

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

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

**Wednesday, 14 June 2006**

**(Extract from book 8)**

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**Standing Orders Committee** — The President, the Honourables B. W. Bishop, Philip Davis and Bill Forwood, Mr Lenders, Ms Romanes and Mr Viney.

### Joint committees

**Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee** — (*Council*): The Honourable S. M. Nguyen and Mr Scheffer.  
(*Assembly*): Mr Cooper, Ms Marshall, Mr Maxfield, Dr Sykes and Mr Wells.

**Economic Development Committee** — (*Council*): The Honourables B. N. Atkinson and R. H. Bowden, and Mr Pullen. (*Assembly*): Mr Delahunty, Mr Jenkins, Ms Morand and Mr Robinson.

**Education and Training Committee** — (*Council*): The Honourables H. E. Buckingham and P. R. Hall.  
(*Assembly*): Ms Eckstein, Mr Herbert, Mr Kotsiras, Ms Munt and Mr Perton.

**Environment and Natural Resources Committee** — (*Council*): The Honourables Andrea Coote, D. K. Drum, J. G. Hilton and W. A. Lovell. (*Assembly*): Ms Duncan, Ms Lindell and Mr Seitz.

**Family and Community Development Committee** — (*Council*): The Hon. D. McL. Davis and Mr Smith.  
(*Assembly*): Ms McTaggart, Ms Neville, Mrs Powell, Mrs Shardey and Mr Wilson.

**House Committee** — (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), the Honourables B. N. Atkinson and Andrew Brideson, Ms Hadden and the Honourables J. M. McQuilten and S. M. Nguyen. (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr Cooper, Mr Leighton, Mr Lockwood, Mr Maughan, Mr Savage and Mr Smith.

**Law Reform Committee** — (*Council*): The Honourables Richard Dalla-Riva, Ms Hadden and the Honourables Geoff Hilton and David Koch. (*Assembly*): Ms Beard, Ms Beattie, Mr Hudson, Mr Lupton and Mr Maughan.

**Library Committee** — (*Council*): The President, Ms Argondizzo and the Honourables Richard Dalla-Riva, Kaye Darveniza and C. A. Strong. (*Assembly*): The Speaker, Mr Carli, Mrs Powell, Mr Seitz and Mr Thompson.

**Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee** — (*Council*): Ms Argondizzo and Mr Somyurek. (*Assembly*): Mr Baillieu, Ms Buchanan, Mr Dixon, Mr Nardella and Mr Smith.

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee** — (*Council*): The Honourables W. R. Baxter, Bill Forwood and G. K. Rich-Phillips, Ms Romanes and Mr Somyurek. (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr Clark, Ms Green and Mr Merlino.

**Road Safety Committee** — (*Council*): The Honourables B. W. Bishop, J. H. Eren and E. G. Stoney.  
(*Assembly*): Mr Harkness, Mr Langdon, Mr Mulder and Mr Trezise.

**Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee** — (*Council*): The Honourables J. M. McQuilten and R. G. Mitchell. (*Assembly*): Mr Crutchfield, Mr Hardman, Mr Ingram, Dr Napthine and Mr Walsh.

**Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee** — (*Council*): Ms Argondizzo and the Honourable Andrew Brideson.  
(*Assembly*): Ms D'Ambrosio, Mr Jasper, Mr Leighton, Mr Lockwood, Mr McIntosh, Mr Perera and Mr Thompson.

### Heads of parliamentary departments

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*Parliamentary Services* — Secretary: Dr S. O'Kane

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**FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION**

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The Hon. ANDREA COOTE

**Leader of The Nationals:**  
The Hon. P. R. HALL

**Deputy Leader of The Nationals:**  
The Hon. D. K. DRUM

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Hirsh, Hon. Carolyn Dorothy <sup>1</sup>	Silvan	ALP	Vogels, Hon. John Adrian	Western	LP

<sup>1</sup> Ind from 17 September 2004  
ALP from 10 November 2005

<sup>2</sup> Ind from 7 April 2005

<sup>3</sup> Ind Lib from 30 November 2005



# CONTENTS

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## WEDNESDAY, 14 JUNE 2006

VICTORIA RACING CLUB BILL		
<i>Introduction and first reading</i> .....	2327	
BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY		
SECURITY OF PAYMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL		
<i>Introduction and first reading</i> .....	2327	
PAPERS .....	2327	
MEMBERS STATEMENTS		
<i>Casterton Kelpie Festival</i> .....	2327	
<i>Refugees: offshore processing</i> .....	2327	
<i>Liana Indovino</i> .....	2327	
<i>Alcoa: Make an Impact campaign</i> .....	2328	
<i>Dr Frank Pyke</i> .....	2328	
<i>Migrants: community acceptance</i> .....	2328	
<i>Harness racing: country meetings</i> .....	2329	
<i>Industrial relations: WorkChoices</i> .....	2329	
<i>Preschools: funding</i> .....	2329	
<i>Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre: legal clinic</i> .....	2330	
<i>Rail: Ringwood and Camberwell stations</i> .....	2330	
PRESCHOOLS: GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION ...	2330	
ABSENCE OF MINISTER .....	2359	
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE		
<i>State volleyball centre: funding</i> .....	2359	
<i>Aged care: Doveton facility</i> .....	2360	
<i>Commonwealth Games: benefits</i> .....	2361	
<i>Housing: Building More Homes Together</i> <i>program</i> .....	2362	
<i>Housing: Footscray accommodation</i> .....	2363	
<i>Sport and recreation: facility grants</i> .....	2363	
<i>Local government: building regulations</i> .....	2364	
<i>Consumer affairs: building practices</i> .....	2364	
<i>Motorised scooters: safety</i> .....	2365	
<i>Rural and regional Victoria: responsible</i> <i>servicing of alcohol</i> .....	2366	
<i>Supplementary questions</i>		
<i>State volleyball centre: funding</i> .....	2360	
<i>Commonwealth Games: benefits</i> .....	2362	
<i>Housing: Footscray accommodation</i> .....	2363	
<i>Local government: building regulations</i> .....	2364	
<i>Motorised scooters: safety</i> .....	2366	
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE		
<i>Answers</i> .....	2366	
TRANSFER OF LAND (ALPINE RESORTS) BILL		
<i>Second reading</i> .....	2366	
<i>Committee</i> .....	2386	
<i>Third reading</i> .....	2391	
<i>Remaining stages</i> .....	2391	
STATE TAXATION (REDUCTIONS AND CONCESSIONS) BILL		
<i>Second reading</i> .....	2391	
ADJOURNMENT		
<i>Member for Gembrook: conduct</i> .....	2394	
<i>Barmah State Forest: cattle grazing</i> .....	2395	
<i>Timber industry: auctions</i> .....	2395	
<i>Rail: Clayton crossing</i> .....	2396	
		<i>Disability services: modified vehicle assistance</i> .....
		<i>Whitehorse: school crossing supervisors</i> .....
		<i>Responses</i> .....



**Wednesday, 14 June 2006**

**The PRESIDENT (Hon. M. M. Gould) took the chair at 9.34 a.m. and read the prayer.**

## VICTORIA RACING CLUB BILL

*Introduction and first reading*

**Received from Assembly.**

**Read first time on motion of Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation).**

## BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY SECURITY OF PAYMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL

*Introduction and first reading*

**Received from Assembly.**

**Read first time on motion of Mr GAVIN JENNINGS (Minister for Aged Care).**

## PAPERS

**Laid on table by Clerk:**

Auditor-General — Report on Results of financial statement audits for agencies with other than 30 June 2005 balance dates, and other audits, June 2006.

Forensic Leave Panel — Report, 2005.

## MEMBERS STATEMENTS

### Casterton Kelpie Festival

**Hon. DAVID KOCH** (Western) — A uniquely Australian event that symbolises the traditional image of the bush took place at Casterton over the Queen's Birthday weekend. The Casterton kelpie muster commemorates the Australian kelpie dog, first bred at Warrock Homestead near Casterton in the 1870s.

Some years ago, on learning of the significance of the Casterton kelpie to the Casterton district, the town launched its claim of being the birthplace of the kelpie breed. Peter Corlett, well known for his statue of Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, was commissioned to sculpt a statue, which now stands proudly in front of the Casterton Town Hall. This year people from all over Australia, and indeed from as far away as Norway and Singapore, joined one of the muster's biggest crowds.

Events over the weekend included dog trials, a kelpie parade, social activities and the enormously successful kelpie auction. A new record price of \$5400 was paid for a hardworking kelpie named Bagalla Mick, bred by Ian 'Spud' O'Connell of Hamilton. Twenty months old, Bagalla Mick won the novice yard dog state championships earlier this year and was sold to a Tasmanian buyer. This is a great result for Mr O'Connell, especially as the Casterton kelpie muster was his idea.

My congratulations go to the Casterton Kelpie Association, its president, David Levy, the festival organiser, Sarah Smith, and a dedicated team of volunteers for organising a very successful 10th Casterton kelpie muster.

### Refugees: offshore processing

**Hon. H. E. BUCKINGHAM** (Koonung) — Following my 90-second contribution last Thursday I note with continuing disbelief that 26 Australian citizens have been wrongfully placed in detention. The former immigration minister Phillip Ruddock has revealed that 26 of another possible 220 wrongful detainees have been investigated by the commonwealth Ombudsman and have been found to be Australian citizens.

The Howard government's record on refugees is deplorable. I note in yesterday's press that four coalition members are leading a revolt against the Howard government's new laws that propose all asylum seekers will be processed outside Australia. I hope these members are brave and true to their beliefs and maintain their opposition to these insidious laws that will once again see women and children locked up. This legislation is an attempt to appease the Indonesians, who, albeit an important neighbour, should not be the dictators of Australian foreign policy, or indeed, any policy.

This new legislation provides no prospect of review or appeal against decisions made to grant or deny people asylum. It also denies legal representation. I note the Senate's legal and constitutional committee, with four coalition members, examined the proposed laws and recommended that they not proceed. Of the 137 submissions, 136 were opposed to the legislation. To the four brave coalition members, I say: maintain your opposition!

### Liana Indovino

**Hon. ANDREA COOTE** (Monash) — I raise the issue of Liana Indovino, a young disabled girl. She was

born with cerebral palsy and has been cared for by her single mother all of her life. Her mother is one of the thousands of Victorian carers who put their own lives on hold and have to work very hard all hours of the day to make quite certain that their disabled people are cared for. Liana's mother is exhausted and fragile, and she desperately needs to have Liana housed in permanent care. She reflects, as I said, the plight of carers across Victoria.

The Bracks government has presided over a huge increase in the waiting list for permanent housing for disabled people. In the recent state budget the disability sector was totally ignored by the Labor government, which gloated over a huge surplus but did nothing for the thousands of disabled Victorians.

I received a succinct and passionate letter from Liana's brother, who implored action on behalf of Liana and the thousands of Victorians in the same position. The Bracks government has ignored the pleas from Liana's family. The Minister for Community Services in the other house must address this issue as a matter of urgency, and I call on her to get accommodation for Liana immediately.

### **Alcoa: Make an Impact campaign**

**Ms CARBINES** (Geelong) — Last Friday I was delighted to officially launch the Make an Impact campaign, a joint initiative of Alcoa and Greening Australia, at Deakin University's waterfront campus in Geelong.

The Make an Impact campaign aims to raise awareness of the role Australian households play in generating greenhouse gases as they contribute about 20 per cent of our total emissions. Most importantly the campaign commits Alcoa's work force and its families to working towards changing the statistics and to becoming part of the solution to global climate change. Seven thousand Alcoa employees across three states will receive a footprint reduction kit containing a greenhouse calculator and tips on how to lower energy and water consumption and more effectively manage waste.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Environment I congratulate Alcoa for its ongoing work with Greening Australia, a partnership which goes back 24 years and which has seen over 10 million trees planted to revegetate degraded land across Australia. Alcoa is certainly an industry leader in the Geelong community, being an excellent environmental role model. Alcoa continues to find new ways to lessen its footprint on our planet and the Make an Impact campaign is to be commended.

### **Dr Frank Pyke**

**Hon. B. N. ATKINSON** (Koonung) — I wish to make some comments on the retirement of Dr Frank Pyke as the chief executive officer of the Victorian Institute of Sport. This evening there will be a function to honour his work at the institute over some 16 years.

Dr Pyke was recruited to head the Victorian Institute of Sport and has done a remarkable job. He has been the only director of that institute. He took it from fairly modest facilities to the facility we have today in Punt Road, which is now one of the world's leading sports centres. It is an important part of the Australian Institute of Sport's network certainly in the development of elite athletes but also in the development of programs that assist everybody who is a plugger at sports as well.

Dr Pyke's specialisation was in sports medicine, and I think he has done some outstanding work in assembling a team that is developing the expertise and performance levels of sportsmen in Victoria and has also contributed a great deal, particularly in respect of injury recovery.

Unfortunately, in the short term Dr Pyke intends to spend at least some of his retirement in Adelaide. He has made a significant contribution and leaves very big shoes to fill. I commend him on behalf of the house.

### **Migrants: community acceptance**

**Mr SCHEFFER** (Monash) — Yesterday morning's *Age* carried a story that Victorians are more supportive of migrants than are people living in other Australian states. The report said that 63 per cent of Victorians believe immigrants play a constructive role and have a positive influence, whereas in other states about half the population share this view. While the positive attitude to recent immigrants in Victoria is without a doubt influenced by the history of the state, it is also true that this good news is the result of successive state governments showing leadership in supporting and speaking up for multiculturalism.

The report says that about a quarter of the people living in New South Wales believe migrants are more likely to be involved in crime and that only 18 per cent of Victorians think this. While the issue of community leadership is important, the greatest sense of acceptance of immigrants in Victoria also seems to be a result of Melbourne being a less topographically segmented city. Melbourne is not broken up by water and hills so people interact more and understand each other better.

The Bracks government's strong support of multiculturalism and community building through its small grants program, for example, plays a critical role

in strengthening local communities and celebrating the backgrounds and cultures of immigrant communities. People who feel valued and respected by the general community are more likely to embrace their new home and subscribe to its aspirations.

### **Harness racing: country meetings**

**Hon. D. K. DRUM** (North Western) — The V3 proposal by Harness Racing Victoria has turned out to be a financial disaster. Twelve months into the program now we have had ample opportunity to see the nearly 30 meetings that have transferred from seven smaller communities to their host clubs. We are eagerly awaiting the result of the state government's review of the whole racing industry. We are waiting for the government to put together a governance model of the harness racing industry to know whether down the track we will see harness racing TAB meetings return to some of our smaller clubs.

Certainly clubs such as Boort, St Arnaud and Wedderburn are not experiencing any benefits in taking their meetings to the host club of Charlton, even though Charlton is doing a fantastic job in promoting its club and presenting meetings. The proposal was put forward by the board of Harness Racing Victoria because it was going to create substantial financial gains to the industry. Those financial gains, 12 months on, are certainly not there. They have been selective with the use of their figures, they have not been comparing apples with apples, and it is time Harness Racing Victoria came clean and told the industry that the V3 proposal is not the benefit that it thought it would be.

### **Industrial relations: WorkChoices**

**Hon. J. G. HILTON** (Western Port) — I would like to commend the federal Leader of the Labor Party, Kim Beazley, on his commitment to scrap Australian workplace agreements and restore unfair dismissal laws. At the next federal election the Australian people will have a clear choice. On the one hand they will have the coalition, which is determined in its so-called WorkChoices legislation to drive down the cost of labour to the benefit of employers and to the detriment of employees, while on the other hand they have a Labor Party which is committed to improving the living standards of all Victorians and Australians.

The federal government trumpets that its new WorkChoices legislation will improve productivity. There is absolutely no evidence that that is the case. What it will do is disadvantage many hundreds of thousands of Australian workers, particularly young

employees who are in low or semi-skilled occupations, with no opportunity to bargain, and create a cohort called the working poor, which is totally at variance with the traditional Australian ethos of a fair go for all.

The federal government is proud to say that the unemployment rate is now 4.9 per cent, but you only need to work 1 hour a fortnight to be considered as employed. If we add to the 4.9 per cent the number of workers who would like to work more hours, the unemployment rate would probably be closer to 10 per cent. This will be the legacy of the federal government, on which the Australian people will pass judgment in 2007.

### **Preschools: funding**

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** (East Yarra) — My matter today concerns the remarkably good policy released today by the Leader of the Opposition in the other house, Ted Baillieu, that will assist Victorian kindergarten students across the state. An amount of \$730 will be provided on a per capita basis to kindergartens for every student, and this is very important because all of the international evidence shows very clearly that money invested in early childhood services is very important.

We believe in ensuring that children are well educated and that they are given the best chance in life. The people who are unable to afford to send their children to kindergarten will be able to do so under this policy.

I congratulate the *Age* for putting the story on its front page today, as it is a very significant story for all Victorians, particularly those with children who will attend kindergarten. It is important to understand that the \$730 bonus grant that would be paid for every child at kindergarten would lift the standard in kindergartens. There would also be money for clusters to improve services there and for rural kindergartens — there would be a whole program of grants.

All Victorians would be proud of what would be a very good program. This government should support it. The Premier should think again and direct the money into early childhood services — into kindergartens.

### **Industrial relations: WorkChoices**

**Mr SMITH** (Chelsea) — I wish to congratulate the federal Minister for Mistakes, the Honourable Amanda Vanstone, who once again has let the cat out of the bag and explained to all of us what the real agenda is behind the new industrial relations policy of the federal government.

Two weeks ago in Perth she told a particular group that the real benefit of the industrial relations policy is that it will have a detrimental effect on and suppress real wages, and that it will therefore remove the ability of the unions to interact with the economy. There it is: right from the mouth of one of the federal government's own ministers — the Minister for Mistakes — that it is about getting to the union movement and that it is therefore necessary to allow the importation of guest workers who will be used to suppress real wage growth in the Australian economy.

Of course I do not oppose bringing in skilled labour when we do not have a particular skill in the country, but when all and sundry are brought in just to attack the conditions of ordinary working men and women in this country, it is a disgrace, and the federal government will pay for it at the next election. I say: bring on that next election, because Labor is back in town!

### **Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre: legal clinic**

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Jika Jika) — On 25 May I had the privilege of launching a unique new pro bono legal clinic for the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre at the offices of lawyers Baker and McKenzie. This cancer patients legal clinic will provide free legal advice to those suffering from cancer, people for whom the added burden of legal fees may just be too much. The involvement of Baker and McKenzie in the cancer patients legal clinic demonstrates that lawyers are willing to make the most of their abilities and respond to the community and those in need.

The cancer patients legal clinic is the first service of its kind anywhere in the world and is an innovative and reasoned approach to the problems that beset cancer sufferers and their families. I applaud Baker and McKenzie for its work with the world-renowned Peter Mac and hope this innovative approach to the provision of pro bono assistance will set a precedent for more of its kind throughout Australia, and the world.

### **Rail: Ringwood and Camberwell stations**

**Hon. C. D. HIRSH** (Silvan) — Today I want to speak particularly about Ringwood railway station, which is part of the transit cities program and which has been allocated \$2.3 million in this budget to commence the development of the station. It is very much needed. Having spent some months on railway stations I feel very qualified to speak of them. Ringwood railway station is sorely in need of redevelopment, and I look forward to the state government's transit cities program developing Ringwood station.

I would also like to speak about Camberwell railway station, where I also spent quite a lot of time over a six-month period. I would like to see the government go ahead and develop Camberwell railway station as fast as it can. It is one of the ugliest, draughtiest and filthiest places I have ever stood to catch a train. Its redevelopment is almost more important than that of Ringwood station. It is ugly, draughty and absolutely filthy, with bottles and wrappers everywhere. It is a dirty station in urgent need of redevelopment.

### **PRESCHOOLS: GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION**

**Hon. P. R. HALL** (Gippsland) — I move:

That this house calls on the Victorian government to move the responsibility for preschools from the Department of Human Services to the department of school education.

Before I start, I want to make sure that people do not get hung up on the terminology I have used in this motion. I have used the term 'department of school education' deliberately to make it very clear what I mean by linking preschools with schools within the education system. The current official title for the department is the Department of Education and Training, and I could have used that title but I wanted to make sure that the link between preschools and schools is well and truly spelt out in the motion, so I have chosen to use those words.

I gave notice two weeks ago that I would move this motion along with another motion. They now appear in my name on the notice paper as notices of motion 1 and 7. Before speaking particularly on motion 1, I want to draw the attention of the house to notice of motion 7, where I called on the government to reverse its decision to sell Victoria's share of Snowy Hydro, and I am pleased to say that was achieved with 100 per cent success within three days of putting it on the notice paper.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Hon. P. R. HALL** — Thank you. I am happy to take the plaudits, but I will make a point on that in a minute. With notice of motion 1 standing in my name I have achieved 50 percent success, because judging from what appeared on the front page of the *Age* today, the Liberal Party has now adopted the policy of The Nationals to move the responsibility for kindergartens from the Department of Human Services to the education department.

I am absolutely delighted that it has finally seen the light and accepted that it is The Nationals' policy. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that had this motion not been due for debate today the article on the front page of today's *Age* would not have appeared, because the Liberal Party would not have made a decision. It certainly had not made a decision two weeks ago. I am delighted that it has made that decision today and finally seen the light. I have already achieved a 50 per cent success rate with those notices of motion. I have no doubt that in due course the pressure on the government will be such that it will come on board and decide to move preschools into education, giving The Nationals a 100 per cent success rate.

The success of these notices of motion demonstrates the effectiveness of a small party in the Victorian Parliament. We will never have government in our own right, but we can successfully apply pressure to both of the major parties. Today's motion proves that we are able to achieve success. Some would describe us as being the conscience of conservative politics in this Parliament. I might say that we are also the conscience of the government in a lot of matters — and it is being dragged, screaming and kicking, to the table on many of the finer initiatives The Nationals have advanced in this Parliament over many years. Today I am absolutely delighted to have the opportunity of moving this motion. I am also absolutely delighted that the Liberal Party has come on board and accepted the policy position of The Nationals, a policy position, I might add, that we have held for over four years. We went to the last election with this policy position and now we await the government's doing the right thing by young children in Victoria and supporting this particular resolution.

I will get to the issue itself. I will not spend time this morning arguing the benefits of four-year-olds attending a full year of kindergarten. The benefits are significant and include both educational and social benefits. Prep teachers consistently see the distinct advantage in the level of learning readiness of children who have experienced at least a full year of preschool. Some would argue very strongly that there is extra educational benefit in children having two years of preschool, and the socialisation benefits are equally important. The merits of preschool are universally accepted. I do not think we will have any argument from members in this chamber today about such merits, so I am not going to spend time arguing the merits.

The issue is whether the current preschool structure in Victoria is sustainable and whether young children would be better served if preschools operated under different administrative arrangements. The Nationals

believe our preschool system would be strengthened by moving the responsibility for preschools from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Education and Training. This morning we will put some very strong arguments in support of our case. We will listen with great interest to the response of the Labor Party. We will also listen to and study with great interest the detail of the announcement in the paper this morning by the Liberal Party. I hope that government members will express some personal views about whether it is more appropriate for preschools to come under education rather than under the Department of Human Services.

That is how I will outline my arguments this morning. I will be supported by at least Mr Drum from my party, and if there is sufficient time, by my other colleagues Mr Baxter and Mr Bishop. We share a common strong view and are united on this issue. We are also prepared to give 10 minutes of our time to Ms Hadden, the Independent, to give her the opportunity to express a view on this motion. If Mr Olexander were to ask for time on this issue, we would extend the same courtesy to him. The Nationals are the conscience of the Parliament. We make sure everybody gets a fair go, no matter the size of their party or who they are.

I will briefly give some background to the situation in respect of preschools. I hope the Honourable Carolyn Hirsh and others are listening to the arguments I will put forward, because I know that Ms Hirsh shares an interest in preschools and I hope she will participate in the debate.

**Mr Pullen** — The member will not listen, and she has already got her speech.

**Hon. P. R. HALL** — All right, we will look at it later on the record. I want to hear the arguments.

First of all I want to spell out where we are with preschools in Victoria at the moment. Preschools, or kindergartens as many of us call them, are not compulsory in Victoria. It is the view of The Nationals that they should not be compulsory and that even if they move to a department of school education, they should remain non-compulsory.

Currently almost 60 000 four-year-olds are enrolled in Victorian preschools, as are a number of three-year-olds, although, as I understand it, the department does not keep a record of the number of three-year-olds enrolled. According to Department of Human Services figures, the participation rate is a healthy 94.4 per cent. I say 'healthy' because that is good, but I also say that there is a growing danger that

that participation rate will drop off unless urgent measures are taken to address some of the financial, access and staffing issues which I will outline in my contribution this morning.

Close to 2000 teachers are employed in nearly 1600 funded kindergartens throughout Victoria. Of interest is that almost 60 per cent of those kindergarten teachers have part-time positions and that roughly 40 per cent of them have full-time positions. That such a majority of positions are part-time is unique in the education sector. The state government pays a rate per child which covers, at the best estimate, 40 per cent of the cost of kindergartens. There is, and always has been, a contribution from the state government towards the cost of the provision of preschools in Victoria.

The average fee paid by parents for their four-year-olds to attend kindergartens is \$165 per term. That amounts to about \$660 per year that parents of preschool children pay in fees — for, I might add, 10-hour weeks of preschool. Because there is no government contribution for three-year-olds, the fees for those children are much higher than that.

Kindergartens in Victoria are controlled by the Department of Human Services but are run by voluntary committees of management. There are some cluster management groups and some local governments that play a role in coordinating preschool services, but essentially, as I said earlier, preschools in this state are run by voluntary committees of management. I will spend some time talking about that aspect of preschools.

I might add that there is now legislation that allows for schools to establish preschools, but that has not been taken up widely basically because of the lack of funding support from government. Why would a school offer to administer a preschool program when it will receive only of the order of 40 per cent from government grants in return? Schools already find it difficult enough to run their programs on the budgets given to them; it should be readily acknowledged that they would not be so keen to take on extra responsibilities if they were to receive only 40 per cent in government funding.

I will outline some of the problems that exist in our preschool system. In doing so I want to acknowledge the wonderful dedication and commitment of staff to providing an education for children in preschools. I also want to acknowledge the great contribution by parents towards making preschools such a success. Parents I know whose children attend preschools put in a lot of hours of voluntary work to ensure that the

kindergartens run well. I want to acknowledge that great work by staff and parents. In saying that I need to declare that my mother was a preschool assistant for some 30 years before she retired, so I have some interest in the topic and have learnt how they operate from her experience of 30 years in preschools.

Among the problems that exist are the costs. I will talk about that in more detail, in terms of both the fees that parents are required to pay and also the fundraising they have to undertake. I will also talk about class sizes. The government would be keen to listen to the arguments about class sizes, particularly when it has advocated so strongly for prep and grade 1 class sizes to be of the order of 20 to 21, while it is not uncommon for preschools to have, and they are allowed to have, class sizes of 28 to 30.

**Hon. C. D. Hirsh** — It is a different ball game.

**Hon. P. R. HALL** — It is a different ball game, said the Honourable Carolyn Hirsh. We will listen to the arguments she puts forward in her contribution to this debate.

I will also spend some time talking about the workload on volunteer committees. I particularly want to talk about a very serious problem — that is, the recruitment of staff to run preschool programs. I also want to talk about kindergarten teachers, not only about the shortage of teachers, which I referred to earlier, but also about the professional isolation experienced by kindergarten teachers, the lack of job security and the lack of any career structure, and I also want to talk about salary parity. All these are important problems that impact upon the provision of preschool services in Victoria.

Let me go to the issue of costs first of all. Department of Human Services figures suggest that the median fee for preschools throughout Victoria is \$150 per term, which equates to \$600 per year for a 10-hour preschool week. I compare that with school fees. As we know, school fees are voluntary — although the majority of schools ask for fees, they are strictly voluntary — and they are for a 30-hour school week. To get it into perspective, parents are paying a \$600 median fee per year for a 10-hour week at kindergarten, while no fees are required for a 30-hour school week. The department's figures suggest that the median fee is \$150 per term; the Australian Education Union (AEU) suggests that the average fee is \$165 per term, or \$665 per year. Whatever measure you use, it is a costly exercise for families at a time when they can least afford it.

I refer to the Australian Education Union's document *Public Education in Victoria — Education for Everyone's Needs*. It is a very good document that the AEU has put together, expressing the need for education in this state. I know it has been sent to all members of Parliament, so we all have access to it. Page 13 of that document talks about recognising early childhood as the first step in education and about the cost of access to preschool education. It states:

Fees paid by parents in metropolitan areas have increased to an average of \$668 per year, an increase of 340 per cent since 1992–93. In rural Victoria, the fees have increased to an average of \$620 per year, an increase of 410 per cent since 1992–93 ...

Those figures are sourced from the 2005–06 budget submission of Kindergarten Parents Victoria. The document makes an important point:

In all other states, except NSW, preschool is free — maximising access especially for those children who would benefit most.

It is a costly exercise for parents to send their children to preschool and, as I said, it comes at a time when the financial pressures on families are probably at their greatest. If you have children attending preschool, it is likely that you also have other toddlers or kids who have started school, and parents therefore have the cost factor of providing for the needs of all their children. The mums of preschool children are more likely to be at home or, if they are working, they will have significant child-care costs. Parents of preschool-age children are also at the age at which they are most likely to be buying a home. The cumulative cost pressures on parents of preschool-aged children are very significant, and the requirement to pay between \$600 and \$700 per year for preschool fees is an impost they can hardly afford.

I will quickly mention the \$300 kids bonus, or 'Steve's lotto', as some letters to newspapers have put it. If you are lucky enough to have a child starting year 7 or year prep next year, you get \$300. I am not saying that is a bad thing: if there is the capacity to help parents whose kids are starting primary or secondary school, then that is a good thing. But I also say that the cost pressures on parents who send their children to preschool are even greater, particularly when they have significant fees pay like the ones I have just outlined. As I said in my response to the budget papers, there is sufficient capacity in the budget to provide a great deal more for those people in need. I suggest that one of those areas of desperate need is support for parents sending their children to preschool.

I have received a fair amount of comment from different people since I announced that I would be moving this motion. I had a call last Friday from one of the parents on the committee of the Neerim South kindergarten, which is in my electorate. She expressed to me the committee's support of this motion. The parents at that kindergarten will be signing a petition which will be tabled in Parliament in due course. The lady mentioned to me that Neerim South kindergarten is a typical kindergarten where parents of four-year-olds pay \$150 in fees per term to send their children for 10 hours per week. Parents of three-year-olds also pay \$100 per term in fees for 2 hours of kindergarten per week.

**Hon. C. D. Hirsh** — Three-year-olds don't need kindergarten.

**Hon. P. R. HALL** — By way of interjection, the Honourable Carolyn Hirsh said that three-year-olds do not need kindergarten. Perhaps she could read the *Public Education in Victoria — Education for Everyone's Needs* document that I referred to before. She should read page 10 of that report —

**Mr Viney** — Who produced that document?

**Hon. P. R. HALL** — I have already said that it is produced by the Australian Education Union. Does Mr Viney have a problem with that?

**Mr Viney** — You are pandering to the union movement!

**Hon. P. R. HALL** — It would be a first for The Nationals to be pandering to the union movement. One thing we are able to do in The Nationals, through you, President, is to get along with a broad range of people. I have absolutely no problem talking to friends that I have in the Australian Education Union. I am delighted to have the opportunity of addressing the union's annual conference on behalf of The Nationals in a few weeks time and will take great pleasure in doing so. If Mr Viney suggests I am biased towards the Australian Education Union, then I will put on the record that I was a teacher for 13 years in the public education system. For all of those years I was a member of the then Victorian Secondary Teachers Association (VSTA) which was a forerunner of the Australian Education Union. I have no qualms at all about consulting with people from a very broad church from right across Victoria.

**Mr Viney** — How many times did you go on strike, Peter?

**Hon. P. R. HALL** — Mr Viney, through you, President, asked me, by interjection, how many times did I go on strike. I say this to Mr Viney: I never went on strike.

**Mr Viney** — No, how many times did you vote to go on strike?

**Hon. P. R. HALL** — I never went on strike. I was a member of the VSTA for 13 years and I did not go on strike once. It was against my principles, but I did not see anything wrong with being part of a union.

