

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

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

Wednesday, 7 June 2006

(Extract from book 7)

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FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Hirsh, Hon. Carolyn Dorothy ¹	Silvan	ALP	Vogels, Hon. John Adrian	Western	LP

¹ Ind from 17 September 2004
ALP from 10 November 2005

² Ind from 7 April 2005

³ Ind Lib from 30 November 2005

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Wednesday, 7 June 2006

The **PRESIDENT** (Hon. M. M. Gould) took the chair at 9.33 a.m. and read the prayer.

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT
2006/2007) BILL**

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

**Read first time on motion of Mr LENDERS
(Minister for Finance).**

PETITION

**Western Port Highway–Queens Road,
Pearcedale: safety**

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) presented petition from certain citizens of Victoria requesting that the Victorian government direct VicRoads to investigate reinstating right-hand turns into and out of the Queens Road and Western Port Highway intersection between Pearcedale and Somerville (42 signatures).

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by the Clerk:

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament:

Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996 — No. 61.

Environment Protection Act 1970 — No. 59.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — No. 60.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 — No. 58.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 —

Minister's exception certificate under section 8(4) in respect of Statutory Rule No. 56.

Minister's exemption certificate under section 9(6) in respect of Statutory Rule No. 58.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Questions on notice: answers

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — I rise to express my complete disgust at the way this government responds to questions on notice. This is a government that won the elections in 1999 and 2002, promising to be open, honest and transparent. It is amazing that the responses members of the opposition continually get back show the lack of capacity of the ministers in their relevant portfolios to respond to the questions we ask. Time and again we see numerous questions returned showing that there is no level of accountability.

There is a constant diatribe in the minister's responses, usually along the lines that it is an unreasonable burden and too much effort. To enable members opposite to understand this, I point out that last week the Ombudsman released a report on freedom of information (FOI) and the way this government deals with FOI requests. It was a scathing report talking about 'secrecy and deceptive practices', the very same issues that I am confronted with in my role of scrutinising government because of the manner in which the government responds to questions on notice. I know there is a procedure under standing order 6.08, but it is getting tiresome.

One of the ministers to whom this applies particularly is the Minister for Environment — —

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

**Federal Minister for Veterans Affairs:
comments**

Mr SMITH (Chelsea) — I wish to record in *Hansard* my concern at the comments made by Mr Bruce Billson, the current Minister for Veterans Affairs, when he referred to some present and past veterans and other defence service members as being somehow unsuitable for service in past and present defence roles. In particular he mentioned the changing role for Australian defence forces going forward in peacekeeping roles in East Timor and the Solomon Islands and active service roles in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places. He used this as a reason to suggest that we need a new breed of personnel.

I admit to feeling very disappointed at these comments, as they imply there are and have been large numbers of service personnel with mental illness problems. I do not believe this to be the case to the extent he has

suggested. I know the reaction he is getting at the moment is quite hot, but I believe it to be minuscule in terms of the actual feelings of current and past defence service members.

Following the appalling performances of recent past ministers of veterans affairs — Mr Bruce Scott, Mrs Danna Vale, Ms De-Anne Kelly et cetera — I would suggest to the conservatives opposite that veterans and current service personnel deserve a bit better than the continuation of what they have had in terms of ministers.

Rail: Box Hill crossing

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — I am concerned about some of the works that are proposed by the government at Middleborough Road as part of a grade separation at Laburnum railway station, which is a project that has been undertaken by the Bracks government, interestingly timed to start after the next state election. A concern which has been raised with me and Philip Daw, the Liberal candidate for Mitcham, is the third railway track. Nick Wakeling in Ferntree Gully is also concerned about this, but he is very diligently working in Ferntree Gully. On this occasion, however, Phillip Daw and I are concerned about residents petitions to us concerning the third track proposal that will be part of the Laburnum railway station project.

The issue with the third track is that it is to be located in the centre of the two existing tracks. Laburnum residents point out that this will mean they will have no access to most of the express services that travel through Laburnum. At this point in time they claim there are only seven express trains that bypass Laburnum station. It is interesting that members of the government are not as concerned about this as Mr Daw is or the residents of Laburnum are, but the reality is that these residents deserve access to express trains at that station.

Deakin University: Geelong waterfront campus

Ms CARBINES (Geelong) — Last Friday the Treasurer, John Brumby, visited Geelong, firstly, to host a very successful lunch for members of the business and wider Geelong community to outline the state budget initiatives, with a special focus on the funding for Geelong. He also used the occasion to announce \$6 million of further Bracks government funding to Deakin University, to assist with the redevelopment of the former Dennys Lascelles wool stores building, which is adjacent to its waterfront campus.

Deakin intends to redevelop the building to provide for an expansion of its health and social sciences schools. It is envisaged that nursing, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy will be housed in the building, accommodating an extra 1000 students, which will double the capacity of the waterfront campus. This new building will also contain a mix of retail, professional and commercial space, to promote public access by linking the waterfront precinct, public transport and Geelong's central activity area.

The Bracks government has been pleased to work closely with Deakin on this project, which has the full support of the City of Greater Geelong. With the Bracks government's \$6 million contribution, Deakin now has \$26 million towards a project cost of \$36.2 million. It is now time for the federal government to play its part, and I call on the federal education minister to immediately allocate the remaining \$10.2 million to allow this exciting project to proceed.

Fishing: commercial licences

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I recently had a conversation with a constituent, Mr John Barrett of Lakes Entrance, who is a professional fisherman and has been fishing for 30 years. He expressed his concern about the increase in costs he now incurs from the Department of Primary Industries when getting his fishing licences renewed. By way of example he showed me his most recent fishing licence renewal statement from the Victorian government.

He has two licences — an inshore trawl licence and a rock lobster licence. The licence fee that he pays for the rock lobster licence is \$1698.13. The breakdown for that fee is: the licence issue — to give him a piece of paper — \$38; management fee, \$1200; quota fee, \$17.93; contribution to the peak industry body, the Seafood Industry of Victoria, \$337; fisheries development corporation, \$83; and a pot fee of \$7.20. Similarly, for the inshore trawl licence he is paying \$997. Part of that is the \$337 contribution to the peak body and there is also a research contribution of \$573.

Mr Barrett says he never sees any outcome from the excessive research fees he pays, nor does he see any explanation of those extra costs. On behalf of Mr Barrett, I ask the government to explain those extra costs and where they are going.

Local government: planning permits

Hon. H. E. BUCKINGHAM (Koonung) — On 5 May the Minister for Planning in the other place, Rob Hulls, and the Parliamentary Secretary for the

Environment, Ms Carbines, visited Whitehorse City Council to announce improvements to the state's planning processes arising from recommendations from the review entitled 'Streamlining the planning process — cutting red tape', which was chaired by Ms Carbines.

As a former councillor with the City of Whitehorse I am well aware of both the amount of work undertaken by a council planning department and the angst generated in the community when it is perceived that decisions on minor planning issues take too long to be made. In a bid to quickly reduce the number of permits and the time involved in passing them through councils, a wide range of minor works around the home and office will soon be exempted from requiring planning permits.

Some of these quick fixes target domestic services such as hot-water heaters, minor buildings and works such as sheds, cubbyhouses, pergolas and decks for houses on blocks smaller than a quarter of an acre, and minor works in business areas such as automatic teller machines, shopfronts and awnings. These quick fixes could reduce the number of planning applications before some councils by up to 10 per cent and potentially 4000 applications across the state will no longer require permits, including applications that would otherwise have taken two to five months for councils to approve.

I congratulate the minister and Ms Carbines on this sensible approach to cutting red tape, and I fully support this initiative, which will be welcomed by councils, residents and businesses. I look forward to the release of the report announcing further improvements to our planning system.

Ian Little

Ms ROMANES (Melbourne) — A great sadness swept over the Parliament and government when the news reached us of the sudden passing of Ian Little, the Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance. It came as a great shock to everyone as it was only six days ago that MPs and electorate officers gathered at the Windsor Hotel for the annual budget breakfast hosted by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the Department of Treasury and Finance. As on many such occasions in the past, participants benefited from the clear and informative presentation by Ian Little on the 2006–07 budget, which is a presentation designed to provide an overview to all parties of the key strategies and features of the budget.

As a member of the parliamentary Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, I know the valuable contribution Ian Little made to the work of our committee and thereby the Parliament through his very useful briefings to PAEC on a regular basis, which was just one of the many tasks he undertook in his pivotal role as Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Ian Little has over many years of public service earned the respect and admiration of both sides of the Parliament. I express my sincere condolences to his family and colleagues.

Deakin University: Geelong waterfront campus

Hon. J. H. EREN (Geelong) — The Bracks Labor government continues to invest in Geelong and the region with a massive injection of \$6 million in funds for Deakin University's waterfront campus. I was pleased to be present when the Treasurer, John Brumby, made the announcement in Geelong last week that the state government would provide \$6 million towards the university's \$36.2 million campus redevelopment.

Deakin will convert a wool store into a health and social sciences hub which will become home to more than 1000 students and will double the capacity of the university at the site. This new hub will be a wonderful addition to the renewal of that area in Geelong's central activities district. It will bring people from across the state to live and learn in that area, bringing vibrancy and excitement to Geelong's waterfront campus.

I am pleased the Bracks Labor government understands the needs of all Victorians, unlike the previous Liberal and National government which considered anything outside the metropolitan Melbourne area as second rate, and also said that country and regional areas were the toenails of the state. This government does not take its regional and country areas for granted. That is why we are receiving record amounts from this government, unlike the previous government.

Once again I would like to congratulate the Treasurer and Deakin University on this wonderful announcement. I look forward to the project getting under way.

Socceroos: World Cup

Hon. J. G. HILTON (Western Port) — I would like to make a statement this morning and wish every success to the Socceroos as they start their World Cup campaign in Germany.

The development of soccer has had a rocky road in Australia. The other football codes of Aussie Rules, Rugby Union and my sport, Rugby League, are all very well entrenched, while soccer has struggled to get media attention, with the notable exception, of course, of SBS. Soccer has not been helped by the racial violence which occurred in the early 1980s at most soccer games, especially in Melbourne. However, the advent of the A-League and a desire of parents for their children to play sport without running the risk of incurring serious injury — which unfortunately was been further demonstrated this week in the Collingwood versus Brisbane game — together with the media attention given to soccer since that fantastic night last November when Australia qualified for the World Cup, can only augur well for the future of the sport.

The Socceroos have every chance to be successful and, although I do not think they have the talent to go quite all the way, I am sure they will play very well and bring credit to themselves and their country.

ABORIGINALS: GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (North Eastern) — I move:

That this house condemns the state government for its failure to adequately address areas of disadvantage in the Aboriginal community and in particular its failure to implement long-term strategies to improve health standards, education standards, employment opportunities, and reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginals in the corrections system.

At the outset I would like to advise the house that the Liberal Party will be giving Ms Hadden 10 minutes of its time.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I thank the member.

Hon. W. A. LOVELL — As a Liberal I am proud that Neville Bonner, the first Aboriginal member of Parliament in this land, was a Liberal member of Parliament. Some years ago I had the great honour of meeting Neville Bonner, and I was inspired by a man who had such vision for his people and a genuine desire to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal people. Perhaps it was that meeting that instilled in me a genuine desire to aspire to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians.

Six years ago, on 31 May 2000, in this Parliament there was an historic joint sitting with the Aboriginals on reconciliation. It marked the first time that an indigenous person had spoken in this place since the Parliament first sat in 1856. It was an historic day, and I

am sure that all those who were present would have hoped that it would be a major step forward for reconciliation.

Unfortunately the Bracks government has failed to capitalise on that day. It has failed to raise standards in the areas of health and education for Aboriginal Victorians, it has failed to give Aboriginal Victorians better employment opportunities and it has failed to significantly reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal Victorians in the justice system.

Hon. R. G. Mitchell — How many indigenous people do you employ?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL — Mr Mitchell asked how many indigenous people I employ. I will have Mr Mitchell know that in the past I have employed many Aboriginal people when I have been in business. I have only one staff member at the moment, and sometimes when I have advertised that position I have not had an indigenous person apply for it. But I have employed many Aboriginal people in my time in business.

Sure, the government has tinkered around the edges and thrown a little bit of money around to appear as if it is attempting to address these issues, but the statistics show that on all levels Aboriginal Victorians are still severely disadvantaged compared to the rest of the Victorian community — and it will not be until these indicators are much closer together that we can truly move towards equality and reconciliation. It is up to the government to work with the Aboriginal community to address these issues and ensure that all Victorians have the same opportunities in life.

Education, health, employment and involvement in the justice system are inextricably linked. The better people are educated, the better their employment opportunities become. Lifting a person's self-esteem and economic status through education and employment also leads to better health outcomes, because it makes them both more aware of health services that are available and also better able to afford to access services. Raising the economic status of indigenous Victorians would also assist in reducing the number of Aboriginals in the justice system.

I now turn to some of the key areas that we wish to address with this motion. First of all I refer to a letter to the editor by Jill Gallagher, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. In the letter, published in the *Age* of 20 September 2005, Jill Gallagher said:

The tragic truth is that life expectancy for Aboriginal Victorians, half of whom live in Melbourne, is not much better than for those of the remote central deserts. A Victorian indigenous male's life expectancy ... is 20.9 years lower than that for non-indigenous Victorian males, while an indigenous female's life expectancy ... is 18.5 years less than that for non-indigenous Victorian females. Other figures indicating health and social wellbeing — such as rates of incarceration and detention of juveniles and children in need of immediate dental care — are no better in Victoria than for the Northern Territory.

The government cannot say that it is unaware of this, because it is well documented on the Aboriginal Affairs Victoria web site, where the government itself says that evidence shows that the health status of indigenous Victorians is still well below that of other Victorians. Victorian indigenous people continue to be overrepresented in many areas of health, including adult and infant mortality, suicide, mental and behavioural disorders, injury and poisoning, respiratory diseases, digestive diseases, neoplasms and diabetes. Public hospital separations are also considerably higher than for the general Victorian population.

The causes of poor health of indigenous Victorians are complex, but social and economic disadvantage, reflected in measures including housing, employment, income and education, is of fundamental importance and places these people at significant risk of poverty, violence, ill health and reduced wellbeing.

I have already mentioned Jill Gallagher's letter, in which she refers to the life expectancy of Aboriginal Victorians being 20.9 years lower for an indigenous male than a non-indigenous male, and 18.5 years lower for an indigenous female than a non-indigenous female. It actually offends me that someone I went to school with in Shepparton can expect to live 20 years less than I can expect to live, purely because they are indigenous and there are problems in health in the indigenous community.

There are many other statistics on the Aboriginal Affairs Victoria web site, including those relating to high infant mortality rates and all sorts of problems with diabetes and other health issues that the government has failed to recognise.

In its *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria* paper, the government has noted that:

Indigenous Victorians continue to experience disadvantage across a range of areas.

In 2002, indigenous perinatal mortality was more than double the rate of non-indigenous perinatal mortality.

The rate of hospital admission of Aboriginal children for upper respiratory tract infections is nearly double that for non-Aboriginal children.

53 per cent of indigenous young people aged 20 to 24 are regarded as 'at risk'.

Babies born to Aboriginal mothers weigh less on average than babies born to non-Aboriginal mothers and infants with lower birth weights are more likely to die or have problems early in life.

The rate of suicide for indigenous people as a proportion of all deaths was 4.7 per cent in 2002, compared to 1.5 per cent for non-indigenous people.

Rates of vaccination of indigenous children are less than half those of non-indigenous children.

Substantiated notifications of child abuse or neglect are almost eight times more likely for Aboriginal children than for non-Aboriginal children.

It is a great shame that the government has not addressed many of these issues and raised the standards of health of our indigenous Victorians.

In its budget papers this year the government has again noted that:

Low birth weight ... is an important indicator of poor health and wellbeing in later life. It is therefore a risk factor not only for infant mortality and morbidity, but also for adult development of cardiac disease, diabetes and kidney failure.

The government notes also that:

The proportion of low birth weight babies born to non-indigenous mothers remained stable at 7 per cent. Babies born to indigenous mothers were approximately twice as likely (14 per cent) to be of low birth weight ...

That will again lead to more health problems later in life.

The *Riverine Herald* of 17 September 2004 quotes Monica Morgan and Lee Joachim, leaders of the Yorta Yorta community. Monica Morgan said that:

The health of Kooris in the Echuca-Moama region is no better than that of indigenous groups in more isolated areas of Australia.

She said also:

The health statistics of indigenous people in urban, rural and remote areas show there is no difference. There are the same problems.

Referring to a Productivity Commission report into how much indigenous people use government services, she said:

It's the same across the spectrum. Our people use the services up to 40 per cent less than non-indigenous people.

So even those who live in a town ... are less likely to go to the mainstream services.

That may be because they do not consider the services culturally appropriate or it may be that they are just unaware of the services or because of their levels of education and employment opportunities they do not feel that they are able to afford those services.

Lee Joachim, the chairperson of the Yorta Yorta Elders Council said that the health of the indigenous population was everyone's concern. Lee is right; it is everyone's concern. It is something that we must all work on together in order to raise standards for indigenous people.

Education is probably the key to raising standards for Aboriginal people because if we can raise their standards of education we raise their opportunities for employment and their ability to earn a better income in life, raise their social status and help them to be able to access more services.

The Governor-General at the time, Sir William Deane, said in a press release on 24 May 1999:

... education is an essential ingredient to successfully resolving the problems of Aboriginal disadvantage in Australia.

He went on to outline that there needs to be not only education of Aboriginal people for their own sake but also better education of non-indigenous people about indigenous people.

The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) prepared a report on the 2005–06 budget estimates, and that report notes:

... indigenous students in Victorian schools are continuing to fall behind those in other states because of the Bracks government's lack of focus when it comes to improving their education.

This is a Labor-dominated committee, but it includes members from this place. There are five Labor members, and the committee is chaired by the member for Pascoe Vale in the other place, Christine Campbell. There are three Liberal members and one member from The Nationals. The members from this place include the Honourables Bill Forwood, Bill Baxter and Gordon Rich-Phillips. This Labor-dominated committee said that there is a lack of focus when it comes to improving educational opportunities for indigenous Victorians.

The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report criticised the government for not providing initiatives to improve indigenous education within its \$800 million social policy package, which was released with much

fanfare by the Bracks government last year. The Australian Education Union branch president, Mary Bluett, also criticised the government and said that Victoria's comparatively small Aboriginal population meant indigenous students were often being neglected by this government.

One of the things noted in the PAEC report is that the data derived from the commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training and the Australian Bureau of Statistics national schools statistics collection 2003 shows that Victoria is below the national rate in terms of apparent indigenous retention for every category. Victoria's retention rate for years 7 and 8 through to 10, for example, was only 74.8 per cent, compared to the national rate of 87.2 per cent. Other states are having much better success in retaining indigenous students in schools. Certainly we all know that students who stay on at school and complete year 12 are much more likely to undertake additional education and training, which in turn means they will have better employment opportunities.

One of the other things the PAEC noted was that the future performance of Victorian indigenous students — years 3 and 5 in numeracy and reading, as measured against national benchmarks — is expected to show no improvement between the expected outcomes for 2004–05 and 2005–06. In fact the government had not aspired to achieve an improvement in that benchmarking in the entire time that it has been benchmarking those performance targets.

That report was released last year, and in this year's budget we have an aspiration for some improvement in those benchmarks, but it is not a great deal. It is poor when you compare those benchmarks against those for the non-indigenous community. This year's budget papers show that the expected outcome for 2005–06 for indigenous students in numeracy is only expected to be 79 per cent compared with 95 per cent in the non-indigenous community. For reading it is expected to be 70 per cent for indigenous students compared with 92 per cent for non-indigenous students.

What aspirations do we have for our indigenous students in year 3 in reaching numeracy in reading targets next year? The government has increased it by 1 per cent for numeracy, to 80 per cent, and 2 per cent for reading, to 72 per cent. We are still well behind the expected outcomes for non-indigenous students. In year 5, 82 per cent of Aboriginal students are expected to reach the national benchmarks in numeracy compared with 95 per cent of non-indigenous students. In reading only 73 per cent in the indigenous community are expected to reach those benchmarks

compared with 92 per cent in the non-indigenous community.

I would like to pay respect to an Aboriginal elder in my own area who sadly passed away a couple of years ago. Aunty Mary Atkinson was a highly respected and well-known Wiradjuri Bangerang elder. She devoted her life to achieving better education outcomes for Aboriginals. Aunty Mary recognised early on that building a strong foundation through better educational opportunities would produce better economic and social outcomes for Aboriginal people. She first became involved in trying to improve such opportunities in 1978, when she saw the need to improve educational opportunities for Aboriginal children and became a driving force behind the Goulburn Valley Aboriginal education consultative group. As a result she was instrumental in the establishment of Lidje child-care centre, the Mirumbah Aboriginal adult education program, the Koori TAFE unit, Manega Aboriginal School Annexe, Batdja Aboriginal Preschool, the community-based diploma of early childhood teaching course, the intern teacher program and the Koori education teaching program at Deakin University, as well as in ensuring that the role of Koori educators in local schools was to support Koori students.

As a very new member of Parliament I had the great honour, together with Aunty Mary, of cutting the ribbon at Manega's new buildings. It was a very special occasion for a me to witness the opening of the new buildings, and it was a great honour to cut the ribbon with Aunty Mary for a project that she had fought so hard to achieve.

At the state level Aunty Mary was a member of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association. At the national level she was of member of the National Aboriginal Educational Committee and later chaired the National Federation of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association was the organisation through which many of Aunty Mary's dreams and wishes for Aboriginal education became possible. Aunty Mary was elected president in 1980 and served until 1999, when she retired. During that time she was instrumental in developing the Aboriginal education policy in Victoria. She was a great, great woman who fought hard to raise standards for Aboriginal students in Victoria.

Employment is another area where the Bracks government has severely let down Aboriginal Victorians. The unemployment rates for the total

Australian population compare quite disastrously to figures for Aboriginal unemployment. The latest figures for indigenous unemployment go back to 2004. From mid-2003 to the current time the employment rate for the general population in Victoria has been between 5.9 per cent and, in the latest figures, only 5.3 per cent. Unfortunately for the Aboriginal community that figure is 23.5 per cent, which compares very badly to the overall Victorian unemployment figures. But even worse than that, it compares very poorly with the figures for every other state in Australia. In fact it is the highest unemployment rate of any state. The indigenous unemployment rate in New South Wales is 18.6 per cent, in Queensland it is only 14.7 per cent, in South Australia it is 17.2 per cent, in Western Australia it is 14.5 per cent, in Tasmania it is 13.3 per cent, in the Northern Territory it is 19.4 per cent and in ACT it is only 13.1 per cent.

The national average indigenous unemployment rate is 16.8 per cent, but as I said we have the highest unemployment rate for indigenous people in Victoria of all the states and territories — it is 23.5 per cent. The Bracks government should be absolutely ashamed of that.

In the Goulburn Valley, where I come from, those figures seem to be even worse. In 2002 Dr Katrina Alford, on behalf of the Ganbina Koori Economic Employment and Training Agency, compiled a report about indigenous employment opportunities and unemployment rates. Dr Alford's report notes that the total labour force in the Goulburn Valley was 10 953 and the total indigenous labour force was 1018. Within the broader Goulburn Valley community the unemployment rate was 7.5 per cent, but in the indigenous community, which includes those on the Community Development Employment Project, the unemployment rate in the Goulburn Valley was 77.6 per cent — a horrendous figure, compared to the unemployment rate for the broader community.

I wonder if the two members whom the Labor Party has preselected for the ticket for the Northern Victoria Region, Ms Darveniza and Ms Broad, have even bothered to look at those figures and the problems that exist in the Goulburn Valley.

Only last month the Premier said to Neil Mitchell on a television program on Sky Channel:

Getting more people into the work force will help reduce Victoria's social problems ...

... people would be happier, and therefore not develop as many problems such as obesity, alcoholism or drug use, if they had jobs.

...

'If you want a solution, then it's having them skilled, getting a job'.

... social problems could be reduced through a work force that produced better quality and kept pace with global productivity.

...

... giving Victorians a 'fair go' was important to allow everyone access to good life opportunities.

'It's always been since Federation, a fair go ... and I think it's a quality we should embody.' he said.

It is the same for all Victorians. If people have pride in what they do and their achievements and a sense of self-worth, it will deliver better outcomes for people — better health and better social outcomes. This applies not only to the wider community but if we can provide better employment opportunities for the Aboriginal community, it will also deliver better social outcomes to the Aboriginal community. I hope the government will adopt some long-term strategies that will provide those outcomes for indigenous Victorians.

The overrepresentation of indigenous Victorians in the justice system is also something that is well documented. The budget papers of this year say:

For the first time in many years, Victoria's total prison and numbers decreased by 2 per cent ...

But unfortunately that is not the case for the indigenous population, because the number of indigenous people involved in the justice system actually increased. The budget papers also note:

The rate of imprisonment among indigenous Victorians increased from 1069 per 100 000 of the adult population at June 2004 to 1224 at June 2005. The indigenous imprisonment rate remains significantly higher than the overall Victorian imprisonment rate, with indigenous persons being 14 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-indigenous persons.

