to pretend the road is finished and cut some sort of ribbon, but Geelong motorists will know that there is still some way to go on this overdue and over-budget project which, frankly, with all the speeding fines incurred by Geelong motorists has had the effect of simply filling the government coffers.

There was great confusion when cabinet visited Geelong the other day with the honourable member for Geelong disagreeing with the Premier and the Minister for Transport as to what the speed limit on the road should be. The Liberal Party still says the speed limit should be 110 kilometres an hour.

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

Ballarat: ICT jobs

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — Last Friday I was pleased to join the Premier and the Minister for Information and Communication Technology at the University of Ballarat where they, along with IBM,

announced a significant new software development which will mean 300 new jobs for Ballarat. This is great news for Ballarat, not just because it will provide 300 direct jobs but also because it will increase the strong base Ballarat has in the information and communications technology (ICT) industry. IBM's decision was made in partnership with the Bracks government, which will provide \$1.5 million from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, and the University of Ballarat, where this development will be located.

This will provide great benefits to the university and its students, as it will provide training and employment opportunities for graduates. This announcement backs up the government's commitment to ICT employment opportunities in the Ballarat region, on the back of the opening of the relocated State Revenue Office, which employs 200 people. It also adds to the other government-supported initiatives which have been valued at \$10.5 million of commitment to Ballarat. Great news for Ballarat — we are moving forward in ICT and other areas.

Thompsons Road, Cranbourne: traffic control

Mr ROWE (Cranbourne) — I wish to raise the matter of Thompsons Road in Cranbourne. It is a road of great importance to the people of Cranbourne.

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

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 12 September; motion of Mr BRUMBY (Minister for State and Regional Development).

Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) — Pursuant to sessional orders, I wish to advise the house of amendments to the Regional Development Victoria Bill and request that they be circulated.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The bill has not been distributed yet so I think the honourable member will have to hold her amendments until that has been done. There is some hesitation by the Chair because I am not sure that the bill is available. Copies of the bill will be distributed and then the honourable member for Gippsland West can speak.

Ms DAVIES — I am not speaking; I just need to ask that the amendments be circulated, that is all.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable member for Gippsland West will have to hold the circulating of her amendments until they are available. As I understand it, they are not available to the house. When they become available, the honourable member for Gippsland West will have that opportunity.

Ms DAVIES — I ask for clarification. It is my understanding that there was a version of the amendments available which had a typing error in it but it was being corrected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! Irrespective of the reason, until those amendments are available the honourable member cannot circulate them.

Dr NAPHTHINE (Portland) — Regional and rural Victoria is sick and tired of the deceit, lies, misinformation and failure to deliver by the Bracks Labor government. The people of regional and rural Victoria were promised so much by the Bracks Labor government in 1999 and they are frustrated and disappointed that so little has been delivered from those promises. There is real concern among people in regional and rural Victoria that this government is treating them with contempt and that this bill is just another con job on regional and rural Victoria.

The lack of interest of this government in this bill is evident here today. The bill could have been debated last week if it had been the highest priority of the government, but it was not. The minister responsible is not even present to hear the debate. The Minister for State and Regional Development was happy enough to read a 19-page second-reading speech, but he does not have the decency to participate in the debate today. That reflects badly on the minister, but it reflects accurately on the Bracks Labor government's failure to deliver in country Victoria, its fundamental lack of understanding of country Victoria and the contempt with which it treats people from regional and rural Victoria. The government was happy to con those people in 1999 when it wanted their votes, but since it has been in office, almost three years now, the government has failed to deliver in country Victoria.

The people of regional and rural Victoria are concerned that this bill is just another excuse for further delay and another example of the way this government deals with country Victoria. It is a bill that is about nothing. It is a bill that does not deliver. It is a further example of a

government which is about hype and talk but little substance and action. What we in regional and rural Victoria want from a government is real decisions, real leadership and real action on projects and programs that benefit the people of country Victoria.

This bill itself is not necessary; it is merely window-dressing. That is typical of the Bracks Labor government.

Mr Nardella — So you are opposing it!

Dr NAPTHINE — The Liberal Party will be not opposing this legislation because the legislation is not necessary.

The legislation is not necessary to establish Regional Development Victoria. If the government were serious about establishing an organisation called Regional Development Victoria to further the interests of people in country Victoria it could have done so two and a half years ago — or two years ago, six months ago or earlier this year. It did not need this legislation to do it. It does not need this legislation to do it. This legislation does not provide it with any greater powers to set up Regional Development Victoria than it has in its normal administrative arrangements in government. It is purely a political stunt on the eve of an election to compensate and to try to paper over the lack of delivery of promises and services in country Victoria. Indeed, this government has treated this bill with utter contempt.

The opposition had a briefing on this bill from departmental and ministerial officers some two weeks ago. We raised questions on which those officers promised to get back to us with responses. This morning we still had not got those answers back. I rang one of the officers, who said, 'We forgot about getting back to you with those answers'. Later they paged me. I have rung them back and finally got half answers to some of those questions, but they certainly have not treated it seriously because as senior bureaucrats they know that this government is not treating this legislation seriously because it is a bill that does not have any real reason for being. It is a political stunt that is being perpetrated on the people of country Victoria.

The people of country Victoria are sick and tired of this government's lies, misinformation and political stunts. They want real action, real decisions, real infrastructure and real programs in country Victoria. When you actually read the bill you see that there is nothing in it that cannot be done in an administrative way by the government at the moment. It is an absolute farce. We are talking about the establishment of this new body called Regional Development Victoria, but I am

advised that it is not a statutory authority and is merely the renaming of a subsection of the department. It is not even a separate department. It is not a statutory authority. It is just existing public servants doing their current job but being renamed. What we have is a bill about renaming a section of the department. What an absolute joke, a farce and a con! That is what this is, Mr Acting Speaker. All the employees are current public servants. There are no new employees, no new staff.

Mr Helper interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — This is what I am advised by your advisers — no new staff.

This bill is just about the redeployment and secondment of existing staff. It is the renaming of a department. When you look at the powers and functions, they all exist under the current department. Indeed, I am advised by the advisers that clause 5(1)(g), which provides that a function is to administer funds out of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, has no effect on RIDF. It will not make it faster, it will not make it slower — it will not have any effect. One would hope it would make it faster because we have councils all over the state that are absolutely frustrated by having applications in for RIDF funding.

Mr Helper interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! the honourable member for Ripon will get his call in a moment.

Dr NAPTHINE — The honourable member for Ripon, who only has a brief week or two left in the house, is once again spreading typical Labor lies and misinformation. He is lying to the house, and he should withdraw those lies.

This bill is supposedly to help us with the RIDF, but I am advised by the bureaucrats it will have no impact on the fund because the people administering it now will be administering it in the future, but just under a different name. It will just involve more printing of new logos, new names and new letterheads. That is what it is about.

Indeed one of the questions I asked was about a minor issue but an issue I think ought to be looked at — the issue of the appointment of the chief executive. Clause 6 (6) says that the chief executive automatically ceases to hold office if they are convicted of an indictable offence, but subsection (7) says that the chief executive may only be removed if they have refused, neglected or failed to carry out their duties or

demonstrated inefficiency or misdemeanour in the carrying out of their duties. So if they are charged with an indictable offence and have not actually been convicted yet, and the offence is nothing to do with their actual duties, you cannot get rid of them. That is a pretty strange way of drafting a provision. I raised this in the spirit of trying to make the legislation better, but of course the government is not interested in our providing that sort of assistance.

I must place on record the concerns of the interface councils — and I have met with the interface councils — about clause 7(3), which says that the interface councils which are listed in the schedule to the bill can only be the subject of the issues covered by Regional Development Victoria if the minister gives written directions. The interface councils wish to place on record in the Parliament, and ask the minister to perhaps look at this while the bill is between houses, that they would prefer to be included fully in Regional Development Victoria so that the areas of those interface councils, which are truly regional and rural areas, will be automatically eligible for programs that apply to those regional and rural areas rather than having to wait for the discretion of the minister. I place that on record on behalf of the interface councils.

Clause 7(4) raises an interesting issue that I raised in the briefing. It says that the chief executive, who is appointed by the Governor in Council, is responsible to the secretary of the department. I ask the question: what precedent is there for a Governor in Council appointee to be subservient to the secretary of a department? I am advised that there are virtually no precedents, or none that could be brought to my attention, for this to be the case. I think it is a pretty interesting concoction to have a chief executive of a branch of the department that is trying to be dressed up as something else being appointed by the Governor in Council but being totally accountable and responsible to the secretary of the department. I suggest that in his response the minister may wish to address that issue.

Mr Acting Speaker, I am concerned with regard to clause 11, which provides for an advisory committee comprised of the chief executive and six other members. Further down it says that of two of those six — you only have six for all of regional and rural Victoria — one is to represent employers and one is to represent employees. I am concerned because when you only have six on a committee they should come to that position unencumbered and represent the interests of regional and rural Victoria rather than sectional interests, irrespective of whether they are employers or employees. I think they should come unencumbered because you only have six people representing the

whole of the state. I suggest that that ought to be looked at.

Indeed in terms of clause 13, we asked how much these people would be paid, and I was told there is no decision yet. We do not know what sort of status this committee has and what sort of importance the government places on it. It seems to me that this legislation has been hurriedly put together without thought or planning simply for the government to try to appear to be doing something for regional and rural Victoria. It is another case of all talk and no action. This is about a political stunt, not about really doing something for regional and rural Victoria.

The other area I think the minister ought to look at which shows the haste with which this bill has been drawn up and the lack of attention to detail is clause 14 when compared with clause 11. Clause 11 provides for the specific appointment of a deputy chairperson of the advisory committee; however, when we look at clause 14(3) we see that in the meetings of the committee if the chairperson is absent a member elected by the committee must preside. It is a pity about the poor deputy chairperson. They have to still do the numbers. They are appointed as deputy chair, but they still have to do the numbers if the chairperson is away.

Mr Helper interjected.

Dr NAPHTHINE — I would presume so too, but I would suggest if you have a deputy chair that they would always automatically chair the meeting if the chair were away. But that is the way this government operates. It does not pay attention to detail, it is not really interested in country Victoria, and it has not really delivered.

With respect to the schedule of the interface councils, we welcome the fact that interface councils are recognised for what they are, which is councils that have significant rural areas. Many of these interface councils are up to 70 per cent rural and many of them wish to remain at 70 per cent rural. It is unfair that farmers and rural dwellers in those areas are denied access to programs that are specifically for people in regional and rural Victoria simply because they live in a council area that happens to be at the interface of the metropolitan area, whether it be, for example, the cattle underpass program or other programs that belong to regional and rural Victoria.

I consulted with local government on the bill, of course, and I want to bring to the attention of the house in the limited time available a number of comments the councillors gave back to me.

I received a letter from Ian Robins, chief executive of Wyndham City Council, and it states:

It appears that the functions and powers outlined in the clause 5 are currently available to staff at the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development ... From council's viewpoint it would be preferable for the interface councils to be included in the area automatically addressed within the bill, without the requirement for separate written direction from the minister.

I urge the minister to take up that issue.

Referring to the regional development of Victoria bill the Colac Otway Shire Council letter states:

Another bureaucracy which centralises the power of decision making in Melbourne is not supported.

That is what Colac Otway thinks of it.

Then we have the Central Goldfields Shire Council. A letter from its chief executive officer, Mark Johnston, states:

Let me say that when I read the minister media release of 11 September, 2002, 'Development boost for rural and regional Victoria' my reaction was along the lines of 'relabelling/repackaging' et cetera and that the new body represented a shuffling of existing resources.

What rural Victoria requires, from any state government, is leadership, policy implementation and an attitude that embraces all of Victoria without any artificial bureaucracy.

Those comments reflect the views of a number of other councils — I have selected a few at random. Many councils are saying they are sick and tired of this government telling them what it proposes to do or what it is on about without delivering. They are concerned about relabelling and repackaging; all hype and no substance; the spin that comes out of the government and the amount of money that is absolutely wasted on party-political-based advertising rather than delivering programs in regional and rural Victoria.

The second-reading speech was wide ranging, and I would like to take the liberty created by that wide-ranging speech to highlight where the government has failed in rural and regional Victoria. Let me deal with some of the major rail infrastructure projects.

It could be said that the iconic promise for regional Victoria by the Australian Labor Party in the 1999 election was its proposal to spend \$80 million on connecting very fast trains to Ballarat, Bendigo, the Latrobe Valley and Geelong. However, every day or week that passes, the trains get slower, the costs get higher and the projects are further delayed. People in those corridors get less information — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Nardella — Ask them up in Mildura!

Dr NAPTHINE — We'll come to it!

We know that the government promised that for \$80 million it would connect very fast trains, and it had pictures of the Eurostar and the speed trains of Europe, and everybody was conned by the Labor Party that they were going to get a 400-kilometre-an-hour or 300-kilometre-an-hour train in these areas; that the service to Ballarat would take less than 60 minutes. Even after it got into government, what did the Labor Party say?

Mr Nardella — It is 64 minutes.

Dr NAPTHINE — It is 64 minutes now and getting slower!

Let's see what the Premier had to say on 21 March 2000 in the *Ararat Advertiser*. I will read what the newspaper article says and then give the direct quotes from the Premier:

Premier Steve Bracks said yesterday high-speed train links between Melbourne and major Victorian county towns would be completed in the state government's current term of office.

This is a direct quote from the Premier:

'We're pursuing this over our first four years', Mr Bracks said.

'We're hopeful that we can at least kick off one of these physically before the end of the year, and the rest scheduled as we go through the next four years.

So, in March 2000 he said one would be started before the end of 2000 and the others completed within the first term of office. We are now three years into his term of office and not one spike has been driven, not one sleeper laid and we are not one iota closer to that fast train service. Indeed, we are further away from it.

Mr Nardella — That is not true!

Dr NAPTHINE — The honourable member for Melton ought to look at the government's own documents. The government produced a budget information paper no. 1 last week. In that the first thing we note is that the project has blown out not from \$80 million to \$550 million, but from \$550 million to \$573 million, well before we have a sleeper laid or a spike driven. We still do not know the route, the timetable or where it will stop.

Mr Nardella — It's called consultation.

Dr NAPTHINE — It is called confusion, stupidity and mismanagement. That is what it is called.

Mr Helper interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — The Joe Helplesses of the world!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! Will the honourable member address the honourable member by his correct title.

Dr NAPTHINE — I do not think I was referring to a member, was I? If the cap of helplessness fits, he should wear it.

Mr Acting Speaker, if you look at budget paper no. 1 on the public sector asset investment program and compare last year's data with this year's data, you can see what has happened to this project. If you look at the estimated expenditure on regional fast rail links for 2001–02, you can see that \$37 million was to be spent in this just-completed financial year. If you look in this year's budget you can see that only \$3 million was actually spent. So the government was supposed to spend \$37 million but actually spent \$3 million. It does not care about regional fast rail links. The project has blown out in cost, been delayed and been completely and utterly mismanaged.

There has been an enormous blow-out in that project because of the complete mismanagement by and lack of commitment from this government. What we need is a genuine commitment to deliver this project. The communities along that route — whether they be at Melton, Bacchus Marsh or Ballan — need information on whether the train will stop at their towns, and they need to know — —

Mr Haermeyer — You haven't even been there.

Dr NAPTHINE — I was in Ballan yesterday.

Mr Nardella interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable member for Melton!

Dr NAPTHINE — I had better move on to other projects, because there are so many that we need to cover. Let's look at passenger rail services. This government said it would restore passenger rail services to Ararat, Bairnsdale, Leongatha and Mildura.

Mr Helper — On time.

Dr NAPTHINE — On time? Right! The honourable member for Ripon says the government

was going to do that on time. I suggest again that he compare last year's infrastructure list with this year's, because last year's list said — —

Mr Helper — July 2003 was the promise.

Dr NAPTHINE — Estimated expenditure for the passenger rail service to Bairnsdale for 2001–02 was \$4.8 million. How much was actually spent? Some \$750 000, well below \$4.8 million. Estimated expenditure for the Leongatha service in South Gippsland was \$2.4 million. How much was actually spent? Zero! Estimated expenditure for the restoration of passenger services to Mildura was \$2 million. How much was actually spent? Zero! How much was spent on the Ararat line? Zero!

Last year the government told us it would be spending millions of dollars on restoring these services in the financial year just completed, yet it has spent very, very little — \$750 000 on one of the four lines and zero on three others, well below budget. Yet these projects have again been blown out, mismanaged and delayed.

The other major rail infrastructure project that this government promised country Victoria was the standardisation of regional freight lines, and the first priority was to connect Mildura to Portland. Last year the government told us it would spend \$10 million on that project in this financial year, and it spent about half of that. Not one spike was driven and not one sleeper was laid on the Portland–Mildura line — not one!

This government simply does not care enough about regional rail projects to deliver them. It makes promises and it allocates expenditure, but it does not do the job. This government is letting down the people of country Victoria simply because it cannot do the task and cannot get on with the job.

We can look further. The most important infrastructure project for Gippsland is probably the Pakenham bypass, which affects the movement of goods and services from Mallacoota right through to West Gippsland. All those municipalities want the Pakenham bypass built and want it built as soon as possible, because they know that if the government does not build it quickly there will be another four or five sets of traffic lights through that area causing further delay, further costs and further impediments to growth in the whole Gippsland region.

What has happened under this government? We have a commitment from the federal coalition government to pay for 50 per cent of the Pakenham bypass. We even had the federal Labor Party committing to 50 per cent of the cost of the bypass prior to the last federal election. We have the state Liberal Party committed to

50 per cent of the Pakenham bypass. The only one missing from the quadrella is the state Labor government! It is the one who has cost us the Pakenham bypass. The only reason the bypass is not being built now is that the Labor Party does not care about Gippsland and does not care about country Victoria. It does not care about the new seat of Bass, it does not care about Narracan, it does not care about Morwell, it does not care about South Gippsland and it does not care about East Gippsland. It simply does not care about the most important infrastructure project for Gippsland.

What has been done with the Geelong Road under this government, which inherited a great project from the previous government? This government has dropped the ball. We have had cost overruns, we have had delays, we have had blow-outs and we have had union-dominated decision making that has crippled and strangled the project. Anybody who travels on the Geelong Road knows how that project has been messed around by a lack of leadership by this government. As I travel across country Victoria the key issue that councils raise time and time again with me as shadow minister for rural and regional development and with local members is the need for a significant input of funding for the upgrading of local bridges. They are an absolutely key issue for farming families, and they are an absolutely key infrastructure issue.

When we were in government in 1999 we allocated funding for the first time for work in partnership with local government on that infrastructure, and I am pleased that the Liberal Party has now allocated \$50 million for work in partnership with local government to upgrade local bridges. As I go around Victoria, shires are saying that that is a significant step forward in providing local funding for local infrastructure which is of key importance to regional and rural communities in an economic and social sense and in making sure that they really can survive into the future.

Local bridges are a key issue that has been absolutely ignored by a Labor government that is more interested in political stunts than in listening to the local communities and responding positively to their concerns.

If we look at gas and electricity, once again this Labor government has talked big and delivered little. How many times have we heard the minister talk about this? He talked again in his second-reading speech about the extension of natural gas to communities across Victoria like Port Fairy and the rest of Koroit, Wonthaggi and the Macedon Ranges, and Creswick, Swan Hill and

many others, all of which are very keen to be connected.

Natural gas, as we know, is a more environmentally friendly, more easily used and more efficient fuel, and it is much more cost effective. But what we have from this government is heaps of talk and no action.

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — The Minister for Police and Emergency Services, who is at the table, is one of the past masters of making announcements and failing to deliver. He made announcements about police stations three years ago, and he has still not turned a sod on many of them. He is a disgrace when it comes to promising big and delivering little.

Liberal Party policy is very clear with respect to gas, as opposed to the airy-fairy, nebulous, non-concrete, no-action and no-decision Labor Party policy. Our policy is to allocate \$50 million to connect communities to natural gas and to pay the differential cost between what the company will pay as a commercial payment and the actual cost of connection. This will connect many towns, communities and individuals right across Victoria to natural gas.

Mr Nardella — Name them!

Dr NAPTHINE — Let's look at some of the towns that will be eligible for that program. I am able to go to the community of Port Fairy in my area of the south-west — a very important town — and say that it will be one of the first cabs off the rank under this program. Under the Labor Party you get hot air and gas but under the Liberal Party you get access to natural gas to run households and your businesses. Creswick will get gas, Whittlesea will get gas, the Macedon Ranges will get gas and Wonthaggi will get gas. The contrast is that the Labor Party talks about things, but the Liberal Party actually gets things done.

The other component of power which is very important for country Victoria is electricity. I draw the attention of honourable members to an article in the *Weekly Times* of 9 October, in which the president of the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria, Peter Owen, is reported. It says:

UDV president Peter Owen said the Bracks government must respond to rural community concerns on what will happen to the rebate.

'It's come to the time when we need a commitment from them ...

'If they want agriculture and regional Victoria to be competitive, they have to give us an answer'.

Further on the same article reports on a Mr Englefield, whose power bill has risen by 75 per cent because this government approved massive increases in off-peak power.

Honourable members interjecting.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Make no mistake, irrespective of the bleating and the carping coming from the government benches, electricity prices cannot be increased in this state unless this government approves them. This government has approved every one of those price increases, including the 75 per cent increase in off-peak electricity for Murray Valley wine-grape grower Brian Englefield. The government cannot run and it cannot hide. It approved those massive increases for farmers across Victoria.

The article reports Mr Englefield as saying:

If the government is going to meddle, it should ensure equity or stay out of it and let industry bodies like the Victorian Farmers Federation and National Farmers Federation negotiate prices on behalf of their members.

What was the government's response as reported in the *Weekly Times* on the whole issue of the special power payment con on country Victoria, where the government is saying, 'We will give you this special power payment, but it expires in April next year.'? Guess what this government is hoping will happen before April next year? It is another example of this government trying to con the people of country Victoria. The people of country Victoria have woken up to it and they want a commitment from this government.

A government spokesman is reported in the same article in the *Weekly Times* as saying:

A government source told the *Weekly Times* Ms Broad — that is the Minister for Energy and Resources —

and the cabinet wanted to sweep the matter under the carpet until after the state election, due any time after November 29.

So even the government sources are saying they want to sweep this issue under the carpet until after the election. They do not want to tell the people of country Victoria they will rip their special power payment off them. They do not want to tell the people of country Victoria that this Labor government is secretly approving massive increases in electricity prices in country Victoria. But that is what they are doing — and they are being exposed for it.

Let's look at other important issues for country Victoria. I turn to the issue of the Essendon Airport.

Where does this government stand on Essendon Airport? This government wants to close Essendon Airport. That is an absolute outrage and disgrace.

Mr Helper — On the bill.

Dr NAPHTHINE — It is on the bill; this bill is about development in regional Victoria. It is obvious the honourable member for Ripon does not see Essendon Airport as important or integral to regional development in country Victoria, because he does not understand that Essendon Airport — —

Mr Helper interjected.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Keeping Essendon Airport open is very important for regional development because an enormous interchange occurs there with passengers for tourism, for business and unfortunately for emergency services.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Lupton) — Order! If the honourable members for Melton and Ripon want to have a conversation, I suggest they go outside. The honourable member for Portland, without interruption.

Dr NAPHTHINE — It is absolutely vital for regional development that Essendon Airport stay open. It is also vital for emergency services.

I was interested to hear the Premier himself in answer to a question today say that some of the unfortunate burns victims from the Bali massacre have been flown into Melbourne using Essendon Airport. That ought to be a salient lesson to every member of the government who wants to close Essendon Airport. Bali burns victims are flown in using Essendon Airport. People in country Victoria also rely on Essendon Airport on a daily and weekly basis to fly people in who require emergency medical care and attention, yet the Labor Party in Victoria wants to close it down. What message does that send to families and individuals in regional and rural Victoria? It says that the Labor Party does not care about them and is not concerned about them — that it is more interested in votes in its electorates around the Essendon Airport than in country Victoria.

I do not think there could be anything clearer than the difference between people who genuinely live and work in and understand country Victoria and who therefore understand the importance of Essendon Airport, like we on this side of the house do, and the people on that side of the house, who only pretend to be concerned about country Victoria. Essendon Airport is very symbolic in that issue.

Also symbolic in that issue is the way the Labor Party has ignored the pleas from south-west Victoria for funding for a south-west emergency helicopter service. It is the only area of the state that has not had access to that service. Yet this government has ignored the pleas from south-west Victoria for funding for an emergency helicopter service, a service that can be used for ambulance transfer by the police, the CFA and search and rescue. It can have multiple uses, all of benefit to the community, and they can be done in a very cost-effective way. I strongly support funding for a multiple-use emergency helicopter in south-west Victoria. It is a pity this government does not as well.

