

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION**

Tuesday, 13 September 2005

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Mr R. K. B. DOYLE

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

The Hon. P. N. HONEYWOOD

Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. J. RYAN

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. L. WALSH

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Tuesday, 13 September 2005

The SPEAKER (Hon. Judy Maddigan) took the chair at 2.02 p.m. and read the prayer.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Victorian certificate of education: English

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the ridiculous proposal of the education minister to set the reading of — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr PERTON — I refer to the ridiculous proposal of the education minister to set the reading of one book as the standard for Victorian certificate of education (VCE) English, and I ask — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask government members to cease interjecting in that manner and allow the member for Doncaster to ask his question.

Mr PERTON — Will the Premier rule out this watering down of VCE English so that we do not get the least rigorous, lowest standard of year 12 English in Australia?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the member for Doncaster for his question. Members on this side of the house can be very proud of what we have achieved in education over the last five and a half years: the highest retention rate to year 12 education in the country, more than 5500 new teachers and support staff in our schools, and of course a prep-to-grade 2 regime which sees lower class sizes and more individual attention to students.

In relation to the question asked by the member for Doncaster, I can indicate that the curriculum authority is canvassing and discussing some options. And I clarify this matter for the house and the member: the proposal requires that the same amount of text would need to be studied by students. The member is wrong. What it is saying — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — I will be happy to answer the question. What it is saying is that there will be fewer texts set centrally but more, of course, set in relation to some of the regional and locally based schools. The same standard would be there, if not an enhanced

standard, but there would be much more relevance as part of this. I refer the member to the article — whether it was today or yesterday, I cannot remember — in the *Age* which set this out extremely well.

Local government: regional mayors summit

Mr HELPER (Ripon) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the government's commitment to listening and governing for all Victorians and ask the Premier to update the house on the latest example of the government's delivering on that commitment for regional Victoria.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the member for Ripon for his question. I was very pleased that yesterday, alongside the member for Ripon, who is also the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development, the Treasurer, the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for Local Government held a summit with the 48 regional mayors and their chief executives in Bendigo. Those 48 mayors represent about 1.37 million Victorians in regional councils around Victoria. I was very pleased that in preparation for our provincial statement later this year we had significant input from the elected representatives of the 48 councils around Victoria.

I want to place on record in this house my congratulations to the mayors on the briefings they obtained before the meeting, the contributions they made and the support they gave not only for the work we have done over the last six years in making sure that there is job growth in regional Victoria and population growth in Victoria, and that there are new opportunities there, but also for our looking ahead to the next wave of changes, reforms and improvements for country and regional Victoria. That is exactly the sort of advice we had in the discussions with the mayors.

It essentially boils down to several issues, which are certainly very high on the government's agenda. The whole matter of infrastructure support is high on the agenda of mayors around the state, and it is very high on the agenda of this government as well. The question of skills — —

Mr Mulder interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Polwarth!

Mr BRACKS — As regional economies are growing and regions are taking the opportunity for growth and are not holding it back, skills are going to be very important. Livability and making sure that there are attractive places to live, to work and to invest in all

lead to a unanimous view, shared by our government, that we should indeed go for population growth in regional and country Victoria. Our government's ambition is to have a population growth for regional Victoria of 1.25 per cent. We note that currently it is travelling at about 1.2 per cent, which is a long way on the road to the achievement of that target, and there is a new vibrancy in regional Victoria. Of course the advice we received from the mayors summit will assist in the provincial statement and in making sure that what has happened over the last five and a half years can be built on in the future as well.

Fuel: prices

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to calls by various commentators for the federal government to remove the 3.8 cents per litre GST on fuel excise. Since it is the state government that receives most of this benefit in GST distributions, why will the Premier not agree to at least rebate that money to Victorian families and businesses?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question and indicate to him — I am sure he is aware of the background and history to this, but I will repeat it here in this house — that the GST was brought in by the federal government to replace a raft of indirect taxes which the states were levying and to replace the federal assistance grants, the untied grants, which were there for the states from the commonwealth. The GST was to replace those.

I think the Prime Minister has answered this in the same way as I have answered it. The GST is overall on all goods and services except food, across the whole of the economy. If one area is booming or increasing in terms of costs or there are difficulties and pressures there, other areas will be down. An aggregate will be a very similar amount.

We expect that the GST will be if not on the estimate, then somewhere below that. We had a situation before the last budget where the GST estimates were increased, and then they were reduced just after our budget, so it is volatile. It depends on spending in the economy. In relation to all those taxes that have been removed, they have been replaced by the GST. That was the agreement which was reached by the former government and supported by this government.

Murray River: red gums

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — My question is to the Minister for Environment. I refer the minister to the

government's commitment to protecting Victoria's environment, and I ask him to detail for the house the latest demonstration of that commitment.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Environment) — I thank the member for Richmond for his question. The Bracks government is delivering on improving the environment and delivering on its Our Water Our Future policy, which is about improving not only water security but also the environment of our rivers.

This morning I was very pleased to join the federal environment minister, Senator Ian Campbell, in Mildura where we jointly announced a major initiative to save Victoria's magnificent red gums along the Murray River. It was a very important announcement; 14 billion litres of water will be provided to red gums along 2000 hectares of the Murray over the next few weeks.

In addition, the federal government and the state government will jointly share funding of \$1 million for the pumping and management of this project. This is a demonstration of the Living Murray initiative working, of the Victorian government having a very good cooperative relationship with the federal government on water, and that we are able to deliver for the environment. Seven billion litres of water will come from the environmental reserve of water, and 7 billion litres of water will come from surplus water from the good rains that we have had in recent weeks. That water is not part of the storages, and we are now able to deliver it to the red gums, many of which are stressed and dying.

I am very pleased that the Victorian government and the national government have been able to work together very quickly on this project. It has only been in the last week or so that this surplus water has been identified. The federal government and the Victorian government have agreed to share the funding of this project. The sites that are going to benefit are Lindsay and Walpolla islands, Hattah Lakes, the Gunbower forest and other smaller sites along the Murray.

I am sure all members are very concerned about the fact that thousands of red gums have been stressed and many are dying or have in fact died, but we know we can make a difference. I am very pleased that the projects we have undertaken in the past have worked, and that red gum areas which were previously threatened with death are now coming to life.

This morning Senator Campbell and I saw evidence of that. Indeed we saw evidence of the benefit of the project where irrigators in the north-west have donated

a billion litres of water for the environment, working with our government — the Bracks government — in securing water and improving the environment. I think it is a demonstration of the very good relationship our government has in rural and regional Victoria with the farming community on water, and we want to build upon that.

That is the sort of thing that the Premier, the Treasurer and others were able to do at the mayors conference, but we are doing it in a very practical way now, where people in Mildura and along the Murray River can really see the difference we are making. There has been concern about the Living Murray initiative and whether it will deliver. We can now show people that it is delivering, that red gum trees that were stressed are no longer stressed and that we are making the environment of regional and country Victoria an even better place to live and raise a family.

Taxation: Allen Consulting Group report

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — My question without notice is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the Allen Consulting Group report on reforms to commonwealth income tax which he released on Saturday, and I ask: will the Treasurer confirm that the Bracks government has spent nearly \$100 000 of Victorian taxpayers money on this consultant's report, and has the Treasurer considered whether that money would have been better spent on a report into reducing land tax and stamp duty, revenue from both of which has doubled since the Bracks government came to office?

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — I think what the Parliament is interested in today is how much money the state opposition has spent on their Scoresby consultant. That is what we are interested in!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — We are! Is it Ecotech?

Mr Doyle — It wasn't taxpayers money though — —

Mr BRUMBY — We don't know!

Mr Plowman — On a point of order, Speaker, despite the fact that the Treasurer has just started to answer the question I ask you to bring him back to government business appropriate to the question.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the member for Mulgrave and the member for Burwood that points of

order are serious matters, and members should be able to raise them without interjection. I ask the Treasurer to answer the question.

Mr BRUMBY — The Allen Consulting Group report on reform of the personal income tax system was released at the weekend. It is available on the Victorian government's Internet site. It represents the views of Allen Consulting, but we believe it makes a very valuable contribution to the national debate about tax reform.

Some weeks ago the Premier released the national reform initiative. I think it is fair to say that that has been exceptionally well received across Australia, including — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — You are so — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The Treasurer will address his comments through the Chair.

Mr BRUMBY — I think it is fair to say that it has been well accepted on both sides of politics right across Australia as being a relevant and constructive attempt to meet the challenges which will confront Australia in the years to come. Those challenges include international competitiveness and the ageing of our population. The background of the Allen Consulting report is that if you want to tackle the issue of work force participation, if you have an ageing population — and in the next ten years our work force participation rate will decline by up to 5 percentage points — you can do so many things via regulation — —

Mr Perton interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Doncaster!

Mr BRUMBY — You can do so many things in education and in improving the health of the work force; but unless you tackle the personal income tax system there will still be massive disincentives for people to re-enter the labour force. The reason for that is that if you are, for example, a single parent at home and you are looking at coming back into the work force, you can lose welfare at the rate of up to 60 cents in the dollar; you pay a marginal tax rate of 25 cents in the dollar; and then of course you have to find some child care. It actually costs you more money to get into the work force than it does to stay at home.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, while it is in order for the Treasurer to make passing reference

to the issue of income tax, my question was directed to whether \$100 000 of taxpayers money was spent on that report, and I ask you to direct him to come back to answering that question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. I think the Treasurer was explaining to the house why he had undertaken the action.

Mr BRUMBY — The report essentially shows that at the bottom end there is an effective tax-free threshold of \$10 000 and that if you implemented these proposals it would encourage up to 140 000 Australians to re-enter the work force. When we are facing these huge challenges on work force participation, we think it is a good contribution to the national debate.

As to the amount of funds we expended on this, we have put it forward as a constructive contribution to the national debate, and we think it is good investment — a far better investment than wasting \$7 billion buying back a road.

Agriculture: production

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to growing Victoria's agriculture sector. I ask the minister to detail for the house any independent information which details the success in this area.

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Agriculture) — Members may be aware that early this year the Australian Bureau of Statistics released some preliminary data for three to four years of agricultural production amongst the states. I am pleased to advise that that data has now been confirmed. There has been \$8.7 billion of farm-gate production in Victoria, and the figures confirm that for the first time ever Victoria is the leading state in agricultural production.

Only 3 per cent of the land here in Victoria is used for agricultural production, but from that 3 per cent we have produced 24 per cent of farm produce, compared to 23 per cent for New South Wales and 21 per cent for that would-be-if-it-could-be agricultural state, Queensland. We have been closing the gap on New South Wales for a long time, and now we have nudged ahead of it. New South Wales has come out of the drought a bit more slowly. I suspect there will be some toing-and-froing, but our position is to be consistently ahead of New South Wales in the longer term. If you have a look at crops, you see that there has been a 39 per cent increase, to \$4 billion. That is just in the

crop sector, which I think demonstrates the positive moves we have seen.

There is more good news. This data complements the fact that Victoria remains Australia's largest food producing state and Australia's largest food exporting state. One in six jobs in country Victoria is in the food industry. Those jobs are on farm and off farm — for example, in the canneries and milk factories — and are dependent on the food industry. They are extremely important for the families which depend upon them.

Earlier, members heard the Premier referring to the confidence of rural mayors. I am pleased to say that when it comes to agriculture there is even more good news. That good news comes from Rabobank Australia. In its quarterly survey of rural confidence Rabobank said that rural confidence has soared in Victoria. There is one state that has outstanding confidence and one state in which farmers have more confidence than any other state, and that state is right here, in Victoria. Why would they not? Victoria has a growing food industry and strong support from the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development and the Department of Primary Industries.

We have good farmers who are prepared to push ahead with innovation, together with the Department of Primary Industries. We have better seasonal conditions. The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics has predicted crop growth this year. We have good prices in the dairy and livestock sectors. We have record state government spending on biosecurity to give confidence to industry. Victoria is a great place to farm, a great place for food processors and a great place to raise a family.

Spencer Street station: completion

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — My question is to the Minister for Transport. Given that the Spencer Street project was due to be completed by 27 April this year, will the minister advise what is his latest date for the completion of this project?

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — As all members would know, the redevelopment of the Spencer Street station — particularly the transport interchange as opposed to the retail hubs, which are not part of the government's component — is coming along extremely well. This is a project that all Victorians will be proud of, particularly people from country and regional Victoria. I suppose it is very fitting that the Liberal Party is criticising the spending of money for investment in public infrastructure and

transport infrastructure that suits country Victoria. This government is prepared to do that under the arrangements for revitalising rail, including Spencer Street station, which is to be renamed Southern Cross upon its completion. This project will be the — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The level of interjection is too high. The member for South-West Coast!

Mr BATCHELOR — This will be the centrepiece of a transport hub that will really revitalise rail services to and from country Victoria. It is being developed by Civic Nexus, which has employed Leightons as its builder. We have asked Civic Nexus to clarify the completion times. We are in discussion with Civic Nexus at this moment. It is doing this project on behalf of the government — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Doncaster!

Mr BATCHELOR — We are seeking advice at this very moment from Civic Nexus and once we have finalisation of that we will make that known.

Public transport: rural and regional

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — My question is also for the Minister for Transport. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to increasing access to public transport in regional Victoria and ask the minister to update the house on the latest example of the government delivering on this commitment.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I thank the member for his question. I can confirm to him and the rest of the house that Victoria is a great place to catch a train!

The Labor government is committed to improving access to regional Victoria. That is why we have already reopened the Ararat and Bairnsdale train services. They have been a huge success of growing patronage. But we are not resting on our laurels. We have undertaken a whole suite of initiatives and I would like to outline just some of them. For example, in Bendigo we are completing work on the bus interchange — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Polwarth!

Mr BATCHELOR — That will improve train-to-bus connectivity. We have enlarged the bus bays and we are constructing a canopy to provide shelter. A major review of Sunraysia Transit bus services has resulted in extra morning and afternoon bus trips. Between Chewton and Castlemaine we have arranged for the trial of a Saturday morning taxi shuttle. That will allow elderly residents to have better access to shopping and other amenities in Castlemaine. We are doing this by trialling new concepts and new ways of doing things — ways that suit the local conditions and local communities. We suspect that this trial will lead the way to having similar services elsewhere, but we will get back to you on that, Speaker.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Bass!

Mr BATCHELOR — Members of the Liberal Party have criticised the government for providing better services for the elderly. The Ballarat city transit system has introduced additional services. The Warrnambool transport strategy has seen new services to Allansford and to the north-east growth area of Warrnambool. We have implemented the Latrobe Valley access and mobility study action plan, with some \$300 000 worth of additional bus services in the region.

We have introduced a new low-floor bus in Bairnsdale. New low-floor buses have been provided in Seymour and we have seen additional weekday services and a new Saturday service there. This week we have also announced extra train services to the Marshall station. For the benefit of the member asking the question, starting on the 26th of this month we expect to have 58 services per week travelling to and from Marshall. These services will bring train services to a growing population on the outskirts of Geelong.

We also, of course, have the regional fast rail program, which will provide a quantum leap in services for regional Victoria. Next year we will announce the new V/Line timetable that will have even more benefits for those living in country Victoria. We are simply getting on with the job of revitalising public transport services right across Victoria.

The interesting thing to note is that history provides a very clear pointer for political parties in the future. To understand what the future will hold you need to understand what our record has been and what our commitments are and to also understand who it was who closed down country rail lines, who reduced services and who sacked key frontline staff — and it

was not a Labor government, it was a Liberal government.

Veterinary science: work experience

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. Does the minister support her department's guidelines for work experience students in the field of veterinary studies which contain a clause banning students from handling animals?

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Education and Training) — I thank the member for his question — and certainly his interest in work experience. As we know, it is incredibly important that students have the opportunity to experience work as well as learning within the school environment. The guidelines are set in relation to the legislation we have in place for work experience, and the guidelines are set through the department. I am not aware of the guidelines in relation to veterinary science, and I am happy to get back to the member in relation to those.

Gas: regional supply

Mr JENKINS (Morwell) — My question is to the Minister for State and Regional Development. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to governing for all Victorians, and I ask the minister to update the house on any recent announcements which will improve infrastructure in regional Victoria.

Mr BRUMBY (Minister for State and Regional Development) — I thank the member for Morwell for his question. I am able to advise the house on some recent announcements that are more good news for provincial Victoria and show that provincial Victoria is a great place in which to live, to work, to invest and, of course, to raise a family.

Earlier this month I was in Bendigo with the member for Bendigo East, who is also the Minister for Education Services, and Bendigo Bank officers at the turning of the first sod on a major new development at the bank worth \$75 million. It is a sensational project that is being supported and assisted by \$3 million, which we have provided under the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, to ensure that there is urban renewal and open civic space around what is the biggest building project in Bendigo in close to 100 years.

In another part of the state, Gippsland, there was more great news last week. I am pleased to say that yesterday, natural gas — and I know that this is a

matter which the member for Gippsland East has been working very closely on — was connected to Patties Foods. Along with the member for Gippsland East, Patties Foods was one of the drivers of the natural gas extension program in that part of Gippsland. This connection to natural gas will save Patties Foods between \$300 000 and \$500 000 a year. Do you know which government has delivered it? The Bracks government has delivered it. The operations manager for Patties Foods, Joe Rettino, said:

The savings compared to using LPG are substantial. This will give us additional funds to continue to grow our business.

As I said, the savings are up to \$500 000 per year. More residents in Bairnsdale will be connected to natural gas by early November 2005 and they will save between \$600 and \$1200 a year. Across the state over the last five years we have put something like \$360 million into school capital works and \$340 million into building and upgrading hospitals. We have upgraded 33 regional ambulance stations and delivered more than 100 new police stations.

Virtually all parts of the state have been the beneficiaries of our programs across Victoria. I suppose I should not talk about cricket, but I am reminded of a grant of \$2000 to the Rupertswood Football Club in Sunbury, in the electorate of the member for Macedon — so there are sporting grants as well. I know we should not talk about cricket after last night's result, but we are all thinking of the Ashes — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — I am talking about Rupertswood, the home of the Ashes — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Doncaster and the member for Scoresby will cease their continual interjections.

Mr BRUMBY — If you think about that great innings of Don Bradman at Headingley in 1930 — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Perton — Why don't you talk about government business?

Mr BRUMBY — Three hundred and thirty-four runs — —

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Minister for State and Regional Development to address the question.

Mr BRUMBY — That was Don Bradman's great innings — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the house to come to order, and I ask the Minister for State and Regional Development to address his answer to the question.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Doncaster, who has been very noisy during this question time, and I ask him to be quiet.

Mr BRUMBY — Speaker, it is relevant today, given recent events — and 334 was a great innings — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will resume his seat. Question time is now completed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of motion: removal

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise the house that under standing order 144 notices of motion 200 to 202 and 335 to 348 will be removed from the notice paper on the next sitting day. A member who requires a notice standing in her or his name to be continued must advise the Clerk in writing by 6.00 p.m. today.

NOTICES OF MOTION

Notices of motion given.

Mr COOPER giving notice of motion:

Mr Haermeyer — On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Mornington seems to be using the vehicle of notices of motion to make speeches to denigrate members of this house. We are not hearing a notice of motion; we are hearing a speech impugning a member of this house and using the device of a notice of motion to do it.

The SPEAKER — Order! I will have a look at this and the previous notice of motion given by the member for Mornington, both of which seem to contain more than one motion. I will allow the member to continue to the end of this notice.

Mr COOPER continued giving notice of motion.

Mr HARKNESS giving notice of motion:

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Frankston will not behave in that manner.

Mr Honeywood — On a point of order, Speaker, in exactly the same context as you ruled in relation to the minister at the table, the Minister for Manufacturing and Export, the member for Frankston is about to personally impugn a federal member. He has referred to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's lack of integrity as 'John Howard doing this' and 'John Howard doing that'. There cannot be one set of rules for one side of the house and another set for the other side.

The SPEAKER — Order! I could not agree with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition more. In fact I allowed the member for Mornington to complete his notice of motion, and I have said I will have a look at it with the Clerk later. I will do the same thing with the notice of the member for Frankston.

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! No, I have ruled on the previous point of order. Is this a new point of order?

Mr Haermeyer — It is, Speaker. On a point of order there is obviously some debate going on about what notices of motion actually constitute notices of motion and what constitute speeches. I would suggest that somehow the amount of narrative and the length of the notice of motion has something to do with it.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Frankston will complete his notice of motion.

Mr HARKNESS continued giving notice of motion.

Honourable members interjecting.

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

Further notice of motion given.

PROPERTY (CO-OWNERSHIP) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill — —

Mr Maxfield interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before the Attorney-General starts, the member for Narracan will cease that conversation across the chamber.

Mr Maxfield interjected.

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

Mr HULLS — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to amend the Property Law Act 1958 to provide for the transfer of jurisdiction of disputes relating to the co-ownership of land and goods from the Supreme Court and the County Court to VCAT and provide for the remedies available for determining those disputes, to consequentially amend the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 and the Transfer of Land Act 1958 and for other purposes.

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — I seek a brief explanation of the bill from the Attorney-General.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — As the honourable member would know, co-ownership actually exists when two or more people have an interest in property that entitles them to possess the property at the same time. This bill will improve access to justice by co-owners of land and goods by introducing much simpler and also cheaper processes for the resolution of disputes between co-owners.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

TREASURY LEGISLATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to amend the Financial Management Act 1994 and the State Owned Enterprises Act 1992 and for other purposes.

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

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — The bill essentially does two things: it enables the implementation by VicForests of a saw log pricing and allocation model which has been previously announced for the sale of timber resources; and secondly, it removes an ambiguity in the Financial Management Act and enables the government to release its financial reports in a timely and efficient manner.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

PETITIONS

Rail: Wodonga line

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the residents and business owners of the Wodonga community draws to the attention of the house that we the undersigned petition the Premier of Victoria, Treasurer and Minister for Transport to remove the rail from the centre of Wodonga to create space for further commercial development, remove dangerous crossings, eliminate traffic delays and improve our cities environment.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly support the relocation of the rail from our city centre and our request that the Victorian government meet its obligations in relation to the Wodonga rail bypass project agreement signed jointly by the Victorian government, federal government, City of Wodonga and Uncle Bens of Australia on 14 August 2001 and the promise made by the Victorian Treasurer in the 2001–02 budget to finalise the design and business plan and to arrange for the tender of this vital project for our city.

By Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) (8218 signatures)

Schools: religious instruction

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of citizens of Victoria concerned to ensure the continuation of religious instruction in Victorian government schools draws out to the house that under the Bracks Labor government review of education and training legislation the future of religious instruction in Victorian schools is in question and risks becoming subject to the discretion of local school councils.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria take steps to ensure that there is no change to legislation and the Victorian government schools reference guide that would diminish the status of religious instruction in Victorian government schools and, in addition, urge the government to provide additional funding for chaplaincy services in Victorian government schools.

The petition of citizens of Victoria [is] concerned to ensure the continuation of religious education in Victorian government schools, and to provide additional funding for school chaplains.

By Mr RYAN (Gippsland South) (35 signatures)
Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) (16 signatures)

Lakes Entrance: dredging

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the severe risk of flooding; threats to public safety;

negative impact on industry; and concerns for the environment of the Gippsland Lakes, associated with the excessive build-up of sand in and around the ocean entrance to the lakes system. The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria fully resource Gippsland Ports to purchase new equipment and develop a permanent solution to maintain this vital piece of infrastructure, in the interests of all Victorians.

By Mr RYAN (Gippsland South) (117 signatures)

Schools: religious instruction

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of citizens of Victoria concerned to ensure the continuation of religious education in Victorian schools draws out to the house that under the Bracks Labor government review of education legislation the future of religious education in Victorian schools is in question, and the petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria take steps to ensure that there is no change to legislation which would diminish the status of religious education in Victorian schools and, on the contrary, require the government to provide additional funding for chaplaincy services in Victorian state schools.

The petition of citizens of Victoria [is] concerned to ensure the continuation of religious education in Victorian schools.

By Mr WELLS (Scoresby) (15 signatures)

Tabled.

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — Speaker, I move:

That the petition in my name be considered on the next day of sitting, together with the nearly 10 000 signatures that were also supplied — —

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the member for Benambra that he is not entitled to add comments to a petition.

Motion agreed to.

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

Ordered that petition presented by the honourable member for Scoresby be considered next day on motion of Mr WELLS (Scoresby).

Ordered that petitions presented by the honourable member for Gippsland South be considered next day on motion of Mr RYAN (Gippsland South).

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Commonwealth Games Arrangements Act 2001 — Orders under s 18 (four orders)

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

Cardinia Planning Scheme — No C33
Colac Otway Planning Scheme — No C13
East Gippsland Planning Scheme — No C33
Golden Plains Planning Scheme — No C19
Greater Geelong Planning Scheme — No C97
Manningham Planning Scheme — No C30
Maribymong Planning Scheme — Nos C38, C41
Monash Planning Scheme — No C16
Moonee Valley Planning Scheme — No C64
Port Phillip Planning Scheme — No C48
Whitehorse Planning Scheme — Nos C59, C61

Project Development and Construction Management Act 1994 — Nomination Order under s. 6, application order under s. 8 and a statement under s. 9 of reasons for making a nomination order (three documents).

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent to:

House Contracts Guarantee (Amendment) Bill
Local Government (Further Amendment) Bill
Melbourne College of Divinity (Amendment) Bill
Racing and Gaming Acts (Police Powers) Bill
Vagrancy (Repeal) and Summary Offences (Amendment) Bill
Working with Children Bill.

APPROPRIATION MESSAGES

Messages read recommending appropriations for:

Land Tax Bill
Primary Industries Acts (Further Amendment) Bill
Treasury Legislation (Repeal) Bill.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Program

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 4.00 p.m. on Thursday, 15 September 2005:

Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill
 Melbourne Lands (Yarra River North Bank) (Amendment) Bill
 Racing and Gambling Acts (Amendment) Bill
 Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and Other Agencies (Merger) Bill
 Sentencing and Mental Health Acts (Amendment) Bill
 Sports Anti-doping Bill.

This motion sets out the government program for the Legislative Assembly for this parliamentary week, and it covers the first six bills listed on the notice paper. We intend to deal with them sequentially, dealing with one bill before moving on to the next unless other events interrupt. In that context it will provide a degree of certainty for the Parliament about what is expected to happen this week before the 4.00 p.m. guillotine on Thursday.

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — The opposition does not oppose the government business program. As the leader of government business suggested, if the six bills are dealt with sequentially they will easily be handled within the time frame before the closure of business on Thursday afternoon. Therefore we have no hesitation in supporting the business program.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — The Nationals will not be opposing the government business program. It is a reasonable program, and I thank the leader of government business for indicating that we will be dealing with the bills sequentially. That is always helpful in order to organise speakers for the bills before the house. I see it as a program that, like last week's, we will be able to get through without any difficulty. We should have that program completed easily by the time we adjourn at 4.00 p.m. on Thursday.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Port of Geelong: economic impact study

Mr LONEY (Lara) — Last week I attended the launch of the port of Geelong economic impact study. This study was commissioned by 11 major regional organisations to determine the significance of port operations to Victoria's regional economies and was a first for the Geelong region.

The study measured the economic impact of all port-related activity, bringing together information on employment, trade, ship numbers and costs from 36 stakeholders, including importers, exporters, service

providers, transport companies and regulatory agencies. The study, of course, confirmed what we have known for some time: that Geelong is indeed Victoria's second largest port, averaging 10 to 11 ships coming in and going out of the port per week. Amongst its other findings, however, the study found that it is in fact the biggest bulk cargo port in the state. Crude oil, petroleum products, grain, woodchips and fertilisers — all of which I might mention are imported and exported through my electorate — form the majority of the trade of the port of Geelong.

In raw figures the port of Geelong provides direct economic impact of \$328 million, with an estimated total output impact on the local economy of \$2.1 billion, a value-added component of \$167.9 million and a direct contribution to household income through the wages of its 1385 employees of \$78 million. I am also pleased that at the launch the minister committed to significant infrastructure improvements.

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

Lal Lal Falls Reserve: management

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — This statement condemns the Bracks government, the Minister for Environment and the Department of Sustainability and Environment for failing to properly listen to property owners adjoining Lal Lal Falls Reserve concerning its plan to proceed with the fuel reduction burn in the reserve.

Recently 16 local residents in the Lal Lal area wrote to me to express their concerns, and they are angry that their concerns have been totally ignored by the Bracks government and the DSE. The basis of the residents' concern is that the Lal Lal Falls Reserve has become dangerously overgrown since cattle grazing was ended there over two years ago, supposedly due to the need to preserve a small colony of the rare Australian anchor plant. Residents share the environmental concern over the future of the plant; however, they believe the plant could be better protected by appropriate fencing. The locals believe the reserve would be significantly better managed if grazing were reinstated.

Residents are particularly concerned that a DSE fuel reduction burn will threaten their properties, potentially destroy the reserve and possibly contaminate the water supply. They are particularly worried about the burn getting out of control, as was the case with the Wilsons Promontory fires back in March. Their concerns were further heightened when in April this year houses and

properties were threatened when a rubbish burn-off by Moorabool shire flared up and got out of control.

On behalf of Lal Lal residents I ask the minister to listen to their pleas and immediately halt any plans for a fuel reduction burn, fence off the rare anchor plant and favourably consider the restoration of grazing in the Lal Lal reserve.