It is quite a concern for the Victorian community that indigenous people are overrepresented in the justice system. Indigenous prisoners are also on average likely to be six years younger than non-indigenous prisoners, with the average age of an indigenous prisoner being 29 years and that of a non-indigenous prisoner being 35 years. It is also sad that indigenous youth are 15 times more likely to receive a custodial sentence than non-indigenous youth.

An article in the *Herald Sun* just last month is headed 'Blacks in jail health alarm'. It notes.

The health of indigenous Australians in jail is a horror story of neglect, disadvantage and inequality ...

That is a quote from doctors. It goes on to say:

Indigenous Australians make up 2.4 per cent of the population of Australia but 22 per cent of its prison population ...

That is quite a significant figure.

Indigenous prisoners are also hit harder by infectious and chronic diseases and mental illness, with 95 per cent of women and 78 per cent of men suffering at least one condition ...

Young indigenous Australians are 19 times more likely to end up in juvenile facilities than non-indigenous Australians, the report found. Almost 9 out of 10 indigenous juvenile offenders end up in jail as an adult.

Keeping our young indigenous people out of the justice system is an area in which this government needs to do an awful lot of work, but I will give credit where it is due. The Aboriginal justice agreement has been a good initiative and has worked towards addressing some of those issues, but it should also be noted that the groundwork for the agreement started under the Kennett government, and much of that work was done by that government. When it came to power in 1999 the Labor government picked up that work and implemented the Aboriginal justice agreement, but the credit for the initiation of that agreement should go to the Kennett government.

The Koori courts initiative has worked well, particularly in the Goulburn Valley. In some other areas I note that they have not worked as well. Koori courts were first investigated by the Law Reform Committee. I know that that committee took a trip interstate to study Koori courts in other jurisdictions and that when the committee's members came back from that trip they were very much in favour of having Koori courts implemented in Victoria. As I said, the Koori court has worked particularly well in Shepparton, where the elders, magistrates and police are very much committed to making it a success. I would like to congratulate Sergeant Gordon Porter, our police prosecutor in Shepparton, who is dedicated to the success of Shepparton's Koori court, and also the elders who sit on that court. It is through people like Sergeant Gordon Porter, our magistrate who set up the court — Kate Aughtie, who unfortunately has moved on from Shepparton — and the elders working together that the Koori court has been such a success in the Shepparton region.

I would like to mention two other programs that have been quite successful in Shepparton. The first of those

is Ganbina, the Koori Economic Employment and Training Agency that is run by a good friend of mine, Adrian Appo, who is the chief executive officer. Ganbina's vision is that within two generations it wants to see indigenous people in the Goulburn Valley sharing the economic benefits of the region in an equitable manner. Ganbina's mission is to improve the economic and social wellbeing of indigenous people in the Goulburn Valley through the implementation of programs and initiatives focused on developing individuals so that they can contribute to the fullest of their capability within the community.

I mentioned earlier the report by Dr Katrina Alford on behalf of Ganbina. In that report Dr Alford noted that, excluding the Community Development Employment Project scheme, there were 221 indigenous people in work at the time of the survey in 2002. Of those, 93 worked for indigenous organisations, 73 worked in the mainstream private sector, 50 worked for the mainstream public government sector and 5 were self-employed. But of the 73 in the mainstream private sector, 24 were placed in full-time work by Ganbina's programs. A further 45 were placed in full-time work by 2005. This program was an initiative of our Aboriginal community in Shepparton. It is funded by the federal government and run by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people, but it recognises the value of placing them in full-time work in mainstream employment. I congratulate Adrian Appo and his team on the success of the Ganbina employment program.

Another program initiated by our local Aboriginal community, and in particular by Paul Briggs, is the Academy of Sport Health and Education (ASHE) in Shepparton. I thank the government for the funding that came through in the budget. That funding will broaden the study and training options available through ASHE. This program is run by another friend of mine, Justin Mohamed, who is a tremendous leader in our local community and the nephew of Adrian Appo. Two people from the same family are showing great leadership in our region in Aboriginal education and employment opportunities. We look forward to ASHE re-engaging some of our young people in education through sport.

I would also like to pay tribute to Paul Briggs, who is an integral part of both of these programs. He is a leader in our Aboriginal community. He shows real leadership and should be listened to by both sides of the Parliament. His vision for his people and his ideas are well and truly worth listening to and governments should work with him to implement them. As I said, both of these initiatives have come from our local community. We must work with the indigenous

community. We cannot tell them what is good for them; we must work with them to provide better outcomes for indigenous people.

I would also like to mention a report done for the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Jennings, by his parliamentary intern Emily Millane in 2003. As part of her report Ms Millane did a snapshot of indigenous disadvantage in Victoria. Most of the information was gleaned from a Victorian government indigenous affairs report, and it showed significant disadvantage in all areas of health, education, justice and employment. Some of Ms Millane's common findings were very interesting. She said that interviewees were united in their view that the change of official government policy is insufficient. She said that respondents were divided on how successful, if at all, the Bracks government's policies have been to date. She said one respondent described this as 'Bracks talks; he does not act'. She said that interviewees agreed that continued indigenous disadvantage in key areas such as health, employment and education needed to be addressed and that the minister himself was reluctant to characterise any policy as a success. That fairly damning report is from the minister's own intern.

It is certainly the case that we all want to see longer life spans for members of our indigenous community and genuine reconciliation and better opportunities for its members all round. Unfortunately the Bracks government is failing to deliver on those things for Aboriginal Victorians. Under the Bracks government the health of indigenous Victorians has continued to fall disproportionately below that of non-indigenous Victorians, the education of indigenous Victorians has continued to fall disproportionately below that of non-indigenous Victorians, unemployment rates have remained significantly higher for indigenous Victorians and the number of indigenous Victorians in our corrections system has increased.

Over the past six and a half years the Bracks government has continued to introduce short-term and short-sighted grants programs that have failed to achieve real outcomes for indigenous Victorians. It is now time that the government committed to long-term strategies to improve education, employment, health and social conditions for indigenous Victorians.

Mr VINEY (Chelsea) — Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this Parliament sits, the Kulin nation, and pay respect to its elders, past and present. There is no barrage of abuse from the opposition — what is going on?

Mr Gavin Jennings — The teetotallers are on the roster.

Mr VINEY — That is right, the teetotallers are on roster, so there is no abuse today.

The address that we have just heard lacked any indication of what the opposition might do in relation to indigenous affairs in this state. There was not a single policy initiative in Ms Lovell's address to this Parliament. It was just a string of chest beating about the issues and concerns that we all share in relation to the disadvantage the Aboriginal community has suffered for over 200 years since white settlement. There is no doubt these very deep, systemic issues and problems in the indigenous community will continue, unfortunately, for some time, but it is absolutely wrong for the opposition to be suggesting that this government does not have a long-term strategy.

In fact, if you look at the policies of this government you will see they are all based on long-term strategies. As well as dealing with the current needs and issues, there are significant long-term strategies throughout the government's policy in all these areas — in education, in health and in justice. These deep-seated problems are being dealt with by this government in two ways: firstly, dealing with the immediacy of the problems by additional funding; and secondly, putting in additional funding to build community capacity in the Aboriginal community.

The address from Ms Lovell reminded me of the long-term traditional whitefella approach to Aboriginal affairs — chest beating about how these problems are terrible but no announcement of initiatives. It reminds me of a line written by C. J. Dennis, 'She turns on the waterworks and tears her hair', but she does not have a single thing to say about what the opposition would do in government to address these issues.

Last night members of the opposition used up a good 7 or 8 minutes of my 15-minute address on the budget with their appalling behaviour in this chamber. I will take every opportunity I have this week to provide a little bit more information about the budget, because they used up my time last night. I will make sure that I continue to deliver — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Smith) — Order! Mr Viney will return to the motion.

Mr VINEY — I am dealing with it, Acting President. I am going to use every opportunity I am given in this chamber to make some further points on what was an outstanding budget. In this instance I can

make those points in relation to the budget's initiatives for indigenous communities.

Hon. Andrea Coote — Acting President, I direct your attention to the state of the house. If we are going to make an issue about quorums, I will make it the government's responsibility to make certain there is a quorum.

Quorum formed.

Mr VINEY — The opposition are in fine form again today. I thought the teetotallers were here, but obviously not. There is still some effect from last night.

Let us deal with the budget again. In this budget an additional \$75 million has been allocated to the indigenous affairs budget. That is on top of the \$45.7 million in last year's budget. Included in the budget is \$10.8 million over four years for new representative arrangements with local indigenous networks set up in 38 communities to deal with local issues and to find practical solutions. As I said at the outset, that is part of building community capacity in the Aboriginal community. There will be \$12.6 million to implement the Aboriginal Heritage Act, which protects Aboriginal cultural heritage as an integral part of planning processes, simplifying the current system and providing increased certainty for developers and Aboriginal groups.

The lead speaker for the opposition does not have a great record in relation to the Aboriginal Heritage Act. She has quite consciously talked up the fear and concerns in the community. As a spokesperson for indigenous affairs, I think she ought to take a serious look at the way she has approached this issue.

The government allocated \$5.7 million to upgrade and improve community buildings across Victoria, to provide better services and to meet building and occupational health and safety regulations. Some \$3.7 million has been allocated to establish a Koori youth alcohol and drug healing centre; \$14.1 million in the Department of Human Services programs for Aboriginal communities, primarily supporting children; \$2.7 million to expand courses provided by the Academy of Sport, Health and Education in Shepparton, to give Koori students in northern Victoria a broader range of study and training options; and \$26.1 million to be allocated to the second stage of the Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement for initiatives such as the expansion of the successful Koori court program and juvenile justice programs that target indigenous youth. That includes, of course, \$1.6 million to turn the old Won Wron prison in East Gippsland into

an indigenous adult residential diversion program for Koori people on community-based orders.

We acknowledge that there are considerable concerns and issues in the Aboriginal community. In fact I notice in relation to the budget that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Jennings, in his media release highlighted what many of the issues are in the Aboriginal community — indigenous children are almost six times more likely to be notified for child protection, spiralling low rates of school achievement and high rates of unemployment, imprisonment and illness. Measures to address those issues have been announced in the government's media statement on initiatives referring to the \$75 million extra that has gone into Aboriginal community funding.

Unlike the Liberal Party, this government is actually implementing long-term strategies to deal with these issues, and at the core of all of that is building the capacity of the Aboriginal community to deal with issues itself. We know from all the examples of disadvantage across our community that the most important strategy is to build community. That is so much the Labor way. When there are disadvantaged people, it is the Labor way to reach out the hand and to give them a hand-up. That is the Labor way: to grow the strengths of our community. It is disappointing that in a debate here on indigenous affairs and in the Aboriginal community a shadow spokesperson in this area would be proposing a motion that is essentially political in its structure, a motion that condemns the government and does not acknowledge the considerable additional funding this government has put into the Aboriginal community or the great initiatives of the government.

It would have been good to acknowledge in the motion some of the great initiatives such as the Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement II, with significant additional funding going into that area. It is also important to acknowledge the \$14.1 million that has gone into Department of Human Services programs in the current budget. It includes \$3.9 million to expand maternity services to support pregnant Aboriginal women and mothers with infants and provide in-home support services to mothers of small children; \$5 million to expand programs to preserve Aboriginal families and ensure that Aboriginal family members, elders and other community members are involved in decisions around the safety of the children in their community; and \$5.2 million to expand services to return children who have been removed from their families, extend the involvement of Aboriginal agencies in the investigation of and responses to allegations of abuse and assist Aboriginal agencies to support children

in longer term placements to maintain connection to their community and heritage.

That additional money directed into the Department of Human Services programs is on top of the fact that two years ago the government announced a variation in the WIES (weighted inlier equivalent separations) funding formula that included aboriginality. As I understand it — and I may be corrected on the precise figure — there is a 30 per cent additional loading in the WIES formula where aboriginality is identified, and that encourages the public hospital system to identify aboriginality and to put in place the additional supports needed to meet the special requirements of our indigenous community in health.

We have a range of programs in health. We have the Improved Care for Aboriginal Patients program, which has established a new approach to improve the accurate identification of and quality care for Aboriginal patients in Victorian health services; we have Aboriginal Health Promotion and Chronic Care Partnerships, which aim to boost access to culturally respectful services; we have the Koori Maternity Service program, which provides culturally appropriate support to women who are either pregnant or with young children; and we have the Best Start initiatives. There are six Best Start programs for indigenous families with young children now operating in Victoria, and these provide more linked responses to services to improve the outcome for children. Considerable additional support that has gone into indigenous health funding.

Last year, as part of the A Fairer Victoria statement, an additional \$45.7 million was provided to address Aboriginal needs, and this is on a total recurrent budget of about \$120 million in the current year — in other words, \$45 million last year and \$75 million this year, which effectively is a massive injection of additional funds into indigenous affairs funding in a two-year period.

Under the Commonwealth Grants Commission's equalisation formula \$670 million is taken out of Victoria as part of that equalisation to recognise the higher populations of Aboriginal communities in other states. So \$670 million comes out of the Victorian budget each year as part of the grants commission formula for state funding. What has Victoria had back in terms of Aboriginal funding from the commonwealth as part of that equalisation program? It has received about \$20 000 for one program. In other words, the taxpayers of Victoria have been funding programs through the grants equalisation process in the Aboriginal affairs area across all of the other states, but we have had only a trifling return to Victoria.

Despite that fact, the Bracks government has been massively increasing its funding and commitment to the Aboriginal community, and it would have been nice — although probably unexpected — for the opposition to have at least acknowledged some of the considerable work that has been going on in Victoria with indigenous funding.

In dissecting the state budget it is interesting to note the comments in the Brotherhood of St Laurence's statement on the budget dated 30 May:

'The 2006 state budget consolidates the Bracks government's social justice credentials', Tony Nicholson, executive director of the brotherhood, said today.

The statement goes on further to say:

In its strategy to sustain growth and build work force participation the budget strikes a balance between social and economic priorities.

We are delighted with the focus on families and young people in today's budget.

We especially welcome the \$75 million investment in services to our indigenous communities, by any measure, the most disadvantaged in Victoria. The strategy to implement new representative arrangements and to strengthen indigenous community leadership demonstrates an understanding of indigenous issues that is lacking at the federal government level.

I think I need to repeat that:

The strategy to implement new representative arrangements and to strengthen indigenous community leadership demonstrates an understanding of indigenous issues that is lacking at the federal government level.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence has recognised and acknowledged the work of this government in relation to the Aboriginal affairs budget. It would have been nice for the opposition to have at least acknowledged with a passing reference in its motion today that this government has been serious, has been committed and has been investing in the indigenous community. However, what it did was to move a motion in this house that condemns the government and does not acknowledge any of the considerable work that it has put into this community.

What I found most extraordinary in the motion was its particular condemnation of the government in stating that the government has failed to implement long-term strategies. That shows an absolute lack of understanding of the policy position of this government. This government's entire approach to this policy area has been about investing in the communities, strengthening the communities and putting in place things like the Koori court system and

significant long-term investment in the justice system — and I know Ms Mikakos is going to talk about that in some detail. This government has been putting in place the policy structure and the framework for a long-term investment in the Aboriginal community.

The Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement was first launched within seven months of us coming to office in June 2000, so just seven months after coming to office we launched that agreement which was about strong and robust partnerships between this government and the Koori communities.

Then, in June 2006, six years later, we announced a further Aboriginal justice agreement. That included, as I said earlier, a \$26.1 million boost to Aboriginal justice funding over four years. It includes capital funds to complete the Koori men's diversionary project in Gippsland and a further three new Koori courts to be established along with those that have already been established in Mildura, Moe, Shepparton, Broadmeadows, Warrnambool, Portland, Hamilton and in the Children's Court in Melbourne; expansion of the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee network in Gippsland and the Loddon Mallee; two additional Aboriginal community justice panel programs; six new Aboriginal community liaison officers with Victoria Police; 10 community-based justice workers to improve the compliance with community corrections and the Sheriff's Office; and the development of a statewide community-based program to assist Kooris to complete their community-based orders.

I do not think there would be an area that has had a more innovative and significantly turned-around approach in the policy area than in Aboriginal justice. This area has had great leadership from the Attorney-General, who I know has had significant personal experience as a lawyer working with the Aboriginal community in Queensland. I know this is something about which he feels great passion and is very close to his heart. This is an area in which the government has had an outstanding record of success.

I want to also mention some of the initiatives in the education portfolio where we have seen the top priority of the government being given to keeping young people at school or getting them back if they have left school. We have had many initiatives working to support this priority, such as 56 Koori educators, 15 Koori education development officers and the creation of the Victorian College of Koori Education across four campuses. We have seen improvements in literacy and numeracy; in 2004–05 we saw a 7.6 per cent increase in

the retention of years 10 to 12 students ; and we have seen a steady increase — up 66 per cent since 2002 — of year 12 completions for Aboriginal children; so again a record of success in this area for this government.

Far from being condemned, this government should be acknowledged for its efforts. There is a lot more to do. We have had over 200 years of entrenched and systemic disadvantage in the Aboriginal community. Over the last 200 years there have been countless examples of policy failure in delivering for that community. I am sure that goes across governments from both sides of politics, although many of the failed policy areas may well have been well intentioned. However, but you cannot say of this government that its policy initiatives in education, and particularly in Aboriginal justice, health and community building, have been in any sense policy failures. This government is very proud of its record of success in the Aboriginal affairs area, which ought to be acknowledged, not condemned, by this chamber.

Hon. D. K. DRUM (North Western) — I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk on this motion because it is an issue The Nationals feel extremely passionately about. We believe this issue needs not only a whole-of-government approach to reach some better outcomes but also a whole-of-community approach if it is to achieve the outcomes that all members of Parliament should be striving to achieve.

Mr Viney touched on some good issues, as did Ms Lovell. The fact is that The Nationals have an opinion that no-one is right or wrong on this issue — that no-one is specifically to blame. Effectively this situation exists within the community and there is an awful lot of work that needs to be done. There is certainly no room for any government in this country to be patting itself on the back for what it has done, and the converse of that is I do not believe finger pointing and blaming is going to achieve the outcomes that we are all after.

From the outset I would like to say that I am no expert in the area of indigenous affairs and indigenous issues. Whilst I have had a lot of contact with Aboriginal people throughout my life, every time I have attempted to gain a better understanding of, learn more about and get to the core of some of the harder indigenous issues, I have found myself wanting as a result of a lack of grassroots knowledge and a true understanding of the depth of some of the issues.

I must mention that The Nationals will afford 5 minutes of their speaking time this morning to Ms Hadden, the Independent.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — Whilst The Nationals and I have a very strong interest in addressing these issues and a belief that we need to work hard to improve in this area, we certainly do not pretend to have all the answers or knowledge that most of us wish we had when trying to address these issues.

Growing up around the Shepparton region, I had natural contact through school and through sport with a large group of Aboriginal people. It is amazing that when I was growing up as a young kid racism issues just did not seem to be all that eminent. Some of the terminology we used back in the 1970s when referring to some of our Aboriginal friends would not be accepted today, but I have very clear memories that there was no divisiveness in the way we mixed with our Aboriginal sportspeople and Aboriginal school friends. I sometimes think that we as a community have put up walls and created divisions that in a lot of instances were not there in the first place, although I understand we have to take certain steps to ensure that we do not vilify people because of race. I suppose the downside to that is that we create issues where in a lot of instances issues did not exist.

I also had a lot to do with Aboriginal communities when I went to live in Sydney. We lived in a suburb called La Perouse, which is a lovely suburb overlooking Botany Bay, and Aboriginals make up its main group of residents. You can look across Botany Bay to the spot where Captain Cook first came ashore in Australia. There are in the vicinity of 300 Office of Housing homes owned and rented by Aboriginal families. It was a good education for me and my family to be living in total harmony — as were all the other Anglo-Saxon people of that little community — with the Aboriginal community. We would go down to the Yarra Bay Sailing Club, which had a large number of Aboriginal members. We would be involved in the junior rugby and the junior footy, and the schools had many Aboriginal students. It was a great experience for our family to have total involvement in so many ordinary activities with so many Aboriginal families.

It was an interesting experience when most days you would drive through Redfern, only 15 kilometres away, on the way to work and at that stage some of the goings on in Redfern were quite deplorable. People were getting their handbags snatched out of cars that pulled up at traffic lights and people were being assaulted as

they simply walked through the streets. I had one experience of getting lost in Redfern, and it was extremely scary. Even though I was a grown man and had the safety of my vehicle, I was still genuinely scared for my safety, having found myself in some of the more dangerous areas of Redfern. We sometimes see bits and pieces of some of the behaviour that was going on back then. It was quite interesting to see the stark contrast between a community such as in La Perouse and the communities in Redfern.

If people are looking for the reasons why the communities were so different, I think much of it comes back to the whole concept of elders and the ability of La Perouse to keep its educated elders in the community. They acted as tremendous role models. The matriarchs of that La Perouse community were extremely strong leaders. The women would rule the community with an iron fist, and they did not stand for the drunkenness and brawling that for some reason were accepted and became an everyday part of life in places such as Redfern. While not knowing the social fabric behind areas such as Redfern, I can only pass on my tremendously positive experience of living among about 300 Aboriginal families in the La Perouse area, which left a very positive slant on my Sydney experience.

I remember my time in Perth working with a lot of Aboriginal families. Some of them were elite footballers, but many were just average Aboriginal people who were struggling for work and who probably fit in more with the types of families that we are discussing today. Every day people in Aboriginal families are struggling to enjoy things such as the same life expectancy that non-indigenous people can expect. When talking about the health and wellbeing of indigenous versus non-indigenous people within the community, we should take stock of the fact that there is a difference of 16 years and 20 years in the life expectancy of indigenous females and males compared to that of non-indigenous people. It is not just about life experience. We can only start to imagine the lack of health faced by someone whose life expectancy is 20 years lower, whether it is because of liver trouble, heart trouble, obesity or malnutrition. People who are experiencing a shorter life expectancy are also experiencing a much lower quality of life than people who are enjoying an average life span extending into their late 70s and 80s.

Some of the issues in Victoria pale into insignificance when we look at some of the problems in our northern states and territories. Recently some extremely troubling documentaries have come to light out of the Northern Territory, especially concerning the

community of Wadeye. We really need to look at places in the north and realise that this is where our indigenous communities may head if we do not keep working hard. A very good friend of mine is a Labor lawyer who works out of Darwin. His name is Sean Bowden. Sean comes from a very famous footballing family; he is the brother of Joel, Patrick and Cain.

Hon. D. McL. Davis — He is not related to Ron?

Hon. D. K. DRUM — No, not related to Ron. These boys, the sons of Michael Bowden, played a lot of football for Port Melbourne. That is how I came to know them.

Sean and his whole family have worked their entire lives looking after their communities. Their father, Michael, who is a schoolteacher, has effectively devoted his entire life to looking after Aboriginal families and Aboriginal children. To put this into perspective, I remember when young Joel was first going to break onto the Australian Football League (AFL) scene. They were trying to negotiate Joel's contract so that there might be enough money left for Michael and his wife to actually purchase a house. The boys thought it would be nice if there were enough money in a son's AFL contract to help their parents purchase their first house. Michael had worked in the Aboriginal communities in and around Alice Springs for some 30 years, and their parents had effectively given every cent they had to try to help the Aboriginal communities of the Northern Territory. I am talking about a family whose members wear these issues on their sleeves and do everything they possibly can to help.

Last year Sean produced a paper in which he commented on the issues surrounding the lack of spending in the areas around Wadeye and the Northern Territory as a whole. He compared the spending on indigenous townships with some of the spending on the more leafy, affluent suburbs of northern Darwin. Sean stated in his report that some of the indigenous communities resemble Third World camps. He also stated that economic and social spending has become so warped that it may be impossible for future Northern Territory governments to address alone.

There is no doubt that the Northern Territory government relies on the commonwealth government for 80 per cent of its income, so there is a real understanding of the issues. Mr Viney spoke about the \$670-odd million that is being redirected from Victoria to states and territories such as the Northern Territory so that it can be spent to address these issues. Anybody in this chamber who has seen items on *Lateline* or some

of the documentaries about the communities in places like Wadeye would not be in a position to decry any of those moneys going north because they would realise that the lifestyle we take for granted here is far in excess of what is experienced in those places.

The social problems that have been brought to the fore are truly horrific. The instances of rape amongst our young men in those communities is absolutely abhorrent. The percentages that we are talking about are literally enough to make each of us stop in our tracks and wonder what on earth has gone wrong. If this sort of thing was happening in some Third World country, we would be disgusted and ashamed. To think that this is happening in our country is absolutely staggering. As decision makers in this state we have to take stock of what is going on. Certainly we need to take heed of people such as Sean Bowden. We need to read his report and understand that the Northern Territory government needs to be closely monitored in the way it is spending commonwealth money in trying to address these issues. Sean's report states that the Northern Territory receives 5.5 times the commonwealth per capita funding of Victoria and New South Wales. We need to ensure that that money is being spent more wisely than it is currently.

The Northern Territory is not alone in having issues. Some horrific stories have come out of Redfern in New South Wales. In Victoria we have real issues and have heard accounts of serious assault, abuse and neglect. Those issues should make all government members take heed of the motion. Whilst I do not agree with the wording or intent of the motion, I certainly agree that this chamber needs to have this debate. Each of us needs to put forward our case.