If you are looking for other examples of where this government has failed country Victoria you only have to look at the recent drought. It was interesting to hear the Minister for Agriculture in the house today finally mention the D word. While country Victoria, country communities, country families, and farmers have suffered from a drought, this Minister for Agriculture and the Premier have danced around, played around and fidgeted under the spotlight because they refused to admit a drought — refused to say the D word.

The *Bendigo Advertiser* of 19 September reports:

Victorian agriculture minister Keith Hamilton is on record as not believing farmers and the Victorian Farmers Federation when they say there is already a drought across northern Victoria.

He declined to believe it again when he made a flying visit to northern Victoria.

And even yesterday, when state assistance for farmers was being lined up, the state government was still shying away from the D word.

The government line is that a committee has been formed to look into it, and it will decide when and if a drought exists.

Everybody else knew there was a drought weeks and weeks ago. Farmers knew their crops had failed weeks and weeks ago.

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — The minister at the table, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, should know better and understand — he has been around long enough to know — that it is the state government's responsibility to declare a drought — absolutely, 100 per cent and entirely a state government responsibility to declare a drought. When it did finally admit there was a drought we got a piddling amount of funding. I ask you to simply make a comparison. In the last three months, when farmers have been suffering from drought — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Dr NAPTHINE — I would ask the minister and the honourable member for Melton to put their hands up and say which they most support. Do they support the government's expenditure of over \$50 million, probably \$60 million or \$70 million, on government party-political advertising on behalf of the Labor Party and the Labor government, or do they support that sort of level of money for drought-affected farmers and drought-affected communities?

Mr Nardella — We are supporting our policy.

Dr NAPTHINE — So the honourable member for Melton has put it up on behalf of the government. He supports the government spending \$50 million, \$60 million or \$70 million on Labor Party advertising compared to the few million dollars it has provided for farmers affected by drought.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — I think those priorities are wrong, wrong, wrong! They are absolutely wrong. The government ought to cut its political advertising and use that money to assist drought-affected farmers and rural communities.

There are a couple of things I wish to go through. I am sorry I have not got more time to go through heaps and heaps more. People would have to say that one of the most vulnerable groups in our society is those people who are victims of sexual assault. It is my sad duty to bring to the attention of the Parliament that the centres against sexual assault (CASA) have had to cancel their weekly outreach visits to assist victims of sexual assault in south-west Victoria. They used to have weekly visits to Portland, Hamilton and Casterton. They have had to cut that back to fortnightly visits. They have waiting lists of up to six months — six months! — for people who are victims of sexual assault to get advice, counselling and assistance. That is an outrage and a disgrace.

Many of those people were victims of sexual assault as children, and many years later they are coming to terms with the problems it has caused them and their families. They need assistance. When they have the courage and are able to come to terms with what has happened to them and put their hands up to seek advice and assistance, they are told they have to wait six months. That is an absolute disgrace. This government should be ashamed of itself.

The CASA service in Warrnambool used to have the equivalent of three and a half workers when the

previous government was in power. It has been cut back to the equivalent of two and a half workers. This is not a government that cares about country Victoria or about victims of sexual assault. That is typical of this government — it purports to care about country Victoria, but the reality is different.

We can have a look at that. Our country hospitals are facing financial difficulties. Our country businesses are struggling under massive Workcover costs. Our schools have significant maintenance funding backlogs. In country Victoria — —

Mr Nardella — That's not true! They are 1999 figures, when you were in office.

Dr NAPHTHINE — I visit my schools, as opposed to some other members.

Mr Nardella — So do I!

Dr NAPHTHINE — My schools tell me that the physical resources management system (PRMS) funding has been delayed, and in some years even cancelled under this government. They cannot get maintenance funding under this government. It is a disgrace.

Mr Nardella — They got new classrooms.

Dr NAPHTHINE — It is an absolute disgrace. The Portland South Primary School has not got a new classroom. It has a significant backlog of maintenance and it has not got its PRMS money.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Dr NAPHTHINE — They are not alone; they are not Robinson Crusoe! There are heaps of them.

I move on to another area I want to cover, which I think is typical of this government not understanding what the real needs are in country Victoria — that is, the issue of the former Department of Agriculture. We have situations in country Victoria where farmers are contacting the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) concerned about neighbours who might have lice among their sheep or neighbours whose animals may have footrot. Farmers at Dartmoor have contacted me with this issue in the past few weeks. At Coleraine farmers are concerned about noxious weeds. They simply cannot get advice or services from DNRE officers because there is a lack of professional and qualified staff who are available to provide that assistance, particularly in the area of animal health.

We have had a situation in western Victoria that affects all Victoria, a situation where live sheep and cattle exports have been suspended from the port of Portland. One of the main reasons they have been suspended is that in the past the Victorian department had a responsibility, and accepted that responsibility, of ensuring that the livestock exported were supervised on the feedlot and examined prior to loading so that only animals that were fit and ready for travel were loaded. Portland, despite its vessels having to travel further with its livestock to the Middle East, had a lower mortality rate than Adelaide or Fremantle. Under this government those services have been withdrawn so it is no wonder we have problems with occasional shipments out of Portland which are now costing jobs, costing the local economy and costing the industry.

An article in the *Hamilton Spectator* of 12 October states:

Jobs and money will be lost due to the ban on the export of live sheep from Portland.

Further — and this is very interesting — it states:

The ban on live sheep exports from Portland for at least October has had an immediate effect on prices.

Hamilton Stock Agents Association president, Derek Morse, said boat wethers made \$48 at Hamilton at the first sale after the ban was imposed.

'Previously, they would have walked on any boat for \$58', he said.

Farmers are losing and people are losing their jobs. We are losing local dollars and the local industry, yet we have had no comment from the Minister for Agriculture and no comment from the Premier. What we are doing is allowing this trade to be lost from this state and lost from the pockets of our farmers because this government does not understand or care about the real issues in country Victoria.

Let me summarise with a couple of other examples of where this government is failing country Victoria. I will go back to what Labor said in its 1999 election policies. Labor said it would establish four pilot one-stop shops in regional and rural Victoria over an initial three-year period. The three-year period is now over, and we have not got one one-stop shop. That has been thrown out the window. It is a failed, broken promise.

Labor said it would establish a regional call centre attraction program to target at least 10 000 new call centre jobs to regional Victoria in its first term of government. We are losing call centres from Victoria. There is no allocation of funds from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to the regional call

centre attraction program. We are seeing call centres closing in Bendigo. They are leaving Victoria and going interstate and overseas because this government promised but did not deliver.

Labor said it would develop a high-tech park at the former Bendigo Psychiatric Hospital site. The reality is that the project is now not going ahead and the government has failed the people of Bendigo once again by not delivering on that.

Labor said it would develop an energy park for the Latrobe Valley. Once again, that project has been abandoned. Labor said it would develop a regional embassy showcasing regional and rural Victoria. Well, I have not found the embassy yet — I am still looking for it. Perhaps it is hidden behind one of the police stations that do not exist that the minister keeps talking about.

This government has failed regional and rural Victoria — it has not delivered on its promises. Regional Victoria is sick and tired of this government's continual hype, misinformation, deceit, lies, and efforts to paper over — with stunts and political gibberish — the reality that it does not really understand or care about regional Victoria.

This legislation is more of the same. It is window-dressing. It is renaming a subsection of the department just to try to give some new angle to the government's purported concern for country Victoria. The reality is that the people of country Victoria are not stupid. They see through this government and know that the emperor has no clothes.

Independent amendments circulated by Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) pursuant to sessional orders.

Mr RYAN (Leader of the National Party) — Absolutely coincidentally, I want to take up this debate on the point on which the shadow minister for rural and regional development finished his excellent contribution. I was reminded of this matter when I first read this legislation and the second-reading speech. It is that wonderful Hans Christian Andersen story about the emperor's new clothes.

Being a student of literature, Mr Acting Speaker, no doubt you will be familiar with the fable of the emperor's new clothes. I am indebted to the very able Karinda Pyke, who works in my office, for obtaining the material relating to this fable from the Web. I do not intend to read it all out, but the essence of it is that once upon a time there lived a very vain emperor, whose only worry in life was to dress in elegant clothes. He changed his clothes almost every hour, and loved to

show them off to his people. At one point a couple of scoundrels turned up at the gate, said that they had a mechanism for designing flash new clothes, and by trickery induced the emperor to think that they were designing magnificent new garments for him when in fact there was nothing — it was all a fiction. As the emperor, and those advising him, were supposedly being shown these new clothes, all of them were afraid to state the obvious — that there was nothing there — until the emperor subsequently paraded his supposed clothes down the main street. A small boy in the crowd offered those words of fact, 'He's got no clothes on!'.

When I read the legislation and the second-reading speech I was immediately reminded of that fable, because the legislation is the height of farce. The National Party will not oppose it, because that would give the government a weapon to use for its nefarious purposes. I want to talk about that at some length and to explore some of the issues raised by the minister in his second-reading speech.

On that point, I mourn the passing of decent second-reading speeches. This material, by which this legislation is introduced, is appalling in its content. You have to go through 10 pages of rhetoric before you get to anything to do with the bill.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr RYAN — Yes, there is a stronger term to describe it, but I will rest with the fact that it contains a lot of rhetoric. When you look at the drafting of the speech and the material it touches on you see it is a mixture of myth and falsehoods and is misleading in many respects. I refer to something that jumps off the page:

This bill creates a new statutory body that will work in partnership with regional Victoria communities, businesses and all levels of government to attract new investment and generate jobs.

There is no statutory body. Clause 4(1) states:

There is established a body to be known as Regional Development Victoria.

It is not a statutory body. As I was about to speak I looked at the Melbourne Market Authority Act, whereby an authority was actually established. If the bill is to establish a statutory authority the second-reading speech should describe Regional Development Victoria as a body corporate with perpetual succession and a common seal, and it should say that it will be able to sue and be sued in its corporate name, be able to acquire, hold and dispose of personal property and be able to do a range of other

things that are usually ascribed to statutory authorities. The second-reading speech is wrong in saying that it is a statutory authority. It is not; it is fiction.

I refer to other elements of the bill. Clause 5 describes the functions and powers of Regional Development Victoria. Subclause (1)(e) proposes to:

... facilitate the coordinated delivery of government programs, services and resources in rural and regional Victoria ...

That is a fine and laudable aim, but what difference will there be between what the department now does and what is proposed to happen under the newly badged Regional Development Victoria? I know many of the people who work within the department, and they have a justifiably proud record of service to Victorians under governments of all persuasions. The department in its current form is perfectly able to carry out the functions and powers that are described in the legislation — and more particularly, the one I have just read out.

As a member of the former coalition government I was on many occasions able to use the services of the department's personnel to coordinate the efforts of government to make sure we got the right outcome. I know of many times when the former minister, the Honourable Roger Hallam in another place, called all the players involved in a particular initiative together and did not let them out of the room unless and until they all struck agreements across the various departments on what was required to have a particular program succeed. Those powers exist now. The notion that the legislation adds in some way to that concept is simply wrong. Again the second-reading speech is nonsense.

Clause 5(1)(g) talks about administering money paid out of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. If we are now creating a body which is not a statutory body as claimed but which will have the task of administering the money paid out of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, who has been doing it up until now? The minister is tearing around saying that the fund has allocated \$92 million since it has been established. Who has been looking after the administration of the money in the meantime? And if the minister's answer is, 'Don't you worry about that. It has all been looked after properly, and there are Auditor-General's reports and all sorts of things that enable us to say it is being done properly', why do we need a new entity that will have a task that patently, as the minister I am sure will say, is being fulfilled now? The legislation is fiction.

Clause 5(3)(b) is a classic, because it states that there is power within Regional Development Victoria to engage consultants to assist it in the performance of its functions and the exercise of its powers. I can guarantee Parliament that there is nothing to be derived from our giving a legislative imprimatur to enable that to happen, because as it currently functions the department is up to its armpits in consultants. Why it needs a specific head of power to engage consultants is beyond me.

There are various other elements that require comment. The second-reading speech states that this:

... also involves a special partnership with local government.

There is only one problem with that — the expression 'local government' does not appear in any of the clauses in the bill. There are references in the explanatory memorandum to councils, but there is nothing in the legislation that talks about this abiding close association to local government as claimed by the minister. The concept he is looking to advance is a vacuum, a fiction. If the minister is so keen on local government and is talking about establishing a Regional Development Advisory Committee, why would he not give local government a place on it? Why does the minister not say that the committee would be a handy mechanism by which the government could directly assist local government in doing what the legislation contemplates? No, there is nothing at all indicating local government involvement in the work of the Regional Development Advisory Committee or Regional Development Victoria.

I also ask the house to have regard to clause 10, which talks about ministerial directions. Subclause (1) states:

The Minister may give written directions to Regional Development Victoria and the Chief Executive about the performance of the functions of Regional Development Victoria.

I emphasise the words 'performance' and 'functions'. Subclause (2) outlines the scope of those written directions. What I am particularly interested in is the nexus between that clause and the councils that are listed in the schedule to the legislation. They are the councils that are referred to in clause 7(3). I will not read them out but they are the fringe councils — I believe that is the expression used.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr RYAN — The interface councils — I thank the honourable member.

I seek an assurance from the minister that he is not going to bleed the funding which was established

within the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and which, by legislation, is intended to accommodate the 47 municipalities that are named in the schedule to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Act out of that fund into the countryside which is accommodated within those interface municipalities.

It is a fair thing if the government wants to do it that it sets up some other new entity or body which enables those interface councils named in the schedule to this bill to become beneficiaries in some way that is acceptable to the minister.

Let's put that aside. My concern is that this government has established a fund, which it specifies by legislation in the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Act, to be referable to the 47 municipalities to which that act refers. When you look at the capacity of the minister to issue directions which relate to the performance of the functions of Regional Development Victoria, it is my contention that there is plenty of scope within the terminology used in that section of the act to enable the minister to use the money from the fund for the benefit of those interface municipalities. I want an assurance from the government — whoever gets up on his or her hind legs first to contribute to this debate on behalf of the government — that the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund is not going to be used for the benefit of those individual nine councils.

I reiterate that I am not attempting to start a 'them and us' debate. I simply want the point clarified. If the government wants to establish a fund of money for those nine interface councils, it is perfectly free to do so. If that is the government's policy then I want Parliament to be informed that that is the case. I think those nine councils also deserve to know, with certainty, what the position is in relation to their interests. Equally, the 47 municipalities which were the subject of so much fanfare from this government when the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund was established are also entitled to know that the money which was allocated to their respective interests under the terms of that legislation is going to be preserved for their purposes, as was always intended. I seek those assurances from the government.

In terms of the legislation itself, the unfortunate fact is that when you carefully examine this, when you analyse it properly, you see the reality is that this is no more than an internal reorganisation with a view to putting new tags on the doors because in fact there is no new statutory authority. That assertion within the second-reading speech on the bill, as I have demonstrated, is a complete fiction, and the National Party has concerns about some elements of the

legislation which will not in reality add anything of substance to the interests of rural and regional Victoria.

The second-reading speech was broad in its terms and regional development, by its nature, is an issue which is broad in scope. It is therefore appropriate that when a debate of this nature comes before the house there is the opportunity, which this debate affords, to examine some of the issues that are pertinent to country Victoria's development, and particularly the performance of the government in this crucial area of the interests of those who live outside metropolitan Melbourne.

I want to go through that process by focusing on two elements of this discussion. In the first instance they are those that affect my own electorate, because everybody has their own stories. But I want to demonstrate how this Labor government has been so influential in my electorate. I also want to talk about some of the broader issues affecting Victoria at large.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr RYAN — I will just move through those by talking about some of the issues relating to my own electorate. This is on the part of the government which is there in its open, honest and accountable way, so it says, representing the interests of all Victorians and country Victorians in particular. Let's have a look at the score card.

In Gippsland South, let us start with the Won Wron prison at Yarram. There is a good starting point. The Won Wron prison, in accordance with an announcement made on budget day last year by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, is to be closed. The actual closure date is a bit of a portable feast: we are not quite certain when it is supposed to be. It started out at 2004, but only recently the government announced a three-year program for the development of two new prisons which will be needed before the Won Wron prison can be closed. That is because one of those prisons will assist in alleviating problems with the prison population by enabling prisoners to be placed elsewhere — at least that is the claim made by the minister.

Here we have a prison which, of the 16 in the state, is regarded on the numbers as being the most efficient. It performs its functions admirably. It employs directly 40 people in Yarram and the surrounding region. There are at least another 40 people who are dependent upon the Won Wron prison. In addition there are literally tens of thousands of man-hours contributed in community work across many aspects of Yarram and the region

which are the results of the efforts of the prisoners. They do an enormous amount of good in, for example, Department of Natural Resources and Environment programs, in the painting of local schools and halls, and in the construction of various aspects of local small-scale infrastructure.

For example, I have just engaged the services of a group of prisoners, via the authorities, of course, for the construction of a bicycle lane from Welshpool Primary School back into the town. In that instance I think the prisoner group may be coming from the Fulham Correctional Centre, the private prison up near Sale, but the example stands. Many projects occur as a matter of course because the prisoners enable them to happen. They make an invaluable contribution to the community.

In addition, we have that magnificent event called Prisoners on the Run. As I recall it has raised something like \$1 million for disadvantaged and disabled children in our communities in Gippsland. Each year that event is a source of an enormous amount of funding assistance for parents who invariably do not have the capacity to access these sort of assets for their children. It has all been derived through the Prisoners on the Run program. Unfortunately the Minister for Corrections could not come this year, but I was there, as I have been the last several years, to see those awards made. It is a touching day.

What is the government going to do? It is going to shut the prison down. It is going to destroy this facility which provides an invaluable service to the prisoners who stay there and to the community, which is serviced in the way I have described by those prisoners. The government will destroy the jobs of 40 people directly employed at the prison and the jobs of another 40 people who are dependent on the operation of the prison. The government is going to destroy the contribution those prisoners make to the community at large. This is Labor at work in country Victoria.

We have other things, like the Basslink debate we went through last week. That has been an exercise of some interest.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr RYAN — I have been invited to go through it again. The day is but a pup. We have plenty of time. I might just work my way through all 180 pylons across 60 kilometres of the magnificence of Gippsland again. This government has not had the courage to do what it should be doing. If the government were discharging its responsibilities properly we would not have the

problem we are having in relation to the Basslink issue. If we had a Minister for Innovation who was really looking to conduct himself in a way which would reflect the ministry he purports to hold he would have been the first to take advantage of the options available for the undergrounding of this cable, and we would not have to have the fearsome debate which is raging in the Gippsland community at the moment. Honourable members should bear in mind that this whole issue is now part of the psyche of the region. It is not just an issue to do with those 22 farmers, it has gone way beyond that. The government had the opportunity to do something innovative about this, but it ducked it.

To this day I believe that the government simply does not understand the options available on this important regional development issue. As we now know, there are plenty of enterprises which manufacture cable that can be used underground and there are plenty of enterprises which can do the development to incorporate that cable. It does not need to be National Grid but on the other hand National Grid could use the new form of cable. There are plenty of options but this government will not take any of them up. The government would not even properly examine the alternatives before it made its decision, in the dead of night as it were, to enable those pylons to be built. Strike two on behalf of Gippsland.

Let's have a look at another one — the marine parks development. As it happens the Minister for Environment and Conservation is at the table and we had a long, agonising and protracted debate about establishing marine parks. Everybody in the Parliament wanted and wants marine parks; there is a completely common point of view about that. The opposition parties proposed a series of alternatives which would have enabled marine parks to be established in a way that would not have wreaked the devastation which the current system threatens in terms of our commercial and recreational fishers. However, the government persisted, and we in Gippsland and along the rest of the coastline of Victoria have had imposed on us a system of marine parks that will result in people being thrown out of work and a loss of benefit to our various country communities.

The jury is still out on the compensation packages and how they operate. They were limited in scope anyway, but I think, with plenty of justification, that there is little or no chance of those compensation packages ever being able to deliver what the government said they would. While I am on the matter, having recently spoken with the abalone industry, it is very interesting to see that even at this early stage the government is stepping back from the tenor of the commitments it made. The abalone industry is finding that the

government is not delivering on the compensation package it promised. I am sure we will hear more about that with the passage of time. Strike three.

Let's have a look at another one. This is the great idea to establish a hazardous waste siting dump at Dutson Downs. This is a little pearler as well. We have a facility at Dutson Downs which presently accepts very low-grade waste, particularly from Gippsland Water but also from other enterprises throughout Gippsland and beyond. Despite the rank rhetoric flying around before this imminent election the government is going to build a hazardous waste siting facility at Dutson Downs. The irony of it is that the whole process went forward on the basis that the government invited communities around the state to put their hands up if they wanted to have a hazardous waste siting dump in their backyards. Although there were 12 or 15 initially we ended up with one, and the one left standing is the one at Dutson Downs. Why is it so? Because the applicant for that facility is none other than Gippsland Water. Who is Gippsland Water? Gippsland Water is a 100 per cent state-owned statutory authority over which this government has complete control.

When he was in Gippsland for an excellent event — the opening of the swing bridge bypass just south of Sale some months ago; another project completed by this government which had been commenced by the previous government, but that is another story — the then Minister for Major Projects and Tourism had the temerity to tell the media that Gippsland Water was representing the interests of Gippslanders for the purpose of nominating Dutson Downs as the hazardous waste siting dump. Again this is a 100 per cent government-owned statutory authority. A bit more smoke and mirrors, a bit more of the emperor's new clothes on behalf of the government. Strike four.

I could keep going through them, but I am conscious that others want to make a contribution. I will move on to some of the broader issues, the statewide ones. The shadow minister for regional and rural development mentioned Essendon Airport. This government has a specific policy to close Essendon Airport — it intends to close it. The honourable member for Ripon is up there puffing out his chest. I will be interested to see if he wants to say something about this because it is as plain as a pikestaff. It is in Labor's policy document; that is how clear it is. This government wants to close Essendon Airport. That would mean an enormous loss of an invaluable asset for country Victorians, but that does not matter to this government, and it would do it in a blink if it got the chance. The government will close Essendon Airport.

Then we have the fast rail saga. I feel empathy for the little boy down the street who blew the whistle on the emperor without any clothes because it was the National Party which blew the whistle on this government with regard to the fast rail project. We went out and commissioned a report from ACIL Consulting because we always suspected that this fast rail links project was a myth. The report demonstrated that our suspicions were correct. I have the report here, but I will not go through it chapter and verse. However, I want to refer to a couple of the elements of this project.

The first thing we must emphasise and always remember is that when Labor went to the last election it had a policy which it set out in its policy documents. Its policy headed 'Fast rail links to regional centres' said:

Labor believes that a key to regional economic development and an improved quality of life for regional Victorians is improved rail linkages to Melbourne.

Labor will work in partnership with the private sector —

I pause to say 'with the private sector' —

to significantly reduce travelling times to Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Traralgon.

I am pleased to see that the private sector got a big mention. It then went on:

Labor will work in partnership with the private sector to cut travel times to Victoria's major regional centres. Our fast rail initiative will:

provide \$20 million for a fast rail link to Bendigo that will reduce travel times to 80 minutes; contribute \$25 million for a fast rail link to Ballarat that will reduce travel times to under 60 minutes; contribute \$20 million for a rapid transit link to Geelong, cutting travel times to under 45 minutes; and,

invest \$15 million in the upgrade of the Traralgon line.

Labor will provide an \$80 million boost to kick start the development of more frequent, competitively priced, fast rail to regional centres of Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Traralgon.

Over the next four years Labor will provide the following funding for this initiative ...

That is \$35 million, and secondly, \$45 million — those being in the years 2001–02 and 2002–03 respectively.

Let's just have a bit of a look at what happened. Having assumed the reins they went out and did a bit of the work they should have done for a start. They got hold of some people — and some pretty well-paid people too, but that again is another story — to have a look at this thing and find out what was the case. I have here in

the ACIL report the figures which are the government's own figures in relation to this fast rail links project. It is interesting because the project had gone from \$80 million, as set out in the policy, to \$810 million.

Dr Napthine — And rising!

Mr RYAN — And rising indeed — slowing down but rising. The split was supposed to be \$550 million from public funds and \$260 million from private funds, this latter money being the money which was to be in partnership with the private sector, of course. There were several interesting aspects to all of this. When the government went to the communities in those four regions and asked them, 'What are your aspirations as to fast rail travel? What do you, living in Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong and the valley, regard as being fast rail? What would be the travel times for those respective centres if you were to really have fast rail links?'. The answers were: in Ballarat the community said 55 minutes running express; in Bendigo, 60 minutes running express; in Traralgon, 60 minutes stopping only at Dandenong but otherwise running express; and in Geelong it was going to be 45 minutes.