Earlier, by way of interjection, the Honourable Carolyn Hirsh suggested that kindergarten is not necessary for three-year-olds. She should have a look at the international educational research about children who have spent two years in education, particularly work done by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development using the Program for International Student Assessment report in 2003. The information is all on page 10 of this report. The parliamentary Education and Training Committee would be happy to provide further information to Ms Hirsh which spells out the benefits of children spending two years in preschool education.

I want to return to the cost factor of sending children to preschools in Victoria. I want to talk about fundraising, because parents of preschool children spend a great deal of their time fundraising to keep the cost of fees down. Fundraising is particularly hard in country Victoria, because the numbers of children in preschools are probably not as great as they are in metropolitan areas. In the city you can have up to two groups of 30 children, which means there would be 60 sets of parents who would contribute to both the fees and fundraising requirements of running the preschool. But this is not the case in country communities where there are often smaller groups.

In some instances in rural communities there may be 10 children in a group — for example, Omeo and Swifts Creek in the Tambo Valley are small communities which combine to run a preschool program. At best there are up to 10 children in those programs. That makes the continued viability of those programs difficult to achieve. I know that the government provides some additional grant money for kindergartens where I think there are less than 16 children in a group, and certainly less than 10. There is some additional grant money, but there is still a requirement to pay a teacher at a level that is required under awards. Whether that person is teaching 10 children or 28 children they are still paid the same, and so they should be. However, there is an extra cost

factor involved with 10 children, because there is not the same number of people from whom fees can be raised or who can participate in fundraising.

In one of the articles to which I will refer later I noticed a reference to a small community in Mr Bishop's electorate around Mildura. Something like nine families involved with a small kindergarten had to fundraise \$17 000 to keep their preschool afloat. That was a significant hardship for the people in that rural community. The fundraising issue is an important one, and it is particularly prominent in rural Victoria, where we have smaller kindergarten sizes. As I said before, government funding provides about 40 per cent of the cost of running preschools. The fees paid by parents and the fundraising efforts provide 60 per cent of the costs.

I want to talk about class sizes. Again, I will refer the house to the Australian Education Union's document. It says this about class sizes:

Group sizes in preschools remain high at an estimated average of 28 children aged three to four years.

That is the case; I have spoken to preschools in my electorate, and there can be up to 30 children in some of those groups. One teacher and an assistant responsibly looking after 30 children aged three to four years is a very difficult ask. For children of that age, as the government itself would claim, class numbers closer to 20 and 21 are a far more desirable outcome than the figure of 28 or so, which is the average kindergarten class size in Victoria.

I want to talk about the workload on volunteer committees. In most cases parents each year are required to form a volunteer committee of management to run their preschool. The problems they experience include the fact that there is no continuity in the committees of management, because there are mostly new faces in the committees from year to year. It is not often that a parent would have a child in a preschool for two years in succession, so quite frequently there is a change in the faces on the committee each year. The new people have to come in and learn the job and undertake some of the very important tasks that those on the committee are required to undertake.

Many members of the volunteer committees of management have said to me that they are not experts in accounting, payroll, occupational health and safety, legal liability or the recruitment of staff, yet they are required to undertake aspects of each of those tasks in their roles as members of volunteer committees of management. Some have suggested to me that they are spending up to 30 hours per week on committee

work — time that could well be spent with their children. Those of us who have served on school councils or kindergarten committees — and I am sure many of us have over the years — would appreciate that a significant time commitment is involved.

One of the other important points made to me by people who have been on committees of management is that they feel uncomfortable having too much knowledge about the financial status of other parents of children attending the preschools. Parents who claim a concessional payment have to disclose their financial position to the volunteer committee of management. It is uncomfortable for some parents to find themselves in a position where other parents have to disclose their full financial details to them. If that can be avoided, I think it is certainly best avoided.

The members of these committees also find liaising with their staff difficult sometimes, particularly when they have to ask the staff to take a pay cut, perhaps because of falling numbers in the kindergartens. We frequently find that numbers vary, particularly in some of our country kindergartens. While for one particular year a kindergarten director may have a full class and be working full time, the next year there might be a collapse in numbers and they have to go back to a half-time position. It is not as if they can make that time up in other year levels as they could in a school; in a kindergarten they are out there by themselves. There is only one person and one group of children, and a variation in class numbers can cause a difference in terms of the time worked. One of the problems kindergarten teachers face is a problem with consistency — a lack of continuity in the employment structure.

Some committee volunteers have described to me their role on volunteer committees of management by saying that volunteering is like a part-time job. For many it is; it is certainly some hours a week that they have to work, and, as I said, they are doing so at probably the busiest time of their lives. Having young kids — and most of us in this chamber have had young kids around our ankles — is the busiest time of your life, and it is the time you can least afford to put into other administrative functions. In terms of preschool structures around the state, about one-third of preschools have some local government support in terms of collecting enrolments and placing children in kindergartens, but two-thirds of the preschools in this state still rely totally on volunteer committees of management.

I want to talk about the staffing situation in preschools, because I think that is one of the most critical areas that

we need to address, and that is one of the main reasons we have put this notice of motion forward. In opening my contribution, I commented that we need to make sure that the preschool system in Victoria is sustainable, and I am of the honest view that if we do not make some basic structural changes then the current system will not be sustainable. I want to cite some more comments of the Australian Education Union, of which many kindergarten directors are members. On page 14 of *Public Education in Victoria — Education for Everyone's Needs*, the AEU refers to the staffing situation:

In a 2005 survey of preschool teachers ... of the 343 teachers who responded, 30 per cent indicated that they would retire within the next three years and a further 25 per cent said they were considering moving to teach in primary schools within the next five years.

So we are looking at potentially more than half the current number of preschool teachers dropping out of the system — 30 per cent retiring and 25 per cent moving to primary education. Our preschool system would totally collapse if we were to lose 55 per cent of our staff.

Further down on the same page the AEU also comments that:

... the attraction rate of new entrants to early childhood education is approximately 20 per year, well short of the number required.

I mentioned before that there were just under 2000 preschool teachers throughout the state. We need more than 20 per year coming into the system if we are going to maintain the equilibrium at the moment. Obviously with population increases, there will be greater demands for preschool teachers. We need to be growing the number of preschool teachers we have in this state, not reducing it.

Finally the article states:

The key problems at the heart of both attraction and retention issues in this sector are the lack of salary parity with schoolteachers, the inappropriate employment structures, the excessive workloads, inadequate administrative support coupled with a high level of responsibility and lack of access to high-quality professional development and professional support.

After the talking with preschool teachers, I agree with every one of those sentiments. The shortage of teachers is a critical problem, and I suspect it is more of a problem in country Victoria than in Melbourne — for example, I know from experience that in recent years the Briagolong community struggled for over 12 months to get a qualified preschool teacher to run its program. We had to plead with the department for an

exemption for a teacher who was undertaking training to run that program. At the end of the day that teacher decided that the uncertainty was too much for her to bear. She got a full-time job in the primary school system, and the kindergarten struggled to find somebody to deliver its program. It is the same with the Yarram kindergarten. I know that only 12 months ago that kindergarten, which had been trying for two years to replace its retiring director, had to ask its director to defer retirement until a replacement could be found. That is the sad state of recruitment in country Victoria. It is extremely hard to attract qualified preschool teachers to some of these areas.

There is a shortage of relief teachers, which creates a difficulty if a teacher is not available because of sickness. I know that in some instances kindergartens have had to cancel sessions because they have not been able to find replacement teachers. Secretaries of committees of management have told me that they have had to make up to 16 telephone calls to try to find a replacement teacher who was prepared to travel to a community to deliver a program when the normal teacher was absent because of illness. There is a critical shortage of relief teachers in country Victoria. There is a lack of job security in the kindergarten system. There are no guarantees from one year to the next that a position will be ongoing because it depends totally on the number of children. If there is a drop in the number of children either the teacher's hours are cut or the position is cut entirely.

There is also an issue of professional isolation. Often there is only one kindergarten teacher in a town. Certainly there is no coordinated structure that readily provides professional development for those teachers. There is no career structure for preschool teachers — that is, they are a preschool teacher or they are not a preschool teacher. Unlike teachers in the school system, they cannot move on to different positions of responsibility through a career structure because that is lacking in the preschool system. The issue of salary parity has been of concern for some time. I note that from 1 July beginning preschool teachers will achieve salary parity with schoolteachers. However, that is only at the entry level, and as time progresses there will still be a difference between the salary structures of preschool teachers and schoolteachers.

I want to mention a couple of other issues. One issue that has not been raised in any of the publicity but is a problem in the preschool system that we need to overcome is the provision of support for preschool students with disabilities. I know it is a big enough problem for schools to find support for students with disabilities, but if a student with a disability wants to

move into a preschool program they have to go through the commonwealth government to try to get some support. That has been a difficult process. I have personal experience over the years where it has been difficult to find some support so that young children with disabilities are able to participate in preschool education.

There are a number of other arguments I want to advance, and I shall talk about what parents are saying. There is an excellent article in the *Sunday Age* of 14 May under the heading 'Crunch time in the children's garden' and the subheading 'Parents are worn out by seemingly endless efforts to raise money, teachers are leaving for better prospects elsewhere. Something has to give in a preschool system in need of urgent overhaul'. I will not have the time to go through each aspect of that article, but it says:

Teachers, principals, academics, educationalists, union and parent organisations are calling for an urgent overhaul, saying makeshift measures will no longer fix the situation.

Add The Nationals' voice to that call. As I said, we have been calling for that for over four years now. From today on we can add the Liberals to that list — and we are waiting for the Labor Party to come on board.

The article talks about many of the issues I have discussed this morning such as the high fee structure and the demands on parents of being on a volunteer committee of management. It says:

Some more affluent kindergartens are charging higher fees and raising money to pay an administrator or bookkeeper to take the burden away from parents.

That is good if you can afford it, but the vast majority of our communities simply cannot afford to do that and have to manage all those tasks themselves.

In fairness and in the interests of balance I refer to a comment made by Gerard Mansour, the chief executive officer of Kindergarten Parents Victoria suggesting that the organisation is not in favour of moving preschool responsibly from Community Services Victoria to the Department of Education and Training but is concerned about the funding issue. I say to Kindergarten Parents Victoria that the funding issue will be resolved only if there is a move from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Education and Training. I notice from the organisation's comments on the Liberal's announcement this morning that it is certainly not in total opposition but wants to see more detail.

Following that article, the *Sunday Age* of 21 May published comments from correspondents welcoming

the suggested move of preschools into the education area. Jennifer Hammett, of Swan Reach, who is one of my constituents, expressed good views about that. I do not have time to mention all of those who wrote in but their views are worth reading.

In terms of what other people are saying, on 18 May of this year I went to a meeting in Pakenham organised by a group called Parents for Preschool Education. It says in the invitation it extended to me — it was also mentioned in the *Age* article — that last year it surveyed 459 parents statewide and found that overwhelmingly — 89 per cent — parents believed that responsibility for preschool education should be transferred from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Education and Training. It has also been circulating petitions among preschools. I am advised that it has about 20 000 signatories to those petitions calling for the change that are about to be tabled in the Parliament. I am particularly grateful to two members of Parents for Preschool Education, Lisa Vagg and Sherylle Hampton, who have been diligent in their efforts to convince governments, the opposition parties and anybody else they can get hold of, that there is sense in moving responsibility for preschools to education and out of the Department of Human Services. They have done a particularly good job with that.

The meeting I attended in Pakenham was attended by parents, preschool teachers, a primary school principal and a representative of the Australian Education Union, who spoke at the meeting. I was there, as was the member for Bass in the other place. Simon Wilde, the Liberal candidate for Gembrook, was also at the meeting. However, there were no Labor Party members, although I know they were invited along to the meeting. I was disappointed because they would have heard first-hand accounts from parents, preschool teachers and those representing preschool teachers about the issues involved in running preschools and the merits of moving that responsibility to the Department of Education and Training.

I will spend a couple of minutes talking about The Nationals' vision for preschools. As the motion indicates, we believe the responsibility for preschools should be transferred from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Education and Training. We believe further that preschool staff, both qualified teachers and assistants, should be fully funded by the Department of Education and Training. Our vision sees schools taking on the responsibility of delivering preschool programs at the local level with full funding to do so by government.

We also envisage much flexibility in the way this is done so local needs and conditions are acknowledged. Services may be delivered from a co-located site or an annexe site, so we are not suggesting that suddenly a new classroom should be built in a primary school and a preschool program run from that. There are some very good facilities around the state — and some pretty ordinary ones too — but there is no reason for a co-location of those school and preschool services. Some locations will cater for that, some will not. We believe there should be enough flexibility to cater for particular local conditions.

We believe that the staff should be employed by the school but funded by the government so as to remove that administrative burden from volunteer committees of management, to give greater job security to preschool teachers and also to provide them with some career structure.

We believe that preschool committees should still exist but they would have an advisory function rather than a direct management function. That is the request that has been issued by parents. 'We want a say' is typically what they say. Lisa Vagg, one of those parents I referred to before, said, 'We want to have a say in our child's preschool education but we do not want to have to run the whole show'. The Nationals' vision about preschool committees being advisory committees rather than management committees is an appropriate one that will give parents a say in how their preschool operates but will not make them totally responsible for it.

We also envisage that what I am calling a predominantly public preschool model would be supplemented by a privately operated preschool model as well, in much the same way as we now have a public education system and a private education system. I know that some private schools run preschool programs, and do so very successfully. I would envisage that under The Nationals' model this would continue to apply — that some private schools would want to continue to run preschool programs; and we say so they should.

I would envisage that government would provide some financial support in the running of that program in exactly the way it provides some financial support to private schools running school programs now. Indeed I think there would be some groups of parents who might want to independently run their own private preschools, and we do not discount that as being possible under this system either.

The other thing I want to say clearly is that we do not envisage that this would be a sudden change that would

occur from one day to the next. There needs to be some phase-in program because obviously there will be some administrative functions that need to be undertaken over a period of time. I think it would take two or three years for a complete phase-in of the moving of responsibility from the Department of Human Services to an education department.

I want to repeat that we do not believe preschool attendance in this state should be compulsory. What it will mean for parents under this plan is that there would be no compulsory fees for preschool. They would be asked to pay a fee just like all other school children in this state but it would be a voluntary fee, not a compulsory fee. There would be no requirement for parents to undertake onerous administrative responsibilities. Parents would be able to have a say in the running of their child's preschool but without the mandatory responsibilities of running the program. I think it would provide parents with greater certainty about the programs. They would not run the risk of having programs cancelled because they could not find a relief teacher.

We believe the benefits for teachers would be greater job security and not so much professional isolation. There would be a career structure for them as they move through preschool in the early years of schooling. There would be greater full-time employment opportunities for preschool teachers, remembering that 60 per cent of them are now part time. There would be greater opportunities for preschool teachers to receive professional development and greater opportunities for them to work at other levels, and they would have a reduced administrative burden.

For children there would be practically no difference in their day-to-day situation. Perhaps there would be an easier transition from preschool to school, there would probably be a greater availability of teachers and also there would be potentially greater opportunities to bring about reductions in class sizes in the preschool system. We say there are benefits all round for all parents, teachers and children.

I want to briefly mention what we believe is the cost structure. It has been suggested by many that the government meets about 40 per cent of the costs of running the preschools and that the other 60 per cent is funded through both the fees that parents pay and fundraising that they embark upon.

According to Kindergarten Parents Victoria (KPV), the move to a fully funded public education system would be of the order of \$87 million per annum. The Australian Education Union has also made an

assessment of this amount. Its estimation is that the cost of a fully publicly funded four-year-old kindergarten would be about \$66.6 million. They suggest also that if you are providing free places for disadvantaged three-year-olds, it would cost another \$5.65 million per annum, totalling \$72.25 million per annum.

I am not saying that this change is not without cost; it certainly is, and they are significant costs. But I want to make a couple of comments on the cost itself: it is significant, but the investment in quality universal preschool years will pay for itself many times over in the years to come.

The next point I want to make is that the new structure will be phased in over a period of two or three years, so the initial costs will not be immediate. Also, the government suddenly found \$40 million for the \$300 prep and year 7 kids bonus, so this is not much more than that. If it can find \$40 million for that out of nowhere where there is seemingly no demand for it, then we do not see why it cannot find similar amounts for funding preschool programs.

My next point is that there is a 7.9 per cent growth in GST funds coming into the state in this year's budget — something well over \$500 million — and if you look at the projected budget estimates, you will see that that trend will continue in the years to come. So from our point of view there is capacity, because of the increased revenue flowing to government, to fund a public preschool education system.

The final point I want to make about the cost factor is that in the longer term perhaps the costs are not as high as has been suggested by both KPV and the Australian Education Union, given that one-third of children in this state attend private schools and the funding for government to support students attending private schools is nowhere near that provided to support students attending state schools.

In the long term I think the ratio of children attending private kindergartens as opposed to public kindergartens will be about one-third to two-thirds and therefore the full cost estimates of both Kindergarten Parents Victoria and the Australian Education Union may not quite be realised. So it might be cheaper than we think.

I want to conclude so that my colleague the Honourable Damian Drum has the opportunity to comment on this issue. I want to conclude with these comments and remind the house of some of the pertinent points I have put forward in this debate today. I mentioned the survey undertaken by Parents for

Preschool Education which found that 89 per cent of parents believed that preschool education should be transferred from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Education and Training.

I also mentioned that there are 20 000 signatures on petitions that are about to be tabled in Parliament advocating such a change. The Nationals believe this change would be supported by an overwhelming majority of Victorian families. We also believe that unless such a change is made, the cost of preschool education will impact on access in a more significant way in the future. We also believe that unless the change to the education department is made, we will continue to have massive problems in attracting and retaining preschool staff.

We believe education is a lifelong learning experience. That process is enhanced when you get a good start in life, and that is what preschool gives young children. We believe the best start we can give our kids is access to a free, quality school and preschool system. Logic tells us that preschools should become the responsibility of the education system as is the case in most places in Australia and around the world where preschool is part of an education system rather than the child welfare system.

Today, the government has the opportunity to do the right thing and secure the future of preschool services for the 60 000 or so young children who attend preschool each year. They deserve the best, and I urge the government to give them the best by supporting this motion.

**Mr VINEY (Chelsea)** — The government will not be supporting this motion today because on balance it has taken the view that preschools are best kept within the administrative responsibility of the Department of Human Services. I am not going to stand here and say there is no case for preschool education to become a function of the Department of Education and Training; clearly there is and Mr Hall has articulated a case. I am not here to say that his case is completely flawed, but I think there are some important broader issues that need to be put into the context of this debate.

I want to pick up Mr Hall's final point that preschools should be part of education rather than of the welfare function of government. I think Mr Hall has confused the welfare function of the Department of Human Services with the broader children's services function. The entire function of DHS is not focused on welfare as such; it is focused on delivering services to the community, with community development and human development intentions and goals, and to suggest that

having preschools within the functions of the DHS makes it a welfare role is to not fully appreciate the broad strategy, approach and function of DHS.

It is probably worth saying that to some extent the administrative responsibility for where preschools sit is not all that relevant. What is relevant is the delivery of services to families and to children, to enhance their educational opportunities and their social and community development, and that is the critical function of a preschool service.

The critical function of a preschool service is to prepare children for those years in the education system and to prepare them for that step into life from, if you like, the protection they naturally have with their parents in those early years of development. So there is a broader function than just an educative one. There is a social and development function for children in our preschool system. I am not saying it could not be done or managed within the education department, of course it could, but it is equally incorrect to say that the education function could not be managed within the DHS because of course it can.

This is an area where there can be views expressed and debate had about what area of government might have better administrative responsibility for the delivery of services to children in preschools, but as I said, that is not the critical issue. The critical issue is what services our children are getting in their preschools, how well they are being delivered and how well our preschools are supported to deliver those vital services of social development and community development and of the early stages of education.

It is also worth saying that these do not just happen in the preschool setting. They happen in many settings across our system. Obviously they happen in the family home. They also happen in the homes of family day-care providers, in childcare centres and in a whole raft of areas including in small childminding centres around our leisure centres when mum or dad need to have the children looked after for a short time while they are engaged in some other activity. They also happen with grandparents, with uncles and aunties. There is a whole raft of things that lead to a child's development in social ability, in the community development function and in the educational function. These are the things that this government has set up to enhance our community by strengthening it and, with the appointment of the Minister for Children in the other place, by ensuring there is a broader and holistic view about how we deliver these very vital services to our young children to give them the best chance to develop in society.

Yes, there is an argument and a case to say that preschool funding should be administered through the Department of Education and Training, but in my view that is not the essential point. This government has been about enhancing those essential services for our children. This government has been about boosting services to our children across the board. It has raised the participation rates to, I think, nearly 95 per cent of four-year-olds who are now getting a preschool education. We have lifted that from what my recollection tells me was about 87 per cent or 88 per cent when we came to government. That had declined to those levels because of the policies of the previous government.

I experienced those policies personally. If I have my mathematics right, my oldest son did his preschool year in 1992. I have mentioned to this house before that when he went to his first year in school in 1993, the Kennett government announced the intended closure of the school that I had just enrolled him in, which again enlivened my political interest. But my recollection — and I am struggling as it is a while ago — is that in 1992 the fees that I had to pay for his preschool education were between \$80 and \$100. He has just started his first year in university, so it was a little while ago. Four years later, when my second son went to kindergarten during the Kennett period, the fees had increased by about that much per term — they were about \$400 per year, which was a fourfold increase.

So that was the first thing that started to drive down the participation rate under the previous government, and that was because the previous government moved to per capita funding. I heard Mr Hall talking about the terrible notion of per capita funding, but of course it was the former government, which included the then National Party, that introduced per capita funding. Whilst I agree that we have maintained per capita funding, we have significantly increased the per capita amount.

The other thing that the previous government did was move the responsibility for the payment of teachers salaries in our preschool system from the government onto the preschool committees. Therefore Mr Hall's crocodile tears and comments about volunteers having to do all of the administrative work involved in paying the salaries of preschool teachers relate to a policy introduced by the then National Party when it formed part of the last government.

This government has also introduced significant support to our kindergarten committees in dealing with those administrative tasks. We recognise that there is an administrative burden that has quite an impact on

parents at kindergartens, and we have provided significant funding and support for our kindergarten system. The previous government cut \$11 million from kindergarten funding. That was occurring on top of the 10 per cent slash to the Department of Human Services, which hit all of the services provided by that department, including disability services.

We agree that there can be a debate about the administrative responsibility of where kindergartens should be managed in the state system — I have no problem with that — and there is a case to argue that it should be within the Department of Education and Training; equally there is a case to argue that it should be within the Department of Human Services. But that is not the core issue. The core issue is: what are The Nationals and the Liberals going to do about supporting kindergartens and supporting education in this state into the future?

I note that today in the *Age* there is one of those pre-announcements of an announcement that the *Age* has got hold of in relation to the Liberal Party saying that it is going to give a \$730 grant to each child in a kindergarten. Of course it will not go to the families, it will go directly to the kindergarten; and the Liberal Party will scrap the \$300 bonus that is going to parents for prep and year 7 students that was announced by this government in the budget. This is all very well — and it is an interesting policy initiative — and I will talk a little about the detail in a second. The problem is that we do not trust opposition members because of their record. We do not trust what they would do to preschools again and we do not trust what they would do to education again.

This is the party that, as I have just outlined, cut \$11 million from kindergarten funding, shifted to per capita funding, caused a massive increase in fees that parents had to pay, introduced a 10 per cent funding cut within the Department of Human Services and, on top of that, it is the party that sacked thousands of teachers in the education system.

**Hon. Andrea Coote** — For heaven's sake, get over it!

**Mr VINEY** — Opposition members say get over it, but they do not want to be reminded. The point is when you make announcements like the one reported today — the \$730 grant to kindergartens — we do not trust the opposition and nor will the people of Victoria, because we need a little more assurance than just an announcement. We are not prepared to accept that that is what the opposition is going to do, because when it came to government last time it did not announce that it

was going to sack 4000 teachers, take thousands of nurses from the hospital system or cut kindergarten funding. Therefore we do not trust the announcements the opposition is making now. They are not worth the paper they are written on.

**Hon. Andrea Coote** interjected.

**Mr VINEY** — It is not about what you say, it is about what you do. The opposition has demonstrated no commitment to the proper funding of education in this state in the past.

The Liberal Party announced kindergarten funding for each child who attends a kinder, but what it has not discussed is the context. As I outlined before, there is a whole raft of measures involved in preschool education. It happens in a whole range of settings. What do they mean by that \$730 per child? What about the children in child-care centres when they are four years of age? Are they giving the grant to them? It does not look like it from the way I read it. Is it going to kindergarten committees? What is happening where children are in family day care and getting an educational experience as well? What is happening in a raft of other areas where there are obvious costs to parents in relation to those early years, including that preschool year? Are there any other announcements coming?

The other thing I would like to know about this announcement is: what are opposition members planning to cut to fund it? We know all of the other promises they have made, so what other things will they do to preschool education, like they did before, to make up for the announcement? There are no guarantees from the opposition in terms of what it is offering to do in this area. We simply do not trust the Liberal Party to provide those services.

Mr Hall raised the issue of class sizes in kindergartens. He talked about classes of 28 to 30 children and compared that with the first year of school, where we have given a guarantee — and we have achieved it — of classes of 21 children or less in years prep, 1, 2 and 3. Mr Hall would know, because I think he said his mother was a preschool teacher — —

**Hon. P. R. Hall** — A preschool assistant.

**Mr VINEY** — Then he would well understand that a class of 28 to 30 in a preschool would require a preschool teacher and an assistant teacher, which would result in a ratio of 1 to 14 or 15, and in any preschool — and certainly in all of my children's preschool education — there was always at least one parent helper and sometimes two parent helpers in the room to do many of the tasks that are part of the

system. I volunteered many times to cut up the apples and oranges and do the puzzles and help with the reading. It was a great task and a lot of fun.

**Hon. P. R. Hall** — You have reader helpers at primary school too, on top of the small classes!

**Mr VINEY** — There are two paid staff, Mr Hall, which makes it a ratio of 1 to 15, and of course that is the same ratio as occurs in a child-care centre. Whilst it is a class of 28 to 30, the ratio is the important factor, and there is a ratio of 1 to 15. We welcome the discussion today, but I would have to say that I find the debate to be a little esoteric. We are arguing over whether the administrative responsibility should be within the area of education or human services.

The critical thing is: what is the government of the day going to do to enhance the educational opportunities, the social opportunities and the community opportunities for children in the preschool system? This government has said it is about a total holistic childhood services approach to ensure that children receive a raft of services to enhance and extend their opportunities in life. That is what this government is committed to and what this government will continue to do. My challenge to The Nationals and the opposition is to give some assurances that they are not going to do to preschools and education what they did before. I have to say that based on their record, I simply do not trust them.

**Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash)** — I have great pleasure in saying that at 10 o'clock this morning the Leader of the Liberal Party, Mr Ted Baillieu in the other place, made a policy announcement on a Liberal government plan for kindergartens in which he came out with a landmark statement which is going to make a profound difference for kindergartens well and truly into the future.

Some of those aspects include the following: kindergartens are going to be provided with fee relief through a grant of \$730 per year on fees for each four-year-old from the start of 2007 and which will be paid directly to kindergartens. We will reallocate the School Start bonus to fund kindergarten grants. Let me remind this chamber that the School Start bonus is the amount of money that was supposed to buy votes for the Labor Party; the \$300 was to be given to people whose children begin prep and another \$300 was to be given to them as their children enter year 7. The problem is that this money is not going to be directed towards education at all; it is going to be left to the discretion of parents.

Some parents would probably use it for school uniforms, but there is no guarantee it will be used for their children. It is not directed to any specific needs at all. Parents could go out and buy a pair of socks or they could go out and buy a DVD. There was to be absolutely no control over their putting it towards education.

Education is a vitally important issue for the Liberal Party, and the education of preschool children is essential if children are going to have a good start in life. We will direct the \$730 grant to kindergartens themselves. There will be a service management agreement done with kindergartens to ensure that the money goes to the kindergartens and that fees are not increased as a consequence. The money would be targeted to education; it would be targeted to the children. We understand exactly how important it is to have preschool education, and this money would go to kindergartens in recognition of that.

We are going to make certain that we create a \$10.5 million capital fund for kindergarten maintenance over five years. Kindergartens do struggle. There is an enormous amount of very welcome support from volunteer and parent groups throughout the state, who do an extraordinarily good job, and it is very important that they continue to work in and assist their kindergartens, but they should not have to run the kindergartens. In a moment I will talk about an additional \$500 000 we will put towards administrative support for an expanded network of kindergarten clusters to manage their GST, to be put into staff allocations and for a whole range of administrative costs so that parents can continue to be supportive of the kindergartens and their kindergarten children without this additional pressure.

The \$10.5 million cash fund over five years would ensure that kindergartens are at the very highest level they can be. In addition we understand that there are 25 country kindergartens with under 10 children enrolled at each. They have some very specific needs. They have grave concerns about issues such as mobility, how they will get a replacement teacher if a teacher does not turn up — a whole range of different challenges from those experienced by city kindergartens. We will put \$300 000 towards ensuring that country preschools have the support they need in kindergartens where fewer than 10 children are enrolled.

I spoke about the \$500 000 that is to be provided by the Liberal Party to encourage the cluster management structure, which should enable an additional 100 kindergartens to be part of cluster management

arrangements. There are about 1700 kindergartens in this state, and about a third of them are involved with cluster management arrangements, but the additional \$500 000 funding will ensure that nearly every kindergarten in the state will have access to cluster management and the benefits that come from this sort of planning.

Progressively we will change the administration and supervision of kindergartens from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Education and Training. This is something for which parents have called for a significant time. It has been out in the arena for a long time, and there has been a loud call for it. It is an integral part of Liberal Party policy to ensure that kindergarten parents, kindergarten teachers and all the key stakeholders involved in kindergarten education are a vital part of this transition so that we get the programming right, we get the protocols right and we make quite certain that into the future kindergartens will be a very important part of the system and that kindergarten parents and teachers have a huge say in how children are going to be educated.

Looking to the future, at some of the greenfield sites on the fringes of Melbourne we are going to make certain that there is space on the site footprint for a kindergarten to be allocated when the time comes for the development of a primary school. This is an example of our listening to parents' concerns. Parents want a one-stop drop, and they want to know that their children are going to be safe. Some schools and kindergartens will provide before-school and after-school care, which will help and be convenient for parents in areas where there is a lot of tension in young families who are trying to work and shuffle children around. This will certainly be of help in those areas.

By way of contrast we will look at what the Bracks government has not done. The government has failed to provide a seamless transition from early education to primary school, unlike what happens in most other states, where kindergartens are part of the education system. This policy will bring Victoria into line with the other states. Most importantly, under the Bracks government too many children are being denied an opportunity to attend kindergarten. Some 3500 children each year miss out on four-year-old kindergarten. They cannot go to kindergarten because the fees are too high. It is just not good enough. The Liberal Party policy of granting \$730 to each child would enable these 3500 children to attend kindergarten, and in many cases it will be a family's first foray into the kindergarten system.

There are too many families with children at kindergarten who are battling to pay kindergarten fees. On average the kindergarten fees are about \$727 a year in metropolitan Melbourne and about \$669 a year in country areas. In some cases those will be the total fees that need to be raised, but many kindergartens and their committees of management charge additional fees. The additional fees can range from \$80 a year right through to the thousands of dollars by which some kindergartens in private schools have raised their fees. We will give the mandated fee amount of \$730 as a grant to every single child across the state who is eligible to attend four-year-old kindergarten.

I cannot leave the debate without mentioning two things. First I indicate that we are giving 5 minutes of our debating time to Ms Hadden. In addition, I cannot let Mr Viney's comments go by without a response. Many times in this place we see Mr Viney brought into difficult debates as a head kicker, but today he was really struggling. I think Mr Viney found Mr Hall's motion particularly difficult to deal with. I think he found it very hard to criticise this motion. It was a very difficult debate for Mr Viney, and I have some sympathy for him. I repeat to the chamber what Mr Viney said — that it is not relevant which department supervises kindergartens, whether it be the department of education or the Department of Human Services. Mr Viney said what was relevant was the quality of the service provided. We would all agree with the need for quality of service, but it was very interesting to hear the lead speaker for the government saying he felt it was irrelevant which department the responsibility sat with. The government actually agrees with this motion.