I have been reading some of the government's publications on what it is doing. I am happy to acknowledge that many of the programs put forward by the government are in fact very positive. In my opinion none is more positive than the Koori court program that has been instigated by this government. I am dismayed when I continually have to read through the self-congratulation and all the usual rhetoric that appears before any actual programs and spending.

The Koori court system is something that members need to be aware of. I have spoken to the police who are running the Koori court system in Shepparton. They have a very, very strong belief that, in order to reduce the recidivism that exists in not only the indigenous community but also the broader community, a specific program had to be put in place. The Koori court has certainly done that. Having been able to witness the Koori court in action over the past four or so years, I

can say that anybody who may have been sceptical about it initially would be an admirer of how the system is resourced and is achieving some results. So much money is being spent in Victoria and Australia wide that I do not think it is right for any government, specifically this government, to talk about how much money is being spent on these issues. We have to really start talking about outcomes. Certainly the Koori court is one program that is delivering outcomes. The Shepparton Koori court cut its recidivism rate back to 12.5 per cent, down from mainstream and general levels of recidivism of nearly 30 per cent. That is a significant win for the program.

It must also be noted that the Koori court has achieved that because the government has been prepared to put significant resources into the system. A Koori court case might take six or seven times longer than a case pursued through the normal court system. There is time to involve the victim in the court case. The victim is actually brought into the process and the alleged offender is brought back in to have a relationship with the victim and actually work through the case. The elders of the Aboriginal community that the alleged offender comes from can be involved, so that the message can be put through further. The family of the offender is involved in the process. There are often outstanding efforts by police officers, and the importance of having a magistrate who understands the issues has been identified in reports.

There are a number of approaches that make the Koori court work, and one is trying to put a positive slant on the situation. You might ask how you would put a positive slant on a situation where a crime has been committed without offending the victim. In many cases victims are in attendance simply because they have been offended against and have no animosity towards the offenders. They are there because they want to help the offenders make sure they learn from the experience and do not offend again.

One instance put to me concerned a young Aboriginal boy who had smashed a window of a leading real estate agent's premises. The estate agent was called out at 3 o'clock in the morning and was forced to guard his shop until a tradesman came in the morning to board up the front reception window. While he was sitting there waiting for the tradesman to turn up a huge shard of glass dropped from the window frame. It made the estate agent wonder what would have happened had the offender been in the vicinity when that shard of glass dropped. The victim was concerned about the offender's safety. That had a positive effect on the young offender, who realised he had done the wrong thing by throwing a brick through the window in order

to rob the place. One of the main concerns of the victim was that if the offender had been in the wrong place at the wrong time that shard of glass could have gone through his back or neck and killed him. It is the ability to put a positive slant on the system that is having a strong influence on young offenders and helping to prevent them from reoffending and reappearing before a court.

Another approach which is having success and which is to the fore in the Koori court system is separating the behaviour from the individual. It is letting young men and women know that their behaviour is totally unacceptable but that we are still there to help them. That separation lets the offenders realise the people involved do not hate them and are not discriminating against them. It helps them realise that they are being respected and helped but that people will not stand for the behaviours they have exhibited in the past.

We need to be mindful of what has happened in places such as Robinvale. Until last year that amazing town in my electorate was thought to be home to some 3500 to 4000 people. However, when a further study was concluded late last year we learnt that a more accurate estimate of the population of the Robinvale township was in the vicinity 8000 people. It would be reasonable to suggest that 15 to 20 people might be sharing each of the residences in the rural region surrounding Robinvale. That is similar to the situation at Wadeye in the Northern Territory, where there are between 15 to 20 people at each residence in the township. We have now identified that many Aboriginal communities in places such as Dareton — it is widely acknowledged that New South Wales has abandoned such townships — have moved across the border into Victoria, have falsified their identification and are now tapping into some of the services that are available on the Victorian side of the border — namely, in Robinvale. We need to be aware that this is a huge problem.

Prior to being given the startling information that there might be more than 8000 people living in the Robinvale region, I spent a couple of days there dealing with youth issues. Effectively I was called to Robinvale because the youth worker had been sacked. One might think it strange that a place like Robinvale has only one youth worker. She had been employed in haste when additional money became available. The great organisation that is led by Graeme Kelly was able to procure funding for a youth worker who supposedly could go out and help mainstream youth with a whole range of programs. The situation in Robinvale was dire and there was an acute need for this lady to work with a small group of up to 9 hardened young boys and girls

of between 14 and 16 years of age, or even younger, who were continually in trouble with the law and were continually breaking and entering premises and vandalising the township.

Robinvale has one main street, but the lawlessness and criminal behaviours of this small group of people, including substance abuse, forced the youth worker to spend all her time trying to deal with them. While she had some contact with mainstream youth through the school holiday periods, the vast majority of her time was spent trying to stop the continual offending of these young people. It became apparent on my visit, from my work with the Aboriginal cooperative and from visiting schools that on my return to Bendigo and this Parliament it would be an absolute nightmare trying to get funding to put youth workers into that community.

The Department for Victorian Communities did not want to know about it. We finally made a submission to the department only to lose out on that project. The department did not see it as a priority. We then went to the Minister for Education Services, who said she would fix it but did not. After about eight months I effectively gave up because I was sick and tired of the bureaucratic blockades that are put in place of a parliamentarian trying to get funding to put youth workers into a small community that needs help. My proposal was to get three youth workers into Robinvale. The one it had had already been sacked and it needed one to replace her to deal with the young criminals who are walking the streets and breaking the law every day.

We needed at least another youth worker to work with the indigenous community as a role model and mentor. We need to realise that there are people from about 40 other nationalities living in Robinvale, which is a melting pot of cultures. To do things properly there is a need to have a youth worker in the school system to stop kids from dropping out, and also to look after the Tongans in that area, but this government is not prepared to face up to the problems in Robinvale and put extra resources into that community. This problem, which I first raised with the relevant ministers, is now almost two years old. I still do not know whether they have been able to secure the youth workers they need in that area to start making a difference. That was a very negative experience I had with this government.

I want to talk about another aspect of my Robinvale experience. I spent about 3 hours sitting around and talking at a monthly meeting of the elders of the region. In my naiveté on Aboriginal issues I expected to be meeting with seven or eight grey-haired, Aboriginal gentleman — obviously elderly, as the name suggests. But nothing could be further from the truth. I met with

about 20 women whose ages ranged possibly from 20 to 50. They are effectively the matriarchs of the community who meet, adjudicate and make decisions on how that community is going.

One of those ladies was quoted in the *Age* noting that it is not uncommon for her to be called out of her bedroom in the middle of the night to try to break up fights between community members. She goes out in her pyjamas to break up the fights in the main street and then goes back to bed. She was also reported in the article as saying how positive it is that the region has been able to get hold of a minibus. She can go around and pick up the young boys and girls from various parties, the hotel in town and maybe even the club across the river and take them back to their houses in the evening. That is a way of keeping them from getting into trouble. There are positive things happening from within the leadership of the communities, but there is so much more that needs to be done.

One thing will stay ever-present in my mind in relation to Robinvale. One day the elders were standing around talking about how they could help lower suicide rates in their community. That was the theme of the monthly meeting. When I had my opportunity to speak I put forward some suggestions, but I was quickly shown that my ideas would not work. For everything that I put forward, they had an answer about how it would not work. They showed me a big mural on the wall in the Robinvale co-op. I urge any member who is going to Robinvale to go and look at the co-op; it is a fantastic building. The mural is titled *A Cycle of Despair*. It shows a big circle about the size of a wagon wheel — about 1.5 metres in diameter — that contains every issue that has ever been inflicted on the Aboriginal communities of this country.

Mentioned there is the domestic violence which all families are continually having to put up with, as has come to light with what has happened in the Northern Territory. The mural mentions Mabo and land rights, the invasion of the land and how it was taken away from the Aboriginal people. Further around the cycle of despair is community racism. They said, 'Even when we make an effort to go out there and join community groups, we are faced with community racism which keeps rejecting us'.

The groups talked about deaths in custody and the fact that when young boys and girls go to jail, sometimes they do not get out. There is a martyrdom which is affecting their psychology and their attitude towards everything about their situation. They have a very strong fear that substance abuse is taking over their young people's lives. They asked, 'How will we break

the substance abuse? The drugs and alcohol are just making it too difficult for our young boys and girls to become leaders in their own right and to become mentors for the following generations'. They spoke of the stolen generations, saying 'You guys, you Anglos, will never understand the pain and the lack of continuity of families that has been brought on by the stolen generation'. They went on to unemployment. They said to me, 'You have no idea, Whitey, what it is like to have three or four generations of unemployed. We cannot get employed because of racism in the community'. They talked about the racial discrimination that goes on in everyday life, and about indigenous health and how they have a low life expectancy.

All of these issues put together made me think about who out there would be prepared to break the cycle of despair. I was not very popular when I said to them that if I were a 13 or 14-year-old boy staring up at that cycle of despair, I would say, 'What hope have I got? What chance have I got of making anything of myself if this is the only way my life is going to go? Every time I try to do something I will be hit by another aspect of this discrimination and by the fact that we have no hope'. Effectively the cycle of despair is facing every Aboriginal community. We as parliamentarians and decision makers have got to look at ways of breaking the cycle. The Nationals believe it has to happen in the early stages of life, in fact during pregnancy. We have to start the educational process with pregnant Aboriginal women. We have to talk about hygiene and health. We have to talk to the expectant mothers about getting off any substances they may be on — alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana. We have to start talking about cleanliness around the home. We have to give these young babies a chance at their life.

Observers tell us that when these young children go to kindergarten, there is no racial discrimination. There are 3-year-olds, 4-year-olds, 5-year-olds, 6-year-olds and 7-year-olds playing together, but at about the age of 7 or 8 they realise they are different. All of a sudden they go to kindergarten with attitude, which they have received from their parents, whether they be white or black, and these issues begin to show. They fester in the home situation and do not come from the relationships the children enjoyed at kindergarten.

We have to work with each other and acknowledge this as a community issue. We have to understand that this is not a matter of one political party being against another political party; it is not a matter of one section of the community being against another section of the community. We should all agree that this is a substantial problem within our community. I and The

Nationals believe we all have to work together to make sure we get some positive outcomes. We have to make sure that the Victorian government stops patting itself on the back for outcomes it has not actually achieved.

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — I rise to support the motion moved by the Honourable Wendy Lovell. As members have just heard from Mr Drum, it is an emotional debate. He gave an impassioned speech about his experiences with the Aboriginal community and detailed some of the frustrations he has with issues right across the board.

Mr Drum summed up the situation well in his final comment: this government is not actually delivering. I will point to clear examples from independent organisations and documentation to show where we are at in respect of the treatment of our Aboriginal community. The motion moved by the Honourable Wendy Lovell shows the government's failure to implement long-term strategies. Members on the other side of the house, including Ms Mikakos, will talk in general about the corrections system and its long-term strategy, so I will begin by dealing with that issue to counter the arguments that may come from the government.

Let me go to the facts that show why we are at a crossroads concerning Victorian Aboriginals who are in jail under this government. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that in Victoria in 2001, soon after the government came to power, the ratio of incarcerated Aboriginals compared with the rest of the population was 11.8 to 1, in 2002 it was 12.4 to 1, in March 2003 it dropped marginally to 12.1 to 1 and in March 2004 it went up to 13.9 to 1. The most recent figures I could obtain from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which are for June 2005, show that the ratio went up to 16.7 to 1. Between 2001 — after this government came to power — and June 2005 we have seen the incarceration rate comparator, which is usually used as an indicator of the number of incarcerated Aboriginals compared with the rest of the population, go from 11.8 to 1 to 16.7 to 1.

It is telling that this government talks about its long-term strategy when dealing with the Aboriginal community. When I was the opposition spokesman on corrections the government undertook a process called the Mount Teneriffe process to establish an Aboriginal correctional facility at Mount Teneriffe. The problem was that not only did the government not tell the local community of its intentions and why it had purchased the land but it did not tell the Aboriginal community in the surrounding areas.

Ms Mikakos — That is not true!

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA — Ms Mikakos says that is not true, but the fact is that the local community, including the Koori community, was in an uproar about the fact that this facility was going to be placed in one of the highest fire danger areas in north-eastern Victoria. It had no running water or access to running water and limited access to local services. The facility was dumped in the middle of the bush, and the local Aboriginal community did not want it there. The community said, 'Bring it to closer to services'. In the end, at 4 o'clock on a Thursday afternoon, after the press and television deadlines had closed, the then new Minister for Corrections in the other place, Tim Holding, announced that the Mount Teneriffe process was not going to continue and that the facility would be moved to the closed Won Wron facility. It proposed to move the facility hundreds of kilometres from the north-east to another part of Victoria without consultation.

The same situation is occurring again. The facility is unfortunately not welcome in the Yarram area because nobody has engaged with the local community. We have the same issues. The Koori community is saying, 'Why is it going down there? It is not close to Koori courts or services'. The same issues have arisen again. This is the government's long-term strategy for dealing with Aboriginals in our prison system.

I will conclude by quoting figures from the corrective services reports on the indigenous prisoner population, which are published on a regular basis by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In 1998–99 there were 123 Aboriginals in our prison system; in 1999–2000 there were 126; at around the time the Bracks government moved into power — it has said on the record that it has improved this situation, and I will tell members how it has done that — in 2000–01 there were 142; in 2001–02 there were 151; in March 2003 there were 163; in March 2004 there were 182; and in June 2005, the most recent figures I could get, there were 220.

Under this government we have seen percentage increases each year of 2.4 per cent, 12.7 per cent, 6.3 per cent, 7.9 per cent, 11.7 per cent and the last is around 20 per cent. Over the period of this government's time in office — since 1999 — we have seen a 79 per cent increase in the number of Aboriginals going into our facilities. At the same time there has been a decrease in the number of non-indigenous prisoners. The last Australian Bureau of Statistics report shows a decrease in the number of non-indigenous prisoners; we are now down to 3472.

The reality is that the process this government undertakes does not match the rhetoric, and I think it is important to put that on the record. As Mr Drum and Ms Lovell have said, Ms Mikakos will get up and say, 'We are spending this' and 'We are spending that'. My view is that you can spend as much as you like, but if there are no real outcomes it is just tokenism.

In the short time I have left I want to move to the most recent figures provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on the labour force characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia. These figures are from 16 May, so they are very recent. This government says it is dealing with some of the issues — and that is why it is important to have Ms Lovell's motion before the house. The long-term consequences of a government that has its foot off the accelerator, with its eye on the spin and off the outcomes, are no better demonstrated than in the most recent statistics. They are very telling and compare every state in Australia between 2002 and 2005. They show that in New South Wales the unemployment rate for indigenous people has dropped from 18.3 per cent to 15.6 per cent, in Queensland from 20.5 per cent to 14.6 per cent and in South Australia from 23.2 per cent to 20.1 per cent. In Western Australia there has been a marginal drop from 15.8 per cent to 15.6 per cent, and Tasmania's rate has dropped from 21.2 per cent to 15.8 per cent. The Australian Capital Territory has had a drop from 10.8 per cent to 5.3 per cent.

Where does Victoria sit in the comparison — like for like, state for state and territory for territory — of unemployment rates among indigenous people? The fact is that in 2002 the unemployment rate was 20.5 per cent. If you look at the trend in every other state and territory, you would expect there should have been a decrease, but not in Victoria. In fact in Victoria the most recent figures for 2005 show 23.9 per cent. We have had close to a 5 per cent increase in unemployment for those who are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

The reality is that the spin and the smoke and mirrors account for nothing when the hard-edged facts show that this government is failing to address the issues of disadvantage, education, employment and the prison system that affect our Aboriginal community. I support the motion. I hope that before she starts to counter the facts with rhetoric, Ms Mikakos will come to understand that things have actually become worse under this government.

Ms MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — Whilst I reject the premise of the motion moved by the Honourable Wendy Lovell. I welcome this debate. I hope that the

interest Ms Lovell has shown in tackling indigenous disadvantage is shared by the rest of her party. I hope that the opposition is as serious as this government is about tackling the unacceptable levels of disadvantage facing Victoria's Aboriginal community. It is an unacceptable state of affairs that indigenous Victorians across all the social indicators are our most disadvantaged Victorians.

It was heartening to see a little bit of passion and emotion being injected into this debate by the Honourable Damian Drum. Like him, I feel very strongly about these issues. I believe these issues should cut across politics and that we should have a tripartisan position on tackling these unacceptable levels of disadvantage.

In my contribution I want to focus on the Bracks government's efforts to tackle the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system. I agree that it is unacceptable that indigenous Victorians are still 12 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-indigenous Victorians, and that indigenous kids aged between 10 and 17 years are 16 times more likely to be in a juvenile detention facility than other people. These statistics are about real lives and real people, and they are clearly unacceptable. All political parties should be committed to tackling these issues.

The Aboriginal justice agreement that has already been talked of by other speakers has been in place for six years. However, we all know that Aboriginal disadvantage in this country has existed for over 200 years. When you catalogue the series of injustices done to Aboriginal people — from colonisation to dispossession, to assimilation, to the stolen generations — it is clear that there can be no quick fixes. John Howard suggested that abolishing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission would fix all the problems in indigenous affairs, but sadly things seem only to have got worse. The Howard government seems content to blame others — indigenous people themselves, their culture and other levels of government.

Instead of using bandaid solutions, the Bracks government has sought to implement a true partnership with Victoria's Aboriginal people and to develop long-term strategies, even though some of the projects may not yet have come to fruition. This partnership approach has served as model for other state-based approaches to the issues of Aboriginal overrepresentation in the justice system. It is widely acknowledged that the Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement is leading the way in such issues Australia wide. As I said, the Aboriginal justice agreement was

launched in 2000 in response to the 1997 national ministerial summit into indigenous deaths in custody. Whilst the Kennett government was in office for seven years, it took this Labor government to actually implement a response to that summit and to the royal commission report that was handed down in the early 1990s.

Sadly indigenous overrepresentation in the justice system has continued to grow since this agreement was launched. This may be seen as alarming, but it needs to be recognised that Victoria has the lowest increase amongst the states. In fact it is highly possible that without this agreement being in place the situation could have been much, much worse. The extent of the increase is uncertain owing to the extent that the figures are based on the 2001 census and do not take into account population increases since 2001. The demography of Victoria's Kooris is also working against them. The Koori population is far more youthful than non-indigenous Victorians, with approximately 50 per cent of Kooris being aged under 20 years versus 28 per cent for the non-indigenous population — and we know that the young are far more likely to find themselves on the wrong side of the law.

The issues in Ms Lovell's motion are complex issues that cannot be dealt with simplistically. The Aboriginal justice agreement has always recognised the complexity of these issues — for example, the interrelationship between poverty and other causes of crime and the outcomes to which that leads in interactions with the criminal justice system. That is why the Aboriginal justice agreement has involved over 60 different initiatives that have taken a whole-of-government approach, to which Mr Drum alluded in his own remarks. Through the Aboriginal justice agreement, for example, we have developed the highly successful Koori courts. I share Mr Drum's enthusiasm for the Koori courts, because they have significantly reduced recidivism rates amongst Koori offenders.

A recent independent review of the Koori courts conducted by La Trobe University has found that, against the general level of recidivism, which is put at about 29.4 per cent, the Shepparton Koori court recorded a recidivism rate of approximately 12.5 per cent. In its first two years of operation the Broadmeadows Koori court recidivism rate was approximately 15.5 per cent. Clearly these courts are proving to be successful. Koori courts are now operating in Mildura, Moe, Shepparton, Broadmeadows, Warrnambool, Portland and Hamilton and there is a children's Koori court in Melbourne. I am pleased that the budget this year announced funding for a further three Koori courts, including a children's

Koori court to be established for the first time in regional Victoria.

Through the Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement we have also developed the Aboriginal Justice Forum, which I have the honour of chairing as the Parliamentary Secretary for Justice. It brings together senior figures in government and senior Koori representatives to work out real solutions to the problems facing Victoria's Kooris. I can assure members of this house that these discussions are always robust, and people never hide from presenting the facts as they truly stand in terms of looking at innovative solutions to tackle those issues.

The agreement has also put in place seven regional Aboriginal justice advisory committees (RAJACs), which give local people a say in how local justice programs are run. They are used as the primary mechanism by which the government consults with the Koori community about justice issues. This has also led to productive and constructive relationships being built between Koori communities and agencies where there may not have been positive relationships in the past, such as the police. It has also provided the RAJACs with a voice at the Aboriginal Justice Forum. I have noted recently that when the RAJACs nominate people for indigenous justice awards increasingly many of the award recipients are local police. It is great to see those relationships improving.

The police-Aboriginal liaison program works to break down the barriers and negative contacts between Kooris and the police. We also have the successful community-based night patrol programs in Shepparton and Mildura, which Mr Drum referred to in his contribution to the debate. The government is currently working with communities to develop similar programs across the state targeting the reduction of negative contact between Koori youth and the justice system. I should point out that in the first year since commencement of the Koori night patrol in Shepparton police reported a 39 per cent reduction in the number of Kooris arrested. At the moment we have Koori night patrols operational in Mildura, Shepparton, Robinvale, the city of Yarra and Melbourne's central business district. This initiative is currently being developed in Bairnsdale and the Latrobe Valley.

The indigenous women's mentoring program at Rumbalara in Shepparton has reported a breach rate of less than half that of the wider surrounding population. This year's budget will establish a statewide Koori offender support and mentoring program based on the successful Rumbalara pilot program.

I am very pleased that Corrections Victoria has been leading the way in many respects in providing support and innovative programs to reduce reoffending rates in Victoria. Programs such as the recruitment of indigenous community corrections officers, Aboriginal wellbeing officers and indigenous services officers have been implemented to make the prison environment safer for Koori offenders in response to the high levels of deaths in custody in the past. Hopefully they will help in preventing further deaths in custody from occurring. Koori juvenile justice workers have also been employed to deal with young offenders and to provide a range of services and support to young Kooris whilst in custody.

The government has accepted that responding to the overrepresentation of Kooris in the justice system is related to issues of poverty and that a whole-of-government approach is needed. Justice issues cannot be viewed in isolation from broader social justice issues. This has always formed the basis of the government's approach to tackling the issues of indigenous disadvantage.

This is also evident in the government's social policy statement, A Fairer Victoria. I was very pleased that in last year's budget there was funding for the Lake Tyers community renewal project, which is a highly successful example of the role local communities can play in rebuilding their own social and economic wellbeing. The A Fairer Victoria statement last year also included funding of over \$2 million for the establishment of an indigenous men's residential diversion program to be located at the old Won Wron prison site near Yarram. The facility is referred to as the Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place. The facility will address indigenous overrepresentation in the criminal justice system by providing a culturally appropriate residential program for up to 20 Koori men on community-based orders. The program will assist them to complete their community-based orders whilst receiving rehabilitation support, work and training whilst learning things such as life skills to ensure that the likelihood of reoffending is reduced. I am pleased that this project is currently under way and is expected to be operational by the middle of next year.

I found it very disappointing to hear Mr Dalla-Riva's contribution in this regard and his denigration of this project since the time when the Mount Teneriffe site was being looked at as a possible location. But I am pleased that the local community there is working very closely with Corrections Victoria to ensure that this facility will be successful.

The budget this year also included a further \$26.1 million for the Aboriginal justice agreement to fund a range of programs, such as the expansion of the Koori courts I mentioned previously, the extension of the mentoring, liaison and support programs and also further capital funding for the indigenous men's residential diversion program near Yarram.

There are a range of other initiatives in the budget, and I am sure the other government speakers will also refer to those. But I want to say that it is disappointing that the opposition is only seeking to be critical in respect of its contribution to this debate. The Honourable Richard Dalla-Riva accused the government of tokenism — and that is coming from a party with no policies or ideas other than moving this motion today.

Leadership is all about admitting where there are problems and having the maturity to take responsibility for something for which you did not have direct involvement. At the Victorian level I am pleased that the Bracks government is prepared to admit where problems exist and where there are further challenges and further work needs to be done.

Sadly, this is not occurring at the national level. On Friday last week we announced the second phase of the Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement, with a range of new initiatives funded in this year's budget. Clearly more work needs to be done. We need to tackle the issue of the overrepresentation of indigenous people in our justice system; we need to ensure that all Victorians have equality and a fair go.

Whilst I welcome this debate today, it is important that we have leadership at the national level as well, because indigenous affairs is a shared responsibility. We need support from the Liberal Party and The Nationals to ensure that these issues are treated with the seriousness they deserve and that indigenous Victorians can truly share in the opportunities that exist in this state.

Hon. ANDREW BRIDESON (Waverley) — My task today is to support the motion the Honourable Wendy Lovell has moved. I must say to date I have enjoyed and been impressed by the content and quality of all speakers. Everybody has made some very good, positive points. This is an extremely complex issue, and I firmly believe these sorts of issues ought to be approached in a bipartisan way without attempting to play politics. That is the category, if you like, in which I put indigenous issues.