Mount Waverley electorate: volunteers

Ms MORAND (Mount Waverley) — I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate 11 members of Monash zone 24 Neighbourhood Watch on 10 years of service to our community. It was a pleasure to attend the Neighbourhood Watch meeting last night to present certificates to the recipients. Volunteers who were recognised were Alan Douglas, Rod Ackroyd, Cheryl Sutherland, Mavis Gardner, Ian Currie, Brian Osborne, Elizabeth Binns, Kath Banks, Kenneth Rowley, Iris Rowley and John Thompson, the area coordinator, who is also very well known in Monash as the chair of the child and family care network.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of two volunteers at the Kerrie Street neighbourhood house. I presented certificates of appreciation at the recent annual general meeting to Anne McKay for 10 years and Linda Nettlefold for 12 years of volunteer work at this great neighbourhood house. My experience is that volunteers who take part in Neighbourhood Watch and neighbourhood houses are the same volunteers who give so much of their time and themselves to our community generally. They typically have also been on school councils, run the parents committee at the local kinder or do volunteer work at the local church, as was the case with some of the recipients I had the chance to talk to last night.

Volunteers in our community also undertake roles that are not necessarily measured in our volunteer statistics, because they may be as simple as helping out elderly neighbours with their shopping. As a community we are all in great debt to our volunteers, who provide so much in our community, all of it without seeking any recognition.

Alpine National Park: cattle grazing

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — Recently I spent some time at Omeo, and I have subsequently received some correspondence, dated 7 September, from Christine Faithfull. She said:

Thank you for taking the time to speak to the Omeo residents on 31 August 2005. My concern is that the cash

compensation offered to the cattlemen for the loss of their alpine leases is an insult.

In this letter Christine goes on to set out the bases of her concerns. Under the heading 'What we have lost' she said:

Between the two families —

that is the Kelly family and the Faithfull family —

nine leases have been removed.

Approximately 24 432 hectares of land with the allocations of 650 cattle for grazing four months of the year.

The opportunity to rest our pasture in the summer months, which is very important due to the harsh weather conditions in this area.

The loss of our ancestors' heritage for our children and their families.

She went on in her note to recite other elements of loss. Christine's letter proposes alternative suggestions to cash compensation in the form of:

Interest-free loans ...

Assistance in finding alternative land.

Alternative agistment for the four months of the summer.

A young farmers scheme to assist them to obtain their own farms, now that it is no longer viable on the family farm.

All this goes to highlight the fact that the work that has been undertaken by this government in kicking the cattlemen out of the high country is an absolute unmitigated disgrace for which this government will ever be shamed in these important areas of the state.

Employment: community jobs program

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — Recently I had the privilege to present graduation certificates to people who had just completed two very important community jobs programs (CJPs) in Wendouree West. The first was the fencing project, where 32 fences were replaced. I congratulate the following participants: Robert Laverso; Andrew Berkin; Graham Grant; Brett Head; Davon Jewell; Garry Stowe; Sean Sheil; Christopher Campbell; Ashlee Collins; Terry Smith; Wendi Snelson; and Janine Strauss.

The second project, in partnership with Sustainable Energy Authority Victoria, saw over 300 homes receive a retrofit to make them warmer. I congratulate the following graduating participants: Matthew Bright; Gordon Martin; Nathan Roberts; David Wilson; Geoffrey Robinson; Gavin Coveney; Shayne Maes;

Christopher Cochran; Maxine Cloke; Lisa Burns; and Anita Livings.

I also want to congratulate BEST Community Development, which provided the training. It is interesting to note that, as with all of the CJs that we have had in Wendouree West, the outcomes are 60 per cent at the moment, and we have 100 days to pick up on that. Sixty per cent of participants have obtained either full-time employment, part-time employment or are going into further training. The community jobs program has one of the best outcomes this government has delivered to unemployed people.

Food: labelling

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — Last week, while shopping for feta cheese, Kalamata olives, pies and pastizzi for a community meeting, I was approached by a person who advised me that he has had enough of poor and misleading labelling of packaged foods. He claimed that in some instances the weight and volume depicted on the package are not the same as the actual weight and volume of the contents.

I call on the Minister for Consumer Affairs to ensure that trade measurement devices are precise and correct with their readings. Trade Measurement Victoria is responsible for administering the Trade Measurement Act. I have also been advised that the Victorian government is about to increase trade measurement fees again. The only reason that no announcement has been made so far is that it is currently working on a media strategy in an attempt to minimise any scrutiny and criticism.

While I agree and expect measuring instruments to be precise, because a charge or payment is determined based on the measurement, I do not agree that fees should be increased again without any real benefit to consumers. Consumers expect and must have protection against faulty instruments. Consumers should not be used as scapegoats for this government's inability to balance the books and hence have to rely on increasing fees and charges to keep them out of the red. Under this government higher fees do not equate to more chicken scaloppini or chicken noodles.

I ask all residents in my electorate of Bulleen to write to the minister with examples of misleading labelling in the hope that the Minister for Consumer Affairs will do something — —

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

Collingwood College: garden program

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — On Friday last week I had the pleasure of attending Collingwood College to participate in A Taste of Slow lunch prepared by the children of the college. Also in attendance was the Treasurer, who announced a grant of \$80 000 to the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation to expand a successful garden program, which has been a part of Collingwood College for four years, to three primary school venues. The program is an intrinsic part of the school curriculum for primary students, led by the iconic Melbourne chef, Stephanie Alexander, and her support staff.

On Sunday I also attended the college's open day at which in excess of 1000 visitors enjoyed a range of cultural, culinary and musical activities. This was a magnificent event. I commend the principal, Melanie Ruchel, her staff and the school council for their leadership and ongoing support for public education.

Hampton Rehabilitation Hospital: hydrotherapy pool

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — Firstly, I wish to draw attention to the closure of Hampton Rehabilitation Hospital and the resultant closure of one of the few hydrotherapy pools in the local Brighton–Hampton area. The pool was part-funded by community donations, which makes it very different from other funding methods in the area. I have been asking ministers for health since 2001 to designate the precise amount of money that will go towards the new facilities at the Kingston Centre. The ministers have all been unable to specify the amount. This is unsatisfactory, because it was community money that went to that pool in the first instance.

Secondly, and more importantly, my query to the Minister for Health is: what services will be provided to the residents of Hampton and Brighton as substitute hydrotherapy services? Unless the minister develops a transport package from Brighton to Hampton to the Kingston Centre, the service is not accessible to local people who are losing the hydrotherapy service with the closure of the Hampton Rehabilitation Hospital. I understand the reasons for the closure of the hospital. I understand the facilities were old and that the changing rooms were even older — I understand all of the reasons behind the government's decision — but what I do not understand is why this minister and the previous minister have taken so long to devise a plan to provide services. They have failed to provide these services for some several years, and I call on the government to do so now.

Bellarine Secondary College: Rock Eisteddfod

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine) — Today students from Bellarine Secondary College are participating in the Rock Eisteddfod grand final being held at the Rod Laver Arena — it is on right now. The students have made it to the finals after competing against 50 schools across Victoria. The school has a proud history in the Rock Eisteddfod, last year winning the grand final. Its productions are always extraordinary and tell important stories that we can all relate to.

This year's production, *Heroes*, is no exception. It is a story of three grandchildren who are able to learn more about their grandfather through his memories, his history and his heroes; his favourite fairytale, his memories of war, his memories about Australia winning the America's Cup and his love of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Through this story we get to know the grandfather and understand more about the particular periods of Australian history.

The students should be very proud of their hard work and dedication. Particular acknowledgment goes to the choreographer, Stacey Carmichael, who is an ex-student, and the Stone family — Eric and Sue — who have been involved for 14 years. Also to all the parents and teachers, who put in an extraordinary amount of time to make it possible, and the principal, Colin Sing, I say well done. I wish them luck in today's final. Whatever the result, the Rock Eisteddfod is about fun and participation, and students at Bellarine Secondary College do that with gusto.

Gippsland: football

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I would like to congratulate some of our local football teams on their success in recent grand finals. First of all I would like to congratulate Wy Yung, which defeated Bairnsdale 16.14.110 to 7.14.56. This is Wy Yung's first flag since 1992, a 13-year drought, although it has been a very strong club during those years. It is only its second East Gippsland Football League premiership in 31 seasons, and Wy Yung will be very happy about its win. I would also like to congratulate the Orbost Snowy Rovers, who won the thirds premiership. This is their first flag since they amalgamated a few years ago and is a great success for that community.

In the North Gippsland Football League I would like to congratulate Heyfield, which beat Cowwarr. Most importantly I would like to congratulate the victorious Buchan Cavemen on their back-to-back Omeo District Football League premierships. This year they defeated Omeo, as they did last year, scoring 18.12.120 to

14.13.91. I would like to congratulate Russell Christy, the coach of the Buchan Cavemen, and make sure that he gets a full supply of tissues, which is very important! He is very passionate and committed to his side. I also congratulate Brooks Joiner, who won the league best and fairest and was best on the ground. I wish Maffra Football Club all the best this weekend.

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

Usha Sharma

Mr LIM (Clayton) — I rise to congratulate Indian community leader, Ms Usha Sharma, who was recently advised by the Premier of her Governor in Council appointment as a commissioner with the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC). Ms Sharma's appointment, the first from the Indian community, is most deserving in numerous respects. She is highly regarded in all sections of the migrant community in the south-east of Melbourne. She has worked tirelessly with the Indian, Fiji-Indian, Spanish, Croatian, Pakistani and South-East Asian communities over the past 15 years. She will act as an effective conduit between these communities and the government. Given her considerable community affairs background, she will contribute significantly to the work of the VMC.

The VMC plays a fundamental role in advising the government on multicultural affairs. It assists the government in advancing the goal of building and promoting a society where diversity is valued and the social and economic benefits of cultural diversity are understood by all Victorians. As a commissioner Ms Sharma will be a contact person for all communities, especially Victoria's Indian community. Ms Sharma's appointment is a mark of the Bracks government's recognition of the important and growing role that the Indian community plays in this state and will continue to play in future. I am confident she will be an extremely able commissioner who will perform her duty with competence and flair. Once more, my congratulations go to Usha Sharma on her appointment as a VMC commissioner.

Drubkang Tub Denke Drup

Mr SMITH (Bass) — Last Friday I had the great privilege and honour to host a visit to this Parliament by His Holiness Drubkang Tub Denke Drup, a reincarnated lama from Tibet. His Holiness was on a peaceful visit to Australia and wanted to visit our Parliament, along with six other visitors from Tibet. He was accompanied by another lama, His Holiness

Shantsa Tenzan Chodak. These leading Buddhists came from Tibet to speak of peace to people across Australia.

Their visit was arranged by the Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China, led by its chairman, Mr William Chiu from Sydney. The consul here in Melbourne was represented by a number of leading members of the Melbourne Chinese community, including Mr Paul Liu. His Holiness was very impressed with the Parliament and the friendly welcome he was given by the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Mr Ray Purdey, and other staff. We toured both chambers of the Parliament and the library. His Holiness presented the Parliament of Victoria with this silk hanging of the Potala Palace in Lhasa.

The SPEAKER — Order! Put it down, please.

Mr SMITH — I told him that I would present it to you, Speaker, as a memento of His Holiness's visit. He requested that perhaps the hanging could go in the parliamentary library, as he said he particularly enjoyed the warm and hospitable welcome he got from the parliamentary staff, and in particular Mr Jon Breukel.

Ethiopian community: new year celebration

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I would like to wish everyone here a happy Inquttatash, the Amharic word for the Ethiopian new year. I represented the Premier at the Ethiopian community's enthusiastic celebration in my electorate last Saturday night. Ethiopia still follows the Orthodox Julian calendar, so last Saturday marked the start of 1998. Of course I am glad Australia does not follow suit, as 1998 would see us still in the grip of the seven long, dark years of the Kennett government.

Ethiopians in the West are numerous, organised and articulate. They are working with government partners to tackle the social and economic issues coming out of the resettlement, often as humanitarian and political refugees, of Ethiopians in the Australian community. With the assistance of a \$30 000 feasibility grant from the Bracks government they are preparing plans for a community centre in Deer Park. Many have also expressed their concerns regarding the violence and political crisis that have followed the elections in Ethiopia earlier this year and which saw a demonstration outside this Parliament on 24 June. The Premier has recently written to the foreign minister to raise these concerns on behalf of Australian Ethiopians.

Here in Victoria the Ethiopian community is approaching its challenges in partnership with government in a very positive way. It is blessed with

proactive leadership like that of the Ethiopian Community Association and community leaders like Adamu Tefera, Eleni Bereded-Samuel, Haileluel Gebreselassie, Tatek Menji and a host of others.

Carers: rally

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — I bring to the attention of the house this morning's rally on the steps of Parliament House by carers and a similar rally held at the same time at Parliament House in Canberra. There are 1.6 million unpaid family carers nationally, and they do a mighty job of caring for family members and partners with disabilities, in many cases profound, lifelong disabilities. They do all this with minimum support from government. Many carers are worn out after 30 or 40 years of caring for family members and are concerned about what will happen to those family members when, because of ill health or death, they are no longer able to care for them.

The waiting list for supported accommodation in Victoria exceeds 4000, and more than 1000 of these people are classified as urgent. This morning both rallies heard impassioned speeches from carers and family members and were presented with a seven-point log of claims. I commend the log of claims to the government and ask that it not only take note of but immediately act to implement these claims. The carers log of claims concludes with this statement:

The message to our state-elected representatives is crystal clear. State support systems have failed families caring for people with disabilities and mental illness. We ask all members to act now to change that.

Haig Street Primary School: 80th anniversary

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — Last Thursday I had the great pleasure of attending the 80th birthday celebrations of the Haig Street Primary School, formerly known as Heidelberg West Primary School. In the words of the school principal, Leanne Sheean, it has been:

... 80 years of providing education and care to students and families of the West Heidelberg community.

The school was officially opened by John Cain, Sr, on 20 September 1925. The school opened with Charles E. Booth as head teacher and 132 students. The school and the local community have shown great strength in hard times. The Depression, World War II, recessions and other hardships have all been faced with characteristic courage and resilience. Enrolments peaked in 1956, with 1046 students. In May 1962, after a huge campaign to upgrade the school buildings, the school was visited by the then acting education

minister, Mr Lindsay Thompson. Soon after six new classrooms were built. Other significant events occurred in 1982, when the then Premier, John Cain, Jr, opened the school hall, and in 1996, when Vin Heffernan, MP, my predecessor, opened the library technology centre. No amount of words can describe the fabulous show that the schoolchildren presented to the enthralled audience.

Today I pay tribute to the school principal, Leanne Sheean; the school council president, Kerry Fox; the 80th anniversary committee; and the teachers, staff, parents and friends for their outstanding celebration. I also pay tribute to Yusef Omar and the Somalian community and students for their contribution to the day. However, I express the most appreciation to the school students for their fabulous presentations.

Housing: Shepparton

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — I bring to the attention of the house the appalling public housing situation in Shepparton. The government's failure to properly progress the redevelopment of the Parkside estate — not Parkside Gardens — is an absolute disgrace. The project was first started by the previous government in 1999, yet this government has not achieved the required local government permits, and the 64 derelict houses which were demolished over a year ago have still not been replaced, despite numerous announcements and reannouncements by successive Labor ministers and a claim in 2002 by the Bracks government that the project would be completed in two to three years.

Meanwhile public housing waiting lists continue to balloon in Shepparton and the minister refuses to answer questions from the local media. Wait-turn lists have increased by 53.74 per cent since June 2000, and that is without counting families seeking housing transfers. Even more disgracefully, early housing waiting lists for Shepparton's most desperate and needy have grown by a massive 594 per cent over the same period. That is not the only problem with public housing in Shepparton. Maintenance is also in a mess. Five days after the event the Office of Housing has failed to replace or secure windows smashed by an intruder at a housing office property occupied by a family with three small children who are terrified for their safety. The Minister for Housing should stop making lame excuses, admit her failures, take some responsibility and get on with the job of fixing public housing, particularly in rural Victoria.

Craigieburn Football Club: premierships

Ms BEATTIE (Yuroke) — The date of 3 September 2005 will go down as an historic day for the Craigieburn Football Club. Its senior team, its reserves team and its under-18 team all played in the Essendon District Football League (EDFL) B grade grand finals at Windy Hill, with the senior and reserves teams successful in their quest for premiership glory.

The senior team won its match in thrilling circumstances, as its opponents never stopped fighting. Coach Gary Sheldon said it was a massive relief that the guys managed to hang on. The Eagles backline has been tough and impenetrable all year, and its members stood tall for the ultimate game. They were challenged on more than one occasion, but their ability to weather the storm and adapt to the changing conditions meant their victory was well deserved. Best players on the day included Jason Giarusso, Daniel McShane, Shaun Gordon, Brett Caton, Mark Beckenham, Heath Woodhouse, Jason Pappin, Brett Hayes, Steven Kenna, David Carrusso and Nathan Skudutis. It was the last game for Nathan, who is now retiring, and it was a fantastic tribute to him and his years of service to the club that the team could send him out on such a high.

The reserves team also managed to win by 8 points. The scores were locked after four quarters, but within 10 minutes of extra time the Eagles reserves secured the premiership victory. Although the club is still in celebration mode, Eagles president Peter Harris now has his sights set firmly on next season, when the club will make its debut in the EDFL's A grade competition. I look forward to joining the Eagles on Saturday night and kicking up my heels to celebrate with them.

Schools: Morwell electorate

Mr JENKINS (Morwell) — I would like to bring to the attention of the house some of the great schools in my electorate. Yallourn North Primary School, its principal Ian Whitehead, his staff and the students are great. They welcomed me as principal for a day, sharing Canadian pancakes for breakfast — courtesy of Canadian exchange teacher Mike McNamara — skipping for heart health and celebrating the school's Commonwealth Games flag. I had a beaut day.

Thanks also go to Kosciuszko Street Primary School at Traralgon, which put on a basketball demonstration for the Minister for Commonwealth Games and me recently when we inspected the progress of the new Traralgon indoor sports stadium. The stadium will host Commonwealth Games matches next year. John Reed

and his staff have a top school, and maybe we saw some future Commonwealth Games players there.

Boolarra Primary School's musical *Superkids* was fantastic! Leanne Emond and her staff have really brought out the best in their talented kids. What is more, they invited along local senior citizens to enjoy the experience. Boolarra is a terrific community and can be proud of its school.

Glengarry Primary School is the centre of a beautiful part of Gippsland, one of the state's best farming areas. Principal Pauline Jelleff, the staff and the community have worked hard with the education department to deliver a great learning environment. The students have responded accordingly — even if they do not all like dissecting sheep hearts! If Victoria is a great place in which to live, work, invest and raise a family — and it is — then Latrobe schools are great schools, and the Latrobe Valley is the best place in a great state.

Housing: Prahran

Mr LUPTON (Prahran) — Work will commence in October on a major upgrade of security for residents of the public housing estate in King Street, Prahran. The entrances of the buildings at 25 and 27 King Street will be fitted with state-of-the-art proximity-reader technology. Each resident will be issued with a small electronic tag which can go on their key ring and will provide secure access for them. Each of the flats will be fitted with intercoms to enable visitors to call the resident by entering the number of the flat on a keypad at the entrances to the buildings, and the residents will control access and entry. This security system will provide public housing residents with the level of security in their homes that is commonly expected in private apartments.

The process which has led to the installation of this new security system is a very successful example of consultation with residents. Local residents spoke to me at my community meetings and various security options were canvassed. The system that has been selected is the one preferred by residents, and I welcome the Bracks government funding that will see the improved security system installed by the end of the year. I congratulate the residents for their input and support and the Office of Housing for its hard work on behalf of residents.

Youth: employment initiatives

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — The Bracks government takes seriously the need to reduce youth unemployment and is tackling the issue on a number of

fronts. The Bracks government has introduced new initiatives to address critical areas such as youth employment, health and wellbeing, sport and recreation, arts and entertainment, and community life.

The Advance youth development program provides an additional \$5 million over four years to build on the existing Victorian Youth Development program by making it available to all government secondary schools. The Bracks government has also provided \$2 million over the next four years to develop FReeZA Central, which is a great initiative and stems from the successful FReeZA program. Youth support agencies across the state will share in \$4 million of funding under the newly aligned youth participation and access program. The three-year program, replacing the former youth services program, supports communities and local organisations in providing practical support to young people who need it.

The program specifically targets young people aged between 12 and 25 who may be facing barriers to participation in community life or difficulties in the transition to adulthood. Only the Bracks government is delivering for young people in the city of Casey. The initiatives are: the community jobs program that involves jobs and training and provides 55 jobs, with an investment of \$452 820; the community jobs program that involves employment initiatives and has assisted 465 people — —

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

Seymour Railway Heritage Centre

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I rise to congratulate the Seymour Railway Heritage Centre for successfully gaining permission to stage the 150th anniversary of railway travelling exhibition called Making Tracks at the historic refreshment rooms at Seymour railway station. Congratulations especially to the rail historian Bob Whitehead and the Seymour historian John Jennings, who spent time lobbying and making the case for the Making Tracks exhibition to visit Seymour. The exhibition opened on Monday, 5 September, in Seymour and will continue until 6 October. I would like to thank the Minister for Transport and the Department of Infrastructure for permitting the extension of the tour by funding its display at Seymour.

I have visited the exhibition since the opening. I was very impressed by the number of people visiting the exhibition. It was enhanced greatly by the local memorabilia and displays from the Seymour Railway

Heritage Centre collection. I would like to thank the Mitchell Shire Council for its sponsorship and the many supporters and volunteers who are keeping the exhibition open for its duration. I encourage people to go and visit it. There is also the Tastes of the Goulburn, which is on 22 October.

GROUNDWATER (BORDER AGREEMENT) (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 11 August; motion of Mr CAMERON (Minister for Agriculture).

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — The Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill is specifically introduced to endorse the ground water agreement which was signed by the premiers of Victoria and South Australia and to give it the legislative backing it requires. The initial agreement between the states was ratified in 1985. It has served its purpose well for 20 years. The agreement established zones inside a 20-kilometre strip on either side of the border between Victoria and South Australia in which to identify the share of the resources.

The bill introduces subzones in these zones to enable a better delineation between areas with different supply levels and different requirements. As I said, the existing agreement has lasted for 20 years. To give greater certainty of supply, the bill identifies different aquifers with different rates of potentiometric surface decline and reductions in permissible annual volumes. The bill ratifies changes to the existing agreement to distinguish between different aquifers, which are interesting to look at diagrammatically but which I cannot demonstrate in Parliament.

Effectively there is a layer of sand, which is on average 100 to 200 metres deep. Under that you have the tertiary limestone aquifer, which stretches from the coast virtually right up to the Murray River, with different levels of water quality. The water quality gets better the further north it goes. But this tertiary limestone aquifer provides a restricted amount of water, particularly in the north of both states, because it effectively is fossilised water and cannot be replenished. As such, any use of the water has to be carefully managed to ensure that we are not overmining a non-renewable resource.

As I said, the certainty of supply of those different aquifers has been identified. The bill ratifies changes to the use of those different aquifers and makes a clear

distinction between them. In the southernmost areas of the 40-kilometre strip along the South Australian border, that includes Mount Gambier, Penola and Naracoorte, a tertiary confined sand aquifer runs under the tertiary limestone aquifer. Between them is a layer of confining clay which keeps the sand aquifer separate from the limestone aquifer. To try to explain in layman's terms, if I can, what the potentiometric surface is, it is the level to which the water in the confined aquifer which is held under the layer of clay will rise up a pipeline if a pipe is put into that confined aquifer. In other words, the clay above the aquifer stops the water rising but if you put a pipe into it the water will rise up the pipe to a certain level. That is what is described as the potentiometric level.

The bill identifies and restricts the reduction of the potentiometric level. In the southern area to which I was referring, the tertiary confined sand aquifer under the tertiary limestone aquifer is up to 1000 metres deep. So it is a very deep aquifer in those sands and therefore constitutes an enormous volume of water which can be used and should be able to be used, particularly where the quality is up to scratch and where it is viable for farmers to be able to irrigate with that water. Equally the tertiary limestone aquifer, where the water quality is good, is still a very good basin of underground water. There is absolute justification for the use of that water, particularly the further north you go, where there is a need to ensure that there is not overmining of the resource.

I have spoken to some of my colleagues in South Australia. They believe that if the good-quality water in the tertiary limestone aquifer is not utilised it could well be lost because of the intrusion into it of saline water. I asked about the detail of that. They believe that the increase in clearing areas of South Australia will lead to greater leaching effect of salt through the soil profile which will end up in that limestone aquifer. From the work done by Phil Macumber, a hydrogeologist, it would appear that that is not the case in Victoria. I would be interested to learn whether that is the case in South Australia or whether that is a justifiable reason for additional use of the water. Dr Macumber believes that the additional salt will get into the non-confined limestone aquifer by the lowering of the level of it and the intrusion of salt water on the edge, particularly the eastern edge, from an adjoining aquifer which is highly saline.

That was of great significance in a recent case where the farmers at Tutye opposed the introduction of further use of the water for potato growing with central pivot irrigation on the basis that if there was added extraction close to the edge of the limestone aquifer the saltwater

intrusion could affect the ground water and put at risk all those other people close to where the bore was to go down who use the water — in Victoria and probably in South Australia — for their stock and domestic use.

Further to the south, there has been a dramatic reduction in the level of the very deep confined sand aquifer. In many cases there has been substantial reduction over the past 30 years. It is believed to be due to the increase in the softwood plantations in the area. They, of course, reduce the inflow of water and therefore the recharge of the aquifer. I am at a loss to understand quite how the deeper aquifer is recharged from that. I imagine that most of the losses have occurred in the tertiary limestone aquifer, which would have direct access to surface recharge.

The central area includes townships like Bordertown and Kaniva in the north and Edenhope and Casterton on the eastern boundary in the south. The area suffered some decline in recent years but much less than those in the southern areas. The water in the northern area, which runs up to Renmark on the Murray River and includes the townships of Murrayville in Victoria and Pinnaroo in South Australia, both further south in the area, is drawn almost totally from the limestone aquifer, which has had a decline of approximately 9 metres since 1997 and effectively stabilised in 2002. My understanding is that that aquifer is not being replenished.

Although the water level has stabilised, given that it is a non-renewable resource it is still of concern if there is a major reduction. The reduction of 9 metres over that five-year period from 1997 to 2002 would clearly have to be a real concern. The tertiary limestone aquifer from which the water is drawn is below a sand deposit of 100 metres in depth on average. The water in the limestone aquifer is of a much higher quality than that in the tertiary confined sand aquifer immediately below it.

The changes introduced by the bill include a new schedule which virtually replaces the past agreement between the states. The new act will be signed off by the premiers of both states. The new schedule replaces virtually all the issues in the initial agreement. The new schedule includes the beneficial changes, including the clear distinction between the tertiary limestone aquifer and the tertiary confined sand aquifer.

This definition was not in the initial agreement, and clearly this is a worthwhile improvement that will give better management. It is of value to have it in the bill. The bill also enables the existing zones and allows them to be subdivided into subzones, which will lead to

better management of the ground water in those areas. There will be better definition of what is happening to the ground water, and, where needed, it will lead to better management by way of restricting the use of ground water.

Equally, the boundaries of an aquifer can now be determined clearly within a zone. Together with the aquifers and the subzones, the allowable annual volumes can be altered or adjusted, and under the new schedule the permissible annual volumes and permissible potentiometric surface lowering rates can also be altered. By the use of both these mechanisms there can be a greater and more defined level of control of the ground water within the 40-kilometre strip from the Murray River to the coast.

Clearly the ground water varies enormously from north to south, and often within small distances the difference can be equally clear — for example, in the northern area there might be a fault that could lead to greater contamination by surface water, particularly saline water, of the tertiary limestone aquifer. It is important to recognise that by way of subzones and, possibly, aquifer boundaries.

In the main these provisions in the new schedule bring into effect a greater level of control and allow better management. In that respect they deserve the support of the house; however, the issues of concern are quite numerous.

The permissible annual volumes used to be equal on both sides of the border. When the initial agreement was introduced the volumes allowed to be drawn down in Victoria were exactly the same as in South Australia. Looking at the initial schedule you can see that the areas to the south, zones 1A and 1B, both had 71 000 megalitres of permissible annual volume. When you look at the new schedule you find that the permissible annual volume has changed from a total between the tertiary limestone and the confined sand aquifers of 40 000 megalitres in South Australia compared to about 60 000 in Victoria. This is in contrast to almost all the others, because in almost every other case the reduction is substantial in respect of the balance that Victoria gets compared to the amount that South Australia can draw down.

This is of concern, and in that respect I was advised that the permissible annual volumes have been determined to be greater in South Australia not because of the volume that has been drawn, but rather because of the increased recharge in South Australia in the aquifer in the south and in the north a greater area of land that is suitable for irrigation, which gives South Australia the

advantage of being able to use more of that water on a bigger area of land. Given that the original ground water agreement suggested an equal drawing capacity for both states, I suggest there could be an argument that water trading between states could allow either permanent or temporary trading which could allow for this imbalance without one state necessarily missing out on its initial allocation. That is something that deserves consideration.

The next point that is of importance is that the permissible potentiometric surface lowering rates in metres per annum are not consistent with the figures that the committee's annual reports show over the two years 2002–03 and 2003–04, which are less in the north but almost double in the south. I inquired about this, and I could not understand why the committee that is responsible for the management of this ground water area along the border had in its two last annual reports figures it was working on, but when we compared them with the figures in the bill we found they differed substantially. For example, as a comparison, 0.25 for 1A and 1B as against 0.5, which is the committee's number. If you go to the northern end of the border, it is 0.65 in South Australia as against 0.25 in Victoria. The figures there are about a third of those stated in the committee's annual reports in those two years.