Mr Viney went on to say that the administration of preschools could be done by the department of education. He went on at length to say he felt that was a possibility. It was extremely interesting to hear that from him. Mr Viney finished up by saying that the motion was a little esoteric. That was patronising in the extreme. It was insulting to both kindergarten parents and kindergarten teachers. It was a fundamental flaw. Mr Viney made a big mistake.

I go back once again to deal with our policy and comment on The Nationals' very good motion. I was interested to hear Mr Hall say he felt the Liberal Party had 'seen the light'. I think that was what he said. I can assure Mr Hall that this policy has been in our pipeline for a considerable time. It is something we have talked about and looked at with great interest for a long time. Indeed I am very pleased to report, as I did earlier, that our leader has come out this morning with a very substantial policy in support of kindergarten parents

and teachers. The thrust of the comments by the Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Mr Baillieu, was to praise the work done in and the excellence of our kindergartens. We look forward to the time when children in four-year-old kindergarten can go on with certainty in the knowledge that they are being given the very best service and that parents and teachers who in the past have done such an excellent job will continue to be an integral part of the development of these little children.

I repeat that the Liberal Party's policy will provide kindergarten fee relief through a grant of \$730 per year on the fees of four-year-old kindergartens from the start of 2007 — and that amount will be paid directly to the kindergartens. It will create a \$10.5 million capital fund to provide kindergarten maintenance over five years, to provide extra funding towards the running costs of country kindergartens with fewer than 10 children, to provide an extra \$500 000 per annum for administrative support for an expanded network of kindergarten clusters and to provide an additional \$300 000 to Kindergarten Parents Victoria to introduce a new collaborative service planning model across a network of early-years providers.

We will progressively transfer the supervision of kindergartens to the department of education within the first term of a Liberal government. We will work with the department of education, kindergarten teachers, primary teachers and parent management committees to develop a set of protocols for the employment of all kindergarten staff and to provide that kindergartens are included within the master planning schemes of new greenfield primary school sites in Victoria in the future.

This policy is sustainable. It is reflective of what parents want, and has been costed. It is an excellent policy and we are waiting to implement it. When we get into government, kindergarten parents across the state will see that the School Start bonus offered by the Labor Party — the cash handout — is nothing more than a grab for votes, a cynical exercise, whereas our policy will put dollars into education. This is a very good policy.

**Hon. D. K. DRUM** (North Western) — It gives me great pleasure to contribute to the motion moved by Peter Hall. One has to take stock of the quality of the notices of motion that are continually put forward by the Leader of The Nationals. The last one he put forward had to do with ethanol. Again, it was a very sensible notice of motion on something that works effectively in other states. The government had the commonsense during that debate to effectively say that it would look into the idea and potential for the

8000-strong government fleet throughout Victoria to use ethanol-blended petrol. That was a very commonsense motion put forward by Mr Hall. It has been accepted in other states. Other states are leading the way for Victoria!

**Mr Smith** — On a point of order, Acting President, can we possibly get Mr Drum back to the issue we are debating today? He is off talking about ethanol. I am not sure what that has to do with kindergartens!

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon. Andrew Brideson)** — Order! There is no point of order. Mr Smith should stop wasting the speaker's time.

**Hon. D. K. DRUM** — Thank you, Acting President. Well before an announcement was made by any government, Mr Hall put forward the motion that the sale of Snowy Hydro should be reversed and that we should not sell off our water assets.

**Mr Smith** interjected.

**Hon. D. K. DRUM** — It is very easy for people to be wise after the event, but it takes some courage to put down in writing and before this Parliament what your beliefs are before the event. Putting on the notice paper your intentions about an event that is taking place takes some courage. That is the situation today, with what has been a policy of The Nationals for over three years. Before the last election we said that we believe the kindergarten system in Victoria would be better placed, better serviced and better administered and provide a better pathway for its employees if it were under the administration of the Department of Education and Training. Again, Mr Hall needs to be congratulated. We are talking about 60 000 four-year-olds who are attending preschool at 1600 kindergartens which are being serviced by over 2000 teachers in Victoria. It is a very important industry and an important sector of our community.

One of the points that is missing in this debate is the government's reasons as to why the move should not happen. It is all right to say that the current system is fine. But we have put forward an awful amount of data which suggests that the people who are intimately involved in the sector will tell you that it is not fine. They will tell you that the committees of management have been forced to work exceptionally long hours just to make their kindergartens viable. Those of us who have had young children — I have vivid memories and Mr Viney gave us some of his stories — and have taken their kids to kindergarten understand that you give up your Saturday mornings to mow the lawn and weed the garden. I did not mind doing the work, but one of the

things that worried me was that I did not have the skills to understand child safety. Someone might have mentioned, 'You can't leave that bin lying against that fence over there'. While we might think it is totally harmless, kids can climb on that bin, get over the fence — —

**Mr Smith** interjected.

**Hon. D. K. DRUM** — Mr Smith is picking the wrong subject here to start interjecting on. Child safety is an important issue and he should not be making light of the fact that responsibility is put in the hands of committees of management that do not necessarily have the skills. They do not have the skills in financial management, they do not have the skills in occupational health and safety and they do not have the skills in a large range of areas that they have been forced to manage. That is not to mention the stress they have, because they may be on the committee of management for only one year, and in very rare cases two years, and then they might go off for a while and come back on again if a subsequent child starts attending the same kindergarten.

It is a clear matter of fact that it is very hard to get a place in a kindergarten, and especially in a kindergarten that is the nearest to your house. My personal situation is that we had to go past three kindergartens to find one that had a vacancy. It was tremendous; it had brilliant teachers and a great set-up. It is very difficult for young families to find a placement in a kindergarten that is in the proximity of their residence. That is simply a factor of what occurs at the moment, and the proposal by The Nationals would alleviate that problem. Even the notion put forward by the Liberals, as reported in today's press, would go a long way to alleviating the problems of access.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Hon. D. K. DRUM** — It is not something that government members should be whingeing and yelling across the chamber about. Genuine policies have been put forward by the opposition. Government members always whinge that all we do is whinge. Now that we have come up with a genuine alternative, government members are sitting there yelling out interjections. But they do not have any genuine reasons of substance for why the move cannot take place or why all the benefits we are proposing will not be met if we leave the administration of kindergartens with the Department of Human Services.

**Hon. J. M. Madden** interjected.

**Hon. D. K. DRUM** — The minister is calling out that he would like to have a touch-up of the benefits. I would have thought that the minister would know some kindergarten teachers. He has a young family himself; and obviously if they followed their old man they would not be too bright! He has obviously had to take them along to kindergarten to kick-start their education process. It beggars belief that the minister would not have a close association with some of the kindergarten teachers in his region. He would understand that it is very hard to get quality teachers into the system and very hard to retain those teachers because they have very few opportunities for job promotion and professional development, and their pay rates are disgracefully low.

Pay parity is an important issue. The fact that the salaries of preschool teachers are an exceptionally long way behind those in the primary sector creates problems. Firstly, many students who have expressed an interest in going into kindergarten teaching eventually do not find their way there because of the poor pay parity; and secondly, some teachers who were previously in the system elect to go back and take even less money for greater job security in the child-care sector. These are significant problems with the current system. Parents are overtaxed and have to work too many hours on committees of management, too many hours helping the programs be delivered and too many hours volunteering on the maintenance programs and in a fundraising capacity. Moving those responsibilities to the Department of Education and Training will go a long way towards fixing all these administrative problems and a long way — —

**Hon. J. M. Madden** interjected.

**Hon. D. K. DRUM** — The minister talks about the finances. I would like to finish on the standard government financial debate that it carries on with. Simply, I think all Victorian families in the respective stages of their family life go through some times of hardship and through some times when they are travelling okay. What this government does continually — and it is very poor form — shows that it is significantly bereft of genuine argument. When our families go through significant times of hardship, we all tighten our belts. We do not buy new whitegoods, we do not go on holidays, and we do not even do some of the things that we should do, like replace our car tyres with new ones. We take risks. Because we do not have the money to replace our tyres, we have to drive around on tyres that are less than safe. That is something we do not like doing, but families who are going through hardship have to make those sacrifices and take those risks, simply because there is no option.

This government continually forgets that the previous Labor administration allowed Victoria to become a financial basket case. Therefore the subsequent government, the Kennett-McNamara government, had no other option other than to make hard decisions. This government needs to understand the mess it left this state in because of the financial impost on it, which forced the then coalition government to make very tough decisions. The government needs to wake up and remember that fact.

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** (Melbourne West) — I am delighted to make a contribution to this debate. Of course I will speak against the motion moved by Mr Hall. It always gives me pleasure to speak on opposition business for a range of reasons. Firstly, it gives me an opportunity to remind the opposition of what its attitude to kindergartens was, given that is what the motion is about — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — I know you do not like it. I know you find it hard — even Mr Dalla-Riva, who was not here at the time. The mover of the motion, the Leader of The Nationals, Mr Hall, was part of the government that oversaw enormous cuts to kindergarten services. Cuts were made not only to kindergarten services but also to education services, so it would not have mattered whether kindergarten services had been under the Department of Human Services or the Department of Education and Training. When the lot over there were in government kindergarten services would have been cut, because kindergarten services and health services were cut right across the board.

The other thing that pleases me about speaking in this debate is that I do not think I have ever before heard The Nationals support a union. They usually sink the boots in and kick as hard as they can against unions, but here they have supported a very good union, the Australian Education Union. It is a shame that the Honourable Bill Baxter has not made a contribution. I do not know whether he will, but I hope he gets up and supports the AEU, because it would be a first.

**Hon. W. R. Baxter** interjected.

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — Mr Baxter has something to say.

**Hon. W. R. Baxter** — I would make a contribution if your government did not have such stupid sessional orders.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon. Andrew Brideson)** — Order! Mr Baxter!

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — Let me address some of the points that have been raised in the very poor arguments put forward by the opposition. If you look at what we have done since we came to government — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — No, I will tell you what we have done: we have done a lot. We have done more than that lot ever did when they were in government. We have increased funding to kindergartens by 109 per cent.

**Mr Smith** — How much?

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — By 109 per cent, Mr Smith. That is a huge increase, unlike what happened when the opposition was in government and slashed kindergarten services. Our government sees kindergartens as part of a whole range of services for parents of young children, such as child-care, maternal and child health, playgroup and early intervention services. We see kindergartens as part of the services we need to provide in the early years rather than as part of the later years of education.

Members have spoken about their experiences of kindergarten. My children went to kindergarten, including as part of a child-care experience.

**Mr Smith** — They graduated?

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — They graduated with flying colours, they were very good. My daughters are very talented young women. Previous speakers have talked about the joyous experience of participating in their child's kindergarten. I have to say I never shared that joy. I was never big on milk and fruit; I was never big on playing with the kids — —

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — I was not big on it. But I did recruit my mother, the grandmother of my children, who was very keen on participating. A lot of parents are enthusiastic about it. They love to get involved with the kinder kiddies, and I know they bring a lot to the children's experience, but it was never my cup of tea.

Let me pick up a few other points. This is how we see it as a government: kindergarten is part of those early development years and associated with child-care,

playgroup and early intervention activities. We all know from the experts that kindergarten is a vital experience for young children. It is vital to their development — to their social development, to their ability to go on with education, to their ability to fit in with education and to fit into the community and be part of society. The things they learn in those formative years, often through play and activities with other children, are vitally important. We as a government see it as being more akin to that rather than as part of education, as The Nationals clearly see it.

We are not alone in that view. There are experts who support our approach, which is consistent with international and local research, such as Dr Jack Shonkoff, from the USA, who is broadly acknowledged as a world leader on early childhood, Professor Frank Oberklaid, who is a leading early childhood expert from Melbourne and Peter Kirby, who headed Victoria's review of kindergartens. While it is fine that there is a debate, there is a variety of views about how kindergarten services are best delivered. There is a strong view of experts, which is supported by their research, that kindergarten fits more readily within the early childhood experience rather than within an educational experience. Our government supports that view.

Mrs Coote said in her contribution that kindergarten services are linked with education everywhere in Australia except Victoria. That is simply not the case. The majority of programs in New South Wales and Queensland are equivalent to Victoria's kindergarten years. Those programs are provided through departments which are equivalent to the Department of Human Services (DHS). Mrs Coote talked about participation rates, but she failed to say what our participation rates are. Our participation rates in kindergarten are consistently above the national average. The percentage of children in Victoria attending kindergarten is 99.4 per cent. This is one of the highest rates — —

**Hon. Andrea Coote** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT**

**(Hon. J. G. Hilton)** — Order! Mrs Coote has had her turn.

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — This is one of the highest rates in Australia. I wanted to deal with a few points which were raised by previous speakers. Firstly, a point espoused by The Nationals — I am not sure if it was one of Mrs Coote's points — was that kindergarten programs will continue to close due to the shortage of trained teachers unless the state government brings

kindergartens under the Department of Education and Training. In response to that point, I will say that our government has provided an extra \$31 million over three years to improve the pay and conditions of Victorian kindergarten teachers as part of our ongoing drive to encourage young graduates to join the profession.

Secondly, Mr Drum said in his contribution that kindergarten teachers are not paid enough and do not have enough opportunities for career development. The graduate starting salary for kindergarten teachers will match primary school teachers. There is an agreement to that effect which will deliver a better quality of teaching and stronger career paths for kindergarten teachers which will be an incentive for them to update their skills. This year DHS will be awarding seven rural employment grants worth \$6000 each to early childhood education graduates who are committed to working in rural kindergarten services for at least two years.

The other allegation which was made by Mrs Coote and Mr Drum is that Victoria is out of step with other states and territories because early years services are under DHS rather than the Department of Education and Training. As I said earlier, this is simply not the case. The overall approach to kindergarten responsibilities in Victoria is aligned with the eastern states. In fact two-thirds of Australian children who attend a kindergarten program are overseen by a similar department to DHS. To say that Victoria is out of sync, out of kilter and not aligned with the rest of Australia is simply wrong.

The Victorian government sees kindergarten as a part of the early years picture and not just a precursor to school. All the research that has been done certainly shows that kindergarten is a good precursor to school and that kindergarten assists the development of children so they are more readily able to attend school, but it is about more than that. The early formative and developmental years of childhood and the experience of child care and playgroups determines not only their ability to approach school but also their whole life. Kindergarten is not just about an educational experience or readying children for an educational experience.

There are also massive one-off and ongoing costs and drawbacks associated with the dismantling of the present kindergarten system and setting it up as a part of the school system. It would be a huge cost to do this. Unlike other states, kindergarten in Victoria is funded through a whole range of different settings which include child-care centres, community-based child-care

centres, independent and Catholic schools and private centres. Most kindergartens have children who are attending from a whole range of those settings. Kindergartens have children who will attend a whole range of different schools. Not every child who attends a particular kindergarten will head off to the same school.

I will pick up on the idea of 'Let's hook children onto primary school and let's make kindergarten another preschool year at schools in addition to prep'. Most primary schools sites are not readily equipped to appropriately accommodate a huge influx of four-year-old students. There would still be problems about collecting children from school and dropping them off to school, particularly given that kindergartens have different times and sessions which are not the same as schools. Schools would also need to be able to provide out-of-school care programs for very young children. Schools are not the most appropriate place for this. Many parents I know would be very worried about children being less comfortable in that sort of school setting as opposed to a kindergarten setting.

This is a bad motion. It does not deserve the support of members of this chamber. Sure, it is good to have the debate, and there are arguments about why things might change, but the way we are delivering these services is the best way they can be delivered — that is, with kindergarten services definitely tied up with those formative, preschool, early intervention years. That provides the best possible development for children, and that is what we are about — providing the best development for children.

#### **The ACTING PRESIDENT**

**(Hon. J. G. Hilton)** — Order! The member's time has expired.

**Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA** (East Yarra) — I rise for the Liberal Party to make my contribution to debate on this motion. I congratulate The Nationals for moving this motion about the transferring of responsibility for preschools to a department of school education. This is not the first time such a motion has been moved by the Honourable Peter Hall. In fact, those who wish to go through *Hansard* of 6 October 2004 will see we had a debate in respect of a similar motion.

I will describe for the record my involvement in the kindergarten system. I have been a president and vice-president of a kindergarten, and I was the president of the Kindergarten and Child Care Association of Boroondara. I was also the vice-president of the board of Kindergarten Parents Victoria. So I guess I have had

some experience as a parent and also in relevant positions, both at a moderate level — starting off as the minutes secretary at a kindergarten — and as vice-president of KPV. I think that experience has assisted me in developing the argument embodied in the release of this policy today.

This policy the Liberal Party has announced is a great move forward in recognising kindergartens as a crucial component in the development of children in this state. A problem we often find in the way governments operate is that they have a very short-term view in the development of their policies, such that they are very opportunistic. You only need look at government members to see how opportunistic they are being in the way that they have responded to this motion. Rather than being supportive, they have been derogatory. They have actually suggested that kindergartens are not important in children's development. They seem to think that the development of a child occurs only when the child hits the union-dominated schools. That is not the case. Over the last seven years, this government has allowed around 3500 children per year to be denied some opportunity to attend preschool.

We know now that this government, despite the rhetoric and spin, does not fully and properly fund kindergartens for four-year-olds. That is why today we are very pleased to announce a significant policy to move forward with. Our policy is going to be about securing additional support. Under a Liberal government, from the start of 2007 a grant of \$730 per year for fees for four-year-olds would be paid directly to kindergartens. That is not the model this government wants; it has made a \$300 vote grab with its supposed School Start bonus.

We are going to tie this \$730 of funding directly to kindergartens, so that the kindergartens will benefit, not the parents. I do not care what anyone on the government side says, the reality is that there will be parents who unfortunately will not use the School Start money the government has said it will provide for educational purposes. That was just a straight-out grab for votes. The government said, 'Here is \$300; here is the money, give us your vote'. We are not going to do that. We are a bit more accountable for our state's money. We are going to make sure that that funding is tied. As a result, there will effectively be no mandatory kindergarten fees for four-year-olds in this state. I think the government should be jumping with joy at this great policy announcement today rather than trying to belittle the opposition.

A Liberal government would also provide \$10.5 million in capital funds for kindergarten

maintenance over five years. We have heard much rhetoric from this government about what it intends to do, but the fact is that we are actually going to do it and commit that money. That is the difference between the Liberal Party and the Labor Party. When we say we are going to deliver things, we deliver them. We are going to provide extra funding towards the running costs of country kindergartens that have fewer than 10 children enrolled — again, that is a demonstration that we understand the issues that are out there. We are going to provide an extra \$500 000 per annum for administrative support for an expanded network of kindergarten clusters.

I have seen some of the clusters in operation, and when I was the president of the Kindergarten and Child Care Association of Boroondara we looked at a significant related program. There was a research paper that had looked at other cluster groups and other central enrolment-type programs in operation in other local government areas, and certainly there were some positives that came out of that in terms of providing support.

We are also recognising the contribution that KPV makes, and I put on record my acknowledgment of Gerard Mansour, the outgoing chief executive officer, for the way in which he has taken on with great vigour the needs of kindergarten parents and kindergartens across Victoria. A Liberal government would provide an additional \$300 000 so that we can work with that peak body that represents over 1000 kindergartens in producing a collaborative service planning model across the network of early-years providers, including cluster managers, stand-alone kindergartens, child-care centres and children's hubs.

Also — and this is the nub of the motion being debated today — within its first term a Liberal government would progressively transfer the supervision of kindergartens to a department of school education. There is no doubt — and I have seen this in my various roles — that the year-by-year changing of the parents on a kindergarten committee puts enormous pressure on the teacher, who has to operate in what is almost a political environment to ensure that the committee functions like a well-oiled machine.

There are some kindergartens in Kew and Balwyn, in my electorate, that were well oiled. I recall one president had a masters in business administration from Harvard University. Needless to say, that kindergarten ran very effectively and generated substantial amounts of money, and the committee of management ran smoothly. I am not beating my own drum but when I was president of the Davis Street Kindergarten — a

significant kindergarten that operated two kindergartens at the same time — in using my management experience I was able to generate a significant amount of money in ensuring we could provide additional airconditioning at the end of that year.

That is not the way kindergartens should be run, they should be dealt with in a more strategic way, and the Department of Education and Training has the resources. The Department of Human Services does the best it can, but it has a myriad of other areas where it needs to provide support. We must understand that we are not moving away from a model that is supportive of early years development, but the administration and the supervision of kindergartens should be under a department of education.

We intend to work with a department of education, with kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers and the parent management committees to develop a set of protocols for the employment of kindergarten staff. There is no doubt that kindergarten staff would like to be involved in a broader development program. Some kindergarten teachers have been working in the same location for many years and see no opportunity to move on. Often committees of management have a problem where there is only one teacher at a kindergarten, but that teacher happens to fall ill or takes long service leave.

Long service leave is another issue, and I will not go into that now, because when kindergarten teachers have been in a kindergarten for three years and move to another kindergarten, are their entitlements transferred and does the committee have to take that into account? A lot of committees do not have the longer term picture in view and moving teachers to the education framework will alleviate concerns about wages, the transferring of long service leave entitlements and whether the principal has a plan in place to ensure there is adequate coverage of absent teachers when teachers are ill.

We intend to work with independent child care centres and parents to establish protocols for streamlined administration. From my experience I am conscious about ensuring there is the establishment of protocols between the Department of Human Services, which is the child care component, and a department of education which would fall within kindergartens. We believe these protocols will address that issue.

We also believe kindergartens should be included in the master planning of any new greenfield primary school sites in Victoria in the future. This is a significant policy that was released today by the Leader of the

Opposition in the other place, Ted Baillieu, and by the relevant shadow minister in this place, Mrs Coote. This is a significant policy, moving forward, in understanding the complexities of kindergartens in that there are many models in operation across the state. We must understand the differences between rural, regional and metropolitan kindergartens and the different skill bases in which kindergartens operate, whether it be in certain parts of Victoria where you have the MBA Harvard president or committees that are ineffective in the way they can manage a kindergarten.

We understand that we must ensure there is sufficient capital expenditure made available to kindergartens over the first five years, and we understand also that four-year-old kindergarten should be virtually free for all parents in Victoria irrespective of their capacity to pay.

The establishment of kindergartens that have a strong foundation and systems in place is a move in the right direction so kindergartens are seen and recognised as a significant component of the development of children, and we see them as a significant component of ensuring that teachers understand that if they want to go into preschool teaching, they will not be stuck in one location forever, that there will be opportunities for them to move within the primary school system as well as the preschool system as they wish.

The burden on committees of kindergartens has been onerous over the past number of years, and we are about to address that in its entirety. We are looking forward to ensuring that this will be of benefit to the many thousands of parents, including me and others in this chamber, who have had to suffer and endure many hours of trying to coordinate kindergarten activities. We are not removing the capacity of parents to be involved. If anything, we are trying to ensure that they can be more involved in the development of their children and less involved in the administrative side of it. This is a great move by the Liberal Party.

This sensible motion is supported by the Liberal Party. We have expanded on the motion and said that we will take into account not only the education component but also the development of kindergartens in this state. Rather than the government coming in and talking about the past, this is a party that is about the future. We are sick and tired of hearing about the former Kennett government. The realities are that we have endured seven years of this government, and in seven years it has failed to deliver in a variety of areas, and one area in particular is the kindergarten preschool sector.

The government can put out as much spin as it likes in the marketplace about how great things are but the fact is that a strong, coherent policy has been released today — a policy about the future of kindergartens and our children. The Labor government should support this motion and understand that we are not about opportunism, we are about development, vision and the future. I support the motion.

**Hon. C. D. HIRSH** (Silvan) — I find it ironic to stand here today and speak on this motion, which I oppose strongly, as I will explain. The irony is that I was a very active member of the Victorian Teachers Union state council for many years. It is interesting to be on the other side of what was my union. However, that being so, at a personal and professional level I do not agree with the idea that preschool education should be under the administration of the Department of Education and Training. I believe that strongly.

I have a long background, as many members know, in education. I have taught from kindergarten right through to the Victorian certificate of education and in the tertiary field. I ran a kindergarten for six months at one stage when my children were very young. My first community involvement was as the president of the local kindergarten — and I have to admit in a quiet tone that that was over 40 years ago. My involvement goes back a long way. I remember once being involved in a fundraiser where we had an auction and raised £500. I was absolutely blown away by the cleverness of this wonderful fundraising event — but I was 24 years of age at the time and things were simple then.

I turn to my reason for opposing the motion. Preschool education is a part of the overall development of young children because, generally speaking, their brains are not ready for formal educational input such as reading, maths and that sort of logical reasoning.

They are still in an early phase of social development, of active learning — learning to get on with their peers, learning about the world, learning to interest themselves, developing a growing awareness in their own thinking and actions and a growing awareness of themselves in relation to the community and in relation to each other. That will be affected if they are in a school ground with a whole lot of older children and in a system of comparative assessment. If we move responsibility for preschools to the education department that comparative thing, which happens right from prep up, is going to eventually creep into preschool situations.

Young learners enjoy their families, enjoy their communities and enjoy developing friendships across a

range of groups of people. If they are in any way threatened, as a four-year-old may very well be in a playground with a bunch of older children, it will be detrimental to their progress and development. Many four-year-olds still prefer to spend their time with a significant other person, a parent where possible, or a carer. Often when a four-year-old goes to kinder they will be upset at first at being left, but as the year goes on they usually adjust and begin to learn to enjoy the social and developmental experiences of kinder.

**Hon. Andrea Coote** — Where is the proof?

**Hon. C. D. HIRSH** — I will answer the interjection. Some of the researchers who are involved in looking at the social construction of learning are Vygotsky, one of the major theorists in this area, Piaget, and Bruner and Gardner. The papers that these people have written highlight the importance of social relationships in the learning environment and of the particular contribution by other adults and teachers around a child. But the actual social milieu in which a child mixes is a most crucial thing in development. They need to be with their peers. They have time at home with older siblings, but to put preschoolers in a schoolyard with a group of much older children could be quite detrimental to a four-year-old and not in their best interests.

**Hon. B. N. Atkinson** — Is that your opinion or does that come from some study? What study are you quoting?

**Hon. C. D. HIRSH** — I have already mentioned the studies from which this information is garnered. If the honourable member did not hear me mention them, I will mention them again — but I believe he did hear them. Vygotsky, in particular, is one of the researchers who is very prominent in early childhood development. Piaget is another researcher who is very prominent in early childhood development and prominent through all childhood development. They are the two major researchers on whom I base the comments I make on the need for a safe, protected social environment in which preschool children can continue the avid learning and development that they have been undertaking since birth.

My view is quite a strong one — that we need to keep four-year-olds away from the education environment until they are ready to go into it, which in most cases is at the age of five or sometimes six. Some children at four are socially, intellectually and developmentally ready to deal with it and some are not. Children mature at different stages, but as a general rule they are better in a very vibrant social situation where they are encouraged and facilitated by well-qualified early

childhood teachers. I admire greatly the work of those teachers because I think they do an absolutely fantastic job in early childhood teaching.

Going back to Mr Hall's point about three-year-olds, I believe that generally speaking three-year-olds are better with their parents where possible. A playgroup in which parents stay and the children learn to socialise in a very safe and very vibrant and stimulating environment is a more useful social milieu for a three-year-old than a kindergarten. Another reason for keeping responsibility for preschools with the Department of Human Services is the relationship between all the early childhood development workers and support services that are available. The availability of maternal and child health nurses right through to school age is quite important. That involvement should and does continue through to preschool and sometimes to the end of preschool.

In 2005–06 the Bracks government provided nearly \$2.5 million over four years to form groups in which maternal and child health nurses are expected to encourage kindergarten enrolment when families visit them for a check for their three-and-a-half-year-old child. That is a very important role. I think that four-year-old children do not need to be pushed into education. Given the appropriate environment and experiences with a range of environmental stimulation they will readily develop at their own pace and in their own time. There is no doubt that preschool education is crucially important. It has been shown to improve children's later literacy, numeracy and general educational ability, particularly with disadvantaged families.

The Head Start program in the United States of America is a classic example. Initially it was thought there was no effect from giving preschool or early intervention programs to children from disadvantaged families. However, 20 years later when those involved went back and looked at the progress of the Head Start children they found quite a difference between those children and children in the disadvantaged groups who had not been exposed to such programs.

I have a strong view that kindergarten should be available to all children in their last year before they go to school. The Bracks government has improved the quality and affordability of kindergarten programs. Funding has increased by 109 per cent. There has been a significant increase in involvement in preschools. Nearly 95 per cent of children of preschool age now attend a preschool. That needs to increase to 100 per cent, and I believe the government will enable the continuation of these programs.

Local government is an important partner in providing universal access to maternal and child health services and kindergarten programs. In fact local government owns 67 per cent of all kindergarten locations. I do not know whether in its grand policy the Liberal Party has suggested it will pay local governments to transfer their properties to education, or whether it will leave them with local government. I do not know whether that has been outlined in the policy. I have not yet heard it specified whether the 67 per cent of kindergartens will stay where they are or go.

Another matter is the existence of preschool education in long-day care centres. Over 50 per cent of parents are now in the work force and are unable to do that traditional thing of taking their child to kindergarten at 9.00 a.m. and picking them up at lunchtime, because kindergartens do not generally operate full time. The program is intensive and the amount of formalised structure is considered to be adequate at about half time or less. But many parents do not have the luxury of being able to go and pick up their children, so more and more kindergarten services are being provided by long-day care centres. I do not know what is going to happen there.

Again, are kindergarten programs going to be taken out of the long-day care centres and put in school grounds? Is there going to be reimbursement to the centres? Who is going to take the children from the day care centres to the school-based kindergartens? Who will provide the care for before and after kinder? Are we going to have expanded day care services in schools? We now have before and after-school care for school-aged children. Some of those programs are great, but is it appropriate that preschool children participate in extended before and after-school care programs, or are they better in long-day care centres or in family day care where the carer often takes the child to one of the kindergartens, and even though many of them are not trained teachers they often provide the children with some very stimulating activities, even some of the little ones, which is a very interesting concept.

There are questions here that have not been addressed in terms of long-day care centres and in terms of council-owned preschools. I do not believe in this policy which removes \$300 from parents of children entering prep and year 7 because they might not know how to spend it properly. I find that a pretty patronising attitude toward Victorian parents. We are told they might spend it wrongly. Three hundred dollars goes into a family's kitty and in the end the school uniforms and school books have to be purchased. I find the Liberal Party's policy generally pretty indecisive. I do not think it makes a lot of sense, and I repeat again that

I oppose quite strongly The Nationals' motion that the responsibility for preschools be moved to the education department.

**Hon. Andrea Coote** — You don't really think that!

**Hon. C. D. HIRSH** — I do actually.

**Hon. B. N. ATKINSON** (Koonung) — I am happy to join this debate today and to congratulate The Nationals on bringing this motion to the house. It is a worthwhile motion and certainly a debate the Parliament ought to have. I am disappointed that the government has not only indicated it will vote against the motion, but has shown, particularly the last speaker, such a lack of understanding of what kindergartens are all about and what preschool education is all about. There is absolutely no appreciation of the current position in terms of preschool education in Victoria by a number of government speakers, including the Honourable Kaye Darveniza and particularly the Honourable Carolyn Hirsh.

In fact drawing conclusions from what Ms Hirsh said, I wonder whether she wants some of the kindergartens in my electorate closed. Does she want the Nunawading Primary School-based kindergarten closed? Does she want the kindergarten at Nunawading South Primary School closed? Are there others that have already chosen to locate within primary schools that she wants closed? The parents behind those kindergartens, the preschool teachers and indeed many other people in the community, and certainly the school communities themselves, have embraced those kindergartens and have all believed it was a positive step that was consistent with the research and trends in preschool education to have those kindergartens located in primary school environments — the very environments that Ms Hirsh suggests are totally inappropriate for kindergartens.

I wonder whether we draw from her speech the fact that that is government policy? To what extent was she on her Pat Malone and talking simply on a personal basis, or to what extent was she presenting to us this morning the government's policy on preschools? She indicated that she has no commitment to three-year-old kindergartens. Does that mean that the government has no commitment to three-year-old kindergartens? What is the government's position on those kindergartens? The community wants them, the parents want them, the preschool teachers and all of those people associated with Kindergarten Parents Victoria and so forth all believe it is a positive step to offer three-year-old kindergartens to people who are interested. The Australian Education Union believes in it and

understands the value of it, and the communities themselves understand the value of it.