Interestingly, on the government's own figures, if it were to build a project that would deliver those travel times which were the aspirations of the people in those communities, those people having been given the understanding that they were going to get a fast rail link, the cost of building that would be \$1.75 billion. The whole thing was again a case of the emperor's new clothes. It was a complete fiction — an absolute and utter fiction. From the time of its conception the whole thing was a lie — an absolute electoral lie.

What did the government then do? It said, 'Oh well, we will go back to the \$810 million model. We will have the \$810 million version'. It was going to have to spend \$810 million — we were going to have this split of \$550 million and \$260 million. Of course if it delivered that, this is what we would have ended up with: at Ballarat, instead of 55 minutes it was going to be 60 minutes; at Bendigo, instead of 60 minutes, which the community wanted, it was going to be 80 minutes; at Traralgon, instead of 60 minutes it was going to be 90 minutes travel time; and of course Geelong it is still 45 minutes, and Geelong is not a factor of influence in terms of the changed times. So for spending \$810 million that was what we were going to get.

What emerged was that we believed from inquiries that we were making in relation to the rail industry that this issue of \$260 million was also an absolute fiction, a complete myth. Mr Acting Speaker, you will no doubt recall the many instances in which I asked questions in

question time or generally challenged the minister in the Parliament about this \$260 million, the general tenor of it being, 'Where is the money? Where is the money, Minister?'

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr RYAN — And of course he did — variations on a theme. I thank the shadow minister for reminding me that the general tenor of the comments from the minister was, 'Don't you worry about that' — that most famous of expressions in political terms. Of course, I pressed him about it over a period of time, and in each instance took a fearful flogging from the minister. Again I say I am not complaining about that. That is one of the joys of being a minister — you can belt the daylight out of your opponent who can only sit here and cop it. That is just the way of the world. It is how the system works.

But within a week of the end of the autumn sittings of Parliament I happened to be listening to ABC radio in the fair city of Bendigo no less, and there was the Minister for Transport being interviewed on the radio that particular evening. The minister was asked a question about the \$260 million. Having denied any problem with it over a period of months, I heard him say in his dulcet tones that they could not get the money. There was no \$260 million. The whole thing was a fiction. What subsequently emerged on the front page of the *Herald Sun* was that when the minutes of the meetings were produced it became apparent that the minister had known for a good 12 months there was never going to be any \$260 million. The money was never there. The whole thing was complete and utter fiction. Another emperor's new clothes job!

What do we get back to? We are now down to \$550 million — some would say it is far lower than that — and now we are going to have travel times from Ballarat of somewhere in the order of 85 plus minutes and Bendigo is going to be 100 plus minutes. I stand corrected. I withdraw those assertions because those times I have just read out relate to the current transit times. What we are now getting is the minister asserting that the Ballarat travel time is going to be, I think, 64 minutes. The interesting thing is that on the government's own documents — on the \$550 million model, or the \$500 million model, which is what they had in their own documents — travel time is 70 minutes running express to Ballarat, 90 minutes running express to Bendigo, and it is 100 minutes to Traralgon, stopping at Dandenong only.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr RYAN — The government members over there are getting very excited. I am reading from their own documents, their own figures. This is no creation of mine. The whole thing is a total farce.

What is also interesting is that the language of it all has changed dramatically. The shadow minister read out the quote from the Premier, where he talked about the fact that in the first term of the Parliament the government would have one of these things running and they would get the other up and running. He corrects me to say that the newspaper article said one of them would be running in the first year. In fact, when you look at the second-reading speech you note a less than subtle change in the language, because what it now says is that over the coming decade country Victoria will be even further transformed, and there is set out a series of initiatives. Guess what is in there on page 9? It is that there will be fast rail links to our provincial centres and beyond.

Dr Napthine — It's on the 10-year plan.

Mr RYAN — Yes, it is on the 10-year plan. It is a case of the emperor's new clothes. Dear, oh dear! I know it is a pretty gruesome sight when you think of it — the minister and the emperor's new clothes. I will not go down that path. Suffice it to say that this is another one where they have just been having a lend of country and regional Victoria. It is the height of farce. You have others like the Melbourne fast rail link that did not make the cut at all.

Mr Helper interjected.

Mr RYAN — The airport link, yes. The honourable member for Ripon has a resigned look upon his face. That was a Freudian slip. I am sorry about that. The Melbourne fast rail link — the airport link — did not make the cut at all. The government abandoned that. You would hate to think how many millions went into that.

There are some other classics. The government was going to maintain the maximum uniform tariff. Wasn't that a little gem? How many people voted for this government on the basis of the maintenance of the maximum uniform tariff when it knew in opposition at the time it made that promise that it was impossible to fulfil it?

When you review *Hansard* you can see that within two weeks of assuming government in Victoria the expression, 'maximum uniform tariff' disappeared from Labor's language, never to be heard again. The government completely abandoned that promise.

Then we had the \$118 million special payment, and even in introducing that the government completely botched it. It promised the payment from December last year but could not do it and had to delay it until April this year.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr RYAN — On 1 April? How appropriate! The issue now is whether the government is going to continue it. Again, this is complete farce on the part of the government. These are the promises made by the Labor Party before it came to government.

Mr Helper — What would you do?

Mr RYAN — I can absolutely assure the honourable member for Ripon — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr RYAN — That is precisely right, and therein lies the distinction. We will have the policy all right, and everyone will find it interesting and constructive. The other thing is that it will be a policy we will be able to tell people about while looking them in the eye. It will be delivered on. It will not be a blatant lie like this was. The maximum uniform tariff! Members opposite knew even as they said it that it was an absolute, blatant lie.

Ms Allan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Lupton) — Order! Will the government benches sit down and be quiet? I ask the Leader of the National Party not to encourage the government benches. He is getting them terribly excited!

Mr RYAN — Thank you for your guidance, Mr Acting Speaker.

Rail standardisation is another absolute ripper! It is a \$96 million investment, and the government has not done a thing. I can see the honourable member for Wimmera is warming up: that will be something worth hearing.

We have the mineral sands industry opening up in the west of the state, with great opportunities coming on stream, and the government is still fiddling around. They make Nero look like an activist, this lot. Honest to goodness they are hopeless!

What else have we got? The shadow minister referred to the Pakenham bypass. Bridges are a ripper and deserve a bit of a discussion.

Mr Helper — Talk to us about bridges.

Mr RYAN — I have been invited to talk about bridges, and I am happy to accommodate the honourable member.

For months the National Party wrote to the Minister for Transport about an initiative which would see not the overturning but the overcoming in Victoria of the Brodie decision in the High Court. I wrote to the minister several times, and I went to the point of having a bill drafted and submitted to the minister for his consideration. I wrote to the Premier to say that I wanted to introduce it as a private members bill. I wrote to all 47 country and regional municipalities three or four times over a period of many months. In roaming around the state like a homeless gypsy I sat at the table and talked with many councils about it, including those represented within the electorate of one of the two members of the government present in the chamber. Sorry, Minister, I did not go to your council!

There was universal support for it in all instances but one, the City of Latrobe, the then mayor being the now-endorsed candidate for the Labor Party and the current electorate officer of the Minister for Agriculture. All of that is another story.

Mr Delahunty — What did the government do?

Mr RYAN — Well you may ask. The first thing is that not once did I ever get a reply from either the Premier or any minister about the succession of letters I wrote about this issue.

Dr Napthine — They sent it to a committee.

Mr RYAN — I do not know, because I have never heard boo from them.

So it was that last week my colleague the Honourable Peter Hall in the other place gave notice of the bill that we had drawn up, and last Wednesday it was second read in the Legislative Council. On Thursday, with no further ado, the Minister for Transport stood in this place and second read a bill in precisely the same terms as the bill which I had suggested to him over many months and on which he had never even seen fit to correspond with me. The bill he introduced last Thursday is the same piece of legislation, yet without any further ado he just introduced it. Talk about the height of farce!

What could I do but write to all the councils with whom I had been corresponding and explain in some detail how we had all been absolutely hoodwinked by the minister and the government over an issue of such

crucial interest to them. What else could I do but make sure they were given all the facts of that act on the part of the government? Typical, again!

We have already proposed that a specific fund be established to enable the extension of the natural gas supply. In a place like Bairnsdale, for example, the east coast pipeline runs virtually right through the town yet the people do not have reticulated gas. It is an issue which needs to be addressed, and it is reflective of what is happening in so many other parts of country Victoria. We have a plan showing how it can be done, which we have published, and I am pleased to see that it has been adopted by the Liberal Party. Between the two of us we may be able to kick some life into this Labor government and get it to do something about it.

I pause to say that after I announced this at our state conference in Shepparton in April this year there was within a week or two the first discussion we had heard by the minister of the prospect of gas extensions happening around country Victoria. An amazing thing that, and the issue has popped up in so many other places. Mind you, I am happy to give the government the lead, as long as we see delivered what is necessary for the betterment of country Victoria.

Another example is the wind farms circus. Hasn't that been interesting?

Ms Allan — How is that on the bill?

Mr RYAN — The honourable member for Bendigo East asks how this is on the bill. I will answer the question as a rhetorical question, so I will not be responding to her interjection.

But had I been asked by someone as to what is the relevance of wind farms in this debate the simple answer would have been that the issue of wind farms is very pertinent to regional development. One of the benefits of having a second-reading speech that encompasses 19 pages of rhetoric is that the minister obviously intends that everybody who debates the bill will be able to make a good, wide-ranging contribution. That is to his great credit and it is a good thing, and I would hate to disappoint him by not taking up the opportunity.

Wind farms are important to regional development. I have been to Codrington and seen the wind farm development there. I have actually stood with my back against one of the towers with the blade spinning above. I have had a very, very good look at it, and it is a terrific development for country Victoria.

Mr Helper interjected.

Mr RYAN — They are three times as high as pylons, actually, from the ground to the tip of the blade. I know that in south-western Victoria a lot of industry development is going on around the prospect of constructing the turbines and constructing the towers — the nacelles, as they are called — and that is all good, strong stuff.

Of course, there is the prospect of a downside, and it is this: if you put two or three of these towers in this chamber, that might be fine, but if you put 30 in this area it would not be, and we must make certain we have planning guidelines that are appropriate to the needs and sensitivities of country Victoria. So what does this government do? It issues a set of guidelines at last, in around August or September, from rough memory.

Mr Helper — July.

Mr RYAN — July is the bid; okay, I will take July. This happens, mind you, after the government had announced in January that the guidelines would be out soon. By about April, when there had been nothing, the National Party started to get on the case of the government to get these guidelines produced, because we have a plethora of organisations that are seeking to establish these wind farms, particularly along the coastal regions of the state. It was in July, so I am told by the member for Ripon, and I accept what he says, that the government issued these guidelines. I thought it was a bit later, actually.

Mr Helper interjected.

Mr RYAN — Yes, I think it might have been a bit later. I will settle on August. So the guidelines come out in about August, and what happens then? The government says to councils in country Victoria, ‘You go and do the consultation. We are not going to do the consultation, you go and do the consultation’. In the meantime I had been to public meetings all over the place, because in Gippsland a wind farm had been established at Toora, built by the Stanwell Corporation Ltd, which is the Queensland electricity entity. It had got that facility going, and initially there was very strong support for the development of that wind farm at Toora.

What then happened, though, was that an absolute rash of these applications came forward to the municipality for the future development of wind farms, and the same sort of thing happened across other parts of Victoria, particularly along the coastline. What became evident was that these guidelines would need to be carefully crafted in consultation with country communities, and those in our coastal regions in particular, to make sure

that we got best outcomes, because — moving to the bottom line in this — the government has published the fact that it wants to have 1000 megawatts of power generated by wind farms by 2006. That means — if you say a megawatt or a bit more is produced from a single tower — we are looking at up to 1000 of these towers being constructed, primarily along the Victorian coastline.

It is an issue of critical concern, particularly, if I may say, in the sense of aesthetics, so it is very important that there be good, broad-based consultation and that we get it right. Bear in mind also that once these things are erected, no-one is going to tear them down tomorrow. They are going to be there for a long time. It is not like a deficiency in a service provision of some sort — be it in health services, road services or otherwise — which we can rectify; these physical structures are going to be erected, so it is very important that we get these planning guidelines right.

When the guidelines were issued there was hell to pay. Councils, particularly in Gippsland, were writing to the minister wanting to talk to her about them. Indeed, I understand that the South Gippsland Shire Council wrote to the minister three times in relation to these guidelines. How many answers did it get? I understand it is still waiting for an answer. What consultation was there between the government and the councils? Well, there was a submission made by the South Gippsland shire and a few other submissions came through to the government, but in the meantime the government was proceeding along an entirely different path. The reality of that path materialised last Tuesday, because last Tuesday the minister gazetted the guidelines she had had out there for consideration and consultation, and so the councils were completely gazumped. The communities across country Victoria — —

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr RYAN — Yes, this is part of the cooperation with councils. In the dead of night, as it were, these guidelines were gazetted. I will tell you the topper, though, Mr Acting Speaker. They were gazetted on Tuesday, 8 October: when did the minister publish to the world that she had done this? Did she come in here to the Parliament and announce it on the Tuesday? Did she tell us on the Wednesday, when she had ample opportunity to stand up and take a dorothy dixer from someone like the honourable member for Ripon, for example, and tell everybody that this had happened? Did she do it on Thursday, when there would have been plenty of chances? They were all long days, those days, and the minister was in and out of the house and had plenty of chances to tell us all about it. Not on your

nelly, Mr Acting Speaker. On Saturday the government issued a press release in which the minister announced that this had happened.

This is absolutely appalling conduct on the part of this minister and this government. It is another example of how they treat country Victorians with absolute disdain. I am sure that story is yet to be fully told.

Tempted as I am to go through a variety of other things contained within this second-reading speech I will not do so — and even as I flick over it temptation is almost getting the better of me, and indeed it does in one minor respect: I see here that the bill refers to the growth of our dairy and barley markets. Isn't that a little gem — the barley industry! This is the government, of course, that deregulated the barley industry in the face of an absolutely overwhelming vote from the 4000 barley growers in this state that they did not want to have it happen. The government employed precisely the same mechanism it had used in the end to justify getting itself out of a hole and deregulating the dairy industry. It employed the same mechanism of having a plebiscite among the growers, but when it got an answer it did not like, it absolutely ignored it. It did precisely the opposite of what it had done in the first instance. It was the Labor government by its own standards again on display for all of country Victoria.

Suffice to say that the content of this bill is a farce. It will not advance country Victoria's interests at all, because all the things it purports to be able to do are able to be done now. In so saying I do not for one moment want to detract from the commitment and the hard work that has been undertaken by many of the departmental personnel who are engaged in these pursuits. That is not the issue. What we are talking about here is the smoke and mirrors that go with a structure which is set out in this bill in a way that the second-reading speech has got wrong, and which I do not think will add anything in practical terms to the way in which country Victoria functions.

I finish my comments by reference to the drought issues. I have spent a fair deal of time in northern Victoria over the past few weeks, and what is happening is absolutely soul destroying. I had a briefing the other night, as did the members of my party, from the major water authority, Goulburn-Murray Water, and it is now in uncharted territory. It has low storage levels at a time when the prospect of being able to have that issue resolved is fast disappearing, and history would say, when you look at the charting it has done, that the prospects for these coming months are bleak. I do not wish to sound alarmist, but that is the fact when you have a look at the material.

You hear some extraordinarily poignant stories from people when you go up there. Only recently, two or three weeks ago, I was at a farm up outside Lockington with a young couple who are faced with the prospect of culling down their herd from about 560 cows to about 420 cows. They have major commitments, of course, and I will not go through all that now, but they told me an extraordinary story which, in one sense, highlights the shocking family trauma that is caused by the problems these people are facing.

One of the cows in the herd was tagged as no. 800 and was more a family pet than anything else. She was bred on the farm and then went into the herd. As I recall, there are five kiddies under the age of 12, and as they walked up the driveway after coming home on the school bus — and I might say they go to the Lockington state school, which is where I started my schooling — no. 800 would come over to the fence and they would pat her, just like a family pet.

A couple of days before I was there, when the culling of the herd was taking place, the herd manager said, '800 has got to go'. I was in the kitchen talking to the young couple, both of whom are very highly qualified in their own right and hardened professionals in the sense of running a very good business. Do you know that the man of the house could not bring himself to put that cow on the truck and send it to the abattoir? It fell on the lady of the house to do it. When I was there that night talking to them they had not yet been able to devise a way to tell their children that 800 was no more.

It was a simple issue, yet in its own way it was absolutely terrible in its effect on that family and its interrelationships. It is an example of the issues at the edge of the main game of how they will continue on.

The other night outside St Arnaud, up Swan Hill way in the grains area, I met a number of farmers. A young mum was telling me that on the eve of the football grand final she and her husband were watching some of the old games of yesteryear on television with their seven-year-old and five-year-old sons. While they were watching the seven-year-old asked his mother, 'What's that on the players?'. She did not know what he was referring to. Eventually she worked out that he was referring to the mud the players had on them. He then said to her, 'And what's that all over the ground?'. She had to explain to him that they were playing on a muddy oval. This child, at the age of seven, living up in northern Victoria, had never seen a football match played on a muddy oval and so had to have it explained to him by his mother. They are in their sixth or seventh consecutive year of below-average rainfall, and they are in terrible difficulty.

I believe there is a common purpose in this chamber to get these people through. We have taken more time than we should have to take action to give these people a hand. But now that it has started, let us make sure that the government sees it through.

I am pleased to see that the government has recognised its commitment to help these farming communities in the first instance, because that is where the responsibility lies. When he was in the house before the Minister for Police and Emergency Services asked by way of interjection, ‘What about the federal government?’. It may be that ultimately the federal government will have a part to play, but we would all hope not, because if it is to play a part it will be on the basis of receiving an exceptional circumstances application from the state of Victoria. We would hope that we do not get to that stage, although the portents are not good.

Even if it gets to that stage I would hope this government re-examines the response it has made to Warren Truss, the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and the federal government over the new design for exceptional circumstances assistance. I believe it can be fairly said that the federal government package is generous. There is now an opportunity for Victoria to lead the way and accept the terms, which I understand were provisionally agreed to by the ministers of the respective jurisdictions, including the Victorian minister. But unfortunately the minister — again, as I understand it — was overruled by the Treasurer, and this government has not been prepared to sign off on those arrangements. I again invite the government to lead the way.

Dr Naphthine — Is that the Minister for State and Regional Development?

Mr RYAN — The Treasurer, the Minister for Innovation and the Minister for State and Regional Development are the self same minister. Here is a circumstance where people in northern Victoria are doing it tough — and by Jove it is tough! There is a chance to get these exceptional circumstance arrangements in place so that if we get to the point where the federal government is called upon to assist we can get better outcomes for our farmers.

I want to make this further point. It is imperative that every member of this chamber and this Parliament understands that this is not a poor-boy-me argument. We all need to understand that the farmers of our state are imperative to our future and that by whatever the means we must edge them through this and make certain we can get them out the other side. We have had

droughts before; we will have droughts again. The issue here is how we can assist them to best manage their affairs to make sure we get proper outcomes.

There are various things that can be done, and the government has started on some of them. I have recently written to all the banks asking them to hold their nerve. I have had their representatives in my office and had discussions with them, and I urge the Premier to do likewise. I urge him to get a commitment out of the banks — which they have been prepared to give to me, in fairness — that they will stand by our farming communities, because we need them from the perspective of the medium to longer term.

There is another important thing this government can do, which was demonstrated to me on Sunday when I was at the Horsham races. I will not go into my punting exploits, because it is a sad and tragic story. Suffice it to say that in the course of the day I talked to several small businesspeople. One of them, who employs about 40 people in the manufacture and maintenance of farming equipment, made the very valid point that it takes a long time to assemble a work force, particularly in country Victoria, that has the skills required to do the sorts of things his organisation does. They are a composition of welders — specialist welders in many instances — electricians and all the others who have the skills that go with the different elements of the trades associated with those industries. That was reflected in what I saw only a few days ago up at Grizzly Engineering at Swan Hill, which manufactures some magnificent equipment.

It is very important that, particularly through the Minister for State and Regional Development, the government brings forward some meaningful regional programs where those work forces can be usefully employed and kept together. The big fear of a lot of these businesses is that unless that is done their work forces will be lost to country Victoria; and if they go it is simply too hard to get them back.

I believe there is an opportunity for the government to go across country Victoria, particularly in these areas which are feeling the stress, and have a good look at getting municipalities and communities to nominate the sorts of projects which can be fast-tracked, on the basis that the government is prepared to assist with the funding and, very importantly, these work forces can be kept together. That is something very constructive that the government could do.

I conclude on that note. The interests of country and regional Victoria will not be advanced by this legislation. Rather, they will be advanced if the tenor of

what is intended by this legislation is given effect to and the government gets busy and actually delivers on the ground and we get past the stage of talking about these things and having a charade such as this put before the house. But at the moment, I am afraid the emperor simply does not have any clothes.

Mr HELPER (Ripon) — It is a pleasure to follow the shadow minister for rural and regional development and the Leader of the National Party. But for fear of those two members suffering from a lack of memory of what the bill is about, given their wide-ranging and lengthy contributions, I will touch back on the fundamentals of the bill. The Regional Development Victoria Bill sets up a statutory body to facilitate economic and community development in regional Victoria.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HELPER — I suggest you read the second-reading speech.

Dr Napthine — I suggest you read the legislation!

Mr HELPER — The body to be established is to be called Regional Development Victoria. Now that we have just had a fundamental move back to the topic before the house, I will touch on some of the comments made, firstly, by the shadow minister and then by the Leader of the National Party.

Basically the shadow minister commenced with clause-by-clause nitpicking, which I would have thought would be more appropriate to do in committee. Be that as it may, he is entitled to do that. Not too many people found it enlightening. Basically he referred to it as relabelling and rebadging, and that is a theme that also ran through the presentation by the Leader of the National Party. Both honourable members fundamentally missed the point.

The bill is about establishing Regional Development Victoria (RDV) and enshrining in legislation in Victoria for the first time ever a body that is dedicated to the advancement of the economic and social wellbeing of regional Victoria. To call it relabelling, rebadging or simply printing a new letterhead is to not understand what the legislation is about, how it will operate and how it will impact on regional Victoria.

The honourable member for Portland touched on a number of projects, such as natural gas, electricity and a range of issues which he wished to nitpick about. There was one common theme running through all of those issues, and through a number of the ones that the Leader of the National Party raised — that is, that they

are all industry sectors which were privatised by the previous government. No wonder this government is having to move heaven and earth to come to grips with the botched privatisations of the previous government. The opposition lacks credibility, and it is hypocritical for the honourable member for Portland to raise those very same issues as a criticism of this bill. Frankly, I do not understand how they relate to it.

Specifically, the Leader of the National Party asked the minister — I think his words were ‘a subsequent speaker’ — to assure him that the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund would not be diluted — his word — by the inclusion of the interface councils in the Regional Development Victoria Bill. I can assure the honourable member that the RIDF is established by an act of Parliament which lists in one of its schedules the councils which can derive funds from it. I would have thought that the Leader of the National Party would have recognised that. The fear he wishes to drum up, that all of a sudden the RIDF is going to be diluted across these interface councils, is indeed a mischievous claim, because that could not be done without reference to the Parliament of Victoria to change the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Act.

I will talk about the bill in a bit more detail, recognising that other honourable members wish to speak as well. The bill establishes the structures, powers and functions of Regional Development Victoria. Those functions are designed, targeted and tailored to meet the economic, social and development aspirations of regional Victoria, including the interface councils. The bill also sets up structures to meet the aspirations of rural Victoria. I am sorry that the honourable member for Benalla is not here. She is very keen on insisting that we use the word ‘rural’, and I more than happy to use it on this occasion.

The bill also establishes the Regional Development Advisory Committee, which is to advise the minister of the day in an impartial way on issues confronting regional and rural Victoria in terms of its development, both socially and economically.

The bill provides for the accountability of Rural Development Victoria through this very Parliament. It provides for the reporting to this Parliament of RDV’s activities on an annual basis, and as such is in keeping with this government’s commitment to open and transparent government.

Fundamentally, the bill is about continuing the effort in rebuilding regional and rural Victoria which was commenced three years ago by the Bracks government. Already we have seen enormous achievements, but a

lot remains to be done. As I mentioned before, it is the first time in Victoria's history that rural and regional Victoria has a dedicated body to pursue its interests and aspirations.