When I discussed this with an advised source from South Australia, he said, 'I believe there has been a cock-up in these figures'. I said, 'I am unsure of the figures because I do not know how you actually ascertain whether the committee's figures were correct or whether the figures in the bill are correct'.

The indication from that advice was that the committee acted responsibly in the past two years and the figures in the bill do not reflect the current management regime, and the figures have been used by that committee in advising the level of permissible potentiometric surface lowering rate that could occur in both South Australia and Victoria. This is of concern, and I would like this issue to be clarified while the bill is between houses, and I would like the minister to give an explanation either in the consideration-in-detail stage or by way of his winding up this debate.

The other major concern I have is in respect of the wording in clause 4(b)(ii) of schedule 2 on page 7 of the bill, and I think the house will understand my concern. It says:

the provisions of those Acts and regulations shall respectively be applied to —

- (i) all bores existing within the Designated Area at the date of this Agreement;

- (ii) all applications to construct, deepen, enlarge or alter or from which water is extracted, after the date of this Agreement

Frankly, I cannot understand what that means. I can only assume it is meant to say what I believe should be there — that is:

- (ii) all applications to construct, deepen, enlarge or alter bores or to extract water therefrom, as are made after the day of this Agreement; and

then going on to (iii). I would suggest that again there needs to be some explanation as to what the words in (ii) mean or the change needs to be introduced by way of amendment, because in my view the words do not make sense and in fact make that part of the bill quite unworkable.

I go back to some of the issues that were raised in the earlier discussion. I owe a lot to Dr Phil Macumber, who advised me about not only management of the aquifers in this area but particularly about the aquifer structure in the north of the state which includes the water running through these aquifers we are talking about which are sourced in the deep leads much further to the east.

It is a fascinating science and is something that very few people understand. Because you cannot see it, it makes it very difficult to completely understand it. It certainly is, for most people, a science that is almost unknown. I also owe thanks to two people who are part of the ground water protection committee, Mr Kevin Chaplin and Mrs Jocelyn Linder, whose local advice was invaluable. The suggestions they have made are very sensible, certainly in respect of the advice that was given to me by Kevin Chaplin, who said the modelling that has been done shows the recharge could come from the saline areas on that eastern edge. That is the real concern.

Jocelyn Linder had that same concern, and I believe that is why the group that opposed the increase in irrigation in that area from the tertiary limestone aquifer believe that to increase irrigation in that area would have led to the incursion of saline water into what is a very good and clean aquifer. It is interesting that the water in that limestone aquifer has, as I understand it, an electrical conductivity (EC) level between 1200 EC running down to 800 EC, whereas in the sand aquifer it is up to about 3000 EC. I can understand people's concern if they are drawing their stock and domestic water from it. Any incursion of that higher saline water would be of enormous concern.

The other concern they had was that if more water were taken from the sand aquifer, it could lead to the loss of

water from the limestone — again on the basis of hydraulic pressure. I am not in any way able to make a judgment on that, but I can understand the principle of it. It is of interest that their concern could well be picked up by the committee, and I would like to see those hydraulic arguments better presented so that I can better understand just how that interaction between those two aquifers would occur if more water were taken from that confined sand aquifer below the tertiary limestone aquifer.

Clearly the majority of water is being used in South Australia. Victoria has introduced metering to determine how much water is being drawn from those aquifers, but there is very little metering done in South Australia, which concerns Victorians. What they use in South Australia in place of metering is irrigation equivalents, which have been shown to be a lot greater than the amounts estimated in respect of the extraction rates which are allowed under this agreement. Quite clearly it is important, if this agreement is to work, that South Australia have a metering system similar to that requested in Victoria.

There is a further cause for concern, because Victoria does not use anywhere near the same amount of ground water from these aquifers as South Australia. We still have cases where ground water irrigation projects have been stopped due to concerns about the sustainability of the projects, especially on the ground of salinity incursion, which was particularly well outlined by Phil Macumber in the Tutye report. The proposed irrigation plans in the Murrayville area have to be carefully considered before any further licences are granted in that area.

Since June 2004, in zone 10A on the South Australian border that fronts the Murrayville area, an allowable annual volume of 9400 megalitres has been allowed to be extracted from the tertiary limestone aquifer, with all but 142 megalitres of that allowance already allocated. In contrast, on the Victorian side of the border in zone 10B the allowable annual volume is much less, at 6720 megalitres, which is 71 per cent of that allocated to South Australia. We have only 6178 megalitres, leaving 542 megalitres unallocated. These figures might not mean much, but they again show that we are not using as much water in Victoria, and we are setting more aside as unallocated. In future agreements we want to look very carefully at the balance between states.

In conclusion, I want to know why this bill is being introduced now. Why is the bill not being introduced in March, when the review will be out?

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — I ask that the amendment in my name be circulated. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted with the view of inserting in their place the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the interstate agreement is amended so that the designated area, and the management thereof, correlates with the boundaries of the aquifers affected, and not just a 40-kilometre-wide zone which encapsulates only sections of the aquifers affected'.

The Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill amends the 20-year-old principal agreement between South Australia and Victoria, which coordinates the protection, sharing and supposedly sustainable harvesting of ground water resources in the border area. Increased demands on that water have led to a need for more targeted management in order to distinguish between the two different aquifers, establish subzones, allowing separate rules to be set for different aquifers and different subzones and update references to other pieces of legislation.

The Nationals are concerned that the bill puts in place a management regime for only one part of the aquifers, effectively in isolation from the rest, which may be either outside the zone in Victoria or outside the zone in South Australia. We have moved a long way in our knowledge of water since 1985, when the principal agreement was made. We have moved a long way in our understanding that water is no longer affected by state borders. The federal government, the relevant state governments and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission have done a lot of work to put in place the national water initiative. We are trying to get a regime which goes across borders so that we have better management of our resource, and I will come back to that.

Our other concern, and it is always a challenge, is about the consultation on the bill. We circulated the bill for comment, and we found that quite a few people did not realise what was going on. The Honourable Barry Bishop in the other place was able to get an article about it into the *Sunraysia Daily* which triggered quite a bit of interest. When you make changes it is always a challenge to consult with people and get them involved in the debate. But it would appear that there are people who did not know this was happening until they saw the article in the paper, which sparked interest particularly in the Murrayville area, which has been a contentious area — and the previous speaker talked about that.

Quite a few years ago — maybe 6, 8 or 10 years — I remember going to a meeting at Bordertown on the Murrayville aquifer, so it has been a contentious issue

out there for a long time. There has been substantial irrigation development out there, and people who rely on that aquifer for both stock and domestic purposes have been very concerned that the draw-down will impact on their ability to access water. At the time when I was involved out there in a previous role, the irrigation industry funded the lengthening of the pipes for stock and domestic bores so they could access good water, because there was an acknowledgement that they had drawn that down too far.

We would all acknowledge that we now have a lot better knowledge and understanding of how ground water works, although it is still very limited, because you cannot see it. It is a lot easier when we deal with surface water, because you can see it and measure it, whereas it is harder with ground water. The people who specialise in that area do a very good job, but no matter how good a job they do they can probably only give their best possible estimates.

The principal things being changed by the schedules to this bill include the permissible annual volume (PAV), which is set for different zones. I note with interest that since 1985 there has been an increase of something like 17 000 megalitres in the PAV which is taken out across the area. Following the publicity The Nationals created we consulted with someone in zone 5B who said that the PAV there is set at the allocated amount. In his view it is not necessarily set at a sustainable amount and that at some stage in the future there may have to be a clawback — and that is one of the things the previous speaker talked about.

The PAV is the amount of water that can be taken out annually. The bill sets the permissible rate of potentiometric surface lowering. To make it simpler for this debate, I will talk about the issue of draw-down. It effectively sets the levels to which ground water resources are allowed to be lowered per annum, or on average over five years, in the case of the agreement. It sets a permissible level of salinity, which is a real issue in some of these areas, particularly to the east of Murrayville, where there is some quite saline water. The bill also sets the permissible distance from the border between South Australia and Victoria within which either government must notify the other if it is going to grant a licence.

One of the challenges I found in researching the bill was getting relevant information. The principal agreement from 1985 has been updated by the review committee over time. Those updates are published in the *Government Gazette*, which is fine for people who get regular copies — —

Dr Napthine — Don't you read it?

Mr WALSH — It is not something that is normally on my reading schedule. For simplicity's sake, one of the things I would like to see in the future is the ability to track the changes over time. If you go to the web site now, you will see the schedules for 2004, but we do not know what has happened since 1985, when the principal agreement was made. It is important that the minister give consideration to how we can make sure there is good information on the web site, so that people can see what happens over time and be aware of the changes that are happening there.

As the previous speaker said, it is quite a complex issue, and talking about the different aquifers in some ways confuses people more than explaining it. My understanding is that principally three aquifers are involved. There is the Parilla Sands one, which is the shallow aquifer that is salty and basically not used at all. There is the tertiary limestone aquifer, which is the main one, which is where the water is drawn from now. The water that is in the limestone tertiary aquifer is what they call 'fossil water'. Carbon dating says that it is something like 20 000 years old. It was put there when we had vastly different climatic conditions in Australia to what we have now, so it is effectively a finite resource that we are, over time, mining. We made a decision to do that.

Then there is the confined tertiary sand aquifer, which is the deeper one that is effectively under pressure. At the moment the only pumping out of that aquifer is for water supply for some of the towns in the area, because there is effectively no surface water there. But in the new schedule there is actually a PAV set for the tertiary confined sand aquifer.

Among the people we consulted with there are some concerns about actually going down and pumping out of the tertiary confined sand aquifer, because there is a belief that there is a certain amount of recharge under pressure coming out of that one into the limestone aquifer. If we go in too deep and take that water away, we will reduce the pressure and may not have what limited recharge there is up into the tertiary limestone aquifer. It is very old water, and it is, as I understand it, a reasonably finite resource.

The people that I talked to have said that since 1997 there has been a 9-metre lowering of the water under Pinnaroo. Scattered across that aquifer there is something like 4-metre draw-down elsewhere. The concerns of the people we talked to were that to the east of that aquifer is what is called the Danyo Fault. There is a concern by people that, if the water is lowered too

much in the tertiary limestone aquifer, the water to the east of the Danyo Fault is salty water and there is a potential risk of saltwater intrusion across the Danyo Fault line into the tertiary limestone aquifer, which would effectively destroy any irrigation industry or any stock and domestic supply out of that aquifer, because it would be termed 'salty'.

There are bores placed along the Danyo Fault line to try to monitor if there is salt water movement, but given that we cannot actually see what goes on down there, I have a concern that by the time we actually know it has happened it will be too late and it may not be able to be corrected into the future. So we are mining that resource, and we need to be mindful of the fact that we have to protect it. If we do not have good water out there, we will not have people living out there at all in the future.

We believe the reasoned amendment that has been moved in my name is a more effective way of managing the resource, whereby you can actually have a management regime across the state borders that would take into account the whole aquifer. We could make sure we have a far more meaningful aquifer management regime, by aquifer rather than by the agreement down the middle with the 40-kilometre zone and then with state management on each side.

As the previous speaker said, there has always been some concern from the people on the Victorian side that perhaps the South Australians are not doing the right thing; perhaps they do not have enough meters on the water. I do not know enough to pass judgment on that. No doubt South Australia probably says that Victoria does not do it well, so I think there is probably bit of blame there. But if you had a management regime for individual whole aquifers, there would no longer be this blaming across the border about who is taking too much or who is doing this or doing that.

As I said earlier, governments have spent a lot of time getting in place a national water initiative so we can look at water management holistically, and this is an instance where we are passing legislation that is not doing that, which is why The Nationals are asking for it to be withdrawn so that we can set up an agreement between South Australia and Victoria that looks at the whole aquifer in its totality.

The concerns of some of the people we have talked to is that what limited flows there are through the northern aquifers in the zone travel to the north-west and effectively end up in the Murray River. We do not understand what the interaction is between the ground water and surface water, but there is a belief that it

travels south-east to north-west and has some form of recharge into the Murray River. The aquifers in the south principally flow to the west, and there is a belief by some people in the industry that water at one time used to end up in the Coorong. All of us who have been involved in the Living Murray debate understand that the Coorong is one of the icon sites, and there is a concern that it is going hyper-saline because not enough water is getting down the Murray River. If it is true that there is interaction between the water running west out of the southern aquifers in this zone into the Coorong, we are probably impacting on the Coorong with that as well as with what may be happening with the Murray River.

There is a concern that the development of the plantation industry, principally in South Australia but now in Victoria, is also having a significant impact on the localised recharge of those southern aquifers. I am not sure where the debate is in South Australia, but I know there was discussion at some stage about the plantation timber industry having to have a water right to grow trees because it is effectively extracting water that would be used from the aquifer. There are concerns in the plantation industry in Victoria that some of the changes in the white paper may lead to having some water rights being pushed onto it.

Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water proposed to allocate some additional water out of the Murray aquifer, but local users objected to it because of the concerns raised by the previous speaker. It is my understanding that the application went to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and the case was lost. I am informed that it was withdrawn before it went to VCAT, so I assume that the people knew they would lose the case and did not want to waste their money. There is a concern that we are mining this resource and that it is the rate of mining we are debating and how sustainable it is into the future. We understand this has to be reviewed every five years, and in the future, depending on our knowledge and science, we may find there could be a clawback on some of the PAVs across the different zones in this area.

It reminds me of some time I spent with Don Blackmore, the previous chief executive officer of the Murray Darling Basin Commission, when we were doing the infamous farm dams public consultation. At that time a lot of people could not understand what the fuss was about when talking about water. Don Blackmore explained it very well by saying that you are not just talking about water or transferring water, you are talking about transferring wealth, because water is wealth for industry. If we get to the stage in the future where there has to be a clawback for the PAVs because

we find this resource is going down too fast or there is some saltwater intrusion of some form or another, there will be tears, because prosperous and efficient industries have been created on this resource, such as the potato industry and the carrot industry in the sands in South Australia, and in some instances in Victoria. It also provides the stock and domestic supply for the dry land farms and the supplies for the towns in that area.

We are passing a bill that is mining a resource. At some stage in the future it may not be able to be done at the rate we are talking about, and we need to think of a process for changing it in the future so that we do not end up in chaos because people who have built up substantial businesses — they may have created equity and have debt in the business — find they do not have access to the resource. We have seen what has happened in Victoria and New South Wales with the recent drought and run of dry years. People have not been able to access the amount of water they had previously come to expect. That has put a huge financial pressure on their businesses, and we do not want to get into the situation where we have to say no to people who extract water from the ground water aquifers and tell them they will lose 25, 30 or 50 per cent of the water that is there.

The previous speaker also raised the argument put on behalf of South Australia that if it does not use the water it will go saline. I have never heard a more spurious argument to justify why South Australia should get a larger share of the resource than Victoria. Victorians are concerned that if we lower that water too far there is the risk of saltwater intrusion across the Danyo Fault. South Australia has been very critical of Victoria and New South Wales over the management of the surface water through the Murray Darling Basin Commission, so if the bill is withdrawn the Victorian government could go back to South Australia and say that it wants a holistic approach to these aquifers. Then both states could put their cards on the table so that the ground water can be shared well into the future. I think South Australia would be very hypocritical if it did not agree to do that after its comments about the Murray and Darling rivers and Victoria and New South Wales.

It is unfortunate, but if the reasoned amendment proposed by The Nationals is not accepted, The Nationals will oppose the bill.

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — A hallmark of the Bracks government is the reform of water management. Victorians now think and act differently about water than they did before the launch of the Our Water Our Future policy in June 2004. With the release of the Our Water Our Future policy the Bracks government

offered Victorians a comprehensive plan to secure our water supplies.

Since the 2002 state election there have been many, many water bills in the house initiated by the Bracks government to make fundamental changes to Victoria's water management. We have offered Victorians a comprehensive plan to secure our water supplies. Some of the actions we have undertaken include giving legal water rights to rivers and ground water systems, rights for some water to flow down rivers — a novel experience in a country that believes all water in all rivers should go into cropping. We have changed the pricing of water to encourage people to use it wisely. There was an amazing response to the increasing cost of water. The population of Victoria embraced it because they realised that we must start treating water and give it the importance it should have in our environment and for our continued existence in this state.

We must make it the very precious commodity that it is and we must believe that it is a very precious commodity. We have instituted permanent water-saving measures and put in place reforms which were debated in this place quite hotly, reforms which secure water for farms through new water allocations and trading systems.

The bill we are debating today updates the way ground water is managed in the shared zone along the Victorian-South Australian border. It recognises that we can and should provide different approaches to the different aquifer types in the region. The bill sets out to improve and to ratify an amended agreement to the broader ground water agreement which was entered into between Victoria and South Australia in 1985. The original agreement was established with only one aquifer in mind — the tertiary limestone aquifer — and enabled only broad-based management to be applied.

The Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill will distinguish between aquifers and enable subzones to be established for more effective local management. It will allow management prescriptions to be set for the different aquifers and subzones within a zone. It will simplify two of the management prescriptions which are at present unclear, and it makes updated references to other legislation. Both the premiers of South Australia and Victoria have entered into the amending agreement and complementary legislation will be presented to the South Australian Parliament.

The agreement provides for a coordinated management strategy for ground water resources that straddle the

boundary between Victoria and South Australia along a 40-kilometre strip centred on the border. This 40-kilometre strip is referred to as the designated area within the agreement. In South Australia there are three towns: Bordertown, Mount Gambier and Penola, which are within or close to the designated area. Ground water is the major water supply source for Mount Gambier and is used extensively in South Australia for high-value horticulture, dairying, small seed and viticulture irrigation. As earlier speakers have said, in Victoria we use this ground water to a much lesser degree. We have a few areas of irrigated cropping in the designated areas but no major townships.

The long-term decline in the ground water levels has been observed in parts of the designated areas and has been attributed primarily to the below-average recharge since the mid-1990s — less rainfall and plantation forests are believed to be what is having the effect on the recharge. Both South Australia and Victoria have initiated programs to meter ground water use and investigate the impact of forest plantations on recharge and the impact of reducing rainfall on recharge. This is also being discussed and addressed at a national level as part of the national water initiative.

The agreement sets the management prescriptions for the designated areas but the actual allocation of water is the responsibility of licensing authorities in each state. In Victoria, eight ground water plans have been approved, which have been developed by consultative committees consisting of farmers who obviously have a lot of knowledge about the ground water issues in their particular areas. The Bracks government has committed \$13 million to upgrade its observation bore network, which consists of over 2500 bores across the state. These bores monitor water levels so that we can manage the ground water resources sustainably. As we know, we hear 'mining a water source' being termed as ancient — that is, it is non-renewable water — and we need to monitor and guard our use. The government also has an extensive monitoring network that focuses on salinity with 2500 bores that monitor salinity trends.

The way in which ground water enters and moves through aquifers and interacts with surface water is not well understood, and we need a responsive and improved management system, particularly during the long periods of drought to maintain the health and viability of a number of our aquifers. There has been \$600 000 committed to undertake ground water resource appraisals and to examine interrelationships between ground water and surface water issues over the next 12 months.

The amendments to the principal agreement that we are debating today arise from the border ground water agreement review committee. This committee has worked hard over a number of years, providing advice to both Victoria and South Australia on how best to manage our shared ground water resources. This bill will reaffirm that the Bracks government is looking after the interests of regional Victoria, giving it the very best standard of water management to ensure precious water resources are available for current and future generations. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — Members can be assured that the ground water resource in my region is very precious, and it is one of those issues that has been very prominent in my experience and in my 10th year as the member for Mildura. I think that situation has been encapsulated by the recently published Macumber report of April 2005. Dr Phillip Macumber produced a report entitled *Salinity Risks Arising from the Proposed Irrigation Development* at the parishes of Tutye and Bunurouk which is to the east of Murrayville. On page 3 of this report the definition of the ground water at Murrayville is well and aptly assessed as follows:

The ground water is fossil water, and there is essentially no modern day recharge. Should the proposal proceed, ground water levels will fall in the vicinity of the development in response to pumping, as they have elsewhere in the region. There are no official water level monitoring bores in the vicinity of the proposed development and hence no way of determining its impact on ground water levels.

That defines the problem we frequently face in this region when it comes to ground water usage.

In 2003 I presented a petition to this Parliament which contained the signatures of 231 concerned residents of Murrayville and the district, primarily land-holders, who were calling for a moratorium on any further development or expansion of the irrigation proposal.

When I flew over the pivots, which are the common form of irrigating the Murrayville ground water area, 10 of the 16 were active. This was on the Victorian side; I did not count the ones that were pumping on the other side of the border. The management at the time was inadequate. There were large flooded areas underneath these pivots. The water was not being used in a way that could be described as judicious, considering how precious it is. The areas bordering on that, where people were not using pivot irrigation, were being disadvantaged by the huge draw-downs. I refer again to the Macumber report, because even though this refers to the Tutye development it refers to the general problems. At page 10 it states:

Accelerated recharge as a consequence of irrigation can result in rising water tables, which in turn lead to land salinisation once the heavily saline ground water comes within capillary reach ...

The current allocation for ground water — the permitted annual volume as at 2003 — was 9993 megalitres, of which 2000 megalitres was not taken up. This means that if another 2000 megalitres had been put into irrigation, there would have been quite significant difficulties in the area. This is a future problem that we need to face, because the PAV is always going to be much higher than it should be. The draw-downs have been quite significant — up to 16 metres — and if you look at the figures from one bore in the Berrook area you see that ground water levels have fallen from 8 metres to 9 metres between 1987 and 2004.

I pay tribute at this point to Jocelyn Linder, a farmer from the Tutye area, who was instrumental in having the Macumber report produced, as were some of her neighbouring farmer colleagues. It is now a very good guide for Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water and other authorities as to how they should assess the licensing of ground water pumping and the processes they use. I remember being at a briefing run by a catchment management authority in 2003. We had a lecture from Richard Evans, chief hydrologist for Sinclair Knight Merz. He indicated at that meeting that the 0.65 metre maximum draw-down per annum, which is in the schedule and has been for some time, so this is not something new, will eventually run that ground water resource out. That is a concern to me and to the community. The other thing he said is that the price of \$7 or thereabouts a megalitre is too low to enable Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water to drill proper test bores or maintain the test bores it has.

I will read a couple of the recommendations and conclusions in the Macumber report, which are relevant to the bill:

Ground water quality within the tertiary limestone aquifer deteriorates rapidly to the east, north and west/north-west of the proposed development sites.

Therefore I would have to support The Nationals' reasoned amendment, because you cannot just say it is a 20-kilometre —

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr SAVAGE — They were your words, not mine. There is an element of sarcasm coming from the member for South-West Coast. I have always recognised good ideas in this place. I am not in the trench that he is often in of being unable to recognise

good ideas, whether they come from the government or from the opposition. Going back to the recommendations of Phillip Macumber:

The limestone aquifer is overlain by the saline Parilla Sands aquifer and underlain by the Renmark Group aquifer ...

I am not going to quote the full details, but he suggested:

... that vertical ground water movement between aquifers occurs along en-echelon faults in a manner similar to that occurring along the Danyo Fault, thereby causing localized salinisation of the limestone aquifer.

The last recommendation states:

The inability to recognise the differences between recovery levels and draw-down levels as published in their monthly newsletters —

that is, of Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water —

up to late 2004 brings into question the ability of GWMWA to fully understand the nature of ground water processes at the time when the decision to grant the licence was made.

The issue here in relation to this is also what the South Australians are doing. There has been some reference to their activities over the border. I have to tell the house that they are not being properly monitored. They have a system where they are not metered. They have what is called an assessment process which says how many hours you are pumping, so you can determine how much water you can take.

Even when you look at the Victorian system you can see it has some flaws. I have been shown how you can lift the meter off the pump and rotate it around so it runs in reverse and therefore goes back to zero. There are ways around it. At least Victoria has metering, but South Australia does not. This ground water agreement should insist that everybody is metered, because if you go and talk to people in Pinaroo you will find a grave concern in that community. Even though the potato industry has impacted positively on the economy, the future for ground water is such that people are very concerned. The boom or the benefits you get from today are going to be of no value if in 10 or 15 years time we run out of ground water.

The problem has died down to some extent, because the cost of diesel and the low price of potatoes have diminished the amount of ground water pumping, but that is only a cycle that will be there for a difficult period of time to assess. My view is that I cannot support this bill, and in conclusion I wish to refer to a letter from Kevin Chaplin, who is the current chairman of the Murrayville ground water supply protection area

advisory committee. These are his views, not those of his committee. He wrote:

Having read the proposed amendment there is one area of concern that I have and that is in relation to the possible development of the tertiary confined sand ... aquifer which is currently not used in this area (this area being the Murrayville, Victoria, and Pinnaroo, South Australia, region — zones 11A–11B and 10A–10B of the border zone).

In the proposal under point 19 in relation to the third schedule I see that all zones from 1A ... and including 8A have ... their potentiometric surface lowering levels (or 'mining component') reduced by 0.20 to 0.25 metres, but in the remaining zones 8B through to 11B this ... has been increased by 0.4 metres. Now currently as I understand there are no licensed allocations been made ... out of the TCS aquifer (South Australian–Victorian —

border agreement. I cannot support the bill under the current arrangements.

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — I rise to speak on the Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill. The purpose of the bill is to introduce a new border ground water agreement between South Australia and Victoria to manage their shared ground water aquifers. The agreement is actually contained in schedule 2 of the bill. I note the agreement was signed on 29 May by Premier Rann and Premier Bracks and that this bill is to give legislative effect to that agreement. I note that the South Australian Parliament has yet to receive legislation on this issue, but it is expected that it will be introduced mid-October. It will be interesting to see what reception it receives.

Let me place on the record my appreciation of the briefing I and the Liberal Party received from the experts in the department — Campbell Fitzpatrick, Randall Nott and Carol Szanger. I understand Randall Nott is actually on the committee which is referred to with regard to this schedule and which comprises two bureaucrats from South Australia and two from Victoria who have expertise in this area. The feedback I have from people on the Victorian side of the border in the southern section is that they recognise the important work that is done by the committee, and they acknowledge that the committee has been running reasonably well.

I trust that Randall Nott will take what I am about to say with the good humour that is intended. When I spoke to one of the irrigators on the Victorian side I asked about Randall Nott and his representation on the committee. One farmer said, 'I have had a few discussions with him. Randall is not a bad bloke for a Melbourne-based, university-educated, bureaucrat greenie with an ear stud'. That is not a bad compliment from a Western District farmer, I must say. For

somebody in country Victoria to describe somebody from Melbourne in those terms almost counts as terms of endearment. It is a compliment to the way in which Randall is able to represent the views of Victorian irrigators on this committee.

The task before the Parliament is to manage these ground water aquifers in a long-term and sustainable way. These ground water resources are shared between Western Victoria, the Mallee and the south-east of South Australia. As other speakers have said, it is difficult to manage these resources because ground water management is not an exact science. It is a science we are learning more about as time goes on, and it is not something that we can see, touch and feel very easily. Sometimes it is difficult for us to actually understand and specify how we can manage these in a sustainable way.

Specifically the legislation deals with water use within a strip of 20 kilometres on each side of the South Australian-Victorian border, with arrangements in place for bores that are proposed to be drilled just outside that 20-kilometre strip. There are a number of aquifers in that strip. Most of the water is drawn from a tertiary limestone aquifer. In the south it is described as the Otway Groundwater Basin, and slightly to the north of that is the Murray Groundwater Basin. These are both in tertiary limestone aquifers that are described as being unconfined.

Unconfined aquifers have been described to me as aquifers that are recharged on a regular basis. The challenge of managing these aquifers is to ensure that the amount of water taken out of them is the same or less than the amount of recharge that goes in so that we do not significantly reduce them, hence making their management unsustainable. These aquifers are subject to recharge. To the north is the Mallee aquifer, which is also a tertiary limestone aquifer and which is described as a confined aquifer. In other words the aquifer is confined and the water in it is confined. It is described as old water from the last Ice Age. This water is not being renewed. Rather, we are mining or managing that water, and that is why there is the concern that other speakers have mentioned about the use of water in the Murrayville area. That water is being utilised and not being replaced at a significant level.

Below that is another aquifer which is called the deeper tertiary confined sand aquifer. Again it is a confined aquifer. It is largely not in use, but in the area there is increasing interest about taking water from it. Because it is a confined aquifer, again we have to be very careful about using the water. I understand that it is largely not in use in the zone, although outside the zone it may be

being tapped. I also understand that Mount Gambier is able to tap into that aquifer for use as an emergency water supply if the current supplies for the town are contaminated for some reason.

Traditionally the South Australian side of the border has used ground water more than the Victorian side. One only has to look at the use in terms of the viticultural industry in the Coonawarra area, which is famous for its wines. One would not want to damage that industry in any way, shape or form. It is interesting that if you go further up towards Padthaway in the Old Keppoch vineyards you can already taste in the wines produced in that area a saltiness that is due to the aquifer being drawn on too much, with an increase in salinity.

I want to refer briefly to some issues to do with bore management and bore licences. I refer to a letter to drillers dated 22 August from Bruce Foley, the team leader of bore construction licensing within Southern Rural Water. The letter is about fee increases for bore construction licences, and it states:

Please find attached a new bore construction licence ... fee schedule.

The fees increased on 1 July 2005 and a list of the new fees are ...

It states that the cost of a bore construction licence application fee was \$395 prior to July this year but that from 1 July it is \$475, a 22 per cent increase. The cost of additional bore data was \$38 but is now \$50, a 32 per cent increase. The cost of bore construction licence renewal was \$130 but is now \$150, a 13 per cent increase.