In recent times I have had representations from the cities of Whitehorse and Knox indicating they want to see the sorts of steps that have been taken by the Liberal Party in its policy announced today and the steps that are advocated in this motion by The Nationals enacted by government. They want to see kindergartens move into the education environment, although not necessarily physically in terms of the facilities because it is appropriate for local communities to choose where they want those kindergartens. It may well be appropriate in some circumstances to have those kindergartens in a range of settings to suit the needs of particular communities, and that is all about the choice of those communities. But it is certainly very clear that in some communities the model that would have some preschools located in primary schools is an appropriate model. There has been no suggestion that children are intimidated, find it difficult to settle in those environments or have some sorts of problems with preschool education when their centre is located with a primary school.

From having visited Nunawading Primary School and Nunawading South Primary School in particular, I can say they are very well-run kindergartens and are now far better resourced within their new environment, where the teachers have some support, where there is increased access to professional development and where parents are more engaged both in the community of the preschool and the community of the school looking forward, and that has been a most appropriate thing. The suggestion by Ms Hirsh that having kindergartens located anywhere near primary schools is a problem is absolutely ridiculous. It just does not justify any serious debate when you look at the body of evidence that is presented by scientific research in early childhood development right across the world, not just in Australia.

Some time ago I sat on an all-party parliamentary committee which looked into this issue. The committee comprised a number of members from both sides of the house. The member for Rodney in the other place was representing the then National Party on that committee, along with former members Lorraine Elliott — whom I congratulate on her Order of Australia award last weekend — and Inga Peulich, who will be coming back into this place very soon.

In addition, Caroline Hogg, a former community services minister from this house, and the present Minister for Community Services in the other place, the member for Bundoora, were also on that committee.

We were all very firm and of a single mind about the importance of preschool education, particularly for four-year-olds. We also believed in having opportunities available for three-year olds to attend kindergarten.

At that time we entertained the debate as to whether or not kindergartens should be administered by the existing structure in community services or whether they should be transferred to the education department. It was an interesting but not a conclusive debate, but I think it would be true to say that that committee tended towards the view that it would be appropriate at a point to move kindergartens under the auspice of the education department.

I found it therefore somewhat interesting that the Minister for Community Services did not pursue that initiative when she became a minister and was in a position to do so. From my point of view — and perhaps some government members do not understand this — moving kindergartens into the education system does not mean a dramatic change in the way preschool education is delivered. It is not about enforcing the disciplined education concepts that you might associate with primary schools. It is still very much about developmental play — physical play as well as learning and gaining knowledge. It is very much about concept learning rather than detailed learning, and it is very much about the socialisation of children.

It is a different experience from the primary school experience. Where kindergartens have been located in primary school environments they have been able to maintain a different environment — an environment within an environment — and certainly I have not observed preschool children running out in the school grounds and trying to compete for tennis balls or such like with children from grades 5 or 6. In fact the approach to the delivery of that model has been very carefully thought out and managed in those schools, and I think it has been very effective.

I would be very concerned if what Ms Hirsh has put to this house today is the direction of government policy — that is, to say, 'We will not have preschools in primary schools. We will not encourage that to happen even where it is the choice of the local community to pursue that model'. I am concerned if what she is saying today is that she or the government would prefer to have centres such as those in Nunawading and Nunawading South closed because the government does not like that model.

I am concerned about the proposition she put in this debate — that kindergartens for three-year olds are not

appropriate, that kids should be home with their mothers or carers, and perhaps their fathers. Certainly I brought up one of my children for some time while my wife returned to work, so I was a house husband for a while. From that point of view is she saying that those children should stay home with their parents of either gender or with a carer and should not have access to a kindergarten for three-year olds, if that is their choice? If that is government policy, then it should be put on the table. Government members should scream it from the rooftops. Let us have the community debate, because I know what the community will think about that particular policy, if that is government policy!

The policy put out by the Liberals this morning is an appropriate step forward. It is good news for kinder, or preschool, education. It is terrific news for those parents involved, who have young families, who are looking at what options they should take in terms of the great start in life that kindergartens can provide for young children. It is also terrific news for people who have careers in the preschool education sector, because it will ensure that they have greater access to professional development and support, that they are plugged in to the education system in a much better way and that they are able to give children the flying start we all believe they deserve.

This is a good policy, and it is consistent with the motion put by The Nationals today. I applaud them on bringing it forward as a matter of debate because I think it is an important issue. It makes a very effective use of the financial resources of this state government through its allocation of funds, to ensure that mandatory fees for preschool education will disappear under a Liberal government — because we will take away the Bracks bribe on preps and year 7s, and allocate the money where it is needed.

**Mr SMITH** (Chelsea) — I am pleased to rise and oppose the motion put by The Nationals.

**Hon. Andrea Coote** — You don't mean that!

**Mr SMITH** — I genuinely mean that. I begin by quoting William Shakespeare. The quote is:

Old men forget.

They forget what they did with education when they were in government. In particular they forget what they did with kindergartens, which is what we are talking about today.

The previous government cut \$11 million out of the system — and I know \$11 million is not a lot of money — and reduced the human services area by

about 10 per cent. So much for the crocodile tears being shed about what is going on in the area of kinder education. I will be a bit generous to the opposition here and suggest that it genuinely believes that what it is about is in the best interests of the child, as we do. We are all in raging agreement that we all want to see the best possible services provided for our children, and we have clearly different views as to how we go about that, but I respect the fact that both The Nationals and the Liberal Party generally want to do what they believe is best for children.

It is a pity they did not have this view a few years ago, and it is a pity they do not have it federally, but we will be a bit generous today in the course of this particular debate. The government thought long and hard about the best way of providing the most appropriate system that would allow our children to learn the necessary skills to function in society, and just to learn — in my view that is what kindergartens are about — social integration and how to learn.

I have had good discussions with representative groups within my community about this, and there are very strong and different views as to which is the best way forward. I might add that some people express a view that the Victorian Labor Party is about a fair go for everyone, and I agree — I certainly think we are — and some people will question what we are doing in terms of the \$300 grants to families and whether that is the best way to provide the resources necessary to ensure that as many kids as possible get to kinder. Maybe the jury is still out on that — time will tell — but it does not alter the fact that we are doing what we believe is significantly beneficial to parents with kids of that age.

It is also a continuous improvement model. It is one of those things that the government will constantly look at, with a view to improving things as time goes by. If there is an area that obviously needs improvement, then we will do it, but it does not change what we are about — that is, doing what we can to improve access and affordability, if you like, for parents with children at kindergarten age.

**Hon. Andrea Coote** — That's our policy!

**Mr SMITH** — The Honourable Andrea Coote interjects and says, 'That's our policy'. I did say at the start that I would be generous and suggest that we both have certain views about how to best look after children et cetera, but we will differ on the detail.

The Bracks government responded to recommendations of the Premier's Children's Advisory Committee that was set up to advise the government on all things

relating to children, preschools et cetera, and the interaction and integration with the Department of Human Services (DHS). Even today I have heard from constituents about the importance of moving responsibility for preschool education from the Department of Human Services so that it comes under the umbrella of education. I suppose it gets back to whether or not you believe the kindergarten system should be part of the education department. All the expert advice we have, including that of Dr Jack Shonkoff, an American expert in child welfare and child education, and Professor Frank Oberklaid from Melbourne, tells us that the model we are pursuing is the best way forward and in the best interests of the child.

Like anything in medical science and in a whole range of different fields, there will be people with different views. We only have to look at global warming. There is overwhelming support from scientists for the world to do something about global warming, while at least 17 000 scientists have signed a petition arguing that it is nowhere near the problem we have been told it is. Where does the truth lie? We can only take advice from those we trust. We have done that, and we have formulated our policies. It is a contentious issue and one that I dare say the Liberals will push very hard, because they sense some political advantage in doing that, and they are simply trying to outbid us, if you like, for the mums' votes in particular.

I am also interested in their attitude towards our taking a broad-brush approach and suggesting that all families get the money, as opposed to their policy. Their approach is totally contrary to what they have done federally. Last time I looked, Johnny Howard was fantastic at spreading out taxpayers hard-earned dollars into middle-class welfare, with no means testing at all in a whole range of areas. The hypocrisy of those opposite seems to have no boundaries whatsoever.

Another issue is that we believe local government has a significant role to play in the area of kindergartens. I have heard talk about the idea of integrating the kindergartens with primary schools, but given that 67 per cent of all kindergarten locations in Victoria are owned by local government, we suggest that would be an extremely difficult exercise. That idea has some merit in relation to mothers in particular having to drop off kids at kindergarten and then rush somewhere else — for example, to a primary school. As Mr Drum mentioned earlier, sometimes kindergartens and schools are miles away from home or at inconvenient locations, so an integrated geographical location may have some real merit. I visited Cranbourne Christian College last week while it was celebrating its arts festival, and it

seemed to have a tremendous early learning system. It is an Italian system, but I cannot quite think of its name at the moment — —

**Hon. Andrea Coote** — Montefiore?

**Mr SMITH** — I am not confident that is right, but it is a system that was developed at the end of the Second World War, and apparently it has had some real success. It has its detractors as well — —

**Hon. Andrea Coote** — Montessori?

**Mr SMITH** — I think that is correct. It seemed to me to be a tremendous, very calming environment and one that allows youngsters to progress quite naturally. But it is separate from the actual school, and there is the dilemma. Some views are being expressed that responsibility for kindergartens would be better located within education, but others say it would not. We subscribe to the latter view. I have been interested to hear those opposite support the views of the Australian Education Union (AEU) on numerous occasions. I never thought I would hear that — not in this place. That would be a first. I am just a little bit bemused by that. Just because a union puts forward a particular policy or position does not mean it is naturally right.

**Ms Hadden** — You are saying Mary Bluett is wrong, are you?

**Mr SMITH** — I have said Mary Bluett has been wrong on a number of occasions, and I have said it publicly. I thank Ms Hadden for the opportunity of reminding people of that. That is not to say the union is always wrong, but there is a bit of self-interest. Every union works from that perspective. One of the claims of the AEU is that Victoria is out of step with other states and territories in having early year services under the Human Services umbrella rather than under Education and Training. I suppose in a sense that is true of other states, but that does not imply that Victoria is out of step with all other states. I think Western Australia, South Australia and maybe Tasmania are in step with one another and out of step with us, but I do not know that there is too much in Western Australia or South Australia that we would want to follow. Generally we tend to lead them.

In our response to that claim we say that two-thirds of Australian children attend a kindergarten program overseen by a department similar to the Department of Human Services. It is more than just a matter of doing what others do; it is essential that we do what is right and what we believe to be right. That is what we are getting back to — who is right? Who knows who is right? I happen to believe that no policy is set in stone

forever and there should always be room to move and improve. If people come up with a strong enough argument and the evidence to prove that we have got something wrong, I believe we ought to have the political strength to accept that and improve the model in a way that moves it forward. I think the proof of the pudding will be in the eating, and I say that this government has got this right.

What I have principally heard from the other side today has been about the policy it has announced rather than genuine debate on The Nationals' motion. The other side is in opposition. It is a bit desperate and has to grasp at every straw it can — and it is doing just that. This is a motion that should be opposed and on that basis — —

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! The member's time has expired.

**Ms HADDEN** (Ballarat) — I rise to speak in support of the motion. I congratulate Mr Hall on moving such a commonsense motion, which is what you would expect of him. At the outset I take the opportunity of thanking the Liberal Party and The Nationals for giving up 5 minutes and 10 minutes respectively of their valuable time to enable me to speak. I would otherwise not be given an opportunity to speak on this very important motion because I am not a member of a political party. I am an Independent member for Ballarat Province and have no speaking rights other than the opportunities provided by the graciousness of the opposition parties.

This is a very important motion. I do not know why government members are not supporting it. It probably has to do with funding issues, since the government now has a \$600 million black hole because it cannot flog off its interest in the Snowy hydro-electric scheme.

A preschool is not a child-care centre. I have a very firm view on that. Preschool education is just that: it is a very important year before a child enters primary school. The preschool year, or kindergarten year, is not and should never be considered part of a child-care centre regime or a babysitting class. The government is not prepared to support this motion because, as the Irish would say, it is clueless and did not think of it first. Everyone else has thought of it. Everyone else is pushing it, including the Australian Education Union, kindergarten teachers, kindergarten parents and members on the opposition side of the house, but the government is not prepared to even entertain commonsense.

I say to the government: if it is truly serious with all its rhetoric and jargon it publishes in its glossy magazines about A Fairer Victoria and improving the lot for Victorian families and parents, then it would transfer responsibility for preschools from the Department of Human Services to the department of education. It could afford it if it transferred across the Bracks bribe, as Mr Atkinson appropriately called it — the \$182 million School Start bonus. That has been seen for what it is — simply a vote-buying exercise by this government. The first half-payment of \$150 is to be made in term 3 to families of students who are currently in prep and year 7 a couple of months out from the 25 November election. If the government were serious about having a fair education regime for all children in this state, it could use that \$182 million to transfer responsibility for kindergartens across to the department of education.

I have done quite a bit of research on this issue. I asked my daughter this morning to tell me about her days at kinder. She said, 'Oh Mummy, that was too far back, I cannot remember that'. She is just 15 years old. When she thought about it she said she had had a lovely time. She learnt to read, she learnt all about families and she played with the animals at the Brown Hill kindergarten on the banks of the Yarrowee Creek in Ballarat. She also met Aboriginal people, who taught the preschoolers how to play the didgeridoo and throw boomerangs across the oval. She also learnt that there were a mixture of families in our community. She learnt that some children had a mummy, and a mummy who lived in the household, that other children had a daddy, and a daddy who lived in the household, and that other children had a mummy and a daddy who lived in the household. She thought that was all very acceptable and normal, and to her credit she has continued with that understanding and belief to this day.

Preschool education at a kindergarten is absolutely essential. It is not child care, it is education at the age of four. The government's own policy — the Department of Human Services policy updated in 2006 — has this definition:

Kindergarten — 'Kindergarten' (formerly known as preschool), is a universal early childhood program, funded by the state government, for children in the year prior to commencing primary school.

It says further:

A funded kindergarten program complies with all the requirements of the Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria.

Why then is responsibility for kindergartens not with the department of education? The very influential Australian Education Union says it should be. In its state budget submission under the heading 'Preschools' it said:

... the move of preschools, as part of an office of children's services, to the Department of Education and Training ...

That was what it called for. It also called for increased professional development to be provided, it called for early intervention services to be provided with special case status in respect of preschool teachers and it called for per capita grant levels for small rural preschools to be increased. It also went on to say in its submission at page 9:

It is the AEU's position that Australia's and Victoria's investment in preschools must be a priority.

And further:

The AEU again proposes that the government investigate the move of preschools as part of an office of children's services to the Department of Education and Training as a mechanism for guaranteeing not only quality preschool education, but also facilitating preschool/school transition.

It also said:

This proposal was strongly supported by the leadership groups established by Minister Kosky in the blueprint process.

Why is the government not going down that path? The very influential and sensible AEU is saying it should be done and the motion today says it should be done, but the government says no.

Let us look at New Zealand as an example. New Zealand is a very progressive country. It has laid the groundwork for a reform of the system of kindergartens. It provides 20 hours of free preschooling for every three and four-year-old by 2007. That is in New Zealand's budget. It aims for 100 per cent coverage of graduate early-years teachers by 2012. It also offers paid maternity leave and licenses child-care centres to take either babies or children aged over two.

We know that Victoria and New South Wales are the only states or territories in Australia that do not include kindergartens in their education system. I wonder what the real reason is. Is it because the government has not thought of it first? Is it because it has no money left in the budget because of the \$600 million black hole caused by the collapse of the sale of Snowy Hydro Ltd? That could be the reason. Or is it just that it does not want to think about it? Goodness knows, but I have not heard a sensible explanation from any government members as to why they do not support the transfer of

responsibility for kindergartens across to the department of education. The government is sitting on its hands and opposing what everyone else in the community wants.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on participation rates of children at kindergartens are very interesting. The government's budget paper 3 at page 112 under the heading 'Kindergarten and Child Care Services' shows funding for 58 000 children to participate in kindergarten in 2006–07. That is the target for the number of children the government will subsidise. It also shows the kindergarten participation rate at 96 per cent. The ABS statistics tell me that in Victoria, 74 800 children aged 4 had attended a preschool as at June 2005.

So a lot of children are at preschool and kindergarten — there could be a lot more, but it is expensive. Unless you are a low-income family and qualify for a subsidy, which is about 40 per cent, from the state government it is a very expensive proposition. The average fees are around \$750 per annum with the cheapest at about \$165 a term, which equates to about \$660 a year. The fees are prohibitive for a number of groups within the community, especially disadvantaged families and those on low or fixed incomes.

We know of the studies done, especially in the USA with the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study, a continuing scientific experiment that has identified the short-term and long-term benefits of a high-quality preschool education program for children living in poverty. Results from that study have demonstrated that children receiving the quality early learning program had better intellectual and social development than those who did not receive a preschool program, and that those benefits extended throughout their adulthood.

The participation rates for indigenous children and non-indigenous children are rather alarming. The ABS statistics show that the participation rate of indigenous children at kindergarten is just 46 per cent across Australia and that the participation rate of non-indigenous children at kindergarten is 57 per cent across Australia. That is alarming. It shows the difficulty with indigenous families accessing preschool and kindergarten. It is a question of cost. We, as a Parliament — and especially the government — ought to be very serious about making education at the preschool and kindergarten level accessible for all.

The government can do that. It has the money to do it, with the higher stamp duties paid in this state and with the gambling revenue — \$55 million a year comes out of Ballarat from gambling on pokies alone — that goes

to the government coffers. It certainly has the money to invest in children. If it is really serious about investing in Victorian families, in parents and children, then it ought to start spending the money at the very early stage — that is, the kindergarten level — so those children have the best chance and opportunities in life.

I must congratulate The Nationals on their policy for kindergarten and preschool funding and also the — —

**Hon. P. R. Hall** — Which we have had for four years.

**Ms HADDEN** — Yes; Mr Hall says they have had that for four years. It is a very progressive party. Also, the Leader of the Opposition in the other place is reported in today's *Age* as about to announce a Liberal Party policy of a \$730 per year grant to cover the cost of preschool fees and that that amount be paid directly to the kindergarten. In the same article the Victorian branch of the Australian Education Union welcomed that Liberal policy, saying:

If the grant is directed to preschool education —

as is proposed by the Liberal Party —

it will provide enormous relief, whereas currently (Labor's) \$300 bonus to parents is welcome in some areas, but is not needed in others ...

I concur with those comments.

It is important that the government takes a long, hard look at the issue of transferring responsibility for kindergartens across to the education department. As I say, kindergarten is the first year of the education cycle for children and ought to be supported by the government, and I really do not know why it will not go down that path.

There have been a number of excellent articles in the *Age* on kindergarten issues and the difficulties kindergartens are experiencing. One in particular, which was published on Sunday, 14 May, is headed 'Crunch time in the children's garden'. It goes through all the issues kindergartens are facing, saying they are facing a crisis:

with parents fatigued by fundraising and volunteering and newly qualified and experienced teachers deserting the system.

It runs through what the kindergarten teachers complain of:

Low job recognition; poor career prospects; few mentoring opportunities; professional isolation; excessive administration; having to retrain new committees as children

leave for school; and intentional and unintentional intimidation from parent management committees.

The article says that parents complain about the need for excessive fundraising, particularly in rural and lower socioeconomic areas, with some kinders having to raise \$9000 per annum to stay afloat and others having to raise \$17 000 a year to stay afloat. It also says that parent management committees complain of needing to spend up to 30 hours a week on committee work and doing the books, at the expense of time with their own families, and that they complain about knowing too much about the financial status of other parents, which information has to be investigated so as to claim government subsidies. It also states they struggle to find replacements for sick kinder teachers, and they have to ask teachers to drop their salaries when enrolments dip or consider increasing fees.

All of these issues have been around for a long time, and unless the government takes them seriously there will be a lot more dissatisfaction amongst this important group of parents of kindergarten children.

The article is interesting where it refers to figures from an Australian Education Union survey of Monash, Melbourne and RMIT university courses that offer early childhood education. It states:

Up to 50 per cent of early childhood education graduates opt to work in lowly paid child-care positions rather than as kindergarten teachers because they offer full-time work and a chance to learn through —

their colleagues. It also states:

Of the teachers who qualify to teach from birth to 12 years, just 15 per cent are opting for kindergarten and in past years this has been as few as 5 per cent. This is despite 50 per cent expressing an interest in preschool teaching at university entry interviews.

Another issue is that Mr Bracks, the Premier, told the *Sunday Age* — —

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! The member's time has expired.

**Hon. P. R. HALL** (Gippsland) — I want to start my comments in reply by thanking the Honourables Andrea Coote, Damian Drum, Richard Dalla-Riva and Bruce Atkinson, and Ms Hadden, for their expressed support for this motion. I also want to thank Mr Viney, the Honourable Kaye Darveniza, Ms Hirsh and Mr Smith for their participation in this debate and at least taking the opportunity to express a view. I am disappointed that they feel disinclined to support this motion. However, there are some rays of hope in the

way they contributed to the debate. That gives us some hope for the future.

In responding to the comments made by some of those who oppose the motion I start by quickly referring to some comments made by the Honourable Kaye Darveniza and Mr Smith about their express surprise that The Nationals would be supporting a policy position of the Australian Education Union. I say in response to that that they should not be surprised. We, as a party, are not philosophically locked into supporting unions, nor are we philosophically locked into opposing unions. If they have a position to put which we believe is a sensible, commonsense policy position, we are prepared to look at it on its merits and support it or otherwise reject it.

The Honourable Kaye Darveniza and Mr Smith may be surprised at the extent of commonality between The Nationals' policy and union policy in some areas, particularly in the Australian Education Union and also the forestry division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). There are positions on which I think there is a great deal of commonality between the views expressed by The Nationals and those of the union movement, and there are others.

The Honourable Carolyn Hirsh seemed to have as her prime objection to this motion the idea that preschools would be co-located with primary schools. I think Mr Atkinson disposed of that idea adequately in his response, but I will say this: this model, which sees responsibility for preschools moved to the department of education, does not require facilities to be co-located. In my contribution I said we need to be flexible enough to take on board the circumstances that apply locally and the wishes of local people. In some cases this may mean a co-located facility, while in other cases it may mean an annexed facility. There is plenty of flexibility.

I go to the comments of Mr Viney, the government's lead speaker on this motion. He said the issue of administrative responsibility is not all that relevant — what services preschools are getting is the main issue that should be considered. I say to Mr Viney and others in the Labor Party: the real question is whether our current preschool system is fair and sustainable. That is the question you really have to ask.

I was disappointed not to get a response from the Labor government on the three main issues I put to the house this morning. They are the issue of the ongoing viability of staffing for preschools, the cost of preschools and the workload on parents. I remind the house of the staffing issue. I quoted an Australian Education Union survey of

its members that suggested that over the next five years 30 per cent of preschool teachers in this state will retire, with 25 per cent likely to move into the school sector. Over five years that means 55 per cent — or about 1100 — of Victoria's 2000 preschool teachers will move out of the system. In any one year only 20 new teachers come into the system. Since 5 times 20 equals 100, we will lose 1100 preschool teachers and gain 100. I suggest that if this eventuates there will be a real crisis in the delivery of preschool services. We will simply not have enough staff to deliver the services we all expect. No-one from the ALP today has rebutted that argument or made any comment on the point about staffing.

The same applies to the issue of parents' workload. Certainly government members acknowledged it was a problem, but all they wanted to do was blame the Kennett government for it. As I think someone else said, the government has had seven years to address the problem of the excessive workload of parents who serve on volunteer committees of management and the issue of cost. In his contribution Mr Viney said that in his day fees were \$80 to \$100 per year but that under the Kennett government they went up to \$80 to \$100 per term to somewhere between \$300 and \$400 per year. Today they are \$700 per year.

There is a real crisis in terms of staffing, cost and the excessive workload of parents. The Liberal Party has come on board, supporting The Nationals' fair and reasonable position. I now call on the Labor Party to show some commonsense — to show the spirit of what is fair and equitable — and support this motion.

**House divided on motion:**

*Ayes, 17*

Atkinson, Mr	Drum, Mr
Baxter, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )	Hadden, Ms
Bishop, Mr	Hall, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )
Bowden, Mr	Koch, Mr
Brideson, Mr	Lovell, Ms
Coote, Mrs	Stoney, Mr
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Strong, Mr
Davis, Mr D. McL.	Vogels, Mr
Davis, Mr P. R.	

*Noes, 21*

Argondizzo, Ms	Mikakos, Ms
Broad, Ms	Mitchell, Mr
Buckingham, Mrs	Nguyen, Mr
Carbines, Ms	Pullen, Mr
Darveniza, Ms	Romanes, Ms
Eren, Mr	Scheffer, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )
Hilton, Mr	Smith, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )
Hirsh, Ms	Somyurek, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Thomson, Ms

McQuilten, Mr  
Madden, Mr

Viney, Mr

*Pairs*

Forwood, Mr  
Rich-Phillips, Mr

Lenders, Mr  
Theophanous, Mr

**Motion negatived.**

**Sitting suspended 1.04 p.m. until 2.08 p.m.**

**ABSENCE OF MINISTER**

**Mr GAVIN JENNINGS** (Minister for Aged Care) — As a courtesy to members of the house, I wish to inform them that the Leader of the Government, Mr Lenders, is currently attending the funeral of Mr Ian Little and will not attend question time today.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**State volleyball centre: funding**

**Hon. B. N. ATKINSON** (Koonung) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, the Honourable Justin Madden. I note the government's announcements about the proposed state volleyball centre at Dandenong and certainly believe it is a very good project. In particular I note an announcement on 20 October 2004 that \$5 million had been allocated by the state government to the project with construction to start mid-2005 and completion in 2006, which is about now. A further announcement on 22 April 2005 indicated that an additional \$2 million had been allocated for the project and construction would start this year with completion of the centre in 2007, so it is another project that is over time and over budget. I ask the minister why the project has been delayed by more than 12 months and why the cost of the state volleyball centre has increased by at least 40 per cent.

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I welcome the question and any questions from the member opposite on sport and recreation. It is good to see Mr Atkinson getting his quota up at last.

This will be a great development. Members would appreciate the comments I have made in this chamber not only about this project but also about sporting participation in this state. As a result of the high levels of increased participation in sport in Dandenong, we could see that this venue was an underperforming asset. It had a number of basketball courts which were not

being used. We entered into a partnership by funding the local council to upgrade that facility and turn it into a state volleyball centre. In the process of doing so and given the increased participation rates, we have seen demand increase at that centre for not only basketball but also for volleyball. Across the course of time we have seen increased participation, increased demand and the need to enhance the centre's scope.

Hence we have provided sufficient funds to improve what was an underperforming asset. It was underperforming because the Liberal Party, as you see if you look back seven years to what it was doing when it was in government, was not investing in communities. We are investing in communities and in grassroots participation. We are seeing demand for improved facilities and we are investing in those. Over the course of the next few months work will develop on that project. I expect we will see not only a tremendous outcome for state volleyball and for basketball in that community — where we are seeing demand increase significantly — but even greater levels of participation. We will probably also see a few champion volleyballers and more champion basketballers come out of that region.

We are making the investment, we are facing the challenges and we are happy to support communities by funding them to improve their facilities, as we do with councils. I will be happy to talk about that in more detail. We are making the investments, whereas members on that side of the chamber would not invest when they were in government. We are proud to see the investments paying off through increased participation.

*Supplementary question*

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Hon. B. N. ATKINSON** (Koonung) — It was not such a great answer actually. The minister made a remark about an underperforming asset. I advise the minister that the basketball facilities at Dandenong have been extensively used over more than three decades. There is nothing new about the level of support there. In fact that centre is the base of a very successful Women's National Basketball League team.

The subject I went to in my question was the establishment of a state volleyball centre. The minister seems to have ignored this and to have suggested that the resources were being put in the first instance towards upgrading the basketball facilities. I ask the minister if he could advise the house if any further government funds above the previously announced \$7 million allocation have been assigned to this

project — recognising that that is a 40 per cent increase in the cost as compared to the original announcement — and when the state volleyball centre will be completed.

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I am happy to clarify that in the short time I have available. I also encourage the member to ask further questions on this matter, because I am very pleased about the level of investment we are making in community and regional facilities. This project is being delivered by the local government in that area. It is delivering the project, we are funding it.

**Hon. B. N. Atkinson** interjected.

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — For Mr Atkinson's information, we have made two funding allocations, one of which was for the initial project. As I said before, the level of participation has increased in not only volleyball but also basketball. One of the basketball courts that was to be used for volleyball is in such demand for basketball that we have had to change the scope of the project. That was requested by all the stakeholders. We are making that investment but the Liberals would never have done so. I will continue to tell members opposite about the increased participation rates, because we are rising to the challenge and making the investments where they need to be made.

**Aged care: Doveton facility**

**Mr PULLEN** (Higinbotham) — My question is to the Minister for Aged Care, Mr Jennings. Can the minister advise the house of recent actions by the Bracks government to improve the access to residential aged care of older people living in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs?

**An honourable member** — You are showing an undue interest in that, Mr Pullen — a vested interest!

**Mr GAVIN JENNINGS** (Minister for Aged Care) — Mr Pullen does have an interest in the wellbeing of senior members of his community. He stands up for his constituents and for the wellbeing of all seniors in south-eastern metropolitan Melbourne, if not in an area broader than that. The good thing about Mr Pullen's question is that it provides me with the opportunity to build on what I reported to the house in connection with the budget — that is, the fantastic \$23 million commitment to redevelop the Kingston Centre and the facilities at that centre.

Yesterday I had the good fortune to be in the company of the member for Dandenong in the other place at the announcement of the new residential aged care facility

in Chestnut Road, Doveton. Members of this chamber have heard me talk many times about the redevelopment of residential aged care right throughout Victoria. Indeed during my period as minister I have been able to talk about the 42 residential aged care facilities that we have developed across Victoria. The vast majority of those have been in country areas — 39 of the 42 have been in rural and regional Victoria. This is one of those comparatively rare occasions on which I can stand up with some degree of pride and satisfaction and say that we are investing in significant facilities in the metropolitan area designed to cater particularly for residents of our community who have high-care and complex-care needs.

We have made a \$34.5 million commitment to build a state-of-the-art, 100-bed facility at Doveton that will cater for people with high-care and complex-care needs. In particular the facility will support the needs of people in the seniors population of the south-east catchment of Melbourne who have mental health issues and conditions. I am very pleased to say that we have used the site in Chestnut Road, Doveton, in a very useful way that will tie in with the existing facilities provided through the senior citizens club there. In fact I am very pleased to say that we have recycled the community benefit of this block of land, which was previously used as outdated walk-up residential accommodation for seniors. The building was flattened some years ago when it was considered to be an inappropriate style of affordable housing for the citizens of Doveton. We are reinvesting by developing this facility.

Yesterday I was joined by not only my colleague from the other place but also representatives of Southern Health, who provide quality care each and every day for the people of the south-east and who are committed to continuing to provide quality care. We viewed the plans that have been prepared by Tectura, a wonderful architectural firm that has been involved in the redevelopment of a number of aged care facilities across Victoria. Tectura is committed to quality care provision and to first-class facilities which are designed on environmental and sustainability principles and which incorporate sympathetic design and garden landscaping to encourage members of the community to be actively involved in the wellbeing of older people who are in residential aged care so that those facilities will be living and breathing community centres as distinct from isolated facilities. In fact, we will deliver through this facility in Doveton a first-class service to meet the needs of the ageing population in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

### Commonwealth Games: benefits

**Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS** (Eumemmerring) — My question is to the Minister for Commonwealth Games. Last week the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that the growth in state final demand, or spending, for the entire March quarter for the whole of Victoria was just \$67 million. How does the minister reconcile this with his claim that the Commonwealth Games boosted spending by \$270 million for the month of March?

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** (Minister for Commonwealth Games) — I welcome Mr Rich-Phillips's interest in the Commonwealth Games and particularly his questions on the subject, which have been a long time coming. When it comes to economic activity and growth in Victoria, if you understand your economics and the investment in the Commonwealth Games —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — Sometimes I wonder whether opposition members do not fully comprehend economics. None of us can pretend to be masters when it comes that subject, but I suspect many opposition members know far less than they pretend to know.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — They are pretty good at yelling but sometimes they are not very good at listening — and you can tell that by the voter turnout for them at the last election.