The legislation provides for the coordinated delivery of government programs, services and resources. I appreciate that this is a very difficult concept for the opposition and the National Party to understand, but this government certainly recognises that for regional and rural Victoria to prosper further we do need to modify and constantly evaluate the way the government delivers services. Certainly any evaluation that is done — and evaluation of its service delivery will be an ongoing activity of this government — will find universally that a coordinated approach to service and program delivery delivers the best outcomes for communities in regional and rural Victoria.

As I said before, already this government has had an enormous impact on rural and regional Victoria in terms of confidence being lifted, economic activity being increased and the aspirations of regional Victoria and the meeting of those aspirations being recognised as legitimate — as opposed to the previous government, which so callously referred to regional Victoria as a whole and its aspirations as the toenails of the state.

Ms Allan — Shame!

Mr Maxfield — Shame!

Mr HELPER — Thank you!

Going to regional exports gives me an example to put figures to my claim. For instance, regional exports were up 43 per cent over the preceding two years to \$7.6 billion last year. That is an enormous achievement. It is a reflection of how regional and rural Victoria is indeed getting on with the job. The other statistic that should be pointed out is that this state government has facilitated and has worked with regional communities to attract some \$1.5 billion of investment. Again that shows and cements the strength of regional Victoria and builds its confidence.

I do not wish to paint a picture of there not being an enormous agenda that needs to be continually addressed in regional Victoria; I simply wish to point out that three years of the Bracks government — a government that is dedicated to regional and rural Victoria and, indeed, to growing the whole of the state — has brought about considerable outcomes.

Specifically on the bill, I would like to stray to quoting from the *Weekly Times* editorial of Wednesday,

11 September 2002. I have not found the *Weekly Times* to be a paper that could be described as the lap-dog of the government — far from it. I generally purchase the *Weekly Times* because it has great Starpost ads in it. To quote from this editorial:

The success of the Bracks government's new Regional Development Victoria authority will depend on its power to cut through bureaucratic red tape and break down departmental territorialism.

Hear, hear!

Ms Allan interjected.

Mr HELPER — I've got to do my own hear, hears!

I could not agree more with that comment in the editorial. But I have every confidence that Regional Development Victoria will indeed achieve the objective of cutting through, as the *Weekly Times* terms it, bureaucratic red tape and breaking down departmental territorialism. I have every confidence that the bill, when it becomes an act, will indeed deliver that.

A further quote that is really worthwhile — it is quite a few paragraphs down —

Ms Allan — More?

Mr HELPER — Yes, there is more from the *Weekly Times* of 11 September 2002. I quote:

The RDV has the potential to rebuild the front desk and face of state government that was rationalised out of many country towns during the Kennett years.

What an incredibly insightful paragraph by the *Weekly Times*! I could not congratulate the editorial staff of the *Weekly Times*, on this occasion, any more if I tried. It is indeed a very pertinent point, and just to ensure that members of the opposition do indeed get the point I will read it out again:

The RDV has the potential to rebuild the front desk and face of state government that was rationalised out of many country towns during the Kennett years.

Will the opposition please take note!

I appreciate that many other members wish to speak on this bill. I commend the bill to the house, as it will deliver an enormous boost and institutionalised support for regional and rural Victoria — not only to my electorate but to the whole of Victoria.

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — I was pleased to sit here through two outstanding contributions to the debate, from the honourable member for Portland and the Leader of the National Party. That was followed by

a speech of all sorts from the honourable member for Ripon. He starts off by saying, to his own bill, that this bill will bring into effect a statutory authority.

I ask, through the Chair: where did he receive that information? Whoever is advising the government of its own bills obviously does not know what this bill has in it. It clearly does not involve a statutory body or authority.

The honourable member for Ripon went on to say that this bill forms, for the first time there, a body for regional development. Obviously he is too young to remember Murray Byrne's 10-point plan for decentralisation — probably the most substantial decentralisation program ever seen.

Mr Baillieu — Not too young, too silly.

Mr PLOWMAN — I hear the interjection from the honourable member for Hawthorn.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member should ignore interjections.

Mr PLOWMAN — I could not help picking up that interjection. The honourable member for Ripon, who is now leaving the house, has suggested this is the first time it has ever happened. I have about eight pages showing what was achieved under the Honourable Murray Byrne's 10-point plan for decentralisation in the Bolte years. In Bendigo the following businesses were developed: Bendigo Mechanical Services, Central Victorian Colour Laboratory, Concrete and Masonry (Bendigo) Pty Ltd and the Derwent Poultry Farm. Many of these businesses are still there. Others included Empire Rubber (Australia) Pty Ltd, EVI Pty Ltd, Fyfe Constructions Pty Ltd, Jansco Jeans, KV Equipment, Ni-Tex Industries, Powermake Constructions Pty Ltd, Sinclair and Duncan Foundries Pty Ltd and Tony Tuck's Windows and Building Supplies. I am not sure whether Tony Tuck's Windows is still there.

Ms Allan — He is still there.

Mr PLOWMAN — That is good to hear. The last is N & O Wessely Manufacturing.

That is a list just of Bendigo companies established under the 10-point plan, going back to a long time ago. To suggest that this is the first time there has ever been a program of decentralisation or a program of rural and regional development shows a complete lack of understanding of what has happened over the years. I could refer to a range of industries developed in towns and cities around Victoria, including Avoca, Ballarat,

Buninyong, Daylesford, Talbot, Dimboola, Horsham, Nhill, Stawell, Warracknabeal, Geelong, Camperdown, Casterton and Hamilton, and the list goes on.

I suggest that the honourable member for Ripon has very little understanding about regional development or about a word that is not used anymore, 'decentralisation'. This is a tiny, inconsequential bill of 9 pages but with a second-reading speech of 19 pages. I do not think I have ever seen a second-reading speech that has more than double the number of pages of the bill. The bill is so inconsequential that it has to be ramped up by a large second-reading speech. All that does is exemplify that the bill is meaningless. Clearly the legislation is a farce, because it is a fiction. The Leader of the National Party likened the government to an emperor with no clothes. I suggest it is more like Imelda Marcos, who kept buying more shoes but never wore them. All it is doing is dressing up the supposed program of decentralisation but not doing anything about it.

Being like me a country man, Mr Acting Speaker, you will be aware that little has happened with decentralisation in your patch in the last three years, just as nothing has happened in my patch. This legislation is a true example of the non-performance of the government. The strange thing is that the government obviously thinks country people are so stupid that they cannot see through this. The government is suggesting that this bill will change everything. But you will have the same people employed in the same department reporting to the same department secretary who is being given a job that the department has had before. Does the government think country people cannot see that for themselves? I have so much faith in country people, and I know they have had enough of promises and empty legislation that means nothing. They will see through this legislation, just as they see through the fact that no development has occurred over the past three years, despite all the promises.

Certainly a lot of money is being poured into some of the regional centres to shore up the Labor-held seats, but what about country Victoria, where we have example after example? What has happened to rail and the promises for the standard gauge? We are no closer than we were to the standard gauge duplication from Albury to Melbourne, and we do not have standard gauge going to the ports, which would allow the double-decking of containers. All of those things were promises of this government.

What about hospital funding? Almost every hospital in my area is short on funds because they were told to employ more nurses to get better nurse-patient ratios.

They were told they would be recompensed for employing those nurses, but when it came to the crunch they were not paid. That is building up the deficits of hospitals. Instead of hospitals being able to develop and provide more health services for the community, they have had to pay for the nurses, who should be paid for by the state government.

What about schools? If you look at all the schools in my area you will see that the PRMS (physical resources management system) funding is at a standstill. Wodonga Primary School, one of the biggest primary schools in Victoria with over 800 students, has classrooms with lifting boards. If honourable members opposite have doubts about that I can show them photographs in the *Border Mail* which clearly identify boards coming off and paint peeling. All these things indicate that the government does not recognise that if you do not maintain public facilities as required it will cost you a lot more later on. This government is not only doing nothing, it is not prepared to maintain schools and hospitals.

I refer to the drought in country Victoria. I know other speakers have talked about it, but it is the most serious issue facing country Victoria. Nothing comes within a bull's roar of it. The government is spending \$50 million or \$60 million on advertising its own programs as pre-election advertisements, but it has committed only a tiny amount to assist all those drought-affected farmers.

Ms Allan interjected.

Mr PLOWMAN — In excess of \$20 million, as the honourable member for Bendigo East tells me, but not a cent has been spent yet. I want to see that money in the hands of those people and communities who need it. This is a cynical exercise. The government should have a good look at itself in respect of its drought policy. It took the government so long to recognise that we had a drought, yet today the Minister for Agriculture said it was extremely broad and worrying. Why did it take so long for him to come to that conclusion?

I will not go any further, but there are other issues such as natural gas, country roads and bridges that I could refer to. I conclude by saying that you cannot fool country people. The legislation is laughable because it does nothing for decentralisation or regional development. All it does is dress them up in new clothes. I believe country people have had enough of the fact that the government has not delivered — and this is yet another example of it.

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — It is very interesting to follow Liberal and National Party speakers on this bill. With their contributions one would think they were opposing this bill, but the Leader of the National Party exposed the reason why they have to support this bill. In his contribution to the debate he said that he did not want to give the government a piece of weaponry against his party and the Liberal Party. The reason is that deep down they would love to oppose this important bill for regional and rural Victoria, but they know they have to support it. They would love to go back to the way they performed during the seven years of the Kennett government and oppose country Victoria at every turn, but they know this is a good piece of legislation for country Victoria and that is why they have to support it.

Regional Development Victoria (RDV) will form the centrepiece of the government's new regional development agenda — a strong agenda that has seen extraordinary jobs growth and infrastructure development right across country Victoria. When you come down to it the reason we need this bill, the reason why we need to enshrine in legislation the formation of Regional Development Victoria, is because if we do not we will risk a return to the treatment of country Victoria that we saw under the previous government where the former Premier referred to country Victoria as the toenails of the state. Country Victoria needs protection from the slash-and-burn policies that we experienced for seven years under the Liberal–National Party government, and we fear there would be a return to those policies if it were re-elected.

Since this government came to power in 1999, from day 1, the opposition has been bagging every good initiative that the Bracks government has put in place for country Victoria, and it continues to do that with this bill. This bill puts rural and regional Victoria back at the centre of government decision making after seven years of the former government. We have had three years of extraordinary regional development under the Bracks government and this bill will cement the growth and development of regional Victoria under the Bracks government for the future.

Let's look at a good example of why we need this protection for country Victoria. I refer to the Department of Agriculture relocation that was started in 1991 under the former Labor government. It is interesting to note that opposition speakers said that Labor governments do not understand decentralisation. The people in Bendigo understand full well what decentralisation under the Liberal Party means. In 1991, under the former Labor government, a decision was made to relocate the Department of Agriculture's head

office to Bendigo. With that came a promise of 270 new jobs for Bendigo's economy. By October 1992, 97 jobs had been established in Bendigo under this relocation. A contract had been signed for a building to be constructed on a site next to the railway station. We even had the former Premier and his Liberal and National Party mates in central Victoria promise that the relocation would go ahead.

But what did we see? After the 1992 election the promise was scuttled. The Department of Agriculture relocation to Bendigo was scuttled. The jobs were taken back to Melbourne and Bendigo was left without those promised 270 jobs. Country Victorians know that this will happen again should the Liberal and National parties form government again in the near future. That is why we need the protection of legislation for Regional Development Victoria.

A number of previous speakers have referred to the issue of the government delivering on its commitments to country Victoria. I refer to the government's rural and regional policy document that it released prior to last election. It has achieved every single one of the commitments outlined in that document. I do not have time to go through every single one of these, but I will touch on a few: establish the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund — done; upgrade the Office of Rural Affairs and create a new Department of State and Regional Development — done; establish the Victorian Major Events Company — done; abolish the catchment management authority tax — done; and abolish compulsory competitive tendering in local government — done!

I think it was the former Leader of the Liberal Party in his contribution to the debate who bemoaned the fact that the call centre attraction program had not been implemented. Can I remind the honourable member for Portland that in the first six months after coming into office the Bracks government encouraged and attracted AAPT to put its Australian call centre head office in Bendigo, resulting in about 400 new jobs for the economy in that region. The Bracks government can stand proudly by what it has achieved over the last three years and certainly sign off on a number of its commitments to country Victoria.

In addition to what I said previously about the opposition's policy on relocation, I also want to talk about the government's program of departmental relocations. Under the Bracks government we have seen the relocation of the State Revenue Office to Ballarat and the relocation of the Rural Finance Corporation to Bendigo. This will be a fantastic initiative for our community, bringing with it 40 jobs. It

really complements the work that has been generated in Bendigo through the Bendigo Bank, North West Country Credit, the Bendigo Stock Exchange and Sandhurst Trustees. It will be a fantastic addition to our region's financial institutions and in turn a great boost to our local economy.

This government is very concerned about jobs in country Victoria, and this bill establishing Regional Development Victoria will result in more jobs being created in country Victoria, not just through the public sector because of the establishment of RDV, but also because RDV will work with local communities to attract investment and future job opportunities to those regions. Public sector jobs are very important to the economies of country communities, whether those employed be teachers, nurses, police or people directly employed in the public sector. These jobs are important to the economy of our region.

In the 1990s Liberal and National party governments — the Kennett government and the Howard government — caused a combined cost to our region of around 1800 public sector jobs. That had a disastrous impact on our economy, particularly because over the decades it had been possible to depend on the public sector employers. They can be depended on to provide stable and ongoing employment. There should be no underestimation of how important public sector employment is in country areas. That is why country Victorians treat very cynically what the opposition has to say on public sector jobs. The Bracks government has already achieved a proud record in those key areas of teachers, nurses and police.

In my own community of Bendigo we have about 13 new police officers and 75 new nurses.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN — I am very pleased to say that we have 75 new nurses at the Bendigo Health Care Group and around 80 teachers in the schools in Bendigo East.

One of the key priorities of Regional Development Victoria (RDV) following its establishment will be an investigation of the extension of the natural gas network. Members on this side of the chamber find it absolutely unbelievable to hear the Johnny-come-latelies in the Liberal and National parties talk about natural gas and promise natural gas extensions. This is the same group of people that privatised the gas networks and made it very difficult for country communities — —

Mr Maxfield interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member for Narracan knows full well that he should not display things in the house. I would ask him to cease.

Ms ALLAN — They made it very difficult for natural gas to be extended to country communities. It is outrageous that the opposition would be bleating around country Victoria about the extension of natural gas.

What is almost more unbelievable was to hear the honourable member for Portland refer to the privatisation of electricity. This is the height of hypocrisy. These are the same people who privatised electricity, sold country Victoria out and led to a climate in which country Victorians are paying the highest prices in Australia.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN — Country people in the western region of Victoria are paying the highest retail prices in Australia. That is a fact that cannot be escaped and it is a direct result of the former government privatising one of our state's assets. The privatisation of electricity has been disastrous for country people.

Mr Vogels — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Bendigo East is not telling the truth.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! I was going to ask for the honourable member's microphone to be turned on, but there is no point of order. The honourable member for Bendigo East, continuing her contribution.

Ms ALLAN — Certainly the Liberal Party can cry crocodile tears over the privatisation of electricity but people in country Victoria know that it was the Liberal Party and its mates in the National Party who flogged off the state's electricity industry forever. That is a fact that cannot be escaped and members opposite cannot hide from.

I would also like to talk about the importance of RDV in attracting infrastructure and investment to country areas and its administration of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF). In passing I would like to remind the house that it was the opposition in the upper house which initially blocked the passage of Regional Infrastructure Development Fund legislation through this Parliament.

The RIDF has been crucial to the development of country Victoria. In my own area it has led to some

special developments. One of the most exciting ones was the announcement last Friday that a company called Empire Rubber will be expanding. With the assistance of \$2 million from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and \$4 million from Victrack it will be shifting into the former railway workshop site at Bendigo. This is the Bracks government assisting industry to go into a site which was closed as a direct result of the privatisation policies of the former government. This is fantastic news for the Bendigo economy, and for people looking for work and in the work force in our region. It will be a very exciting development.

In conclusion, all members on this side are working with our regions to see country Victoria go ahead. RDV will be working with local government, local communities and industry around jobs attraction, investment attraction and infrastructure development. We are all working in partnership. The fact is, country Victoria is growing and it is doing very well. However, we need this coordinated effort through RDV to continue this growth.

Members opposite hate to admit this and that is why we have heard them oppose the fast train. If the Liberal and National parties get back into office, they will rip up the fast train contracts. Let there be no doubt about that — the Liberal and National parties will rip up the fast train contracts. This is one of the key infrastructure projects in country Victoria and the members opposite would rip up the contracts.

In my own region the opposition does not support the Calder Highway duplication between Bendigo and Melbourne. We are still waiting for the Liberal and National parties to join Labor in lobbying the federal government for that much-needed funding for the next section of the Calder Highway.

Members opposite certainly hate to see the Bracks government invest in teachers, nurses and police, which, as I said earlier, leads to more jobs in country areas. In their presentations on this bill members opposite should come clean and oppose the bill. At least that way they would be showing their true colours. That is why it is important that we protect regional development in Victoria through legislation from the hangman's noose of members opposite should they ever get back into government.

The warnings were there when the former honourable member for Bendigo East said while commenting on the recent change of leadership in the Liberal Party that it was a change by the Liberal Party back into a cocoon of city politics. I think he summed up very well the

Liberal Party's attitude to country Victoria. That is a great contrast with what the Bracks government is doing with the passage of this bill. For the first time, country Victoria will have a dedicated body to coordinate the delivery of government programs, services and resources. This body will play a key role in the economic and social future of country Victoria. This is great news for people in country Victoria. It is great news for those people who want to live and work in country Victoria. I certainly commend the bill to the house.

Mr VOGELS (Warrnambool) — I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak on this so-called Regional Development Victoria Bill 2002 and the sham that it is.

Mr Hulls — I dare you to oppose it.

Mr VOGELS — I have no doubt that we are heading to an early election, and this government cannot wait to try to pull the wool over the eyes of the people of rural Victoria once again.

I had a look at the infrastructure report the Treasurer tabled last week and looked at some infrastructure developments promised to rural Victoria, mainly in my region. I will go through them. The restoration of passenger rail to Ararat was allocated \$5.4 million and funding expenditure at the moment is nil. The allocation for restoration of passenger rail to Bairnsdale was \$14 million, actual expenditure to date \$749 000. You can go on to Leongatha with \$2.4 million and expenditure nil.

Ms Davies — Excuse me!

Mr VOGELS — It is out of this book here.

Ms Davies — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, it is my understanding that it is not appropriate for members in this house to state incorrect information.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Gippsland West will have ample opportunity to speak on that issue when she raises points in her own contribution. The honourable member for Warrnambool, without assistance.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member for Warrnambool, without assistance!

Mr VOGELS — The source is the 2002–03 *Public Sector Asset Investment Program — Budget Information Paper No. 1* tabled by the Treasurer last week.

Ms Davies — It is out of date.

Mr VOGELS — It is out of date already? It was tabled last Thursday but I would not doubt it is out of date.

For the standardisation of regional freight lines, which is very important in the south-west of Victoria for mineral sands, et cetera the funding allocation was \$96 million; expenditure to date, \$5 million. For the Wodonga rail freight and urban development the allocation was \$30 million; expenditure to date \$851 000.

Under the budget for the Department of Natural Resources and Environment the Sunraysia Horticulture Centre was allocated \$3.5 million, and actual expenditure to date is nil. Marine park vessels, which are meant to be out there when we have developed these marine parks to make sure there are no people out there pinching stuff — were allocated \$630 000 to the end of June, and the actual expenditure is nil. Regional telecommunications statewide — \$3 million, actual expenditure nil. Maryborough police station — \$4.5 million, actual expenditure \$504 000. A 10-year cell safety project so we do not have prisoners sitting in cells in police stations was allocated \$50 million but the actual expenditure so far is \$4.24 million. Police protective equipment to keep our police safe — actual expenditure for the last year was supposed to be \$7.8 million but the expenditure was nil. Apsley police station in the Western Province — \$250 000, expenditure nil. Branhholme police station — allocation \$250 000, expenditure nil.

Casterton Secondary College was allocated \$612 000, but the actual expenditure is nil. Merrivale Primary School was allocated \$928 000, and the government has actually spent \$361 000 there.

It is all just smoke and mirrors — it is all nil for nil. The minister goes on in his second-reading speech to say:

Regional Development Victoria will be a practical, no-nonsense body that gets on with the job, working alongside local councils to put projects on the ground and create local jobs.

This legislation will bring another layer of bureaucracy that local councils will have to try to wade through, and eventually when they get through that bureaucracy there will be another layer and another layer. I see this legislation as just window-dressing.

The minister goes on in his second-reading speech to say that building approvals are at record levels. The simple reason for that is that our interest rates are probably the lowest they have ever been, and when you add the federal government's first home buyer scheme grants of \$7000 and then \$14 000, people have been out there building houses. But what the state government is doing is collecting stamp duty at an average rate of \$14 000 a house and ripping it straight out of the system.

The minister talks about having \$12 billion worth of food exports by the year 2010. This is a project that has been in place for nearly 10 years, so hopefully we will get there by the year 2010. I hope the drought will not have too big an effect on that.

I see one of the credits the minister has claimed is Murray Goulburn Cooperative and its major new investment in Koroit, with total sales of around \$2 billion and exports of more than 400 000 tonnes of dairy products. The state government put in \$63 000 for a turn-in lane on a \$50 million project, yet it claims the credit.

Mr Dixon interjected.

Mr VOGELS — Yes, a turn-in lane. The co-op got \$63 000 on a \$50 million project, and here we have the government claiming credit for it.

There is no shortage of talent, ideas, determination and courage in country Victoria. That is despite the shackles that are often put on by government and the red tape that results. The minister talks about the budget, saying:

Over our first three budgets we have spent over \$2 billion in rural infrastructure.

He is, of course, counting the \$50 million that the dairy farmers paid for at Murray-Goulburn as part of his infrastructure development.

If we were honest we would be debating the percentage of the budget that is spent in rural Victoria. Under the Kennett government, around 32 per cent of the budget was spent in rural Victoria, but this government has never got over 28 per cent in its three years in office. That is the more genuine figure. Because of the income that is being raked in et cetera, the dollars are not all that important. It is the percentage of the budget that is spent in rural Victoria that is important. It was 32 per cent; now it is down to 28 per cent. It is a disgrace.

Mr Hulls — So is your speech!

Mr VOGELS — The minister interjects. He has been to Warrnambool three times, I think, or maybe four times.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member for Warrnambool should ignore interjections. The Attorney-General knows that he should not be interjecting across the table. The honourable member for Warrnambool, without assistance.

Mr VOGELS — The minister tried to scuttle the \$8.8 million Warrnambool court house project, but could not because it was already in the forward estimates. He has been down there three or four times now announcing it, and still not one brick has been laid. Of the \$8.8 million, in three years they have spent only \$1151 in developing it. I hope the minister comes to Warrnambool on Sunday, because we have the races on. That will be another great day, and he can go to Avoca as well on Saturday — another great day.

Mr Hulls interjected.

Mr VOGELS — We talk about hospitals and aged care services. In the last three or four years of the Kennett government I went to hospital openings at Port Fairy, Koroit, Mortlake, Timboon and Apollo Bay, and the next ones on the list were Camperdown and Terang. They are still waiting after three years. Hopefully they are still in the pipeline.

I went to openings of police stations at Lismore, Port Campbell and Warrnambool, but there has been not one new police station under this government in my area. In his second-reading speech the minister said:

Community halls are being rebuilt and restored.

I would say to the minister, 'Name one'. He said:

Regional rail lines are being reopened.

Where? I have not seen one reopen.

Environmental flows will be restored in our great rivers — the Snowy ...

I think that is an indictment in a drought year. It is not something of which you should be proud. Some 38 000 megalitres have been sent down the Snowy, worth in today's market prices, given what farmers are paying for it, probably over \$10 million. Yet here we are running it into the ocean in a drought year. That is a disgrace. He should come out and say, 'This is a good project, the restoration of the Snowy, but we will not do it in a drought year'. The minister said:

Our country road network will be the best in Australia.

Thank God the federal government is putting funding directly into local councils now instead of going through the state government, because if it comes to here we will never see it back in rural Victoria.

This is a drought year, but dairy licensing fees have approximately doubled. Instead of having a flat rate — I think the highest could be \$180 a year — this government has changed it to a volume charge. Probably nobody could argue that a volume charge is not fair — 0.1 cents a litre is probably fair — but to do it based on last year's figures when in a drought year the average dairy farmer will be lucky to get half the produce of last year — and when his fees will double — is I think pretty tough. The minister also said:

Right around the state, people have come along to regional and community cabinets ...

I went to the one in Warrnambool. Most of people I spoke to after said, 'How did you go?'

An honourable member interjected.