It is interesting that in South Australia the equivalent fee is \$38, so in Victoria we are paying 12.5 times more for bore construction licences than people in South Australia. I think we really have to ask about those costs and about the level at which they are being imposed on Victoria compared to South Australia. It is an issue I have raised before, and I will continue to ask why Victorians are being disadvantaged compared to South Australians.

In Victoria we use water for lucerne and dairying in the Lake Mundi area and for white clover and potatoes in the Apsley–Neurpurr area, but there has been a general decline in water levels across all zones. In the southern and Otways zone — the Otway Basin zone, which I am largely interested in — this has been attributed to climate change, pumping and forestry. It is interesting that in 1983, when major areas of pine plantation were

burnt, there was a significant increase in water in the aquifer because there were fewer pines around.

Now with the replanting of pines, new pine plantations and the massive increase in blue gum plantations, there has been a significant decline in the aquifer. I have been advised that in the last four to five years there has been a 2-metre drop in the aquifer in the Lake Mundi area. Some of that may be due to the bout of dry seasons with less recharge and the fact that there was an increased use of ground water from what was a fully committed aquifer, but one of the other issues is the increase in blue gum plantations. I think that needs to be looked at, and looked at very closely. We need to look at what effect blue gum plantations, and the massive increase in their number, is having on these aquifers.

The new agreement allows for subzone management in the 22 zones — 11 on each side of the state border. I think that is appropriate, because those zones were drawn geographically and need to be adjusted so that the subzones match the aquifers. It allows for control and access to the deep, tertiary-confined sand aquifer, and again there needs to be good controls or that resource will be misused. It allows for controls over aquifers in regard to permissible salinity and permissible potentiometric surface lowering. These issues provide a framework for good sustainable management, and I trust that is what will be implemented in practice.

In conclusion, we need good management of our ground water. We need to protect Victorian irrigators and water-users and their access to water compared to that of the South Australians. They seem to be greater users of that water — and there seem to be fewer controls in South Australia. We need also to make sure we scientifically examine the impact on the aquifers of plantations, particularly the blue gum plantations and the increasing pine plantations and how they impact in Victoria. This legislation is not perfect; it is based on an inexact science. While we are learning all the time about the management of aquifers we need to continue to adjust the legislation to match the changes in the science so that we get the best sustainable management.

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — I too am pleased to make a short contribution to the debate on the Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill. This bill sets out to approve and ratify an amendment agreement to the border ground waters agreement (principal agreement). There are a lot of agreements in there! The ground water border agreement was entered into between South Australia and Victoria in 1985 and given effect through

complementary legislation in the two states. The agreement provides for the coordinated management of ground water in a 40-kilometre strip along the South Australian-Victorian border, this being 20 kilometres into South Australia and 20 kilometres inside Victoria.

The principal agreement has served us well to date, but it needs to be amended to address the increased demand for ground water resources within these designated areas. The amendments to the principal agreement will distinguish between aquifers and enable subzones to be established for more effective local management, allow management prescriptions to be set for the different aquifers and the subzones within a zone, simplify two of the management prescriptions which are unclear, and update references to other legislation.

This bill is about improving the way we manage our water resources. It is about being smarter. The Bracks government is recognised as a world leader in sustainable water management, and that is demonstrated in our policy document *Our Water Our Future*, launched in 2004. Through an improved water allocation system we are working to establish the right balance for allocating water for our homes, our farms, our environment and industry. In the main ground water is a renewable resource, and we need to protect it to ensure it continues to be available for future generations. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I also am very pleased to be speaking on this piece of legislation, which recognises the importance of updating management practices as they relate to the ground water supplies used in this state. Ground water supplies are of course vitally important. At this stage they meet something like 13 per cent of water needs across the state, and they are particularly important in some areas. In the Mallee area in the west of the state ground water supplies are very important not just for agricultural purposes but for drinking water supplies. Within my own electorate and the area around where I live ground water is very important — even on my own property where I utilise ground water to provide water for my stock and for watering my garden and so on.

I know that the issue of ground water across my electorate has caused a number of arguments amongst land-holders on adjoining properties when they have been concerned that the next-door property holder may be utilising more aquifer water than they should be or sending bores deeper and closer to their boundaries than they would like. Many concerns and disputes have arisen.

Unfortunately we have not had great science to back up our understanding of how these aquifers are being recharged and what the effect will be of drawing water at particular depths and volumes from these aquifers. However, our understanding of the effects is increasing. In recent times the state government has put something like \$13 million into upgrading our observation bore network across the state so that we can have good reliable information provided by observation bores. We have also committed \$600 000 for the undertaking of ground water appraisals to examine the interrelationships between ground water and surface water users in the state. There has been a lot of work done on trying to understand the ways in which aquifers are being recharged and the effect that drawing water has on them. Why is that necessary? We know there is a much greater requirement placed upon bores now as more producers want to irrigate properties and as these water supplies are being utilised for drinking water for communities.

When we refer to this bill, we see it relates to the relationship between the Victorian and South Australian governments regarding bore water that is used along the border region. As we have heard, at the moment the agreement that exists relates to a 20-kilometre zone on either side of the border. I understand The Nationals are concerned about the fact that it is a fixed 40-kilometre zone with 20 kilometres each side. As we understand, that does not relate to where the aquifers are actually found. The Nationals make a valid point: it would be ideal to be able to ensure that the relationships between the states recognise the reality of the boundaries of these aquifers and related more broadly to their sources. Of course this state government will try to work with the South Australian government and water users to develop the system along those lines so that management processes will ensure the sustainability of aquifer use in this region.

To accede to the requirement of The Nationals at the moment would simply set back this bill for quite a period of time. As we know, when you are dealing interstate the discussions on these sorts of matters can be quite protracted, and we could lose one or two years or even longer trying to establish where the new boundaries ought to be. In that time we are not providing for the safety and best management practices for the regions that at least we have boundaries for at the moment. It is very important that this bill be passed and not delayed until further works can be done.

As we have heard, the bill recognises there are in fact two aquifers in the border region. Whereas we know that the limestone aquifer is the one most extensively

used by land-holders in the border area, there is a deeper sandstone aquifer which has not been well understood or utilised. It has been utilised to some extent to provide municipal water supplies. We know there is greater pressure on utilising this deeper sandstone aquifer. We want to ensure that within the border agreement, we are also allowing the management practices to address the use of water from this aquifer. Within this bill, we are also setting in place opportunities to simplify some of the management arrangements that have already existed to make them clearer and less ambiguous, and to recognise there has been other legislation that has been upgraded over recent times. We want to ensure that the bill recognises the newer contemporary legislation.

It is very important that we upgrade our management arrangements on ground water use in all parts of the state and that we do the scientific research necessary to understanding the aquifers so that we can ensure that their quality is maintained and the water in them is not overdrawn. Right across the state a great deal of work is being done to establish ground water management zones. Now there are eight ground water management zones in place in the state and more will be put in place. We must ensure that the overuse of the past can be addressed, that where the water supply is approaching overuse that is addressed too, and that we return to the situation where all our ground water supplies are used only on a sustainable basis. That is very important for the future of this state.

The bill recognises that the border zone is vitally important. I trust that the bill will be passed to ensure that the management procedures are put in place on the earliest possible occasion and that the amendment put forward by The Nationals will not be agreed to by the house because it will only cause delays and problems with existing management. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I rise to support the Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill as well. Members of the Bracks government are very proud of how we have looked at water over the six years we have been in government. We have made it a most important aspect of the legislation and other work we have been doing in Victoria. Our Water Our Future says it all: it is our water, and it is our future. We want to provide a sustainable water supply for all of Victoria into the future so that we can all benefit from it.

The purpose of the bill is to approve and ratify an amendment to the border ground waters agreement. It is about providing a far more intensive management regime so that the government, our responsible rural

water authorities and other water authorities can better respond to issues as they arise. The issues that are there now need to be addressed. Everybody recognises and understands the concerns of The Nationals. We know also that if we do not act now it will be too late. We must have agreements. All members know that over time many wars have been fought over water and its use and who is entitled to it. The bill is about a border agreement between South Australia and Victoria. From what I hear in the debate South Australia is not as advanced as Victoria in the management of water because its authorities do not meter as well as ours.

The concerns of those opposite are noted but the use of ground water must be controlled and a framework must be set for its use in the future. The government must continue to work with the South Australian government and all water users, including irrigators and stock and domestic suppliers. Ground water also provides for the users of urban water in towns such as Geelong. Like the people represented by the member for Ballarat East, in the Seymour electorate we have had some significant issues over time, brought about particularly by the drought in places like Kinglake. That is a very wet area usually, but over the past six or seven years it has suffered from the effects of the worst drought we have had in more than 100 years. That has obviously lowered levels and caused concern for people who access the ground water. Many of those concerns have certainly come through my office over time.

Members know that without the passage of this amendment bill the management issues regarding the tertiary limestone aquifer in particular would be difficult. We need to ensure that we understand that the aquifers and other water resources are different and that they must be managed differently. The bill recognises those differences and puts in place a management regime which will hopefully provide a sustainable future for water supply in those areas.

As I said, ground water is important for irrigation and stock and domestic supply — especially in areas in the west of the state that are quite sparsely populated and where people do not have many other options for water supply. We must ensure that they have a water supply. Those places will continue to decline and perhaps die off if we do not ensure that they have a sustainable water supply. It would be too expensive to take water there from somewhere else. There are many issues. The ground water management in the shared zone along the border with South Australia will be successful. It shows again that the investment by the Bracks government in time and resources is important. It is recognised and appreciated by many country people. They know that tough decisions must be made and costs are involved

but that water management for the future is important for their communities to thrive.

I will refer to a couple of examples of what has been done. The government has put \$13 million into upgrade observations of the bore network in 2500 places. An extensive program of metering 4000 bores has been put in place to sustain a fair and equitable system of water allocation, and the government has provided \$5 million, of which half will be available to offset costs to consumers to ensure that happens. Recently a drought assistance package of \$1.25 million has been made available to improve infrastructure to deliver emergency domestic and stock water supplies. I know that people in my area took great advantage of that. I commend the work of the government and those who have been working on the bill and I commend the bill to the house.

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) — The Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill is an important next step for this government to fulfil its commitment to save and manage our scarce water resources for the future. The Our Water Our Future policy plan released last year provides the most comprehensive action plan for achieving major water savings and changing the culture of water use for generations to come. In 50 years time, when social commentators talk about policy milestones, I am very confident that in talking about water they will be talking about the achievements of the Bracks government with water.

The bill arises from the identification in the Our Water Our Future plan of ground water needing better management. Whilst most of us in metropolitan Melbourne rely on surface water for our needs, people in many areas of Victoria rely on surface water and ground water together. In other areas people rely, of course, on bore water only. We should not look to ground water as a backstop for water supply but recognise that in many instances it is the only source of water. The government's actions need to reflect that harsh reality. The fact is that unless we manage our scarce water resource properly for generations to come we will certainly be left without water in some areas of Victoria.

Regional Victoria has often been referred to in many debates in this chamber as the food bowl of Australia. The government's water policy supports this vital industry, as does the government's forward thinking in the expansion and relocation of the Melbourne wholesale fruit and vegetable market to Epping, where it will have access to efficient transport including arterial roads and highways and other transport modes

and hubs. That, of course, is planning for the future, as we are with the management of ground water supplies. Ground water, of course, supports the food bowl and provides urban supplies to a number of towns across Victoria, including the major city of Geelong. Ground water also provides vital sustenance to our ecosystem. It provides base flow to streams and sustains many wetlands.

The bill amends a major agreement between Victoria and South Australia which involves details of how shared ground water is managed. The original agreement between the two states on managing ground water around the border region dates back to 1985. The principal agreement is sound and it defines the areas shared by the two states to be governed by the agreement. The area is defined as the full length of the border for a distance of 20 kilometres on either side of the border, and this will be known as the designated area for the jurisdiction of the bill. The overriding principle is that the ground water supply is to be shared equitably. There are clear prescriptions for the granting or renewing of licences or permits and the prescribed limits of water use in the designated area are specified and are to be balanced with permissible salinity levels that may exist.

The bill modernises the management of the ground water supply, and it does so by creating a more efficient regime. Let me be clearer on that point. For example, in the first instance it distinguishes between tertiary limestone aquifers and tertiary confined sand aquifers. The existing agreement recognises only the tertiary limestone aquifer. Distinguishing between the two allows for different management prescriptions to be developed for the two varieties of aquifers and subzones within a zone. For example, that allows those responsible for managing the resource to account for the differences in the geological construction of land in particular zones.

The bill also simplifies two of the management prescriptions. It updates references to other legislation, and obviously that is simply a mechanical response; a consequential amendment to the Water Act 1989 to acknowledge the amendment agreement encapsulated in this bill.

Members who have contributed to the debate before me have recognised that there has been a long-term decline in ground water levels in this designated area. There has been an increase in the use of ground water in this time, but there has also been an expansion of forest plantations, and the jury is still out on exactly what impacts the increase in forest plantations has had on the availability and levels of ground water. While Victoria

and South Australia have initiated metering systems — and Victoria has been quite conclusive in doing that — to gauge use and investigate the impact of forest plantations, on recharge, for example, South Australia is yet to complete that process. I understand it is due to complete the initiation of metering systems by July next year.

The Border Groundwaters Agreement Review Committee is proposing remedial measures for the situation of declining ground water levels and mitigating circumstances in its upcoming five-year management review, which is due in March next year.

This bill will provide flexibility and greater efficiency in the management of ground water by distinguishing between the aquifers and allowing for subzones. This will therefore allow for more targeted management to be applied. This will take into account, as I have already mentioned, certain circumstances; for example, the geological conditions in a particular area, aquifer types and hydraulic conditions.

The bill is another indicator of the terrific agenda this government has to achieving generational change in our water habits and water use. It also provides a very modern framework for efficiently managing ground water reserves along the border with South Australia. For those reasons I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — I rise to make a brief contribution to the Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill.

Ground water is a similar issue to that of geothermal power, which we debated earlier in this session. In both instances we do not really know what we are dealing with in terms of the quantifiable resource. Therefore, be it a geothermal power resource or be it ground water, anything of this nature which is hidden, which is dynamic in terms of quantity, which is not inert but is something that will often permeate different rock substrata and the like, has to be dealt with very cautiously indeed.

We are all aware that every year for the past eight years or so we have had only approximately two-thirds of Melbourne's average annual rainfall in the central business district, and it has been even worse in rural areas, so we can easily see that Mother Nature often dictates the dimensions of whatever resources we are dealing with anyway. Even though we may have made licence agreements or contractual agreements to reflect a certain quantity of water, that may not be available if we have eight years of drought as we have experienced in Victoria.

Therefore we have to be very careful in allocating such scarce resources. Today's agreement on providing additional environmental flow for river red gum areas along the Murray River is a good example where in this case an act of God — additional rainfall — has encouraged and led to an announcement being made about the provision of more water to assist the very much depleted river red gums when it comes to their ability to survive along the Murray and its tributaries, given the lack of environmental flow that has been provided for to date.

My only note of caution, based on my experience of signing interstate agreements when I was the Minister for Tertiary Education and Training in the former government, is that these interstate agreements are all very well if each side does its bit. In Victoria we have been very stringent when it comes to state-government-imposed requirements on water extraction from aquifers in north-eastern Victoria. I have travelled around that area with the shadow Minister for Water, the member for Benambra; the Honourable Wendy Lovell and the Honourable Phillip Davis, members for North Eastern Province and Gippsland Province respectively in the other place. The four of us met with many irrigation farmers who rely primarily on aquifers for their scarce and precious water resources. These farmers face a difficult conundrum where, on the one hand they have either signed agreements or purchased farm properties that carry with them a licensed entitlement to extract water from aquifers, but on the other hand these are often historical agreements which, while giving them the right to anticipate a certain amount of water resources, may not reflect the reality of modern-day water availability.

On the Victorian side of the border state governments have been very harsh when applying the strictest standards to private property owners when it comes to extracting their entitlements. If Victoria is going to be harsh or stringent — and I do not dispute the need for that, given the environmental imperative that is overarching all of the issues to be debated in this bill — we need to ensure that state governments in South Australia and New South Wales contribute their part to the deal. That is a cautionary note I put forward. Victoria has a very good history between successive governments of ensuring the aquifer resource is used sparingly and that we do not deplete it unnecessarily.

From discussions I had in north-east Victoria recently with my three parliamentary colleagues and the affected farmers, their depleted resource as a result of government-imposed requirements has been the subject of a Supreme Court case. Even though the opposition is not opposing this bill, we do have concerns about the degree of goodwill or the degree of willingness to come

to the table to implement this border agreement on the ground to ensure that farmers in South Australia and New South Wales are really brought to the jump and are required to meet the same harsh measures that we have inflicted upon and required of our farming community in the areas that are reliant on aquifer water. But, as I said, the opposition is not opposing this legislation. Our shadow Minister for Water, the member for Benambra, has done an excellent job in researching this issue thoroughly and the intellectual property that he brings to the water portfolio will be greatly missed in this house.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr HONEYWOOD — I do not say that lightly, because there are few members in either house of this Parliament who could match some of the technical knowledge of the member for Benambra. I hope that members on the other side of the house have done their homework to the degree that has been done on this side when it comes to bringing to the house fulsome knowledge and understanding of the implications of such legislation on private property owners, on their historical rights versus their contractual rights, and on the degree of goodwill they have displayed to date in volunteering water as part of the national water agreement which was referred to in question time today by the Minister for Environment. That degree of goodwill is only there to the extent that property owners believe they are getting a fair deal vis-a-vis farming communities over the border. That is the key issue the opposition raises on their behalf.

Insofar as this legislation requires some more scientific exploration and greater understanding of the resource we are dealing with, hopefully the government will come to the party with sufficient financial resources to ensure that the science can actually be followed through in properly ascertaining the dynamic nature of the aquifer resources contained across the borders, and hopefully those financial resources, which are often the most vexed issue when it comes to this government matching its rhetoric with reality in the field, will be forthcoming to ensure that this legislation is more than just window-dressing.

Mr MAXFIELD (Narracan) — I rise this afternoon to speak in support of the Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill. I have been in the chamber listening to several speakers during this debate. The previous speaker mentioned the contribution to Parliament of the member for Benambra and how his knowledge will be lost to this chamber when he retires. I am sure we are all going to wish him well in his retirement and hope he has a very enjoyable

one. It is good to see that he has been able to learn and gain some expertise.

We know during the debate on farm dams, for example, how the member for Benambra had the chance to learn and understand that there were farmers right across this state with intense water needs and rights that needed to be protected to ensure their long-term survival and future. It was pleasing that the member for Benambra realised after significant debate that farmers across this state needed to have reliable water supplies and to have their resources protected. That is really the hallmark of the Bracks government's contribution to water.

One of the things I as a member of the Bracks government have been proudest of is its approach to securing water resources right across the state. It is not about some of the proposals we hear from opposition parties, when they say, 'Build more dams'. That amounts to stopping rivers from flowing, having no environmental flows and turning areas like the Gippsland Lakes into a wasteland, a sewage farm, with the loss of thousands of jobs.

Certainly what we need do is maximise the use of the water that we have. A good example of that was the announcement the other day of the water factory recycling project in the Latrobe Valley, where rather than just taking more water out of the river we are going to treat the water that is currently flowing out into the ocean after going through an outfall sewer. It is good to see the member for Gippsland South here, because he has the open sewer going through his electorate. I know he very much welcomes the recycling of water from the Latrobe Valley to better protect those in his electorate. This is what protecting water is all about.

This bill is about protecting the resources that we have and ensuring that we have water available for the farmers and communities that need to access ground water. The agreement with the South Australian government and the legislation now before the chamber are all about ensuring that we act according to the right principles and have agreements in place to properly manage the water in the aquifers, including between the subzones, and ensuring we have effective local management. I think that is really important.

We need to ensure that local communities are effectively involved in the management of ground water. The days are gone when an arrogant government in Spring Street ruled the roost and dictated from above. With the Bracks government Victoria has a government that responds to local communities and empowers them to have a say in their water resources and their water

usage — and that is one of the key reasons why I welcome the fact that the bill is before the chamber today. Obviously, without this bill there would be some difficulties managing the ground water, especially the tertiary limestone aquifer. The problems around that will be far better managed through the amendments we have here today.

I turn now to the issue of protecting our water sources, and I spoke briefly before about farm dams. When you consider that in this state we have been through some of the worst drought years in memory and you look at where we are today as a result of that, with Victoria leading agriculture production across Australia, it highlights how our initiatives in protecting the water supply for our farmers in very dry times are delivering dividends to the state. By better utilising and carefully protecting the water we are able to have irrigation water for farmers. Better management makes maximum use of our water for irrigation.

In the past we would throw a bit of water on the ground and hope to grow a bit of grass. Now, by carefully targeting water, we can produce far more value-added crops, and we can see that with the whole range of olives, citrus, grapes and the other fruits which are grown using irrigation where previously that irrigation water, from bore water or from dams and rivers, might have been used to grow a bit of grass or hay. The value of those agricultural products is one of the reasons why we heard from the Minister for Agriculture in question time that we are now the leading agricultural producer in Australia, and that is a result of the better management of water and the protection of our resources.

It is pleasing to see that Melburnians have reduced their water consumption by 20 per cent. As a result we have recently been able to announce improved flows in the Macalister and Thomson rivers. The Thomson dam is in my electorate, so I am very keen to see the improved flows there. That water is flowing through the Gippsland Lakes. Those who know and love the Gippsland Lakes realise that with the nutrient flow that has been coming down our rivers, the removal of more and more water in the past for irrigation and the needs of the communities along the rivers, we have seen the Gippsland Lakes dying and their productivity going backwards, with the result that a lot less fishing is now available. That affects tourism and the wellbeing of the lakes. Had we continued down that path we would have had to put up a sign which said, 'The Gippsland Lakes are closed for business'.

This bill is a good news story. Some of the concerns on the horizon include the proposition by The Nationals to

build more dams, divert more water and destroy environmental flows. Areas like the Gippsland Lakes would become a wasteland with the loss of thousands of tourism jobs and the destruction of the region. As a community we must resist that. We can better utilise our water by recycling and conservation. We can reduce nutrient flows by ensuring that we do not have inappropriate run-offs. Those are the sorts of initiatives we need, and the bill helps us manage the bore water as a part of managing our resources. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — I rise on behalf of the electorate of Lowan to speak on this important Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill. According to the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, the purpose of the bill is to amend the Groundwater (Border Agreement) Act 1985 to approve and give effect to the borders ground water agreement amendment agreement. The committee notes that the provision is necessary to enable the timing of the commencement of the act to coincide with the commencement of the corresponding South Australian act.

The Nationals are concerned about what is going on along the South Australian border. We have moved our reasoned amendment to enable better cooperation between the two states and particularly to make sure that the designated area is not just a 40-kilometre-wide zone which encapsulates only sections of the aquifers affected. It was fair enough to have the 20-kilometre zone on either side in the early stage, but we have learned a lot more about ground water movement and activities in the area, and at this time we should go back and look at the aquifers rather than the physical lines mentioned in the legislation.

The bill amends the 20-year-old principal agreement between Victoria and South Australia about the coordinated protection, sharing and sustainable harvesting of ground water resources in the border area. There is increasing demand in that region for centre points which are mainly used for white clover and the growth of potatoes, but there is also increasing demand for domestic use. I particularly highlight the townships of Edenhope and Nhill and other towns in that area that use ground water. We have seen greater domestic use in a lot of other areas — towns and cities — and even here in Melbourne we are seeing greater demand for water. These towns are also tapping into ground water reserves. The bill distinguishes between two main aquifers and establishes subzones.

I want to compliment my colleague the member for Swan Hill. He has consulted widely, and like him I

have consulted in my area. His knowledge of water is to be commended. It is important to take on board comments of people like the water authorities, the Victorian Farmers Federation and the stakeholders including those involved with the ground water management plans, and the users — both farmers and domestic users in towns.

I sent this bill out to many people in my electorate. My electorate covers an area along the South Australian border right down nearly to the sea. The people of Lake Mundi have concerns about the drop in water levels because of the dry seasons in particular but also because of other uses of the land, including blue gums. It is important that we have good management of ground water, whether it is for the people of the Lake Mundi area or the people I also represent up north around Edenhope and Neuarpuurr, who are also concerned.

The designated area in the principal agreement runs the length of the borders, is 40 kilometres wide — 20 kilometres in each state — and is divided into 22 zones, 11 in each state. It applies to all existing and future bores except stock and domestic. There are a number of aquifers and that is why it is important that we support the reasoned amendment. It is more than drawing lines on maps. I was pleased to see that the majority of government members who have spoken on the bill support the intent of The Nationals' reasoned amendment. I commend them for that and hope they will vote according to the way they have spoken.

There are different levels of recharge in all the aquifers. We have had seven dry years and we do not know what the impact of that will be. That is why there is concern not only from the government but also from the stakeholders in the area. We have two main aquifer systems, one being the tertiary confined sand aquifer which is deep and under pressure, and the main tertiary limestone aquifer. In the north, the ground water is fossil water, and I am led to believe that it could be 20 000 years old with little or no recharge. The concern of the people in the area is that we are mining it.

In the south the concern is that plantation forestry is reducing the necessary recharge. We believe the overuse of the resource could lead to saltwater intrusion. This issue has been raised very publicly by the people in the Murrayville area. I was fortunate enough to work in that area for a couple of years. It relies heavily on ground water not only for domestic use but also for stock and for the growth and development of the area. There are many centre point pivots there, and it is important that the permissible

annual use level given to those people is appropriately looked at.

A lot of work has been done by Sinclair Knight Merz on the permissible annual volume. I know it is an imperfect science. We can look at any other form of water storage and know how much water is there. We are learning every day about ground water.

Organisations such as water authorities and stakeholders and Sinclair Knight Merz are recognised for their understanding of ground water; no doubt they are also learning about ground water every day.

In researching this paper I looked up the Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water web page. It highlights that:

Ground water resources in the Wimmera are part of the larger Wimmera–Mallee stock and domestic supply system, which is thought to be the largest water supply system of its kind in the world. The Wimmera–Avon Basin region has large reserves of ground water with varying salinity levels. Good quality ground water is found in the far west ...

This is the area we are talking about in this legislation.

Elsewhere the ground water is generally of poor quality, and therefore it is of limited use.

That is what the stakeholders in my electorate have concerns about. It could happen to them — in other words, the salinity levels could rise and the level of water could drop and therefore create bigger problems.

I went to Goroke to meet with some people who are very concerned that the water authority and the government is not taking enough action in relation to setting up a ground water supply protection area in the area. They highlighted the fact that we have a Neuarpuurr ground water supply protection area. Under this area ground water allocations are issued in accordance with the permissible annual volume figures determined by the border zone agreement of 1985 in zones 5B and 6B. Currently around 18 000 megalitres of ground water is pumped annually for irrigation purposes, with a licence allowing 5000 megalitres to potentially be extracted. There are small fluctuations in the water level of the tertiary limestone aquifer, as has been detected over the past 10 years. However, more comprehensive and detailed monitoring and research are required prior to recommending any changes to the permissible annual volume and associated ground water entitlements.

The plan is about educating the community and increasing awareness of the need to manage this vital resource. The people of Goroke are very concerned that there is not enough action being taken. In particular they are very concerned about action 2.9 in the state

government's white paper entitled *Securing Our Water Future Together*, which states that:

For significant new water allocations, the government will establish an auction or tender process that allocates water resources by: public advertisement of the sale; and setting of a reserve price.

On behalf of those people who are right out near this water zone, I ask that this government and the water authority take action to come up with a ground water management plan similar to the Neuarpuur area agreement.

Having raised those concerns, I want to finish by saying that the good management of ground water is vital for the continuing development of the area I represent. We need appropriate and high-quality scientific research. Ground water science is improving every day, but it is an imperfect science. There are many uses of water in that area, including stock and domestic, but we need to control the draw-down of ground water in the region. I think the reasoned amendment put forward by The Nationals should have the support of this Parliament, because we need to have greater action from both sides of the border in relation to not only the zone but also the aquifers in that region. With those few words, I support the reasoned amendment.

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — It gives me great pleasure to speak on the Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill 2005. As has been said previously, this is about an agreement initially entered into between South Australia and Victoria back in 1985, which has served us well for all that time. The current agreement provides for a coordinated management strategy along the two borders, and it covers an area straddling 20 kilometres either side and running the length of the Victorian-South Australian border.

When this agreement — the principal agreement, as it is referred to — was first established in 1985, it was with only one aquifer in mind, that being the tertiary limestone aquifer. It provided a broad-based, one-designated-area-size-fits-all management approach. This legislation seeks to amend that to enable much better targeted management, and it does that in couple of ways. It does it by distinguishing between the aquifers, and it also enables the creation of subzones to better finetune the management of that designated area. It allows for management prescriptions to be set for different aquifers in the subzones, simplifies two of the management prescriptions and updates references to other legislation.

I refer briefly to the comments made by members of The Nationals. It is very unusual to hear members of The Nationals arguing that we need to be cautious with our use of water — to take a cautionary approach to a natural resource. To my memory this is not something that they have argued for in the past. It is a great pleasure to hear the Deputy Leader of The Nationals expressing his concern about the potential overuse of ground water. It is a change of view for The Nationals and is not the side of the debate they normally stand on. I agree with the Deputy Leader — again it is an extraordinary admission on my part that I would agree on any issue of water management with The Nationals — that we need to be extraordinarily careful with the way we manage all of our water.