The growth from the Commonwealth Games will not happen in one particular month or one particular quarter. Let us have a look what will happen. If you appreciate the multiplier effect, particularly when it comes to infrastructure, Mr Atkinson and Mr Rich-Phillips will realise that the \$450 million project at the Melbourne Cricket Ground alone will not arise as a spike in one particular month but has been going on for years. The growth in the economy had been occurring for years in the lead-up to and occurred during the course of the games. When you consider the opportunities that were provided to major businesses and that 87 per cent of procurement in infrastructure expenditure was picked up by Australian companies, you realise that did not happen in one particular month, one particular week or in the 11 days of the Commonwealth Games but in the weeks and months leading up to the games.

When you look at some of those statistics across the course of the games, you see that there were some

spikes, but that will not occur right across the economy. We all appreciate that if you measure the economic activity over several years you will see the growth. That is supported by the growth that occurred in Victoria across that time over and above what happened in other states. I advise Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips that investment spending grew more in real terms in the March quarter in Victoria than in any other state. I suspect that was because of the Commonwealth Games. Some of the additional expenditure is likely to have been related to the Commonwealth Games — for example, expenditure on hotels, cafes and restaurants grew by an unusually high 3.8 per cent. Spending on recreation and cultural services grew by 1.9 per cent. Of course not all additional expenditure was related to the holding of the games, but a sufficient amount of it no doubt would have been.

As I mentioned before, the vast majority of the investment that helped grow the economy has been occurring for years and years. Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips would know that because of the detailed questions he has been able to ask at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on a number of occasions over many years in relation to the Commonwealth Games. I suspect that if Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips reflected on those comments made in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee over a number of years, he would see the examples of that growth that have been reported to that committee.

*Supplementary question*

**Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS** (Eumemmerring) — The minister seems confused, because the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures of last week show that Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory all grew faster than Victoria during the month of March. Those are the official figures. The minister's colleague the Minister for Tourism in the other place has issued a press release saying that the impact of the games for the month of March was \$270 million. Given that all the official independent statistics consistently show a lower economic impact from the games than the minister claims, will he now publicly release the full KPMG report on which his claims are based?

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** (Minister for Commonwealth Games) — I have just outlined where the growth occurred. It is worth appreciating that in real terms spending in Victoria grew in the March quarter more than in any other state. That is what I said in my answer to the last question, and I am repeating it now. Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips should look at the detail about consumer spending. He is being very selective in

expressing what his statistics show. It is worth appreciating that the growth from the games occurred over many years. When we report comprehensively on the games, although it might disappoint the member opposite, that report will reinforce what a fantastic event the games were and what a fantastic job this government did in delivering those games.

**Housing: Building More Homes Together program**

**Ms ROMANES** (Melbourne) — My question is addressed to the Minister for Housing, Ms Broad. Can the minister inform the house what the government will deliver through implementation of the first stage of the Building More Homes Together program?

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Housing) — I thank the member for her question and for her interest in boosting the number of affordable homes for Victorian families to live in. The Bracks government believes every Victorian deserves a decent and affordable place to live. That is why the Bracks government will deliver 107 new homes as part of a \$16.3 million package in the first round of the innovative Building More Homes Together program. Under that program the government has contracted with two developers — Common Equity Housing Ltd and Demar Developments — that are in a consortium with Community Housing Victoria Ltd to construct new affordable rental housing across the state. The program involves builders, developers and community agencies working with government on projects to provide a mixture of private and community homes.

We as a government have gone down this path because we want value for money and because we think housing associations offer a positive new way of providing affordable rental housing. By working side by side with developers and housing associations the government is able to complement its own funds with private investment, and that means we can deliver more homes for families who need them. In this case the government has secured \$4.8 million in equity from the private sector that will deliver 30 per cent more housing than the government could purchase through public funding alone.

I am pleased to say that slabs will be poured and frames will go up later this year as construction of the first homes in this round of the program gets under way. The majority of these homes will be one and two-bedroom units to meet demand. I am pleased to say that many parts of Victoria will benefit. We have worked hard to ensure this program will help families in both metropolitan and regional Victoria, because we

are a government that governs for the whole of Victoria. Families from Carrum Downs to Shepparton, from Epping to Greensborough, from Ballarat to Mildura, from Morwell to Warrnambool and at Rosebud will all benefit from this program. The homes will be owned and managed by not-for-profit housing agencies and will be available for long-term rental to low-income households.

I am also pleased to advise the house that there is more to come. I plan to announce a second round of building contracts under the program later this year. The Bracks government will keep working on innovative programs like this one so that more Victorian families will have decent and affordable homes to live in.

### **Housing: Footscray accommodation**

**Hon. W. R. BAXTER** (North Eastern) — My question is also directed to the Minister for Housing. I particularly noted the minister's laudable reference in her answer to Ms Romanes that every Victorian deserves a decent place to live, and I refer to reports that residents on a Footscray supported accommodation assistance program were fed a diet of pasta and salad for weeks on end. I ask: how is it that such a circumstance could occur under her watch?

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Housing) — The member's question is more properly directed to my colleague, but I will respond by indicating to the member that in circumstances where Victorians for whatever reason find themselves in difficulties and without a place to live, whether as a result of private housing circumstances or any other circumstances, then agencies that are within my responsibility — the Office of Housing and community housing agencies that are funded through the supported accommodation assistance program — will make every effort to assist people to find appropriate short-term and long-term accommodation.

In these circumstances, of which I am well aware, a range of agencies that are funded through the Department of Human Services are alerted to the fact that people need assistance, and certainly those agencies that are funded through my portfolio will be rendering every possible assistance to people who need to find alternative appropriate accommodation.

#### *Supplementary question*

**Hon. W. R. BAXTER** (North Eastern) — I note the minister's attempt to deflect the question, and I refer the minister to page 183 of the 31st edition of the *Victorian*

*Government Directory*, which says that the Office of Housing provides and:

... works in partnership with the community sector for the provision of supported accommodation assistance program (SAAP) services.

I suggest that the government's own document sheets it home to the minister. That being so, I ask: what audit arrangements are in place to ensure that SAAP providers deliver appropriate services to their grossly disadvantaged clients?

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Housing) — Further in response to the member's question, he is correct that I am responsible for the supported accommodation assistance program (SAAP). That is a matter I am very proud of, given that this government, unlike the previous government, has more than doubled funding while the Liberal Party in Canberra has cut funding to this program. This is a program which is strongly supported by the Bracks government. However, the member is not correct in identifying this particular facility as a SAAP provider, and I reiterate what I have said in response to his first question, that the agencies I am responsible for will render every assistance to people who need it in terms of alternative accommodation. He is not correct in saying that this facility is a SAAP provider.

### **Sport and recreation: facility grants**

**Hon. J. H. EREN** (Geelong) — I direct my question to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Mr Madden. I ask the minister to advise the house how the Bracks government is getting on with the job of providing all communities with access to quality sporting infrastructure through the community facilities funding program.

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I take great pleasure in being able to answer such an impressive question from the member. I appreciate his level of support, not only for community sporting groups in his region but right across the board when it comes to sports funding in this state.

The community facilities funding program, which is a hallmark program for Sport and Recreation Victoria, sees facilities funded right across the state. It sees minor, major and pool funding provided to councils across Victoria. What is spectacular about this is the impressive outcomes we see from it. First of all, the objectives of the program are to encourage a planned approach to sports development and to support high-quality, accessible, inclusive and robust sport and recreation communities across the state, and by that

investment to strengthen communities through recreation and sporting participation.

The program, the results of which I recently announced, opened for applications in August last year. As members might be aware, I announced a number of successful projects. The member for Evelyn in the other place, Heather McTaggart, was at Chirnside Park Football Club when I announced a grant of \$29 000 for the oval lighting project. That was in response to an increased demand, particularly because of the great job the volunteers are doing in those communities and the huge turnout of juniors. The club needs those lights to get better value out of the existing facilities. That is just one of the 153 successful projects — minor facilities and planning grants — across Victoria to the value of \$5 million that were funded through this program.

The grants range from \$43 406 to the East Gippsland shire in the electorate of Mr Hall and the Honourable Philip Davis for the development of a skate park in Orbost to \$50 000 to the Moriac Tennis Club in the electorate of Mr Eren and Ms Carbines for facility improvements and \$50 000 to the Dunkeld Bowling Club in the electorate of Mr Vogels and Mr Koch for the installation of a synthetic green. It shows that we are providing opportunities for all Victorians. That translates into grassroots participation figures.

In addition to the recent funding announcement, in December we announced 28 grants to the value of \$10.4 million through the program for 19 major facility projects and 9 Better Pools projects across Victoria. These announcements bring the government's total investment in sport and recreation infrastructure through the sport and recreation community facilities funding program to — and get this, President! — over \$118 million, and I know Mr Drum will appreciate that. The number of projects — and members might want to write this down because it is particularly important and impressive — totals 1450 community projects funded across the course of this government.

**An honourable member** — How many?

**Hon. J. M. MADDEN** — I will say it again: 1450 community projects have been funded, and through the \$118 million investment, we have seen a multiplier effect of the order of \$400 million building better communities right across the state.

### **Local government: building regulations**

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** (East Yarra) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Local Government. I refer to the introduction of

regulation 312 of Building Regulations 2006, which is scheduled to commence today. Does the minister agree with the Victorian Municipal Building Surveyors Group and many councils that the regulation will reduce the revenue received by councils, and if so, what steps will she take to reduce the impact of these revenue cuts on council services?

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Local Government) — In response, I do not have a copy of that regulation in front of me. I will be happy to take the question on notice and respond to the member.

### *Supplementary question*

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** (East Yarra) — The Victorian Municipal Building Surveyors Group has estimated the reductions in revenue for councils as follows: Bayside, \$134 000; Glen Eira, \$54 000; Stonnington, \$34 000; Moira, \$5800; and more than \$100 000 in Boroondara. I also note that the Municipal Association of Victoria wrote to the minister on 11 May saying that the capping of fees for services that local government must provide is an unnecessary undermining of the autonomy of local government. When the minister comes back I ask her to say why she, as part of cabinet, has supported this undermining of local government autonomy.

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Local Government) — It is an extraordinary question from a member of a political party that sacked every council bar one in this state and put in its mates as administrators. For it to now claim to be the defender of democracy in local government shows an extraordinary hide. It is quite remarkable.

As I indicated in my first response, I will take the matter on notice and respond to the member in due course.

**Hon. D. McL. Davis** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! Mr David Davis has asked his question. I ask him to be quiet.

### **Consumer affairs: building practices**

**Hon. J. G. HILTON** (Western Port) — My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, the Honourable Marsha Thomson. The Bracks government takes very seriously its responsibilities to protect Victorians from dodgy builders and building practices. Building or renovating a home is one of the most significant transactions that a Victorian consumer may undertake. Can the minister advise the house of any recent activities that the Bracks government has

undertaken to protect Victorian consumers from dodgy builders?

**Hon. M. R. THOMSON** (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — I thank the member for his question. I know Mr Hilton is keen to ensure that consumers in this state are properly and appropriately protected, and the Bracks government certainly takes that responsibility very seriously.

Consumer Affairs Victoria spends a lot of time informing traders about their rights and obligations as traders, and about doing the right thing by consumers and acting responsibly. It is very proactive in that exercise. We do not apologise for taking action against those traders that do the wrong thing. We have a legislative regime in place to protect consumers, and we want to maintain and stand by that legislation.

This is in contrast to the Liberal Party, which, if its consumer affairs policy stays in place, will deregulate the industry. As a matter of fact its policy does not even mention the issue of builders and legislation to protect consumers. As the member who asked the question rightfully pointed out, consumers who purchase their homes, or build or renovate their homes, are obviously expending large sums of money, probably the most they will spend in their entire lives, and they have a right to expect that they will be treated appropriately in those transactions.

It will not surprise members that the Bracks government has been running a blitz on dodgy builders and taking action to bring to court those builders who are ripping off Victorian consumers. Thirty-three builders have been prosecuted by Consumer Affairs Victoria for significant breaches in the building area, and seven prosecutions are still before the courts this financial year.

CAV has especially targeted builders who accept large deposits but then do not commence the work they promised. That sort of practice is particularly cruel for consumers and families. In recent cases builders like Slobodan Bogdanovic in Melbourne and Jeff Vandersluys in regional Victoria have been convicted and fined for breaking the law and ripping off consumers. The prosecution of dodgy builders has resulted in fines totalling close to \$230 000.

We will continue to work with those traders who want to do the right thing, to ensure they understand their obligations under the law, but we will also go after those who are doing the wrong thing and ensure they are taken before the courts to be dealt with in the way they should be dealt with. I want to take this

opportunity to commit to Victorian families that we will continue to protect their interests and ensure that Victoria is a great place to live and raise a family.

### **Motorised scooters: safety**

**Hon. ANDREA COOTE** (Monash) — My question is to the Minister for Aged Care. I have raised with the minister on many occasions in this place the safety of our senior Victorians driving their motorised scooters. I have called for him to develop regulations to protect these people. It is vital that our senior Victorians have the independence and flexibility which scooters give them, but it is vital that they use them safely. Tragically, more than six elderly Victorians have died and more than 152 have needed hospital treatment because the minister has neglected to do something about this issue. When is the minister going to implement safety regulations for motorised scooters?

**Mr GAVIN JENNINGS** (Minister for Aged Care) — I am grateful for any interest shown by any opposition member on matters that deal with the wellbeing of older members of the community. I am not quite sure how many times is the ‘many’ that the member says she has raised the issue here. I certainly know the member would be acutely aware that regulations relating to transport issues, whether they be motorised small vehicles or those used on roads and footpaths in Victoria, are the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Transport in the other place. She would be acutely aware of that, and acutely aware — —

**Hon. B. N. Atkinson** — ‘She’! What has happened to Mr Batchelor?

**Mr GAVIN JENNINGS** — No. It scanned nicely in the sentence I was uttering but which Mr Atkinson was not listening to. In the sentence I was constructing, my reference to the honourable member was gender specific and correct to my understanding.

The substantive answer is that I am happy to take advice from the member or any member of the Victorian community about the best way in which those regulations could take place. I am happy to engage with the appropriate minister and the appropriate regulatory body within the regulatory framework in Victoria to deal with that matter. If the member wishes to continue to pursue this issue, I would be happy to receive any suggestions about the way in which it can be implemented.

*Supplementary question*

**Hon. ANDREA COOTE** (Monash) — Can I ask the minister to make representations on behalf of senior Victorians to his colleague for advice on what speed scooters will be allowed to go on the footpaths?

**Mr GAVIN JENNINGS** (Minister for Aged Care) — My brain is obviously not working fast enough to deal with the complexities of this issue! The issue would normally have been raised on the adjournment, but maybe we should not be hung up about the form in which it is pursued.

I would be happy to pursue the matter in conjunction with my colleague the Minister for Transport, and I will not encourage him to do a survey to answer the member's question, but I think we need to be mindful about what the capacity of those vehicles may be, the way in which they should be used, and what risk they may present to riders or pedestrians in the community.

**Rural and regional Victoria: responsible serving of alcohol**

**Hon. R. G. MITCHELL** (Central Highlands) — Can the Minister for Consumer Affairs advise the house what the Bracks government is doing to promote the responsible serving of alcohol in rural and regional Victoria?

**Hon. M. R. THOMSON** (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — I thank the honourable member for his question. The Bracks government has done a lot to ensure that responsible serving of alcohol (RSA) training is taken very seriously, and that it is available to employees in licensed venues, regardless of where these employees may live.

I am pleased to say that during the past year more than 40 000 Victorians have undertaken responsible serving of alcohol training. Employees in pubs, bars and clubs as well as packaged liquor outlets are required to take responsible serving of alcohol training courses.

We understand the importance of providing this training in all areas, and as a result of the work that has been undertaken under the Bracks government there are now more than 15 000 Victorians who have completed responsible serving of alcohol training in regional Victoria and who are now in a better position to responsibly serve alcohol in their jobs within country Victoria.

Unlike members opposite, we actually do take an interest in regional and rural areas of Victoria and in ensuring that services are provided in those areas and

that training is extended into rural and regional Victoria. Of the 400 registered training organisations that provide RSA training, 111 are in regional Victoria. These comprise mainly TAFE colleges, as well as universities, colleges of advanced education, secondary schools and private training providers.

RSA training is now available from regional areas as diverse as the South West Institute of TAFE in Warrnambool, the Sunraysia Institute of TAFE in Mildura — I know the Honourable Barry Bishop will be interested to hear that — and the Gippsland Education Centre in Warragul. Over 230 trainers have been approved to provide training across regional Victoria.

As well as face-to-face training, Consumer Affairs Victoria also provides a refresher course online, which means that those who are already in the business of providing alcohol in a responsible way can undertake their refresher course in a more convenient environment. It means that staff who work in bars, pubs and clubs can keep up to date with any changes that are occurring; they can meet their legal requirements and learn about the latest techniques, and this is just another example of how the Bracks government is governing for all Victorians and ensuring that our services reach all parts of Victoria.

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Answers**

**Mr GAVIN JENNINGS** (Minister for Aged Care) — I have answers to the following questions on notice: 6612, 7024, 7253, 7631, 7673, 7715, 7970, 7971.

**TRANSFER OF LAND (ALPINE RESORTS) BILL**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed from 13 June; motion of Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government).**

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** (East Yarra) — I am pleased to make a contribution to the debate on the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill, and in doing so I indicate that the opposition has some concerns about aspects of the bill, although the broader principles deep in the bill are not things that we oppose. The greater lease security and the improved processes for registration of leases are things that we support, but since this bill was introduced into the chamber, our level of concern about

a number of matters in alpine areas, particularly Mount Stirling, has increased massively, and for that reason it is the opposition's intention to move a reasoned amendment, and I will move that now:

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 government provides a guarantee to the Victorian community and key stakeholders that no high-level development will be undertaken on Mount Stirling and that Mount Stirling will remain a pristine area administered consistent with the recommendations of the Mount Stirling environment effects statement of May 1996'.

That environment effects statement (EES) is a very important document from the Office of Planning and Heritage which followed exhaustive community discussion and consultation. It was founded on good science and good supporting documentation and should, in my view, be the bible for the management of Mount Stirling into the future.

Until further work is done that indicates something to the contrary, I believe it is very important that that document be given the credence and support it deserves, and I have to say that the opposition became very concerned in the recent period, with the government's decision to put on the web site of the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board a new strategic plan called the Buller-Stirling 2011 strategic management plan. That plan is a chilling document which lays out a future for Mount Stirling that is very different from what the community acceptance is and from what, in my view, is proper.

Concurrent with the appearance of that document there are also regulations that govern aspects of the future of the mountain, and a series of meetings was held where the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board met the Mount Stirling development task force.

In those meetings the cat was let out of the bag. The Mount Stirling development task force was told that the board was enthusiastic. As it has been related to me, it was made very clear that the board was enthusiastic for high-end user accommodation. The idea that there would be massive development consistent with the standards at some of the other big alpine resorts — Buller, Hotham and so forth — taking place on Mount Stirling is anathema to many people. The Honourable Graeme Stoney and people from the Mount Stirling development task force, including Dr Alan Kerr and Mr Martin Hunt, fought very hard through that period in the 1990s to get the arrangements to a point of community acceptance that Mount Stirling would not be developed willy-nilly and would not be

developed into a monstrous resort with huge towers and frightening levels of development that would despoil the area and fundamentally change the nature of the usage of the mountain.

Mount Stirling is used fundamentally for a wide range of recreational activities. It is best known for its role in cross-country skiing, and that should be protected into the future. That sort of skiing will not occur if there is high-end user accommodation put on the mountain. If we see towers and massive developments put on Mount Stirling, we will not see such skiing. I have to say that the minister and the department have been quite weak on these things in the recent period. The minister has been flapping around and just will not come out and say super clearly that this board is on the wrong tram and that he is not going to allow the development of Mount Stirling in the way it has been talking about.

I want to make the point here that the development plan — the strategic management plan — that the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board put on its web site has since been pulled off, so this document is now no longer available to the community. If ever there was a sign of a guilty conscience from this government, if ever there was a sign of secrecy and underhand activity, if ever there was a sign of a slippery piece of behaviour, this is it. The document goes up — —

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** — It's you!

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — Where is it? Mr Mitchell represents that area, so can he say why on earth that document is not up there now? We have a copy of it, but the public cannot get copies now because it has been hidden from view. What I think has happened is that the Buller and Stirling management board has had a pretty good kick; the government has decided it has to be quietened down and cooled down quite quickly. The minister has been embarrassed by what has begun to develop up there on the mountain. He was not happy when he went up for the opening of the ski season that people were asking questions everywhere he went. I have had a number of those points relayed to me. The fact is that the government knew it was wrong. Unfortunately I think the government still has this plan deeper down and has sought to hide it from the community.

It is worth reading part of the mission statement for the resort. A number of points are made there, and I seek to incorporate the precise words into *Hansard*. At 5.3.1, on page 14, the document states:

Reference the Alpine Resorts 2020 strategy as the overarching strategic direction to guide planning decisions in the resorts.

I will come to that document in a moment. In the next column it talks about the provision of accommodation such as tented accommodation. At 5.3.2 on page 15 it goes further and in relation to accommodation says:

Encourage the provision to the public of a diverse range of quality accommodation ...

Evaluate a range of accommodation on Mount Stirling and at Mirimbah.

All I can say is that these descriptions of accommodation are not consistent with the environment effects statement. These statements in the development document that was pulled off the web site caused great offence to many who know and love Mount Stirling. I think the government did intend to do something there, but that has been chilled off, at least temporarily. What is required now is a more active process to ensure that the government does not proceed in an unhelpful way.

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** — Your nose will grow!

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — What does Mr Mitchell think the documents meant? Why has the government taken it off the web site? Through you, President, it is extraordinary that the opposition cannot explain why the government slipped the document out of public view in that way.

**Ms Carbines** — I will explain it all to you.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — I will be listening very carefully to Ms Carbines. The truth of the matter is that we know what was going on — and the community knows what was going on.

The Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill amends the Transfer of Land Act to include new leasing provisions and amends the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 to add to the leasing and licensing powers of the alpine resorts management boards. The significance of that is that lease arrangements on the mountain and the registration of leases will be made more secure. We support that greater security on Mount Buller, Mount Hotham and the other mountains that make up our alpine accommodation areas.

What we do not support is the application of this bill to Mount Stirling. For that reason we will move an amendment to excise Mount Stirling from this bill and to limit its effect to those areas that are not Mount Stirling. If the government has no plans for high level accommodation, if the government has no plans

for development at Mount Stirling that is inconsistent with the environment effects statement, it will have no trouble at all in supporting this amendment because it will not be necessary to provide that approach on Mount Stirling. If the government does have a secret agenda, if the government has not put away its approach to building greater levels of accommodation on Mount Stirling, it will almost certainly oppose this amendment that I will seek to move in the committee stage.

I make it clear that the opposition is concerned about the future of Mount Stirling, and I have to say this is not the first time the Labor Party has had a go at Mount Stirling. I can even go back to the 1980s. A letter to the *Age* dated 29 May 1995 from David Malay of Preston refers to the then shadow environment minister, Mr Barry Pullen, who had belatedly discovered Mount Stirling. The letter says:

Where has he been for the past 10 years. More precisely where was he in 1989 when the previous government —

the Cain and Kirner governments, in which Mr Pullen was a minister —

proposed a real taxpayer-funded fully fledged \$350 million downhill resort for the mountain with an alpine village accommodating 5000 people?

Labor has form on this, it has a very sorry history on this — —

**Ms Carbines** — The member does!

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — We do not. I have got to say to Ms Carbines that people like Mr Stoney and others have been at the forefront of protecting the mountain over a long time. He may well remember Mr Pullen's statements and that as a minister in the Cain and Kirner governments Mr Pullen planned a \$350 million downhill resort on the mountain, with a village accommodating 5000 people. That is the sort of accommodation that we are very concerned about. We do not want to see 5000 people accommodated on Mount Stirling, like the Cain and Kirner governments sought to do. We do not want to see a development of that nature. We think it is inconsistent.

I will quote from the news release of the Mount Stirling development task force of 28 May 2006 headed 'Hotel horror on Mount Stirling'.

**Ms Carbines** — There have been a few sleeps since then.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — I know there have, and I know that the minister — —

**Ms Carbines** — It has been 20 years since then!

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — No, I am about to quote from a news release of May 2006. It states:

Abandoning the Mount Stirling EES, the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Management Board is proposing 'high-end user accommodation' on Mount Stirling.

The task force news release discusses section 5.3 of the 2011 management plan and says that in a meeting with the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board and the Mount Stirling development task force the board had made it clear that it was enthusiastic for what the board calls high-end user accommodation developments on Mount Stirling. The news release reviews the history:

The Mount Stirling environment effects statement 1997 rejected accommodation options for Mount Stirling. The state-funded EES was exemplary in its process and provides a comprehensive planning document for the future of Mount Stirling.

We agree very strongly with that. Dr Alan Kerr, the chairman of the task force, is quoted in the news release as having stated:

We thought the EES had finally put to rest inappropriate development proposals on Mount Stirling and we are dismayed that this jewel in the crown of our alpine resorts is again under threat.

The news release goes on to say:

Mount Stirling provides a unique combination of proximity and wilderness in the alps and has always been about affordability, accessibility and diversity of use in an unspoilt natural environment.

I could not agree more. It continues:

It is a delicate balance and these latest proposals would fundamentally alter the Mount Stirling experience to the detriment of all Victorians.

The statement goes on to say, and I think this is an important point and is exactly what the opposition thinks too:

We are not against appropriate development on Mount Stirling and we are not against high-end user accommodation in the Mansfield district but this is not right for Mount Stirling and the minister must unequivocally and publicly reject the idea from the start.

It took the minister quite a long time, but I know he has belatedly written to the task force. However, all he has said, as I have had it relayed to me, is that the management authority will not be allowed to do anything inconsistent with government policy. That is not quite strong enough for people on the mountain and for people who use the mountain. The government will need to go a

bit further than that to put this to bed, given the history, given Labor's plans in the 1980s, given the sneaky and underhand way that this was conducted — —

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** — The member should not talk about sneaky; he is Mr Sneaky himself.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — I am very happy to talk about sneaky here, Mr Mitchell, but as a local member for Central Highlands and one who would seek to represent the Northern Victoria electorate, you have been missing in action! The member is a disgrace! You are a great concern for the people in your area.

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** — The member has never been there!

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — I have indeed, I grew up in Mansfield. Mr Mitchell may not know that, but I grew up in Mansfield.

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** — You never — —

**The ACTING PRESIDENT**  
(**Hon. H. E. Buckingham**) — Order! Mr Mitchell!  
Through the Chair, Mr Davis.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — I agree with that, Acting President, I spent the early part of my life in Mansfield and have links and — —

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** interjected.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — No, Mansfield is what I said.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT**  
(**Hon. H. E. Buckingham**) — Order! Mr Mitchell!

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — Acting President, I make the point that Mr Mitchell has not represented his electorate in this matter, he has not been prepared to stand up for the mountain, he has been prepared to go quiet, prepared to hide on this issue. It is also of concern that members like Ms Broad and Ms Darveniza, who seek to represent that Northern Victoria Region in the upper house under the new arrangements later this year, will not stand up for the mountain or for the values that are involved.

I, for one, want to put on record my concerns about the behaviour of those individuals. They have already voted in favour of a toxic dump in their new electorate and now they are going to vote for the despoiling of an important environmental asset at Mount Stirling — —

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** — Where has it been spoilt? Show us that!

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — If Mr Mitchell thinks that high-end user accommodation would not despoil Mount Stirling, he has to have a very good look at himself. I am concerned that somebody like Mr Mitchell would seek to represent that area, because he will clearly do a very poor job, as he has done to date.

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** — That is why I won the seat, didn't I, you goose!

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — Since you have won the seat you have hardly been sighted.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT**  
(**Hon. H. E. Buckingham**) — Order! Through the Chair, Mr Davis.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — The honourable member has been hardly sighted in the area; he spends most of his time in Melbourne, and I am deeply concerned about that matter.

I note also that the Auditor-General has made some comments about the financial standing of alpine resort management boards. It is not that long ago that this chamber brought together the Mount Stirling and Mount Buller management boards. We did that to strengthen the financial position of Mount Stirling.

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** — You did?

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — No, the chamber, the whole Parliament.

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** interjected.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — The whole Parliament, I have to say, brought together those boards. That was seen as a way of strengthening the Stirling situation. It is interesting to read what the Auditor-General says on pages 48 to 50 of his June 2006 report on the results of financial statement audits for agencies with other than 30 June 2005 balance dates and other audits. In the report at page 48 he says that the boards, as they were set up:

plan for the proper use and development of the land they manage

develop resorts that primarily provide quality alpine recreation and tourism experiences in all seasons of the year

conduct their business in an ecologically, economically, culturally and socially responsible manner.

I guess it is the last point that the government has lost sight of in the case of Mount Stirling. The Auditor-General goes on to say:

The boards are required to be largely self-sufficient. Their main revenue sources are service charges, gate fees and site rentals ...

He then has the footnote:

The smaller alpine resorts are less developed and, consequently, their revenue sources are more limited than the larger resorts.

That is obviously true and is one of the reasons why the Parliament sought to bring Mount Buller and Mount Stirling together in that way. The report continues:

The boards may also receive capital works grants from the Victorian and commonwealth governments.

On page 49 the report states:

In May 2004, the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 was amended to disband (in November 2004) the Mount Buller and the Mount Stirling boards and establish the —

new —

Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board. The new board is responsible for managing the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling alpine resorts.

As part of the changes they were required to establish:

a seasonal snow drought fund to maintain cash flow during poor snow seasons —

and —

a capital investment fund to finance asset maintenance and replacement.

When the boards were brought together I think there was some concern from people that Mount Stirling may not be the major focus of the board and that the Mount Buller interests, which are so strong and predominant, would override Mount Stirling. It appears that that is something of what has occurred here. The fact is that this matter will have to be looked at again. We will have to be very cautious and find ways to strengthen the position of those who would protect Mount Stirling, to ensure that the interests which have legitimate positions with respect to Mount Buller are not able to overwhelm the legitimate aims and objectives of those who have a different experience with Mount Stirling.

Another of the points the Auditor-General makes in his report tabled in Parliament today relates to financial viability and the fact that the alpine resorts are of their nature seasonal and the snow season varies. He said:

The poor season also heightened concerns about the long-term financial viability of these boards.

He is talking here about Lake Mountain and Mount Baw Baw, but the general principle also applies elsewhere:

Both required cash injections, which took the form of revenue grants, from the Department of Sustainability and Environment to meet their operating costs in the year ended 31 October 2005. Lake Mountain received \$350 455 and Mount Baw Baw \$830 769. Both also received further cash payments after 1 November 2005.

In his conclusion on page 50 the Auditor-General goes on to say:

The larger alpine resort boards have continued to achieve positive operating results and net cash inflows in 2005. However, the Department of Sustainability and Environment will need to closely monitor the financial condition of the smaller boards ...

While Mount Buller and Mount Stirling are shackled together in their current structure, the financial issues with making Mount Stirling viable are real because it is, in some respects, similar to those other mountains. There has to be a proper financial plan that protects the values of but at the same time ensures the long-term viability of Mount Stirling without the excessive control that could occur from Mount Buller. There has to be a set of values that is protected. Those values are very important and would be supported by most Victorians; they certainly were at the time of the environment effects statement. If the response and calls to my office that have occurred over the recent period are any guide, there is no doubt that the community has a strong view about protecting Mount Stirling.

I want to turn to the minister's comments on Mount Stirling. He was reported in the *Herald Sun* of 6 June as having said that he had not seen a copy of the draft management plan yet. He said:

However, I understand it does not raise the issue of accommodation on Mount Stirling ...

He was either clearly misinformed then, or misled the public through that statement. I suspect that he was misinformed. He went on to say:

The government believes Mount Stirling should be for low-impact activities, not major developments.