Mr VOGELS — Exactly. They know me very well in Warrnambool. They got lectures. 'Yes, we will look into it and have another inquiry'.

Ms Duncan interjected.

Mr VOGELS — I am reading straight from the minister's second-reading speech:

Right around the state, people have come along to regional community cabinets, to the rural and regional mayors summits.

The mayors tell me, 'Boring, boring, boring and more boring'. It is absolute rubbish, and less and less are coming each year. A lot just tick off and then go down the street and do a bit of shopping, because it is the one time of year they now come to Melbourne.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr VOGELS — No, they are not on a gravy train at all; real mayors are not.

In conclusion — and I probably should wind up — there is no doubt that this government is racing to an early election while trying its old smoke and mirrors trick. It has not delivered for the last three years. As with most of the things I have read out, it is a case of promising heaps and spending zilch. The government is going to try and hoodwink the public, or rural Victorians in particular, one more time by going to an

early election before they wake up that nothing is happening.

I would say, 'Get on with delivering projects to prove you are genuine. Let's start connecting the gas to towns. Let's get enough generating capacity out there so our power bills do not double next year when the subsidy goes off in April'. Why is that not happening? Because the generating power is not there, because it has not built any new facilities to produce the power.

Ms Duncan interjected.

Mr VOGELS — David White sold it off. David White sold off the Loy Yang B power station under the Kirner government. We are — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr VOGELS — Victorians and Australians are obviously a society that is prepared to give new governments a honeymoon period. This government was left with a surplus of \$1.7 billion, which it has managed to spend. We are down to \$200 million, according to the Treasurer — we are about to go into the red — and basically none of the major projects has been delivered. No fast rail — you name it, it just is not there. There is no courthouse in Warrnambool — and that is what upsets me the most.

This bill will deliver another layer of bureaucracy that small businesses and local governments have to wade through to get to the next layer, with another lot of people wearing cardigans sitting at desks, then the next layer, and nothing will change.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member for Gisborne does not need assistance before she commences her presentation.

Ms DUNCAN (Gisborne) — I am interested to hear the honourable member for Warrnambool speak on the bill. I would not want to hear him speak against a bill if that was a speech in favour of one. It has been interesting to hear the members of the opposition supporting the bill — 'but'. It is like what happened with many of the bills we have seen in the Parliament in the last session: opposition members said, 'We support the bill, but' and then they spend the next 10 or 15 minutes criticising the same bill that they then move to support. I suspect that if it is not their legislation, if it is not their idea, it is a bad idea but if it is their idea and their legislation it is fantastic.

I am pleased to speak on the Regional Development Victoria Bill. It puts in place another Bracks government commitment made before the election, and that was to growing the whole of the state, not just to the end of the tram tracks of the Melbourne CBD where we know the previous government had a particular focus. Through each successive budget this government has demonstrated that commitment.

The purpose of the bill is to facilitate economic and community development in rural and regional Victoria by establishing the statutory body known as Regional Development Victoria. The aim is to enhance policy development and program and service delivery to ensure that regional Victoria gets the best of investment opportunities — gets the share of investment opportunities that it needs and deserves. For many years in the past it has often been neglected.

The functions and the powers of this office will be used to enhance the economic development of rural and regional Victoria. It does that by setting up a number of things. One of the key features is the advisory committee. It will be a benefit to Victoria; the knowledge and experience of people in regional Victoria will be pooled and we can use and build on their knowledge and experience to make this state the best it can possibly be. To a large extent the role of the advisory committee is to advise the government on matters relating to economic and community development. It will also play a major role in promoting rural and regional Victoria. The members of the committee must come from rural and regional Victoria and have skills and knowledge in economic development, community development, finance and marketing. These people will work with state government and local government — all levels of government — to ensure we make regional Victoria the best it possibly can be.

The principal functions will be to facilitate new investment in rural and regional Victoria; to facilitate the operation and growth of existing businesses in rural and regional Victoria; to facilitate the creation of jobs within the private and public sectors; and to propose rural and regional infrastructure development opportunities. This builds on the existing policies of the Bracks government, on projects like the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and a number of other key government initiatives.

The only thing from the honourable member for Warrnambool I would agree with is where he says, 'Let's get on with the job'. This is what the Bracks government is saying. We have put a lot of work and investment into many of the projects that we are now

seeing come to fruition. We look forward to many of those continuing on — for example, the regional fast train. I look forward to seeing the benefits that service will deliver and, like most good projects, they cannot be done overnight. They cannot be planned and developed overnight, as the opposition would have us believe.

Sitting suspended 6.30 p.m. until 8.02 p.m.

Ms DUNCAN — I will go on and speak a little further about the Regional Development Victoria Bill 2002, which as I said earlier puts into place another Bracks government commitment. In my view the key piece of this legislation is a further demonstration of the Bracks government's commitment to growing all of Victoria, not just the city centre. It is also a recognition that Victoria does not stop at the end of the tram tracks, as we have seen previously.

The bill builds on the fabulous growth in country Victoria, the commitments made by the government in successive budgets and on all the government does in delivering benefits to country Victoria. Building approvals are at record levels and regional exports are increasing. Food and fibre exports reached over \$7 billion last year, which is a massive increase of 43 per cent over the last two years. Regional Victoria is kicking on.

The bill will help to continue the good work of the government. From my point of view one of the things I look forward to the bill delivering on is the extension of the natural gas network into regional Victoria. There have been no extensions to this pipeline over the past five years. The opposition has now recognised that perhaps this is something that might deliver some benefit to regional Victoria. When in government it had seven years to do something but did nothing. Rather than doing anything it put enormous impediments in the way of extending the gas pipeline, so while it may have been difficult previously it is now a lot more difficult.

I am very proud to be part of the Bracks government, which has the political will to implement this extension. I look forward to seeing Regional Development Victoria turn its attention to this critical issue of gas network extension. The gas pipeline is a priority of this government, and its extension is a good example of how Regional Development Victoria will focus on the needs of country Victoria. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DIXON (Dromana) — It was interesting that in his contribution the honourable member for Warrnambool talked about a long list of regional projects in his area that were promised but have failed

to come to fruition. The same situation is reflected in my electorate. Many signs announce that these projects are going to start, but they have never actually started.

Mr Robinson — The sign-writers are well employed.

Mr DIXON — As the honourable member for Mitcham says, the sign-writers are well employed. The signs go up 18 months before anything happens. A sign has been on a couple of major road projects in rural areas in my electorate for a long while but not one piece of roadwork has been done. The smallest piece of minor roadwork, which was worth about \$50 000, was done quickly, but the sign is still there 12 months after the project was finished.

Before I start my brief remarks I would like to mention amendment 2 put forward by the honourable member for Gippsland West, which proposes to amend clause 13. Clause 13 reads:

A member of the Committee holds office for a term not exceeding 3 years specified in his or instrument of appointment and is eligible for reappointment.

The honourable member proposes that the word 'her' be added to that clause. I can only surmise that the original bill was written before the Labor Party conference in Queensland when the 40 per cent rule was invoked, so 'her' must be added. The honourable member for West Gippsland has very nicely done the bidding of the government, corrected its spelling and grammatical errors and has taken the rap for that. This should have been a government amendment rather than one proposed by the honourable member for Gippsland West.

I turn now to the bill itself and how it affects my electorate. I do not think Regional Development Victoria will make a huge difference. The opposition does not oppose the bill, but there is no need for legislation. RDV is being established by an act of Parliament because the government would like to be seen to be doing something for regional Victoria.

It will service 47 municipalities in the state, but my concern is that it can include nine interface councils, one of which is the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council. The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council is about 70 per cent rural and 30 per cent urban. It is growing; it has a high growth rate of 2.5 per cent. The uncertainty this bill provides for these interface councils is the fact that they are really at the whim of the minister as to whether any of the projects they would like to get up in their municipalities will be eligible

under the fund and the committee that will be set up through this legislation.

Rather than having something straightforward and clear cut where, if a project is to be in a rural area — and I think what is a rural area and what is an urban or built-up area are fairly easily defined — this legislation should just automatically apply to it, rather than the nine interface councils having to apply to the minister and ask that a special exemption be given to an area of the municipality that could benefit from a capital project.

I think this is very much a hit-and-miss way of going about business. It brings a lot of uncertainty to these shires and city councils. It is certainly in great danger of being politicised, because I can see some picking and choosing going on about what is and what is not a rural area. I dare say it will have nothing to do with the land use but will have more to do with the margin of the seat.

Often it will be too little, too late. If there is a long process of applying to the minister for exemption, by the time that goes through the bureaucracy, into the minister's office and back again to the shire or city council, it is probably too late for it, or they have missed the funding round, or whatever the case might be.

It is good for the interface councils to be recognised. I have worked very hard with the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council to have it recognised, and that council and the other interface councils have done a great job in being recognised. You just cannot have clear black and white lines between what is a rural and what is an urban area. These interface councils that are recognised in this bill are very important to Victoria. Each of them has a different constituency, different issues, and different capital needs, and that needs to be recognised. They are not city, they are not rural, and as I said, the council in my area is 70 per cent rural.

I have looked at the figures for what sorts of capital works need to be done within the Mornington Peninsula shire. They identify that over the next five years about \$110 million worth of capital works need to be done. They have an expected expenditure of about \$55 million — that is all they can possibly raise through their rates — and so have a shortfall of \$55 million. If they can access this fund it will be well worth it for them.

Probably one of the two greatest capital needs is an expansion of public transport. We now have a better service, but it certainly needs to be included in the Met

and expanded into the more remote and rural areas of the electorate. We are also one of the two interface municipalities that does not have a drainage authority. The drainage throughout our shire is very much hit and miss; there is no authority to control and coordinate it. That needs to be addressed, in terms of not only management but also capital works.

With those few words I wish the legislation well, but with the proviso that the interface councils have something far more cut and dried than what they will have with this legislation.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! Prior to calling the honourable member for Mildura, I remind honourable members that if they wish to have a conversation, they should leave the chamber.

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — I rise to support the bill. I am aware of the time elements here, and I will make my comments brief.

I have to say that things have come a long way since I was first elected to this place. I acknowledge the good work that has been done with regional development by this government. To steal the words from the second-reading speech, I will say that much has already been achieved, much more is to come, and there is still a lot more to be done. I have to echo those words; there is a fair degree of catch-up needed, and some of the projects are not in sight. That is the thing that concerns a lot of us in this place. I know that when governments do things it takes a long time, but there seems to be an inordinate delay in achieving some of these outcomes.

The bill will set up a regional statutory authority that will report to and receive direction from the minister. The boundaries will be between Melbourne and regional and rural Victoria and will be determined by local government authorities, and extend to the municipalities of Cardinia, Casey, Hume, Melton, Mornington Peninsula, Nillumbik, Whittlesea, Wyndham and Yarra Ranges.

I have to make some reference to the Eureka Project, which has reported on what has happened in regional Victoria since the last election in a discussion paper it has put out headed 'What is country Victoria saying three years after its revolt?'. It is an interesting discussion paper, and the project has come up with some very brief notations in a discussion note headed 'Three years later: what does country Victoria have to say?'. The discussion note states:

Government departments are running the agenda
Big projects are no substitute for recurrent program funding

Bureaucrats are too political and out of touch
Only a handful of ministers have earned respect
Local solutions and experience don't count for anything
'Community capacity building' is being left to chance
Small towns and villages still out in the cold

As I have indicated, there is certainly much to be recognised with this government, but there is a lot to be done. I think the Eureka Project discussion paper should be given some merit in taking notice of these issues; otherwise we are doomed to repeat the mistakes we already have.

The paper quotes one delegate as saying:

It's a bloody long day, driving 8 hours to Melbourne and back for a 20-minute meeting.

Many people in the bureaucracy do not seem to realise that. The document also reports that added to that, there is an increased influence of ministerial advisers in their own right. I think that becomes a barrier between the community, the public service and ministers, and that there needs to be a greater flow of information going direct to and from ministers and communities.

The paper also states:

'Community building' in country Victoria means that ministers, advisers and most especially bureaucrats need to be spending serious and thoughtful amounts of time in the country on a regular and reliable basis. This needs to be the philosophical backbone of the way the government departments do business rather than just being seen as a cosmetic 'add-on'. The centralisation of authority and policy development has to end.

I think that document should be well read by most members of Parliament. It is not a criticism of the Minister for State and Regional Development. I think he has shone in this area, and I think his leadership led to 28 per cent of the population getting some recognition in capital works — and I think the budget before last showed 40 per cent.

As the second-reading speech says, much is needed to be done, and we need to refocus the balance between city and country. Everybody is deserving of a fair share, and I am sure this Parliament will ensure that that happens. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — I rise to make a brief contribution to the Regional Development Victoria Bill. It is very important that we as members have a good look at this piece of legislation.

I refer to clause 5, which refers to the functions and powers of Regional Development Victoria. I could go through each paragraph, (a) through to (l), and I could

also pick up on some of the amendments. But each paragraph picks up the issue. I start with the first one — facilitate — then the others state the following functions: facilitate, facilitate, propose, facilitate, facilitate, administer money, promote, facilitate, liaise. That is about all this bill does.

This bill does absolutely nothing. It does nothing for the people of Victoria and it does nothing for rural and regional Victoria. It is an absolute brick wall between the minister and local government. It is designed to slow down projects right around rural and regional Victoria.

The bill does nothing! It is a 9-page bill with a 19-page second-reading speech. That we are even discussing this piece of legislation is an absolute slander. We are wasting people's time and we are wasting the Parliament's time, because the bill does nothing. It contains six 'facilitates', one 'propose', one 'promote', one 'liaise', and one 'administer money'. The bill does nothing and it is an absolute disgrace that it has been introduced into Parliament.

Around rural and regional Victoria all we ever hear about is the applications that are being made to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) and the delays. This bill sets up a brick wall between the minister and local government and the people who are trying to get the projects up and running. Is it any wonder the people out there are saying, 'You are an absolute do-nothing government because you brought legislation into this Parliament which is a stunt. It does nothing. It shuffles around public servants and does nothing. If you could start a project you would be able to put your hand up and say, "We have done something"'.⁴

Mr Trezise interjected.

Mr MULDER — The honourable member for Geelong should not start to interject. There he was through the week walking down the Geelong Road with the Minister for Transport. He should have been over the rail looking at the — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! The Minister for Local Government is out of his place and out of order. The honourable member for Polwarth should ignore interjections.

Mr MULDER — I will ignore the interjections, but I will pick up the issue in relation to the honourable member for Geelong, who must be getting very sore from sitting on fences. He has never made a move in any way, shape or form. He was happy to walk down the Princes Freeway and have his photo taken with the

Minister for Transport when what he should have done was jump the fence and have a look at the fast rail projects. With not a spike in the ground in three years how dare you even think of announcing another road project for Geelong when there is nothing happening in that regard.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! The honourable member should direct his remarks through the Chair!

Mr MULDER — I am sorry, Madam Acting Speaker. As I said, when this piece of legislation was first brought into Parliament we thought it would do something for rural and regional Victoria, but this bill does absolutely nothing.

The government needs to look at issues with reference to the policies of the Liberal Party. There is the policy of the Liberal Party in relation to natural gas in rural Victoria. If only the government had followed the line we took on waste water treatment plants in the small town sewerage schemes right around Victoria and introduced that process into natural gas, allowing municipalities to apply for natural gas projects and get those types of infrastructure programs up and running, I believe it would be heading in the right direction.

This government is the blocker, the filter, the slowdown — a do-nothing government for rural Victoria. You can look at all of those projects and then look at the Liberal Party's current policy on bridges, which is a bridge program to introduce infrastructure into rural Victoria. We would deliver! That is the very difference between the Liberal Party and the Labor Party. We would not talk about it, we would actually deliver.

Mr Maxfield interjected.

Mr MULDER — It would be very interesting if I could show the honourable member for Narracan, who is keen to jump up and down there, the difference between the last two years of the Liberal government and the first two years of the Bracks government. The blue is the Liberal Party, the red is the Labor Party. On infrastructure in rural Victoria \$100 million more was spent by the Liberal Party. Whether it was in education or health the Liberal Party outgunned Labor. The Liberal Party outgunned the government bunch of do-nothings on infrastructure spending in every single quarter looked at.

I could take honourable members through my own electorate of Polwarth. Water initiatives in the electorate included waste water treatment plants for Bannockburn and Timboon, and sewerage work at

Mortlake. What happened to all the infrastructure projects that should have followed on from what the Liberal government introduced? They have all ground to a halt, to the point where the Australian Bureau of Statistics announced that the government had cut spending on water infrastructure.

Mr Maxfield interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! The honourable member for Narracan will have his turn.

Mr MULDER — The government has cut spending on water infrastructure for the state of Victoria by 55 per cent. That is on top of all the announcements that have been made by high-profile businesspeople around the state that we should be spending more. The government is hopeless. It has done nothing. It is nothing more than an insult to the people of country Victoria. People who pay taxes should not have to listen to this.

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — That was an interesting diatribe from the honourable member for Polwarth.

It is a great pleasure to speak on the Regional Development Victoria Bill 2002. I will take a lot less time than the previous member, but I am sure my contribution will have a lot more substance. The bill encapsulates what the Bracks government has been doing for the last three years in Victoria and what it intends to do in the next three or four years as well. Honourable members in this house know the importance of providing investment opportunities for business — —

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr HARDMAN — Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to have less assistance from the other side.

Mr Perton interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster should cease interjecting.

Mr HARDMAN — Since the election of the Bracks government there has been a massive increase in spending in rural Victoria. I have but to go around my own electorate to see it. I could tell the house about Marysville, where there is \$2.3 million in regional development funding for the Lake Mountain resort. But guess what? The federal government was going to give only a few hundred thousand dollars for part of that,

and although the federal government's part of the money has gone missing Lake Mountain is going ahead. It will be a great centre for people to visit. At the moment honourable members are probably aware there is a car park and maybe somewhere to grab a cup of coffee, but in future there will be restaurants, catering services and places for things like shops to be established. That will be a great boost for my electorate and for country Victoria in general.

Just down the road from Lake Mountain is Marysville itself. Recently at Marysville the government announced \$469 000 from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) for streetscaping and drainage in the main street. It is a great project. Later on the same day we went to Alexandra. There was an announcement of \$100 000 for the Alexandra visitor information centre, a project that was being worked for under the previous government but could not be funded.

In my electorate the Murrundindi technology project is in place. That \$500 000 RIDF project will assist people in the trout industry, the timber industry and other local industries in general, to get their products to markets in a less damaged fashion. Also, the wine industry in that area is booming. That was a great project from the RIDF.

In the place where I used to teach, Flowerdale, the Treasurer recently announced a great link project. Flowerdale has quite a long town area with little streets off the main road, the Yea–Whittlesea Road. A path to link the people is going to be built 5 or 6 kilometres down to the south of Silver Creek Road, right up through to the Flowerdale hall and school. The hall will be done up and there will be a couple of rest areas. These are facilities the town has never had and it has been crying out for them for a long time. The Bracks government has delivered through this project.

This bill enshrines the importance of regional development in Victoria through what is described as a statutory body. This bill also brings in rural community development officers — probably one of the most important Bracks government initiatives. Members opposite will know, if they are doing their jobs properly, what the officers can do for our local communities. Rural community development officers can get out there into those communities, assist people in finding the types of programs and projects they can apply for and then help them write the submissions and get them in. Communities have been saying for a long time, 'We haven't got the skills, we haven't got the ability. Our volunteers are too old and tired to apply for these types of funds and to know how to go about it'.

These officers are there to assist. That also assures a great spread of funds around country Victoria, which is a great thing as well.

The purpose of the bill is to make sure that economic and community development occurs in country Victoria and to make sure that the right opportunities are there for investment in country Victoria. It would be great if there were not so many election speeches being read by the other side of the house and if we got on and passed the bill to allow time for other important legislation that is coming on later tonight — and there is a great group of people in the gallery who are interested in that. I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I read this bill with interest when it first came into the house, only to be so disappointed, because I thought we were actually going to get something happening for rural and regional Victoria.

This government promised so much in 1999, but it is really treating rural and regional Victoria with contempt. There is a lack of interest in country Victoria. We have a 19-page second-reading speech to go with a bill that goes for 9 pages, which is obviously meant to pad it out. And despite this 19-page second-reading speech, this bill was not deemed important enough to be debated last week.

The bill lacks substance, it is not necessary and it is only window-dressing. It is more of the smoke and mirrors that we had so much of in the first two years of the Bracks government. All it does is rename a department. Does it speed up the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund? There is no indication of that anywhere. It is just about rebadging and extra costs. The one thing it does is enable the interface councils, at the minister's request, to access funds from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund — but that is the only thing it does.

To see what has happened with rural and regional Victoria you should look at fencing. The previous government said the Crown should pay half the costs of fences destroyed or damaged by natural disasters or, alternatively, provide fencing materials or access to timber on Crown land. This government dismissed the costs involved because of the budget implications, yet it can afford more bureaucrats.

What has happened to the regional fast rail? Nothing — not one spike has been laid.

When you look at roads — the Calder Highway and the Carlisle Bypass — you see that the funding allocation in 2001–02 was \$25 million but the actual expenditure

was only \$6.48 million. When you look at infrastructure — for example, the passenger rail to Bairnsdale — you see that it is a \$14 million construction project, and the funding allocation in 2001–02 was \$4.8 million. How much has been spent? The answer is \$748 000.

The restoration of the passenger line to Leongatha is a \$5.6 million construction project, and the funding allocation in 2001–02 was \$2.4 million. How much has been spent? Zero. The restoration of the passenger rail to Mildura is a \$7.7 million construction project, and the funding allocation in 2001–02 was \$2 million. The actual expenditure? Zero. The standardisation of the regional freight line is a \$96 million construction project. The funding allocation in 2001–02 was \$10 million, but the actual expenditure was \$5.329 million. And on it goes.

If you look at the Sunraysia horticultural centre, you see there is a \$3.5 million budget to modernise facilities, with funding allocation of 2001–02 of \$1.3 million. The actual expenditure was zero. For regional telecommunications statewide, including a \$630 000 infrastructure installation, the funding allocation for 2001–02 was \$2.4 million — and the actual expenditure was zero.

If you look at police stations you see that the funding allocation for Gisborne police station was \$1.8 million, but the actual expenditure was \$159 000 — and so it goes. Kaniva had a funding allocation of \$554 000 but the actual expenditure was \$51 000 — which shows this is a do-nothing government. Kilmore police station had an allocation \$1.2 million but expenditure of \$239 000. I have pages and pages of these promises and pages and pages of budget allocations — but nothing has happened. For Ocean Grove the funding allocation was about \$1.7 million but the actual expenditure was \$680 000. For Romsey we have the 10-year project to upgrade cells and buildings: although \$5 million was allocated in 2001–02, only \$4.242 million was spent. We also have the diversionary program for Aboriginal offenders: although \$1.75 million was allocated in 2001–02, actual expenditure was \$4000.

We have an integrated road safety campaign for which the allocation has not been spent, as well as an allocation for Yackandandah police station that has not been spent and zero allocations for Apsley, Branxholme and Chiltern police stations.

It was interesting to note that when the honourable member for Portland was listing a lot of things for which the money had not been spent the honourable member for Ripon interjected, probably thinking he

was being clever, saying, 'Ha, ha! Look at the money we have saved'. The government has not done anything for country Victoria. It has been so slow getting off the mark: it has been making promises and making budget allocations but not actually spending. The Bracks government — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs FYFFE — I am trying to talk faster, Madam Acting Speaker, because I understand there is an agreement that we only have 6 minutes each. I really have an awful lot to say.

I want to close by commenting on the timber industry restructuring — that is, the logging cuts that are going to break small communities. Premier Bracks said he would govern for all of Victoria, including rural Victoria. The timber cuts will cost at least 600 jobs directly in the forest industry. The special packages offered to the timber industry are a joke.

During the adjournment debate last week the honourable member for Gippsland East raised the need for the government to make decisions and take action, because its indecision is ruining industry. People do not know what to do, including whether to invest in new machinery. The banks are looking closely at their finances. The timber industry is not progressing while the government sits on its hands and dillies and dallies and does not give clear directions by making clear decisions. There is a lot more I would like to say on what is not being done for rural and regional Victoria. The wide-ranging 19-page second-reading speech opens the door for us to argue all these points.

Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) — I support the Regional Development Victoria Bill, along with every other member of the Parliament, despite what some honourable members are saying. The bill sets up the statutory body, Regional Development Victoria, which has a significant range of apparent responsibilities, including facilitating new investment, facilitating the operation and growth of existing businesses and facilitating the creation of jobs and so on. I have added a couple of extra duties in the amendments I have circulated in the house, including that the body should facilitate the development of information technology infrastructure in rural and regional areas and liaise with the Department of Education and Training on the development of education and training opportunities in rural and regional areas. I have included those to stress to the minister how important proper IT infrastructure and education and training opportunities are to the development of business and employment opportunities in rural areas.