Today I will only concentrate on the educational issues. I will try to present some facts which I have been able to research in the last 24 hours or so. I would like to

start off on perhaps a more positive note than sometimes is attributed by the government to the opposition. Last year I was fortunate to have Katie O'Connell, a university student, working with me as a parliamentary intern. She prepared a report for me entitled *From Little Things, Big Things Grow*. It is a report into the participation, success and retention rates in Koori education.

Whilst acknowledging that the government has some important strategies in place, the approach I would like to take in presenting the facts to the Parliament today is that the government, whilst it is doing something, could do more. That could be attached to governments of all persuasions, but that is the tack I will take.

The report prepared for me examines the participation, attendance and retention rates for indigenous students within our education system at all levels — primary, secondary and tertiary — and looks at possible future initiatives. I recommend that anyone who is interested in this field read the report; it is in the library. Katie has come up with some very decent recommendations which I would personally endorse, and which I would like the government and the opposition to take on board. It was very apparent from Katie's research that while improvements in Koori education have been made at those three levels of Koori students, the gap between indigenous students and non-indigenous students is wide and becoming wider. We do not seem to be getting the outcomes that we would all desire.

Mr Viney, in his contribution to the debate, put some facts on the table in relation to literacy and numeracy rates, but he really did not tell the whole story. Things have improved marginally, but they have not improved when they are compared with non-indigenous students. The most recent report I was able to find was *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage — Key Indicators 2005*, which was commissioned by the Productivity Commission.

When you go to the facts in this report, you see the numeracy and literacy comparators between indigenous and non-indigenous students in Australia. The graphs for Victoria prove that we are not achieving the outcomes in Victoria that we would desire, although I must acknowledge that the results of indigenous students in Victoria are generally better than the results of indigenous students in the other states, particularly from the Northern Territory and South Australia.

We need to do more, and I will go to the recommendations in Katie's report, because there is a story behind each one. Firstly, it is recommended:

That the government provides funding for the appointment of a greater number of Koori educators, with the eventual aim of providing one for each government school in which an indigenous student is present.

I accompanied Katie to the Drouin Primary School and spoke with the Koori educator down there, and I must acknowledge that Terry Marks is doing a fantastic job. She is a very experienced Koori educator in Victoria, and she strongly believes this is the only way. We must build the communities together, and the only way you can do that is by having well-trained, professional Koori educators working within each school community.

Katie also recommended:

That the government implements regular training forums for teachers of Koori students in the government school system, to ensure that certain standards are met in the quality of education provided to Koori students in the state system.

In my teaching career I only ever taught one Koori — and, gee, I had trouble with that boy. But he was a terrific kid. It used to take this young boy an hour to write the date. He could not see the need for writing the date; and when you come to think of it, why should anybody have to write the date as their first educational task of every day?

We really need to question the type of pedagogy we are giving our Koori students. That experience hammered home to me the fact that I was totally unqualified to understand and teach Koori students, and I am talking about 25 years ago. Yet here is a recommendation from 2005 still dealing with the same problems. The government ought to ensure that in teacher training more emphasis is given to assist teachers to teach Koori students.

Also it is suggested:

That the ... Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority implement a benchmark for the inclusion of indigenous culture in certain areas of the curriculum for all Victorian government schools, whether they be attended by indigenous students or not ...

The important reason behind that recommendation is that in the general community at large there is not a great acceptance of indigenous culture, and it would also help the broader community foster a sense of identity and understanding, and hopefully even some pride in the work of Koori students.

My intern also suggested:

That the Victorian government, in conjunction with the federal government, allocates funding directed toward a scholarship scheme specifically targeting indigenous and non-indigenous males to encourage entry into tertiary courses.

There is a lack of Koori educators in our schools, and the implementation of a scholarship scheme would certainly encourage more, and we need to encourage more male role models as Koori teachers.

One of the issues that Terry Marks was most concerned about was the number of young pregnant Koori women. She believes the program that has been implemented in South Australia, Young Mums on the Move, would assist young mothers from both indigenous and non-indigenous groups to maintain their educational advancements. Terry feels strongly that this issue, although difficult to raise in a public forum, is a real issue in Koori communities, particularly in Victoria. It is an initiative I would like to see Minister Jennings take on board.

Two more recommendations were made. One was that the government, through the Department of Justice, in conjunction with the indigenous community, review the Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement and include strategies to deal with the specific needs of indigenous women upon their release from prison. I think that is another worthy recommendation. Finally, she suggested that, in conjunction with the commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the Victorian government should provide further financial incentives for companies to sponsor programs modelled on the Juno Consulting Group's Employability for Life program. This is a program that the Juno group has taken on board in conjunction with Ford Australia, and it is proving to be very successful. I think there is a lot of room for such a program to be implemented by other corporations in Victoria.

One of the reasons for including that recommendation on employment is that we need to break the cycle. Previous speakers have mentioned the cycle. I think we would generally agree that Aboriginal communities live in an impoverished society, that poverty leads to a lack of educational opportunity and that a lack of educational opportunity, lack of training and lack of qualifications leads to difficulties in gaining employment. If you are unemployed, you tend to be marginalised; if you are marginalised, you tend to get into a life of petty criminal activity. I could go on and on. It is a pity I do not have more time. The government needs to do a lot more in the field of education. The statistics I have been able to find support my argument.

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA (Melbourne West) — I am delighted to have an opportunity to rise and speak on this motion. Of course I will be opposing the motion, because it is clear that the Bracks Labor government is very serious in its commitment to the indigenous community. We are absolutely committed

to working in a cooperative way with that community. You only have to look at the programs and initiatives of the government since it took office in 1999 and at the money allocated to those programs and initiatives to know how serious we are about ensuring that the disadvantage that exists and has existed for many generations within the Aboriginal community is addressed and that strategies are put in place that will assist the Aboriginal community to participate fully and more actively in the community. We are doing that in a range of different ways, and I am happy to talk about some of those initiatives.

Previous speakers on the government side have talked in depth about some of those initiatives — and even opposition spokespeople have talked about them. To his credit Mr Drum acknowledged and talked about the many positive programs that have been initiated by the Bracks government. While he had a limited opportunity to go into the detail of some of those initiatives because he had misplaced his paperwork, he was able to recognise the work that has been done. We need to remember that the Liberal Party has moved this motion. We should go back and look at what the opposition did during the years in office of the previous coalition government. If we look at the broad picture, we see the number of schools that were closed, the number of health services that were either significantly downsized or closed, the number of teachers who were sacked and the number of nurses and health professionals who were also sacked. All of those categories of people were involved in a range of services, including the provision of services to our indigenous community.

Let us look at what the opposition's federal counterparts are doing. While the opposition has moved this motion in this house, I would love to know what discussions Ms Lovell is having with her federal counterparts about the action they are taking in relation to Aboriginal affairs, particularly on funding of Aboriginal affairs in Victoria. Since the federal government pulled the rug out from under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission we have only one shared responsibility agreement in Victoria — one out of hundreds of agreements across the state. I wonder if Ms Lovell and her colleagues in the Liberal Party have been lobbying the federal government — their federal colleagues — and saying, 'What about committing more than one of the hundreds of these sorts of shared responsibility agreements? What about giving Victoria its fair share?'. I would also love to know what Ms Lovell's discussions with her federal counterparts have been, or indeed with the federal opposition, in relation to investing in Aboriginal affairs in Victoria.

If you look at the federal government's grants formula, you see that \$670 million every year is being taken out of the Victorian budget — that grants formula budget — and distributed to other states and territories. I would like to know whether Ms Lovell thinks that is fair and whether she is doing anything to try and counter the fact that all that money is being taken out of the grants program. That is money which could be spent here in Victoria, which in the past has been spent here in Victoria but which is no longer being spent in Victoria. She loves to talk about what she calls the spin of the government, but in her contribution as lead speaker for the opposition she said nothing about and gave no indication of what the Liberal's position is in relation to Aboriginal affairs — what its policy is or what its strategies are for the future. She said nothing about the funding relationship with the federal government. She said nothing about the lack of funding or the decreases in funding in the grants programs in Victoria.

We were given no insight at all as to what Ms Lovell's views are about that matter. You can only come to the conclusion that she has none. If you look at the investment in Aboriginal affairs in Victoria you see that the federal investment is between \$10 million and \$20 million and that the Victorian government spends \$120 million in recurrent funding and this has put in an additional \$75 million. When you look at the way the Liberals funded Aboriginal affairs when we had a coalition government in Victoria you can see their attitude to Aboriginal affairs. The programs for and resourcing of the Aboriginal community were at a very low ebb when we came to government in 1999. When you look at what we have done since 1999 you can see that we have put in place a range of long-term strategies and short-term projects. We have been willing to work with the federal government, which has been decreasing its contribution to this state in Aboriginal affairs for quite some time now.

I will take up a few of the points that have been raised by Mr Brideson. He talked about education. Of course education is important, and it is particularly important in the Aboriginal community. It has certainly been a priority of this government — in fact a top priority of this government — to keep young Aboriginal people in school, and if they have left school, to get them back to school.

We have put in place a whole range of initiatives that are working to support this priority, and I will quickly run through some of them. There are 56 Koori educators, 15 Koori education development officers and 6 home school liaison officers who all continue to support the education of our Aboriginal students. We

have created the Victorian College of Koori Education across four campuses, and we are also introducing literacy improvement teams across the state. This is an issue Mr Brideson was quite passionate about when he spoke of some of his experiences when working as a teacher. These expert specialists will work alongside teachers. They are all about developing strategies that best suit and address the literacy needs of individual learners, and they are being directed to where the need is greatest — and of course that includes our Aboriginal community.

Mr Brideson talked about wanting to see improvements. I will outline some improvements we are seeing as a result of government initiatives, and they go to some of the issues he raised about education. While the results of indigenous students remain behind — there is no doubt about that — those of non-indigenous students, the performance of indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy in both year 3 and year 5 have increased steadily since 2004. We have introduced the Koori Literacy Links program, which has assisted in this area.

Retention is very important, and the government has put initiatives in place. We are seeing results from the initiatives that go to ensuring that indigenous students are kept at schools. The apparent retention rates for Koori students in years 10–12 in 2004–05 increased by 7.6 per cent. The apparent retention rates for Koori students in years 7–12 in 2004–05 increased by 4.3 per cent. So we are seeing results from the strategies that we have put in place. That is not to say that more does not need to be done, but you do not allocate the sorts of funds and make the sorts of commitments that we have made in the most recently released budget, where very significant funding has been provided for the Aboriginal community, if you do not understand that more needs to be done and that there are challenges there. This government is committed to addressing them and building on the work it has already done, and that has been working.

These programs and strategies are not developed out of thin air. In her contribution to the debate Ms Lovell talked about how important it is to work with the community leaders. That is something the Bracks government has been prepared to do. She mentioned some of the leading people within the Aboriginal community in Shepparton, many of whom I know well and have known for a long time, having grown up in Shepparton. This government consults widely with them and works with them in a collaborative and cooperative partnership so that it can be as sure possible be that the best possible services are being delivered where they are needed most. There is nothing like

hearing from the people who need and want services about where and how they should best be delivered. That is what the government has been doing.

Retention rates have increased, as I said, and I reiterate that we are committed to doing more in this area. We recognise the challenges there and that more needs to be done, but we have seen good results because of a more coordinated approach at our schools at both the regional and central levels. Things are happening out there on the ground to target Koori resources and to respond more effectively to the needs of Koori students.

There has been a range of Koori-specific trials. The It's not Okay to be Away trial has impacted directly on retention rates. The attendance strategy was implemented by this government in 2005 for the development of programs to support retention in those schools where there are high concentrations of Koori students. Year 12 or equivalent completions have been steadily increasing and are up by 66 per cent since 2002. The government has put in place long-term strategies in education which are having some good results and which it intends to build on, and it is committed to building on them in the recently announced budget.

There is a range of health strategies, many of which are very good and are working very well, which again have been put in place in consultation with the community. I will pick up on one of them, because it has been raised by a number of speakers on the opposition side — that is, the Koori Maternity Services program, which Mr Brideson spoke about. Since 1999 the Victorian government has funded the Koori Maternity Services program, a program which it has been committed to. It is about ensuring that the programs and services are culturally appropriate and give the right sorts of support to women when they are pregnant as well as through childbirth. Midwives and Aboriginal health workers are employed. They work as a complementary team and provide comprehensive services to Aboriginal women in the community, not only during pregnancy and delivery; the team provides ante-natal and post-natal services as well as the important services for when women are delivering their babies. This program is addressing important health issues and is a long-term initiative.

This is a bad motion. It does not deserve the support of the chamber, and I will not be supporting it.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — I am pleased to make a contribution to the debate on the motion moved by the Honourable Wendy Lovell. It is an important motion. It is well known that there is

significant disadvantage in the Aboriginal community. I am conscious that I have just 3 minutes of time remaining, so my contribution — the one I may have made would have been more comprehensive — will need to focus on just one or two areas.

It is worth putting on the record the size of the Aboriginal community in Victoria. At 30 June 2004 it was around 29 683, although the Department of Human Services has acknowledged the difficulties in getting precise numbers. That showed a slight growth, up from 27 928 in 2001. It is a significant community. While Victoria has the lowest percentage of indigenous people as a proportion of the jurisdiction's population, at 0.6 per cent, the Victorian community represents 6.1 per cent of the total Australian Aboriginal population.

In the couple of minutes I have left I will draw the attention of the house to some very stark and surprising statistics that point to Aboriginal ill health. The figures on Aboriginal ill health are known generally, but the growth in renal dialysis admissions for Aboriginals is not so well known. That is an important point to make. Renal dialysis admissions relate to kidney disease. Two of the leading causes of kidney failure are diabetes and high blood pressure, and diabetes is very prevalent in the Aboriginal community. Aboriginal people suffer high rates of renal failure — six to eight times the rate of the non-Aboriginal population — and consequently there are very high rates of admission for renal dialysis.

I think it is instructive to put on the public record some of the figures for renal dialysis in Victoria in recent years, including the growth in the number of admissions for renal dialysis. In 1995 there were 89 admissions to Victorian facilities for renal dialysis of indigenous people and that was 3.37 per cent of the total admissions for dialysis. By 2004–05 that had grown to 3051 admissions, or 38.65 per cent of admissions for dialysis in Victoria, which was a very significant number of admissions and a very significant percentage of the admissions for all conditions of people of indigenous background. Given the importance of diabetes and the fact that it is one of the leading causes of renal failure, this must be tackled.

Certainly diabetes is more prevalent in older patients but interestingly in the Aboriginal community there are significant cohorts in the age groups from 35 to 44, from 45 to 54 and from 55 to 64, again reflecting not only the increase in the prevalence of diabetes in our community generally but in particular in the Aboriginal community. The ill health of Aboriginal people reflects in part their socioeconomic status, of course, but also a series of particular and individual characteristics. As a

community we need to tackle those issues. That means resources but it means — —

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

Ms HADDEN (Ballarat) — I rise to speak in support of the motion brought by Ms Lovell, condemning the government for its failure to adequately address areas of disadvantage within our Aboriginal community, and particularly its failure to implement long-term strategies to improve a number of areas, such as health standards, education standards and employment opportunities and to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginals in the corrections system.

Before I continue, I wish to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional owners and custodians of this land, the Wurundjeri and the Bun wurrung balug.

I support the motion because it is timely, given the budget that was handed down recently. There is a cycle of frustration and despair, as was noted by previous speakers. As far as I am concerned, the government has not put its money where its mouth is. It has had seven years to actually deliver. It has not delivered sufficiently enough because the incarceration rates of Aboriginal men — young Aboriginal men especially — have nearly doubled since 1999, when this government came to power. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, the incarceration indicators have increased substantially, from 11.8 to 1 in 2001 up to 16.7 to 1 in June 2005. That is nothing to be proud of and the government should not by any means be proud of it.

There should be a whole-of-government strategy, approach and care. I do not believe that at the moment that is being represented by this government. I recall the big event in 2004 here in the Parliament of the amendment to Victoria's Constitution Act 1975. The bill, which was passed by both houses of Parliament, inserted section 1A to provide recognition of the Aboriginal people in Victoria. The section states in part that the Parliament recognises that Victoria's Aboriginal people are the original custodians of the land on which the Colony of Victoria was established, that they have a unique status as the descendants of Australia's first people, that they have a spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters within Victoria, and that they have made a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the identity and wellbeing of Victoria.

I believe firmly in that amendment to the Constitution Act — and of course I voted for it. However, I think that the government has failed and since then especially has been quite hypocritical in its paternalistic behaviour to our Aboriginal communities in this state. I say this because of something that happened most recently and which hurt me terribly, as one who has had a long association with Aboriginal people in this state and Aboriginal people in general, going back some 30 years to when I lived with a small Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. In the 1980s and 1990s as a lawyer I represented Aboriginal women around Victoria.

I read what the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs said back in April. It was cited in all the newspapers, but I refer to the report in the *Age* of 25 April. Mr Jennings had just sacked the 48 volunteer Aboriginal cultural inspectors. He signalled that he would take a hard line on protection applications on the cultural sites. He is reported as having said:

I can assure the Aboriginal people of Victoria that I will exercise my responsibilities with vigour.

He certainly did — he sacked them. That was unforgivable behaviour by a Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, especially given the 2004 amendment to our Constitution Act. What was he saying? Was it that they have not made a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the identity and wellbeing of Victoria, because that is how he has acted?

The Premier's behaviour over Camp Sovereignty and the sacred fire in the Domain Gardens in March, April and May was equally shameful. He passed the buck and said, 'It's a matter for the Melbourne City Council to resolve'. Come on, Premier, you are the Premier of this state; why did you not do something to protect the Aboriginal people?

Then on 19 April the Acting Premier at the time, the Minister for Environment, said 'snuff out the fire' — they were his words. He is reported by AAP as having said:

I don't support the fire, the government doesn't support it ...

We don't believe it's appropriate for that place.

He called for it to be snuffed out. They were appalling statements and that was appalling behaviour by cabinet ministers and leaders of this state.

Following the recent budget announced on 30 May, the Minister for Children in the other place, Sherryl Garbutt, recorded a \$268 million funding boost for children and child welfare services. However, when

you get through all the rhetoric and blurb, you find that of the \$268 million allocated four years, just \$14.1 million has been allocated over four years to reduce the overrepresentation of indigenous children in the child protection system. I say to the government: that is not good enough and it falls far short of what it should be doing.

In the *Age* of 1 September 2005 there was an article headed 'Aboriginal studies planned for children in care'. It is noted in that article that:

Aboriginal children are 12 times more likely to be placed in care than other Victorian children. They make up ... 10 per cent of the 4200 children in out-of-home care.

...

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency chief executive officer Muriel Bamblett said it was vital Aboriginal children were connected to their culture.

I recommend that at some stage people look at the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency web site. Under an entry headed 'Health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', some alarming statistics appear. It states:

... indigenous children are still seven times more likely to be removed from their families than other children.

...

Despite the ... indigenous child placement principle approximately 25 per cent of indigenous children removed from their families are still placed with non-Aboriginal foster parents.

...

Life expectancy at birth among non-indigenous people was 74.9 years for males and 80.6 for females, life expectancy at birth was 15 to 20 years lower for indigenous people.

It states that about one-third of indigenous children left school by age 15 or younger, compared to 15 per cent of all young people.

It goes on:

The unemployment rate is highest for indigenous people, 15 to 19-year-olds, 50 per cent, and also very high for 20 to 24-year-olds, 46 per cent.

It states also that:

Twenty-six per cent of indigenous people in employment were employed in the Community Development Employment Project, CDEP scheme —

or work for the dole. It goes on:

Twenty per cent of indigenous households had an annual household income of less than \$16 000 per annum. A further

40 per cent had household incomes of between \$16 001 and \$40 000.

...

According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, indigenous children and young people are 21.3 times more likely to be incarcerated than their non-indigenous counterparts.

I say to the government that those statistics alone are nothing to be proud of.

I turn to the *Annual Report of Inquiries into the Deaths of Children Known to Child Protection 2006*, which was prepared and tabled in the Parliament by the Victorian Child Death Review Committee. Under the heading 'Aboriginal status 2000–05' we see that there was an overrepresentation of Aboriginal children within the child protection population for the five year period; there were 108 deaths in total, 15 of which involved Aboriginal children. Again I say to the government that it is not doing too good on this issue at all.

The Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement of 2000 was admirable, and it contained a lot of startling statistics. Nothing much has improved. In fact I think the statistics have got worse and the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the prison system and the child protection system has increased.

Aboriginal people make up about 0.5 per cent of Victoria's total population, and 5.9 per cent of the indigenous population of Australia. Some 50 per cent of Aboriginal people live outside of Melbourne in contrast to 28 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population. The statistics go on to show that the unemployment rate of Aboriginal people in Victoria is 21.4 per cent, and 57 per cent of Victorian Aboriginal people are aged under 25 years compared to 39 per cent of the total Victorian population. Just 3 per cent of Aboriginal people are aged over 65 years compared with 39 per cent of the total population. Of course, we know from the statistics that young Aboriginal men in Victoria have a life expectancy of some 18 to 20 years less than the state average. This is all very alarming.

In the *Sunday Age* of 29 August an article headed 'The neglect of Aboriginal children shames us all' states:

The way Aboriginal children are neglected by the welfare system shames us all. With 500 children in care ... it beggars belief that the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is expected to provide support to indigenous families across Victoria with 2.5 staff.

Again nothing much has improved. There was an excellent article in the *Age* of Monday, 5 June, headed 'The elders who want to banish triggers of domestic

violence'. It included interviews with Jenny Whitton, a female elder, and Barbara Egan, a female elder of the Aboriginal community at Robinvale. They also interviewed Myra Grinter, whom I have met, of the Mildura Local Aboriginal Justice Action Committee. They talk about the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care. The article states:

Not all is well south of the Murray. Figures released last year by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, show Victoria is failing Aboriginal children. Fifty-three per cent are on care and protection orders, compared to 5 per cent of all Victorian children.

Myra Grinter said she was looking forward to improvement in the drop in domestic violence in her community, with the perpetrators being removed from the home and not the mother and the children, which is something I have been advocating for 20 years across all communities, both black and white. Myra Grinter said she:

... has faith in the ability of the Koori court, now being trialled, to effect change.

That is important. The Robinvale elders, Jenny Whitton and Barbara Egan, talked about what they do in their community to address domestic violence and to remove troubled young people off the streets. It is all voluntary, and they are to be commended. Where is the state government assisting them? It is not. We find also on the same page that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs is now taking a turn of mind. He has suddenly realised that he cannot operate the Aboriginal Heritage Act without the 48 volunteer heritage inspectors and is now considering reinstating some of them but under his terms. I think he might get a shock.

I have had a lot of experience with the Koori court in other states, and during the 54th Parliament I visited Aboriginal communities around this state and interstate as a member of the parliamentary Law Reform Committee. One of the many recommendations was that a Koori court be established in Victoria. That was done but it took the Attorney-General three years to do it — but he has done it. It is not funded anywhere near the way it is funded in South Australia, the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales.

One of the budget media releases of 30 May from the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs reports that the Attorney-General said the Koori people were overrepresented in the criminal justice system. We know that, and it is getting worse and not better under his regime. We know about the cycle of crime and that early disadvantage spirals into a low rate of school achievement and high rates of unemployment,

imprisonment and illness. It is admirable that both the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Attorney-General want to strengthen families and have them strong and connected within strong and connected communities, but they are not doing a good job at the moment because they are simply not communicating with and consulting Aboriginal communities.

Going back to the article dated 5 June, Jenny Whitton commented that no representatives of the local Aboriginal cooperatives were invited to the talkfest that was conducted by the department in Mildura around May to June. The local community was ignored. Mrs Whitton was surprised and angry about that — so she should be — as should all the Aboriginal communities. If you want to engage Aboriginal communities you sit down with them and listen to them, and they will tell you what they need. It is always very reasonable, commonsense, practical and pragmatic.

The courts of course, especially County Court judge Peter Gebhardt, have been very critical of the way in which young Aboriginal men are overrepresented in juvenile detention centres in this state, especially at the so-called Malmsbury Juvenile Justice Centre. It does not provide much justice for the juveniles in there. Referring to an annual report of the Youth Parole Board and the Youth Residential Board tabled in the Parliament last year, the *Age* of 27 May 2005 stated:

... young Aborigines continued to be overrepresented in juvenile detention centres, with 27 coming within the boards jurisdiction in 2003–04, compared with 20 the year before.

The report said that they continue to be overrepresented in detention centres. The Youth Parole Board recommended that it is absolutely critical that the community develop strategies to better meet the needs of these young people.

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS (Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) — I am thankful for the opportunity to briefly contribute to this motion today primarily, in the spirit of reconciliation and in the spirit of goodwill, to recognise any concern expressed by any member during the debate about the ongoing disadvantage and poor life experiences of Aboriginal people.

I thank members for their sincere concerns about those issues, and I thank them for their concerns, when they have been expressed sincerely, about the wellbeing of Aboriginal people and for what would seem to be a commitment to doing something about it. While I congratulate them on that, I encourage members of the chamber and members of the community to be fellow travellers in that regard by standing up and making a

difference in the daily quality of life of Aboriginal people. We need to turn around their circumstances so that they are fully functioning and happy members of this community. I welcome that implied commitment, and I hope it is a living, breathing real commitment.