But that is not what the document says, and that is the problem. The minister continues to fluff around and not sufficiently clarify the position of Mount Stirling. Even the documents of the Mount Stirling task force have not been clear enough for many people. I call on Ms Carbines, when she makes her contribution, because she is just one heartbeat away from the environment minister's job —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — She will no doubt be able to give the government's position very clearly on Mount Stirling and will be able to ensure that the —

**Mr Gavin Jennings** interjected.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — I mean if something untoward were to happen to the minister. I hope nothing of the sort happens! Although, for the record, I hope Ms Carbines will find an opportunity to contribute in the Parliament in the future. I mean —

**Ms Carbines** interjected.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — There is some doubt about that with her positioning on the ticket down in the Western Victoria Region, although I note there is hope that opportunities and vents may open up for Ms Carbines much nearer to Melbourne.

**Ms Carbines** interjected.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — I certainly suggest that she would be a better addition to the Parliament for the Western Metropolitan Region than a current occupant of that seat, as I have outlined to the chamber already.

The minister's spokesperson made some comments, which I think should go —

**Mr Gavin Jennings** — Which relate to the bill, as distinct from your contribution.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — Actually they relate to the issue of Mount Stirling, which relates to the bill, to my reasoned amendment, and to the amendment that we will move in committee. In the country times of Wednesday, 14 June —

**Hon. E. G. Stoney** — *The High Country Times.*

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — It was in the *High Country Times* of Wednesday, 14 June.

I was not greatly comforted by the government's position. I was pleased to hear what Dr Sykes, the member for Benalla in the other place, and others had to say, but government members are still not sufficiently clear about the future.

Chairman of the Mount Buller/Mount Stirling resort management board, John Dyson, said on the weekend at the opening cocktail party —

for the opening of the ski season — and I wonder if Ms Carbines was there, swanning around with others from the government —

that the board had come under fire for the new management plan, but defended the board's role in being able to consider all options and ideas, without necessarily agreeing with their implementation.

That is a very slippery little statement, given that it was his body — the management board — that put up the new management plan to 2011. This was not just a vague suggestion; he was not canvassing 14 different options — this was the suggested or recommended option. The accommodation that would have despoiled the mountain was mentioned several times in the document. It was not a casual mistake. People do not make five-year management plans, slip in little bits here and there, put them up on a public web site and then, when they are discovered, take them down and hide them. John Dyson was defending the board's role in being able to consider all options and ideas without necessarily agreeing with their implementation.

I suggest to the community that that statement is very concerning, that the plan is still on. I think the government is trying to go quiet at the moment. It is looking for an opportunity to start this plan up again when things get quiet. In the committee stage we will move amendments to clauses 11 and 12 to delete —

**Hon. E. G. Stoney** interjected.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** — Look at what Barry Pullen, a former Minister for Conservation and Environment in this place, said — that is right. Look at what he said. I saw him sitting there when he was in government. He wanted to build a resort with the capacity to accommodate 5000 people on the mountain. The Labor Party has a sorry history with respect to this mountain. The amendments we will move to clauses 11 and 12 will seek to protect the Mount Stirling environment by ensuring the provisions of this bill do not apply to Mount Stirling.

As I said before, there are two options: the government either has a plan or does not. If it has no plan to build significant accommodation on Mount Stirling, there will be no need for the bill to apply to Mount Stirling. If the government does have such a plan, it will resist the amendment and provide further evidence that there is an ongoing and slippery plan.

In summary, I indicate that the opposition supports the principles in the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill and believes in greater security and stronger title and leasehold arrangements in the major mountain resorts at Mount Buller, Mount Hotham and so forth. We are very supportive of those points, but we do not support using the provisions to facilitate the building up of

significant accommodation on Mount Stirling. For that reason, we will move to prevent that.

**Hon. P. R. HALL** (Gippsland) — The Nationals made a decision in our party room not to oppose this legislation. Since that decision was made the Liberal Party moved a reasoned amendment in the other place and again here this afternoon. We see some merit in that reasoned amendment and are happy to have the government consider it. The Liberal Party seeks a commitment in respect of issues concerning Mount Stirling. It is a reasonable request of the government from the Liberal Party. Hopefully that will be considered, that commitment will be given, and therefore we will all be able to support the passage of the bill through the Parliament.

I am not aware of the particular amendments that will be moved in the committee stage. I am not sure whether they were distributed during the course of debate in the other chamber, so I request through Mr David Davis that I receive a copy of those. Maybe between now and the time the committee stage transpires I can consult with some colleagues in my party as to the merits of The Nationals' position in respect of those amendments.

Before commenting on the bill, I commend my colleagues Dr Sykes, the member for Benalla, and Ken Jasper, the member for Murray Valley, both in the other place. They both have a very keen interest in skiing. Dr Sykes has some of the major alpine resorts in his electorate; he has a keen interest in that and participated fully, I understand, in the opening of the ski season last weekend. I commend them both for the work they have done in consulting organisations and for their ongoing interest in the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill.

The bill amends two acts of Parliament — the Transfer of Land Act 1958 and the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997, and I will deal with them in that order. The amendments to the Transfer of Land Act predominantly concern Crown leases. A Crown lease is simply a lease taken over an area of Crown land. Clauses 3 to 9 of the bill amend the Transfer of Land Act around the issue of Crown leases.

Clauses 3 and 4 concern the removal of the requirement that when a Crown lease is created, both the original and a duplicate be lodged at the land registry. Now only the original will be required, and that Crown lease will then be converted into an electronic form. This is the current practice in respect of land titles. It seems to us a commonsense measure that reduces the administrative burden. The provisions described in clauses 3 and 4

apply to Crown leases. We do not have any objection whatsoever to those provisions.

Clause 5 inserts a new section 67A, which concerns the recording of certain minor variations to a registered lease. It seems commonsense to us that variations to leases that have the permission of the lessee in writing can be recorded without the need to strike a completely new lease. We understand there are certain safeguards enshrined in this legislation by new section 67A. If there are major changes or major variations to a lease, a new lease needs to be constructed. However, the sorts of minor variations envisaged in the new section can simply be recorded. We are happy to accept those changes as well.

Clauses 6, 7 and 8 make sure that certain matters applying to general leases also apply to Crown leases. Those matters concern bankruptcy of a lessee, the surrender of a lease and the recovery of possessions by lessors. As I have said, there are particular provisions within the Transfer of Land Act that currently apply to normal freehold leases which will also now apply to Crown leases. We think they are fair and reasonable propositions and we are prepared to support them. The new section inserted by clause 9 simply concerns some machinery transition measures which are necessary for the changes brought about by the previous clauses.

I will now turn to the amendments to the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997. Essentially these amendments concern the ability of the alpine resorts management boards to enter leases in particular areas. Clause 10 simply inserts the definition of VicRoads, which is necessary for some of the subsequent clauses in this amendment bill. Clauses 11 and 12 are essentially the heart of the bill. Those two clauses collectively give the alpine resorts management boards the power to grant leases in stratum. This is best described by the words of the minister in the second-reading speech. At page 4 the second-reading speech states in respect of clause 11:

This clause will give boards greater flexibility in the shape of the land and airspace they lease, subject to the same controls that apply to exercising any of their leasing powers ...

In relation to clause 12 the second-reading speech states:

Clause 12 inserts a new section in the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 which provides similar powers to clause 11 but relating to licences rather than leases.

These clauses have been described as giving greater flexibility to the alpine resorts management boards to enter into lease provisions. We are happy to agree with that sentiment. We therefore accept those amendments

to the act as fair and reasonable. Clause 13 simply substitutes the new words 'communication systems' for the word 'telephone' in section 9 of the principal act. It is a simple measure which more accurately reflects infrastructure provisions as they exist today. Those are the provisions of this amendment bill. As I said, we made a decision in our party room that we would accept those provisions.

Before finishing my contribution I want to make some brief and general comments about alpine resorts in Victoria. As I said before, the opening of the ski season took place last weekend. If you are not one of those people who participate in the opening of the ski season, it is always a highlight to look at the papers over the weekend. I was not one of those people who were fortunate enough to be on the mountains, but I was interested to note in the weekend newspapers changes that have taken place at the alpine resorts over the summer period. I noted extensive commentary about the development at Mount Hotham and Dinner Plain.

Dinner Plain is of particular interest to me because it is in my electorate, as are Mount Baw Baw and Mount St Gwinear. Residential development and changes to accommodation have taken place at Dinner Plain — and it has been done very well. When I was last there I noticed the lodges had reticulated liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), which is a very innovative idea. People who live at Dinner Plain can purchase LPG in bulk, which makes it cheaper for them than other sources of fuel. I have said this before and I will say it again: I think that sort of model is an opportunity which this government could well consider for smaller towns and communities around Victoria. There could be bulk storage of LPG and a reticulated LPG supply to homes rather than each home having to have its own bottled gas. When you know the cost of bottled gas nowadays you can see that any savings would be most appreciated.

Last Saturday's *Age* included an article on page 8 regarding Mount St Gwinear, which is one of Victoria's smallest alpine resorts. Concerns were expressed in the article about the promotion of Mount St Gwinear. I agree with some of the concerns of the people I represent about that resort. It struggles to compete with some of the bigger alpine resorts in this state. Nevertheless, last winter Mount St Gwinear attracted about 14 000 visitors. It was estimated that 3000 of those visitors were skiers and the other 11 000 people simply enjoyed the experience of visiting the snow and taking part in activities like playing in the snow and tobogganing. The article said it is a good, cheap introduction to the Victorian snowfields. The cost of entry to Mount St Gwinear is \$9.70 per car, so it is a

cheap way for families to experience the joy of snow. It is a very costly exercise for families to purchase tickets to undertake activities at major resorts, whereas small resorts like Mount St Gwinear offer a cheap alternative for people to get a taste of what activities at the snow are all about.

We should be promoting and encouraging people to visit resorts like Mount St Gwinear. One of the difficulties pointed out in the article is the fact that the resort has not been promoted on the alpine resorts tourism web site. That is unfortunate. I understand that if you are a member, you get automatic promotion on the skivic web site. If you become a fully fledged member, it costs of the order of \$30 000 per year or \$5000 per year for some of the small resorts.

Mount St Gwinear, which does not really have any commercial operations directly attached, offered to contribute \$1500 for at least a position on the skivic web site. The area's representatives were knocked back, and I think that is a shame. Michael Leaney, who some members will know and who is the president of the Walhalla and Mountain Rivers Tourism Association, has been very vocal on this issue. Michael has done a lot for Walhalla and is the owner and operator of Walhalla's Star Hotel and has been a great advocate for that region.

He has expressed some disappointment that the region cannot get promotion for Mount St Gwinear, particularly given that people would often spend half a day in the snow and then come and visit some of the nearby attractions like Walhalla, Erica, Rawson and other places close by.

Mr Leaney has made the point that, particularly after the devastation caused by the fires of last year in the Erica–Rawson area, which virtually isolated Walhalla, there does need to be a bit of an effort made by government to attract tourists back to the area. It seems to me it would be entirely appropriate for the government to make a very moderate contribution to at least helping to promote this resort by perhaps paying the \$5000 to have it included on the skivic web site. As I said, I think there is a real need there, and I would hope that the government would look at that and listen to the request of Michael Leaney and others to do a bit more to promote Mount St Gwinear and some of our other alpine tourism areas.

Nevertheless, as I said, I look forward to what may transpire during the committee stage of debate on this bill. I will look at the Liberal Party amendments closely and consult with some of my colleagues in respect of the appropriateness or otherwise of those. As I said, Bill

Sykes, the member for Benalla, and Ken Jasper, the member for Murray Valley, both in the other place, have been very involved in this legislation and understand the issues as they currently apply to the major resorts within their electorates. They understand those issues much better than I, so I will have a chat with them and see what we will do with the amendments. But as I said at the outset, The Nationals made a decision that we would not oppose this bill, and we will stick by that decision.

**Ms CARBINES** (Geelong) — I am really pleased to speak in support of the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill this afternoon. All members would agree that Victoria's magnificent alpine region is very important to our state. It is a quite profoundly beautiful environment which contributes so much to our way of life, socially and economically. Our six alpine resorts of Falls Creek, Lake Mountain, Mount Baw Baw, Mount Buller, Mount Stirling and Mount Hotham contribute much to the year-round recreational pursuits of Victorians and interstate visitors. The resorts contribute about \$129 million annually to the Victorian economy and provide almost 4000 jobs, so they are economically important to the state as well.

However, we must also be very mindful of managing the fragile alpine environment carefully. We must ensure that the resorts continue to be managed in an environmentally sustainable way. In fact it is our obligation, as the government, to ensure that that is the case. We have acted very strongly in this place during the present term of this government to protect the alpine environment, and I enjoyed very much the debates that took place in this chamber while the government was moving to remove cattle grazing from the Alpine National Park.

If you want to find a symbol to represent protection of a fragile alpine environment, you need look for no further than that. We on this side of the chamber were very strong in protecting our alpine environment and felt that the fragility of that environment and cattle roaming over it were mutually exclusive. We successfully passed that legislation last year on a what was a historic day as far as I am concerned. That was a symbol of the Bracks government's action to protect the Alpine National Park and the alpine environment.

Also, two years ago we released a blueprint for the future of Victoria's alpine regions. It was called the Alpine Resorts 2020 strategy. I have had a good read of that strategy document, and I would like to acknowledge the role a former federal minister, the Honourable John Button, played in managing the work in relation to that strategy. It certainly sets forward a

way of managing our resorts in the future so as to ensure that they still exist in the face of climate change, which will have a very serious impact on our alpine environment in Victoria.

I know that the strategy has the very strong support of our alpine resort boards and the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council. The strategy made a number of recommendations regarding the management of our resorts to ensure the protection of the natural environment whilst enabling the sustainable use of the region to benefit the economies of local communities and to benefit all Victorians socially and recreationally. The content of the bill this afternoon reflects some of the recommendations that were contained in the Alpine Resorts 2020 strategy regarding the way leasing arrangements are undertaken in the alpine region.

We know that this bill has the support of the alpine resorts boards and also that of the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council. The bill comes out of very wide consultation by the council regarding the registration of leases and strata titles for leases. In fact the council released a discussion paper two years ago to canvass opinion in relation to these very matters. In the introduction to that discussion paper, which was released in 2004, the chair of the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council, Andrew Fairley, said that the 2020 policy:

... has satisfied many of these concerns by addressing the term of tenure, ownership of improvements, and establishing the basis of obtaining a new lease. However, the need for registration of leases and a strata title scheme for leases were also raised. These were identified as desirable to enable simpler documents, to reduce costs related to document preparation and conveyancing, and to provide for strata titles, including common property.

That statement was in the introduction to the discussion paper.

Some 21 submissions were received in response to that discussion paper and public workshops were held. The results of all that consultation were then collated and brought together by the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council in its recommendations document on the registration of leases. Andrew Fairley, the chair, in his preface said:

This report describes council's recommendation for a system of lease registration that it believes will be of benefit to all leaseholders and provide certainty to vendors, purchasers and lenders. Council further recommends that legislation be introduced to enable the recommended system of registration to be put in place. We found that there was strong support amongst alpine resort stakeholders for such an initiative.

The bill we are discussing and debating this afternoon reflects the desire of Andrew Fairley that we introduce legislation in this place to implement the recommendations of the consultative process that the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council undertook. Specifically the bill will facilitate the registration process for Crown land leases, it will streamline the process by removing the requirement for a duplicate lease document, it will save time and money, and improve transparency of arrangements by providing for the registration of leases with the Land Registry. It is a simplification of the current process as recommended.

It will also provide alpine resorts boards with the power in respect of leases or licences in stratum to allow the leasing of structures such as overhanging balconies and pedestrian overpasses and, if necessary, structures above and below roads in the resorts. This is the outcome of the consultation process that I have already discussed. We know that the amendments are simple, yet they have the support of all stakeholders. It is for that reason that we are debating this bill this afternoon. But if you listened to the debate and the contribution of Mr David Davis you would have mistakenly believed the bill was all about something completely different. If you listen to Mr David Davis you were led to believe the bill is all about development at Mount Stirling.

**Hon. R. G. Mitchell** — Where is he?

**Ms CARBINES** — That is a good question, Mr Mitchell. Where is Mr David Davis? He posed all these questions during his contribution, but he does not have the courtesy to be in the chamber to listen to the response. One can only presume that he was scaremongering. We know Mr Davis is particularly adept at mischievous scare campaigns, and this is no exception, but one would assume from his lack of appearance in the chamber that he is not interested in the answers. He was posing rhetorical questions. He does not want to know the answers because that does not suit his scare campaign. He has form on this.

The government is not considering accommodation at Mount Stirling. That is unequivocal advice from me and the minister. Yes, there was a public consultation document circulated by the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board which canvassed the idea of accommodation at Mount Stirling. That document was out for public consultation. I know 'consultation' is a word that Liberal Party members do not understand, because when they were in power they never consulted anybody, they acted always without consultation. Seven years after they lost power consultation is still a new concept for Liberal Party members.

Consultation means raising ideas, asking people what their opinions are of those ideas, listening to what people have to say and taking that on board. That is exactly what the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board has done by issuing a draft document. The overwhelming advice was that accommodation was not supported at Mount Stirling; therefore the advice back to the minister does not recommend accommodation at Mount Stirling. It is a complete furphy on the part of Mr Davis.

In 1997 an environment effects statement was conducted on Mount Stirling. It recommended that only low-impact activity should occur there, not major development. That is the position the government supports and has always supported, and it is completely erroneous to suggest otherwise.

In 2004 the Minister for Environment, Mr Thwaites, moved amendments to the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 to further provide for the protection of Mount Stirling. We have in our term of office enhanced the protection of Mount Stirling. This was on top of an amendment to the National Parks (Amendment) Act 2000 by the former Minister for Environment and Conservation, the Honourable Sherryl Garbutt, to put back into the Alpine National Park 285 hectares which the Kennett government, of which Mr David Davis was a part, had removed in 1997 without consultation. Why was that done? To develop ski lifts in the Alpine National Park.

It is rank hypocrisy on the part of Mr David Davis to run around Mount Stirling, or maybe ski around it — I am not quite sure what Mr Davis was doing on the weekend — talking about development and scaremongering when the only people who are likely to develop Mount Stirling, and who have form on this, are Liberal Party members. When they were in office they removed 285 hectares from the Alpine National Park without consultation. You cannot get more major development than having ski lifts, and that is what the Liberal Party plans to do, whereas under the Bracks government we have acted to further enhance protection for Mount Stirling. We have ensured that any development at Mount Stirling is low-impact development. There is no accommodation at Mount Stirling. If Mr Davis were in this chamber I would say, 'Mr Davis, read my lips, no accommodation at Mount Stirling, and repeat after me', but he is not here. He scurried out of this chamber, probably to issue a news release scaremongering again. I would put money on it. There is absolutely no evidence to support this mischievous campaign.

We also further protected the Alpine National Park by introducing an excise policy to ensure that the Liberal Party cannot in the future seize national park land, our heritage, for major development. Ski lifts certainly are major developments in anyone's book, and I wonder if they are in Mr Davis's book. It was interesting when Mr Davis talked about excising land, because he has form on excising land from the alpine environment when he was part of the government that excised 285 hectares of alpine parkland without consultation.

He also has form on trashing the fragile Alpine National Park environment. He voted against the government's legislation to remove cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park, which I notice this week the Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Mr Baillieu, has now decided to do a backflip with a double pike over because he is not interested in it any further. He knows that the Victorian people do not support cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park. But Mr David Davis certainly voted to keep cows in the national park. Mr Davis speaks with a forked tongue. It is typical of Liberal Party members: judge them by their actions, not by what they say. When in power they did not care and took no responsibility for consulting with the Victorian people. Now when in opposition they are all care and no responsibility. Liberal Party members should look back on their form and we should judge them by what they did when they were in power, not by what they are saying now. This scare campaign run by Mr Davis is ridiculous, and most Victorians will see it for what it is.

This bill deserves the support of all members of this house. It has wide support from stakeholders across the alpine environment, including the management boards for the alpine resorts and the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council, and I wish it a speedy passage.

**Hon. E. G. STONEY** (Central Highlands) — For the record I need to defend Mr David Davis against criticism that he is not in the chamber. The bill was due to be debated later this day, and we accommodated the government and the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee by bringing the bill forward. Mr David Davis has a series of important appointments which he has juggled around to accommodate the house. Members will have noticed that he has been running in and out of the chamber. I think it is a bit rich for us to be bashed up for cooperating, especially when Ms Carbines has a history of making her contribution and taking off before we even get to the next speaker.

I had a bit of a smile when Ms Carbines talked about protecting the alpine environment and said we want to trash it. I ask Ms Carbines if she has been to

Mount Hotham, but, again true to form, she is going. I ask, perhaps rhetorically, if Ms Carbines has been to Mount Hotham because the gateway to Mount Hotham has been trashed with the construction of a huge dam. It could have been sited in some other position. Surely it could have been placed elsewhere with a bit more sensitivity. It really has destroyed the gateway to Mount Hotham. I know there are lots of benefits in having recycled water, but if you were to talk about trashing the environment, nothing could top that. I have had lots and lots of comments about it.

Firstly, I wish to note that I support this bill in relation to the establishment of ski resorts. Lease registration will be of great benefit to stakeholders, and I support that. However, I have grave fears about the implications for Mount Stirling. Mount Stirling has been in the sights of a lot of people for a long time and it is important that we raise the issue again. To address that, the opposition has moved an amendment to take Mount Stirling out of the bill and therefore out of the equation. It is a sensible move, I support it, and I congratulate Mr David Davis for outlining our position on that and for his contribution outlining the concerns of the opposition. I also congratulate Mr Hall who again was very strong on that.

I have to say that over the years there has been no stronger supporter of the established alpine resorts than me. The established ski resorts have contributed an enormous amount to the Victorian economy. Mount Buller, Mount Stirling, Mount Hotham, Falls Creek, Mount Buffalo and Lake Mountain are all in my electorate, and these resorts provide a magnetic attraction for skiers and an economic base for local economies. The advent of snow-making has moved us into a new era, and the use of recycled water will be a great boon to that because snow-making takes an enormous amount of water. The only snow up there at the moment — I was just looking at the Mount Buller web site — is man-made snow along some of the tracks. Kids are there having a bit of fun and there are a few learners are on Bourke Street, so it is a great boon and a fillip for the resort.

However, once again Mount Stirling has entered the debate. Mount Stirling provides accessible back-country experiences for locals, visitors and more than 140 schools. It is a treasured icon to thousands of people. In the 1990s more than 20 000 people signed a petition to stop ski lifts being installed and the erection of a gondola, and I am very proud to have been a part of that campaign.

I make the point that almost all the people who go to Mount Stirling would support some upgrade. They

would like to be able to get up to the snowline rather than tramp from Telephone Box Junction. They would accept a day centre up near the snowline somewhere in the trees. That has been discussed as one of the options for the environment effects statement. They would accept a new access road. Perhaps they would accept some services huts. When we talk about accommodation and such we need to be careful that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater. There is room there for real ecotourism, and we need to be careful about that. It is some years since the environment effects statement, and I think it is quite a good time to perhaps revisit what we could do that would be accepted, but in my judgment we certainly will not be accepting a swank ecotourism resort of any sort with 'eco' in front of it just to give it legitimacy.

Mount Stirling is now part of the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board. It is managed by the resort management board, and I know that the board is very concerned as to how to attract people to Mount Stirling. I know it wants to recoup some of the expense of running Mount Stirling, which is fair enough, and I will outline that a little later in my contribution. But a few things occurred recently which pointed to a resurgence of major development interest in Mount Stirling. There were approaches to the minister from the resort management board, there were briefings to the Mount Stirling development task force by the board talking about high-end development ideas and there was the introduction of this bill — and that was all in one week. By coincidence a major company associated with the resorts has established a separate alpine construction company. I just wonder, being cynical about this, if this company has already put ideas to the board about Mount Stirling. It would be fascinating to know the answer because Mount Stirling has been looked at longingly for many years for development.

I have here a chronology of Mount Stirling put together by Rodney Waterman from the Victorian National Parks Association, and there is probably no better documented history of modern Mount Stirling than this paper. It was written in 1997 while the issue was at its peak, and I will quickly pick out some of the historic sections of it.

In 1979 the Land Conservation Council recommended that Mount Stirling be developed for downhill skiing. In 1981 Liberal Premier Dick Hamer revealed plans to build a world-class multimillion dollar alpine resort at Mount Stirling. In 1982 the Cain government instigated the first Mount Stirling environment effects statement for a large downhill ski development, including a village at King Saddle. In 1983 Mount Buller and

Mount Stirling, formerly managed by the Forest Commission, were gazetted in the schedule to the act as alpine resorts. In 1984 Premier Cain announced a \$100 million alpine resort proposal at Mount Stirling had been approved in principle by the state government. He called for private developers to submit plans, and the development was due to be completed by 1992. In 1989 the Alpine Resorts Commission released a draft strategy plan for the integrated development of Mount Buller and Mount Stirling, including downhill ski lifts for Mount Stirling and the mechanical linking of Mount Buller and Mount Stirling. In 1993 the Mansfield-based Mount Stirling development task force was formed, principally to oppose development of Mount Stirling and to investigate long-term options for the protection of Mount Stirling. This group grew out of the Stirling-Delatite Action Group, and I wish to declare that I was a member of that — proudly a member of that group — and we did a lot of good work.

In 1994 Alpine Resorts Commission chief Philip Bentley gatecrashed a public meeting in Mansfield. He announced the imminent signing of an agreement between the ARC and Buller Ski Lifts to develop Mount Stirling for downhill skiing, including a gondola, and there was general public outrage.

I have to quote this because it is part of the history. The chronology by Rodney Waterman continues:

Local Liberal upper house member Graeme Stoney, announces that he is 'implacably opposed to downhill skiing on Mount Stirling'

That statement appeared in an article in the *Sunday Age* of 20 March 1994. The chronology entry for 21 March 1994 is:

State Labor Party opposes proposed development.

It goes on to talk about the Mount Stirling task force taking out Supreme Court injunctions: it all got pretty untidy at that stage. I pay tribute to Martin Hunt and Dr Alan Kerr, who are true bush lawyers. Many others on that task force really did a great job on that issue.

In April 1994 the government announced that the Alpine Resorts Commission would be reviewed, and there would be an environment effects statement to investigate future options for Mount Stirling. About that time in a contribution in this place the then Minister for Conservation and Environment, Mark Birrell, reminded the people of the Labor Party's plan for Mount Stirling. Ms Carbines talked about the form of the Liberal Party. She should listen to this. The then minister said:

The proposal from the Cain government for a 50 per cent larger ski village at Mount Stirling, a 5000-bed alpine village at River Spur, a big car park along the Delatite River and two gondolas from the new bitumen car park on the river tells honourable members what the Labor Party is all about!

There were public meetings, the second of the commissioners was appointed and the Labor Party jumped on the bandwagon. There was then a new dimension when a lot of groups, including the cattlemen, the Victorian National Parks Association, the Wilderness Society and many other people, got together to prevent further development. I think it was very significant that those groups got together.

In 1997 former planning minister Robert Maclellan announced that downhill ski development would not be allowed on Mount Stirling for 15 years, and that nature-based tourism would be promoted. Eventually the resorts at Mount Buller and Mount Stirling merged and have been run as one resort until now. It is a bit unfortunate that I am running out of time.

The Mount Stirling task force put out a brochure at the time listing what it wanted. It wanted:

Emphasis on all-seasons attractions ...

No infrastructure above the tree line ...

It also wanted a high-level road, a day centre, walking trails, additional bush huts, education initiatives and an upgraded road to Mount Buller. I do not understand why there has not been some low-level development on Mount Stirling. Everyone knows the problems with Mount Stirling. The elevation of the day centre at Telephone Box Junction (TBJ) is too low. People have to walk kilometres to get to the snow; for safety reasons school groups want to camp in the snow gums and not in the mountain ash, and they have to slog too far from their buses at TBJ.

Option C of the environment effects statement outlined a lot of those matters. I think option C was a very good option and would still be supported, with some variation. Given the time lapses there would have to be some variation to it. Option C was about nature-based, low-impact mountain tourism with a focus on recreation. It talked about the mountain centre at TBJ being kept, access to higher altitudes being facilitated, perhaps a sealed shuttle road up to the cricket pitch area, a shuttle service on the new road and the building of a new higher altitude centre near the cricket pitch.

I think the idea deserves to be revisited. I think it would be an accepted way forward for what we are discussing here today. It amazes me that successive governments and the resort management board have not seen a

logical way to move forward on this matter. If they revisited option C and some seeding money was provided, in my opinion visitation to Mount Stirling would triple. It is quite simple. There is a need for a one-off capital grant; governments provide those all the time. There is need for some hut or camping infrastructure in the snow gums. There is a resort management board (RMB) strategic plan for Mount Stirling, but that needs to be revisited.

I do not know why the RMB is so hesitant about approaching the government for some seeding funding. Do we know whether the government has been approached? Perhaps it has not been. That is what governments do. They have seeding funding for all sorts of projects; some with economic benefits, some not, but that is what governments do. The government has just done it at Mount Hotham and Mount Buller with the water issue, which I think is a great initiative. It should do it with Mount Stirling. I think with very little real capital and a lot of lateral thinking, and moving away from resort-type development towards true eco-type development which would complement the Mount Buller resort we would have a very good outcome for Mount Stirling.

There are quite a few people with visions for Mount Stirling, including the Mount Stirling development task force led by Martin Hunt and Alan Kerr. I congratulate them; they have led the fight for more than 12 years. Also there are people like Barb and Craig Jones, who have been tour operators on the mountain for 21 years. Nobody knows the mountain better than Craig Jones. He is a very thoughtful person and a very good tour operator. He looks after more than 100 schools and tells me that the big demand for schools is to be able to get out of the mountain ash and into the snow gums; to camp safely, move around, and have some serviced-type camping areas. He tells me that would be a wonderful thing for these schools because safety is a big issue.

Mount Stirling is basically a very safe mountain. It is a back country mountain with great access, and Craig Jones tells me that with very little capital input Mount Stirling could be the most wonderful eco-tourism resort. These people have always had a wider vision for Mount Stirling along the lines of option C, with some variations. It has been very difficult for the Joneses, who have been working under terrible conditions for years. They are to be congratulated for the service they provide to the public and to many schools.

In conclusion, I call on the Bracks government to go back to the environment effects statement and look

carefully at option C. We need to give Mount Stirling a new direction. It is time for that. This debate is probably an opportune way to give Mount Stirling a new direction. It will need some seeding money. I do not see that as a big problem at all because it is a one-off. With a little bit of lateral thinking and looking at the eco-tourism side of it, it would create an enormous boost to visitation in the area, and a big fillip for the Mansfield district.

**Hon. R. G. MITCHELL** (Central Highlands) — Despite what Mr Stoney said, Ms Carbines sat here the whole time listening to his words of wisdom, while Mr David Davis is still down in his little hole somewhere.

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Hon. R. G. MITCHELL** — If branch stacking keeps you busy, I am sure he is busy. I rise to support the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill and indicate that I will not be supporting Mr David Davis's amendment. This bill is about continual improvement in the management of our alpine regions. It makes amendments to the Transfer of Land Act 1958 and the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 and the agreed actions in the Alpine Resorts 2020 strategy.

The bill before us, along with the current Bracks government policy, protects Mount Stirling from any major development. The opposition's very weak attempt at relevance with its amendment is unnecessary and shows how far out of touch Mr Davis is on this issue and in his portfolio, which is obviously far beyond his capabilities. Certainly that is in stark contrast to Mr Hamer, as he then was, when he was Premier. Much as it chokes me to say so, I think he had very great environmental credentials. I believe Mr Davis could really help his case if he sat down and looked at the work of the late Sir Rupert Hamer. In fact, I think it will be a very long time before Victorians view the opposition in the same way and with the same respect as the former Hamer government.

We are not supporting the Liberal Party's amendment because in 2004 the Minister for Environment in the other place amended the Alpine Resorts Management Act 1997 to protect Mount Stirling from major development, and major development is the key. Specifically section 38(3) of the act states:

In relation to the Mount Stirling alpine resort, the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board must exercise its functions under sub-section (1) subject to the following principles —

- (a) that the resort must be planned for, developed, promoted and managed as a nature based tourist, recreational and educational resource for all seasons of the year.