I agree with the opposition that there are clear and definite elements of window-dressing in the structure to be established by Regional Development Victoria. The issues this body will deal with should be dealt with by the Department of Infrastructure or the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, as it is now called. The legislation will cause that part of the department to stand out a bit more.

The potential improvement created by setting up this body is in the clarification of roles and in providing a more overt structure for councils, individuals and groups in rural and regional areas. The legislation has the potential to clarify a structure rather than allowing it to be opaque, vague, formatted and bureaucratic. That is enough to encourage me to support the bill.

The clear advisory structure provided through the Regional Development Advisory Committee has the capacity to do good. Creating a responsible authority that is answerable to the minister has the potential to stop the department from being the fiefdom of a minister and enable it to be a more open and overtly obvious structure. Whether it works will depend on the intent and practice of the minister.

I acknowledge the proactive efforts of the Minister for State and Regional Development. He has vastly increased and improved the status of and focus on regional issues under this government compared to past governments. I note there is still a long way to go in rural areas in bringing essential major infrastructure into our region.

Whether it be through this structure or through the minister, the government must ensure the extension of natural gas into rural areas. It must continue its efforts to ensure freight is carried on our soon-to-be reopened rail lines so that those B-doubles are moved off our highways.

The government must acknowledge and commit to the building of the Pakenham bypass. The Gippsland local government network comprises seven councils in the Gippsland region. It made the Pakenham bypass the major priority more than three years ago. I remind the minister of a document I sent him at the end of 1999 which urged the government to accept the network as a body that was able to accurately identify development priorities in Gippsland. That document urged closer cooperation between local councils and the government and urged the government to accept the Pakenham bypass as a priority.

Contrary to the contribution of the honourable members for Warrnambool and Evelyn, who were not correct —

I do not know how many other members of the opposition read the same briefing paper — I am pleased to acknowledge the early work that has been done on the reopening of the South Gippsland rail line. Somewhere between \$600 000 and \$750 000 has been spent on three bridges and track work between Korumburra and Leongatha over the last couple of months. I think the book opposition members have been reading is out of date. The latest work on that line is the upgrading of the station at Nyora. The people of that town have spent a lot of time and effort to make their town square look attractive, and they will be very pleased that the station, an essential part of their focus, will match up. All those things are appreciated by the residents, and they are vital to the development of the South Gippsland tourist rail, a valuable tourism attraction in our region.

The last part of the bill that I highlight is the specific acknowledgment, which I commend, of the special needs of interface shires. Under this legislation the Minister for State and Regional Development can instruct the authority to allow the rural parts of interface shires to participate in programs designated for rural areas, which is important. They will still not be able to access the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. I have had many conversations with the Treasurer about this issue, and it is clear to me that those shires have special needs and require their own special funds to deal with the growth pressures they face.

This part of the legislation provides a pathway for stepping beyond the barriers that interface shires such as Cardinia shire in my own electorate face. I am pleased that progress is being made on this issue, and as I said before, I look forward to continuing progress.

It is very obvious that rural areas are way behind in the services and infrastructure which metropolitan areas have taken for granted for a long time. It is also obvious that we cannot fully grow, develop or help ourselves without the additional support of that extra infrastructure.

Amendment 3, which I have circulated, aims for a more substantial planning process than the annual reporting, which is required in the bill. It aims to ensure that the authority develops long-term plans that are openly available and capable of being discussed.

The government has indicated that it will not support the amendments but will consider the issues that are raised by the amendments. I ask the opposition to consider whether it can support the amendments. However, in general I am pleased to commend the bill

to the house with the proviso that it is very necessary to make this work, not just make it a token gesture.

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I am pleased to join the debate on the Regional Development Victoria Bill. I have listened with a great deal of interest to the contributions from members on both sides of the house, and particularly the contribution from the Leader of the National Party, who sought to put into proper perspective the legislation that is before the house as far as the National Party is concerned and to highlight the difficulties faced by people who live in country areas of Victoria.

I was disappointed with the rhetoric contained in the second-reading speech presented to the house by the Treasurer. He gave no credit to previous governments — and I repeat, governments — of this state for what they did in the past. I get angry when I hear members in the government benches say nothing happened in country Victoria in the years between 1992 and 1999. I have invited members such as the honourable member for Seymour and the honourable member for Bendigo East to visit my electorate of Murray Valley to see that despite the difficulties we face in country Victoria developments have taken place over a long period of time.

I noted also that in the second-reading speech the minister indicated that the creation of an organisation similar to Regional Development Victoria had been suggested in the early 1970s, and he seemed to blame the conservative side of politics for not introducing an organisation such as that created by this bill. What he forgot was that from 1982 to 1992 a Labor government was running Victoria, and had it been so keen to see development in country Victoria surely it would have introduced this sort of legislation during that period. I take issue with the Treasurer purely and simply on the basis of the comments in his second-reading speech. I commented on the Treasurer's rhetoric in the early part of the speech, and also on his remark that this type of organisation had been suggested back in the early 1970s but nothing had happened. The blame for nothing happening in that period also rests with the former Labor government.

I also indicated earlier, and I do so again while the Treasurer is in the house, that I get angry when I hear honourable members say that nothing has happened in country Victoria. Sure we want more, and there is no doubt about that. Sure problems have developed in country areas, but corrective action has been taken not only by the Victorian Labor government but also by the federal coalition government. I am interested when I hear the Treasurer and others talk about low

unemployment in country Victoria. I note that the federal Liberal member for Indi in a recent media release claimed that credit for the low unemployment levels in north-eastern Victoria should go to the federal government. Perhaps credit should be given on both sides, where credit is due. I suggest to the Treasurer — and to the government — that he should attribute credit for actions taken by previous governments while suggesting that perhaps his government can do it better.

The National Party certainly supports the objectives of this legislation. It understands that since the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund was established in 1999 there have been some advantages for country Victoria. The Minister for Transport visited my electorate recently to open the rail trails project, which is a cycling track that goes from Wangaratta to Bright and covers Beechworth as well. The minister was opening the project and I joined him in riding a bike through that area and reminded him that in fact \$1.5 million that had been approved for that project had been approved by the previous government. I suggested that perhaps it should be given credit for that.

The Minister for Health will be visiting Wangaratta on 22 November to open three projects. One of those projects is the \$15.4 million redevelopment of the Wangaratta District Base Hospital. I remind the Treasurer that that project was approved by the previous government. It is a great project. What I want to ensure is that this government understands that things were done by previous governments that were effective and that those governments should be given credit for them. That is not to say that we cannot get improvements and that better things cannot happen.

Clause 10 refers to a number of municipalities in outer metropolitan Melbourne listed in the schedule of the bill which are to be included in assistance being provided for the development of industry in country Victoria. I suggest that the Treasurer read the part of his budget speech in which he said that the government is giving support to regional areas. But he also made a proviso. He said that the government recognised that the majority of people want to live in outer metropolitan Melbourne and would be giving them support to make sure those areas continue to develop. I suggest to the Treasurer that we need to have an active policy of giving weight to industry that wants to establish in country Victoria. If you drive into Melbourne as I do almost once a week, when you come through Craigieburn you see the enormous development — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! I remind honourable members that the level of

conversation is a little too high. Should they wish to carry on a conversation, I ask them to leave the chamber.

Mr JASPER — I remind the Treasurer, who is also the Minister for State and Regional Development, of the comments he made in the budget speech. I suggest that if we are going to concentrate on funding being provided to outer metropolitan Melbourne it will continue to develop and will grow bigger and bigger. We need an active decentralisation policy, and hopefully through this bill we will have a policy which will support and develop industry in country Victoria.

I come back to the point I made just a short time ago. If you drive into Melbourne as I do almost once a week — not that I want to — you will see the development going on in Craigieburn, where new houses are going up with the building boom out there. We see continued development being supported by the government in outer metropolitan Melbourne. I understand legislation is being brought before the Parliament to have green wedges, but the fact is that the development is taking place.

We need to have specific support provided for industry to establish in country Victoria. Unless the government does that, industry will continue to expand and develop in metropolitan Melbourne and only develop in country areas where it can be related to specific country interests, where it gets support and where it is particularly related to primary industry. I refer to the dairy industry, the factories of Murray Goulburn and Kraft, Uncle Toby's and its factory at Wahgunyah, Dominance Industries in Wangaratta, and the timber industry based in north-eastern Victoria.

I repeat again, the important part of this legislation is that specific assistance will be provided to industry in country Victoria. I repeat that again because I do not think the Minister for State and Regional Development really understands. The minister should read his speech again.

An Honourable Member — No, no!

Mr JASPER — He does not want to read it in the house but he should read it to himself. The rhetoric is unbelievable: the magic the government has created since it came to power.

What I hear so often is, 'The former government closed schools'. I look at my electorate of Murray Valley with its 34 schools. Four schools were closed in that period; they each had less than 12 students and could not be sustained. I could go into the stories behind why each of them was closed, but I will not. We have 34 schools

in Murray Valley. They have had money spent on them and they are in excellent condition. We need more — of course we need more. There is evidence that we need funding to be provided now and the maintenance under the physical resource management system should be reinstated to overcome that situation.

Members opposite talk about the previous government having closed hospitals. No hospitals were closed in the Murray Valley electorate. The only hospital closure was in 1988 when Labor was in power. The greatest change was the change to Glenview Community Care at Rutherglen. My brother was the key person who pushed that change; he was right and I was wrong about changing over and going to Glenview Community Care. The hospital provides a great health service in north-eastern Victoria and within my electorate of Murray Valley.

The government talks about police stations and having more police stations in country Victoria. Members opposite should come and have a look at my electorate. We have new or near-new police stations across the area. We have worked hard for that and we have those stations. I believe we have achieved delivery of excellent policing services in north-eastern Victoria based at the 24-hour police station in Wangaratta. Approval for that police station was provided by the previous Labor government in 1991. I mention that because what I am seeking to achieve is some sort of balance and recognition that good things are done by both sides of the house. We believe that there needs to be more such recognition and we would follow up with that.

The other issue that has been mentioned at length in this house is the extension of natural gas. Natural gas has been extended through the Murray Valley electorate through Rutherglen, Yarrawonga, Cobram and Numurkah. Why? Because I worked on getting that. It took 12 years to get the extension of natural gas into the Murray Valley electorate. The only reason we got it is there was a change. Previously we had uniform charges in Victoria. The Gas and Fuel Corporation told me that with the uniform charges it could not extend the natural gas pipeline to the Murray Valley because it could not be justified on a cost-return basis.

I pressed the corporation for many, many years to do something about it. In the finish a change was made so that the Gas and Fuel Corporation could charge an increment for those receiving natural gas through the electorate. They had probably a 10 per cent increment to cover the infrastructure for the development into country Victoria. So I pressed hard to ensure government funding was provided, and we got it.

I say again to the house, while there has been privatisation of many facilities and government departments and authorities in country Victoria — and I am not being a white-haired boy as far as the coalition was concerned from 1992 to 1999 — one of the mistakes, apart from removing passenger rail services from country Victoria, was privatising the Gas and Fuel Corporation.

Mr Maxfield — Hear, hear!

Mr JASPER — The difficulty the government will have is if private enterprise is to be forced to extend natural gas into country Victoria, the only way it will do it is by using the same program used in the Murray Valley electorate whereby it is allowed to levy an incremental charge. I suggest to the government that if it is going to do that and it is prepared to subsidise that extension I will support it, but it will have to do something in my electorate to offset the charges being imposed at present on those of us living in north-eastern Victoria and within my electorate of Murray Valley. That is the case. That is what the government has to look at, and I suggest that that will be a difficulty.

Bridges were mentioned particularly by one or two speakers. The Rural City of Wangaratta is a typical example which should be mentioned. Within that municipality 8 per cent of bridges are on local roads. It has 365 bridges or culverts and a percentage of them have load limits and need replacement. The government talks about needing more funding. One of the great programs was the Roads to Recovery funding provided by the federal government. Members opposite should give the federal government credit for that program. It needs to be continued for us in country areas, particularly for the Rural City of Wangaratta, which is seeking support to upgrade its bridges. Roads to Recovery is an important program. The government needs to have a look at black spot and other types of funding and jointly provide funding with the federal government to see that that works.

I suggest to the house that unless programs are jointly funded and credit is given to the federal government for what it is doing — —

Mr Cameron interjected.

Mr JASPER — The Minister for Local Government, who is at the table shows, a lack of understanding. I do not think the minister has visited my electorate on many occasions; he would learn something if he did. I honestly believe that the Minister for Local Government has a lot to learn. The smart alec comments coming from the minister at the table are not

acceptable. What the minister should do is listen to other people. He should be able to listen to other people, get a balanced judgment and give credit where it is due occasionally. That is a fault with the government as I see it today. They are the sorts of issues.

Stamp duty has been mentioned. It is a big issue as far as we in country Victoria are concerned. I spoke to the general manager of Bruck Mills only last weekend. The minister at the table is responsible for Workcover and he should be aware of the difficulties being faced by industry. Bruck Mills is one of the great industries in Wangaratta, but it is battling for survival and needs assistance in that sort of area. Where there is 10 per cent stamp duty the government should have a look at what New South Wales put in and consider halving it to 5 per cent. The government received an estimated \$1.8 billion in revenue from stamp duty in the last financial year. We need to get assistance in country areas so that that can happen.

I suggest to the government that while this legislation is supported by the National Party and while members opposite can indicate to the house that they recognise the importance of country areas, what we need is balance generally and in what is being done for us in country areas. I also suggest that the minister at the table as a member coming from a country area does not perhaps have a true understanding of some of the issues of deep concern in country areas. We need to give credit for what has happened in the past, and we need to get action into the future. This legislation will, I think, be able to assist that, provided it is balanced and we get assistance right across country Victoria on a continuing basis. It will not help if, as we have suggested, there is a problem with the municipalities listed in the schedule of the bill cutting into the outer areas of metropolitan Melbourne. If that is the case, we could see funding siphoned off into areas which do not really need support.

I will wind up by saying that decentralisation is not a dirty word as far as the National Party is concerned. What we need to have is active policies to encourage industry to establish in country Victoria. We need to restrict the development that is taking place in metropolitan Melbourne.

Mr Cameron interjected.

Mr JASPER — I have not got onto fast rail, but I should. If you want me to push on to that I can. Fast rail and rail have been a huge issue for me in country areas. To suggest that we have Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and the Latrobe Valley — —

Mr Cameron interjected.

Mr JASPER — The minister would do well to listen. I have said it on a number of occasions, but for a minister to shout across the room and not listen to what others have to say is, I think, a disgrace. I would be interested to hear what he has to say. I will sit and listen if he is prepared to speak.

But if we have a look at what is going on in north-eastern Victoria, what we find is that the federal government is supporting funding to upgrade the standard gauge track between Melbourne, Wodonga and Sydney, but in fact is saying to me that the intrastate line between Wodonga and Melbourne is the responsibility of the state government. An amount of \$96 million was to be provided for upgrading of lines in country Victoria and standardisation. Virtually none of that money has been spent. All we see is the rhetoric coming from the Minister for Transport and others that, 'We will upgrade and improve the transport system, the fast rail between Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong', which most people in those areas who understand it indicate will not improve the delivery of fast rail or improve the service to them anyway.

These are the sorts of issues that should be looked at, and I believe that legislation, while it does have merit, needs to be considered on the basis of the other issues — and major issues — that affect us in country Victoria.

Mr MAXFIELD (Narracan) — I rise to briefly speak on the Regional Development Victoria Bill. Our National Party colleague opposite who has just spoken said some things I found interesting. Certainly his comment about the fact that the previous government of which he was a member should not privatise our gas supplies is one that I wholeheartedly endorse. But when it comes to the principle, how did he vote? Did he stand up and vote with his conscience?

But let's move on to the bill. Certainly it is a bill which is designed to facilitate economic and community development in rural and regional Victoria. The body will be known as Regional Development Victoria.

This is a bill that makes me very proud to be a member of the Bracks Labor government. It is also a bill that tends to point out and explain why the Labor Party has more seats in rural and regional Victoria than the National Party does. It also explains why the Labor Party has more seats in rural Victoria in the lower house than the Liberal Party does. It is because we stand and represent rural Victoria. We understand and know its needs and requirements. Just sitting here before

listening to the debate, I heard some members opposite making the comment that we had not done much in rural Victoria. I thought to myself, 'Let's add up some of the activities that we are engaging in in my electorate alone'.

I started adding up, and first of all was the Ellinbank Dairy Research Centre, with an \$11 million upgrading. I thought about the \$3.5 million for infrastructure development at Mount Baw Baw resort and \$1.8 million for eight projects for revitalising our timber communities. Then I got to education: there was \$5 million for the TAFE Yallourn campus. I got up to a housing call centre in Moe — \$8.6 million to employ over 64 people to provide housing services for this state. I then discovered we are spending \$4 million at Warragul Secondary College. We are also spending \$1 million at the Warragul TAFE college and a tad under half a million dollars at the Warragul Primary School.

Mr Cameron interjected.

Mr MAXFIELD — That is right. I then moved on and discovered that we are spending half a million dollars on our tourism gateway project down near Longwarry, at Sands Road. At the Drouin Secondary College there is a \$2 million redevelopment under way. The Premier will be opening part of that next week. We have \$12 million for the greenhouse research centre, and we are doing the design plan work now in the Latrobe Valley to drive a greenhouse and coalfield development.

Then we have \$2.5 million for the Trafalgar High School, and we have \$3.5 million committed for the nursing home in Trafalgar. We are just waiting on the federal government to give us the beds, but the federal government is slowing down the spending of that money. We have just spent \$850 000 for a new community health centre in Warragul and \$300 000 at the Toorong Falls, as well as upgrading the Moe courthouse.

And there is more! We are spending over half a million dollars for two disability houses in Warragul — one for respite care and one for permanently disabled people.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr MAXFIELD — This is what is happening at the moment — under way, currently being planned or just completed, to respond to the interjection. We are working through these issues. I forgot to mention the \$4.2 million for the half-completed Moe police station, and about \$2 million in black spot funding around my area. On my calculations that adds up to \$60 million,

and I have not even touched on the fast rail development from the Latrobe Valley to Melbourne.

I attended a fast railway community forum in Warragul last night. A range of questions was asked. What I can say about the people who attended our forum is that there was overwhelming support. The National Party opponent who has just been preselected turned up. He sat there silent. He did not say boo. I spoke to that meeting, and I explained what we were doing and answered questions and queries. Certainly people were excited to know about the development that is occurring and to hear about the planning and design work and the trains that are being built in Dandenong for the fast rail.

I will conclude my speech by saying how proud I am to support the Regional Development Victoria Bill. This will drive the benefits further. It will drive the future. It will show that this government is committed to bringing together the bureaucracy in rural Victoria to work for rural and regional Victoria and to delivering a wonderful outcome for all.

Mr PATERSON (South Barwon) — I think this bill pretty well sums up the current Labor government — a whole lot of fairy floss to cover up the fact that it really has done very little over the last three years. You have only to come down to Geelong and the Surf Coast to discover that not much has been going on since the Labor government came to power. This is in stark contrast to the previous seven years, where the great benefits of the previous Liberal government were delivered to the Geelong and Surf Coast regions.

It is interesting to note that at the last election, the Labor candidate in my electorate campaigned very vociferously on the Grovedale railway station project. Since the Labor government has come to power, Mr Acting Speaker, do you know what has happened there? Absolutely nothing. Nothing has happened about the Grovedale railway station, and it has now taken a Liberal Party to promise to build the Grovedale railway station. And still the government remains silent.

In fact when the Minister for Transport was down a couple of months ago he indicated that he would not be building the Grovedale railway station. Realising, I assume, that that was not a particularly popular announcement, he came back a couple of weeks later and said, 'About that thing I said the other day that we were not going to build, we might build it now'. But still there has been no announcement. This is after a consultants report was delivered to the government in 2000. Two years later there has been absolutely no announcement from the Labor government — a Labor

government that pretends to support rural and regional Victoria.

As for connecting gas to Barwon Heads, there has been no announcement from this government. The Liberal Party has announced it will connect the town of Barwon Heads to natural gas.

Another campaign feature of the Labor candidate for South Barwon at the last election was to provide fair compensation for the Barwon Heads Football and Netball Club. This government has had three years to provide fair compensation to the football and netball club — and you guessed it, Mr Acting Speaker, absolutely no money has been given by the government to the club. So you know what value Labor promises have at election time: absolutely none. Labor Party members campaign on issues, they get into government, and three years later they deliver absolutely nothing.

We have seen the botch-up on the Princes Freeway, and I spoke about that earlier today. At the last election the Liberal government promised to make a start on duplicating the Princes Highway to Colac. What did this Labor government do? It cancelled the project. We have seen the farce with the fast rail project, which is going absolutely nowhere. Nothing has occurred on the fast rail project three years down the track.

In opposition the Labor government also promised to create 500 jobs in call centres in Geelong. Do you know how many have been created Mr Acting Speaker? You guessed it. Absolutely none! The Labor Party promised 500 call centre jobs in Geelong and none have been delivered.

Again, we saw a farce when several weeks ago the Minister for Police and Emergency Services came to ceremonially turn the sod at the ambulance station site down there, the money for which had been set aside by the previous Liberal government. Three years down the track nothing has happened, despite the circus of a few weeks ago of the minister pretending to turn the first sod. They had a lovely marquee, and drinks and sandwiches. The circus left town and the site remains vacant with not a thing having happened.

The Labor government when in opposition also made great play of the Grace McKellar Centre, and it has made great play of the money it has supposedly given the aged care centre there. By the end of this financial year, despite its promises of \$19 million, there will still be nearly \$13 million owing on the project.

We have seen so many examples in the public sector asset investment program of promises that have ended

up not being delivered by this Labor government. It promises the money and then does not deliver the projects. It is more fairy floss from this government, which is what we have come to expect from it.

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Regional Development Victoria Bill. At the outset I state that I support the legislation, and I congratulate the Treasurer on bringing it in. I also endorse the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and what it has achieved in country areas. It has not all been easy and there have been some limitations on what it has been able to achieve. One of the main limitations on funding to regional areas is the inability of most rural councils to provide funding for infrastructure proposals because of a lack of resources. They are extremely stretched. There is a real funding crisis within most of our rural councils because of the cost of maintaining current infrastructure let alone providing good quality new infrastructure that will promote business and industry development in country areas.

One of the reasons for the bill — and I had a number of discussions with the Treasurer probably nearly two years ago in relation to this — is the duplication of agencies right across rural areas. When business proposals come up in country areas the duplication of agencies creates problems for the businesses involved in getting their proposals up. If this body has the ability to facilitate the absolutely essential development in rural areas by bringing together those agencies and making it easier for businesses that will be a plus.

I listened to the honourable member for Murray Valley and his commitment to decentralisation. I strongly support decentralisation — I have raised that matter a number of times in this house — and the idea of getting some of the agencies and departments out into country areas. This is a real challenge for us in this place because there is currently a disincentive for the creation of those businesses in country areas. We have set up a system which promotes centralisation, with the lower costs associated with bringing businesses into cities. The cost of transport and communication and the lack of essential infrastructure in regional areas need to be overcome to get those businesses out into country areas. If this body is being set up to promote business development, which is very difficult in country areas, it is absolutely essential to overcome that lack of infrastructure. One of the innovations the Wellington and East Gippsland shire councils I represent raised with the Treasurer was a one-stop shop, and that is what this bill creates.

One of the things that is really important in my area is providing tourism infrastructure, particularly in national parks, so that people can utilise those parks in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way. Putting that infrastructure in is absolutely essential. If the bill makes better use of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to invest in those essential pieces of infrastructure to promote tourism and business development in country areas that will be a good thing. That is why I support the bill.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr CAMERON (Minister for Local Government).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

NATIONAL PARKS (BOX-IRONBARK AND OTHER PARKS) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 12 September; motion of Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation).

Government amendments circulated by Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation) pursuant to sessional orders.

Independent amendments circulated by Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) pursuant to sessional orders.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — According to Dr John Lovering, who chaired the box-ironbark forest and woodlands investigation, the inquiry involved trying to achieve a balance between biodiversity needs and the socioeconomic needs of the users. In recent times the past has caught up with us, and there is no point in deferring the day of reckoning. According to one of the government and departmental publications:

The ecosystem is fragmented and degraded and requires active management to arrest the decline and initiate a recovery. An alarming number of species, including the eastern hare-wallaby and robust greenhood orchid, are already extinct. The nature of the forests has also changed — they now consist of mostly small, younger trees rather than large, older ones. The full effects of this on box-ironbark biodiversity are not yet known. Simply maintaining the status quo would result in further loss of biodiversity within the short term. Active management will be required to recover the natural values of these forests and woodlands.