As the Deputy Leader of The Nationals acknowledged, ground water is particularly tricky. We cannot see it, and there are many things we do not know about how aquifers operate and what the impacts are of their long-term use. A cautionary approach is required. I support the sentiments in that regard expressed by members of The Nationals. I make the point that the reasoned amendment, which states that Victoria should refuse to sign off on this agreement until the management of the designated area correlates with the boundaries of the aquifers, is unnecessary. This amendment to the agreement would do nothing that would necessarily preclude that from happening.

There is nothing in the bill to prevent the concerns expressed by the Deputy Leader of The Nationals from being implemented. That would be done through the existing border ground water review committee which proposed these amendments in the first instance. The committee members are able to look at all those issues. They are already mindful, and they did not need The Nationals to tell them, of the impacts that have occurred over the last 10 or 12 years. They are already preparing the five-year management review for March 2006 and will be introducing a program to remedy those impacts that have been referred to by the Deputy Leader of The Nationals.

One of those impacts is the increased use of ground water. The increasing demand for water is occurring worldwide and certainly in Australia, in this part of Victoria and in South Australia. We know South Australia uses its ground water extensively. A number of towns in and immediately adjacent to the designated area use the ground water, and it is a major water source for Mount Gambier. Victoria does not use the ground water as much. There are very few areas where it is used for irrigated cropping, but substantial areas of plantation forest in Victoria and South Australia rely heavily on rainfall, and that has been lacking recently.

While there is no intention to use ground water for plantation irrigation we know that plantations impact on ground water and that they reduce the amount of rainwater going into the ground water and recharging it, and depending on the level of the ground water tree roots can access it close to the surface.

We have seen a long-term decline in ground water levels. These have been observed by the border ground water review committee and it is taking measures to address it. Following consideration of the implications the committee will propose a program to remedy that situation. That is why we do not need to support The Nationals' reasoned amendment because it is not necessary: we can walk and chew gum at the same time.

We know that the tertiary limestone aquifer in the Mallee is a non-renewable aquifer and therefore a depleting resource over time. The Bracks government white paper on water, *Our Water Our Future*, refers to ground water and contains a revised policy in respect of mining non-renewable resources. The white paper states that the government will manage non-renewable ground water resources to ensure extractions are ecologically acceptable and to progressively reduce the mining of such resources. It states that the review committee acknowledges this policy and is working through its implications in its forthcoming five-year management review.

The bill is necessary to make changes to the principal agreement of 1985. It will provide greater flexibility and transparency in the management of aquifers, including the setting of extraction limits that are carefully targeted so we do not have just one designated area with one management plan but can distinguish between the aquifers with the creation of subzones to target management plans that take many issues into account. By distinguishing the different aquifers and creating the subzones we can better manage this designated area. We can take into account specific circumstances, specific aquifer types and specific geological and hydrological conditions in the designated area. This is further recognition of the need to be very careful with the management of our water.

As we better understand the way ground water works it will be necessary to amend the border ground water agreement. It has stood us in good stead but we know there are more stresses on our system and greater demand for the use of ground water. We need to be careful with its management, as outlined in the white paper, *Our Water Our Future*. It is not necessary to support The Nationals' reasoned amendment because

all these things can and will be done. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — Far be it for me to leap to the defence of my colleagues in The Nationals, but the member for Macedon made a sweeping statement about their attitude to water. Many of their constituents are probably our best conservationists and environmentalists because their livelihood depends on it. A lot of their practical knowledge and knowledge handed down from generation to generation should be harnessed. Governments and bureaucrats should work with that constituency to arrive at practical solutions and policies for ground water and other water issues. There are exceptions to the rule, but I say that as a sweeping statement to counteract the other view.

The principles in this bill involve aquifer levels and permissible salinity. I wish to speak about ground water in general, as previous speakers have done. I do not have an in-depth knowledge of the ground water issues in the border areas but I do have knowledge of an aquifer that sits under my electorate called the Nepean aquifer. We have real issues which are reflective of the issues with ground water throughout Victoria, throughout Australia and probably even internationally. The problem is that the levels are dropping.

There are too many users. It is not the domestic users, more of whom are tapping into that water due to the recent drought and water shortages and what have you, but the heavy users, and I have some very heavy users of the Nepean aquifer in my electorate. They include golf courses, which are growing in number and taking a lot of water out of the aquifer, and extensive market gardens and flower gardens. Those users and the lack of rain over the last number of years have put a fair bit of pressure on the Nepean aquifer, to the extent that before last summer they were called together and told that the aquifer would have to be closed down because of the rate at which it was dropping. As it turned out that did not have to happen, but it is going to have to happen any year now, I dare say.

One of the lessons for all of us right throughout Victoria and Australia is that we have to have solutions. We just cannot continue to do this. Ground water is a great resource but a misunderstood resource. We have to manage it correctly, but we also have to think laterally. A proposal has been put forward by the users, who together with the shire council have been coordinating their efforts to look at an alternative solution for watering the golf courses and the market gardens. We are lucky that running right through the middle of my electorate is the outfall pipe carrying

C-class sewerage from the eastern treatment plant to the ocean at Gunnamatta.

The proposal is to construct a treatment plant on site or near the pipe, to upgrade the water going down the pipe to A class — or as much as is needed — and then pipe that around the peninsula to the market gardens and the golf courses. In fact some of the preliminary figures show that the availability and proposed cost of that water would mean not only that the golf courses would be able to flourish but that the market gardening businesses would be able to expand. What is holding them back is the lack of water, including the inability to take any more water out of the aquifer.

If this plan goes ahead — and of course they will be talking to government about it — it will have three benefits. Not only will it help those industries down on the Mornington Peninsula, it will also reduce the amount of ground water coming out of the aquifer and perhaps give it time to recover naturally. I do not know whether that is possible, but the authorities could certainly look at recharging or storing water in the aquifer. It will also reduce the volume of contaminated water going out of the outfall at the moment. To me there is the possibility of a win-win for everybody there. It would be a win for the environment, it would be a win for the aquifer users and it would be a win for the industry down there too. The lessons of the process going on there should be looked at and perhaps applied right around the ground water areas of Victoria and also the ground water areas throughout Australia. With those few words I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — I rise today to support the Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill. Both the premiers of the states of South Australia and Victoria and their respective cabinets have agreed to the amending agreement in this bill. The principal act, the Groundwater (Border Agreement) Act, was entered into between South Australia and Victoria in 1985, so that legislation is now 20 years old. Things have come a long way in the management of water in that 20 years.

This further amendment to the principal agreement is required to create greater flexibility and transparency in the management of the aquifers. I must admit before I started researching this bill that I did not know what an aquifer actually was — but now I do. The bill also sets extraction limits for these underground water supplies, which will ultimately improve the sustainable management of this resource. Water levels are declining in three areas: the Mallee, West Wimmera and the southern region. This agreement covers a 40-kilometre-wide strip along the border between South

Australia and Victoria called the designated area. It is my understanding that The Nationals have said that this should be a greater area and that that is why the amendment has been proposed — —

Mr Delahunty — To cover the aquifers.

Ms MUNT — To cover the aquifers! This legislation makes a start, and perhaps that could be considered. It will allow for the greater micro-management of the underground water reserves, which have been declining. This may be due to increased use, to drought, or to the forest plantations which impact on these underground water reserves.

As we know, in Australia water is a very scarce resource. We rely on our ground water reserves, our waterways, our reservoirs and our dams. Some communities have only bore water, and some use a combination of all those I have mentioned. In Perth one can see very clearly the problems that can arise when ground water levels change and are not properly managed. One can also see, particularly around the Murray River, the salinity problems that arise when ground water reserves are not properly managed. I have many relatives with farms up around Echuca, and the rising salinity levels are giving them all pause for thought and making them much more focused on the management of water — something that did not cross their minds 20 years ago.

The bill provides that there will be no impact on existing users and their water rights. It allows for an appeal mechanism to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal over water allocations. I would also like to say that this bill is another example of our government's dedication to water management and to our commitment to smart and efficient water use in our communities.

Our Water Our Future, launched in 2004, is recognised as world best practice in water management and sustainability. Over the next 50 years this raft of legislation will repair rivers and ground water systems, price water to encourage using it more wisely, permanently save water in our towns and cities and secure water for farms through pioneering water allocation and trading systems.

As I said, this is another example of the focus that the Bracks government has put into water management. I think it is a step in the right direction. It will focus our rural and regional members of Victoria more closely on water and the use of water with this amendment bill for our ground water reserves. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — I support the Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill, which mirrors similar legislation in South Australia, as it is an important and mature step forward. Some four years ago you, Acting Speaker, were on the Environment and Natural Resources Committee with me and other members of this house. We visited South Australia and were educated about the water needs of South Australia and other border issues. We had a look at the aquifers in the region. People talked to us about metering — the bore water would have to be metered through the aquifers to determine how much water was being used so we could establish the use and conservation of the water — and the involvement of the various local committees, including the district committees, that make application even before a bore could be put in. The subject was part of a committee report tabled in the house.

I will refer to the hypothetical scenario presented in South Australia. All the environment and public works committees jointly talked about the war over water in South Australia, Victoria and other states. I am reminded of that by the amendment in this bill — that is, where it says 40 kilometres is not far enough and the borders have not been sufficiently designed. The hypothetical that was presented at the conference was quite hilarious at the time, but now, some five years on, people have realised the importance of water and its shortage in Victoria.

At that time Victoria did not realise the problem that would come about with the shortage of water; salinity was the big problem then. All the committees were starting to conduct reports on, and the media was talking about, the salinity problem but not about ground water issues. There is a shortage of ground water, and in many cases it does not replenish itself. If salt reaches it, then we have salinity problems, as we have seen in the western suburbs. We have a big artesian basin across the western suburbs; however, due to salinity problems the water cannot be used even for stock.

The water we are talking about in the bill — the water we share with South Australia — is a precious commodity. It cannot be replaced, even if we were to say that in some areas, as we are seeing in Elizabeth, South Australia, they catch stormwater and pump it back into underground storage aquifers that have been emptied out so that the aquifers are being refilled. The water is recycled and allowed to resettle naturally by due process, which is an important step in this experiment. When we saw what was happening we realised the difficulties South Australia is having with water across its state.

But we are also seeing that irrigation of this irreplaceable quantity of water is used to feed stock, for pasture improvement and related activities. On the Victorian side we have to look at options for farming differently and having a respect for water accessed through ground water reserves, because it is not easy to replace. I do not think it will be replaced in any of our lifetimes, it does not matter what floods or rain we get. Once the clay soil ferments there is no way for the water to penetrate through to the artesian basin, and that is one of the problems with modern-day farming. We have virtually sealed off our soil and degraded it to such an extent that water cannot seep through to the ground water in the artesian basin. In many areas we have a crust of clay across the basins.

Yes, water can flow about 1 metre underground, but it cannot go deeper. It finishes up in the low-lying areas and creates salinity. Most regions in the west — Western Australia is a good example — have this condition. We have it in the Mallee — it is everywhere! — and that is why we talk about the importance of building the Mallee pipeline.

Turning to the amendment moved on behalf of The Nationals, I cannot see why its members think the distance is not far enough. It had plenty of time during the consultation stage and discussions leading up to this bill to examine this issue. I believe the study that the Environment and Natural Resources Committee did at the time indicated that 20 kilometres on either side of the border from where the bores are and where the aquifers exist is sufficient. At that time people were objecting to metering, but it is a matter of controlling the use of the water because it cannot be as easily replenished as one thinks. It took hundreds of thousands of years for that water to be stored down in the aquifers, and we cannot continue to exploit it as we have done up until now.

The agreement and understanding with our South Australian neighbours, with both states legislating on this issue, will encourage our neighbours to put meters on all of their bore waters and start controlling it — that is, to use less water but to use it more efficiently and economically. Having said that, I support the bill and reject the amendment. I wish the bill a speedy passage through the house.

Mr HELPER (Ripon) — It gives me a great deal of pleasure, also, to support the Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Bill. In doing so I would like to point out that the bill is an evolutionary step in the agreement between South Australia and Victoria regarding ground water resources abutting the border between the two states.

I understand that the agreement was first put in place in 1985 and is subject to a statutory review every five years. However, it is not until the review that was completed most recently that the government of the day has acted on that review and has modified the agreement and through this legislation is moving to amend appropriate state legislation to reflect the agreement between the two parties.

The first great change between the previous agreements and this agreement is that this agreement has evolved to reflect the distinction between the layers of the aquifer that are prevalent in that part of Victoria. The second important difference or evolution of the agreement is that it allows us to differentiate between zones in those aquifers so that specific management prescriptions can be applied to specific zones. Thirdly, the legislation and the agreement aim to simplify the management prescriptions and to clarify them to the extent that they are currently unclear. Finally, the bill has to update references to it in legislation.

Having given that description of the evolution of the agreement I come to the amendment that was moved by the member for Swan Hill, the Deputy Leader of The Nationals. If one were to look at the agreement I guess one could have two interpretations of it. An uncharitable interpretation would be that it is nothing other than stick-in-the-mud opposition on the part of the member for Swan Hill. The other interpretation, one which I favour, is that with his legitimate concern on this issue the member for Swan Hill is following in the steps of his predecessor, the Honourable Barry Steggall, who I think in a bipartisan way has the respect of members of this house for the valuable and positive role he played in terms of the management of water in this state.

Despite that charitable interpretation I remain unconvinced by the amendment put forward by the member for Swan Hill because I do not think it recognises the evolutionary nature of this agreement and of the legislation that enables the agreement. The point he makes in his amendment is that we should look at the whole aquifer rather than the part of the aquifer that is covered by a 20-kilometre zone each side of the border. I would not necessarily disagree with that. I think it would be worthwhile to look at, and it may well be looked at as the statutory review takes place, I understand, next year towards the further evolution of this agreement.

I am sure the old agreement was put in place with the goodwill of the government of the day; nevertheless it is improved dramatically by the agreement that has superseded it. Why would we want to stick to the old

agreement until we consider the impact and management of the whole aquifer, which may take a considerably longer time? Sure, we should look at that holistic management approach, but we should not stand still until we do so.

Having made those comments I wish to support the original legislation and reject the amendment moved by the member for Swan Hill. There is no doubt that his amendment is well meaning, but I reject it on the basis of taking a step forward. It is the best step forward we can take at the moment and one that has come about from the best knowledge that we have. Let us take a further step forward when we have the knowledge, the management techniques and the management prescriptions that will allow us to take that subsequent step. I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr McINTOSH (Kew).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

ROYAL VICTORIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND AND OTHER AGENCIES (MERGER) BILL

Declared private

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! Before calling the honourable member for Kew, the Speaker has examined the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and Other Agencies (Merger) Bill and is of the opinion that it is a private bill.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Education Services) — I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Second reading

Debate resumed from 17 August; motion of Mr HULLS (Attorney-General).

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — The opposition certainly is very happy to support this bill and to support the minister's proposal that it should be considered as a public bill. In essence it came into this place as a private bill because it deals with a charitable organisation called Vision Australia, which is an amalgamation of three well-known charitable institutions, the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales and the Vision Australia

Foundation. Those three organisations merged into one body as a result of the incorporation of a company called RBS.RVIB.VAF Ltd, which was incorporated on 11 May 2004. The purpose behind that incorporation was to merge the three organisations which have provided support for vision-impaired people in Victoria and New South Wales. The idea was that they would then trade under the name of Vision Australia. Federal Court approval for the merger was given on 6 July last year, and ultimately the company called Vision Australia Ltd was incorporated and essentially it took over the assets and responsibilities of the former merged corporation. The essence of this bill is to enable any bequests, gifts, dispositions or trusts that could have been made or were made to the former corporation or the former three charitable institutions to flow on to the benefit of Vision Australia.

It is a matter of some note that the second-reading speech points out that the principal purpose is that the legislation does not apply to past gifts or bequests; it only relates to those gifts and bequests that may have occurred after the incorporation of Vision Australia. Essentially that means that even the doctrine of *cy pres* may apply to existing gifts, but this bill puts beyond doubt that if a will has not been amended and a bequest is made to the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, this legislation would enable the bequest at the death of the testator to devolve to Vision Australia.

As I said, this legislation has a private purpose in the sense that they are private, well-known charities. The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind has been providing a strong charitable service for the last 135 years, and this legislation will enable the new merged body to be the beneficiary of a bequest as if the former individual body still existed. Accordingly this legislation has the support of the opposition, and I am happy to support the minister and treat it as a public bill.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — The Nationals support the bill. It would otherwise be private but has been declared a public bill, and that is so for very good reasons in that the entities involved in the work now being undertaken through the new enterprise Vision Australia are engaged in truly charitable work. It is appropriate that the Parliament recognise that, in the context of forgiving — to use the formal expression — the fees that would otherwise apply to the passage of this legislation.

The background to the bill is that there was a merger of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB), the Royal Blind Society (RBS) of New South Wales and the Vision Australia Foundation (VAF) that took effect

through a scheme of arrangement that was approved by the Federal Court of Australia on 6 July 2004. The property, the undertakings and the liabilities of each of the merged agencies were thereby vested in a new entity termed RBS. RVIB.VAF Ltd. The next in the sequence of events was that on 28 July this year that single entity RBS. RVIB.VAF changed its name to Vision Australia Ltd.

The legislation makes it expedient to provide that certain bequests, gifts, dispositions or trusts made in favour of any of the merged agencies take effect as if they were made in favour of Vision Australia. All of that is set out in the legislation, and I do not need to recite it. The particular clause of specific operation is set out in clause 4, and I invite members to consider it. The Nationals have sought advice from the chief executive officer of Vision Australia, Gerard Menses, and I have a note from him addressed to my office, dated 12 September, which says:

Vision Australia is the result of a merger approved by the Federal Court on 6 July 2004 ...

Mr Menses said:

The four organisations merged as they believe it is in the best interests of people who are blind or who have low vision to have one major organisation. The merger has already resulted in significant infrastructure savings and we have identified a range of improved services that we can now provide to people who are blind or who have low vision.

Mr Menses went on to recite his appreciation of all the parties involved in the debate and the unanimous support which is offered to this legislation. He said:

As a combined entity we are reliant on some \$12 million per year in bequests. The purpose of this legislation is to maximise our ability to receive bequests. The bill simply ensures that it is clear that any bequests made to one of the four former organisations can be applied in the name of the new entity — Vision Australia.

With the greatest of respect to Mr Menses, I see a note of blind panic in his final paragraph here, as I read it, because it says:

I hope these notes are helpful to you and in particular the huge impact that not passing the bill could have on an organisation so reliant on \$12 million bequests per annum in ensuring that it is able to maintain its excellent community services.

I am happy to be able to say that all members of the house support this legislation, and we wish it a speedy passage.

I cannot conclude without reference to the wonderful advertisement which is being run on television and through the media generally by the organisation at present. It features the training of the guide dogs and

young puppies coming in to the dogs school — for want of a better expression. Whoever orchestrated and choreographed it did a brilliant job; it really is wonderful. Indeed I have heard a comment in my own home that if members of the Parliament all conducted themselves in the same orderly manner as those young puppies in that advertisement, we might all be the better for it! In any event, we wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr LUPTON (Pahran) — I am delighted to be able to speak in support of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and other Agencies (Merger) Bill. It is a simple piece of legislation but one of great importance to the organisations that work on behalf of and support the blind and vision-impaired members of our community.

The background to this bill is that three organisations — the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB), the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales and the then Vision Australia Foundation — were merged into one combined agency under an agreement approved by the Federal Court of Australia on 6 July 2004. That merger was undertaken by those three separate agencies that had been working in support of blind and vision-impaired members of the community so that the combined agency was better able to support the vision-impaired community by combining its assets, resources and properties to take advantage of efficiencies they would gain as a result. That was a very sound and sensible decision for those agencies to take, so that they were better able to work in support of their members and people who depend on their services to such a great extent.

As a result of that merger, it has become necessary to pass this small but important bill to make sure that any of the bequests, gifts, dispositions or trusts which were made in favour of any of the merged agencies take effect as if they were made in favour of Vision Australia, which is the organisation that now exists and what the merged and combined agency is called.

The situation that exists as a result of this merger means that without the passage of this bill, there could possibly be some doubt about the legal effect of people making bequests, gifts, dispositions or trusts in favour of the previously existing organisations. We need to make sure that any of those bequests or gifts that are intended to go to the former organisations are effectively bequeathed or passed on to the new organisation. For instance, if someone had nominated the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind in their will and had not changed that as a result of the merger, there should be no doubt at all that the bequest intended to go to the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind should

properly find its way to Vision Australia. There should be no doubt about that. This is what this bill is designed to achieve.

I am also happy to speak in support of this bill because for some time the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind has been based in my electorate of Prahran and in more recent times, in High Street, Prahran. I am pleased that the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs is in the chamber at the moment, because we have had opportunities together in the past to visit the RVIB premises in High Street. The minister and I were able to launch the very special National Youth Week last year at the RVIB premises.

On that occasion, and as has happened on so many other occasions, I had the opportunity to pay the RVIB a visit and see what great work it is doing on behalf of the community. We were able to see some of the terrific educational and employment-related services it was able to provide. RVIB has been able to take advantage in particular of some of the great advances in technology that have taken place in recent years and which have made great advances for the blind and vision-impaired members of our community. These advances have given so many more people the opportunity and ability they did not have before to participate more fully in the overall life of our community for both their personal and private purposes and also to be able to benefit from a wider area of employment and education.

It was not very long ago I was able to present to the RVIB a small grant that had been provided to the organisation through the Department for Victorian Communities. It was for some wonderful digital audio computer equipment which provides enormous benefits for them and gets them involved in a greater range of educational opportunities. I was particularly pleased on that occasion when I was presenting the certificate of appreciation from the Minister for Victorian Communities that the RVIB invited me to make an introductory recording on their new digital education service to enable that program to be tested and rolled out in the community for the benefit of blind and visually impaired people right across Victoria.

I was pleased to be able to make that contribution as well on behalf of the government to support such a great organisation. It is one of those organisations in Victoria that is wholeheartedly supported by the broad community. It has done a wonderful job in this state for more than 130 years. The bill will ensure that the work of the new combined organisation will go ahead unimpeded and that all the bequests to the RVIB, which I understand amount to something of the order of

\$12 million a year, will go to the new organisation, Vision Australia Ltd, without any legal doubt or difficulty.

I am also pleased that the government has decided appropriately to treat the bill as a public bill rather than a private bill. It was introduced as a private bill because it is for the private benefit of an organisation rather than for the public generally. In its discretion the government can treat such a bill as a public bill. As a consequence, the merged organisations now to be known as Vision Australia will not have to pay any fees for the preparation and passage of this legislation. Given the charitable nature of the work that the agency does on behalf of the blind and vision-impaired community, that is an entirely appropriate and proper thing for the Parliament to have done.

I am very pleased to be able to give my wholehearted support to the legislation. I look forward to those entities that have merged into Vision Australia operating for the benefit of the blind and vision-impaired community — not only of Victoria but, as a result of the merger, Victoria and New South Wales more broadly — for many years to come. They are wonderful organisations that have done and do a great job on behalf of their constituencies. I wholeheartedly support the bill.

Mr LANGUILLER (Derrimut) — I will be very brief. I am very happy to rise in support of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and other Agencies (Merger) Bill. Three charitable organisations that provided services for the blind and vision impaired merged their activities into a single organisation under a scheme of arrangement approved by the Federal Court in July 2004. The three organisations were the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales and the Vision Australia Foundation. Under the scheme, all the property, undertakings and liabilities of those bodies were vested into a new combined agency, called Vision Australia Ltd. So in 2004 Australia's first truly national blind agency, Vision Australia, was formed following the merger of those three organisations. We commend them and wish them good luck.

I wish to recognise that the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind has a wonderful history. Members will be aware that it was founded in 1866 when it rented its premises on Commercial Road, in the electorate of the member for Prahran, who has so eloquently spoken about it. An institute was set up to take care of the needs of people in Victoria who were blind or vision impaired. On Friday, 31 July 1891 — 31 July happens to be the date of my birthday, for the information of my

colleagues — at the 24th annual meeting of the Victorian Asylum and School for the Blind the following motion was moved and carried unanimously:

That the present title of the institute be changed to the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, subject to consent being obtained from Her Majesty the Queen to use the prefix 'Royal'.

I conclude by confirming that on 28 October 1891 a letter stated that:

Her Majesty has been graciously pleased to grant this application.

This is a good bill, and I commend it to the house.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — I am proud to rise to speak on behalf of the Lowan electorate on the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and other Agencies (Merger) Bill. As other speakers, including the Leader of The Nationals, have outlined, The Nationals will be supporting the legislation because the organisations that have formed the new combined agency do a lot of work. The blind and visually impaired people in my electorate rely heavily on the merged organisation. It plays an important role in helping people in our community. This morning some members were on the front steps of Parliament house meeting with carers, some of whom look after blind or vision-impaired people.

As members are aware, three charitable organisations that provided services for the blind and vision impaired merged their activities into a single organisation under a scheme of arrangement approved by the Federal Court back in July 2004. I highlight again those three organisations: the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales and the Vision Australia Foundation. Under the scheme, all the property, undertakings and liabilities of those bodies were vested in a new combined agency, known as Vision Australia Ltd.

It is important for members to recognise the important work done by not only the agency's staff but also, importantly, the volunteers. I do not think any one of the 132 members of Parliament falls into the category of being blind or vision impaired, although some might be one eyed in their support for a football team or political party. The agency plays an important role in our community because many people are vision impaired.

Many agencies work in the electorate of Lowan. The new agency is located there. As I have said many times, the electorate of Lowan covers a big area of the state — 34 500 square kilometres — and 76 of the other

87 electorates would fit into that region. I have no doubt that the combined agency is located and plays a very important role in many other electorates. It is important that the new combined organisation, known as Vision Australia Ltd, has the combined resources to provide excellent support to those in our community who are blind or vision impaired. With those few words, I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Sitting suspended 6.30 p.m. until 8.02 pm

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave) — I am very pleased to make a brief contribution on the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and Other Agencies (Merger) Bill, which contains an important set of arrangements. I am also pleased to follow the contributions made by the members for Prahran and Derrimut.

The bill before the house was made necessary by the merger, effective from 6 July 2004, of three separate organisations charged with the very important task of supporting the blind and vision impaired within our Victorian community. Those three organisations are the Royal Blind Society, the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, or RVIB as it is otherwise known, and of course the Vision Australia Foundation. These three dedicated and hardworking organisations merged and were re-formed as Vision Australia.

The bill and the arrangements before the house have been made necessary by this merger because some doubt has been cast legally over the status of bequests, trust disbursements and other financial contributions to one or more of the component organisations that have merged to become Vision Australia in cases where they were granted after the formation of the new body — that is, after 6 July 2004.

The bill and the arrangements before the house tonight put beyond legal doubt the status of those bequests, gifts, dispositions or trusts created after that date. That is very important, given that a large component of the recurrent funding that supports the important work of those three organisations — now Vision Australia — comes from bequests and other donations from a particularly generous Victorian community and from generous communities right across the country. These changes put beyond doubt the legal issues in relation to those bequests, trusts and other disbursements passing directly to the amalgamated entity, Vision Australia, even though they may have been put in place and designed to benefit the individual organisations prior to their merger.

The bill is important, because a large percentage of the funding provided to support those in our community

who suffer from blindness or other visual impairments comes from charitable donations, bequests, trusts and so on. I am advised by Vision Australia that these contributions amount to around \$12 million per year. That is a substantial amount of money, and accordingly it is important to make sure that the status of the donations that generate that source of funding is put beyond doubt.

Since 1866 Victoria has been well served by one of those three component parts of Vision Australia, that being the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind. Not only has it provided critical support and services to Victorians who suffer blindness or vision impairment, but now, as an amalgamated and truly national organisation for the blind and vision impaired, it is providing that support to some 38 000 Australians right across the nation. It is very important work and the \$12 million that is provided annually is great testament to the worth of the cause and to the great dedication of its staff, particularly its volunteers.

I have had the pleasure in my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Health to meet Gerard Menses, the chief executive officer of Vision Australia at a function for the Victorian division of the Australian Optometrists Association. The great passion that he and his team have to provide support and service to the blind and visually impaired in the Victorian community was evident to me as we talked. The 3200 volunteers who support his substantial paid staff do a wonderful job of providing assistance to and empowering people by giving them the tools and the practical help they need to live the life they choose. That work is of great value to them and to the broader Victorian community.

Insofar as the important arrangements in this bill strengthen and put on a sounder footing the sources of funding for the important work performed by Vision Australia, I am pleased, along with my colleagues, to support them. I commend the work of Gerard Menses and his team, particularly the volunteers who work so hard to empower visually impaired Victorians and Australians and give them the support and service they need. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — I support the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and other Agencies (Merger) Bill 2005. I understand this is a private bill that is being treated as a public bill, which we are very pleased about. I am also pleased to note that it has the support of all parties. This bill will give full effect to the merger in July 2004 of three charitable bodies that have been prominent in providing support for the blind and vision impaired — that is, the Royal Victorian Institute

for the Blind, Vision Australia Foundation and the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales.

As a result of the merger the assets and liabilities of those three agencies have been transferred to the new agency Vision Australia Ltd. This legislation was requested by lawyers for the organisations. I come from a family of lawyers and know it is sometimes very hard to do as they request, but I suppose in this particular instance we will give it our best shot.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms MUNT — Yes, out of sympathy.