There has been some degree of denial and hypocrisy, if not lies, perpetrated during the course of this debate. There are many strides that we have successfully embarked upon as a Victorian community to address many concerns. Whether we have achieved the results is another matter because we are just starting on that journey. We have a lot of work to do as a community to try to turn around the circumstances of Aboriginal people.

In terms of commitment and the partnership arrangements that underpin the justice agreement, the reforms to health, to education, to community representation within the Victorian community, and to empower people to take control of cultural heritage, there are many demonstrated processes and partnership arrangements that the Victorian government enters into and maintains every day across Aboriginal communities to increase the participation of Aboriginal people in controlling their destiny. That is the hallmark of our approach, but is not the only hallmark. There has been significant investment.

We have heard many derisive comments during the course of this motion today about the lack of financial support and dedication from the government. Only a week ago the Bracks government introduced a budget which supported Aboriginal initiatives to the extent of \$75 million and which builds on a commitment in last year's budget, which was a record for the state of \$45.7 million. This year we came out in partnership with the Aboriginal community to spend \$75 million to build on those partnership arrangements and the strength of our programs and to support the Aboriginal community to empower itself into the future.

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (North Eastern) — I would like to address a few issues raised in the debate this morning. Firstly, in his speech Mr Viney referred to me as the Liberal Party spokesperson for Aboriginal affairs. Whilst I did hold that position for a short time a couple of years ago, and it was a time I enjoyed very much, I am no longer the Liberal Party spokesperson for Aboriginal affairs. When I was given the consumer affairs shadow portfolio, the Aboriginal affairs shadow portfolio went over to the member for Sandringham in the other place, Murray Thompson. I am not the Liberal Party spokesperson, I am just a member of the Liberal Party who is genuinely interested in raising social standards for Aboriginal Victorians.

Mr Viney and Ms Mikakos spoke glowingly about programs the government has implemented, but the reality is that all the indicators show that statistics for Aboriginal Victorians are not improving; in fact they are getting worse. Ms Darveniza spent 15 minutes attacking the federal government and talking about everything but improving opportunities for Aboriginal Victorians in health, education and employment and reducing their representation in the justice system. Ms Darveniza needs to remember that health, education and law and order are state responsibilities. It is the state government's responsibility to raise the standards for Aboriginal Victorians in these areas.

The unemployment rates for Aboriginal Victorians are the worst in Australia. The latest figures the library was able to get me were a little behind the ones Mr Dalla-Riva used, which were actually worse than the figures I have. In 2004 the unemployment rate for Aboriginal Victorians was 23.5 per cent, compared to a national rate of 16.8 per cent. They were much lower in all other states, including Queensland with 14.7 per cent and Western Australia with 13.5 per cent. The Productivity Commission's report showed that health for the indigenous in Victoria was no better than in remote areas of Australia. This was backed up by Monica Morgan of the Yorta Yorta and Jill Gallagher, the chief executive officer of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

Ms Darveniza talked about bipartisan and tripartisan approaches to Aboriginal affairs, but we know this government is into spin. An example is that when the Mount Teneriffe project was abandoned the announcement of the abandonment was made at 4.00 p.m. on a Thursday, which was designed to minimise media scrutiny.

In all of the debate this morning we did not have one statistic from the government to show any improvement in health, education or employment opportunities or in the reduction of the overrepresentation in the justice system of indigenous Victorians. You cannot claim success just by spending money. We must get results for indigenous Victorians. It can be claimed as a success only when results show that we are improving opportunities for indigenous Victorians. The minister said we are just starting on this journey, but this government has had the opportunity and has had the money and has had seven years, but still we have seen no improvement. There is a cycle of frustration and a cycle of despair amongst indigenous Victorians. As the Honourable Damian Drum pointed out, there is no room for a government to be patting itself on the back when it is not achieving results for indigenous Victorians.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 14

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

Noes, 26

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

Pair

Mr Forwood	Theophanous, Mr
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Motion negatived.

Sitting suspended 12.55 p.m. until 2.03 p.m.

ABSENCE OF MINISTER

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I wish to advise members of the house that Minister Theophanous will not be attending Parliament this week or next week. He is travelling to Greece and other parts of Europe. He needs to be in Athens by 8 June in order to deliver a speech at a large international conference that will also be attended by a considerable number of Australian businesses. The minister will also meet with his counterparts to discuss energy cooperation. It was not possible to delay the trip until after Parliament because of the timing of the conference. The minister has notified the Leader of the Opposition, and I thank Mr Philip Davis for agreeing to provide a pair during this time.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Australian Football League: ground redevelopment

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, the Honourable Justin Madden, who

probably has an expectation he will receive a question, notwithstanding that it is without notice. I note today's announcement by the Premier and the minister in conjunction with the Australian Football League of a \$55 million grant redevelopment package for seven football grounds associated with Victorian clubs. I note that the government contribution announced today was \$14 million, but the budget papers indicate that funds of \$12 million have been provided by the government in the 2007–08 financial year. Understanding that this is a good headline for an election year, I therefore ask the minister if the funding package has been confirmed and why there is a shortfall in the government contribution of \$2 million just one week after the budget has been brought down.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I welcome the member's question. I also welcome the fact that he is asking the question today in relation to today's events rather than asking the question yesterday in relation to today's events! Can I just say that — —

An honourable member — He is always ahead of the game.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — I will not go there. The announcement today is fantastic on a number of fronts, and I will allude to those later. But in terms of the funding package, if the member wants to follow through on the figures that we have committed to the projects, I refer him to one of the projects we have announced as part of the package — that is, the redevelopment of Arden Street. I understand we have already made that financial commitment. I understand that funding in the order of \$12 million was announced today, but we have previously announced a \$2 million allocation to the North Melbourne redevelopment. It is all part of the one scheme, hence this redevelopment contribution across all the packages is in the order of \$14 million.

This is a great approach because it is strategic. As the Premier mentioned today, you could take a piecemeal approach — and some of the organisations may have wished to put up their hands and say, 'Give us the money first' — but we were adamant that whatever approach was taken needed to be strategic. There are similar situations and difficulties in every venue where Saturday afternoon or match-day games have been moved out of those venues, thereby leaving them only as training venues with substantial assets that need to be developed, repaired or renewed.

This is a great strategic way to make sure that, in conjunction with the community and with the other

stakeholders — the councils and the Australian Football League teams — we are working as a team and that our teamwork is delivering for all Victorians.

Supplementary question

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — I am surprised the minister did not mention that I attended the announcement; it was the only way I could find out about it, seeing he would not divulge it to the Parliament yesterday.

Is it not true that, while there have been talks on this Australian Football League grounds upgrade initiative, there is currently no budget commitment by the Melbourne City Council to this project, despite the funding package released today incorporating a \$6 million contribution from that council?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I welcome the member's question. I have here in front of me minutes from a meeting of the Melbourne City Council held on Tuesday, 13 December 2005. If the member refers to those minutes he will find that item 5.11 is headed 'Redevelopment of recreational and sporting facilities used by the AFL'. He will also find at 1.1.1 further down the page that the council resolved to:

... support the redevelopment of the recreational sporting facilities located on land managed by the City of Melbourne at North Melbourne, Richmond and Carlton, which are currently used by three Australian Football League and various cricket clubs and note that the provision of financial support will be managed through council's ... processes ...

Members will appreciate that there is strong and sound support from the City of Melbourne. Of course it will manage that the way it needs to.

Australian Football League: ground redevelopment

Mr PULLEN (Higinbotham) — If I can follow up on Mr Atkinson's question, I refer the Minister for Sport and Recreation to the government's commitment to making Victoria an attractive place to work and raise a family, and ask the minister to inform the house how today's announcement concerning the upgrades of the Australian Football League suburban grounds demonstrates that the government is delivering on that commitment.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I welcome the question from Mr Pullen, because I know he is great advocate for sport generally. He loves his football and his cricket, and I understand he has been a fairly reasonable cricketer and footballer

in his day, so I welcome the question because he shows a great degree of commitment for grassroots sport, not only in his electorate but right across the state.

As a government we are making Victoria a great place to live and to raise a family, and we are doing that through a number of initiatives, one of which was announced by the Premier today and alluded to by Mr Atkinson, who was in attendance. I know that he felt a warm inner glow being there today. One of the great elements of this package is the \$14 million the state is contributing to the \$55 million Australian Football League (AFL) Victorian club facilities funding program. The \$14 million contribution of the state government will also see a \$55 million economic injection into these facilities. As well as bringing these facilities full circle back to the community, it is also about economic development.

This program will transform existing club facilities into multipurpose sport and recreation venues suitable for a range of activities. The AFL clubs and their grounds, as members will appreciate, have played a vital role in the lives of many Victorians over many years. They also have a great place in the culture of this city. It is a great opportunity for the clubs, the AFL, the state government and councils to reinvigorate these iconic locations. For many Victorians the names of grounds we are redeveloping hold a special place in their hearts — Punt Road, Princes Park, Moorabbin, Arden Street, Victoria Park, Windy Hill and Waverley. They are also places with proud histories of significant community importance.

What we are seeing is that they are no longer being used for AFL games. Nevertheless the great strength of the Victorian game has always been its connection to the community, and this funding will help rebuild and reinforce that connection to the community. It will mean better facilities for local communities and will keep the grounds linked to communities by providing community office and meeting spaces — facilities such as pools and indoor court space, and improved access to the grounds. It complements our existing grassroots community facilities development programs, one of which is the country football and netball initiative being run through the Department for Victorian Communities. This also complements the Go for Your Life campaign — getting more people more active more often.

Not only will today's funding announcement help keep the AFL clubs competitive in terms of the national game but it will also restore and assist those clubs in the heartland of not only AFL football but also the heartland of sport in this country. Can I just say that this

program is going to make these clubs better community organisations. We would expect that it might even make them better performers on the field, but there are no guarantees of that. I would like to thank individual clubs — like Richmond, Carlton, St Kilda, Collingwood, Essendon, North Melbourne — and the cities of Melbourne, Yarra and Kingston. Together we are going to produce great outcomes for the community right across Victoria. Together as a team we are making Victoria a great place to live and raise a family.

WorkCover: violence claims

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — My question without notice is to the Minister for WorkCover and the TAC. Can the minister tell the house how many WorkCover claims in the 2004–05 financial year involving violence in the workplace or threats and intimidation in the workplace also involved trade union officials like John Setka of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for WorkCover and the TAC) — It is interesting to note that during our debate on the occupational health and safety bill in late 2004 this chamber echoed to the horrors that would happen if we brought in these authorised representatives of registered employee organisations (ARREOs), or the trade union reps. I remember thinking that if we had a clear roof in this chamber you could almost have seen the sky coming down — crashing down on the building — as the fear of these ARREOs and these union reps was out there, and those opposite in chorus, in unison, were warning us of it.

Come 1 July last year when the legislation came into place we had a huge number of employees of the WorkCover inspectorate ready to deal with this crisis the world was telling about! It was ready to deal with these union reps who were charging in and causing chaos in workplaces — if you believe those opposite. There were a lot of people in the WorkSafe inspectorate waiting for the calls to come in. A lot of people were waiting and there was a lot of redeployment. After a few days those people all went back to their tasks of inspecting dangerous workplaces, doing their bit to bring down injury levels in our Victorian workplaces.

Am I concerned about rogue elements roaming out there? If they are out there roaming, I am absolutely confident the WorkSafe inspectorate will find them and deal with them. But to date what we are finding is that the ARREOs are out there, and they have been out there despite the efforts of the federal government to make it impossible for WorkSafe reps to go into places

because of its double registration laws and a range of other things. The ARREOs are out there.

By having health and safety representatives, deputy health and safety representatives, authorised representatives of registered employee organisations, known as ARREOs, and a better culture in the workplace, we are actually bringing down the number of injuries and deaths. Victoria is, I think, the safest place to work in Australia. If not, it is certainly far better than it was some years ago and is the envy of most of the system.

I look forward to the member’s supplementary question, but I can certainly say to David ‘Chicken Little’ Davis that the sky did not fall down when this legislation came into place. I have yet to see the sky fall down.

Hon. D. McL. Davis — On a point of order, President, my question was a very specific question seeking a number. I asked how many claims or incidents there were.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The honourable member is well aware that in raising a point of order he cannot re-ask his question. Either he must raise a point of order or, if that is all he has to say, there is no point of order.

Mr LENDERS — I flicked through the WorkCover annual report during that brief interlude, and I could not find a specific answer for Mr David Davis, but what I will say is that this government has an absolute commitment to having a good workplace health and safety regime in place. As Mr Davis knows, as part of the Maxwell review, one of the checks and balances in the system was that, if the ARREO powers were abused by anybody who exercised them, there was a very speedy resolution process, in that either the employer or the employee or the workplace inspectorate could take the matter to the Magistrates Court where that person’s capacity to be a representative of an ARREO would be withdrawn promptly.

There are checks and balances in the system, but the proof of the pudding is that the number of injuries and deaths is down — and I might say to Mr Davis’s constituency that the premiums are down. I look forward to his supplementary question.

Supplementary question

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — I note that the minister simply did not answer the question. I asked him about the number of WorkCover claims. There clearly are some that relate to violence in the workplace

and some that involve union officials. Whilst he may say that it is Chicken Little-like to be concerned, the fact is that we know from what is on the front page of the *Age* that there is a problem in certain workplaces, and there are links between certain unions and unsavoury elements. I ask the minister in that context what steps he has taken to reduce or eliminate violence and threats in the workplace by trade union officials engaged in gangland style violence, like those on Melbourne's building sites as reported in today's *Age*.

Mr LENDERS (Minister for WorkCover and the TAC) — Again I welcome Mr David Davis's newfound interest in this area. Clearly it is a vote of no confidence in his colleague Mr Bruce Atkinson that he needs to ask WorkCover questions while Mr Forwood is away. All I can do is assure Mr Davis that this government takes a holistic approach to health and safety in the workplace, and that holistic approach is working. He should ask the Australian Industry Group; he should ask the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry; he should ask the Victorian Farmers Federation; he should ask any of the other industry groups whether that is the case or not. Perhaps, once he has asked those groups, he could have the courtesy to pick up the phone, ring his federal colleague and say, 'Hello, Kevin. David here. Have a look at Victoria', and he might actually get some sense of how an occupational health and safety regime can actually work.

I say unequivocally to Mr Davis that if anyone breaches their ARREO powers, there is one remedy: it is off to the Magistrates Court where those powers are taken away, as they should be. But we have a good regime that is bringing down injuries, and that is something we should all rejoice in.

Libraries: LibraryLink

Mr SMITH (Chelsea) — My question is directed to the Minister for Local Government, Ms Broad. Can the minister inform the house how the Bracks government is making Victoria a great place to live and raise a family by assisting all Victorians to access library resources?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — I thank the member for his question. The Bracks government believes by assisting all Victorians to access library services it is helping Victorian families, and this is a great way to do it. Improved access to library services can help families to make savings when family budgets are under pressure due to increased fuel prices and increased interest rates. That is why I am pleased to advise the house that on a recent visit to

Warrnambool, on one of my many regional visits, I announced the investment by the Bracks government of up to \$500 000 for the development of an innovative new service for Victorians called LibraryLink Victoria. When LibraryLink is fully operational later this year, over 9 million books and other resources in Victorian public libraries will become available to all Victorians via the Internet.

Members of 257 participating Victorian public library services will be able to use LibraryLink to directly search a virtual catalogue of all member libraries to find a book, a CD, a DVD or any other library item. Through LibraryLink the more than 50 per cent of Victoria's population who are library users will be able to find out instantly where an item they are searching for can be found and have it sent to their local library service. LibraryLink Victoria will provide better access to library services for all Victorians, especially culturally and linguistically diverse communities, young families and people living in remote rural areas, as well as older Victorians, to name just a few.

The new software will enable library users to search and place online requests from libraries, at home, in schools and any other place people have access to the Internet — in other words, to be anywhere and tap into everywhere.

The Bracks government recognises the important role public libraries play in their communities. That is why we are pleased to be investing up to \$500 000, in partnership with the Victorian Public Library Network (VicLink) to make LibraryLink Victoria available across Victoria.

I am also pleased to be able to inform the house of the additional funding being provided to libraries from the budget handed down last week. In 2006–07 a record amount of \$33 million is to be allocated to public libraries, and this represents an increase of 6.8 per cent on the funding provided in 2005–06.

Under the Bracks government recurrent funding is now being indexed in line with inflation and population growth, and that means that all library services will receive an increase, at a minimum, at the rate of inflation, regardless of whether the population they are serving is static or decreasing.

In 2006–07 recurrent funding for public libraries is up by more than \$1.1 million, to a record amount of almost \$29 million. This is a terrific investment for Victoria's public libraries and a great investment for families.

Hazardous waste: Nowingi

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — My question is directed to the Minister for Major Projects, Mr Lenders. Last week on the front steps of Parliament House we saw natural justice flags being handed over, and this theme was driven by Professor Bill Russell's words that during the panel process of the government's proposal to put a toxic waste dump in the Mallee natural justice would prevail.

However, given the fact that Major Projects Victoria has overrun its allocated time at the panel hearings by eight days, we now find the community being requested to review its contribution, I suspect due to time and budget constraints. My question to the minister is: in the interests of natural justice, will the minister contribute to the extra costs incurred by our community due to Major Projects Victoria's time overruns at the panel hearings?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Major Projects) — The term 'natural justice' is one that I could spend a lot of time on; it brings back memories of my days as a law student, when we seemed to spend many hours on a description of what natural justice was or was not. But if Mr Bishop thinks that the delay by Major Projects Victoria is in any way a breach of natural justice, he should put pen to paper, write to the chair of the independent panel and seek an extension of time. The best way natural justice is addressed is for all parties to have equal access to the tribunal.

If Mr Bishop wishes to write to the independent panel, I will in this place support his call to go to the independent panel, because this environment effects statement process is all about parties having the chance to present their cases to that panel and to look at the evidence — a lot of which has been generated by Major Projects Victoria. Mr Bishop should write to Professor Bill Russell and seek an extension of time. That is the best way to address the issue of natural justice.

Supplementary question

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — On a supplementary question, following the minister's answer — and again he shows his elusiveness in his answer — I ask: can the Minister provide the house with the Major Projects Victoria budget allocation in relation to the environment effects statement panel hearing?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Major Projects) — Sometimes I feel I am on a completely different planet from Mr Bishop. He asks me a question in the house,

and I can see the *Sunraysia Daily* tomorrow thundering about my elusiveness, and Mr Bishop's press release will be in the middle of it. His office has probably already pushed the button on the press release before he has heard my answer!

I can say to Mr Bishop that I am anything but elusive. Going back to my response yesterday, this government has pledged to have this house sit for 50 days a year. On the issue of Nowingi, I am a stationary target for Mr Bishop day after day. I will happily take his questions; I will happily respond. Today I have even suggested a course of action for him to achieve natural justice — that is, to write to Professor Russell and seek an extension of time.

I will not say I take offence at the word 'elusive', because I think I am probably the most accountable Minister for Major Projects in the history of the house; but what I will say to Mr Bishop is that if he wants natural justice, he should write to the chair, put forward the case, and I am sure he will get a sympathetic hearing.

Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council: establishment

Ms CARBINES (Geelong) — My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. The recently passed Aboriginal Heritage Act created the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council. Can the minister advise the house of the process for selecting members of the Aboriginal heritage council, and when it will be established?

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS (Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) — I thank Ms Carbines for her question and her concern about the wellbeing of Aboriginal people, and in particular the way we will ensure that cultural heritage is well managed and protected in years to come.

Since the time that this house and the Parliament of Victoria passed the Aboriginal Heritage Bill the government has embarked upon a selection process which closes on 30 June. It will culminate in the establishment of the heritage council, which will ensure that Aboriginal people are at the centre of the community better understanding cultural heritage. It will make sure that there are procedures and standards of a high calibre in terms of the professional behaviour demonstrated by Aboriginal community organisations which are responsible for cultural heritage, and will provide guidance to local government and other developers and to me about the management of cultural heritage.

I assure the house that there is a strong need each and every day in our community to ensure that misinformation does not prevail in relation to cultural heritage and that it is not perpetuated by opponents of cultural heritage protection. I draw the house's attention to the particular role Ms Lovell has played in the last month, since the passage of the bill, in terms of untruths continuing to be expressed on the radio in relation to cultural heritage protection.

Hon. D. McL. Davis — You are very sensitive!

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS — The community is very sensitive. In Ms Lovell's presentation this morning she referred to a number of her friends in the Goulburn Valley. Funnily enough I was struck at the time, because one of the 'friends' she mentioned rang me recently, just after hearing Ms Lovell on Goulburn Valley radio badmouthing cultural heritage protection and trying to talk down the involvement of Aboriginal people in cultural heritage protection — —

Hon. W. A. Lovell — On a point of order, President, the person that the minister is referring to rang the radio station and lied about what I had said on the radio station.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is no point of order. The minister, to continue.

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS — Ms Lovell knows that she is on shaky ground, because in fact there continues to be misinformation peddled by the Liberal Party right around the state of Victoria in relation to how this cultural heritage protection legislation will work and the role of Aboriginal people in it, and it has been extremely mischievous. Ms Lovell is one of a number of members of the Liberal Party who have been peddling misinformation about the way in which cultural heritage will be protected, and in fact trying to generate fear and anxiety within the general population, trying to generate a resistance to the way in which it works. She knows she is only one of a number — —

Hon. W. A. Lovell — On a point of order, President, I am offended that the minister has accused me of instilling fear in the community over this bill, and I ask him to withdraw.

The PRESIDENT — Order! When a minister answers a question during question time, he should not debate the issue. I ask the minister to come back to answering the question, but I do not uphold the point of order. It is more of a debating issue and not a question of offence. The minister to continue, on the question.

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS — I know it is important for the Parliament to know the important role that Aboriginal people will play in ensuring that our community better understands the application of the legislation and that they do not submit to misinformation that may be perpetuated throughout the community, that they will not be confused about the application of the legislation which, for the first time, integrates cultural heritage protection with the planning scheme in this state.

Cultural heritage will not, as has been suggested by the Liberal Party in particular, give mums and dads in their backyards something to fear; they have nothing to fear. The mums and dads of Victoria have nothing to fear in their backyards in relation to cultural heritage protection. Any misinformation that is peddled by anybody has to be put down and will be put down by the diligence of the heritage council and the Bracks government, and by the diligence of local councils which, one by one, right across Victoria, are realising the virtues of protecting cultural heritage in the name of protecting the interests of their entire community and of cherishing our cultural heritage in Victoria.

Any attempt to promote anxiety and apprehension in the Victorian community will fail because those who peddle stories will not have credibility. They will not pass the test if they say they stand up for the Aboriginal community on the one hand and then badmouth the Aboriginal community at every other possible opportunity. That disingenuous behaviour will not be tolerated.

Minister for Information and Communication Technology: trade mission

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Information and Communication Technology. I refer the minister to her response to a question without notice on 3 May this year in which she explained her trade mission to Japan, the United States and Israel. Given that she explained the supposed benefits to Victoria, can she now advise the house how many ministerial advisers, departmental staff and others accompanied her to these countries and what the cost was to the Victorian taxpayer?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Information and Communication Technology) — We have a very aggressive campaign to ensure that our businesses in the information and communications technology (ICT) industry get opportunities to link into other businesses overseas to give them the potential to partner other companies, to give them the ability to do business in

other countries and to make people aware of what opportunities there are overseas. The trips that we have taken have been highly successful for the companies involved. In the case of Japan the trips were highly successful for the companies that went there. Unlike the federal government, we realise we need to sell our capabilities overseas. We are prepared to promote our companies as they travel overseas, assist them in making links with other companies and ensuring that the trips are rewarding for those businesses.

While we are overseas we take the opportunity of looking for opportunities for investment back into this country by companies in Japan, and the number of investments by ICT companies into Victoria has been much higher than in other states. We are very successful at getting a high rate of companies deciding to invest in Victoria because we are aggressively out in the marketplace looking for those investments. We make no apologies for the aggressive way in which we promote our industry in Victoria, and we will continue to do so.

Supplementary question

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — I wish I could thank the minister for her answer. Given that this is the second of the so-called trade missions around the world, perhaps the minister can tell the house how many ministerial advisers, departmental staff and others went with her on her trip to India in late 2004 and what the cost was of that trip.

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Information and Communication Technology) — As I have indicated already in my answer, we are intent on ensuring that we make the best of the opportunities that are available for our companies to venture out into the world. Our industry plan, which we launched in November of last year, was very clear about our intention of being export focused, of ensuring that our companies have access to the globe and of ensuring that the world industry understands the capability of our ICT sector. We make no apologies for the aggressive way we do that. Victoria is recognised in Australia as the place to be if you want to be an ICT business.

Consumer affairs: travel agents

Hon. J. G. HILTON (Western Port) — My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, the Honourable Marsha Thomson. With the Queen's Birthday long weekend approaching, Victorians may have travel on their minds. The Bracks government protects consumers from unfair practices by travel agents. Can the minister advise the house of any

concerns relating to the travel industry that Victorian families should be aware of?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — Members will be aware that we have a licensing regime for travel agents in this state, and that in fact not only do agents have to be licensed but they have to be members of the Travel Compensation Fund. The reason those requirements are in place is to protect consumers from travel agents who defraud or go bankrupt without having passed on funds to the relevant travel destination. Unfortunately not all travel agents comply and not all travel agents do the right thing. That is why it is important that we follow up and act on incidents when they occur.