There has also been a diversity of viewpoints, and widespread consultation has taken place. According to Robin Taylor of the bushland users group, the legislation represents an absolute attack on culture and tradition and is a bushfire waiting to happen. On the other hand, those with a keen interest in environmental

issues are of the view that the people of Victoria are looking to the Liberal Party for leadership on this legislation.

The legislation affects a number of rural communities including Ararat, Stawell, St Arnaud, Dunolly, Inglewood, Castlemaine, Bendigo, Heathcote, Rushworth, Wangaratta, Chiltern and Beechworth. The Liberal Party has a long record of achievement in relation to the environment. It was suggested that one of the factors behind its record of achievement is its striving to achieve high environmental goals that have their origins at the local community level.

The Liberal Party was instrumental in the establishment of the Land Conservation Council. Established in 1970 under the Land Conservation Act the LCC was designed to determine the most appropriate use of Crown land, excluding urban areas, and to make recommendations on land use in order to achieve a balance between conservation and utility. The LCC consisted of an independent chairman and the heads of eight relevant departments, as well as interest groups representing the diverse areas of business, farming and conservation.

Its achievements included the development of a land classification system, with 40 different public land-use categories dividing Victoria into 17 study areas where public land use was analysed. The council made over 4000 recommendations on land management, most of which were accepted and many of which were implemented in the days of the Hamer government.

The Environment Conservation Council, the successor to the LCC, was established in 1997 under the Environment Conservation Council Act. The ECC became directly responsible to the Minister for Environment and Conservation and was designed to conduct reviews as requested by the minister. The present legislation is a product of a review initiated in 1995 under the ministry of the Honourable Mark Birrell in another place as Minister for Conservation and Environment. The ECC is not a decisive body; its role is to complete investigations with the aim of balancing the competing needs of the environment and public land use in order to achieve ecologically sustainable and economically viable land-use outcomes.

The Liberal Party was also responsible for the establishment of the Environment Protection Authority, the first regulatory agency of its type in the world that was designed to look after land, air, water and noise pollution under the one act. The Environment Protection Act reflected the key principles of protecting

intergenerational equity, the polluter-pays principle and protecting biodiversity.

Another key environmental initiative of the Liberal Party was the establishment of a trust for nature under the Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972. It enables covenants to be entered into between the landowner and the trust to protect and enhance the biodiversity and environmental features on private land. The covenants are legally binding and registered on the property title and thus bind all future owners to protecting remnant habitat.

There was also the recent initiative in 1996–97 to abolish scallop dredging on Port Phillip Bay, which has led to an increase in fish stocks of the bay. Improvements in water quality treatment and sewage treatment and the unprecedented commitment to beach renourishment funding were further initiatives. In the recent ECC report that was implemented in the marine parks legislation it was the Liberal Party that stood up for both the Ricketts Point reserve and the Cape Howe Marine Park when, contrary to ECC recommendations, they had been omitted by the Labor government in the first draft.

In addition there was the establishment of the National Parks Act in 1956, which was later revised under the Hamer government. The Fraser National Park proclamation, the Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act, the Vermin and Noxious Weeds Act and the Wildflower and Native Plant Protection Act were passed in 1958. Then there were the Hattah Lakes National Park and the Mount Eccles National Park in 1960, the 1964 national parks provision for the declaration of the Port Campbell Park, the Morwell National Park in 1967, the Little Desert National Park and Kinglake National Park in 1968, and the Lower Glenelg National Park in 1969.

The Organ Pipes National Park was established in 1972, and the Cape Schanck Coastal Park and the Warrandyte State Park were established in 1975, the same year in which the Wildlife Act was passed. Then there were the Nepean and Warby Range state parks, and then Baw Baw, Croajingolong, Snowy River, Hattah Lakes, Cape Nelson, Mount Samaria, Chiltern, Eildon, Beechworth Historic Park, Murray-Kulkyne, and Lake Albacutya, to name but a few parks and reserves that were established in 1978. Then in 1981 the Otway National Park, the Wonnangatta-Moroka National Park and the Gellibrand Hill Park were also established under a Liberal government.

It is apparent that the Liberal Party has a very strong record of achievement in the declaration of national

parks and public land management in this state. It is also notable that it was the Turner government of 1898 that established national parks. Turner was a Liberal who later entered the federal Parliament and was responsible for the establishment of legislation which provided the foundation for parks such as those at Wilsons Promontory, Mount Buffalo, Wyperfeld, Mallacoota and Wingan Inlet.

In Australia at a national level there have been a range of outstanding achievements. Only in the past week or so there was the declaration of the world's largest fully protected marine reserve to be set up in Australia's remote subantarctic waters, announced by the federal environment minister, David Kemp. It is to be a 6.5-million hectare marine reserve on Heard and McDonald's islands and the surrounding precincts of those islands. Dr Kemp indicated that the reserve would help protect some of the world's most important sea creatures, including the southern elephant seal, the subantarctic fur seal and several species of penguin.

Then there was the leadership shown by the Liberal Party in the ban on international whaling in 1978, the Antarctic Treaty Bill of 1960, the abolition of sand mining on Fraser Island and, most importantly in perhaps the last 30 or 40 years, the financial commitment of a Liberal government at the national level to set up the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), which was to provide an unprecedented \$2.5 billion to the environment. As it is the largest environmental rescue plan ever undertaken in Australia, the federal government recognised the importance of this on-the-ground work and the need to continue to support it. Four major programs were established under the NHT — the Landcare program, the Bushcare program, the Rivercare program, and the Coastcare program.

The legislation before the house is the product of the work of the Environment Conservation Council. The members of that council include Professor John Lovering, a senior academic who is a former chair of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission; Ms Eda Ritchie, a farmer with extensive experience in natural resource management; and Ms Jane Cutler, who holds an environmental science degree and has been engaged in the finance sector. With the important support of the department and a number of individuals who are following the debate today, they went through the process of preparing a draft report and a final report, which was subsequently responded to by the government. The government then set up the Button committee, which reviewed the best way to implement the box-ironbark recommendations.

It has been a process where many diverse community groups and organisations have made submissions at varying stages of the review. They include the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Bendigo and District Environmental Council, the Bush Users Group, the Central Goldfields shire, the City of Greater Bendigo, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Environment Victoria, Field and Game Australia, the Field Naturalists Association of Victoria, Friends of Box and Ironbark Forests, Friends of the Earth, the Goulburn Valley Environment Group, the Green Party, Greening Australia, Indigo Shire Council, Loddon Shire Council, Moira Shire Council, Mount Alexander Shire Council, the North Central Catchment Management Authority, the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria, the Public Land Council of Victoria, the Pyrenees shire, the Rural City of Wangaratta, Rural People for Parks, the Shire of Campaspe, Timber Communities Australia, the Victorian Apiarists Association, the Victorian Catchment Management Council, the Victorian Eucalyptus Oil Distillers Association, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Victorian Minerals and Energy Council, the Victorian National Parks Association, and the Wilderness Society. It was through this process of widespread consultation on behalf of the range of agencies that the recommendations were developed.

I would now like to state a number of clear propositions to the chamber. The first thing I would like to advise the house is that today the Liberal Party announces its support for legislation to establish new national and state parks to preserve box-ironbark forests. The Liberal Party has undertaken extensive consultation with the range of stakeholders and interests over many months, and has made the decision to support the legislation as an appropriate balance between conservation values and access for park users.

However, the Liberal Party has fought hard to balance the vital environmental outcomes with the legitimate wishes of park users, including those who have traditionally made a living from the forest. To that end, as announced in a government press release today, the Liberal Party was keen to negotiate several commitments from the government to improve the processes affected by the bill. These include the work of the opposition to try to achieve an improved notice regime for track access closures, a system where local people would be included on park management planning committees, the use of local timber cutters in forest thinning programs and the use of timber cutters working on local fire management.

It should be noted that the Liberal Party will continue to press the government to provide a 10-year phase-out for

eucalyptus distillers and to provide improved access for fossickers in the St Arnaud Range National Park, the Chiltern-Mount Pilot National Park and the Heathcote-Graytown National Park. The Liberal Party will continue to monitor the implementation of the new inclusions in the national state park system to ensure that all parties are adequately consulted and that the best outcomes are achieved, consistent with the ECC report.

I would now like to examine some of those issues in closer detail. In relation to track closures, representations were made that often apiarists had difficulty in accessing their traditional box sites. It is a very important issue, where park management plans are able to define the roads and tracks which will be provided and maintained for the range of uses of tracks, including visitor enjoyment and the management of fire protection and suppression. The well defined tracks will also minimise the impact of vehicles on the parks' natural and cultural values.

With seasonal closures it is important that outcomes are negotiated with key stakeholder groups. The honourable member for Monbulk, whose family farmed in north-western Victoria over many decades, is aware that when the blossom is on, the blossom is on and that apiarists must get their boxes into the regions without delay and must not encounter track closures. So it is important that there be an effective exchange of understanding so that those people who are locating their beehives in the park system are given appropriate time to plan the placement of those boxes so they do not encounter the adverse circumstance of coming across a closed gate.

In relation to thinnings I would like to read from the ECC report, which notes:

The sole objective of thinning as an ecological management tool is to improve the habitat conditions in parks and reserves by increasing the numbers of large trees. Thinning should be carried out in a manner that best achieves ecological goals. It may differ from silvicultural practices. Production of firewood is not an objective. Where it does occur however, thinning will produce wood as a by-product, which can, where appropriate, be sold as firewood.

There is an important note at page 73 of the original Environment Conservation Council report:

... thinning as an ecological management tool is to improve the habitat conditions in parks ...

It is also noted that the opposition has been very keen to look after the employment opportunities of those people who have been working in state forests. Priority should be given to enabling timber workers who have lived and worked in box-ironbark regions to embark upon

silvicultural thinning programs and appropriate ecological management strategies.

There are a number of significant issues in relation to fire protection. It is important that public land be managed in a way that minimises or does not lead to the build-up of fuel hazards. According to the department, this is assessed according to a combination of surface fire and fuel hazard, back hazard and elevated fuel hazard. Heavy ground fuel such as fallen logs is known not to be a critical factor in fire behaviour, but it is important to ensure that it does not contribute to combustion. The departmental approach to managing fire protection is standard, whether it be over state forests, national parks or Crown land reserves.

Jason Doyle of the Victorian National Parks Association noted:

There's no evidence that national parks are any more fire prone than any other forest. If anything the reverse is true — for example, in 2001–02 in New South Wales 101 fires started outside of national parks and spread to them. Only 26 started in parks and spread outside. Over the previous five years the average is 57 going into parks, and 21 leaving them. The point is that any vegetated land will burn, but parks appear to be less likely to be the cause or the seat of fire than most other areas.

It is also important to note that firewood access has been critical to people in rural communities and rural areas. There are a range of firewood users. Preference for firewood collection from public land has been given to residents in the box-ironbark area. Residents will need to produce a domestic licence from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment office 'which allows them to collect firewood from designated areas of state forest'.

One of the key points, according to the information provided by the department, is that elderly and disabled residents will be unaffected by firewood collection methods following the introduction of the box-ironbark parks and reserves. Elderly and disabled residents in the box-ironbark area who are unable to collect their own firewood will still be able to access firewood in the same way they do now. Firewood would still be available for purchase from commercial cutters who have been granted licences to continue to work, and residents will also be able to purchase a domestic firewood licence and nominate someone else to collect the firewood on their behalf.

There is also an issue in relation to a mining amendment affecting the Bendigo region which I understand the government will be introducing to the chamber, and that amendment is supported by the opposition. There is also the role of eucalyptus

distillers. I mentioned earlier on that they currently have six years to continue to operate. It is the opposition's position that it will continue to try and work to achieve an equitable outcome for eucalyptus distillers.

As part of the background to this review I had occasion to embark on a number of trips across key areas of the state, in concert with the then shadow environment minister, the honourable member for Doncaster. The first site we had occasion to visit was the Guildford Forest, which had been logged on multiple occasions. The understorey in the area was not sufficient, in our estimation, to maintain a reasonable biodiversity and habitat for the flora and fauna of the region. We met a number of people there, including Ian Huxley, Phillip Ingamells and Doug Ralph, who provided their own insights into the ecological issues in the region.

Later on that trip we visited the property at Bung Bong, near Maryborough. This is an area which I have visited on a number of occasions and where I saw private land which strongly contrasted with other sites as it had not been the subject of intensive timber operations or mining. Large old trees are a feature of the area, as is the range of age and class sizes and the understorey. It is an example of what box-ironbark woodlands should and could look like if they are allowed to. On a subsequent trip I saw the nest of a wedge-tailed eagle and heard the call of the barking owl.

We also visited a state forest site north of Dunolly that showed the effects of medium-size mining — holes large and small, some filled in, but with little regrowth. Combined with heavy timber cutting, including one 250-year-old tree, it left a scene of modest devastation.

It might also be noted that as a consequence of mining activity in the state a range of trees have been cut down over a period of time. There are not many 200, 300, 400 and 500-year-old trees that provide important habitat for the fauna that rely upon the hollows and other areas of those trees to prosper.

We also visited a site at Tunstall State Forest, near Bealiba, where there was a good selection of larger trees that were crucial to the survival of the nationally endangered swift parrot. I understand that the larger trees also represented a good source of timber for sleepers for timber cutters. But they also have very high conservation values, and it is important that those values be preserved.

A later trip saw a number of us visit Mount Pilot, where we met Dr Barry Trail and Susie Duncan and a number of experts in environmental issues in that particular region, such as Peter Curtis, an expert on grass trees.

They gave members of Parliament, including the member for the area, a detailed insight into their perspective on the flora and fauna of the Chiltern-Mount Pilot precinct. It was in that region that one of the people there indicated that they were looking for leadership from the Liberal Party on this box-ironbark review. Dr Trail had been documenting the extinction of woodland birds for over a decade. He regards that region as a precious and unique place where, as a consequence of 200 years of change, there has been a depletion of what was once a more prosperous area.

Through this process I am aware that parliamentary colleagues have consulted heavily with a range of interest groups, both ecological and industry, and user groups of the box-ironbark region, to gain a detailed understanding of some of the stakeholder concerns.

Stakeholder concerns are not just confined to those who live in the country either, as many of the people who use the box-ironbark forests are city dwellers — miners and prospectors on the one hand, and those who follow the habitat and environs of Australia's great flora and fauna on the other. A gentleman by the name of Michael Norris recorded the arrival of birds in the bayside area. He was of the view that the swift parrot was relatively common in the 1980s, being recorded every other year in the City of Bayside, but that since then it had been absent for about 10 years. The last regent honeyeater recorded was in 1953. It was noted by some of these people that the Environment Conservation Council had undertaken excellent technical work to develop the balance between environmental and socioeconomic concerns.

Then there were the representations of Anna and Manfred Ruff, who had established a property close to the Graytown-Heathcote area and had established a business of Box-Ironbark Birding. They had located some 24 nest boxes on their property, all of which had been used. They still had a few old trees on their block, but the fact that all the nest boxes had been used suggested, in their opinion, that natural hollows are a limiting factor in the region.

In relation to the management of our forests, they say that in order to bring about sustainability — that is, good, sustainable outcomes for the future — it is the responsibility of the current generation to try to implement policies that will deliver better outcomes and better objectives.

In addition to the submissions we received from those with a very keen environmental interest were those who were concerned about the management of state national

parks. There was a very comprehensive submission from Licola. Concerns were raised by a number of Licola residents and forwarded by a Mr Ralph Barraclough, who noted that following a fire there was a major concern regarding the cost of bushfires in the region. Land-holders in Licola were horrified to find that if control lines failed the fall-back position was to be west of Licola, providing some level of danger to private property owners.

He was concerned about erosion and river pollution, and said that massive erosion had occurred after a fire and a thunderstorm in the Caledonia Valley, where alluvial boulder fans the likes of which had not been seen before were deposited. Kilometres of deep channels were gouged, with unstable banks falling in and landslides developing. He referred to water pollution as a result of heavy burns within the forest area — the fact that as a result of the problems of intense heat and the loss of the forest and ashes in the waterways the water became unpalatable and could not be drunk. Then Mr Barraclough raised his concerns about the Caledonia Track, which was partly washed away by the Caledonia River and adjacent creeks. He was concerned about what happened to Kevin Higgins, because no warning was given to this property owner that a fire was burning out of control.

Graziers are also concerned to maintain some of their interests relating to cattle grazing. Mr Barraclough went on to note the weed and dingo programs in the parks, and that there had been little improvement as a result of government expenditure on a range of initiatives.

In addition to the concerns raised by the Licola community, the Timber Communities of Australia have also raised concerns relating to the bill. They have raised the concern about protection for their cultural heritage. Many of these people are second, third, fourth and even fifth-generation timber cutters. They also raised concerns about the action plans for endangered species, and suggested that more needs to be done. If there are 350 endangered species why are there not more action plans to protect them and to develop suitable management strategies?

In terms of the ECC process, this is a point that was not raised by numbers of people whose correspondence I reviewed, but they were keen to raise their concerns following surveys in Chiltern and Mitiamo about the economic benefits of areas being declared national parks. They stated:

Our surveys in fact showed that not one business had grown as a result of the declaration of a national park in their area, with many businesses stating that they are not open on weekends or public holidays due to the lack of business, and

in fact their business had dropped off due to the loss of timber cutters, domestic firewood cutters and prospectors visiting the town.

At this juncture I would like to make some general comments. In relation to one range of stakeholders there was concern regarding firewood supply, the access of woodcutters to forests to reduce the amount of combustible fuel, the fact that some people may have to rely on blankets after 6.00 p.m., access by beekeepers, fire safety and fire track clearance in the Beechworth areas and tourism issues where ecotourism had not matched expectations or the predictions made during the national parks debate.

A serious point made by one person I met is that poverty is such in some country towns that people on welfare are sometimes regarded as the best paid.

Environmentalists are concerned about air, water and soil qualities and the continuity of endangered species. A number of issues are common to both groups of stakeholders. They include the management of parks, the importance of having a long-term strategic vision and the importance of appropriate strategies to manage weeds and pest animals in park regions.

In a letter received by honourable members today reference was made to Victoria's forgotten forests. The government's role is to ensure that not only are forests not forgotten but that as part of the process people are not forgotten. It was mentioned by a parliamentary intern in a survey of Victoria's national parks that one of the strengths of the Liberal Party had been to build its national and state parks on local knowledge and local communities. For the purpose of establishing these reviews it is imperative that there be stakeholder input at all levels in balancing the important needs of biodiversity protection for the future and socioeconomic uses so that in intergenerational terms what we hand on to the next generation will be of a standard equal to or better than the standard we have today.

It is in light of those wider remarks that the Liberal Party will support the legislation. It is the product of a review that was initiated by the Liberal Party, and in supporting it we must continue to act as an advocate for those country towns and community groups affected by its impact.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — It is with pleasure that I speak on the National Parks (Box-Ironbark and Other Parks) Bill. I desire to move a reasoned amendment, and therefore I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted with the view of inserting in place thereof the words 'this bill be withdrawn

and redrafted to provide for the development of management plans for new parks and reserves and additions to parks and reserves proposed within this bill and incorporate a range of other matters that were referred to in the second-reading speech'.

The amendment is couched in terms approved by the Clerk, but we would have included in the reasoned amendment in layman's language the following principles, which I will go through before dealing with the legislation.

The National Party wants the bill withdrawn and redrafted to provide for the development and approval by Parliament of management plans of all national parks, natural heritage parks and conservation reserves proposed within the bill prior to the declaration of those parks and reserves, and the establishment of residential advisory committees to develop those management plans. We want local input into the development of those plans. The National Party also proposes the use of ecological thinning as a management tool, as was recommended by the Environment Conservation Council. We support the notion and believe that it should be implemented. We also want finalisation of the five-year firewood plans for the 13 community firewood supply areas in the box-ironbark region. We want those finalised before dealing with the legislation.

We want business and industry development funding to be made available to those affected by the withdrawal of commercial timber licences. We propose the development of effective, timely and transparent procedures for the approval of exploration and mining activities on newly established parks and reserves. We would also like to see the phase-out of eucalyptus harvesting increased from the present proposed 6 years to 10 years. Finally, we ask that a grievance process be established to ensure that any concerns over discretionary decisions made by land managers can be dealt with in an open and transparent manner.

Before going on to deal with the legislation, I followed with interest the contribution of my good friend and colleague, the honourable member for Sandringham, which was presented in his usual thorough and workmanlike way. I was interested to listen to his Crosby Morrison-type tour of the birds, animals and trees of the box-ironbark parks and woodlands. However, I was very disappointed to learn that once again the city-based conservationists in the Liberal Party had won over the interests of those who live and work in country Victoria, and that the Liberal Party will support the government's legislation. Therefore the National Party stands in contrast to the government and the Liberal Party in its approach to the legislation.

I refer honourable members to the National Party's view on natural resource management generally, which was very competently spelt out by a colleague in the upper house, the Honourable Peter Hall, in an excellent speech on Wednesday, 24 April, when he put the various principles guiding our decision-making process.

I will provide a brief background to the legislation and set the scene for country Victoria. Victoria has about 7 million hectares of public land, and it is timely to remind the house that that is about 34 per cent of Victoria's landmass. About 3.6 million hectares is covered by parks and reserves and therefore has restrictions of various sorts on it. The Environment Conservation Council recommendations we are dealing with tonight cover some 427 000 hectares.

The National Party has expressed the view on many occasions that it is not opposed to parks and reserves, but it does criticise the wanton neglect and maintenance of those so-called protected areas. We reject the notion that just by declaring a piece of land or sea a national park we have done a great job in protecting that area. We have not unless we have in place management plans and are prepared to implement those plans by backing them up with finance. We want to see management plans in place before legislation is introduced. We argue that the key to environmental protection is good management, and that grazing, for example, can be a good management tool in itself by reducing the fuel on the forest floor.

We believe strongly that public land is owned by the public and should be available for use by the public. That use includes recreational and commercial activities, which can be done at the same time as preserving those important environmental values we are concerned about.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Under sessional orders the time for the adjournment of the house has arrived.

Drought: stock feed

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I raise a matter for the Premier. We are all very much aware of the drought over large areas of Victoria. We know that some farmers are having to sell off their stock because they do not have enough feed for them. In many cases these are breeding stock that three or more generations of the same family have bred into premium stock. Other

families have had no choice but to shoot weak and starving animals, causing not only financial stress but also emotional stress for the whole family.

My request for action has been instigated by a constituent of mine, Mr Arch Carswell, who has asked me to look at how the vast hectares of publicly owned land can be used to help alleviate the problem. I ask the Premier to instruct all government departments that control large areas of land to stop mowing the grass short for aesthetic reasons and to let it grow, and then to have it cut and baled into hay for distribution to farmers. A quick decision followed by quick action is required, because there are only a few growing weeks left around Melbourne.

A few places with large grassed areas that spring to mind are the Melbourne Water easements or pipelines; Silvan, Cardinia, Upper Yarra, Maroondah and Sugarloaf dams; and Parks Victoria land — for example, Warrandyte State Park. I also ask the Premier to urge municipal councils to let the grass grow, where possible, on council-owned land and have it cut for hay. Arch Carswell knows this will not solve the enormous problem of the lack of feed, but it might help save some breeding stock until the drought ends.

Disability services: Shepparton

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I wish to bring to the attention of the Minister for Health representations I have received from Mr and Mrs Colin Davies of Numurkah. Mr and Mrs Davies wrote to me earlier this year, bringing to my attention their concerns relating to an assessment by Goulburn Valley Health of their child for autism. They were told it could take many months before this assessment could be undertaken. They wrote to me on 4 May, telling me that despite there being full-time psychologists, including a consulting psychologist, at that hospital up to 18 referrals were being handled each week and there was a long waiting list. They made further investigations and found that their child could not be assessed until later in the year.

I wrote to the Minister for Health to bring the matter to his attention, pointing out that there should be an investigation as to why there are such delays in getting a response from the hospital on this matter. The minister's response gave details of assessment programs, particularly those undertaken by the Austin hospital and the Monash Medical Centre, but it did not indicate the support being provided at Shepparton. He confirmed that there was a significant waiting list and that the situation was being assessed, but he said there would be private psychologists available within the area.

I provided this information to the parents, and they came back to me with a response dated 13 September, which I have now sent to the minister in a letter dated 4 October. I want to read that letter, because Mrs Davies in her response said:

Having received your letter and a forwarding one from the Minister for Health, I am extremely annoyed the minister did not even research his facts before replying.