The bill will complete the intent of the merger and ensure that all future gifts and trusts to the former agencies favour the new Vision Australia Ltd. It puts in place security for fundraising required by the new agency. Previous speakers have said that most funds — up to \$12 million a year — come from the agencies' own fundraising efforts, and those funds really need to be secured.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my support and gratitude for the work this new agency will do for the community. In its previous incarnation the three bodies worked for 140 years for thousands of people in our community, to give the vision impaired the services that they require. I wish them well for the future as the new Vision Australia Ltd. This new body should provide them with increased resources, greater services for our vision impaired and the ability to provide a broader and improved range of services for those they serve. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) — I am pleased to join this debate in support of the bill, and I am also pleased the government agreed to make this a public bill, because after all it is a bill about assisting charitable and not-for-profit organisations. If it were not a private bill, the organisations would have had to pay for its passage, and I think that would have been inappropriate. The bill provides the legal basis for the merger of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, Vision Australia Foundation and the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales. It particularly removes any ambiguity or doubt in respect of bequests that may have been made before the merger of those three organisations.

As somebody who previously worked professionally in the health field, I have at times cared for patients and clients who were either blind or vision impaired, so I have had the opportunity to think of it from that perspective. But it was really only over the last couple of years, as a member of the Scrutiny of Acts and

Regulations Committee (SARC) in a particular inquiry, that I had cause to think about the issues confronting people with vision impairment from a political, democratic perspective.

The final report of the committee, entitled *Victorian Electronic Democracy*, was tabled in this place in May 2005. We covered a couple of very important issues: the act of voting, and the accessibility of web pages for people with vision impairment. The first time I had contact with people from Vision Australia was when they appeared before the committee along with blind citizens to make submissions. I congratulate Mr Tony Clark, business manager, Vision Australia Foundation, for his professional submission; and blind citizens Mr John Power, the national policy officer; and Ms Nadia Mattiazzo, the Victorian advocacy officer from Blind Citizens Australia, who made some very valuable contributions at our public hearings.

With respect to voting, the inquiry and evidence made me think about a right we take for granted — that is, being able to cast our vote in secret, which was not necessarily available to people with vision impairment. Previous attempts to assist them, such as the Victorian Electoral Commission's producing Braille templates, had not been all that successful. Our report recommendation 53 was that at the next election, electronic voting machines be trialled at selected voting centres, which as well as assisting people with vision impairment would also assist those with English language difficulties.

The other issue we dealt with that I had never previously had cause to think about was the inaccessibility of pages on the World Wide Web, and the committee learnt very quickly about the varying standards. These standards are set out by the World Wide Web consortium W3C. The committee recommended that for the whole of government there be a move to AA compliance and even recommended a higher compliance for Parliament of AAA. Those were a couple of very practical ways of assisting people with vision impairment. I was impressed by the professionalism of the organisations which appeared before us, and I am pleased to speak on a bill that further assists them in their work. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr LIM (Clayton) — I support this bill, which in many ways is a very simple administrative measure whose sole purpose is to give full effect to the recent merger into a new combined agency of three organisations which have a long history of supporting the blind and vision impaired. In July 2004 the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales, the Royal Victorian

Institute for the Blind and the Vision Australia Foundation merged to form RBS.RVIB.VAF Ltd, now called Vision Australia. This bill adds a sort of parliamentary imprimatur to this merger, allowing, for example, bequests benefiting any of the merging societies to still be paid.

I have spoken previously about bills like this. They are housekeeping, administrative bills that do not excite much interest. The bill is not sexy; it is not going to make the front page of the *Herald Sun* tomorrow, and there are no protest groups outside agitating either for or against it. But bills such as this are the rock upon which our democracy is built. And, as is usually the case when you look into the history, you find a bill is often a lot more interesting than it appears at first sight.

It is instructive to look at the origins of these three advocacy groups, not least because the history of services for the blind and vision impaired impinges on the wider issue of human and political rights for the underprivileged. I am sure most members will be aware there was a time when women, Aboriginals and, indeed, people who did not own property were denied the vote. But I am sure that other members will be as surprised as I was to discover that the blind were once disbarred from voting. In the late 1800s and the early 20th century voting was only available for people who could write with a pen. This deprived people who were blind or vision impaired of one of the most basic human rights. In 1902 the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, later the Vision Australia Foundation, was pivotal in achieving the first voting rights for those who were blind or otherwise could not write.

This reform went hand in hand with the introduction of the secret ballot — another Australian, and indeed Victorian, first. The secret ballot was introduced in 1856 in Victoria and South Australia, and by 1924 was used in all commonwealth states and territories.

Among the other reforms instituted by these advocacy organisation for the vision impaired was the abolition of a £400 bond to allow them to travel interstate: previously people who were blind faced humiliating scenes at border crossings. Pension and travel concessions for people who were blind or vision impaired were also introduced, as well as free postage for braille materials, which was a world first.

Until the late 1800s Australians who were blind had virtually no access to education. In 1866 Victoria pioneered the nation's first school for blind children through the Victorian Asylum and School for the Blind, later the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind. These three organisations have a magnificent record of

achievement in advocating for the blind and vision impaired, and I know that their work has continued unabated since their merger.

The Royal Blind Society, the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and Vision Australia Foundation relied heavily on fundraising, volunteers, bequests and the like for their operations. This bill will make sure that the newly merged organisation continues to benefit from bequests or other gifts and that no trust funds are lost to the Royal Blind Society, RVIB or the Vision Australia Foundation merely because they were made in favour of one of the former agencies. I fully commend the bill to the house.

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on what is a rather unusual bill to come before the house, in that I understand it is a private bill — —

Ms Barker — No.

Mr ROBINSON — It is not a private bill? It was a private bill and it has been made a public bill, so it is even more unusual.

Mr Holding — We are a very transparent government.

Mr ROBINSON — We are a very transparent government. The bill provides for the creation of a new entity in Vision Australia Ltd through the merger of a number of other long-established agencies, the most prominent of which is the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB). It is a good thing that the RVIB, the Vision Australia Foundation and the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales are merging because their collective capacity to provide services and advocacy for those who are vision impaired is undoubtedly enhanced.

I am pleased to support the bill because of its worthy objectives and because Vision Australia has for some time operated from premises in Mitcham Road in the Mitcham electorate. I have had the opportunity of visiting those premises on a number of occasions. In particular, I found Julie McConnell, who is the very capable manager there, to be a source of great advice. She certainly informed me about some of the history and the differences in philosophy of different agencies doing vision impairment advocacy, and it is quite an interesting history.

Vision Australia offers an impressive array of services, and earlier this evening I was looking on its web site at some of the aids that it offers, many of which are very practical. It offers optical aids, reading and writing aids,

canes and mobility products, telephones and communication aids, including accessible mobile phones, diaries, address books, universal remote controls, cassette players and accessories, video magnifiers and closed-circuit television sets, electronic personal organisers and note-takers, and the list goes on. It is a tribute to the large number of people who have been involved in that field for a long time that they have developed it to the point where such an extensive array of aids and equipment is available. The office located in Mitcham for the last few years has also been practising what it preaches. As a result of its dialogue with the City of Whitehorse tactile paths and pedestrian aids have been introduced in the vicinity of the premises. These are of particular value to the large number of volunteers.

I will conclude my brief comments in support of this legislation by paying tribute to the many volunteers who work for the new entity and who for many years have worked for the RVIB and others. It has probably been noted previously that the RVIB is very much part of Melbourne's history. I think it was that organisation that initiated Carols by Candlelight with another great Melbourne institution, Norman Banks on radio 3AW back in the 1930s —

Ms Barker — In 1938.

Mr ROBINSON — In 1938. It was his idea. The member for Oakleigh might help me here, but I think he passed by the window of a house one night and saw a blind woman singing a song or listening to the radio, and from that brief encounter came the inspiration for what is now a Melbourne tradition. That is a great story. I am sure we all wish this legislation a speedy passage and look forward to the outstanding work of Vision Australia continuing for many years.

Ms BARKER (Oakleigh) — I am very pleased to speak on the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and other Agencies (Merger) Bill. The bill will give full effect to the merger in July 2004 of three bodies, the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, Vision Australia Foundation and the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales.

As a result of that merger, the assets and liabilities of those three agencies have been transferred to a new agency called Vision Australia Ltd. The bill is necessary to complete the intention of the merger and to ensure that all future gifts or trusts that are expressed to be in favour of any of the merged agencies take effect as gifts or trusts in favour of the new agency, Vision Australia Ltd. This new agency will be the largest provider of services to people in Australia who are

blind or vision impaired, assisting more than 38 000 children or adults to experience life to the fullest. I note that while there is certainly a team of people from a wide variety of professions who support and deliver this valuable work, there are more than 3200 volunteers who freely give their time and skills to help Vision Australia Ltd in its essential work. I also note that it costs more than \$60 million each year to deliver these services, and the generosity of the community assists with these costs by raising approximately 60 per cent of the funds.

When the historic merger of the three leading blindness and vision impairment agencies took place in 2004, the president of the new board of the merged entity, Mr Graeme Innes, said that there was a need for change in a difficult charitable environment. He indicated that it was becoming increasingly difficult to raise the necessary funds to meet the demand as the growth in the number of not-for-profit organisations seeking donations had increased substantially in recent years and charities needed to either fund new ways of doing business, such as by joining together, or risk falling over. The amalgamation was the best option for all three agencies and provides the opportunity to change the way things are done and move forward in a positive way.

The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind has a 138-year history of providing services to children and adults who are blind or vision impaired. Founded in 1866, there have been several key milestones and events in its history, such as the opening of the bluestone building on St Kilda Road in 1868; the introduction of braille to the school in 1873; being officially named the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind in 1891, as the member for Derrimut said, with Queen Victoria's approval; the establishment of the braille library in 1903 and the first RVIB Carols by Candlelight in 1938; the secondment of the St Kilda Road site for military purposes in 1943; the opening of a new school in Burwood in 1960; the setting up the talking newspaper service in 1983; the production of computerised braille in 1986; and of course the vote in favour of this merger in 2004. I am pleased to see that this long and distinguished history has been written up by Dr Judith Buckrich, who has also written the histories of Collins Street and St Kilda Road. The book is entitled *Lighthouse on the Boulevard* and was launched earlier this year.

RVIB, as it has been known, has provided most of its services in clients' homes, schools, workplaces or local communities, with some specialist training provided at RVIB sites. Of course, the southern regional office of the RVIB is in Atherton Road, Oakleigh.

Mr Nardella — In your electorate.

Ms BARKER — Absolutely! The Vision Australia Foundation also has a very long and distinguished history. Founded in 1895 by Miss Tilly Aston, a young blind woman, the Vision Australia Foundation has also led the development and provision of services to blind and visually impaired people. I found reading about this very determined and active woman most interesting. Tilly Aston was born in 1873 in Carisbrook, Victoria, and was totally blind by the age of seven. After excelling at school, Tilly entered the University of Melbourne as the first blind person admitted to an Australian tertiary institution. However, a lack of braille meant she was unable to finish her second year. To address this lack Tilly called a meeting in 1894 with sighted friends, from which the Victorian Association of Braille Writers was formed. The association set up courses to train sighted volunteers to transcribe braille. From these origins Australia's first braille library was established, and that is now the National Information and Library Service.

Tilly joined with a group of blind friends to establish the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, which became known as the Vision Australia Foundation, to fight for major societal change, and they achieved a great deal. Some of the changes achieved included the abolition of a discriminatory travel bond for interstate travel, under which blind people were classified as undesirable, and that was achieved in 1901. As the member for Clayton said, voting rights for Australian blind people were first achieved in 1902; the free postage of braille material was attained in 1902; Australia's first nursing homes for blind people were established in 1909; and a pension for blind Australians was set up in 1911.

Tilly Aston became Australia's first blind teacher, and I understand that the Aston electorate in Victoria was named after her. Tilly's significant contribution to our community was also recognised when, during the centenary of Federation celebrations in 2001, she was nominated as one of the women who shaped our nation and was one of the first on the Victorian honour roll of women. Tilly also twice received the King's medal for distinguished citizen service, and she was the author of a number of books.

Another very significant achievement by the Vision Australia Foundation was in the area of sport for blind people — that sport being cricket. Blind cricket was invented in Melbourne in 1922. It involves the use of a cane or rubber ball inside which are metal ball bearings that make a sound when thrown, allowing the location of the ball to be audibly tracked. Through the Vision

Australia Foundation land was secured for the world's first sportsground and clubhouse for blind cricketers, which was built in Kooyong in 1928. Blind cricket is now played internationally in seven countries, with the world cup held regularly.

Both these agencies have had very long and very interesting histories, and I am sure the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales has also achieved many things for people who are blind or visually impaired. This merger will ensure that their distinguished services and achievements for people who are blind or visually impaired can continue and expand and that future gifts or trusts in favour of any of the merged agencies can take effect as gifts or trusts in favour of the new agency, Vision Australia. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I am delighted to speak in favour of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and Other Agencies (Merger) Bill. As other speakers, including the member for Oakleigh, have mentioned, this brings together three agencies. I note this is a trend that is occurring in other areas. I know the deaf societies are doing similar mergers. This is a bill that is tidying things up in terms of bequests, trusts, gifts and dispositions that are available so they can be declared in favour of Vision Australia Ltd.

I join with other members in commending the many volunteers who work for these organisations and the people who work in the organisations and do a marvellous job. The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind is well known to me, as the member for Oakleigh has mentioned, because its school is in Burwood. I very proudly inform the house that two of the students from the school completed the Premier's reading challenge recently; that is an excellent result for the school. I also mention in terms of Vision Australia that my daughters have been down to athletics in the same area as the Kooyong facility and watched the blind cricket and played baseball in the same area. I have been to Vision Australia and by invitation talked to some of the volunteers and groups on occasions. They do a marvellous job supporting the blind community. This house is universally committed to totally support the blind communities and their agencies. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr LOCKWOOD (Bayswater) — I, too, am pleased to contribute to the debate on the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and Other Agencies (Merger) Bill. The bill provides for the retention of those assets and contributions that were provided by the combined agency.

I want to mention a person who is a product of and a participant in the activities of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, Don Draffin, who some members may know. He is a blind man with great vision. He is a Bayswater bloke and is the chief executive officer of a factory in Bayswater that makes street furniture. He is on the public speaking circuit and is a very entertaining and interesting speaker to listen to. He is an inspiring speaker and has a great story to tell. He is a frequent correspondent with me and members of the government by email. I regularly receive his emails, particularly on matters of taxation. He is keen to reduce taxation for small to medium businesses. He has an antagonism towards payroll tax at the moment. I am sure that debate will go on.

As I said, he is an interesting character and only recently has taken on a guide dog. For many years he got about on his own or with the help of friends and family but decided that a guide dog would be useful to him. He enjoys having a guide dog because he believes the dog has a sense of humour and its own opinions. He often says in his emails how the guide dog is quite shocked by some of the things it hears and some of the jokes it has to laugh at.

For Don Draffin the lights went out about 20 years ago. He was a victim of retinitis pigmentosa, a disease stemming from a genetic malfunction. His brother suffers from the same ailment. Don was sighted for a number of years before he lost his sight, so he has the memory, which he regards as an advantage, and he sees himself as well off with the memories of the things he saw before he lost his sight. In fact he regards himself as more fortunate than those who were born blind and who did not have that experience.

Don is the chief executive officer of a company, as I said, with two of his brothers. He runs an engineering company that makes street furniture. Some members of this place may have used the street furniture. He employs 40 people in his Bayswater factory and makes such things as street signs, park benches, rubbish bins, bicycle racks, tree guards and lifting equipment. Don uses a program called JAWS, or Job Access with Speech, for his emails. It is a computer program that converts his speech into text. When he receives emails it converts them back to text to be transcribed to listen to. He uses the program a bit and says ironically that when he had his sight he used a secretary to write his letters but now that he is blind he writes them himself.

He makes the point that blind and sight-impaired people are becoming more independent as technology and society help them more. Don says that years ago he might have been consigned to a wicker chair, although I

doubt that as he is far too active to sit and vegetate. He is a much sought-after public speaker and a very successful person. He says that living with his disability is about putting alternatives in place so he can continue to enjoy the pleasant things of life. He has a very positive attitude and is someone I admire. He has a wonderful view of things. He says, 'Being blind is a tough way to learn, but it has taught me to look at the bright side. I can't see it, of course, but I can look'. On that note I commend the bill to the house.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — I support the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and Other Agencies (Merger) Bill. It demonstrates that disability is no barrier. The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB) has for a century performed a magnificent role in not only advocating for vision-impaired people but providing an extremely important service. I know this in a personal way from my niece, Bianca, who is vision impaired. The RVIB in Victoria assisted Bianca with her first computer, which helped her start to communicate with the world in a real sense, even though she lives in Perth. The institute keeps up with developments and technology to help its members and vision-impaired people throughout Australia. So the RVIB in Victoria assisted someone in another state.

All people with vision impairment face many challenges, and it is important for organisations like the RVIB and now Vision Australia to provide services to make their lives easier; to assist them to become more functional in society; and to give them all the possible opportunities we take for granted. I concur with other honourable members regarding the great work these agencies do.

I also mention as an aside the great fundraising work these agencies do — the bill is about fundraising — with such events as Carols by Candlelight. Honourable members may be interested to know that quite a number of years ago, along with Harry Secombe and others, I was in the Carols by Candlelight choir. It was great: there were many other people in the choir, because my voice was drowned out! It is probably the one and only time that my voice was drowned out, but if honourable members heard my singing they would understand why.

The agencies undertake important work and do a fantastic job. My family and I appreciate the great work they do. I support the bill before the house.

Mr HARKNESS (Frankston) — I join with other members in supporting the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and Other Agencies (Merger) Bill because I think the bill has some very worthy objectives in that it

strengthens the arrangements for fundraising for these organisations. I had a constituent who came to see me regularly probably once a fortnight or every three weeks to talk about some of the issues that face people who are vision impaired. I came to understand and appreciate some of the issues that confront such people on a day-to-day basis, whether it is going to the shops, getting on a train or getting off it at the right station without having to ask anybody for help, and all those other things that sighted people take for granted.

Along with other members I too would like to congratulate and commend all the volunteers who make the wheels of this institute go round and round. For some years I worked with a lady called Faye, who was a volunteer. She provided some administrative support at the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind. Faye used to come in every week to the office where I was working and tell us about some of the fantastic things that were happening in that organisation, which gave us a bit of a taste of it as well. With those two experiences I do have some sort of appreciation for the work that this organisation does.

From a personal perspective, though, I was born with an ophthalmic squint in my left eye. I was effectively blind in my left eye. By the age of five I had had about five eye operations in order to correct the problem. I too have had personal experience, although at a very young age, of some of the issues that people who are visually impaired face daily.

I know that some members have spoken about the volunteers who make up this organisation and about its history. In each of its 140 years of work the organisation has delivered fantastic service to probably many thousands of people in our community. Many members will remember — and I certainly knew about it from an early age — seeing the model big golden Labrador sitting on the doorstep of shops, with the little slot in its head. Every time I walk past one of those I always throw a few coins in because I think this organisation is absolutely fantastic. With those few words, I endorse this bill and commend it to the house.

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — Firstly, I would like to thank all honourable members for their contributions on what has been a very important piece of legislation and one in which a very reassuring level of support has been received from all members from all parties across the chamber. I begin by thanking in order the member for Kew, the Leader of The Nationals and the members for Prahran Derrimut, Lowan, Mulgrave, Mordialloc, Preston, Clayton, Mitcham, Oakleigh, Burwood,

Bayswater, Melton and Frankston for their contributions.

I think the spirit in which this debate has taken place in the house is very encouraging, and I know it will be of great reassurance to the affected organisations to see the bipartisan support that exists for the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, the Vision Australia Foundation and the Royal Blind Society of New South Wales, which are the organisations that will be merged, not so much as a consequence of this bill as their merger took effect from 6 July 2004, but this bill will provide the suitable and appropriate legislative backing for that merger, to make sure that any bequests, gifts, dispositions or trusts created or granted since 6 July 2004 will not fail. That is a very important development.

I would also like, as well as thanking all of the members who have contributed to this debate, to acknowledge and recognise the considerable work that has been undertaken within the Department of Justice by the civil law policy unit. I know it has worked very hard to make sure this legislation was finished so that it could be introduced into Parliament, that it could be debated and all the matters in it settled.

Again in thanking all members for their contributions and all those who worked on preparing this legislation, I acknowledge the contribution that the various merged associations have made, and I know they will continue to make, in supporting visually impaired people across Victoria. We look forward to seeing this bill proceed quickly through Parliament and given legislative effect as soon as possible.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

RACING AND GAMBLING ACTS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 26 May; motion of Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Gaming).

Government amendments circulated by Mr HOLDING (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) pursuant to standing orders.

Mr SMITH (Bass) — The Racing and Gambling Acts (Amendment) Bill is interesting in that it makes a number of changes to the racing industry and to how people can bet on races, and describes how those in the industry will have the opportunity to appeal decisions of the stewards to the more independent body of the Racing Appeals and Disciplinary Board. The bill will also allow the transfer of a lease currently held by the Victoria Racing Club to Racing Victoria Ltd. This property is known as the Racing Victoria Centre and is at 400 Epsom Road, Ascot Vale.

It will also allow this high-taxing government to tax poker machine operators an additional \$45 million on the pretext that the money will directly go to the Hospitals and Charities Fund. We have some doubts that the money will go in there.

We in the Liberal opposition do not oppose the bill, but we have serious concerns with some of the problems being put forward by the Bracks socialist government, and I will deal with these issues.

Mr Mulder — Pinko greenies!

Mr SMITH — I could have said ‘the Bracks pinko socialist government’, but I will not. Firstly, we support the transfer of the Crown lease to 400 Epsom Road from the Victoria Racing Club (VRC) to Racing Victoria Ltd (RVL). Secondly, the new appeals process is supported as a way of giving the industry stakeholders, or licence participants, as they are called, an opportunity to appeal a steward’s decision to suspend them if they feel aggrieved by that decision. It also allows the Racing Appeals and Disciplinary Board to adjudicate on the more serious breaches of the rules of racing.

But we have concerns about the government’s attempt to do something that no-one else in the world has been able to do — that is, control the Internet and any betting on it. We are all aware that this move is to stop Betfair and the Darwin bookie, Mark Reid, from being involved in Victorian racing so there is then no way of their possibly damaging the integrity of Victorian racing. The important issue is the protection of this state’s great industry. We are renowned around the world for our clean racing industry, and we are bringing people to Australia for our Spring Racing Carnival, which is becoming known around the world. People are bringing their horses from around the world to race here during this important season — —

Mr Mulder — Vinnie Rowe.

Mr SMITH — Yes, Vinnie Rowe is one of those, and many others. We are seen as running a very clean industry here in Victoria.

The government and the racing industry in general do not want Betfair involved with Victorian racing on the basis of probity and integrity, and as the minister said on the first page of his second-reading speech:

Strategies contained within this bill support the economic contribution of the racing industry by guarding against practices which seek to divert revenue from Victoria.

What is it all about? What is the minister talking about? Is he talking about integrity or money? I think the truth of the matter is that this socialist government sees this great racing industry as a milching cow, which it wants to pump dry as soon as it possibly can. It is investing and looking after its investment in the industry we have in Victoria.

The government is showing concern about the involvement of the Darwin-based bookie, Mark Reid. Members here should be made aware that he was charged by the New South Wales racing industry and he has now had those charges dropped. The government thought it had a really good case such that it was going to fix him up and he would never be able to operate again. But the authorities made a big mistake in New South Wales. I think we are making — —

Mr Nardella — There are pinkos up there.

Mr SMITH — There are pinkos up there too, there is no doubt about that — not quite as pink as the pinkos down here, and not quite as pink as the member for Melton!

We have the government that is showing some sort of concern, but we have to wonder a little about how fair dinkum it is about trying to protect the integrity of the racing industry. Is it looking to do something about preventing a significant revenue loss to the racing industry? I do not know. There is probably going to be a significant loss to the government if it cannot do something about controlling the Internet betting that is going on here in Victoria. I think the government is more concerned about the losses of dollars going to its coffers than it is about the racing industry. As a further example of this let me raise another issue — and there is issue after issue I could go on with.

Treasurer Brumby called into his office all the pokie heavies, including the top people from Tattersall’s, Tabcorp and Crown Casino — ‘Come into the office. I want to talk to you. No excuses: be there!’. He said to them that he was going to increase the pokie levy from

\$1533 per machine up to \$3033 per machine. He went as far as to say, 'It's okay, because I am going to put it into the Hospital and Charities Fund'.

Let us be fair dinkum about this: this is Treasurer Brumby saying he will put this money into the Hospitals and Charities Fund — like he did with the other \$45 million that never showed its face! It was never there, and the government could never show where that extra \$45 million went. Now he wants another \$45 million to put into the same little pot. You really have to worry a bit about where the Treasurer of this state is going.

With all the crocodile tears that are being cried at the moment by this government about its trying to look after the racing industry, we have to understand that the effect of the increase in the pokie levy on Racing Victoria is quite significant. It is in a position where it gets 25 per cent of what Tabcorp makes as a profit, because it is a shareholder in that company — in other words, it gains some sort of a financial gain for that holding.

In 2001 the government paid Racing Victoria \$4 million for introducing this first levy. That was to offset some of the money Racing Victoria was going to lose by not getting some of that levy. We know that that was paid for two years, and because of the pressure put on by the racing industry it was given a further extension of two years. That was four years in total that Racing Victoria got \$4 million that it in fact was losing on that particular deal. Racing Victoria is the big loser in this, because Tabcorp's share of the new health levy is \$20.626 million. That is how much it will lose from its bottom line. I will say this slowly, Don, so you understand: Racing Victoria is in a position where it is getting 25 per cent of the take — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Lindell) — Order! The member for Bass will refer to members by their proper titles.

Mr SMITH — Let me explain this quietly and slowly for the member for Melton. Racing Victoria's share of this — 25 per cent — should be \$5.165 million. It is a considerable amount of money, but what has this generous, socialist government offered to it? The pinkos from this government have offered Racing Victoria \$3.5 million as a one-off payment to offset the losses it has made because of the rip-off that this government has put in, seeing it as easy takings. They say, 'We are going to put this money in — —

Mr Jenkins interjected.

Mr SMITH — No, hang on! The government is supposedly going to put this money into the Hospital and Charities Fund. We know the first \$45 million disappeared and that the second \$45 million is going to disappear as well. We also know that the government is going to say, 'We are collecting this money on the basis that we are putting it into the Hospital and Charities Fund'. What an absolutely disgraceful joke the government is putting in!

While the government cries crocodile tears for Racing Victoria in relation to dealing with Mark Reid and Betfair, it is ripping the guts out of the racing industry here in Victoria. Come May next year the racing industry will suddenly be short by over \$7 million a year. That is going to affect the way Racing Victoria is going to be able to run the industry. No more money will be paid out from the first rip-off, and no more money will be paid out from the second rip-off by this government on the basis that it is going to do something. One also has to consider the consequences of the government's grab for cash in this way.

Mr Nardella — Better hospitals!

Mr SMITH — No, it is not. You should remember that when the pokie licences were issued there was no levy, no prediction of a levy and no suggestion that there would be a levy. Of course Tattersall's, Tabcorp and the Crown Casino had not budgeted in any way for getting ripped off by what is now nearing nearly \$100 million per year. It is not as if this government is not getting enough money from gaming. It is getting a couple of billion dollars a year, and it is still ripping it out of the industry. You have to wonder what the bottom line is. The minister makes a prediction, and you only have to look on the last page of the second reading speech to find it:

It has been four years since the government last increased the levy on gaming machines. This was consistent with an undertaking of the Bracks government to ensure that there would be no further gaming tax increases in its first term.

Mr Nardella — That's right.

Mr SMITH — Hang on! Did I miss it? Did I hear it say there would not be a second lot of rip-offs coming in next term? No, I did not hear that; I did not hear that at all. Government members are open about it: they will be ripping into this industry like you would not believe! The truth of the matter is that no business can trust the Bracks socialist, pinko government. Government members know that the pokies companies are an easy touch. They do not complain much, and they know that if they do, this government will deal with them harshly. The community looks at them as being parasites and

sucking the funds out of their pockets, and of course the government is going to pay the money into the Hospital and Charities Fund.

It sounds fine: it is an easy go for the government. It says, 'We can just slip into any of the gaming areas, and people really do not care much. We will say we are putting the money into the Hospital and Charities Fund' — but where is the accountability for the first \$45 million and where is the accountability for the second \$45 million? Where is the government's proof to show that that money has not just been taken out of consolidated revenue? This is a government of thieves and liars, and we know that!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SMITH — Sorry, they are fibbers. Can I say that \$100 million is a lot of funds for this government to be taking out of the community, and it is taking it out of the pockets of the shareholders. There are Tabcorp shareholders who are just ordinary mum-and-dad shareholders, and then there are the shareholders in Tattersall's and Crown Casino. Those shareholders are looking for the dividend cheques to come in, and they are going to be short this year, next year and the year after. This is easy takings for the government, but the truth of the matter is that no business in this state is safe in trusting this government. Treasurer Brumby could adapt funds from the private sector to the government to suit himself. He can use any mealy-mouthed terms he wants and he will be able to drag the money from the community. It does not matter about contracts, and it does not matter about memorandums of understanding. They do not matter to this government. Government members have no morals and no concerns for business and how business works.

Mr Ingram — As a spokesman for racing, you make a good plumber.

Mr Donnellan — Pinko bloody plumbers!