Occasionally I have chosen to name traders in this place. I do not do that lightly. However, Consumer Affairs Victoria did become aware of a travel agent, or a family of unlicensed travel agents, that refused to stop trading when it became known it was unlicensed. CAV has recently obtained injunctions against Australasian Corporate Events (2004) Pty Ltd, Enews Publications Pty Ltd, Hannah Crowley, the sole director of these companies, and Bevan and Ann Crowley, her parents. The Crowleys and their companies advertise travel and accommodation for overseas study tours and conferences. Some are marketed as half scholarships.

CAV has received a number of complaints in relation to this agency, which has not met its commitments and has not given refunds. It is important that the public be aware of the situation, and the director issued a public warning about the Crowleys earlier this year. We ask consumers to check that the person they are dealing with is a licensed trader and a member of the Travel Compensation Fund. Consumers should do their homework first. It is unfortunate that it is necessary to name these travel agents, but they are not doing the right thing. We ask that everyone be very careful and deal with a licensed travel agent.

Housing: Carlton

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Housing, Ms Broad. The minister has said publicly that the Bracks government is committed to reducing public housing waiting lists. There are 35 000 households on public housing waiting lists. There are 510 people living in the Carlton public housing estate. After the redevelopment of the public-private estate there will only be 371. I ask the minister: where will the 139 people go who will be left out after this redevelopment is completed?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Housing) — I welcome a very rare question from the opposition on my housing portfolio. The member referred to public housing waiting lists. At the end of the March 2006 quarter, compared to when the Bracks government came to office, waiting lists had decreased across Victoria by 14 per cent as a result of a major investment by the Bracks government over and above its commitments under the commonwealth-state housing agreement to provide more housing for Victorian families who need it. This is no thanks to the federal government, which over the last decade has reduced Victoria's funding for public housing under the commonwealth-state housing agreement by some \$760 million — enough to house some 5000 Victorian families who are not able to be housed as a result of those cuts to commonwealth funding. The government is very proud of the commitment we have made to our inner city high-rise housing estates.

The investment the Bracks government is making to these estates stands in marked contrast to the way they were treated over the period of the Kennett government, when the former Premier spent more on the refurbishment of No. 1 Treasury Place and his own office than he spent on all the inner city high-rise housing towers in Melbourne — an out-and-out disgrace.

Under this government there is a commitment to our high-rise housing estates, and with Carlton I am very pleased to correct the member's assertion and advise her that through the investment the Bracks government is making at the Carlton housing estate there will in fact be a 25 per cent increase in the number of public housing units. The very old, dilapidated, walk-up housing which is being demolished will make way for a 25 per cent increase in the number of public housing units on that part of the estate as well as private housing, which will provide a much better social housing mix for the area.

Those are the facts. The member is referring to some numbers which come out of a consultant's report which is trying to estimate how many people might live in those households, which is not the same thing at all as the number of housing units that will be delivered. There will be a 25 per cent increase in the amount of public housing that is there right now.

Supplementary question

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — I ask the minister: how much money will the Bracks government reap from the 729 private housing facilities on the

redeveloped Carlton housing site she has just spoken about?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Housing) — The level of profound ignorance about what it costs to deliver public housing is astonishing. To deliver this housing the Bracks government is making a net investment at Carlton of some \$50 million. The notion that the Bracks government is going to be able to demolish the dilapidated walk-up housing units that are there now and replace them with brand-new public housing — 25 per cent more than is there now — and generate a surplus is so misinformed as to be breathtaking.

Parliament House: dining rooms

Mr SOMYUREK (Eumemmerring) — I have a very important question for the Minister for Major Projects, Mr Lenders. The parliamentary dining rooms have had a major upgrade — for the first time since 1927, I understand. Can the minister advise the house of the details of Major Projects Victoria's involvement in this undertaking?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Major Projects) — I thank Mr Somyurek for his question. I am delighted always to talk about Major Projects Victoria, and this is a very good illustration of major projects at work. There is one person in this house who will understand it more than any other, and that is Mr Baxter, who has spent a good deal of his working life looking at how this building could be rebuilt and restructured. He, more than most, would know about the very old building we are in.

Major Projects Victoria has been managing the construction of the Parliament House catering facilities, which is a refurbishment project everybody is familiar with. I am pleased to say that this project is progressing on time and under budget!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LENDERS — On time and under budget! Full credit should go to Major Projects Victoria for working with the staff of Parliament House to have this happen. Final commissioning of individual cooking appliances will be completed in the week beginning 19 June, in parallel with the catering team moving back to commence operations. This has been a very complex project, as I know. It is an older building, and the kitchen has been tweaked and kept running through the initiative of resourceful staff over many years — well past its natural use-by date. The project planning phase was undertaken while the old kitchen was still operating. What we have seen is a very interesting

illustration — as with the state library and a lot of other buildings — of what happens when you are reconstructing a building while people are using it. It is a complex process.

Hon. Andrea Coote interjected.

Mr LENDERS — I am happy to take a question from Mrs Coote on the state library at any time. I would wax lyrical for as long as I could on that one, but I am talking about the parliamentary dining rooms here.

It is interesting that construction at one stage was eight weeks behind time because of some of the obstacles here. We have made it up, and we are ahead of time and under budget now. Quite often the refurbishment of an old building gets behind time because of structural defects in a building like this, and the eternal curse with old buildings is that you find asbestos. With this building all the regulations relating to the handling, removal and subsequent monitoring of asbestos were scrupulously followed, and the building occupants were notified and informed.

We now see that we have had a project that has been managed by Major Projects Victoria at the request of the Parliament, which is how this government tries to operate with major projects. Major Projects Victoria operates where it has project management skills and perhaps a client has not on the building of something like the dining rooms. We have seen prudent budgeting where we have budgeted for contingencies; we have seen delays which have been made up by good management; and we have seen the project come in under budget.

Hon. D. K. Drum interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Mr Drum says it has made no difference to the kitchen. One difference it is making is that it will be a place that, rather than extending over multiple levels, will meet occupational health and safety standards. This place, with its new facilities, is being opened up to the Victorian community.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LENDERS — Far from being an exclusive club, this building is being opened to the community. Now we will have weddings, we will have conferences and the public will be able to come into the building for morning or afternoon tea. I welcome this redevelopment. This will be one where the taxpayers recoup their money through usage of the area, and it will be one where the community gets access to the building. As I say, the popularity of this place with conferences, weddings and members of the community

is such that the Parliament is actually recouping money by making the building more open to the community.

It is a good example of how government can work. It is a project that is running under time and under budget, and it is opening this building to the community and removing the barriers. When the parliamentary open day happens this year on Sunday, 25 June, the Speaker of the Assembly will invite members of the public into the dining rooms to see how they are going. Sadly, they will not know that the project was under time and under budget.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I have answers to the following questions on notice: 5849–57, 6556, 6579, 6580, 6584, 6586, 6587, 6589, 7228, 7230, 7233–5, 7246, 7248, 7268, 7481, 7566, 7818, 7841, 7860.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — In relation to questions on notice, yesterday I raised for the attention of the Minister for Energy Industries a question which I had directed to him more than two years ago to which there was no response. The minister responded to my point of order by saying that he would attempt to provide a written response by the close of business last night. I note that the minister left Parliament early last night and is, as advised by the Leader of the Government, now overseas.

I make the point that this seems to be an unsatisfactory level of accountability, and I therefore ask that the Leader of the Government take action on behalf of the Minister for Energy Industries to satisfy the request, which was made more than two years ago and concerns a matter which could be easily addressed.

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — Which number?

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — It is 1550, the first one on the paper.

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I will use my best endeavours to promptly chase down that question for the leader.

**ENERGY LEGISLATION
(MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL**

Second reading

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated on motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance).

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

This is an omnibus bill to amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000, the Gas Industry Act 2001, the Local Government Act 1989 and the Gas Safety Act 1997.

Clause 3 of the bill amends the Electricity Industry Act to repeal redundant provisions which confer power on the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in respect of regulation of charges for connection to and use of the electricity transmission system. As part of the national energy market reform program, these functions are no longer provided by the ACCC and have been transferred to the newly formed Australian Energy Regulator, which assumed these functions on 1 July 2005.

Clauses 4 and 5 of the bill amend section 27 of the Electricity Industry Act and section 34 of the Gas Industry Act respectively. Sections 27 and 34 require energy retailers, in certain circumstances, to act as a supplier of last resort in order to prevent situations where a customer is left without a retailer, where a customer's normal retailer ceases to be licensed or otherwise ceases trading activities.

Sections 27 and 34 require that the tariffs, terms and conditions of a contract between a supplier of last resort and a customer must be approved by the Essential Services Commission. The bill streamlines the Essential Services Commission's approval processes in relation to the submission of tariffs, terms and conditions by energy retailers under these provisions. In particular, the bill will allow the Essential Services Commission discretion to approve classes of contracts, where contracts are homogenous or substantially similar in terms.

The amendment also gives the Essential Services Commission discretion as to whether a retailer is required to submit a particular class of contract for its approval. This will allow the Essential Services Commission discretion to not require submission of contracts between retailers and large users, as the Essential Services Commission, under normal circumstances, has no role in relation to the negotiation of these arrangements.

Clauses 6 to 9 strengthen monitoring and enforcement provisions in the Gas Safety Act and will assist Energy Safe Victoria in enforcing existing safety standards.

Clause 6 of the bill amends section 71B of the Gas Safety Act, which currently provides that a person must not affix a label on a type A appliance which falsely represents that the appliance has been approved or authorised by Energy Safe Victoria. The bill inserts a prohibition on persons who also 'cause' a false label to be affixed which represents that an

appliance has been approved or authorised by Energy Safe Victoria.

In effect, the amendment will enable Energy Safe Victoria to prosecute persons who act either as principal or agent in the false labelling of appliances.

This amendment was sought as Energy Safe Victoria was unable to take action against an Australian agent who imported appliances from Italy, where misleading labels were affixed to the appliances in Italy.

Clause 7 of the bill amends section 99 of the Gas Safety Act and will enable an inspector, after obtaining the written consent of Energy Safe Victoria, to require a person to give information to and assist the inspector to the extent necessary for the purpose of determining compliance with the act or the regulations. This amendment will provide consistency with the powers of inspectors under the Electricity Safety Act, and will assist Energy Safe Victoria in monitoring compliance with the Gas Safety Act.

Clause 8 of the bill amends section 117AB of the Gas Safety Act by inserting a definition of 'inspector' into the act, to enable the plumbing industry commissioner or a plumbing inspector to issue infringement notices under section 72 of the act in respect to gasfitting work on standard gas installations undertaken by plumbers. This is an operational amendment which will assist enforcement of safety standards under the act and also assist in improving the safety performance of installation work being carried out by plumbers.

Clause 9 of the bill makes a minor amendment to the regulation-making powers under section 118 of the Gas Safety Act.

Currently the act provides that regulations may be made to exempt persons from any of the provisions of the regulations. More specifically, the Gas Safety Act provides that Energy Safe Victoria may exempt a gas company from complying with prescribed standards relating to quality of gas. For the purposes of administrative efficiency and consistency with the exemption-making power in relation to gas quality, the amendment will expressly provide that Energy Safe Victoria may exempt persons in relation to complying with prescribed standards with respect to testing of gas.

Finally, clause 10 of the bill amends the Local Government Act. The Local Government Act currently preserves any right, power or interest held by a 'public authority' in relation to infrastructure in or near a road, where a local council deviates or discontinues a road or part of a road. 'Public authority' is defined in the act. However, this definition does not include energy companies and therefore does not reflect the privatisation of Victoria's energy sector. The bill will ensure that, on a road closure, existing rights in land will be preserved for licensed entities under the Electricity Industry Act, Gas Industry Act and Pipelines Act 2005 in order to cover those utilities responsible for the provision and operation of gas and electricity infrastructure in or near a road.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland).

Debate adjourned until next day.

**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES ACTS
(MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL**

Second reading

**Debate resumed from 6 June; motion of
Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Energy
Industries).**

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — I rise to support the Primary Industries Acts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. It is a straightforward bill that deals with some simple administrative matters, one of which is very significant to the better administration of fisheries in this state in tandem with the arrangements at a national level under the offshore constitutional settlement (OCS), wherein there are some 50 agreements between the various states and the Northern Territory in respect to managing fisheries resources. Therefore there is a fairly complex and cumbersome regulatory framework within which the arrangements are managed. This legislation enables recent amendments to the relevant commonwealth act which facilitate better management arrangements between Victoria and the commonwealth and it simplifies future management.

The changes to the commonwealth act will lead to the following outcomes: it will allow for government to more easily vary the OCS agreements to ensure that they are flexible and responsive to the current situation of fish stocks, it will allow the commonwealth, state and Northern Territory ministers the power to create and terminate OCS agreements and it will allow for a combination of commonwealth, state and/or Northern Territory law in a fishery covered under a single OCS. The changes to the Victorian act are being made in response to those outcomes.

It is important to note that the changes made to the commonwealth act followed a review of the commonwealth fisheries policy which identified deficiencies and a lack of consistency and cooperation between governments in the management of fish stocks. Therefore the opposition supports the outcome. We believe that following the changes initiated by the government there will be a better administrative result and that that will lead to better long-term sustainable management of our fisheries resources.

Further changes to the Fisheries Act made by the bill relate to the creation of a new charge. As members know, generally I am against the impost of any new charges. However, the charge provided for in the bill relates to the Victorian abalone fishery management arrangements. It is important to recognise that

previously there was an omission so that a fee could not be charged following the notification to fisheries management of persons nominated to take abalone under individual abalone quota units. The bill provides that the department can set a fee for the effective registration of a person nominated to take quota units. This is important simply in the cost-recovery process. It is not unreasonable that a fee be established to deal with those licensing arrangements. That fee is estimated to be about \$192. That was flagged and discussed with the industry in respect of the Victorian Abalone Fishery Management Plan 2002.

The third element of the bill relates to the Meat Industry Act 1993. Currently the act provides that meat which is unfit for human consumption cannot be permitted to be sold from a butchers shop. Of course, that puts butchers shops at a disadvantage in some respects to supermarkets, in that supermarkets are able to sell meat for human consumption alongside meat for pet food. This anomaly does not exist in other states. I understand that in New South Wales and Queensland retail butchers shops are permitted to sell pet food which is cooked and packaged. The amendment to the act will allow the sale of pet food that is manufactured, processed, pre-packaged, labelled and put into leak-proof containers at a pet food manufacturing facility to be sold in butchers shops. The amendment specifically does not allow the sale of fresh, uncooked meat intended for animal consumption alongside fresh meat for human consumption.

Meat substitution is a subject which this house has heard much about on previous occasions. I do not want to reprise the discussions about that which I and others have had in this place. Clearly there will be some in the community who will be concerned that the new provision may contribute to the potential of meat substitution occurring. The constraint to that is the fact that the pet food needs to be prepared and packaged in sealed containers. That will limit the risk of any meat substitution.

Mr Lenders — Be alert, but not alarmed!

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — Yes, indeed. The Leader of the Government suggests that we should consider the possibility of being alert but not alarmed. I agree that that is not a bad sentiment.

That gives me the opportunity to talk a little about another aspect of meat. I referred to that home-grown, very healthy product, kangaroo meat. Currently kangaroo meat harvested in Victoria cannot be sold in Victoria for human consumption. We have an interesting conundrum. The Minister for Agriculture

and the Bracks government in general have failed to respond to the community demand that a rational policy approach on kangaroo meat be adopted in this state.

Each year in Victoria tens of thousands of kangaroos are harvested under permit for kangaroo population management. Frankly, in the most part those kangaroos are left lying in a paddock or wherever they are destroyed. That meat is therefore wasted. It seems an entirely rational thing to adopt the approach that other states have, which is that kangaroos harvested under permit should be part of the human food trail. Providing that proper health standards are met, meat that is harvested from kangaroos in Victoria for kangaroo population management should be able to be included in the rich tapestry of foods available in Victoria.

At present, if you go into a restaurant and ask for kangaroo meat or it is on the menu and you inquire as to where the meat has come from, either the restaurateur will not know, which is typically the case, or if they do know they know it is brought in from another state — and typically it is from South Australia, where all kangaroos that are harvested under permit are required to meet human health standards.

That seems to me to be the most rational policy position to adopt. The reality of country Victoria is that, as in other states, with the development of the countryside there is additional fodder in the form of improved pastures and additional watering points, and in many parts of the state populations of kangaroos abound and run rampant. Many of us who spend a lot of time travelling the bush know the inconvenience of having to avoid collisions with kangaroos, and the number of kangaroos we see on the roadside as road kill is bewildering at times, but most farmers in areas adjacent to national parks and state forests make a very large contribution to the ecology of the state.

Hon. B. W. Bishop — It is share farming.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — Mr Bishop says it is share farming by providing grazing for the state's wildlife. Even where there is no interface with public land, often there is a large population of kangaroos. In those circumstances land-holders have the opportunity to apply for permits for population control. In circumstances such as these it is entirely unreasonable for the government not to adopt a more practical approach to the use of kangaroos harvested in that manner.

The South Australian model is useful for us to examine because it enables the commercial utilisation of kangaroos harvested specifically for control reasons,

and that industry has become a sustainable industry which has added value to the South Australian rural economy and importantly provided an alternative source of protein for people who would rather have a leaner and healthier diet.

I raise this matter because this debate provides the opportunity to reflect on it, and I make the point that on Tuesday, 6 January 2004, which if memory serves me right is now more than two years ago, the Liberal Party put out a policy position on this issue. I was pleased to see that it was endorsed at the time by the Victorian Farmers Federation, and I note that the then president of the VFF, Paul Weller, suggested that the VFF had been calling for — —

Hon. B. W. Bishop — A good man!

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — He could be a better man. The VFF made the point that it had been seeking this change to establish a kangaroo meat processing industry in Victoria for some time. Importantly, this is the genesis of my argument, a bipartisan view has been expressed. It was the Environment and Natural Resources Committee that in 2000 made a recommendation to the effect that kangaroos harvested in Victoria should be able to be used for human consumption in Victoria.

I will not labour the issue because I have made the point. There is some nonsense policy which the government seems to be intransigent about addressing. There is no merit in seeing tens of thousands of kangaroos dead in paddocks around Victoria because of the need to manage populations which inevitably get out of hand from time to time. What we could do more usefully is deal with those culled kangaroos in a constructive way. I urge the government to adopt that approach, and country Victorians, and most people in the city who think about it for 5 minutes, would also agree that that is a sensible view.

Without further ado I express support for the bill and encourage the government to take a further step in regard to amendments to the Meat Industry Act and the Wildlife Act to ensure that kangaroos in Victoria can be harvested in the future.

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — I have much pleasure on behalf of The Nationals in speaking on the Primary Industries Acts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. Our position on this is not to oppose it. We have consulted widely over the various issues, which are substantially different. The chief purpose of the bill is to amend the Fisheries Act 1995. The commonwealth Fisheries Management Act 1991 and

supporting state legislation allows jurisdictions to make an offshore constitutional settlement (OCS) covering some 50 arrangements.

I struggled with the expression ‘offshore constitutional settlement’ because I had not heard a great deal about it previously, so I had a look at page 1 of the second-reading speech, which says:

The OCS is the jurisdictional arrangement between the commonwealth, the states and the Northern Territory ... which sets out responsibilities for offshore fisheries, mining, shipping and navigation and crimes at sea.

We are not discussing all of those today, but we are certainly discussing some of them. These amendments include holistic fishing management. A commonwealth amendment act provides for three changes that will improve fish stock management and requires parallel state legislation. Page 2 of the second-reading speech gave me more information about the commonwealth legislation:

The commonwealth therefore introduced the Fisheries Legislation Amendment (Cooperative Fisheries Arrangements and Other Matters) Act 2005 (the amendment act) to address these concerns.

As I have said, I will touch on three main issues on this bill. The first one I want to talk about is that the bill will put into place a broad power to create and terminate the OCS arrangement that is currently with the Governor-General and the state governors. No doubt time has moved on since those original arrangements were made. As I understand it these provisions of the bill will enable the states and territories to discuss these issues and then go to the commonwealth and have further discussions, so the arrangements will be undertaken on a collective basis. That will be a much more coordinated system, which is a good idea. I understand from the research I have done that there will be a licensing system, log books will be kept and some monitoring will take place. The agreements will be reached between all parties. The things they will reach agreement on will include, for example, recreational fishing, both traditional recreational fishing which involves families and charter fishing as well. The bill will allow the variation of existing and future OCS arrangements, so it introduces flexibility into that system.

The bill also creates a broad power to update OCS fishery management, which as I understand it will allow the federal government, state governments and territory ministers to create or terminate the OCS arrangements.

The third part of the bill creates options for regional fisheries arrangements — in other words, multiple laws

affecting multiple states can be applied in a fishery under a single offshore constitutional settlement (OCS). That sounds a bit complicated, but we did a bit of research and found that it is quite a good idea because it allows our state laws to be applied with the separate arrangements for commonwealth law. As I understand it, this is because fish, including lobster, abalone and the like, move backwards and forwards across state areas of responsibility — a bit like a state border. While we do have some difficulties with it, it appears to manage fishing in the sea reasonably well. This will provide regional fishing arrangements across state borders.

The next part of the bill facilitates the issuing or granting of appropriate licences or permits and provides for a notification fee for abalone licence-holders. As legislators we represent people from various industries — I can assure members that abalone fishing is an awful long way from my office in Mildura; however, I do take an interest in it — and we are always nervous about new fees being brought in. I am advised that in this case the fees might be around \$190 or \$200 but I do not have confirmation of that. Perhaps the minister would like to confirm that when she sums up. I cannot comment on whether those fees are value for money; I simply do not know.

Whilst I have said I am no expert on abalone I have been in this house many times and heard many debates about abalone fishing and certainly lots of discussion about abalone poaching. Obviously that happens because it is a lucrative industry but it has got strong regulations and as I understand it those regulations have been put into place generally with the support of the industries.

I understand that the seafood industry in Victoria does not have any issue with this legislation except that it was not consulted on it. I am surprised. That seems strange to me, and I do not know why it was not consulted. It would not have taken much effort. If the industry has been consulted, then I have been wrongly advised. I cannot understand whether the minister was not interested, whether he did not ask his department to talk to the industry or what transpired. However, if the industry was not consulted, I urge that it be done in the future. We have noticed that the minister has not been prepared to consult as much as we would like him to do. Agriculture and fishery are very practical and hands-on industries. We would expect our minister not only to stick up for those types of industries but also to be able to provide an overview to his department by going out and seeing what is going on. We take note of what happens in these industries, and we believe the

minister should be out checking on what his department is doing.

I can remember clearly that when PrimeSafe came into being we had some doubts about it. We were concerned that some of the fees might be a bit too high and would make things difficult for the industry. As we went through the process we took the view it was an industry that probably needed a bit of regulation to ensure its prosperity in the future. If I remember rightly, we took the position, albeit grudgingly, of not opposing that bill, but we raised our concerns.

Unfortunately our concerns were justified, particularly in regard to yabbies. Yabbie farming was a fledgling industry in the area I represent. Initially it was not going too badly. A fair bit of work and early research were put in there, and I thought it would do very well. However, I am afraid the regulations, costs and charges on yabby farming made it very difficult for the industry to survive. It is a great pity that it did not get much more support, because we could have had another decentralised industry that would have provided employment in country areas.

I will add something about consulting. I know the minister quite well, and I know he was born in the Sunraysia area. I would dearly love him to come up and have a look at the horticultural crisis we are experiencing at the moment there. The industry would be happy if the minister would come up to get first-hand information about what is going on. I have seen ministers for agriculture in the past — I can name them if members wish — who have visited at times of crisis and gone through the process with the industry in doing their job of getting first-hand information. Unfortunately the Minister for Agriculture does not seem to want to do that. I say more's the pity. Our industries in the Sunraysia area are crying out for assistance and a better understanding of them by governments in general, and any future assistance they could get would be very much appreciated. If I may say so, certainly a visit would be appreciated as well.

The last clause of the bill inserts sections 37A(2) and 37A(3) into the Meat Industry Act and will eliminate a trade restriction on the sale of pre-packaged pet food in retail butchers shops. Currently pre-packaged pet food is not allowed to be sold alongside fresh meat for human consumption. We hope this will put our corner butchers shop, or any butchers shop that we deal with, on a level playing field with supermarkets, which will be a good thing. When we asked staff at butchers shops about the proposed amendment, they told us they had not heard about it and did not know a thing about it. That might be the fault of the organisation they belong

to — whatever it might be — or it may not, but I found it a bit strange to learn when we wandered into the butchers shops that the staff did not know about it. They did not have a problem with the process, but it would not have been a bad idea to consult more in that particular area. Talking to people who work in the industry would be worthwhile.

People who are experienced in food inspection and food transport have been involved in discussions with The Nationals. The fact that food transport vehicles are only licensed to carry meat for human consumption was raised. Perhaps the minister might explain when summing up how we can overcome that particular issue. Is it a problem? If not, do we need to do something about it?