We already know that children need a referral by a paediatrician to the Austin —

because they cannot get assessment at Shepparton quickly.

There are no private psychologists ... in the area —

which was mentioned in the minister's letter. She said it would cost them \$500 to get the assessment in Melbourne. She went on:

Our paediatrician has already referred several of his clients to proceed privately ...

That is so children can get assessed so they can enter school next year.

The concern that Mr and Mrs Davies have drawn to my attention is that they cannot get an early assessment from Shepparton service. They need to get an assessment in Melbourne, which will cost them money. And even when they get that assessment they will need to get a referral so they can get a reference to a school for next year, which they cannot receive at this stage. This needs assistance from —

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

Crime: Greater Bendigo

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services regarding the latest crime data for the City of Greater Bendigo, which is within my electorate. I seek the release of this important set of figures for the city.

Crime prevention and reducing the rate of crime in the City of Greater Bendigo are important issues to many constituents in my electorate, as I am sure they are across many areas of Victoria. I have an increased awareness of the concern in the community of Bendigo through my role as chair of the Safe City forum. That is an organisation under the banner of the City of Greater Bendigo that has broad representation from police, local trade groups, education groups and a number of concerned people around issues to do with safety in our community.

This has been an excellent forum in which to raise and address issues to do with crime, and it has been very proactive in this area. I will give one example, which is the formulation of the Bendigo liquor accord, which has been in place for a number of years now. We have recently re-signed and re-released this liquor accord, which is a fantastic initiative designed to raise people's awareness of the responsible serving and consumption of alcohol and of the side effects too much alcohol can cause. Following on from that, the City of Greater Bendigo, with the Safe City forum and the Tabaret, have put in place a Safe City taxi rank, which ensures that patrons can get home in a safe and timely way in the evening.

The reason I am asking the minister to address this issue is that in recent weeks the ministerial Crime Prevention Council met in Bendigo. I had the opportunity to address the council on the role of the Safe City forum.

It was interesting to see the commonality of issues faced by the ministerial crime prevention council and the Safe City forum, particularly around, as I have already identified, the issues of crime prevention and how these issues affect two specific groups in our electorate. Issues around crime prevention often deal with young people and older people.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work done by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, particularly in the area of police numbers in Bendigo. I hope the minister can confirm that we have around 13 extra police on the streets in Bendigo. That is fantastic when you consider how important this issue has been to our region across central Victoria.

Drugs: government policy

Mrs PEULICH (Bentleigh) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Premier. I certainly hope he comes in here. We all know that he is probably celebrating a birthday, as is the Deputy Premier, but for the rest of us who are also celebrating a birthday the workday goes on. I certainly expect the Premier to come in and respond to a very important issue that has been raised with me time and again in relation to the government's drug policy.

The community sees this government drifting on drug policy and sending out many confusing and ambiguous messages. First of all we had the heroin injecting rooms plan. Then we had a government minister accepting supervised chomping; that minister was then shuffled out of that portfolio to avoid parliamentary scrutiny. Most recently we had the *Stuff* magazine being

distributed to year 12 students. I am the mother of a year 12 student who has friends in year 12 whose parents are concerned. They see this as absolutely reprehensible. They have asked me to call on the Premier to retire the Minister for Consumer Affairs because clearly she continues to peddle the same myths about harm minimisation and the safe use of drugs when there is a growing problem in the community with very serious mental health issues and a range of other issues people are struggling to deal with. They see a continuation of that as an abrogation of the Premier's responsibility. They have asked me to call on the Premier to send a clear and unambiguous message by retiring this minister and taking her out of any portfolio with any influence on drug or youth policy so the community is inoculated from the policies of this irresponsible minister.

Rail: Noble Park crossing

Mr HOLDING (Springvale) — I wish to raise a matter this evening for the Minister for Transport. It concerns the condition of the road and rail crossing at Heatherton Road in the vicinity of the Noble Park railway station in my electorate of Springvale.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr HOLDING — As the honourable member for Mordialloc points out, this is an issue I have raised before in this chamber on the adjournment. In fact I think I most recently raised it in March 2002.

Mr Leigh interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mordialloc!

Mr HOLDING — The action that I seek from the Minister for Transport is that the minister or his department take urgent action to address the condition of the road at this level crossing. I would like the minister to instruct his department to take action to address the state of the rail crossing, which badly needs improvement to repair the uneven surface so that pedestrians and road transport can cross at the intersection safely and comfortably.

The level crossing I am referring to is on Heatherton Road, as I have mentioned, in Noble Park near the roundabout that connects Heatherton Road, Douglas Street and Lightwood Road.

Mr Robinson interjected.

Mr HOLDING — The crossing is near the Noble Park railway station and includes a pedestrian crossing.

I know that the honourable member for Mitcham has asked for a *Melway* reference. The reference that I can give is it is just near the roundabout which received \$306 000 in black spot funding. I am very pleased to be able to accurately identify the exact location of the rail crossing I am referring to for the benefit of honourable members.

Members may also recall that this particular rail crossing was the scene of a tragic accident in December last year when a woman in a wheelchair was struck and killed by a train leaving the Noble Park railway station. There has been an inquiry and the government is currently in the process of implementing the many recommendations that came out of that inquiry to address some of the dangers facing disabled people using wheelchairs who need to access level crossings.

Many local residents have contacted me to complain about the poor state of the road at the point where Heatherton Road crosses the train line. I have driven over it many times and I can say that it is far from smooth or comfortable and that at times it is also somewhat dangerous.

As I mentioned earlier, I raised this matter with the minister in March this year. I raised it then in conjunction with the crossing at Corrigan Road in Noble Park. I am pleased to be able to report to the house that the crossing in Corrigan Road, Noble Park has been addressed. Roadworks are currently under way across a portion of Corrigan Road in the Noble Park area. That area is being addressed and this evening I am asking the Minister for Transport to direct his department to take action to ensure that the rail crossing at Heatherton Road in Noble Park is addressed as soon as possible.

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

Rural and regional Victoria: government vehicle sales

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — I wish to raise an issue for the attention of the Premier. Much has been said in this place in recent times about regional development and equity for all Victorians. However, unless we have a global view of all aspects of service delivery this principle cannot be delivered. I draw the attention of the Premier to the sale of ex-government vehicles, which are usually pooled into Melbourne and sold at Fowles Auction Group or one of the large auction houses. I ask whether consideration can be given for a more regional view of this arrangement so that local communities can get some of the benefits. I have been approached by an

auction premises based in Wagga Wagga, which operates just out of Mildura.

Mr Jasper interjected.

Mr SAVAGE — Just out of Mildura across the border. It is called Deans Milner Skellern Auction Services. I ask that the Premier look at that.

The other issue I wish to raise concerns a similar situation. A local architect has contacted me. There have been a large number of significant projects because of the good government policy we have seen of building schools such as the Christie Centre, the special school and the Irymple secondary college.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member can raise only one matter during the adjournment debate.

Mr SAVAGE — It is only one matter. I am raising the issue of an architect not getting the opportunity to design some of these premises. It is one architect. I am giving the house some examples of premises which have been built in recent times. There is a principle involved in this. I ask the Premier to give consideration to ensuring that the Department of Infrastructure makes available to local architects opportunities at a local level to be able to contribute to the good design of buildings built with taxpayer funds through the capital works program.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I think they really were two distinct matters, so I shall leave the first one for the minister to respond to. The honourable member can raise the other one next week.

Leopold Primary School

Mr SPRY (Bellarine) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport. It is an issue of growing concern for parents of Leopold Primary School students about the safety of children crossing the Bellarine Highway on their way to and from school. About 600 students attend this school. It is an exemplary school with excellent leadership, dedicated staff and an involved and committed parent and community support group.

The township of Leopold is divided in two by a major, four-lane highway. It has a small shopping centre and a kindergarten on each side of the highway. However, the one school serves the whole community on both sides of the highway. I am not suggesting that there should be a second primary school on the other side of the highway, because there is a much simpler solution — that is, traffic lights. The community wants traffic lights

to help the children across the busy highway and to assist the lollipop ladies who currently carry an enormous responsibility. The matter has been on the boil for more than six months with my office and Liberal candidate Frank Kelloway upping the ante. Labor's Elaine Carbines in another place has raised the issue with the Minister for Transport apparently with no effect whatsoever.

In fact, as far as I am aware, he has not even answered her letters. On behalf of the people of Leopold, I now ask the minister directly to get his head out of the sand and address this issue as a matter of prime importance. Children's safety is at stake here, and Leopold parents are becoming increasingly anxious as time goes by and as Labor in government as usual does nothing.

Consumer affairs: motorhome

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I want to raise this evening an issue for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs. It is a very serious issue for a middle-aged Blackburn North couple. It involves their purchase of a vehicle from Brighton Toyota earlier this year. I will outline the circumstances of that purchase to the house momentarily, but I want the minister to take action to direct Consumer Affairs Victoria to urgently investigate the adequacy of procedures in circumstances like this where the consumer seeking action from the seller faces a situation in which the seller is reliant to a very large extent upon the actions of a third party and in so doing is able to escape what I think most people would consider a reasonable obligation to address defects in the product.

The middle-aged couple involved, as I said, live in Blackburn North. They purchased a brand new Toyota Hilux motorhome from Brighton Toyota in January for the sum of \$84 000. Their intention was to pursue their passion for motoring holidays, including a very long trip to Perth later this month. The vehicle was equipped with a campervan provided by Matilda Motorhomes, a Queensland company, which has a service depot in Tullamarine for hire vehicles it runs out of Victoria. In short, this purchase has been a disaster, with repeated and continuing failures in both the vehicle and the campervan. Since January this year the vehicle has been in for repairs a total of more than 50 days. It has been available for use on only 16 nights.

Some of those defects include — and this was only up until August — that the TV stand, VCR shelf and TV aerial were not installed on delivery; the smart bar was not fitted on delivery; the rear vision mirror on the passenger side does not stay in position; the boot locker does not seal; there are water leaks; the battery saver

light is not working; the refrigerator fuse keeps blowing; there is a crack in the fibreglass in the upper cupboard; the rear bumper bar fits badly; sink water drains into the shower; the pipes for draining tubes are not adequately bracketed; the water pipes are not adequately tied back from the exhaust; the refrigerator door does not close properly; the hoses on the hot water service are not adequately secured; and — this is a ripper — the brakes on the lazy axle were fitted back to front.

There is a also small crack in the fibreglass under the sink; a crack in the fibreglass under the lounge area; the access door to the drain outlet would not stay closed; the on-off switch on the airconditioning was very stiff; there were problems with mains pressure water connection; there was a possible future problem with lounge seating; the shower screen was not supplied on delivery; and the support arms that are used to lift the bed were leaking. The most recent problem involved windscreen cracks. They have been attended to repeatedly, but it has now resulted in the windscreen having to be repaired, which involves further delays.

The couple has sought explanations from the companies involved. The responses have been very unsatisfactory. I note that an email from Peter Dutton of Matilda Motorhomes earlier this year said that he acknowledged the quality of their product in the past had left a bit to be desired. He is not joking! I seek the minister's intervention to address this problem.

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

Melbourne 2030 strategy

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) — I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Planning to clarify the state government's metropolitan strategy and its effect on our community. Indeed, this week the honourable member for Carrum has basically welcomed the fact that Chelsea will be effectively taking high-rise accommodation with her claims that regional housing groups were looking at increasing the areas to take such housing. It also affects Mordialloc.

In 1999 the then opposition leader, Mr Bracks, said that the Premier at that time was arrogant on planning and was not giving local communities an opportunity to be involved. I am seeking clarification from the minister as to what this strategy means to our community. That well-known Labor activist, the secretary of the Victorian Local Governance Association, Mr Mike Hill, then said that we had created a range of problems affecting different areas and it needed a radical

overhaul. Last week, when this strategy was announced, he was quoted in the *Age* newspaper as saying:

The inner city has borne the pain of urban density over the last decade ... but I think some of that pain is now going to be transferred out into these major activity centres, with people saying they don't want some of these developments.

The fact is that what this means to Cheltenham and Mordialloc — to our community there — is that it is going to take high rise.

What I am seeking from the minister tonight is for her to come into this house and clarify for us what this means. What height are developments going to go to in Cheltenham? What height are they going to go to in Chelsea? What height are they going to go to in Mordialloc? Indeed, the Labor Party's own council in our city has taken the view that it does not want high rise, and we know that the former opposition spokesman for planning at an earlier time said he believed the maximum height that should be possible around the bay was three storeys.

The state opposition would like to know for our community's sake what this means. I suspect it means that the government intends to change the face of a community of 22 500 people, and it is time this minister came into this house tonight and told us what heights we are going to be taken to in this area. Because I can tell the house that our community does not want it. This is a dud project that people like the Labor candidate for Lyndhurst know all too well is going to damage our community. Where is the minister? She is gutless as usual.

Mansfield: seniors activities

Ms ALLEN (Benalla) — What a disgusting person! I raise with the Minister for Senior Victorians the very important issue of facilities for retired people in my electorate. I want the minister to take action to ensure that senior Victorians in Mansfield, particularly retired men, have access to facilities so that they may enjoy social interaction as well as be able to have a hands-on activity to be involved in.

The township of Mansfield is a very dynamic community with a diverse population of city professionals seeking an alternative rural lifestyle, local people who have been born and raised in Mansfield, and also many retirees, both local and those having moved into the Mansfield area because it offers a wonderful lifestyle.

Women in country towns are very good at organising themselves into activity groups such as the Country

Women's Association, Probus and other clubs. Retired males, we know, so often have a shed at the back of their homes where they can tinker, repair or build numerous items so they can keep themselves busy and keep their minds active. I suppose there would be a few men and women on the other side of the house who should be retired so they can tinker in their back sheds, sharpening their knives and making voodoo dolls!

Many retired men have over the years of their working lives gained extraordinary talents, and so often they create toys or furniture and/or repair car engines. However, even though these retired blokes love to tinker in their own back sheds there are some who live alone or in units and who often spend a lot of time alone, isolated and without other company. It would be great if there were somewhere for them to go to meet with their mates, old and new, to socialise, talk about old times and still be able to use their skills; and perhaps even offer other members of the community the opportunity to have items repaired.

There is a great need for these men to have a place where they can go to enjoy putting all these aspects of life into practice so they feel their talents are still appreciated, they feel needed, and most of all, they have the company of others. I urge the minister to take action to ensure that these retired blokes in our community are looked after.

Housing: Warrnambool tenant

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — I have a matter I want to draw to the attention of the Minister for Housing. I ask the minister to immediately cease the legal action that she and her department have commenced against a penniless 90-year-old gentleman, Mr James Hubert White, who was until recently a tenant of a ministry house in Alison Avenue, Warrnambool. The matter was drawn to my attention by my constituent, Mr White's son, who lives in Mornington.

Mr White broke his hip and was admitted to the Warrnambool hospital. He is still in the hospital until a place is available at the Koroit and District Health Service nursing home. On 7 August he had a stroke. Following his vacating the house in Alison Avenue, his family cleaned up the premises. Shortly after that the ministry sent in workers who repainted, recarpeted, gardened, et cetera, and then sent Mr White a bill for \$2500. As he is penniless his family requested that the amount be waived, and the ministry refused.

On his behalf the family took the matter to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, where an

amount of \$530.15 was awarded against Mr White. The ministry has now placed the matter with Sholl Nicholson Lasky, attorneys at law, at 505 Collins Street, Melbourne, and they are demanding payment forthwith, or else.

When recently asked by a family member to desist from the pursuit of a penniless, 90-year-old stroke victim who is suffering from dementia, a ministry official said that the normal practice of the ministry in such cases is to garnishee the pension. When Mr White is admitted to a nursing home — —

Ms Allan interjected.

Mr COOPER — I am sorry the honourable member for Bendigo East finds this funny, but I do not.

When Mr White is admitted to a nursing home, 85 per cent of his pension will go towards his board and lodgings. The tiny remainder, some \$7 or \$8, will then be subject to a garnishee order by the ministry. This is a disgraceful pursuit of an elderly man who is, as I said, penniless, suffering from dementia and a stroke victim. His family is aghast at the pursuit of this man and at the thought — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Springvale!

Mr COOPER — Yes, I think the honourable members for Springvale and Frankston East are a disgrace.

His family are aghast — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr COOPER — The laughter from these members is simply disgraceful. His family are aghast at this prospect, and ask the minister to desist from this action.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Keilor has 1 minute 20 seconds.

Keilor Plains: fire prevention

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — The matter I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. First, I congratulate him on his campaign on fire growth eradication in the country, but the action I seek is to make people aware in the Keilor Plains area. This is the rural part between the satellite cities of Sunbury, Melton and Werribee, where there are large grasslands and a lot of holdings. We have had major

fires across that area at different times, endangering livestock and human beings. Honourable members might remember back to when a woman and her children perished on the Geelong road — although there is no bushland there, just grassland.

I ask the minister to ensure that members of the community and property owners in that region are aware that they have an obligation to remove fire hazards from their grassland areas, because as we saw in New South Wales with the recent fires, it is not just bushland but also the grasslands that are at risk. Keilor Plains and district can be in danger. A lot of this land is not grazed these days but has been held by insurance companies and developers that are hoping to make big money out of it. I hope that the strategy plan for Melbourne has stopped those dreams and that the land will be turned back to rural land.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired. Time for raising matters on the adjournment debate has also expired.

Responses

Ms CAMPBELL (Minister for Senior Victorians) — On the matter raised by the honourable member for Mitcham, we all listened in horror as he described the terrible plight of a Blackburn North couple and the trauma involved in their purchase of a motorhome. He outlined eloquently the problems of that couple and the fact that this dream has become a nightmare —

Mr Leigh — On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is clearly a horrific case. I ask where the honourable member for Mitcham is, since he raised it? He is not in the chamber.

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

Ms CAMPBELL — The facts as outlined by the honourable member for Mitcham are of great concern to me as the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Tomorrow I will make sure that the department investigates exactly the facts as he presented them, follows up the matter with the relevant firm in Victoria, and works with our interstate colleagues in Queensland. I have the facts as presented tonight involving the Matilda Motorhomes company, which has its head office in Queensland, although it has a site in Victoria. That matter will be taken up and thoroughly investigated. I want to make sure that this couple's dream becomes just that and that their nightmare is removed.

The matter raised by the honourable member for Benalla about senior Victorian men in Mansfield is not uncommon in other electorates, where retired men find that their friendship and social networks are often tied up with their paid work and that when they retire they need to establish friendship networks within their own communities. It is really important that some of the initiatives that have already begun, led ably by Mr Don Hodges, to start a men's shed program in Mansfield are supported by the government. I have sought advice from Mr Hodges and from the Mansfield adult continuing education (MACE) centre about planning for the Mansfield men's shed. I understand that they have formed a steering committee that has held promising discussions with officers from the Shire of Delatite.

The honourable member for Benalla has outlined why it is important to support strong, vibrant communities such as Mansfield that are proactive in establishing programs for local older men, for positive recreation and for retirement initiatives that value and allow them to be productive and build on their community spirit. To that end I am pleased to inform the honourable member that Mr Hodges and a MACE centre representative will be able to develop a networking strategy to enable them to source community and business support to forge practical links with other older men's shed programs in Victoria.

I am pleased to offer a small grant of \$2000 to those men and to the local community so that they can learn the importance of the men's shed program and that the wisdom of other communities can be shared with the Mansfield group so that they can get cracking and enjoy their retirement in the men's shed at Mansfield.

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The honourable member for Bendigo East raised the issue of crime reduction and prevention in Bendigo. I pay credit to her: she is the convenor of the Bendigo Safe City forum and gave an extremely impressive presentation to the ministerial crime prevention council when it visited Bendigo a few weeks ago. She certainly showed a great appreciation of some of the issues, and I am very impressed with some of the proactive work that the Bendigo Safe City forum is doing in that area.

That, together with some of the additional policing resources that have been allocated to the City of Greater Bendigo, is starting to make a real difference. The crime rate in the City of Greater Bendigo is 21 per cent below the state crime average and 29.9 per cent below the average crime rate in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Not only is Victoria the safest state in Australia

but the City of Greater Bendigo is one of the safest municipalities in our safest state. That is a great credit to the Bendigo police and also a great credit to the people who make up the Bendigo Safe City forum.

There has been an increase in the number of police in the area from 73 in October 1999 to 85 effective full-time uniform police officers in April this year. Policing around Bendigo has been significantly improved, although I appreciate that people will always want more. The government has spent most of this term undoing the damage done by the previous government, which had cut police numbers by 800 despite promising 1000. Those cuts made their presence felt not just in Bendigo but across the state.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HAERMEYER — Maybe Mordialloc needs a new local member and the crime rate will go down. As I said, the crime rate in Bendigo has fallen this year.

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I ask the honourable members for Springvale and Frankston East to be quiet.

Mr HAERMEYER — The crime rate in Bendigo has fallen by 1.6 per cent and there have been reductions in most categories, including property and other crimes, together with an extraordinary reduction of 14 per cent in drug crimes. The activities of the Bendigo Safe City forum and the Bendigo police are making a difference, and I congratulate the honourable member for Bendigo East on the interest she has taken in this area.

Unfortunately, during the years when crime was growing quite dramatically under the previous government and police numbers were being viciously cut, none of the Liberal Party members in the area had a word to say about — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable members for Doncaster and Mordialloc!

Mr HAERMEYER — They were all busy paying homage to the great god, Jeff, and licking his boots.

Mr Perton — Was the police union grateful to you? What did they say on Sunday?

Mr HAERMEYER — They said you should pull your socks up!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The minister, to respond to a matter raised by the honourable member for Keilor, not the honourable member for Doncaster.

Mr Perton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster! I ask honourable members to cooperate so that the adjournment debate can finish at a reasonable hour and to allow the minister to complete his response.

Mr HAERMEYER — It is very unfortunate that some members of this place think that this is some sort of private school debating society.

The honourable member for Keilor raised the very serious matter of growing vegetation and the issue of very high grasslands in the area around the outskirts of the interface suburbs of Melbourne, particularly around his electorate. One of the problems in those outer urban areas is that a lot of people who move into the municipality have come from the inner suburbs and have little appreciation of the fire dangers and the precautions they need to take.

This year we are facing one of the most dangerous fire seasons since 1982. Over the next few months I know the Country Fire Authority (CFA) will be out there proactively raising awareness of people in the suburbs in that urban-rural interface, trying to get them to take precautionary steps to reduce their exposure to fire hazard.

One of the problems is that there is a lot of development land where farmers have moved off their properties, so care is not being taken to reduce the fuel load as occurs where someone is living on a property. This needs to be taken into account, and I congratulate the honourable member for Keilor on raising awareness of this danger. I can assure him that the CFA in its fire awareness campaign over the next few months will certainly be drawing to the attention of the property holders the need to take extra precautions in the run-up to the summer period.

Ms CAMPBELL (Minister for Senior Victorians) — The matter raised by the honourable member for Evelyn with the Premier will be referred to him.

The matter raised by the honourable member for Murray Valley with the Minister for Health in relation to Mr and Mrs Davies's assessment for autism of their child will be referred.

The honourable member for Bentleigh's matter for the Premier will be referred.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very disappointed with the Premier, who was here only 15 minutes ago, who has obviously been celebrating his birthday and does not see fit to respond to a very serious community issue. I ask the minister to relay the ire of my community about the failure to treat this institution with the seriousness that is required.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The minister at the table has taken the appropriate action in referring the honourable member's request to the Premier.

Ms CAMPBELL — The importance of telling the truth in this place will also be emphasised, I am sure, by the Premier.

The honourable member for Springvale raised a matter for the Minister for Transport in relation to a rail crossing near the Noble Park station at Heatherton Road, which will be referred.

The matter raised for the Premier by the honourable member for Mildura regarding the importance of local services, particularly in regional communities, being able to be approached for tendering will be referred, particularly given the honourable member's concern in relation to the Department of Infrastructure and architectural services.

The honourable member for Bellarine raised a matter for the Minister for Transport about the Leopold Primary School and the Bellarine Highway. I will refer that matter.

I will refer the matter raised by the honourable member for Mordialloc for the Minister for Planning — —

Mr Leigh — On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, clearly some honourable members in this house and the government, depending on its factions, can get the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to come in here. The Minister for Transport would not come in for the honourable member for Springvale, and clearly other ministers in this government will not come in for members of the opposition. This government said that it would set new standards by ensuring ministers were accountable. All we want to do is raise matters — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member for Mordialloc knows that this is not an occasion for debate.

Ms CAMPBELL — The honourable member for Mornington raised a matter for the Minister for Housing in relation to legal action against a man in Warrnambool, which I shall refer.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The house stands adjourned until next day.

House adjourned 10.46 p.m.