One of the problems we have seen in the past with the alpine areas is that they have been very heavily promoted during the winter, but all the exciting things there are to do up there and the natural beauty there is on top of the mountains during the summer have not been promoted. This government has gone a long way in promoting these areas as resorts for 12 months of the year and as being exciting to go to all year around. Our highly successful 'You can always blame the alpine air' campaign brought many visitors to those regions in the summer months.

The government believes that Mount Stirling should be used for low-impact activities and not be subject to major development, and that is why this amendment was sufficient to ensure that. It is not the only thing we have done as a government to protect the high-value environmental areas. The National Parks (Amendment) Act 2000 was also amended to provide the inclusion of an area of 285 hectares, which was excised in 1997 during the seven dark years of the Kennett government.

It was excised by the previous government to develop ski lifts in areas of high conservation significance, in what is now the great Alpine National Park. Fortunately the Bracks government has returned that land and ensured that the Liberals will never get their grubby little hands on it to build their fun parks and ski parks in such a magnificent part of the state.

We have to remember that Mr David Davis was part of the government that did this, and now he comes in with his crocodile tears and is all for the environment; but his history and form show that he has no plans, no idea and that he is out of his depth in the tear drops, the poor boy!

The move by the previous government to excise land from the national park to build ski lifts was a significant attack on the integrity of the national park. It struck one of the most fundamental principles of national parks — that they should be reserved, preserved and protected permanently. We had further proof of our stance when, as Ms Carbines mentioned, the government passed the alpine grazing legislation, which removed alpine grazing from very sensitive ecological areas.

I was part of the task force involved in that measure, and I spent a lot of time and effort learning and understanding what it was all about.

**Hon. Andrew Brideson** — You sold out the mountain cattlemen. You sold them out!

**Hon. E. G. Stoney** — They'll be gone!

**Hon. R. G. MITCHELL** — You may both think that, but once again you are dead wrong. I was going to exempt you from this, Mr Stoney, because I know you are very passionate about the cattlemen, and I know the trouble you went through and the headache it caused, and I am very thankful for the way that we spoke together; but unfortunately I cannot say the same about the rest of your colleagues.

There was no genuineness at all in anything they mentioned on alpine grazing. They carried on, they ranted and raved and made noises about how they were supporting the cattlemen and how they were doing all this, but in actual fact it was just another case of Liberal scaremongering without any facts, because as late as 12.45 p.m. on 2 June, on *The Country Hour*, the Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Ted Baillieu — or Backflip Baillieu, as he should now be known with his backflip on Scoresby and on anything and everything — admitted that he is walking away from protecting the mountain cattlemen.

He said in the interview with Libby Price on *The Country Hour* — and I am sure Libby would have choked on her coffee when she heard this, given the rantings and ravings of those opposite:

The mountain cattlemen have accepted the compensation and that cannot be undone.

For all their empty words and hollow promises, at the end of the day they knew that we were right. I can still remember saying at the time that at least half of the members opposite were privately supporting what the government did but were not game enough to put it on the record because they did not have the backbone to stand up and tell the truth. The then Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Robert Doyle, was running around like a little jackrabbit saying, 'We will bring back the mountain cattlemen, we will guarantee this' and now Ted has backflipped again. It just shows that what we are doing is the right thing. The government is on track with what it is saying in protecting the environment, and we are ensuring that Victoria's alpine regions are protected for many generations.

Anyone who spends time up there, whether they are going for a walk or a drive, would be very happy to see the condition of the park and appreciate the government's \$7.5 million package to remove weeds and pests, and to repair moss beds. But one great difficulty when driving through the Alpine National Park is the Bogong High Plains Road. The Alpine Shire Council put in its \$2 million up-front to seal this road

and make a tourist loop from Gippsland across and down through Bright, to make a fantastic touring opportunity. The state government then put up its money, but the federal Libs flatly refused. All the people living in those areas are reminded every day when they drive on that dirt road about how their federal member, Ms Panopoulos, failed them, backed down and was too scared to stand up to her masters.

The federal government will not put in its fair share of funding to get the alpine road sealed, and it is an absolute shame because it is vitally important to the communities on both ends of that road, and it would make a fantastic tourist trip, encompassing possibly the best parts of Victoria.

Through this bill the government has worked very hard to bring alpine stakeholders together and explore how we can lead the way in sustainability. We wanted to make sure that it was viable both economically and environmentally. They are two important factors that we have to consider when we do these things. We will ensure that that environment, which is very rare — the alpine region is only 1 per cent of the state's total area — remains for future generations because it is some of the prettiest terrain you are likely to see, with its snow gums, snow daisies and the different grasses that grow through the summer months after the snow melts. Many thousands of jobs spin off from these sorts of environments. I never understood ecotourism properly. I always thought, 'Well, is this really going to generate income, generate jobs?'. But I must admit I have been amazingly surprised at how many jobs and benefits flow from ecotourism as it grows across the state.

Our 'You can always blame the alpine air' campaign has attracted many thousands of visitors to the magnificent views across the high country. The Alpine Resorts 2020 strategy recommended the amendments being made through the bill. Specifically it is about making it more attractive for head lease registration in our alpine area. We are cutting the red tape, which is a commitment we gave at the last election, and we are trying to ensure that businesses and Victorians right across the state find it easier to do business with this government, compared to with the previous government.

Under our proposed changes Crown land leases would be treated the same as any other freehold lease, and the new provision will allow the variation of any registered lease to be recorded in the land registry, which means that a registered lease can be updated easily rather than being surrendered and then reissued, which is currently

required, and which is really a doubling up of what needs to be done.

The bill clarifies issues relating to the application of the Transfer of Land Act for both Crown and freehold leases. The bill importantly enables alpine resort boards to issue a release for a stratum of land, but it does not provide the ability for the alpine resorts board to issue strata releases involved in body corporate and common property.

Members will find when they look through it that it is a very sensible bill. It clears up a few things, but most importantly it protects our alpine regions. I wish it a speedy passage, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** (Melbourne West) — I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to debate on the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill. As a government we are very passionate indeed about Victoria's alpine region. You only have to see some of the activities that we have been involved in to really appreciate just how passionately we feel about preserving this very important area not only for those in our community to enjoy now but also to ensure that this national park is there for generations to come. Such things as the removal of cattle grazing from the Alpine National Park clearly demonstrate just how passionately we feel about the Victorian alpine region and how much we care about preserving this important heritage for future generations. This commitment was further supported by a \$7.5 million government package to restore the national park and preserve the unique high country environment for future generations. It is a very significant amount of money that was provided by the government for the restoration work that needed to be carried out, and some of that work is still being done now.

The Bracks government has a very strong commitment to strengthening our regional economy, protecting our national environment and ensuring the sustainable use of our resources that will benefit all Victorians. To recognise that commitment you only have to see some of the work that has been done by the Minister for Tourism in the other place, Mr John Pandazopoulos, in that alpine region and the towns that surround it, in promoting a whole range of tourist activities to encourage people to come to the region and enjoy the many activities that are available there. There are activities that involve food and wine and activities that involve going up onto the mountain, whether that be in winter, when you can enjoy our very fine snowfields, or in summer, when you are able to enjoy our national parkland and the areas that make up the snowfields during the winter season.

We recognise that our alpine region contributes a great deal to our way of life and creates many jobs and work opportunities as well as opportunities for businesses to develop and grow. It contributes socially as well as environmentally. In 2000 the industry contributed \$129 million to the Victorian economy and provided over 3700 jobs — and those figures have increased since then. The area makes an enormous contribution to our economy, our lifestyle and the way we are able to enjoy our lives. It contributes particularly to our enjoyment of our recreational time, to job creation, to the enhancement of business and to protecting our precious environment.

We in the government are very proud to proactively ensure continual improvement in the management of Victoria's most precious asset in one of our most spectacular natural environments. We have done so through changes to legislation as well as through the release of the Alpine Resorts 2020 strategy. In 2004 amendments were made to the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 to ensure the protection of the alpine region and specifically Mount Stirling. Any decisions regarding the ongoing use and management of Mount Stirling will be made in the context of a very clear and well-articulated government policy. Accommodation on Mount Stirling is not under consideration, even though those on the other side are saying that is what we are trying to do. Ms Carbines, who is the Parliamentary Secretary for Environment, and my parliamentary colleague Mr Mitchell also made it quite clear in their contributions that accommodation on Mount Stirling is not under consideration. I do not know how much clearer we can be about that.

In 2004 we amended the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 to protect Mount Stirling from major development. What we have here today is legislation that protects the environment. It is not about leaving the way open for development. Section 38(3) of the act states:

In relation to Mount Stirling alpine resort, the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board must exercise its function under subsection (1) subject to the following principles —

- (a) that the resort must be planned for, developed, promoted and managed as a nature based tourist, recreational and educational resource for all seasons of the year; and
- (b) that there are not to be any ski lifts in the resort.

I do not know how we can be much clearer than that. I do not know how many times we have to spell it out. The government believes that Mount Stirling should be preserved for low-impact activities and not opened up

to major development. The 2004 amendment is sufficient to ensure that result.

But that is not the only amendment the government has made to protect the high country and our valuable environmental areas.

The National Parks (Amendment) Act 2000 was also amended to provide the inclusion of an area of 285 hectares that was excised in 1997, and I know a member spoke earlier at some length about this. It was excised by the previous government to develop ski lifts. Some members have come in here today and been critical of this bill, but when the opposition was in government it excised 285 hectares for the development of ski lifts on areas of high conservation significance, which is now the great Alpine National Park.

Not only did this government amend the National Parks Act to include this 285 hectares back into the Alpine National Park but we went further to introduce an excise policy to ensure that reckless decisions such as that made by the previous government could not be made again. What we are doing is protecting the future of the alpine park against the kinds of decisions that the opposition made when it was in government — to simply take out great chunks of what is a national park and to use it for inappropriate development. What we want to do is ensure that the opposition does not do it again.

Not only did the opposition excise that very large number of hectares for such an inappropriate development, but it did so without any consultation. It was not interested in going out and talking to stakeholders about what they wanted to do or how they saw this land being best utilised or protected; it simply went ahead and did it. The opposition has a history of really attacking various significant environmental areas and showing a total disregard for the use of these environmentally sensitive areas so that not only can the present community but also future generations enjoy it.

We always need to be wary of what the opposition is putting up. We always have to look at its track record, how it behaved in the past, and judge it on the sorts of things it did in the past —

**Hon. Philip Davis** — If we looked at the government's record, we would be laughing at it.

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — Mr Davis interjects across the chamber but you cannot get away from it, Mr Davis, that this is what the opposition did when it was in government. It excised large areas —

**Hon. Philip Davis** — We saved Mount Stirling.

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — So 285 hectares were excised to develop ski lifts and the member says that is protecting Mount Stirling? I would not want to be protected by the member if that is what the opposition has done to protect Mount Stirling. I would not want to be a national park and be protected by you — and you are one of the opposition leaders — —

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Smith)** — Order! Through the Chair, Ms Darveniza!

**Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA** — I think that says it all: the Leader of the Opposition in this house has made it very clear what he sees as protection.

This is a very good bill. It is about building on many of the initiatives and actions that the Bracks government has already taken in its term of government to protect these very valuable environmental areas, to build on and expand resources that we have in those areas, to encourage people to be able to come and enjoy those areas, and to build on employment and business opportunities in the surrounding districts. This is a very good bill, it deserves the support of all members of this chamber, and I wish it a speedy passage.

**Hon. PHILIP DAVIS** (Gippsland) — I want to speak about the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill and to make my position very clear at the outset I will respond immediately to some comments made by the Honourable Elaine Carbines and the Honourable Robert Mitchell, if indeed they are honourable — which I do not really know.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Smith)** — Order! Mr Davis knows better than to make those sorts of comments in the house.

**Hon. PHILIP DAVIS** — I do not know what their forms of address are.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Smith)** — Order! Mr Davis knows better than to make those comments.

**Hon. PHILIP DAVIS** — It is very confusing — we used to all be honourable here, Acting President, but some people deem not to be honourable any more.

In any event the comments I wish to make are to respond to some aspersions cast on the opposition in respect of the position of the mountain cattlemen. I will deal with that expeditiously.

Let me be clear: the Liberal Party opposed absolutely the legislation presented to Parliament last year that removed the mountain cattlemen. At that time we gave

an undertaking, as we gave to the cattlemen themselves variously at the rally on 9 June 2005, separately at a meeting at Dinner Plain preceding that and separately again at the mountain cattlemen's get-together in January, that we will return the mountain cattlemen to the alpine park when we are next in government. That is the position of the parliamentary Liberal Party.

In relation to Mount Stirling, let me be clear that as far as I am concerned this bill may or may not have particular merit in the eyes of some people involved in the downhill ski industry and those who are involved with property interests on some resorts. However, with respect to the capacity of this bill to facilitate significant development on Mount Stirling, the opposition totally opposes that aspect of the bill. There is no question but that the additional security of tenure will ensure that any development proposal has a higher level of bankability, therefore capacity, to attract investment. We therefore believe that the government is motivated to put in place the policy of the Labor Party announced in 1983 and again in 1989 to establish a 5000-bed development, including constructing a gondola from the Delatite River on Mount Stirling. The opposition is absolutely opposed to these sorts of plans.

When the issue of Mount Stirling was last discussed significantly in a parliamentary sense, which was in 1996, the then Liberal-National party government made its position clear that Mount Stirling should not be developed into a downhill ski resort and that it should be reserved for the much-lower impact activities that go with traditional alpine and cross-country skiing arrangements.

Mount Stirling is quite special; and to those of us who have a personal familiarity with it, it is very special. I do not know how many members in this place have had the opportunity to be engaged in any meaningful way with Mount Stirling, either in summer or winter. Fortunately over the years I have had a large number of opportunities to be familiar with Mount Stirling, going back to 1968. I first learnt to ski in 1968 at Mount Stirling. That was in the days when men were men and boys were boys. The point of learning to ski on Mount Stirling was to put the skis over the shoulder, walk up, strap them on your feet, ski down and walk up again. I can tell you that by the time you had finished a day of skiing on Mount Stirling you had worked out that as a 15-year-old you were probably not quite a man yet, because it was an exhausting process.

The swishing at Mount Stirling was my first engagement with skiing and is something I fondly remember. I remember Mount Stirling in all its seasons, having on many occasions walked across it en route to

some of the other peaks in the high country that both in my youth and in later years I was keen to pursue. I make the point that Mount Stirling is not just an icon because some people have an historic attachment to it and perhaps yearn for their youth when they were stronger, fitter and faster; it is because it is an alpine area that is accessible to the public and has not been developed. We need to ensure that we preserve the opportunities for the community to be engaged in alpine recreation and activities which are not part of an intense development.

The opposition is concerned that the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill before the house creates the opportunity for Mount Stirling, as part of the arrangements of the Stirling-Buller management structure, to have long-term major development, and that the bill will facilitate that development simply by the change to the tenure arrangements that are facilitated within it. The opposition is concerned to excise from the bill those aspects of it which relate to Mount Stirling and therefore to preserve the pristine nature of Mount Stirling as a distinct and separate identity from the alpine resort at Mount Buller adjoining it. I have skied at resorts at Mount Buller and other resorts. Mount Buller is an interesting and enjoyable place for those people who enjoy the downhill experience. During the winter months many activities are undertaken at Mount Buller which we can enjoy and participate in, but that does not have to be the case on every peak in the high country.

In moving the reasoned amendment the Honourable David Davis made it clear that there should be consideration of community concerns and a guarantee provided to key stakeholders that no high-level development will be undertaken on Mount Stirling and that Mount Stirling will remain a pristine area administered consistently with the recommendations of the Mount Stirling environment effects statement (EES) of May 1996. That EES made it clear that there was no future for Mount Stirling as simply, in effect, a mirror of Mount Buller. It would be a great loss to the diversity of our high country if every resort were managed for an identical outcome, and that the principal purpose of their management was to provide an opportunity for commercial development of the mountain.

I see a large lump of hypocrisy floating through the Parliament at the moment with this bill. It was, after all, a Labor opposition which made a very impassioned argument about commercial development at Tidal River at Wilsons Promontory. The effect of those comments and the campaign waged against development was that there is no commercial

development at Tidal River. From the reasons articulated at that time by the then opposition, one would have to display an enormous amount of intellectual imagination to think that the principles are substantially different in this case.

Presently Mount Stirling is undeveloped. A large number of stakeholders, community interest groups and Victorian citizens, believe it should remain undeveloped. Large numbers of people regularly enjoy recreational activities of a less-sophisticated nature, I might say, compared with those enjoyed at the well-developed alpine resorts that have been designed for commercial downhill skiing, and that therefore those quiet pursuits should be encouraged. Therefore it would simply be a travesty were this bill to be passed in the form it is in, which would in effect facilitate over time a major investment in significant development on Mount Stirling, and therefore change the very nature of a mountain of which many Victorians are very fond.

I absolutely support the reasoned amendment and will be interested to hear the response from the minister in the house, the Minister for Local Government, on the government's view. I also look forward to the government's response in the committee debate, when I am sure some of these matters will be further teased out. In conclusion, I support the reasoned amendment.

**Hon. W. A. LOVELL** (North Eastern) — I rise to speak on the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill. Principally the bill allows for greater security of leases in the alpine resorts area. We have all heard what the bill includes, so I will not go over that again.

I want to talk more from a tourism point of view on the importance of the ski industry in Victoria. During 2005 a report was prepared for the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council, which has come out in June 2006, on the economic significance of the Australian alpine resorts. The report shows that the alpine resorts make a significant contribution to both the Victorian and local regional economies. The report indicates that alpine resorts are worth \$361 million in gross state product during the winter months and a further \$144 million during the summer months.

In the summer months the resorts generate about 40 per cent of what they generate during the winter months. Although they are mainly for winter activities they have quite a significant benefit to Victoria during the summer months as well. That gave us a total gross state product of \$505 million on annual basis. The report also shows that in 2005 alpine resorts contributed quite significantly to employment in the state, providing in winter an annual full-time equivalent of 4694 jobs and

in the summer the equivalent of 1877 jobs. The total gross direct expenditure generated by Victorian resorts was \$369 million. That covered all items of visitor expenditure, including food and drink and extending to lift passes, entry fees and travel from place of residence to the resort. Quite a significant amount of money is spent in the communities. Victorian resorts had 1.3 million visitor days in 2005 and visitors from other states made up a significant portion — around 16 per cent — of those visitors.

On a more regional level, I would like to mention some of the contributions the resorts make to local shires. The Alpine shire, part of which is in my electorate, includes the winter resorts of Falls Creek and Mount Hotham as well as Dinner Plain. It is interesting that Dinner Plain is not mentioned in this report. Falls Creek and Mount Hotham generated an additional \$106 million in gross regional product for the Alpine shire in 2005 — about 20 per cent of the shire's gross product. The resorts generated 1375 total annual equivalent employment opportunities. The combined shires of Mansfield and Benalla include the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling resorts. In 2005 the winter use of the resorts increased the combined economy of the shires by \$49 million, or 7.6 per cent. The resorts generated 555 total annual equivalent employment opportunities. The Murrindindi shire includes the resort of Lake Mountain, which contributes \$7.3 million to the shire's gross regional product and generated 127 total annual equivalent employment opportunities in 2005.

Alpine resorts provide significant benefits directly to the region and are an important part of our regional economy and tourism industry. The report goes on to list the benefits of greater usage of the resorts and suggests it would be possible to attract an additional 35 000 visitors by targeting international visitors to Australia or Australians who currently ski overseas. It estimates that this would yield to Victoria a benefit of \$40 million. There are certainly opportunities to grow the ski industry in Victoria and benefit those regional economies even further.

I started visiting the alpine area of Victoria in the late 1960s, when my godparents were part of a group that built a lodge at Mount Buller in its early days. It was then a very different resort to the one we see today. One of the things I discovered on my initial visits as a child was that I was more suited to being a snow bunny than a downhill skier. Problems with my balance told me very early on that I was never going to become a downhill skier. However, I discovered later in life that I am quite happy to find a very nice, resort-style lodge and stay in it for a few days. On my last trip, which was to Falls Creek, I spent four days in the lodge while the

others skied. I enjoyed all the benefits of the lodge — massages, facials et cetera — while the others were skiing. I even did a bit of sunbaking on the balcony while I was there. My one and only venture into cross-country skiing was at Mount Stirling with a group of friends who are into adventuring. They enjoy Mount Stirling for its pristine conditions. They love to pack their tents and camp in the snow. That was something that did not appeal to me. I was happy to stay at a friend's house off the mountain and just visit the snowfield during the day.

As I said, my friends enjoy Mount Stirling for its pristine conditions. We have heard that from the community around Mansfield, and that was the opinion of the community when it generally supported option C in the environment effects statement. Option C was for a nature-based, low-impact resort with a recreation focus. Unfortunately, since the release of the environment effects statement there has been total inaction by the government in adopting that position. In 2004 the government seemed to support option C.

John Dyson, the chair of the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board wrote a letter to the editor that was published in the *Herald Sun* on Thursday, 12 August, 2004, in response to a previous letter to the editor headed 'Skiing too expensive' published on 9 August of that year. I quote from John Dyson's letter:

The Mount Buller/Mount Stirling resort management board acknowledge that Hans Grimus is a Mt Buller icon ...

Mount Buller would not be the world-class resort it is today without his involvement ...

However, regarding Mount Stirling, the Victorian government has announced that it will remain a nature-based cross-country resort, with no ski lifts or downhill skiing.

Everyone was disappointed to hear of the recent proposal that indicates we could have a resort-style development on Mount Stirling. An article by Victoria Brown in the *Mansfield Courier* of 31 May under the heading 'Stirling bid a hot topic' says:

Mount Stirling resort authorities have sought state government approval to evaluate small-scale accommodation on the mountain.

The article says the management board's chief executive officer, Phil Nunn, has confirmed that accommodation was part of the Mount Stirling 2011 strategic management plan.

Further in the article Dr Alan Kerr of Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board said:

We thought the ESS had finally put to rest inappropriate development proposals on Mount Stirling and we are dismayed that this jewel in the crown of our alpine resorts is again under threat ...

From this article it is obvious that the proposal to have development on Mount Stirling is out of step with the express wishes of the people who use Mount Stirling. I certainly support alpine tourism and support some appropriate development that would improve its conditions for those who enjoy Mount Stirling, such as improvements to the daily visitors centre, but the Liberal Party does not support a Falls Creek or Mount Buller-style alpine village with multilevel ski lodges being established on Mount Stirling. For that reason, I support the reasoned amendment. If the government is genuine about not over-developing Mount Stirling, it will also support the reasoned amendment.

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

	<i>Ayes, 22</i>
Argondizzo, Ms	Madden, Mr
Broad, Ms	Mikakos, Ms
Buckingham, Mrs	Mitchell, Mr
Carbines, Ms	Nguyen, Mr
Darveniza, Ms	Pullen, Mr
Eren, Mr	Romanes, Ms
Hilton, Mr	Scheffer, Mr
Hirsh, Ms	Smith, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Somyurek, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )
Lenders, Mr	Thomson, Ms
McQuilten, Mr	Viney, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )

	<i>Noes, 19</i>
Atkinson, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )	Hadden, Ms
Baxter, Mr	Hall, Mr
Bishop, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )	Koch, Mr
Bowden, Mr	Lovell, Ms
Brideson, Mr	Olexander, Mr
Coote, Mrs	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Stoney, Mr
Davis, Mr D. McL.	Strong, Mr
Drum, Mr	Vogels, Mr
Forwood, Mr	

*Pair*

Theophanous, Mr      Davis, Mr P.

**Amendment negatived.**

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

**Committed.**

*Committee*

**Clauses 1 to 10 agreed to.**

**Clause 11**

**The ACTING CHAIR (Hon. J. G. Hilton)** — Order! Mr Davis is to move his amendment 1, which is a test of his amendment 2 to clause 12. Both are related to excluding the Mount Stirling alpine resort from certain provisions in the bill.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** (East Yarra) — I move:

1. Clause 11, page 7, line 12, after “under section 7” insert “, other than a lease in Mount Stirling Alpine Resort,”.

When this bill came to the Parliament’s attention initially, nobody thought that this was a problematic bill. The principles behind this bill in themselves are not things we object to. We believe the greater security and greater predictability of lease arrangements and the set of arrangements for the registration of leases are sensible. We believe the review that was conducted is helpful. We support those principles absolutely, and they should apply to the major downhill ski resorts: Mount Buller, Mount Hotham and so on. We think that will strengthen the position of the ski industry considerably, and to that extent we have been prepared to support the bill, both in its second-reading stage and indeed when it comes to the third-reading stage.

What we are concerned about is what has developed in the recent period since the bill was first introduced into the lower house. In the time since the briefing I received from the department — and I thank the department and the minister for that briefing — it has come to light that the government clearly does have a plan to develop Mount Stirling in a way that is inconsistent with the environment effects statement (EES) of the mid-1990s. That environment effects statement has been referred to by a number of speakers in this chamber during the second-reading debate. They certainly made great play of the importance of that environment effects statement, and I certainly support the approaches taken in the environment effects statement and the need to protect Mount Stirling as a resort for recreational activity of a lower intensity than that which we see at the major ski resorts, particularly the downhill ski resorts like Mount Buller.

Clearly the recent bill that brought together the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling resorts into one authority to manage those mountains and to plan for the future was significant and was supported broadly at the time. However, it became clear on the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board

web site recently that the government, through that authority, did have a plan for the development of Mount Stirling that was not consistent at all in my view and in the view of many others with the approach that was outlined in the environment effects statement and with the understandings that people had built up about the future of Mount Stirling.

I hasten to add that we are very supportive of sensible development at Mount Stirling, which would see visitors supported in their day trips to the area and able to have access to certain facilities. What we do not support is the building of a full alpine village of the sort we see at many of the other downhill resorts. We think that would spoil Mount Stirling and would not provide an enhancement that the community would support. We think the environmental values that are important there would be compromised, and much of the tourism that occurs in our mountains now, particularly in the off seasons, is driven by those environmental values.

I want to quote again for the chamber the comments made in the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling strategic management plan. I again make the point to the chamber that this strategic management plan has now been taken off the web site; it has disappeared. That was a slippery act. It was an act that we think showed bad faith by the government when it came under heat and public pressure in regard to its true intentions. Page 14 of the plan refers to item 5.3.1 headed 'Alpine resorts planning scheme and village design' and states:

Reference the Alpine Resorts 2020 strategy as the overarching strategic direction to guide planning decisions in the resorts.

Under 'Actions' it states:

Amend the Mount Stirling section of the alpine resorts planning scheme addressing

infrastructure for the public

the provision of accommodation such as tented accommodation

recreational facilities.

At a slightly later point, under item 5.3.2 headed 'Accommodation', the document describes the aim as:

Facilitate a broad range of affordable and value-for-money accommodation that is available to the public in summer and winter.

Under 'Actions' the plan states:

Encourage the provision to the public of a diverse range of quality accommodation.

Specifically it says:

Evaluate a range of options for accommodation on Mount Stirling and at Mirimbah.

It is hard to get this wrong. The intention laid out in the strategic plan is for a significant amount of accommodation on Mount Stirling with the evaluation of a range of options. I know the Mount Stirling task force had further evidence, and I have recorded some of this in my second-reading debate. It is important in moving this amendment that it be put on the record, again juxtaposed with the amendment that we seek to move.

On 28 May the Mount Stirling development task force issued a news release entitled 'Hotel Horror on Mount Stirling' and reported a meeting between the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board and the Mount Stirling development task force. It states:

... last week the board made clear its enthusiasm for what the board calls 'high-end user' accommodation developments on Mount Stirling.

This is a concern. There is no doubt that the plan was on to develop Mount Stirling inconsistent with the environment effects statement. I, for one, am opposed to that. I know Mr Stoney has fought a long battle to protect Mount Stirling, and I compliment him and many others, including those on the task force — Dr Alan Kerr, Martin Hunt and others — on the long fight they have fought to protect Mount Stirling.

That does not mean that there is no development, it means there is no development of an inconsistent nature that would ensure that the values that people believe are appropriate for the mountain are compromised. The task force says in its news release:

We are not against appropriate tourism development on Mount Stirling and we are not against high end user accommodation in the Mansfield district, but this is not right for Mount Stirling and the minister must unequivocally and publicly reject the idea from the start.

That completely summarises the sentiments of the community and the opposition.

What we are seeking to do with this amendment is to say that it is inappropriate for these sorts of high-level developments to occur in the Mount Stirling area, that these monstrous developments are best contained in the current footprint of the major resorts and not allowed to stray across onto Mount Stirling, to see an overdevelopment of the mountain. If that were to occur, those values would be compromised — it would be a very sad day if that were to occur.

Why the government would need to provide these additional arrangements for leases and licences on Mount Stirling is beyond me. If the government were sincere about protecting Mount Stirling, then it could well leave the lease arrangements on Mount Stirling as they are and thereby excise them from the bill, as the proposed amendment attempts to do.

I invite the government to sincerely consider that by excising them it can make a statement that it does not intend to put major accommodation on Mount Stirling that would require these higher levels of lease protection that is necessary and appropriate in the major resorts. They are not required on a mountain that does not have that development; they are simply not required.

If the government is prepared to vote for that, I hasten to say that it is hard to interpret that in a way other than that they see those lease arrangements as being necessary on Mount Stirling, and that foreshadows that there will be further development.

The Nationals will not support the amendment. I put on record my strong belief in the individuals in The Nationals but my disappointment that they will not support the amendment. I know, for example, Mr Hall today moved a very important motion in this chamber about childhood education and kindergartens, which I respect greatly, but I am disappointed that The Nationals will not support the amendment. They may not have fully understood what is at stake, which is disappointing.

I certainly communicated to The Nationals' planning spokesperson, the member for Shepparton in the other place, my intention to move this amendment excising Mount Stirling from the provisions of the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill, and I also communicated that to the member for Benalla in the other place, Dr Sykes, personally. Obviously the member for Shepparton has overall carriage of those planning issues for The Nationals, and she does that very strongly.

The member for Benalla has an electorate to which this is appropriate. Certainly my understanding is that he was concerned about what could occur on Mount Stirling, as are most people. In the local newspapers there has been some considerable discussion on a number of these matters, and he has certainly been prepared to speak out publicly on some of these things. For example, he spoke in Parliament last week on the importance of protection of the pristine natural beauty of Mount Stirling, and in debate on this bill in that chamber he made a number of points. Our concern is that without a preparedness to excise

Mount Stirling from the bill, it leaves Mount Stirling that bit more vulnerable.

It is true to say that this amendment on its own accord will not protect Mount Stirling forever into the future, but it is an important test about the government's intentions and the minister's intentions. I have to say that the minister, as I said in the second-reading debate, has been very fluffy on this issue. He has been all over the shop as he sought to indicate that there will not be development but not quite ruling it out and not quite closing the door. That is of considerable concern. I hope he closes the door on future development.

I know he has written to the Mount Stirling development task force. The essence of that letter, of which I do not have a copy but it certainly has been relayed to me, is that the government will ensure that development on Mount Stirling is consistent with its policy. On the one hand that can be interpreted as a slap down for the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board but on the other hand it can be read that if there is a shift in the government's policy at the moment, it leaves the mountain very exposed to future development.

The question for the government is: if it has no plan to develop Mount Stirling in any appropriate way that is consistent with the EES, why does it need the powers in the bill? If it plans to develop Mount Stirling, as it appears the Mount Stirling and Mount Buller authority contemplates doing, then it would need these powers and it would want to oppose this amendment, but the government should at least have the honesty to come clean and say that it will develop Mount Stirling and the public can then make a proper judgment about the government's environmental credentials and its commitment to protecting important areas of Victoria's alpine regions.

I hasten to add again that we are very supportive of the proper development that has occurred inside the footprints of many of the major resorts and ongoing developments. I note there was one as recently as last weekend that the minister opened at Dinner Plain. When asked to comment on that, I was certainly supportive of that development, as I am of most of those appropriate developments. In terms of environmental impact inside the major resorts it is important to put on record that the opposition is supportive of steps to reduce the environmental impact of skiing and the alpine pursuits that people undertake on the Alps, and that means dealing with waste on the mountain and with the impact of large populations and movements of populations in and out of the alpine regions.