Like the Honourable Philip Davis, I will briefly touch on the issue of kangaroo meat. I was a member of the parliamentary committee he spoke about. During that inquiry we took a small step forward and tried to interest people in kangaroo meat. Mr Davis is quite right; there are strong restrictions in Victoria which do not apply across our state borders. It is quite frustrating.

An abattoir in Mildura was prepared to have a go at processing kangaroo meat. It was exporting it and had some domestic business as well. The business had to go through a difficult permit inquiry, which was fine, but it had to get the kangaroo product from other states. It seemed quite silly to us that a truckload of kangaroos would come into the abattoir at Mildura from just over the border for the kangaroos to be processed. Due to the difficulties of the whole process, that operation has now ceased, which I think is unfortunate. If that business had continued, it would have created substantial employment in that area.

It frustrates me even more when we know that the management of the culling process is done very well in Victoria. I clearly understand that and I have had regular briefings about it. I understand you can get permits to cull kangaroos on your own property, so it is a waste that we cannot utilise this product. I know it is an emotive area, and it can be made much more emotive if people want to take that line. It seems to me it is sensible, practical and commonsense, and I stress that it is far better to manage that area carefully and to utilise that product rather than burying it, or in many cases — for example, when permits are used on farms — simply leaving it to rot on the ground.

I join with Mr Davis in saying it is a good idea for the government to look at that process. I do not think it should shy away from that issue. The government should engage in a consultative process. No doubt that

would be difficult, but it would be well worthwhile so that in the future we could make better use of that national resource which abounds in parts of our state.

All in all this bill provides quite practical and sensible amendments to the Fisheries Act. It also gives our butchers shops the chance to be on a level playing field with supermarkets in relation to pet food. I am sure butchers shops will appreciate that. I am also sure our communities will appreciate it, because many people shop at their local butchers shops as well as at supermarkets. The Nationals do not oppose this bill. It provides for a number of changes to a wide range of issues. The Nationals position is to not oppose this particular bill.

Hon. R. G. MITCHELL (Central Highlands) — I rise to speak briefly on the Primary Industries Acts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. In doing so I indicate my support for the bill and thank the Minister for Agriculture in another place, Bob Cameron, for introducing the legislation.

The bill makes some amendments to two different acts: the Fisheries Act 1995 and the Meat Industry Act 1993. Whilst the bill is small in stature, it has big implications for provincial Victoria, particularly for small towns where the fishing industry is vital and where butchers shops are a vital and central part of the community. Butchers shops will now have the ability to sell pet food. Is it a big deal? Yes, because many, if not all, butchers shops have been under severe pressure from big supermarkets which not only sell meat which is for human consumption, but they also sell meat which is available for pets.

Presently, under the Meat Industry Act butchers cannot sell meat which is deemed to be unfit for human consumption, including those products which are pre-packaged. The anomaly with this issue is that supermarkets like Safeway, Coles et cetera, are able to sell pre-packaged pet food alongside food for human consumption. This bill will now remove this restriction, which is really a restriction on competition, by allowing some exemptions for pet food products which will now be allowed to be sold in butchers shops. The bill will allow butchers shops to sell pet food which is properly labelled and properly sealed in a leak-proof container and which has been processed at an approved facility operating in accordance with a licence under the Meat Industry Act, whether that facility is here in Victoria, interstate or—unfortunately as we see more often—overseas. That will also have to have been approved for importation under the commonwealth legislation by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, which is

part of the commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry.

Local butchers have welcomed this legislation. We on this side of the house know all too well the pressures that are being faced by our local butchers and how many have closed across the state and across the country in general because of the difficulty of the unfair competition they face from large supermarkets. At my home we enjoy going to the local butchers, where we can have a chat. The butcher is always a great source of local information and is always up to date on local issues. We can chew the fat, so to speak, and usually get a good cut of meat the way we like it — and always at a reasonable price. It is very pleasing when you go to the local butcher and he tells you that the piece of beef, lamb or pork — whatever — is locally grown and processed. The legislation is further proof of this government listening and acting: the bill is a result of listening to the industry's requests and delivering them in a very sensible way.

In closing — I do not want to hold the house up for too long — I refer to some comments made by the member for Benalla in another place. In his contribution he said:

... we ask the Bracks government to continue to listen to country people and to apply commonsense provisions, not only in relation to retail butchers shops but across the board.

I can assure the member for Benalla that we have been listening, and, as we have said, we will continue to do so. I commend the bill to the house.

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — I will say a few words on the Primary Industries Acts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2006. I say at the outset that the Liberal Party supports the bill. The bill introduces amendments to the Fisheries Act 1995 to facilitate improvements to fisheries arrangements under the offshore constitutional settlement (OCS), an arrangement between the commonwealth and states which sets out the responsibilities in relation to offshore fishing. Apparently there were some anomalies in the arrangement and this legislation will overcome the problem.

The bill also amends the Victorian act to provide for a fee — and that does not surprise me. If the Bracks Labor government can find a hollow log anywhere to charge a fee, it is in there with all guns blazing. I reckon the government must have hundreds of bureaucrats trawling through legislation to see if it has missed any conceivable opportunity to say, 'Let us get another fee out of this'. I think this fee is supposed to be about \$192, and no doubt it will increase in line with the consumer price index from now on.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. J. A. VOGELS — A shark talking about the fisheries! The bill also amends the Meat Industry Act, which will enable retail butchers to sell pre-packaged pet food. We have heard members speak on that already. Currently butchers are not allowed to sell pet food, and this legislation will bring them into line with what happens in supermarkets. We do not have a problem with that.

The government may not have thought about a matter that has been mentioned to me. At the moment I believe you cannot transport pet food in the same truck as food for human consumption, and I am not sure whether that will cause any difficulties with this legislation. If the Labor Party has not thought about that, maybe we will see another amendment coming through in a week or two when its members wake up. I remember that in, I think, the 1970s there was a big scandal when butchers substituted kangaroo meat for beef and consequently things were toughened. Most people when they go into butchers shops would not have a clue what cut of meat they were buying. If the butcher said, 'That is porterhouse', or, 'That is fillet', they would believe him. Of course 99.9 per cent of butchers are honest — and I believe them. However, I am sure that on many occasions when I have ordered a porterhouse steak in a restaurant what I got was not porterhouse steak but a bit of rump or a bit of scotch. Not that I mind a bit of rump, by the way!

The Honourables Barry Bishop and Philip Davis made some excellent points on the kangaroo-processing industry in Victoria, and I think we should investigate whether it is feasible. I am sure it would be feasible to slaughter our own kangaroos — ones that have been culled legally — and process them in Victoria. It seems absolutely ludicrous that we do not do so, because you can go into any restaurant and order kangaroo meat, which has obviously come from another state. I do not think it would come from overseas because I do not know of any other countries that have kangaroos, so I assume it comes from interstate.

I would also like to comment on the abalone fishing industry. The abalone fishery is Victoria's most valuable commercial fishery. I was surprised to read in the Department of Primary Industries annual report that south-east Australia has the only remaining wild catch abalone fishery left in the world. Having grown up in the Port Campbell and Peterborough areas, I know that abalone fishing was always quite common. When licences were first introduced in around the early 1970s I think they cost about \$12.50. You could buy eel licences, abalone licences and lobster licences for

\$12.50. Down our way some smart people bought a few licences. I think the abalone licences are now worth some millions of dollars, so those people have done very well. We used to take a holiday house at Port Campbell or Peterborough. Lynne and I used to go there with our kids — our two sons. One of the great things was to go down to the beach. The kids would put on their snorkels and dive down in among the rock crevices. Their mother would sit on the ledge and they would throw up a few abalone. She would then go away and cook them while they could do things they really wanted to do. A lot of good fun was had in those days.

I read in the Department of Primary Industries annual report that recreational fishers are now only able to catch 5 abalone. I think it was 10 in those days. I think that is a pity. I do not think recreational fishers do much damage to the environment; it is the poachers and the illegal fishers who destroy our fishing habitats. It is a pity that recreational fishers usually get clobbered and have their catch limits reduced and reduced when, if they catch the amount of fish I ever catch, very little damage is being done.

Abalone aquaculture has also become a very important industry in Victoria, especially down where I come from. Only a couple of months ago I read in the Warrnambool *Standard* that a huge disaster had happened in the abalone aquaculture industry in south-west Victoria. I would like to quote from an article by Liz McKinnon, which appeared on Wednesday, 10 May. It says:

Millions of dollars worth of abalone has been destroyed by a deadly virus at south-west mariculture farms, threatening the immediate future of the lucrative industry.

Port Fairy's Southern Ocean Mariculture and Allestree's Coastal Seafarms are restocking all their abalone as a result of an infection known as ganglioneuritis.

The disease had not previously been seen in Australia.

Since December Port Fairy has lost its entire stock of more than three million abalone with an estimated potential market value of \$13.5 million.

That is a huge blow.

The Allestree farm has lost more than 50 per cent of its stocks, or 3 million, with a similar market value. The loss is expected to have a major impact on the \$45 million Australian industry.

That is according to an insider. I am an outsider, but I will tell you exactly the same.

The deadly virus infects the abalone's nervous system ...

The abalone had to be destroyed, which was a great pity.

I was also disappointed to read in the Department of Primary Industries report that there has been a \$28 million drop in the department's budget this year. The output summary in table 3.7 on page 207 of budget paper 3 shows a decrease in funding of \$28 million compared with last year. It shows that the Bracks government is not really serious about agricultural fisheries et cetera in Victoria. In conclusion, the Liberal Party supports this bill, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Hon. J. H. EREN (Geelong) — I am also pleased to speak on the Primary Industries Acts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. This bill makes amendments to two acts: the Fisheries Act 1995 and the Meat Industry Act 1993.

Back in 2003 the commonwealth fisheries policy review found problems with the current offshore constitutional settlement (OCS) between the commonwealth, the states and the Northern Territory. It found there was lack of consistency and effective cooperation between the governments over the management of fish stocks. The OCS is the jurisdictional arrangement between the commonwealth, the states and the Northern Territory which sets out responsibilities in regard to offshore fisheries, mining, shipping navigation and crimes at sea. At present there are some 50 arrangements in place between the commonwealth, state and Northern Territory jurisdictions, and they are obviously not working properly.

The bill before us today will make amendments to the Fisheries Act 1995 to bring us in line with the new arrangement with the commonwealth that has already been introduced in federal Parliament through the Fisheries Legislation Amendment (Cooperative Fisheries Arrangements and Other Matters) Act 2005. These amendments today will provide a broad power for governments to vary existing and future OCS fisheries arrangements so that arrangements are current, accurate and in accord with developments in fisheries management. They will also provide a broad power to commonwealth, state and Northern Territory ministers to create and terminate OCS fisheries arrangements. This power currently lies with the Governor-General and state and Northern Territory governors. The legislation will allow state laws and not just commonwealth laws to be applied under an arrangement that involves the commonwealth and more than one state, and as well will allow more than one law to be applied in a fishery under a single OCS.

Fishing is an important industry in Victoria, especially in my electorate of Geelong Province. I am pleased to see that we have understandings with the commonwealth that allow for the long-term development of the industry in Victoria. Fishing is not only a commercial pursuit but also a major recreational pastime. My parliamentary colleague Ms Carbines and I know that a lot of people come to Geelong for recreational fishing. Families and children are keen to fish, and there is a fair bit of investment in fishing. Just the other day it was announced that the council had given funding to upgrade the platform on the Geelong North Shore where people can go fishing. I recommend it to anybody in this chamber who might want to go fishing in Geelong and enjoy those surroundings.

To sum up on this part of the bill, the amendments will simplify and streamline administration and provide a more holistic and responsive approach to the management of fisheries. These arrangements will also require to be constantly reviewed and updated.

As far as the Meat Industry Act 1993 amendment is concerned, I am glad to see that commonsense has prevailed with the amendment. Currently butchers are not allowed to sell pet food. I think that is unreasonable, considering that it has been a time-worn tradition that customers in butchers shops buying meat for their own consumption would also ask for something to take home for their pet. Supermarkets are allowed to sell pet food but butchers are not. To me this is anti-competitive and a little bit silly. This bill will change all that through an amendment to the Meat Industry Act 1993.

The kind of pet food that will be able to be sold at a retail butchers shop under the amended act will include pet food that has been manufactured, processed, pre-packaged and labelled in a sealed, robust, leak-proof container at an approved pet food processing facility operating in accordance with a licence under the Meat Industry Act or an equivalent facility in another state or territory. It will also include pet food that has been manufactured and processed overseas, pre-packaged in a sealed, robust, leak-proof container and approved for importation under commonwealth legislation by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service of the commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. We are talking about canned and chub-packed formulations of pet meat, grain dry extruded pellets and dry extruded snacks like those chewy dog treats or, as my parliamentary colleague Rob Mitchell would say, Shmackos.

While this legislation will be fairer for butchers and bring them in line with what is allowed at

supermarkets, it will not change the food standards this government demands of food suppliers. There is really no reason why pet food cannot be sold alongside human food, provided that butchers shops follow the rules set out in this legislation. There will be strict guidelines with the way the pet food is to be treated so that there will be no cross-contamination between pet food and human food. It is important to note that this amendment does not include fresh, uncooked meat. That is a good thing, because I do not think we want our porterhouse steaks lying next to offal suitable for pets at butchers shops. This is sensible bill, which I think is supported by all members in this chamber. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms CARBINES (Geelong) — I am very pleased to join the debate this afternoon on the Primary Industries Act (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill, which I must say I have enjoyed. It is a very small bill but it affects two very important industries to Victoria and Australia — the fishing industry and the pet food industry.

Most of the debate we have heard this afternoon has concentrated on the second part of the bill, which contains provisions relating to the sale of pet food in butchers shops. From my perspective the most important and substantial part of the bill concerns the arrangements that will, as a result of it, relate to fisheries across Victoria. It will bring Victoria into line with the commonwealth legislation, which was passed last year.

The commonwealth undertook a review in 2003 of the fishing arrangements around the country — federal, state and territory — and ascertained that there were some 50 different arrangements in place across the jurisdictions. Of course those 50 different arrangements were about 50 too many. There were many inconsistencies in them, and they were deemed to be quite inadequate. As a result the federal government last year introduced and passed legislation bringing about three main changes to the fishing legislation to ensure that arrangements covering fisheries across Australia are up to date, accurate and consistent, which is very important.

Hon. J. A. Vogels interjected.

Ms CARBINES — They do some good things, they do many things badly — but don't get me started on that!

The legislation also gives flexibility to the states and territories, and indeed the federal government, to allow for terminations of fishing arrangements. It is important

that state and federal ministers should have the flexibility to terminate fishing arrangements, because at the moment only the Governor-General or the state governors have the power to do so, which seems to be an anachronism dating back to colonial times, and of course it is important that state and federal ministers have the power and responsibility to create and terminate arrangements surrounding the fishing industry.

The changes that were introduced by the federal government also allow for regional fishing arrangements, which is important across jurisdictions. These are sensible changes that were made by the federal government, and this bill implements those changes in the Victorian legislation. I am pleased to know that they have the support of all parties in this chamber, and of course they deserve that support.

As we have heard from my colleague the Honourable John Eren, in the electorate of Geelong Province, which we share, fishing is important to our local regional economy and is also an important recreational pursuit. I have had the pleasure of visiting a number of the different areas in which the fishing industry is located in Geelong Province and had a look at some of the places to which the fish are brought to be packaged, and I know it is a very important industry that employs many of our local people.

On the Bellarine Peninsula we have a growing aquaculture industry that is increasingly important to our regional economy, and I was pleased late last year when the Minister for Agriculture, Mr Cameron, released some extra waters off the peninsula for that industry. The bill will have an impact statewide, but it will also have an impact locally in my electorate.

The second part of the bill affects the pet food industry. As we have heard from all speakers this afternoon, currently butchers shops are not allowed to sell pet food because the regulations state that they are not allowed to sell food that is unfit for human consumption. This places them at a disadvantage when supermarkets such as Safeway and Coles can sell pre-packaged pet food, which is usually found in the meat section in the supermarket and often in the fridge adjacent to where you buy your sausages or your chicken fillets. It certainly is at my supermarket in Waurin Ponds.

I am pleased to know that the change made by this legislation will mean that the very good butchers shop opposite the Safeway supermarket at Waurin Ponds, Town and Country Meats, will now be allowed to sell pre-packaged pet food. I am sure the butchers will welcome this sensible change. And I am sure they

know about it, because butchers are alert to what their customers want, and it is easier for consumers if they can buy their meat and their dog or cat meat in the same store. As I said, this is very sensible legislation. It will be covered by regulation to ensure that the pet food that is sold will need to be in sealed containers or leakproof packets so that there can be no cross-contamination with human food.

This is a small bill, but it will have a worthwhile impact on two important industries for Victoria — the fishing industry and the pet food industry — and I have been pleased to hear other members support the bill. I have also enjoyed their stories about some of the activities in their electorates, as well as the debate about kangaroo meat. With those few words, I commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) —
By leave, I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

In doing so I respond to some matters raised in the second-reading debate. I can advise, firstly, that in relation to the matter of the fee being imposed for the processing of administrative notifications in relation to the transfer of abalone quota units, the abalone industry, through the Seafood Industry of Victoria, will be consulted over the setting of an appropriate notification fee, as it involves an amendment to the fisheries regulations 1998 and therefore requires a regulatory impact statement.

Secondly, in relation to the matter of consultation with the seafood industry, I can advise that the proposed amendments in relation to the offshore constitutional settlement (OCS) to the Fisheries Act 1995 are machinery and consequential in nature, arising from the amendments to the commonwealth Fisheries Management Act, which took effect on 23 March 2006. As there are no material OCS amendments proposed at this stage, there was no need to consult the Seafood Industry of Victoria.

In relation to the matter of transporting meat for human consumption, I can advise that the question of whether a licensed vehicle that transports meat for human consumption may be allowed to transport pet food is a matter that PrimeSafe would need to consider in accordance with national standards.

Finally, in relation to the matter of kangaroos, I can advise that those matters are outside the scope of this bill. I thank all members for their support for the bill.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

BUDGET PAPERS 2006–07

**Debate resumed from 6 June; motion of
Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance):**

That the Council take note of the budget papers 2006–07.

Mr PULLEN (Higinbotham) — I only have about 4 minutes and 27 seconds left because I lost about 3 minutes last night with the opposition playing up on points of order, but I see that the Mr David Davis is here now, along with some other good opposition members, and I am sure they will not play up while I finish off my last 4 minutes. I have had to cut out a lot of my speech, but I want to refer in particular to what has happened in my electorate — and that is why this is such a good budget.

First of all, last Friday I was out with the Minister for Education and Training, Lynne Kosky, and the member for Bentleigh, Rob Hudson, both from the other place, when we announced the modernisation of the McKinnon Primary School, with an amount of \$4.3 million being directed to that school. We have put a similar amount — \$4.33 million — into stage 3 of the Cheltenham Secondary College.

We are allocating \$25.5 million for works to the Kingston Centre. I have had a lot to do with the Kingston Centre. My dear mum spent many years there before she passed away — and she was well looked after there.

Many years ago, when the opposition was in power, I asked my local bus driver for a timetable. He burst out laughing and said, ‘We don’t have one, we just roll backwards and forwards’. I thought, ‘That is just like the Liberal Party’. We have now launched the transport and livability statement, and included in it is part of the largest investment in public transport ever — and public transport is running to proper timetables. We are introducing late night train services and extensions to the times of no less than five bus routes in my electorate. For example, the 811 and 812 bus routes which run from Dandenong to Brighton, through the

four lower house seats in my electorate, will run on Mondays to Fridays from 6.00 a.m. until 9.00 p.m. On Saturdays, when currently buses run from 7.45 a.m. until 4.45 p.m., they will run until 9.00 p.m. We are going to introduce a Sunday service that will run from 9.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.

As a follow-up to my question today to the Minister for Sport and Recreation — I am a great lover of sport — I must say that the Bracks government will build on the success of simply the best of the Commonwealth Games ever with a \$177 million boost to key community sporting facilities. I underline that it is community sport because, as the minister said in a press release:

The Bracks government continues to support sport and recreation from the grassroots up, investing in children's playgrounds, local football and netball clubs right through to major international events like the Commonwealth Games.

I concur with that because every application that Bayside City Council has put up to the state government since I have been a member for Higinbotham Province has been approved. Only last Saturday — I will make a 90-second statement on this tomorrow, if I get a chance — I opened the new Tulip Street soccer and baseball pavilion.

In the short time I have left, in case members do not believe me when I say how good this budget is, I refer to a Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce media release. It says:

Small business will benefit from Mr Brumby's budget with cuts to a number of taxes, apprentice trades bonuses and reduced red tape, the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce said yesterday.

VACC senior manager for government and public affairs, David Russell, said this year's budget was positive - particularly as there were no new taxes and that there were reductions to existing taxes on businesses.

'There are a number of positive impacts for small business in the budget', he said.

The reduced land tax for small business is welcome, as is the reduced payroll tax ... and the reduction in WorkCover premiums and reduced red tape.

...

Mr Russell said the apprentice trades bonus of \$500 should see more young workers entering the industry; a positive, as apprentices are in short supply.

...

VACC has welcomed the state government's commitment to increase expenditure on infrastructure while also reducing business costs of \$1.4 billion over four years.

There are wonderful business initiatives in my electorate. There will be \$300 payments for children starting at prep or year 7. It is estimated that nearly 5800 children in my electorate alone will benefit from that. I have always said that P. J. Keating was the greatest Treasurer ever. I think he has been finally beaten by the Honourable John Brumby, who in my opinion is the best Treasurer this country has ever seen.

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — The Bracks government should admit that its 2006-07 budget is flawed and contains many statements and promises that do not bear close scrutiny. I cannot help but refer to an article that appeared in today's Warrnambool *Standard* under the heading 'Funding glitch hits Brauer'. Brauer is a very important secondary college in Warrnambool. The article by Amy Marshall says:

The state government was left embarrassed yesterday when it was forced to admit \$90 000 it announced to Brauer College came with a catch.

Does that surprise you? Of course it does not.

The money was for solar equipment in a refurbished science wing but the announcement failed to point out the school was still waiting on the \$1.5 million for the wing's upgrade.

An even bigger question mark was put on both funding contributions when the government admitted many schools would have to wait longer for spruce-ups because of the backdown on the Snowy Hydro sale.

...

When The Standard asked parliamentary secretary Elaine Carbines how the school could buy the solar technology for a building it didn't have, she was confused.

I would say there would be many people and many schools across Victoria that will be confused by this budget.

The government should be upgrading and refurbishing schools on an annual basis. It has been in government now for seven years. It is outrageous for the Treasurer to say, 'We need \$600 million from the sale of the Snowy hydro scheme' — a one-off windfall — 'to refurbish and rebuild schools'. The Treasurer said the government is collecting, I think, \$32.4 billion in revenue this year. As part of any good business you refurbish, upgrade and build new things right throughout; you do not wait to sell off the family heirlooms before you build another bit of infrastructure. I see Mr McQuilten over there. He knows that is what good businesses do. He has been fighting hard for a school at Maryborough for many years. It should not depend on the sale of the Snowy, it should be coming out of general budget revenue as the years go by.

I have had a good look at the budget to see what is in it for country Victoria. I have found nothing. I should not say I have found nothing, but I have found very little. Under the heading ‘Big spend misses the mark for farmers’ the Victorian Farmers Federation, the state’s big agricultural body, had this to say:

Farmers will be disappointed the biggest infrastructure spend in Victoria’s history has ignored the top priorities of the farm community.

Victorian Farmers Federation president, Simon Ramsay, said the government has missed an important opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the farming community by investing heavily in the farm sector’s priorities over the next four years.

‘The VFF is also very concerned about the scheduled long-term decline in the Department of Primary Industries budget’, said Mr Ramsay. ‘This demonstrates a fading commitment to agriculture despite the government’s acknowledgment that there are one in six regional jobs relying on this sector’.

As I mentioned in a speech earlier today, the budget shows there will be a \$28 million cut in agricultural funding between 2005–06 and 2006–07. That demonstrates that this government is not all that interested in country Victoria.

If you compare that with the Liberal Party’s policies on funding for country Victoria, I would say the first thing you would notice is the \$127 million we have said we would inject into upgrading local roads and bridges right across the state. Our commitment to match the federal government’s Roads to Recovery funding has been especially welcomed by smaller rural shires. I am 100 per cent positive that once we finally achieve the three tiers of government sharing responsibilities for local roads and bridges no government in the future will ever be game enough to scrap it.

Of the municipalities in my electorate alone, the Rural City of Ararat would receive an extra \$2.5 million; the Shire of Central Goldfields would receive an extra \$1.37 million; the Shire of Colac Otway, \$2.7 million; the Shire of Corangamite, \$3.5 million; the Shire of Glenelg, \$3.5 million; the Shire of Golden Plains, an extra \$2.7 million; the Shire of Hindmarsh, \$1.7 million; the Rural City of Horsham, \$2.2 million; the Shire of Moyne, \$4.2 million; the Shire of Northern Grampians, an extra \$2.8 million; the Shire of Pyrenees, \$2.3 million; the Shire of Southern Grampians, \$3.5 million; Surf Coast Shire, \$1.5 million, and even the small City of Warrnambool would receive \$641 000 extra. The Shire of West Wimmera would receive \$2.5 million and the Shire of Yarriambiack, \$2.2 million. That is what country

Victoria is looking for — some real money from the state government.