Mr SMITH — God bless them! Internet betting is also a serious issue, I must say. At this stage the federal government is not prepared or able to close down any of the services, and it knows it will not be easy to do so. Yet with all the resources of the federal government and its brains trust — of which this state government has very little — it has not been able to solve the problem by legislating to ban Internet gambling in this country. I do not know whether other members get them, but I must get just about half the casinos in the world emailing me to say, 'Listen! We are offering you five bucks — or \$10, \$50, \$100 or \$1000 — in credits

to come and play at my casino'. I get them day after day.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SMITH — I will forward them to any member of this house who wants them. They can have them. This is about Internet betting, about gambling on the Internet. This is what Betfair does, and this is what a lot of other companies around the world do, and it is very difficult to be able to close them down. The government is having a go, and that makes it very interesting, I must say.

The house should not forget that Betfair is not just about racing. Betfair will take bets on anything, and it will do it for a worldwide audience. It will take bets on cricket, two flies running up the wall, who is going to win the next election, who is going to win the next game of tennis and who is going to interrupt me next — and I will take some bets on that!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SMITH — I really did not expect one of my own to do it, so I have just lost!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Campbell) — Order! Perhaps that might be an opportune time for the member to return to the bill.

Mr SMITH — Acting Speaker, you will not believe it, but I have not left the bill for one moment since I got to my feet, but I thank — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Campbell) — Order! Believe it or not, I ask the member to return to the bill.

Mr SMITH — Could I say to anyone here that Betfair is an organisation that will bet on almost anything. Here are some figures that members should think a little bit about. On one of the recent international cricket finals Betfair held bets of \$670 000 compared to the \$120 000 that was held by the TAB. They were bets in Australia. On the second game of the one-day series Australians had placed \$5.4 million in bets at Betfair compared with \$123 000 worth of bets with the TAB. Now, Betfair must have something the punters like. I do not know what it is; I have no interest in betting there.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SMITH — The member for Narre Warren North sounds like he is a Betfair man; he can probably

explain to the house when he gets to his feet how he relates to Betfair and how good he thinks it is.

I can understand the concerns that have been raised by the racing industry regarding Betfair. It certainly will suck a lot of money out of the local betting people, and it will certainly deprive the racing industry here of a lot of funds. It will also deprive the government of a lot of funds. It is going to be important for us to be able to protect the racing industry's integrity, as it is certainly well respected around the world. It is paramount that the punters do not lose confidence in the Victorian racing industry. We know it is a good industry; we know it is a clean industry. Everybody associated with it is licensed. We are trying to protect that very important industry from what may very well occur to it — and that is called Betfair, and it is also called Mark Read, because Mark Read is also somebody else who is prepared to take bets via your computer.

The government's proposal to create a new offence that will prohibit the unauthorised publication of race fields is interesting. Offenders will be reported to Victoria Police or the gambling commission for further investigation. Those are the bodies that will in fact be prosecuting those people that may offend against the Victorian racing industry and, after this legislation is passed by this house, they will also be restricted by legislation. The New South Wales authorities that had charged Mark Read had to withdraw their charges because Read was in fact permitted to be able to take bets. If the Victorian bodies are going to try and prosecute Mark Read they had better ensure they are in a position where they have it right — not like the people in New South Wales.

The proposals by the Bracks socialist government are put forward to combat illegal betting on the Internet. The situation is probably no different from that regarding the starting price (SP) bookies who used to operate for years when I was a kid. I can remember it quite well. My father used to work for one of the SP bookies. I can remember him drawing up all of the forms of a Friday night and going over the road and sitting by the phone at my aunty's place where people would ring in with their bets — whether it was two bob each way or whatever it might have been. The SP bookie my father was working for was very successful at what he did. The only way the authorities of the time were able to stamp out SP bookies — and this government should actually have a look at this — was to legalise betting. They set up the TAB. In fact most of the SP bookies finished up owning the TABs; they were the very experienced people who were running the industry.

I am not suggesting that the government or the racing industry should let Betfair in. But I do not know what it is proposing as far as the Internet and prosecutions are concerned. What is the best way to go? I think it has to look harder and work with Betfair to overcome the problems. I am not saying it should go out and accept everything Betfair puts forward, but let us look at what other proposals there are.

Nobody in the world has been able to stamp out things on the Internet, whether it is pornography, child pornography, gambling or the publishing of any sort of false information. The truth of the matter is that nobody has been able to stop those things from happening. The government is now rushing to put this bill through even though it has been sitting around on the notice paper for four months. The government will wipe its hands of it and say, 'We have done all we can do for the racing industry here in Victoria'. But the truth of the matter is that it will not solve the problems.

As we all know, Betfair is in Tasmania trying to negotiate a deal. It is my understanding that there will be an announcement made tomorrow about Betfair setting up in that state. Once that happens it will open up a whole new world to punters in Tasmania and probably to punters around Victoria. I am not sure that the racing industry here or in any of the other states have made the right move in closing their eyes to what Betfair is about. I say this quite clearly: I am not advocating that this is the best way to go. I am sure there are other issues that should be addressed, but I think it is going to be important for the government to keep a close eye on what is happening here now.

Members have to be aware that in England Betfair pours a lot of money into an otherwise ailing UK racing industry in the form of sponsorship and levies. It also pays about 15 per cent of its gross commission revenue to British treasury. I read that in a newspaper report that came out in the last few days. What is Betfair talking about doing if it is forced to pay more money to the government? It is looking to move to Malta. Of course we have a big display on Malta in Queen's Hall. I saw a lot of the buildings shown there. Maybe Betfair is looking to name one of them Betfair House, or something like that as somewhere where people can place their bets. But it does not really matter where it sets up on the Internet.

If it operates and starts punting on Victorian racing fields, which is what this government hopes it will not do, it will be extremely difficult for Victoria Police or for the gaming commission to do anything to prosecute and stop that type of activity occurring. There has to be a better way. It is not up to me to tell the government

what to do. And yes, it is taking some steps to try and overcome the problems we may have with racing here in Victoria. It is certainly my best wish and that of the Liberal Party that we protect the integrity of the racing industry here in the state of Victoria. As I said, we will not oppose this bill.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — It is good to see the Minister for Racing at the table. Like all of us he takes an interest in racing. I am concerned about how he is dealing with harness racing, but we will deal with that later. I thought I would just throw that one on the table. I rise on behalf of The Nationals to speak on the Racing and Gambling Acts (Amendment) Bill. As the member for Bass said, this bill has been in the Parliament since 26 May. It has taken a little while for it to be debated.

We know the purpose of this bill is to amend three acts. One of them is the Racing Act 1958 with respect to Racing Victoria Centre land and appeals to the Racing Appeals Tribunal. The Nationals have no problems regarding the transfer of the land and the issue about the Racing Appeals Tribunal. The second act to be amended is the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 with respect to the publication of race fields and the health benefit levy. I will make more comments about that later.

Thirdly, the bill amends the Casino Control Act 1991 with respect to the health benefit levy. I will make more comment about that later. The bill also makes amendments to the Gambling Regulation (Further Amendment) Act 2004 and repeals spent acts. My colleague the Honourable Damian Drum is the spokesperson for The Nationals on racing and gambling. The bill was discussed at length at our meeting on Monday night and we have resolved not to oppose the legislation before us tonight.

First I declare that I am not a horse owner and I am not a gambler — I suppose I am a gambler in some ways, but I am working on it — but I have a strong connection to the racing industry. My grandfather owned a horse that was not a Melbourne Cup winner but should have been — it never quite got to Melbourne. It was a champion of the bush called Erinbank. An uncle has just retired from training racehorses. He had a great one in Caucus Boy, which won a few races. His daughter, Majella Ballantyne, has taken over training and a couple of weeks ago she had a good winner at Caulfield named Future Analysis. For those who are not aware, it paid \$14.80 for a win and \$4.10 for a place, so it was at good odds.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DELAHUNTY — I know that in the racing industry if you get tips usually the horses do not win; it is a matter of finding them in the paper. If it is in the paper and you have not been tipped, there is a fair chance it will win.

Coming back to the bill, it makes four key amendments: the creation of a new offence prohibiting the unauthorised publication of race fields; legislative support to facilitate the transfer of the Crown release — as I said, The Nationals have no problem with that; and consistency of process for appeal rights to Racing Victoria Ltd's Racing Appeals and Disciplinary Board. It does not happen too often these days, thankfully, but it is important to have the process right. We have major concerns about the fourth amendment — that is, an increase in the annual health benefit levy payable by gaming operators and the casino operator. I will deal with that later in my presentation.

As the member for Bass said, all members would support measures designed to protect the racing industry and also, importantly and particularly, government revenues. Governments of all ilk now rely on the gaming industry for revenue through taxes. This government — I will come back later to this — has made an art form of tackling them. All members would agree that the strength of the industry is firmly linked to the integrity of the racing industry and the wagering sector. All members must support anything that can improve or maintain the integrity of the industry.

As I said, the racing industry contributes an enormous amount to social, cultural and economic outcomes in Victoria. I will focus particularly on country Victoria. I looked up the web page of Country Racing Victoria. It shows that it is made up of 53 race clubs and 52 racecourses and has 412 meetings per year. It has an economic impact in excess of \$912 million per annum. It creates 10 635 direct jobs in breeding, training, race clubs and wagering. Regional Victoria represents 65 per cent of the direct jobs created through thoroughbred racing in the state; 79 per cent of thoroughbred racehorses are trained in regional Victoria; 58 per cent of owners live in regional Victoria, as do 74 per cent of breeders and 91 per cent of trainers; and 75 per cent of all race meetings are held at country racecourses. As I said, country racing is an important sector in Victoria.

Mr Cooper — What is the biggest country racecourse? Mornington!

Mr DELAHUNTY — I will get to that a little later. It is interesting to note that country racing contributes \$494 million in local offcourse wagering, which is approximately 45 per cent of Victoria's annual local

offcourse revenue. It has enormous attendance of nearly 1 million people. Importantly, more than 600 voluntary committee members are supporting country racing. It is an important sector of the racing industry.

The history of racing administration is that back in the 19th century the regulation of racing and betting activities and such matters were dealt with by Victoria Police under the police offences legislation. Other legislation was brought in. A specific Racing Act was introduced in 1953, and the Bookmakers and Bookmakers Clerks Registration Committee was established in 1954. As was mentioned by the member for Bass, the Totalizator Agency Board was introduced in 1961 and commenced its successful offcourse wagering service at that stage. It is interesting to note that the Racing Appeals Tribunal was established in 1984.

It is important to recognise that the Racing Act regulates the conduct of race meetings and betting at meetings. It provides for the licensing of racing clubs and racecourses, the issuing of permits for race meetings and betting activities and the registration of bookmakers and their clerks. It is interesting to note that the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 is administered by the Minister for Gaming, in some parts jointly with the Minister for Racing. As members are aware, the issuing of a wagering and gaming licence to Tabcorp Holdings Ltd is part of that role, as is the regulation of the totaliser and, importantly, the enforcement provisions against illegal betting — for example, starting price (SP) bookmaking. They are some of the activities it is involved in.

Given the time, I will refer to the clauses in the bill. Clause 3 relates to appeals in the thoroughbred racing industry. The current provisions relating to harness racing and greyhound racing will be retained. Clause 6 on page 9 inserts into the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 new section 2.5.16A relating to the publication of race fields. It is interesting to note that the maximum penalty for contravening that part of the legislation will be 60 penalty units. That is not a lot when you consider how enormous the industry is. I just put that on the record.

The member for Bass spoke about concerns that have been raised by the racing industry. I highlight a couple of articles. I have one from the *Herald Sun* of 20 September 2004 which is headed 'Turf war breaks out over betting' and states:

Australia's horse racing industry has called for a ban on a new style of online betting, saying it encourages fraud, in a move intended to thwart a bid for a gaming licence by British Internet betting company Betfair.

An article in the *Age* of 9 September 2004 is headed 'Betfair "not wanted" in Australia, says Racing Victoria' and states:

All you (Betfair) want to do is float your company in Australia, line your pockets and go off somewhere with your millions ...

It is obviously of concern to the racing industry but no doubt to the government also. It is interesting to note that, as another article is headed 'Brits give thumbs up to Betfair operation'. It is working very well over there. We certainly do not mind it working well in England but we want to make sure that they do not take dollars out of Victoria particularly and, importantly, we are concerned about the integrity of the industry. It has been highlighted by Racing Victoria and others that with Betfair people can bet on not only winners but also losers. That is a real concern to the racing industry.

As I said, there are major concerns with the betting exchanges here in Australia. As part of a review, the members of the Economic Development Committee are looking at the breeding industry. We have been fortunate enough to travel to New Zealand and a bit of Australia looking at that. People have expressed major concern about betting exchanges. There are many articles in relation to that which I have highlighted in the notes for my presentation.

As members would know, Betfair currently services Australian clients from its United Kingdom base, rather than from Australia. Wagers by Australians on Betfair do not attract Australian taxes such as the GST or state gambling taxes. Instead, Betfair pays betting tax in the United Kingdom and that is currently set at 15 per cent of gross profit, which is the total amount less winnings paid out. Betfair also does not currently make any payments to the Australian racing industry, so we can see why the Australian industry is concerned.

The member for Bass spoke about why people are supporting Betfair. This is due to the fact that the Betfair cost structure is lower than that of the TAB, partly because it does not support a network of shopfronts or oncourse facilities and partly because of the level of tax and the industry contributions paid. All bets with Betfair are placed either on the Internet or by phone.

When I highlight how important country racing is, I should also mention that in country racing it is important to have the TAB on course. This not only creates jobs but also provides a good betting environment for people who go to the country races. I am sure people would not be able to jump on a computer or get on their mobile phones to bet. They

may be able to do it, but I do not think it is good for racing. A better way of doing it is the way we are doing it at the moment.

It is also of concern that Betfair has a loyalty program, so there is a strong incentive mechanism to bet frequently with Betfair — —

An honourable member — To back the losers.

Mr DELAHUNTY — I will come to that. It is also unusual in an Australian context. We are trying to support people who are problem gamblers, but under the Betfair system we would not be going the right way.

The main issue is one of integrity. The Australian racing industry has expressed concern that betting exchanges pose a risk to the integrity of racing, and we would have to agree because people can now more easily profit from the knowledge that a particular horse is likely to lose; or more generally, the proposition that it is easier for a person wishing to influence the outcome of a race to ensure the horse loses rather than ensuring that it wins. That goes against the Australian tradition of trying to back a winner — it is a pity it is not Essendon this year, but it may be next year! That is our major concern with Betfair.

The other interesting thing — and maybe the next speaker for the government can talk about this — is that currently all racing details are published in the newspapers. These are spread far and wide around Australia. If you are anywhere in Australia you can pick up a Victorian newspaper containing the race fields; whether you are in Darwin — —

Mr Smith — Or on the Internet.

Mr DELAHUNTY — Or you can pick it up off the Internet, as the member for Bass says. I am unsure how this bill is going to work to stop people getting that information, because, as I said, the newspapers are spread all around Australia and, importantly, apart from the newspapers people can access the Internet and get the same information.

The other issue I want to cover before I finish concerns clause 11 of the bill. As the member for Bass highlighted, the government is going to increase the contribution it receives from the gaming machines by an extra \$1500, which is nearly double the amount they pay now. All Labor governments have a great love of taxing motorists. We have seen that happen through the use of speed cameras, fuel taxes, police fines; even car registration payments for pensioners, health care cardholders and some Australian war veterans. They know they are being scrutinised very hard in that area

but we are now seeing this Labor government move to tax the gaming industry more heavily.

As we know, gaming is a very competitive industry and these high rollers and others can move interstate or offshore. We have to remember that the gaming industry provides jobs and importantly, a social environment for people, whether it be the Spring Racing Carnival or other racing events. There are major concerns about the approach taken by this government. These concerns are being raised not only by Crown Casino but also groups like the Horsham sports and community club in my electorate. This is a great example of a facility that was set up with community money and is now run by a community committee. It has paid off its expenses and now all the profits are going back into sports and community groups right across the Wimmera Mallee. They are a great source of support for kindergartens and many sporting groups. Now that the club is going to lose an extra \$1500 a machine those community groups are going to miss out. This government is going to get the money but the reality is that it has been the community groups that have supported the club and been very appreciative of the dollars coming their way. The gamblers will not be impacted on, but the companies that pay the community groups will be.

The minister is saying that some 87 per cent, I think, of gaming revenue comes back to the gambler. That is not going to change, and I appreciate that. The minister can say this is only going to hit the industry, whether it be the casino or these other clubs, but the reality is that they have to keep their margins up so they will spend less on supporting community groups. I bring that concern to the house.

The other issue I wanted to highlight — and I am a member of this club — concerns the Wimmera Racing Club. This club provides a great racing medium, and the member for Mornington talked about one of the big country race clubs — —

Mr Cooper — The biggest country racing club.

Mr DELAHUNTY — I think it is the biggest country racing club. It was formed in 1998 and it was Australia's first regional racing club. It runs nine racecourses in the Wimmera Mallee and these are Ararat, Donald, Great Western, Horsham, Murtoa, Nhill, St Arnaud, Stawell and Warracknabeal. The club has 11 directors; its chief executive officer (CEO) is Sandy Horton and the chairman at the moment is Lance Huebner. I must admit that there are a couple of Delahuntys on the board too: my brother, Michael, and cousin Leo. But there is another director whom

members would know, and he was formerly a minister, together with the member for Mornington, and that is the Honourable Bill McGrath. He is also a director of the Wimmera Racing Club. He may have retired from this house, but he is putting back into his community — and not only through the Lions Club.

These racing clubs have enormous pulling power. They do a wonderful job in attracting patrons and have great social events. In the 2005 racing season they will hold 38 race meetings, including 11 cup days on 9 racetracks. The biggest meeting was at Stawell, where they dragged in approximately 4000 people, but the Horsham Cup and others will also be very big race meetings. The 2006 New Year's Day Marma race meeting has been organised as a day out for drought-affected farming families, and I am pleased to say they have received a grant from VicHealth of \$7000 to run that event.

I would like to thank the sales and marketing executive from Wimmera Racing, Bradley de Martino Rosaroll, who provided me with that information, which highlights the importance of the gaming industry for rural and regional Victoria. I will finish by saying that The Nationals will not be opposing this legislation, because it is important that we support measures to protect the racing industry and the integrity of this very important sector of our community.

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I am pleased to make a few comments in support of this very significant bill, which is aimed at making Victoria an even better place in which to race a horse and enjoy a wager. It is a great place to start with, and this bill will help make it better. I want to congratulate the very professional way in which the staff of the Office of Racing go about their work in framing legislative amendments. We usually have a racing bill of some description every year, and once again they have demonstrated their great professionalism.

Mr Pandazopoulos interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — We have had two this year, indeed. They are working overtime.

Racing, as all contributors to this debate will note, is part and parcel of Victoria, and efforts to strengthen the industry are under way on a number of fronts, certainly through this legislation but also through the work of the Parliament's Economic Development Committee which I have the privilege of chairing. The committee earlier this year was asked by the minister to investigate and report back to the Parliament in due course on the viability of the Victorian thoroughbred and

standardbred breeding industries. It is a tough job but someone has to do it, and we are engaged in this work in a very tireless manner.

I want to pay tribute to one of the members of the committee who are looking at this — that is, the member for Lowan, who just made his contribution to the debate. I want all members to understand that he is going about his work in a fearless manner. Indeed he has got the bruises to show for it. I think they are on his left arm. He very unwisely, as it turned out, tried to get friendly with Testa Rossa and Testa took a nip. I think the moral of that story is: if you are going to pat stallions, you are better off doing it at the end of the breeding season rather than a few weeks beforehand. We were in New Zealand not long after that and Zabeel eyed him off and wanted to give him a matching pair of bruises, but he had the good sense not to get too close.

In Victoria we also have the Champions display at the Australian Racing Museum and Hall of Fame down at Federation Square, which in its own way is also contributing to a strengthening of racing in this state. I had the opportunity this evening to attend a presentation there, an interview with the esteemed trainer David Hayes. It was a very informative interview conducted by Brian Martin. David Hayes is a master trainer. He had a number of training premierships in his own right in Melbourne following on from his father's legendary contribution, and he has spent the last 10 years in Hong Kong as one of the leading trainers there. His return to Melbourne is a vote of confidence in our great racing industry.

The bill is largely administrative in nature, and previous speakers have commented on this. It incorporates amongst other things a transfer of the Crown reserve on which the Racing Victoria premises are situated from the Victoria Racing Club to Racing Victoria Ltd (RVL), and in that sense probably represents one of the last chapters in the transition of racing administration from the VRC, which for many years was the principal club.

The bill also streamlines some of the appeal rights procedures. They are a vital ingredient in Victorian racing administration. I think it is fair to say that the appeal procedures in place in this state are probably now the best in the country. The bill also deals, which previous speakers have made mention of, with the annual health levy amendments which are pursuant to earlier announcements. I am sure all members would have no problem with that particular tradition of the racing industry being continued, where proceeds of wagering are directed into health areas. That is

something that has been part of Victorian racing since the TAB was founded in 1961.

The most broadly discussed element of the bill is the proposed prohibition on the unauthorised publication of race fields by wagering service providers. This is a measure that is designed to protect the revenue of the racing industry in the state by protecting its key intellectual property, if you like, and that is the race fields' information, without which there can be no betting.

It is particularly important at this time because we have the spectre of betting exchanges. It is important to simply point out that Betfair, despite all the bluster — and certainly the Betfair people are great self-publicists — simply has not been able to address to the satisfaction of racing authorities across Australia the manifest concerns about integrity, about probity and about revenue impacts. It is a fair bet to my mind that if after months and months of lobbying Betfair is not able to convince racing authorities across the state, that is for good reason, and the good reason is that the revenue base and the integrity standards of the industry have been built up over many years, and people in this country are not prepared to surrender that on the promise of a quick dollar.

One point on which I might disagree with the member for Lowan is that I am not so sure there is universal opinion in the United Kingdom that Betfair has been such a great thing. I think there have been a number of probity issues about people falling off horses at inopportune times, which seems to reflect betting patterns on races — something that might have happened in John Wren's days down at the old pony tracks in Melbourne. We like to think we have moved a little bit beyond that.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — And more recently in Western Australia, perhaps. The member for Bass made the observation that a prohibition of sorts had been attempted in New South Wales. My understanding is that the New South Wales legislation was not so well drafted, and indeed, the legislation that has been proposed for Victoria is far more tightly drafted by reference to wagering service providers. Of course, it is the wagering service providers that contract with the newspapers for the publication of race fields; it is not something that is done perchance, and I make that observation in furtherance of the comments made by the member for Lowan. We believe the legislation in Victoria is better worded and will stand a better chance than that in New South Wales.

The government's legislative direction has been quite broadly endorsed, and I do not think I am revealing any secrets by saying that wherever the Economic Development Committee has been — and we have travelled reasonably broadly in pursuit of our information and research — —

Mr Delahunty — Not broadly enough.

Mr ROBINSON — Perhaps not broadly enough although I am sure broadly enough for this Parliament. Wherever we have been, the comment that has been offered to us is one of positive endorsement of the way in which Victorian racing is administered, and that is very comforting.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — I do not have a problem with money going out of the racing industry, because I have been putting money in and I have not seen a good return for many years. It is all one way so far as I am concerned!

The bill also provides for fixed odds betting, currently undertaken by a number of Victorian bookmakers, to be restricted. I understand this is a result of concerns expressed by the integrity services division of Racing Victoria about the potential misuse of this power. Following a fairly protracted investigation in Queensland earlier this year about manipulation of tote odds by bookmakers, there was some speculation that this measure needed to be introduced in Victoria.

While none of us would dispute the judgment of Racing Victoria Ltd on this matter, I think it is important that further work be undertaken to examine precisely what, if any, potential integrity issues arise. In this state we would like to think that we have a much more sophisticated and advanced wagering industry, both on the Tabcorp side of things and the bookmaker side of things, than exists in other parts of the country, and for that reason it is something that I will continue to discuss with Racing Victoria Ltd.

In summary, this is very good legislation designed to enhance Victoria's undisputed leadership in terms of its racing program, and I am sure it will meet with the support of all members.

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — I am happy to make a contribution on a couple of aspects of this bill. I start by quoting the old maxim, 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions'. This bill certainly has some good intentions; I do not think anyone would quibble about that. It has good intentions with regard to the issue of Internet betting and the activities of Betfair and other

similar agencies and bookmaking services in the Northern Territory. The good intention is to protect the industry which is so important to this state. That has been mentioned by the member for Bass and other speakers on this bill, and it is something that I would like to repeat because the racing industry is important to Victoria.

It is important in terms of employment throughout this state, and it is certainly very important to my electorate because the racing industry is its biggest employer. The Mornington Racing Club is the third-biggest racing club in Victoria, certainly the biggest racing club in country Victoria — —

Dr Napthine — Country Victoria?

Mr COOPER — The member for South-West Coast may jeer but the Mornington Peninsula is not in the city of Melbourne. It is outside Melbourne, and the Mornington Racing Club is regarded as a country racing club, the biggest club outside metropolitan Melbourne, and as I said, the third-biggest racing club in Victoria.

Employment, both direct and indirect, in regard to the activities of the Mornington Racing Club is quite significant. So many companies, both in Mornington and around the Mornington Peninsula, rely very heavily for a good part of their turnover each year on the activities of the club, and therefore anything done by a government to protect the activities of racing and the activities of large clubs like the Mornington Racing Club that generate such enormous economic activity is to be commended.

With that aspect in mind I congratulate the government for bringing in that part of the bill that will deal with Internet betting. There is no doubt that organisations like Betfair make money out of Internet gambling, but none of that money goes back to the industry. It is a bit like offshore insurance. People might think that it is great because they are being covered but the reality is that with offshore insurance, and fire insurance in particular, no money goes to the people putting out the fires. In this case, no money from these organisations goes to the racing industry. That is one of the major concerns of the Victorian racing industry.

The other concern in regard to Betfair is the way in which it takes bets on anything, not only on people backing horses to win or run a place. It is quite happy to take bets on horses that will not win — they are backed not to win. As the member for Mitcham said, the stories coming out of the United Kingdom about the activities of Betfair are mixed. Over the last couple of years there

have been some well-publicised instances of activities which fortunately we do not see in our racing industry in Australia, and certainly not in Victoria. We have a clean, good industry and it needs to be protected. Those are the good intentions that I spoke about.

The bill sets out a legislative form to stop Internet betting and make it illegal for betting exchanges to publish Victorian race fields, and that is a very good intention. But how is it going to be put into operation? How will that occur? As the member for Bass said in his contribution to debate on the bill, it simply cannot occur because governments around the world, and certainly governments in this country, have been trying to stop a whole lot of activities that have been going on with the Internet, and they have been unsuccessful.

Here we have a situation where we are saying this legislation is going to stop Internet betting agencies from publishing Victorian race fields. I would like to know, and I assume the minister will tell us in his summing up on this bill, how that is going to occur when this legislation is brought into operation. For example, how are we going to deal with a betting agency in Vanuatu, in the West Indies or somewhere out in the Pacific, in Mauritius or South Africa? How are we going to stop them from publishing racing fields? The racing fields are available in newspapers and on the Internet two or three days in advance, as they have to be. They become known and they are going to be published. So how are we going to deal with these agencies that have no connection with this country other than through the Internet?

I hope the minister will be able to tell us how this law will be policed and how action will be taken against agencies that breach it. The racing industry will be very interested in having an answer on that, because they are keen to see their industry protected. I acknowledge that the government also is keen to see the racing industry protected.

But it is no good just bringing in a law that is really nothing more than lip service. Right at this stage, I and others on this side of the house are saying that that is what this legislation appears to be with regard to the stopping of Internet betting. We will be listening with considerable interest to the response by the minister to the second-reading debate. I do not want to dwell on this any longer. As I say, I will be looking forward with great anticipation to the response of the minister to the comments and questions that have been raised by the member for Bass, by me and no doubt by others during this debate.

In the couple of minutes remaining to me, I want to comment on the section of the bill that raises the levy on poker machines from \$1533 per machine annually to \$3033 per machine. The increase in the poker machine levy, which is called a health benefit levy — I think that is a bit of an oxymoron; nevertheless, it is called a health benefit levy — is going to raise an additional \$45 million per year, and I would like to know where that money is going. I think everybody on this side of the house would very much like to know where the government is going to place that money. It certainly will go into consolidated revenue, and no doubt we will get the usual response from government speakers that this money is going to be spent in the health area — but we do not believe that.

We see it as nothing more than another revenue-raising exercise by the highest taxing government in Australia. This government has and will continue to have that record while it does these kinds of things. Each year, as we all know, a whole raft of charges go up by whatever percentage figure the Treasurer likes to pluck out of the air.

I noticed in a newspaper recently that they talked about all of these taxes and charges, like driving licences, fishing licences, boat registration fees and all those sorts of things going up by the CPI increase. That is wrong. They do not go up by the CPI; they go up by a figure that the Treasurer selects, and it could be — and usually is — well above the CPI. This government has been taxing the life out of Victorians now for the last five years and obviously will continue to do so. Here we have another example of a huge increase in taxes that will go into consolidated revenue. It is covered under the weasel words of ‘health benefit levy’, but it is just another \$45 million going into the consolidated revenue of this government. It is something that I oppose: I oppose increased taxation by this government, and I think every member in this place with a view towards the best things for Victorians —

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — It is a great honour to speak on this bill, and it is a great industry. I think it is the sixth-biggest industry in Victoria. It is very close to my heart. It is one of the biggest employers in the city of Casey at the Cranbourne race track and a massive employer in provincial Victoria. My family has also had various bookmakers, including my grandfather who was a starting price (SP) bookmaker on the runners. Realistically the first workingman’s tote was actually set up by a great sponsor of the ALP, John Wren.