These are laudable aims that are shared across the Parliament — across both chambers and all sides of the Parliament. But the idea that we would open up Mount Stirling to further excessive development is of great concern to me. It is for that reason that I intend to move this amendment. But before I do so I want to ask the minister a couple of very direct questions. The first of those relates to clause 11 and the leases in Mount Stirling alpine resort. How many of those leases currently exist, and could the minister provide the chamber with a list of those current leases to which this bill and this provision would apply?

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Local Government) — Before responding to that question, given the wide-ranging nature of the member's comments, there are some matters which I wish to place on the record.

The government's environmental credentials are not at issue here. The only issue before us right now is the extraordinary efforts that the member has made to beat up a 'monstrous', to use his own words, 'red herring'; and I congratulate The Nationals on their clear thinking in seeing through that attempt for exactly what it is — a complete and utter beat-up.

I was very pleased over the course of the long weekend to meet the members of the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board and many other members of the local community to discuss these issues. They are very clear about the government's stance on these matters and they fully support it. That stance is very clearly set out in legislation, and I defy any reasonable, clear-thinking person to find any part of what is already in legislation equivocal in any sense whatsoever. The legislation already states at section 38(3) of the act:

In relation to Mount Stirling Alpine Resort, the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board must exercise its functions under sub-section (1) subject to the following principles:

- (a) that the resort must be planned for, developed, promoted and managed as a nature-based tourist, recreational and educational resource for all seasons of the year; and
- (b) that there are not to be any ski lifts in the resort.

Government member after government member in the second-reading debate has drawn attention to those provisions of the act in addition to the government's very clearly stated policy that Mount Stirling is for low-impact activities, not major development, and the government's view that this amendment to the act in 2004 ensured that that policy of the government is not only a policy but is enshrined in legislation. For those

reasons, needless to say, the government does not support or accept the member's amendment, which has clearly been set out for the purpose of trying to make this red herring bigger and bigger. As the member has acknowledged in his own statements, this amendment does not alter the power of the board to lease any land that it manages.

All this amendment would achieve, if it were agreed to, and it certainly will not be agreed to by the government, is that the flexibility which has been provided through this bill to all of the resorts would not be available in relation to Mount Stirling. For those reasons the government does not support or accept this amendment or the proposed amendment.

In relation to the information that the member has sought in relation to current leases, I am advised that there is a report which was produced in recent times which sets out the leases at that point in time. I do not have available to me an up-to-date version of that list of current leases, but I can certainly undertake to seek that information and, if it is available, to make it available to the member.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** (East Yarra) — I find it extraordinary, on the minister's own admission, that the government cannot tell us how many such leases on Mount Stirling would be impacted by this. The government is prepared to vote down such an amendment, but it cannot tell us how many Mount Stirling leases would be affected by clause 11 or by the relevant clauses of this bill. I think that is indicative of its failure to think this through clearly. I would be very interested if the minister could provide that information to the chamber and would certainly be very appreciative if we could have those figures put into the formal record of this Parliament as we debate this clause. Am I presuming here that the minister has those figures?

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Local Government) — Further to my previous reference, on page 31 of the *Alpine Resorts Background Paper — Registration of Leases, Strata Titles for Leases*, there is a table headed 'Current leasing details' and it indicates for Mount Stirling that there is one lease.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** (East Yarra) — Perhaps the minister could inform the chamber of any discussions or proposals or plans that may exist with respect to Mount Stirling. Alternatively, if there are none, could she assure the house that there are no such current plans afoot?

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Local Government) — As the government has already very clearly indicated publicly, but especially for the member's benefit in the house today, I repeat that there are no proposals before the government. Even if any proposals were to come forward in the future, it is not the government's policy and it would not be in accordance with the legislation, which can only be changed by the Parliament, and the government would not support that because it would not be in accordance with the government's policy to allow any development at Mount Stirling.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** (East Yarra) — Perhaps in examining these relevant clauses a little more closely the minister could explain to the chamber what is meant in the Mount Stirling 2011 strategic management plan that was on the web site. Perhaps she could explain to the house what is meant by the reference in clause 5.3.1 of that plan to 'the provision of accommodation such as tented accommodation' and the references in clause 5.3.2 to 'Evaluate a range of options for accommodation on Mount Stirling and at Mirimbah' and 'Encourage the provision to the public of a diverse range of quality accommodation'.

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Local Government) — I believe the document the member is referring to is a draft, and in fact I think I can read the word 'draft' upside down stamped on it.

**Hon. D. McL. Davis** — Yes.

**Ms BROAD** — It has never been presented to the minister and that is all it is, a draft document.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** (East Yarra) — My understanding is that this document was indeed presented to the minister. Certainly people on the mountain are of the view that this document was presented to the minister and there were later discussions between the department and the board, and at that point the board removed this document from the Mount Buller-Mount Stirling web site. Is that correct?

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Local Government) — I have already indicated it to the member and I will indicate it again — I am not sure which part of it he did not understand — that the advice to me is that that draft document has not been presented to the minister and that is all it is, a draft.

**Hon. D. McL. DAVIS** (East Yarra) — Perhaps the minister could then explain to the chamber why the document was hastily removed from the web site, and why the alternative document, if there is such an alternative document, was not available, certainly as recently as a day ago.

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Local Government) — No, I am not in a position to do that, but given the draft is clearly not in accord with government policy, that might be a good explanation why it is no longer on a web site.

**Hon. P. R. HALL** (Gippsland) — I think the committee would expect an explanation of The Nationals' position on both amendments, particularly given the fact that our position seems to have been argued from both sides of the fence already. Mr Davis commended us for not supporting the reasoned amendment, and the minister has congratulated us for not supporting these amendments. However, let me explain the position we adopt on these amendments.

We were happy to support the reasoned amendment that was put before the house because we think it was a reasonable request to ask for a clear commitment from the government that no high-level development would be undertaken on Mount Stirling. We certainly support that position and believe that was a reasonable request from the opposition. Whether that has been responded to satisfactorily by the government is a matter of opinion, but nevertheless, as we said from the outset, we are prepared to support this bill but we are not prepared to support the reasoned amendment.

I was not aware of the intended amendments to this bill that we are now considering, and I admit it may be a fault of my colleagues. However, during the course of the second-reading debate I said I would consult with my colleague, the member for Benalla in the other place, Dr Sykes, who represents that area, as to his views on these two amendments. In the end we have decided not to support the amendments for these reasons. We are not sure that these amendments will not restrict the issuing of a lease for other appropriate purposes, and as Mr Davis said in moving the amendments, he is not opposed to some development taking place on Mount Stirling. It may be that we do not understand the full implications of amendment 1 and its impact on clause 11 and that is why we are taking this cautious approach to it. We would not want to impede appropriate developments taking place on Mount Stirling.

I acknowledge there is a bit of trust in not supporting this amendment, but given that Dr Sykes had the opportunity over the weekend to speak to some of his constituents who have interests in Mount Stirling, the opinion that he came away with from those consultations was that his constituents were satisfied that the provisions in clauses 11 and 12 will not open the door to future inappropriate developments. So for those reasons we are not supporting these two

amendments, but as I said, it is not entirely inconsistent with our approach. We thought the reasoned amendment to the bill itself was a fair request and one that was supportable, but again, principally because we are not sure these amendments will not restrict the opportunity for a lease for appropriate developments we are therefore not prepared to support them.

**Committee divided on amendment:**

*Ayes, 13*

Atkinson, Mr	Koch, Mr
Bowden, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )	Lovell, Ms
Brideson, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )
Coote, Mrs	Stoney, Mr
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Strong, Mr
Davis, Mr D. McL.	Vogels, Mr
Hadden, Ms	

*Noes, 25*

Argondizzo, Ms	McQuilten, Mr
Baxter, Mr	Madden, Mr
Bishop, Mr	Mikakos, Ms
Broad, Ms	Mitchell, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )
Buckingham, Mrs	Nguyen, Mr
Carbines, Ms ( <i>Teller</i> )	Olexander, Mr
Darveniza, Ms	Pullen, Mr
Drum, Mr	Scheffer, Mr
Eren, Mr	Smith, Mr
Hall, Mr	Somyurek, Mr
Hirsh, Ms	Thomson, Ms
Jennings, Mr	Viney, Mr
Lenders, Mr	

*Pairs*

Davis, Mr P.	Theophanous, Mr
Forwood, Mr	Romanes, Ms

**Amendment negatived.**

**Clause agreed to; clauses 12 and 13 agreed to.**

**Reported to house without amendment.**

**Report adopted.**

*Third reading*

**Ms BROAD** (Minister for Local Government) — I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

In so doing I thank honourable members for their contributions to the debate.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

*Remaining stages*

**Passed remaining stages.**

**STATE TAXATION (REDUCTIONS AND CONCESSIONS) BILL**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed from 8 June; motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance).**

**Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS** (Eumemmerring) — The Liberal Party will support the State Taxation (Reductions and Concessions) Bill now before the house on the basis that, as inadequate as it is, it does provide some relief to Victoria's long-suffering state taxpayers.

One of the interesting things about our budget process is that although Parliament is in the process of taking note of the budget papers and debating the appropriation bill, the actual initiatives that were announced by the Treasurer in terms of changes to the state taxation regime require a separate bill to come before the house to amend the taxation legislation.

Although the initiatives were announced in the budget, articulated in the budget speech and reflected in the budget papers they do not actually take effect without separate legislation being brought forward to amend the requisite acts — in this case, in terms of taxation, the Duties Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005 and the Payroll Tax Act 1971.

It is the purpose of this bill to put into effect some but not all of the changes that were announced in the state budget by the Treasurer two weeks ago, and a number of things have occurred since that budget was brought down. The first of those that I place on record is the sudden and sad death of the Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance, Mr Ian Little. For those members of this house who, like me, are also members of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee it was particularly sad to hear of Mr Little's death early last week. He had been heavily involved with the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in the work that it does in relation to the budget, and indeed had presented at the budget breakfast for the PAEC only three or four days before his death. I take this opportunity to place on record my condolences to his family. His sudden death will be a great loss to the state of Victoria and to the Department of Treasury and Finance.

One of the other changes since the budget came before this house was the decision by the commonwealth not to proceed with the sale of its share of Snowy Hydro Ltd, and as a consequence, the decision by the governments of Victoria and New South Wales also to not proceed with the sale of their respective shares of Snowy Hydro. That has had a major impact on the government's announcements with respect to the proceeds of that sale.

As part of the budget cycle, the government announced that it would spend an estimated \$600 million of proceeds from the sale of Victoria's share of Snowy Hydro to fund some school replacements, some substantial upgrades and maintenance of schools. It was interesting at the time the announcement was made to note that an asset sale such as the state's share of Snowy Hydro was required to fund much-needed maintenance of our state schools, and honourable members will recall that when the previous government came to office in 1992 there was a substantial backlog of maintenance on state schools — of the order of \$600 million or \$700 million over the life of that government.

A lot of that backlog was drawn down. However, since the change of government in 1999 very little has been done to address the maintenance backlog in our state schools, and in fact in some areas we have seen that backlog increase.

It was only through the proposed sale of Snowy Hydro that the backlog was to be funded by this government. Now that the sale will not proceed there is a substantial shortfall in the government's revenue against the commitment of those funds. Since the Premier and the Treasurer have appeared before the estimates committee they have noted that despite announcing the sale of Snowy Hydro and the way in which the proceeds were to be acquitted, the budget papers themselves only record spending of \$150 million against that \$600 million target, so \$450 million of the government's commitment on education maintenance expenditure has not been appropriated. The Premier and Treasurer have both indicated that due to that sale not proceeding, those funds would have to be found elsewhere. The consequence of that is that many of the projects that were announced within a three to four-year time frame will have to be delayed due to those sale proceeds not being available for the education budget.

The Premier made the interesting observation that the government would proceed with its planned package of education maintenance on the basis that it would be funded from unallocated capital as reported in the budget papers, and, curiously, from future dividends

from Snowy Hydro. It was interesting that the Premier grabbed at the concept of using future dividends from Snowy Hydro to fund the government's education commitments. He told the estimates committee that the government had received dividends from Snowy Hydro of the order of \$45 million per annum, but what he did not state and what is evident from examining the annual reports of Snowy Hydro is that dividends have only been paid for the last two years. In the previous financial year the state attracted dividends of the order of \$40 million and in the year before that a slightly higher figure, so the total dividends that have been paid by Snowy Hydro since its corporatisation are only of the order of \$80 million to \$90 million, which is obviously substantially short of the funds that the government needs for its commitment.

What the Premier did not address in his statement and what the Minister for Finance did not address when I raised the issue with him in the adjournment debate is the prospect the government has of relying on those future dividend payments. As honourable members know, the Victorian government is only a minority shareholder in Snowy Hydro and does not have a controlling interest in the company, so that, firstly, the capacity of the Victorian government to dictate dividend policy for the company is basically nonexistent and, secondly, the opportunity for the directors of the company to make decisions on dividends looking at the interests of the Victorian government as a shareholder, as distinct from looking at the interests of the company as a whole and its future capital needs, is something that would rub very seriously against the requirements of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, noting of course that Snowy Hydro is a corporation that is regulated by ASIC.

I have a number of issues with the Premier's hypothesis that the education package will be funded through dividends from Snowy Hydro. Firstly, the government does not control the flow of dividends. Secondly, the board of Snowy Hydro would have to make a decision on dividends in the interests of the company, not in the interests of the state government. As honourable members know, one of the reasons the three governments were looking at a sale of Snowy Hydro was to give access to additional capital. The asset base of the Snowy Mountains hydro-electric scheme is very old — 30 to 50 years — and its infrastructure will require capital injection. As it stands now as a company, Snowy Hydro does not have the capital resources available to it for that upgrade.

One of the advantages that the initial public offering would have given was that the company would have

had access to capital on the stock market. Now that that option has gone, Snowy Hydro will be required to find its capital needs elsewhere. One option is through the use of retained earnings and the other option is through raising debt. Both those options, though, will impact on Snowy Hydro's capacity to pay dividends. It is worth placing on record that for the two years in which the company has paid dividends to its three government shareholders, those dividends have accounted for roughly 90 per cent of the company's profit, so the dividend flow on which the Premier is looking to rely to pay for his education package represents roughly 90 per cent of the company's recorded profit for the two years in which it has paid dividends. At some point in time the directors of Snowy Hydro will have to make a decision; they will have to decide whether to fund their capital requirement through borrowings. If they do that, it will obviously have an impact on the bottom line in terms of interest costs and will therefore reduce profits. Alternatively, if they make a decision to fund the capital requirement from retained earnings, they will not be in a position to pay out the dividends at a level of 90 per cent of their profits as they have for the last two years.

With both of those options available to them it looks unlikely that the state will be in a position to rely upon the dividend flow that the Premier spoke about to fund his education package.

Therefore it raises the question of exactly how that commitment will be funded by the government going forward. The Premier's statement at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the Treasurer's statements yesterday have really only served to muddy the waters more than anything in terms of how that package will be funded.

I said earlier that the bill before the house puts in place some of the taxation measures that were announced by the Treasurer in his budget speech two weeks ago. It is not the full package, it only addresses — as the title of the bill notes — some of the measures that the Treasurer announced. In particular it makes some changes to the thresholds at which exemptions and concessions for pensioners in relation to stamp duty kick in, raising the threshold in from \$250 000 to \$300 000 for exemptions and from \$300 000 to \$400 000 for concessions.

The bill also changes some of the entitlements in regard to the election of concessions with respect to the first home owner bonus the Victorian component of which, as honourable members know, is due to be abolished within the next 12 months. This bonus was put in place by the Victorian government a number of years ago in

addition to the commonwealth's first home owner grant. As members know, the commonwealth initiative was announced as part of the intergovernmental agreement between the commonwealth and the states effectively as a transitional arrangement to address one of the impacts of the introduction of the goods and services tax. As part of the agreement between the states and the commonwealth, under which the states are the beneficiaries of the goods and services tax revenue, the states all agreed to implement the first home owner grant scheme, which provided for \$7000 to be paid to people who under the criteria are identified as first home buyers.

Roughly three years ago the state government decided to implement a bonus to that scheme. It supplemented that scheme. Initially it was a supplement of \$7000, which allowed first home owners a total of \$14 000 against the cost of a first home. Of course while that was very welcome among first home owners, and many of them are in my electorate, it did not address the fact that under the state government the level of stamp duty paid by first home owners had escalated through the roof. With the property boom over the last four years, first home buyers were paying substantially more stamp duty on a first home than was the case in many of the other state jurisdictions around Australia. So while the supplement to the first home owner grant, the bonus, was gratefully received by Victorian first home buyers, it went no way to compensating them for the extra level of stamp duty they were required to pay on their first home purchases simply due to the escalation in property prices.

This bill also make some changes to the land tax scales and makes some changes with respect to payroll tax. I place on the record at this time that while the government and the Treasury in particular have announced in successive budgets that Victorian taxpayers have received \$X in tax cuts, it is worth noting that in aggregate Victorian taxpayers will pay more tax this year than they have in every previous year. During the life of this government we have seen the total aggregate level of taxation collected by the state government increase from year to year.

When the government first came to power in the 1999–2000 year the actual aggregate level of taxation collected by the state government, and I quote from the historic series in appendix A of budget paper 4, was \$9.7 billion. Every year since, with the exception of 2000–01 because of the changes under the intergovernmental agreement in relation to the introduction of the GST, after allowing for those one-off changes, the state government has collected more and more taxation revenue in aggregate. So

despite the Premier and the Treasurer getting up at successive budgets and saying that the state has reduced taxation by \$X, the reality is that the reductions, the adjustments in rates and thresholds that the Treasurer has announced, have not compensated for the growth in economic activity in either wages or property prices that are reflected across the economy. We are seeing an increase in the level of state taxation collected every year under this Treasurer.

In 2000–01, the GST year — the GST package was introduced on 1 July 2000 — state taxation was at \$8.5 billion, and in every subsequent year it has increased: in 2001–02 to \$8.8 billion, in 2002–03 to \$9.3 billion, in 2003–04 to \$10 billion, in 2004–05 to \$10.4 billion and in a revised estimate for the current financial year to just under \$10.8 billion. Notwithstanding the measures that are implemented by this bill we will see a further increase in the aggregate level of state taxation to just under \$11 billion in the 2006–07 year.

While the Treasurer likes to trumpet the level of so-called tax cuts which he is making and which will be implemented by the changes made by this bill, they do not compensate for shifts in the economy, they do not compensate for wages growth and they do not compensate for increases in property prices. Any claim to a tax cut is, at best, an illusion because the growth rate of those measures means that the level of taxation collected by the state will continue to rise, despite the changes in thresholds and rates.

It is pretty rich for the Treasurer in his budget speech to trumpet these changes and expect the people of Victoria to be grateful. The reality is that the changes announced in this budget and in previous budgets do not compensate for growth in the economy. As a media commentator on the state budget noted, if we had had the same level of cuts to income tax under the federal government as we have had to the state tax regime under this government, given the growth in the economy over that period, there would be an outcry. The rate changes announced by the Treasurer simply do not compensate for the change in the economy over the life of this government. That is why we are seeing the aggregate level of taxation collected by this government increase, despite the announcements made by the Treasurer. It is also why we are seeing the majority of the individual taxes collected by this government increase.

Page 171 of budget paper 4 looks at the budgeted receipts to the consolidated fund and breaks down the taxation receipts into the various taxes. Despite the changes announced by the Treasurer with respect to

payroll tax, we will see budgeted revenue for payroll tax increase from \$3.5 billion in 2005–06 to more than \$3.8 billion in 2006–07. Admittedly, we see a slight reduction in the level of land tax — from \$824 million in 2005–06 to around \$747 million in 2006–07, but it very quickly returns to a level collected in previous years, in the out years.

From the congestion levy, which was a new tax introduced by this government, this year the level of revenue collected has doubled.

**Hon. E. G. Stoney** interjected.

**Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS** — I thank the whip; at least the message is now consistent. Similarly we are seeing a growth in revenue from individual gambling taxes that far exceed the level of growth in the broader economy.

The measures the Treasurer trumpets as tax cuts that Victorian taxpayers should be grateful for are, at best, an illusion. They do not make up for the growth we have seen in the economy over the life of this government and they do not provide real reductions in taxation for Victorian taxpayers, as the forward estimates show. These measures are a minimum; Victorian taxpayers have a right to expect more. I look forward to this government delivering more in terms of tax reform and tax cuts for long-suffering Victorian taxpayers.

**Debate adjourned on motion of  
Hon. W. R. BAXTER (North Eastern).**

**Debate adjourned until next day.**

## ADJOURNMENT

**Mr LENDERS** (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Member for Gembrook: conduct**

**Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS** (Eumemmerring) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education and Training in the other place. It relates to an article which was published in the *Pakenham Gazette* and which has been brought to my attention concerning the distribution of posters by the member for Gembrook in the other place. The member has circulated posters to various schools within the Gembrook electorate. The posters have a presentation of times tables, but at the bottom they also have a promotion of the member herself as the member for Gembrook. This matter has been raised in the media by

a number of teachers and a school principal in the Gembrook electorate complaining about the way in which the member has attempted to politicise the presentation of educational material.

One of the schools has noted that the use of a times table is a very outdated means of promoting mathematics in schools and that it is not the way that mathematics is taught. The school has also complained that the member is attempting to politicise the presentation of this information to schools, and noted that in bypassing the school administration and the principal and presenting it directly to one of the classrooms she was acting inappropriately.

I ask the Minister for Education and Training to investigate the matter and to direct the member for Gembrook to not present the material to schools in this manner in the future. The fact that teachers and schools have been offended by and have publicly presented objections to the way it has been done demonstrates that the member should conduct such matters in a far better way.

### **Barmah State Forest: cattle grazing**

**Hon. W. R. BAXTER** (North Eastern) — I wish to direct a matter to the attention of the Minister for Environment in another place. It goes to the issue of grazing in the Barmah State Forest and the release of a report which was apparently prepared by the department some time ago but which has not been released. There were expectations among the local graziers and population that that report would be released, but the government has apparently taken a decision that because there is now a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council inquiry into the river red gums, the report will not be released until VEAC completes its deliberations.

I find that logic somewhat difficult to follow, because I think it would be better if all available information — correct or otherwise, tainted or otherwise, logical or otherwise — was put on the table for VEAC's consideration. But as always happens when governments attempt to hide things, they leak out. Last week in the *Age* newspaper there was a big article about this. What concerns me is that there is obviously a leak out of the minister's department to someone in the Victorian National Parks Association. I suspect that it was that person in the VNPA who alerted the *Age*.

What is my evidence for making that allegation? The evidence is that the photograph used in the *Age* article last week of the alleged damage to the Barmah forest by cattle grazing and cattle crossing a creek in the forest

as part of an annual muster also appears on the VNPA web site, so I am advised. That seems to me to be fairly significant, albeit circumstantial, evidence that there is a leak from the minister's department to the VNPA, and the VNPA has taken it upon itself to make mischief.

That being the case, I call on the minister to formally release the report forthwith so all interested parties know what it contains and are in a position to respond to it and rebut it if they believe it is incorrect, rather than having a document floating around and being held in secrecy, but which has been made available, rightly or wrongly, to one of the parties involved in this issue. It is not fair to make it available to one party unless it is available to all. I call on the minister to release it.

### **Timber industry: auctions**

**Hon. DAVID KOCH** (Western) — The matter I raise for the Minister for Agriculture in the other place concerns recent auctions in the timber industry. Many rural communities are in grave economic danger as a result of major timber mills failing to secure log supplies at recent industry auctions. Sawmillers who competed for native timber contracts in the second phase of the auctions and missed out on much-needed logs have publicly expressed the view that the auction process used by VicForests is fatally flawed.

Prices achieved for these valuable contracts do not represent the industry viability that the taxpayer-funded Our Forests Our Future policy sought to achieve. Prices realised were 20 to 25 per cent above industry expectation. The result has left many sawmillers in an unviable position into the immediate future. I am informed that in some cases it is unlikely that successful bidders will be able to meet the cost of their purchases, further frustrating losing bidders.

Although detailed outcomes remain unclear as auction results are not yet published, the 82 grievance notifications that were lodged by both successful and unsuccessful bidders are an indication of the industry's concern. That all grievances were rejected by the VicForests panel should come as no surprise, as the grievance panel consisted of none other than the chief executive officer of VicForests, the sales director of VicForests and the BOMweb auction manager appointed by VicForests. Many have asked: is this another case of VicForests being judge and jury in its own case; or is VicForests trying to extract every last cent out of this skewed auction process at the expense of our small rural communities; or, worse, does VicForests desire to see greater timber imports into Victoria?

Contracts available for auction will see a reduction of up to 15 per cent of resources over the next five years. The shortfall will further threaten the viability of active milling businesses, their employees and small rural communities. This situation is contrary to the — —

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! The member's time has expired.

**Hon. DAVID KOCH** — Where is the clock? It could not have expired, President — not in your wildest dreams.

**An honourable member** — I do not think the clock was on to begin with.

**Hon. DAVID KOCH** — It has not been. The clock was not running when I started, President.

**Hon. Andrea Coote** — Let him do it again.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! No. The member has another minute.

**Hon. DAVID KOCH** — This situation is contrary to the Bracks government's 1999 policy that supposedly supported the viability of small rural communities. Given the contribution that the timber industry makes to the Victorian economy and the jobs it supports, the current situation has come as somewhat of an aberration in the distribution of timber and sawlog allocations for millers and has unnecessarily threatened many rural communities.

I ask that the Minister for Agriculture review the VicForests auction processes as a matter of urgency in order that all future bidders for timber contracts can bid on a basis which is not distorted and which will allow equal competition among all forestry industry participants.

### **Rail: Clayton crossing**

**Hon. ANDREW BRIDESON** (Waverley) — I raise an issue with the Minister for Transport in the other place. It concerns the ever-increasing traffic snarls at the Clayton Road railway crossing in Clayton. Motorists are becoming extremely frustrated with the gridlock that occurs every time trains go along the railway line. Traders are also becoming increasingly concerned because people are turning away from the shopping centre, and this is reflected in their tills. There is an expectation from people who use Clayton Road, from the residents of Clayton and from the traders of Clayton that the government urgently do something to alleviate this problem.

Last week in a letter to the local paper, the *Oakleigh Monash Leader*, Brenda Bacon said:

I have on numerous occasions in the morning waited for between 17 and 20 minutes and counted eight trains going through without the gates opening between them.

In another article in the same newspaper she is quoted as saying it is much quicker to drive into Mount Waverley to get a carton of milk than shop in her local shopping centre. Bill Pontikis, the president of the Clayton Traders Association, is quoted in this article as saying:

Of course the train line is affecting the Clayton traders ...

You come at certain times of the day and it —

traffic —

goes back to Centre Road. It is definitely affecting business.

I come up to the train line now and I just switch my car off and read a book.

As I said, it is most frustrating to all who use Clayton Road.

In my budget reply I mentioned that the government was doing the Middleborough Road grade separation in Blackburn. Middleborough Road becomes Stephenson's Road in Mount Waverley, and Stephenson's Road becomes Clayton Road. It is a major thoroughfare on the north-south route between Box Hill and Frankston. EastLink may alleviate some traffic problems, but I am talking about the local traffic snarls. I note that in the past three or four years the government has taken major steps to get trucks off this section of Clayton Road, particularly the stretch between the Monash Medical Centre and Centre Road. I ask the minister to urgently do something to alleviate this problem. I also ask him to advise me and the constituents of Waverley Province of what he proposes to do to alleviate the increasing problem of traffic congestion at the Clayton Road railway crossing.

### **Disability services: modified vehicle assistance**

**Hon. ANDREA COOTE** (Monash) — My adjournment matter tonight is addressed to the Minister for Community Services in the other place, the Honourable Sherryl Garbutt, and it regards Brendan Hart and his need for a modified van. I have a heart-rending letter from Brendan's mother, Maria. I will not read it into *Hansard*, but I will refer to some of the issues she raises.

**Hon. M. R. Thomson** interjected.

**Hon. ANDREA COOTE** — It is a modified van.

Brendan is a severely physically and intellectually disabled 14-year-old. He requires care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. His father is on shiftwork and his mother stays at home to look after Brendan. She also has a little baby. Brendan attends the Cobram Special Development Primary School during the daytime, but in order to get him there, his father has to lift him into and out of the car, so his father has to juggle his shiftwork around this. Brendan, at 14, is too heavy for his mother to lift.

They live in a small country town close to Cobram. They have no public transport and there is no government assistance for any vehicle modifications. Mrs Hart has contacted many groups including the Department of Human Services, the Variety Club, philanthropic organisations and Community Interlink, but no-one has been able to assist her. To modify a car such as a Chrysler Voyager for use by a disabled person would cost in the vicinity of \$54 000. This is an exorbitant amount of money and the family cannot afford it.

It is absolutely appalling that this woman has to put up with this type of situation, which reflects a number of issues which affect the support of the disabled right across the state. I want to remind members of this chamber again about disabilities and the fact that this Bracks government in its latest budget gave no money at all to carers. I will quote from Jean Tops again:

... to carers and friends,

... I have taken a look at the budget for disability services handed down today, and you might as well say there isn't one! \$46.5 million over four years?

That is going to go nowhere. She also said:

Big spending budget for everyone except disabled and their carers ...

Jean Tops claims that the Bracks government has dumped people with disabilities and their carers. I believe that if the minister cared, she could do something about this. My question to the minister is: will she please use her ministerial discretion and provide a modified vehicle for Brendan Hart and his family? This is a family in need in rural Victoria. It is an absolutely essential and good thing to do. I beseech the minister to act on this.

### **Whitehorse: school crossing supervisors**

**Hon. B. N. ATKINSON** (Koonung) — I direct my adjournment item to the Minister for Transport in another place. It is a matter of some urgency because schools break up for the term holidays this Friday.

Schools in the city of Whitehorse area have advised me that the City of Whitehorse has decided it will not provide school crossing supervisors on the day schools close at an earlier time than usual. This has been a longstanding practice which goes back to when I was at school — —

**Hon. M. R. Thomson** — You're going back a long time!

**Hon. B. N. ATKINSON** — Exactly! On the last day of term it has been a longstanding practice that schools actually close earlier. It is the case that most of the schools, particularly primary schools, in the city of Whitehorse — and I daresay, right around the metropolitan area, if not throughout Victoria — close at around 2:30 p.m. In this situation schools have formally advised the council of their closing times so that the council will be able to change the times of the crossing supervisors. The schools have been told by the City of Whitehorse that this Friday it will not happen and the crossing supervisors will not be available at an earlier time. This clearly puts the children at those schools at risk if the schools proceed to close earlier as has been the case in the past.

The council has indicated it has no flexibility on this matter, because a government regulation means the council is locked into and cannot vary a time frame that exists now. This has not been a problem in the past and I am at a loss to understand it. I notice that the Minister for Consumer Affairs is also quizzical about this. I think she probably shares my view that this seems to be an extraordinary situation. I would like to add that obviously the school crossing supervisors are funded by VicRoads and therefore VicRoads has some bearing on them. The provision of school crossing supervisors at these crossings, which are located for speed zone purposes, by VicRoads is from 2.30 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. and from 8.00 a.m. to 9.30 a.m., so there is already a provision in the existing regulations for an earlier school closing time.

I request that the minister immediately intervene in this matter with the council to ensure school crossings will be manned this Friday at those schools which elect to close at an earlier time than usual.

### **Responses**

**Hon. M. R. THOMSON** (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — The Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips raised a matter for the Minister for Education and Training in another place concerning materials being sent to schools.

The Honourable Bill Baxter raised a matter for the Minister for Environment in the other place concerning a report in relation to grazing in the Barmah forest. That matter will be passed on to the minister.

The Honourable David Koch raised a matter for the Minister for Agriculture in another place concerning the process for the auction of log supplies. That matter will be passed on to the minister.

The Honourable Andrew Brideson raised a matter for the Minister for Transport in another place concerning traffic congestion at the intersection of Clayton Road and a railway crossing.

The Honourable Andrea Coote raised a matter for the Minister for Community Services in another place concerning Brendan Hart and his need for a modified van.

The Honourable Bruce Atkinson raised a matter for the Minister for Transport in another place concerning the City of Whitehorse and school crossing supervisors not being available for the early closure of schools on the last day of term. All matters raised will be passed on to the relevant ministers.

**Motion agreed to.**

**House adjourned 6.23 p.m.**