Getting back to the objectives of the legislation, it introduces a new offence of prohibiting wagering

service providers from publishing information related to horses and dogs nominated to participate in race meetings unless authorised by the controlling body. It facilitates a Crown lease transfer from the Victoria Racing Club to Racing Victoria and ensures consistency in processes of appeal rights to the Racing Appeals and Disciplinary Board, and it gives effect to the expenditure review committee’s decision to increase the annual health benefit levy on electronic gaming machine (EGMs).

Realistically, we have a lot of money — I think the estimates are up to \$342 million — wagered on Victorian racing going into Darwin alone. The result is the loss of \$15.4 million to the Victorian government, but worse still, \$22 million is lost to the racing industry. What we are trying to say is we want to ensure all operators who are taking bets on Victorian racing products are paying a product fee to improve the industry and to be fair to everybody. The Northern Territory has a large bookmaker interest that is not authorised to place bets on Victorian racing and is drawing over \$300 million of revenue from Victoria.

This amendment is consistent with legislation in other states, including New South Wales. It does not prohibit the state from licensing new wagering operators in the future or exempting certain betting operators from its application. Further exemptions are provided for newspapers and others who provide a vital service function for the industry.

All state governments, I believe, have been asked by the racing industry bodies to enact similar legislation if they have not done so already. I have previously mentioned the technical amendments which relate to the transfer of a Crown lease from the Victoria Racing Club to Racing Victoria, and also the operations and functions of the Racing Appeals and Disciplinary Board. The bill introduces a new levy of \$1500 per EGM, with the new levy being \$3033 per machine from 1 July 2005.

It is a good bill because above all else it protects an industry that is vital to Victoria. It is the best industry in Australia in terms of the thoroughbred racing industry. It is important the government moves to ensure that the industry is protected. The government also will provide a one-off \$3.5 million assistance package to the Victorian racing industry in 2005–06 to ensure it is unaffected by the increase in the levy previously mentioned. This will mean that the industry will receive some \$7.5 million in the 2005–06 year. I commend the bill to the house.

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — This bill fundamentally is a taxing bill. It is another tax grab by the greedy, avaricious Bracks government. The main purpose of the bill is espoused in clause 8, where the government increases the so-called poker machine levy, which is a tax on poker machines, from \$1533 per machine to \$3033 per machine — that is, nearly a 100 per cent increase in the tax on poker machines. This is another \$45 million annually that the greedy Bracks government is taking out of the pockets of the people of Victoria.

I note when the Bracks Labor government came to office in 1999 there was no tax on poker machines in this way. The normal taxes applied — the Community Support Fund levy and the 4 per cent of turnover that went to the government — but this is an additional tax of \$3033 per machine being placed on the people of Victoria through the poker machine levy by the Bracks Labor government. It follows a history by the Bracks Labor government of massively increasing taxes and charges since its election to office.

Mr Herbert interjected.

Dr NAPHTHINE — The member for Eltham says it is nonsense. The facts are that in 1998–99 the total revenue of Victoria was \$19.1 billion but in the 2005–06 budget it is \$30.3 billion. The tax take under the Bracks Labor government has gone up by 52.5 per cent. That is well ahead of inflation and population growth. It is because this government is driven by pure greed and it wants to put its hands much deeper into the pockets of all Victorians. Under the Bracks Labor government we have seen a raft of new taxes and charges. We have seen the poker machine tax, the 5 per cent water tax, the car parking tax, the \$50 motorcycle tax, the \$80 registration fee on pensioners, health care card holders and veterans. I do not know that any Labor member ought to be proud of that.

The SPEAKER — Order! I must interrupt the member for South West Coast. The time for government business has now expired.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

RULING BY THE CHAIR

Adjournment debate: guidelines

The SPEAKER — Order! Prior to moving to the adjournment debate I wish to discuss a matter raised with me by Acting Speaker Ingram. During the adjournment debate on Thursday, 8 September, the member for Hawthorn raised a point of order seeking

guidance on what constitutes action. I have considered the matters raised during the adjournment debate and wish to clarify two issues: firstly, situations where members ask for issues to be raised with federal ministers; and secondly, a request for a minister to continue with existing action. I now wish to clarify earlier rulings in relation to both these issues.

Matters raised during the adjournment debate must relate to Victorian government administration. It is in order therefore to ask a minister to raise an issue at the federal level which relates specifically to Victorian government administration. However, it is not in order to request a state minister to lobby or refer matters to federal ministers that are not within the state minister's direct responsibility.

A longstanding practice has been to require matters raised to be of urgent public concern. While the definition of 'urgent' has been lenient, it is still a required component for requests for action. Simply requesting a minister to continue doing something does not meet the requirement of urgency. Members must make it clear what new action is required to address a particular urgent concern. I advise honourable members that issues that fail to meet the requirements of admissibility will be ruled out of order.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Commonwealth Games: flags

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education and Training. I seek the redressing of the Bracks government's stingy flag hand-out to Victorian schools. The Bracks government has been caught out dampening the Commonwealth Games spirit by refusing to give more than one Commonwealth Games flag to schools with more than one campus. Despite the claim of the Minister for Commonwealth Games in the other place, Justin Madden, that hosting the games is about much more than sport and is about bringing people together and being more active and learning about other cultures, the Bracks government is stifling Victorian students' sense of citizenship by refusing multicampus schools more than one flag.

After contacting the Minister for Education and Training's office to request an additional flag for Sandringham College in my electorate, which in addition to the Sandringham campus has a Highett and

a Beaumaris campus, I was told that all schools were permitted only one flag regardless of how many campuses they had and that the flag would have to be shared around. If the Commonwealth Games minister and the Minister for Education and Training want Victorian students to embrace this sense of citizenship and awareness about what hosting the games means to Victoria, why is the Bracks government being so stingy with the allocation of these flags?

Just over two weeks ago the Bracks government was forced to go back on its initial denial of flags to Catholic and independent schools following pressure from opposition members and the media, and now it is refusing schools with more than one campus a flag for each site. In Victoria there are approximately 36 government, 21 Catholic and 35 independent multicampus schools. Noting that some schools have three or four separate campuses, this means that more than 100 Victorian campus sites will not get a flag under the Bracks government's mean-spirited plan.

These school communities will be angry and perplexed at the Bracks government's stingy allocation of games flags, and I seek from the minister the allocation of a flag for every Victorian school campus. At a time when the Bracks government is prepared to spend \$400 000 to save a gum tree within a Commonwealth Games precinct, for the cost of a couple of cabinet lunches it is not able to secure flags for every Victorian school in the spirit of citizenship.

The multicampus schools in the state that would miss out, some with up to three or four separate campuses, include Bacchus Marsh College, Ballarat Secondary College, Bayside Secondary College, Bellarine Secondary College, Benalla College, Box Forest Secondary College, Buninyong Primary School, Camperdown College, Caroline Springs College, Castlemaine Secondary College, Chaffey Secondary College, Collingwood College, Rowville and Essendon secondary colleges, Eumemmerring and Horsham colleges, Lavers Hill and Mill Park secondary colleges, Peranbin Primary College, and Dunkeld, Maryborough, Millwarra, Sale, Sandringham, Sunshine, Sydenham, Tarwin Valley, Terang, Traralgon and Western Heights schools, Williamstown High School, Woody Yaloak Primary School and Wonthaggi Secondary College.

I call on the minister to ensure that in the spirit of citizenship every campus in Victoria has a flag.

Aspendale: beach renourishment

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — The matter I raise tonight is for the attention of the Minister for

Environment. The minister will be aware that in August 2004 I tabled a petition with the signatures of over 900 local residents highlighting the serious erosion at the North Aspendale beach. Following the tabling of this petition, money was made available through a partnership between the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and the City of Kingston to embark upon a trial of geotextile sandbags to try to stop the erosion at North Aspendale.

A problem arises now in that the coastal risk mitigation program is about to open for applications from municipalities with coastal areas at risk. The trial that DSE and Kingston council have undertaken was for 12 months from February 2005, so it may be that the funds within the coastal risk mitigation program could be fully expended before the trial is actually assessed.

What I am asking the minister to do is to take action to make sure that some funding is kept to one side in this program, so that if the trial is assessed in a positive light — and residents, the local council and DSE believe to date that everything seems to be working very well with this new sandbagging trial — once the monitoring has been completed in February 2006, there are some funds left in the coastal risk mitigation program to ensure that a continuation of this sandbagging can continue. Some 300 metres of North Aspendale beach that has suffered from serious erosion needs some form of risk mitigation. I ask the minister to take on board the fact that it is not within the realms of possibility for a proper review of this trial to take place before February. It would be very disadvantageous for the council to miss out on funding just because of the timing of the trial. To have to wait another 12 months would be unfair. This beach is at risk, and the local community is being robbed.

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

Police: reservists

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and in his absence the Minister for Community Services, who is at the table. I refer to the very successful police reservists program which operated in Victoria for many years and which has been disbanded by this government. The history is that the police reservists program was initially brought into play in 1957 and ran through until about 1989, and then there was an investigation undertaken by the government at that time. It believed there was no real need for the reservists program to continue; however, a

large number of reservists were already in the system at that time.

Given the number of police stations within my electorate, from my point of view as the member for Murray Valley the police reservists program was one of the successful programs in the provision of services by police within my electorate. From 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. daily services were provided within those police stations. The program involved people who were police officers, retired from the service but brought in as police reservists. This allowed the operational police to go out on their normal duties and also allowed counter services to be provided in places such as Yarrowonga, Cobram, Numurkah and Rutherglen in my electorate. Over the years those police reservists have retired and in fact we see very few police reservists who are operational at present. Yarrowonga police station, for example, has one police reservist, Ellen Phipps, who is still working there but will be retiring shortly.

I raised this matter with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in correspondence recently on the basis that the government should review and reinstate the program to bring those people into operation again. It would assist in the provision of those day-to-day services at the police station, but importantly it would allow trained police officers to perform operational duties. In fact the response from the minister to me, dated 13 July, in one paragraph indicated:

A review of the police reserve undertaken in 1989 found the need for reservists no longer existed and that public service staff were more than capable of performing the assigned tasks.

I suggest to the house and to the minister that this is absolutely wrong. In fact, those police reservists provided an important program and an important service, and we should be looking to reinstate them. I call on the minister to review the program and review the report which was provided in 1989. I am sure that if he reviews the system the results will indicate the importance of the police reservists and the part that they play not only in providing day-to-day services at many police stations, particularly in country Victoria, where there are no 24-hour stations, but more importantly in releasing those operational police officers to go out and perform the duties they need to.

Karralyka Centre: 25th anniversary

Ms BEARD (Kilsyth) — The issue I wish to raise is with the Minister for the Arts. I ask the minister to consider a grant to the Karralyka Centre in Ringwood East to offer financial assistance in bringing a touring

production to the theatre and to the people of the outer east. I ask the minister to consider a grant to support a touring program of Tracey Bartram's show *Illegally Blonde*. The show includes a three-piece band, a range of female characters, singalongs and anecdotes. I ask the minister to look favourably on this request.

Karralyka Centre is a service provided by the Maroondah City Council. The centre recently celebrated 25 years of entertaining the people of my electorate and neighbouring areas. The theatre was opened on 19 April 1980 by the then Governor, Sir Henry Winneke, and in the 25 years since it has grown in reputation to become one of Victoria's finest theatres and function centres. To celebrate this significant milestone a range of special events were planned. The top-class actors appearing included Jacki Weaver, Henri Szeps, Helen Morse and Drew Forsyth, and companies such as the Bell Shakespeare Company, Oz Opera — Opera Australia's touring arm — Bangarra Dance Theatre, Malthouse Theatre and HIT Productions.

The state government provided almost \$125 000 towards the making of improvements to the Karralyka theatre, including an upgrade of the scenery flies, to provide clients and staff with a safer working environment, the installation of ticketing software, an upgrade of the lighting control desk, improving the theatre's capacity to serve both professional touring companies and local communities, and an upgrade of the audio equipment.

Last year Arts Victoria supported Karralyka Comes Alive, the first Maroondah Professional Theatre season, which boasted such stars as Bud Tingwell, Julia Blake, Max Gillies, Jacki Weaver and Noeline Brown. It was a great thrill for me to attend these productions and particularly to have the opportunity to meet Jacki Weaver and Max Gillies. This season of theatre exceeded all expectations.

Apart from these major productions Karralyka also provides an outstanding venue for a range of school and community performances. I would like to pay tribute to the outstanding contribution of the manager of the Karralyka, Kevin O'Loughlin, whose dedication and hard work in attracting first-class performances cannot be underestimated. Kevin loves his work at the centre and is a real inspiration. We are all proud to have such a quality venue in our area, and on behalf of the people in my electorate I ask the minister to provide special support through the grant for the upcoming touring season.

Schools: sex education

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education and Training, and it has to do with a government-funded CD titled *Celebrating Diversity in Schools — Making Schools Safer and More Inclusive for Same-sex Attracted and Transgender Students and Staff*. I ask the minister to investigate whether schools will be required to have parental approval to introduce this CD into their classrooms and, if not, to take action to ensure that parents are notified and permission is sought from them. The notes that come with the CD state:

Celebrating Diversity in Schools provides a range of resources for teachers and those working in schools to help make schools safer, more supportive and more inclusive for same-sex attracted and transgender students and staff.

While I strongly maintain that all students should be supported in the schools and no student should be discriminated against, as a parent I would like to make the decision whether these issues are raised with my children at school. It should be the responsibility of the parents to either agree to their children taking part or to deal with these matters at home. I do not believe schools have a mandate to bypass the parents.

As part of this curriculum students are requested to undertake a number of activities. The handbook describes one objective and activity as follows:

This activity aims to raise students' awareness of family and societal support for heterosexual relationships and the lack of support for, and hence invisibility of, lesbian and gay relationships.

...

Divide the group into group one and group two. Ask group one to imagine they are in a lesbian or gay relationship and group two to imagine they are in a heterosexual or straight relationship. ...

Read out the questionnaire ...

Questions include:

Could you invite your partner home?

Would your family feel OK if you started introducing your partner to their friends as your girlfriend or boyfriend?

Would you take your partner to the school formal?

Could you tell your friends what you did on the weekend and with whom?

Would you chat about your love life with a close friend on the train?

When you go out in a crowd of friends do you feel you can give your partner a kiss and a hug?

Could you easily find other couples like you, if you wanted to go out as a group?

The handbook also has some resources for students — for instance, giving an example of experiences of young men and women, it states:

When I was six I remember feeling particularly close to another boy called Marc. We were exclusive to each other. Only I had the right to hold his hand as we lined up after lunch to go inside, and only he could hold mine. I would spend all my spare time with him, creating fantasy worlds where cars flew and aliens invaded. On other days I would just lie in his arms on the school oval, occasionally laying on top of him and laughing as I pressed my face up against his. I always found it so funny when Marc's brown eyes turned into one giant blob — —

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

Police: Bellarine stations

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine) — The matter I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The action I seek is for the minister to guarantee that the police stations at Drysdale, Portarlington and Queenscliff will remain open.

Prior to the Bracks government's election in 1999 these stations were identified for closure by the former government. The Bracks government committed both to building a new 24-hour response station to service Bellarine based at Ocean Grove and retaining the three local stations at Drysdale, Portarlington and Queenscliff. Over the last few years I, as the local member, and the former police minister have reassured local residents that we are strongly committed to maintaining these stations.

In recent months there have been attempts to spread rumours and generate fear in these communities that the stations are under threat. Even though we can stand proudly on our record — that is, we built the \$5 million new station in Ocean Grove, we have provided 15 additional police officers to Bellarine as promised, and we have retained these three stations — it is important that we ensure that rumours of closure are dealt with swiftly. The local police in Bellarine do a fantastic job, as is evidenced by an ever-declining crime rate. They are also actively involved and engaged in the local communities and held in very high esteem by local residents.

These rumours appear to be part of a broader Liberal Party campaign to create fear about community safety. Residents in some parts of Geelong have recently received a leaflet containing many misleading

statements sent out by the Liberal Party of South Barwon — —

Mr Perton interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Doncaster will desist!

Ms NEVILLE — Many misleading statements about police numbers in the Geelong area refer to comments by the Victoria Police Association. The Geelong MPs have also recently welcomed an announcement by the police commissioner that additional police will be allocated from the academy. These are worthy and needed additional allocations.

The government has promised 600 police in this term, building on the additional 800 it has already delivered, and this commitment was acknowledged by the Police Association secretary, Paul Mullett, in the *Geelong Advertiser* on Friday. He said:

We pay credit to the Bracks government, they've provided 440 of the 600 police they promised, and we expect that they will provide them.

In the context of the government's commitment to more police and opening police stations I again ask the minister to reassure and guarantee to the residents of Drysdale, Portarlington and Queenscliff that their local police stations will continue to operate into the future.

Western Port Highway: upgrade

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport regarding the Western Port Highway between Cranbourne Road and the Frankston-Flinders Road. I ask the minister to urgently allocate funds for the upgrade of the road. This whole section, which is two lanes wide, has no paved shoulders, multiple crests and 23 intersections crossing it, only one of which has a roundabout. There are very few opportunities for overtaking on the entire section of the road, because most of it has double lines. There is overhanging vegetation and the speed limit on most of it is 100 kilometres an hour. It is a very heavy industrial route, taking traffic from Melbourne to Western Port and Hastings, so there are a lot of tankers and B-double trucks carrying loads of steel and moving at great speed. In fact on some days they make up to 30 per cent of the traffic on that road.

It is also a very busy road for holiday traffic. A lot of people from the eastern suburbs of Melbourne — indeed from all areas of Melbourne — use it as access to the Mornington Peninsula and the beaches along Western Port. It is also a commuting route for a lot of people from the Mornington Peninsula who go to

Melbourne. In fact I use that route as I travel to Melbourne because it joins the Monash Freeway. It is a very busy road for commuters, and it carries all the local traffic in what is a growing area. The traffic volume averages 16 000 vehicles a day. Theoretically if you look at the times of the day, the speed at which traffic moves and the volume of traffic, there is little opportunity for any car to enter the road, therefore those drivers who do so are taking a great risk. In the last five years there have been 209 collisions, and 61 per cent of those have involved injuries. There has been one fatality per year in that time, and 78 per cent of the crashes have been in fine weather.

The traffic management unit (TMU) from Frankston has found that speed has not been a contributing factor to any of the accidents. In fact the Frankston TMU has said:

Given the extremely large amount of traffic that uses this highway, traffic enforcement along this section has become outright dangerous and, during peak times, almost impossible.

...

Given the road trauma that is presently occurring, the human physical and psychological suffering of victims of this road trauma and the cost to the community as a whole, it is my firm recommendation that this road be duplicated into a four-lane divided highway in its entirety.

I agree with this report from the Frankston TMU.

Schools: excursion safety

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I want to raise an issue this evening for the attention of the Minister for Education Services. The issue concerns the safety of school students in Victoria while on school-sponsored camps and excursions. I ask the minister to have the Department of Education and Training examine whether further advice needs to be provided to Victorian schools which are involved in providing excursions, particularly camping trips, for their students. The issue came to the fore recently following the tragic death of a young girl while on a school camp in the Snowy River National Park. The *Age* reported that the girl was killed when a river red gum branch fell onto the tent in which she was sleeping. It was a very tragic accident. However, it is not the first; from time to time across the state we see accidents of this type.

A constituent has contacted my office this week suggesting that the Department of Education and Training examine the current guidelines for schools and the advice that schools use in planning and supervising these excursions and camps. The constituent believes that some types of river red gums are more prone to dropping branches than others. I am not sufficiently

familiar with the different types of red gums to know whether this is the case. I expect it is the sort of thing about which different people have different opinions.

School excursions in Victoria, as in other parts of Australia, are very popular, and school camps are of great value. All of us would want to see schools give their students every opportunity of enjoying those experiences, but it is important to regularly review the advice being provided to schools to ensure that the risks to students on those excursions are minimised. I hope this is something the minister can instruct the department to look at as soon as possible.

Anglicare: Doncaster home

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) — My matter is for the Minister for Community Services. The action I ask for is that the minister implement better and more effective rules for carers of children in state care to undertake the discipline of those children. A group of elderly residents in my electorate of Doncaster has been tormented by the unruly behaviour of a small group of children in a home managed by Anglicare Victoria. These long-suffering residents have endured many years of disturbances, but events in recent months have left them upset and frightened as they are being terrorised by a small group of primary school-aged children.

The home has been used as a residential home by the Department of Human Services for the past 25 years, but recently the situation has deteriorated. Residents have complained that children have climbed and run over their carports to retrieve balls, thrown faeces and stones into their yards, screamed foul language at them, climbed fence palings, removed iron trellis from fences, exposed themselves, played loud music and lit bonfires. One resident said they were nearly hit by a piece of wood thrown over the fence.

In a letter to me Anglicare's eastern regional manager, Margaret Chipperfield, claimed there appeared to be a multitude of small disturbances with neighbours in the past couple of months. The culprits were primary school-aged children who engaged in 'frequent naughty, nuisance and disrespectful behaviour towards the neighbours'. I am told that these two boys are no longer living together. That may have temporarily eased the situation in this Doncaster street, but it does not solve the problem of dealing with these out-of-control children. Carers need measures to be able to discipline children in their care. Obviously under the current rules they do not feel they can apply any physical discipline or lock the children in their rooms when it would be appropriate to do so. Therefore

these children are able to run riot in a residential neighbourhood.

These elderly Doncaster residents have lived in their homes for many years, and they legitimately ask why they should have their peace disturbed and be anxious because of out-of-control children who have no firm rules to abide by. These are difficult issues, and they arise in primary schools in this state as well, but they will not be solved by the state denying there is a problem. It is simply unacceptable to have children in state care running out of control in normal suburban areas. Means need to be found for organisations like Anglicare and others operating facilities for children in state care to be able to discipline them and ensure that they do not impact upon neighbours in a seriously adverse way, particularly older neighbours who now live in terror of these children.

Frankston: multicultural centre

Mr HARKNESS (Frankston) — I raise an issue for the Minister for Victorian Communities. I ask the minister to give serious consideration and hopefully his approval to a grant application which has been made to the community support grants scheme from the South Central Region Migrant Resource Centre for a multicultural centre to be built in Frankston.

Specifically this organisation, along with many other groups within the Frankston community, is keen to assess the feasibility of establishing a multicultural centre in Frankston. In fact a steering group made up of a broad range of stakeholders has been meeting regularly over the past 18 months or so not only to investigate the potential for such a centre in Frankston but also to determine a preferred location. It has been determined that a detailed feasibility study is required and ought to be conducted, including the preparation of architectural plans as well as an ongoing business plan for a centralised multicultural centre within Frankston.

So far many groups have been involved, and the project has developed partnerships among many different multicultural organisations located within the Frankston local government area. Other organisations include representatives of state government departments and its agencies, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Adult Multicultural Education Services, the South Central Region Migrant Resource Centre, other non-government organisations and the Frankston City Council.

A particular location has been identified as a preferred site, and that is the former Wesley Church manse, an existing dwelling on the site of a large community

centre which is being developed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in High Street, Frankston. Interestingly the brotherhood has received a significant input of funds from the last state budget to develop that site. This is a particular building on the corner of the site. It is the former manse, and it would be an ideal location for a multicultural centre in Frankston, which would encourage much greater participation in social, learning, recreational, cultural and civic activities within the city.

Many different cultures are represented in Frankston. In fact people from over 30 different countries choose to live there. Eighteen separate multicultural groups meet regularly in Frankston, such as the Russian, Greek and Italian senior citizen groups; Unity in Progress, a local organisation; the Polish community; and many other organisations. I certainly encourage the Minister for Victorian Communities to actively consider the grant of \$30 000 for a feasibility study.

Responses

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The member for Murray Valley raised with me the issue of police reservists and sought to follow up some correspondence he had previously provided me with about the value of this program and the possibility of having it retained in some way, shape or form.

A few critical issues are raised as a consequence of the representations that have been made to me by the member for Murray Valley. The first of those is how we retain or appropriately use the skills of more senior members of Victoria Police, either prior to their retirement or once they have left Victoria Police as an organisation; and secondly, how we provide administrative support to operational police or police stations so that serving members time is freed up to enable them to respond to the various community safety and policing issues they are required to respond to on a daily basis.

In relation to the first question, the approach the government has taken has been to ensure that as much as possible Victoria Police members who wish to continue to provide service to Victoria Police as an organisation are not required to retire at what was the previous compulsory retirement age of 55 but can continue to keep serving — and some occasionally do — and further to that, that those members, once they retire and if they would like to continue providing support and assistance to serving police members, are able to apply for the administrative positions which now exist within some police stations across Victoria.

That really responds to the second part of the concern of the member for Murray Valley, which is how can we ensure that there is sufficient administrative support to police members in performing their duties where that is appropriate? Previously that support may, in some instances where reservists were available, have been provided by police reservists. We take the view that as much as possible questions of administrative support should be provided on the basis of assessed operational need in a systemic way which reflects the operational environment and the administrative burden placed on particular stations around the state. That is why police are resourced in a way which enables some administrative support to different stations where appropriate. There is no reason why retired police members cannot fill those positions in the usual way if their skill sets and capabilities are appropriate for those things.

I thank the member for Murray Valley for raising this issue. I thank him also for the correspondence he has provided me with in relation to this issue. The government strongly believes that the best way to support Victoria Police as an organisation is to provide, firstly, the maximum flexibility to those serving members who do not wish to retire at what would have been the previous compulsory retirement age of 55 but to enable those members once they have retired, if they wish to continue to make a contribution, to offer themselves for those support positions that exist at various police stations across the state; and secondly, to resource Victoria Police as an organisation so they can provide administrative support in stations where that is appropriate.

More generally we have obviously been recruiting a very large number of new police members and embarking on the most substantial police station construction program in the state's history, which ensures, firstly, that there are sufficient police members across Victoria to meet the operational needs of the organisation, and secondly, that there are police station work environments that are consistent with modern standards of occupational health and safety and meet the operational requirements of police, so that police members are working in an appropriate operational environment.

This government is very proud of what it has achieved in terms of supporting Victoria Police members. We are proud of the things we have been able to do to provide the flexibility to allow police members to continue serving and also to allocate resources to ensure that those police stations that require it have the administrative support they need. Whilst I appreciate the representations that have been made by the member

for Murray Valley, it is still the government's view that the arrangements it has put in place are sufficiently flexible and robust to enable police to continue doing the important operational work that from a community safety perspective we would expect them to do.

The member for Bellarine has raised with me the concern that exists on the Bellarine Peninsula in relation to rumours — no doubt spread by mischievous people of a different political persuasion — that a range of police stations such as Drysdale, Portarlington and Queenscliff may be closing. The first thing that I would say to the member for Bellarine and to all people who live in those communities is that those police stations will not close on this government's watch. The reason is that this government is in the business of opening new stations and refurbishing existing police stations — —

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr HOLDING — We are not in the business of closing police stations. We would like to contrast this approach with the approach taken by the previous government.

Mr Perton interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will answer the question without the sort of interruption he is getting from the member for Doncaster.

Mr HOLDING — As I said, this government is in the business of opening police stations, not closing them. We take the view that the appropriate resourcing of Victoria Police is one of the significant responsibilities this government has. Firstly, we have resourced Victoria Police with the biggest budget in its history, worth \$1.47 billion. Secondly, we have embarked on a substantial police recruitment program. Again I contrast that with the previous government, which promised 1000 police and cut 800. We have recruited 800 police in our first term and are well on track to recruiting 600 additional police — —

Mr Perton interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Doncaster!

Mr HOLDING — We recruited those police as part of our second-term commitments. We have also seen Victoria Police go from having the highest attrition rate of any state police force in Australia — 6.2 per cent under the previous government — to now having the lowest attrition rate of any police organisation in any state or territory anywhere in Australia, at 2.3 per cent, for two years in a row. This means we are retaining

some of our most experienced police members, which will ensure we have the police officers necessary to meet the operational needs of police stations across the state.

Once again I want to reiterate to the member for Bellarine that we have no intentions — none whatsoever — of closing any of the police stations that she referred to. Instead we are currently embarking on a police station construction and refurbishment program worth \$284 million for 136 police stations across Victoria. This is the largest police station construction program in the state's history, and it — along with Victoria Police's record budget, our substantial recruitment campaign and the low attrition rate — demonstrates that we will be doing everything we can to resource Victoria Police appropriately as an organisation so that it can carry out its very important mandate of promoting community safety. Once again, there are no proposals to close police stations. In this we are unlike the previous government, which closed or had plans to close something like 50 police stations across Victoria. Instead we are investing in new police stations.

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Community Services) — The member for Doncaster raised with me the issue of a residential care home in Doncaster managed by Anglicare Victoria where there has been some difficult behaviour among the children. The member has had some representations from the neighbours about that. I understand they have had a response from Anglicare management. Some action has already been taken, including shifting one of the children. I understand some other measures have been undertaken as well by management to try to improve that situation.

We must understand that these children are living away from their families because the Children's Court has decided it is not safe for them to live at home; so they are living in residential accommodation. The department provides a range of services for children in this situation. We have established a new program called Take Two, which is a \$20 million program to provide therapeutic care for children in this situation. It is important to point out they are not criminal children. They have not been through the criminal division of the court, and it is not appropriate to lock them up or take any other measures of that sort that have overtones of punishing criminal behaviour. They are often children with very unfortunate pasts. The management of Anglicare has been responsive, but nevertheless I will see if there is further action that can be taken about this situation, if indeed it is still continuing.

Other members raised issues with a number of different ministers. I will ensure those issues are drawn to the attention of the relevant ministers.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 10.41 p.m.