What is the best part of all this? Councils would not be asked to match the Roads to Recovery funding that a Liberal government would inject into their regions. They would be able to spend it on the roads and bridges that they believed were the most important to their community.

There was nothing in this budget for rail standardisation. Five budgets ago, when I happened to be in the lower house, I heard the Treasurer promise \$96 million to standardise rail lines in western Victoria. It was recognised that because of our burgeoning sand mining industry, our grain and our timber et cetera freight needed to come off the roads and we needed to upgrade and standardise the rail infrastructure in western Victoria. Not one sleeper has been laid and not one spike has been driven. The \$96 million has basically disappeared. I do not know where it has gone. It is not in the budget figures any more, so I do not know what has happened to it.

What about water? If you live in south-west Victoria you know that Geelong and Ballarat have been left high and dry. The government has been too gutless to make any decisions on future water supplies for those two major cities. The government has just released another draft strategy, the draft central region sustainable water strategy, which includes Geelong and Ballarat. The main recommendation in that draft report is that water should be piped from Gippsland to Geelong.

What a joke! Melbourne does not have enough water now — it is already on water restrictions — and Gippsland is stressed, yet here we are talking about piping water from Gippsland through Melbourne and all the way to Geelong. We all know that Geelong and Ballarat are in a desperate plight with water.

Hon. J. H. Eren — We cannot make it rain, Mr Vogels!

Hon. J. A. VOGELS — No, you cannot make it rain, but why would you pipe water from Gippsland to Geelong? On the Geelong doorstep is a range of mountains called the Otways, where 97 per cent of the water flows into the ocean. Geelong now pinches what is rightfully Ballarat’s water out of Lal Lal to take to Geelong.

There is a simple answer. If you look in the report that has been released you will see there is a new aquifer called the Newlingrook aquifer sitting under Carlisle. It is on the Geelong doorstep. It pours tens of thousands of megalitres into the bottom of the Southern Ocean

through springs. It just pours into the bottom of the ocean and is completely and utterly wasted. If you are fishing 3 miles out to sea, you can dip a glass over the side and drink fresh water. That is how much water is coming up from the bottom of the ocean. Nobody is game to tap it because it is an aquifer. If it were a sealed aquifer and you were going to deplete the water supply, you would say, 'Hang on, we have to be careful about this', but the water is pouring into the bottom of the ocean and is completely wasted. If you tapped that aquifer you could say to Ballarat, 'Lal Lal is your water' — and it should be Ballarat's water — and you would solve two problems, but this government does not have the foresight to do it.

I want to mention one thing about the Snowy hydro. I remember sitting in this house a couple of years ago when we passed legislation saying that no publicly owned bodies that had control of water assets were allowed to be privatised. That was enshrined in the constitution. At the first opportunity since that legislation was passed this government was prepared to ignore the constitution and flog off its assets. Obviously what was enshrined in the constitution was not worth the paper it was written on, because the government is now saying, 'That was two years ago. We will now sell off our water assets'.

There is nothing in this budget for fencing assistance. Six months ago there were huge bushfires in my area. Once again the Labor Party has lied. Prior to the 1999 election one of its policies, which I have read carefully, was that it would contribute fifty-fifty funding to boundary fencing after a natural disaster like a fire. That was part of its policy. As soon as it got into government it reneged on it, and it has not lived up to that promise. The Liberal Party has a policy that, if there is a natural disaster like a fire that starts in Crown land and burns out private property and fences, it would fund half the cost of the restoration of those fences. The Liberal Party stands by its election promises, unlike the Labor Party.

Let us look at local government. I am pleased to see the Minister for Local Government sitting in the chamber because I have a press release from the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) — and again these are not my words — headed 'Budget disappoints councils'. It must have been disappointing to the minister as well, because on budget day I looked at the government's web site, and I think every other minister put out a press release on their fantastic achievements and the money that was being given to whatever portfolios they were in charge of. The Minister for Local Government put out no media release — not one — on budget day. There was one the next day, but nothing on budget day.

There must have been nothing much there or the department would have had someone ready to push the button to send out the media release saying that this is a fantastic budget for local government. There is nothing in it, and the MAV recognises that, as do councils.

There is a special page in the budget for local government. It contains table D1, which I think Mr Somyurek spoke about the other day. The table shows that grants and transfer payments to local government are expected to increase by 10.7 per cent, from \$494.9 million in 2005–06 to \$547.9 million in 2006–07. Mr Somyurek preached on about this, saying what a fantastic outcome it was, but he failed to read the next sentence, which says that the Department for Victorian Communities provides the majority of the funds to assist local government. Most of these funds are commonwealth financial assistance grants, around 60 per cent, and road grants, around 20 per cent, from the commonwealth that are passed on to local government — in other words, 80 per cent of that funding comes from the commonwealth. Four years ago, in 2002–03, the state contributed \$206 million in local government grants. This budget will contribute \$154 million. That is \$50 million less than four years ago.

Library funding has once again been overlooked in this budget. Yes, we get a consumer price index (CPI) increase. Libraries are now funded 80 per cent from councils and 20 per cent from government. I remember that that used to be fifty-fifty, although I admit that that was a long time ago. Since 2002 this government has increased library funding in line with increases in the CPI, which has been about a \$1 per capita increase over four years. The Liberal Party's policy is that it will increase library funding by \$1 per capita each year, up to \$9 per capita or \$46 million per annum, if it wins government, compared to the \$30 million that local government is getting now.

The failure of this budget to address health needs in south-west Victoria is stark. We are the only region in Victoria not covered by an all-emergency rescue helicopter. This is despite the fact that Woodside Petroleum was prepared to put \$20 million towards the cost of the service. We still have no full-time paramedics at Timboon, even though all the statistics prove beyond doubt that they are urgently needed. There is no funding to rebuild the South West Healthcare campus. The hospital at Warrnambool, the major regional centre in the south-west, is the only hospital in a city of that size that still works out of a campus 50 years old or more. There is no funding for radiotherapy facilities in Warrnambool, and cancer

patients are forced to travel to Melbourne, Geelong or Ballarat for treatment.

In conclusion, after seven years of the highest taxing government in the state's history, with approximately \$2.2 billion sitting in a slush fund in the lead-up to the November election, this budget fails to deliver for my electorate or for local government right across Victoria.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN (Ballarat) — I believe this is a wonderful budget; it is a great budget. The Premier is to be congratulated, and the architect of the budget, Treasurer John Brumby, has done a wonderful job.

What I will talk about goes a little bit more into the future than what has been happening. It is about energy. Any healthy economy needs energy — all healthy economies need energy, and even sick economies need energy. Where will we get that energy from? I am strongly of the view that we need to be creative and use a mix of energies to carry our economy into the future. Currently in Victoria we have very cheap brown coal, and therefore cheap energy compared to world standards. We have wind energy, which I think is being held back by some actions of the federal government, and we have solar energy, with the best solar technology in the world, which I will talk about later. Our society, particularly in Victoria, has enormous potential for the years to come.

I will come back to the point of the Treasurer and the Premier talking about the two economies — the resources boom in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland, and the current view that the eastern seaboard is a manufacturing and intellectual area.

First I would like to talk about nuclear energy. The fact is that the two major producers of yellowcake are Australia and Canada. I believe that that clearly puts an obligation on Australia to confront the nuclear issue in a global sense. Something like 16 to 18 per cent of power generated around the world is generated through nuclear energy. Therefore, Australia and Canada have a particular obligation to consider how the waste is treated and the whole issue of nuclear power.

I also put on the record that I do not believe that Australia needs any nuclear power plants in my lifetime or for a longer time. But I do believe that in terms of nuclear power we have an obligation to play a part in finding some solutions to issues such as all the nuclear bombs that seem to be lost in Russia and the future aspirations of countries such as Iran. I think there has to be a debate in Australia. My view is that at the moment

it is being sidelined by considerations of whether we should have nuclear power in Australia.

As I said, I do not believe that we need nuclear power. In Australia we are extremely lucky to have a number of other options, but there are regions and countries in the world that do not have other options. Therefore we need to participate in the debate. One part of the debate is the possibility, which has been mooted recently, of the United Nations or the major industrialised nations of the world supporting a sort of recycled nuclear industry in which the producers of yellowcake also enrich uranium and then swap the used rods for new ones. In that way, there is a real potential —

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. C. A. Strong) — Order! The issue of nuclear energy is perhaps not central to the budget debate. I have given Mr McQuilten a fair bit of latitude on that. Perhaps if he could wind up fairly quickly on the nuclear issue and turn to the budget?

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — On a point of order, Acting President, could you stop the clock?

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. C. A. Strong) — Order! No.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — That is a very bad ruling, but I will continue. I believe that there is a real opportunity for Australia to participate in that debate.

I will now move on to solar energy. My point about energy is that any healthy economy needs ongoing energy. We have in Victoria a company called Solar Systems which I believe will be successful, in cooperation with the federal and state governments —

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. C. A. Strong) — Order! I think Mr McQuilten did reflect on the Chair in his statement about a bad ruling. I ask him to withdraw that reflection on the Chair.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — I withdraw. As I said, we have in Victoria a company called Solar Systems, which would be of great benefit if there was a carbon trading scheme. I am of the view that within a number of months the federal and state governments will announce what will be presumably the world's largest solar power station. It will be built along the Murray River. To describe it briefly, it uses mirrors and steel and a very smart box. When you are making five or 10 of them, they are very expensive; when you make thousands of them it is like producing motor cars. I believe that it has the potential to change the way that

solar energy is viewed around the world. It has the potential also to create a lot of jobs in Victoria — and it is green. In the process of producing that energy, it actually cleans up water — because it needs a lot of water to cool down the central panel, which heats up to 1600 degrees. I have been working on that for six years.

The last area I want to talk about is clean coal. There has been a lot of talk about clean coal, with people saying that it may happen in the next 10 or 20 years. It is here now. I have clean coal in my pocket. I am holding up an example of what Victorian technology can do and has done. It has cleaned up coal by taking the moisture out of brown coal. Once you take the moisture out of brown coal you have the potential to make oil. At some expense you have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the Latrobe Valley by 30 to 40 per cent. The federal government and a lot of other people have been trying to find the answer. It is here now, being done by a company called Asia Pacific Coal and Steel, which started in Bacchus Marsh. We have the option. We just need the political will to find a way of funding the cleaning up of the Latrobe Valley power generators.

It will cost about \$13 a tonne to remove the water. Basically you put in 2 tonnes of brown coal to get out 1 tonne of black coal and 1 tonne of water. In my dreaming I can see an industry processing 30 million tonnes of brown coal per year, which will also generate 30 million tonnes of clean, distilled water. The potential to have an industry exporting black coal to the world is enormous. Black coal is around \$60 a tonne. Currently brown coal is about \$4.35 a tonne. The transition from \$4.35 a tonne, which is like burning dirty socks, to a potential major export industry. As I said, it costs around \$13 a tonne to clean up the coal by taking out the moisture.

After the 1975 oil crisis, in the 1970s and 1980s the Japanese built a coal-to-oil plant in the Latrobe Valley. After all the expense involved in that, they stopped. The price of a barrel of oil was \$17; the cost to them was \$32 to \$34. It is my understanding that samples of the brown coal pallets have been sent to Japan and the whole process looks incredibly exciting. So there is a real potential that brown coal can be turned into oil. I really believe that this is an amazing prospect.

The Gippsland coal reserve is four times larger than that of the North West Shelf. Until recently we did not have the ability to commercialise that resource. We can now make oil out of brown coal, which has global implications not only for Australia but for the Middle East, for the United States of America et cetera. This is incredibly important technology.

I shall finish on a slightly critical point. The view expressed by a lot of people is that Australia's economy is now separated into two components: the resource-rich Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory, and the manufacturing eastern seaboard. I am confidently predicting that because of Victoria's natural resource, and because it now has the technology to change that resource and make it usable and important in many ways, there will be a resource boom in Victoria in the next one to five years.

I finish on this thought: I know the Premier and the Treasurer are strongly of the view that we have to work with manufacturing, with which I agree, but I am predicting that there will be a resource boom for Victoria the like of which we have not seen before, which is incredibly exciting and challenging. All sorts of infrastructure issues will have to be confronted, but it is the largest potential project that I have ever been close to.

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I want to start my assessment of the 2006-07 budget with a view of what the people out there in the street are saying about it. By way of setting the scene I refer to the letters to the editor section in the *Herald Sun* last week following the introduction of the budget. At page 20 of the *Herald Sun* of last Thursday, 1 June, there are six or seven letters. The first letter, which is under the headline 'Addicted to pokies revenue', is a criticism again of the Bracks government's reliance on revenue raised from gambling in the state. When I looked at the budget papers I noted a 3.9 per cent increase in gambling revenues. Now we are getting almost \$1 billion of revenue coming directly from poker machines. For a government that said it will play wacky-do with gambling in this state and reduce the state's reliance on gambling and address problem gambling, nothing has been done.

The second letter is under the headline 'Insurance rip-off' and talks about the \$600 million dividend taken from the Transport Accident Commission. As a motorist, and somebody who pays that fee, I am rightfully fuming, because \$600 million is going directly to the government on top of the normal dividends. This is a one-off \$600 million grab. Surely that should be used to reduce premiums people pay for compulsory insurance, or at the least it could address some of the registration costs that have been incurred by pensioners since the Bracks government lifted the 50 per cent concession for pensioners on car registration.

The third letter is headlined 'Worrying debt trend' and talks about the budget taking us further into debt. The comment is that:

The federal government recently celebrated debt-free day: the state government is celebrating digging us into debt.

The federal government has been able to completely eliminate its debt.

The fourth letter talks about buses on jammed roads, and makes a commentary on the poor state of public transport in Melbourne. I can attest that public transport in country Victoria is certainly no better than that in Melbourne at the moment. V/Line seems to be running a day-to-day disaster on the line servicing my electorate in Gippsland. We do not have trains at the moment, but we have had buses for four months and people are being left on stations because of the lack of coordination of the buses. It is proving a day-to-day disaster.

The fifth letter is headlined 'Water plan trickles away'. That letter was not talking about Snowy water because that all went with a big torrent last Friday — that being the \$600 million the government expected as its share from the sale of Snowy Hydro Ltd. It is referring to a number of water issues, one being a \$50 million water factory in Gippsland. It is a cute term for a wastewater treatment plant which will take Melbourne's wastewater, treat it in Gippsland and then use it for industry in Gippsland. I do not mind the concept of wastewater being reused for different purposes, but it seems to be extraordinary that we are spending \$50 million to take Melbourne's waste to Gippsland, treat it and then reuse it. Why can it not be treated and reused where it is in Melbourne?

The boxed section in the letters to the editor talks about 'Steve lotto' and makes reference to the \$300 cash bonus for all children. You are a winner of the lotto if next year your child is in year 7 or starting school in prep. They are the lotto winners out of this new cash-for-kids scheme, as it is being called.

The *Herald Sun* of the next day published more letters that had come in. One has the headline, 'Howard's legacy keeps Labor in', and talks about the GST revenue coming to the state. I note in the budget papers there is a 7.9 per cent increase in the GST funds coming to the state. That amounts to over \$600 million that the state receives because of the goods and services tax dividend coming back to the states this year.

There are four more letters on the budget. They make comments about the \$300 for schoolchildren, and one letter states:

Brumby gives a \$300 handout to millionaires who have preppies.

Wasn't Labor condemning tax cuts for the rich a while back? What hypocrites.

That letter is from Rob Stewart in Geelong. The next letter talks about the Snowy hydro, but that has already gone, and the final letter in that section states:

The Victorian government has found \$143 million for a new sports stadium, and \$52 million to try for the 2018 World Cup.

But it could not find a lousy \$500 000 to keep operating the mercy helicopter for sick and premature babies.

Hon. J. H. Eren — Ghost writers!

Hon. P. R. HALL — They are the letters that were published in the *Herald Sun*, Mr Eren. There were no letters from the other side of the legend. Mr Eren said they are ghost writers, but they are the letters that were printed in the *Herald Sun*, and I would say it is typical of how people viewed the budget.

The *Sunday Age* of 4 June has the headline '2b stash tipped for schools'. I notice that Jason Dowling wrote an article in which he identified that between now and 2009-10 there will be more than \$2.2 billion of unallocated funds which, no doubt, will be used as a slush fund for the Labor Party leading up to the election at the end of the year.

Those comments are the sorts of things people out on the street are saying about the budget. This budget contains a lot of less than open, honest and transparent features. One is the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund which illustrates the con tricks that this government is playing on Victorians. The Treasurer and the Minister for Energy Industries have been lauding the fact that the government is spending a lot in regional Victoria through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund.

The budget papers show that in 2004-05 there was a budget expenditure in the RIDF of \$78.7 million, and the government crowed about it. In May of this year it said it still expected to spend \$76.7 million of that. When the budget papers were released last week the final figure shows that only \$36.4 million was spent. I do not know how the Treasurer, if he is such a good Treasurer as is claimed by his colleagues in the

Labor Party, underestimates the amount that will be spent out of that fund within a two-month period. In May he said \$76.7 million was going to be spent, but two months later we find out only \$36.4 million has been spent. If you look at the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund since 2000-01, you see of a total of \$450 million only \$150 million has been spent.

To suggest that spending has been delayed because projects take a while to implement just does not make sense, when the Treasurer that said for this year's — —

Hon. J. M. McQuilten interjected.

Hon. P. R. HALL — No, the Treasurer said in May he was going to spend \$76.7 million of the \$78.7 million allocated. In fact two months later he has spent only \$36.4 million. He is not that dumb. He is a pretty astute sort of fellow. If he said in May he would spend that, I would have expected him to spend it. The fact that he has spent only \$36.4 million is a bit deceitful I reckon. It is a bit of a con trick.

There are other less than honest and transparent features of this budget, such as the fact that the Transurban \$2.9 billion has been cashed in early for a miserable \$609 million. As the analysts tell us, that is the equivalent of a 9.7 per cent rate of interest. I do not even pay that on my home loan or my personal loan. It is extraordinary that the Bracks government is prepared to bring forward such anticipated revenue at such an exorbitant rate of interest. I have talked about the Transport Accident Commission \$600 million cash grab.

I want to point out, too, that Victorians are now paying \$900 a head more in state taxes than they were when Labor first came to office. That is very clear. There is no land tax relief for people with properties valued under \$900 000. I read in the commentaries that five out of every six people who pay land tax pay it on properties of less than \$900 000 in value. So for five out of six people who pay land tax there is no relief whatsoever in this budget. There is no stamp duty relief. When you compare the Victorian level of stamp duty to those of other states you find that we pay far more. All of this is happening when GST revenue is at absolutely record levels. When the federal government can completely eliminate its debt, it seems extraordinary that the state government cannot do better at returning a dividend to the Victorian people by way of tax relief, by way of dividends or at least by being honest and expending the money it has promised to expend on certain areas.

This budget tackled the very easy issues that made good headlines. The headlines that we saw the day after the budget came down were predominantly about cash for kids — the \$300 that was afforded to the parents of every child starting school or starting year 7. Of course that was welcomed by parents, because there is a cost factor for children going to school. But it seems extraordinary that this was introduced without any call for it. I did not hear one person suggest that it was absolutely necessary. It proved to me that it was merely a pork-barrelling exercise. There was no needs analysis associated with this handout to those lucky parents who have children at the right school ages.

I acknowledge and recognise that schools were big winners in this budget. There were some good things, and there are plenty of schools around the state of Victoria and certainly some in my electorate that need such injections of money. I welcome those.

There were a couple of disappointments that I want to mention before my time elapses. I was disappointed that this budget did not address the very significant financial problems suffered by parents who are sending their children to preschool. Across Victoria, parents with preschool-age children pay an average fee of \$165 a term. That totals \$660 a year for 10 hours a week, only a small amount of time. Yet there was no attempt to address any of that hardship in the budget. I will talk more about that next week when I move a motion with respect to preschools.

I was disappointed that there was nothing for the environment in this budget either. There was nothing for the Gippsland Lakes, yet I think no member would disagree with me when I say that they are one of Victoria's icon tourism features. To the government's credit there has been a \$12 million project up to this point to try to clean up the Gippsland Lakes and reduce nutrient run-offs into the lakes. That has been great, but the funding is almost finished now and there is no renewal of that funding in this budget.

The \$50 million water factory is a topic I will talk about another day, but I will just mention that it seems to me a bit of a con trick to suggest that it is a new factory, a \$50 million bonus for Gippsland, when we are actually putting in a new treatment plant for Melbourne's wastewater in the Gippsland region.

There was nothing about renewable energy. I listened very carefully to Mr McQuilten's comments about renewable energy. I actually agree with his comments. It is fine to have a debate about nuclear energy, but we should not be focusing all of our attention on nuclear energy, because there are other issues we need to

explore. I absolutely agree with the use of clean brown coal, and I am disappointed that there seems to be no mention of that in the budget. The research is fine, but what is needed in the Latrobe Valley is the next stage — a demonstration plant. There should be some capacity for the state government to work with the private sector to build demonstration plants to ensure that this technology gets off the ground. I agree with Mr McQuilten's comments that that is a future source of energy.

I also agree with his comments about solar energy. For my life I cannot understand why state and federal governments do not focus more on solar energy. Mr McQuilten spoke about solar energy technology that has significant power, where a series of mirrors concentrate the sun onto particular points in a tower. I tore an article about this topic out of the *Auto Industry News* of May this year because I had seen it featured on ABC television. It said that with this setup, which is being explored by the National Solar Energy Centre the federal government has established, an area of 50 square kilometres in the centre of Australia would be capable of providing all of Australia's energy needs in the year 2020. So 10 or 12 years down the track we could be producing all the energy we need from a concentration of solar towers in an area of 50 square kilometres in the centre of Australia. That is where we should be going in terms of renewable energy. Maybe next week in debate on the energy bill I will get a chance to elaborate on that point.

I want to express my serious concern and grave disappointment that there is nothing in this budget for carers and particularly nothing to address the urgent accommodation needs of people with disabilities who are being looked after by ageing carers. The Honourable Andrea Coote mentioned yesterday that Jean Topps referred to, I think, something like 14 000 people with disabilities living with carers over the age of 35. We all know there is an urgent need to address that. Some very old parents are still looking after their children with disabilities and have been doing it all their lives. They deserve a bit of help, but they got nothing from the government in this budget.

I would like to speak about a couple of small matters, but 15 minutes does not give me much time to address them. One matter I was going to explore in more detail was conveyance allowances. I appreciate that three years ago the government moved in the right direction with regard to that matter and provided a conveyance allowance that was structured on the distance that had to be travelled — but the government did not index it. Every fee, fine and charge in this state is indexed but not the allowance paid to parents to assist them with

conveying their children to school. I do not know why not; it does not make sense. We are going to have the same problem with the conveyance allowance in the future.

The other matter I was going to talk about was the lack of integration of public transport in country Victoria, but my time has expired. It is a disappointing budget overall. I will conclude my comments on that note.

Hon. J. H. EREN (Geelong) — I hope, Acting President, you are as generous with me as you were with Mr Hall. I am pleased to once again speak on a Bracks-Brumby Labor government budget. Unlike Mr Hall, who is not happy with the Treasurer, I would say that we have the best Treasurer in the country. This is his sixth budget, and time and again he has proved to be a very good Treasurer. It seems to be getting easier every year for the Treasurer to put together a very generous and well-considered budget for the whole state, all the while keeping an eye squarely on the bottom line — —

Mr Lenders — AAA is here to stay, Brother!

Hon. J. H. EREN — Absolutely, Minister! Yet again this budget continues the great work of the Bracks Labor government and delivers for all Victorians. Before I get to the budget goodies for the Geelong region and my electorate, of which there are many, I wish to talk about how the Treasurer is maintaining Victoria's AAA rating by delivering a fiscally responsible budget. This budget includes the biggest investment in infrastructure in Victoria's history, with \$4.9 billion invested in health, education, roads and community safety. As the Treasurer, John Brumby, said when the budget was released:

The 2006-07 budget continues to deliver the economic growth, financial stability and responsible investment Victoria needs to maintain its reputation as one of the most livable places in the world and meet the challenges ahead.

I am pleased to note that Victoria's economy is forecast to grow by 3.25 per cent, which will maintain Victoria's consistent record of growth. Unemployment is marked to remain at about 5 per cent. Although that is good compared with previous years, we need to do more work there. This Bracks Labor government budget provides for Victoria without punishing sections of the community that choose to live outside Melbourne.

Some interesting figures in this budget are: a \$4.9 billion record total estimated investment in capital works, with \$12.6 billion to be spent over the next four years; \$1.4 billion of savings to Victorian businesses

over the next four years through cuts to payroll tax, land tax and WorkCover premiums; \$1.2 billion for schools and skills; \$2.5 billion for health, community services, aged care and medical research; \$3.3 billion to meet our transport challenges in roads and public transport; \$818 million for A Fairer Victoria to improve opportunities and support of families under pressure; \$766 million to maintain Victoria's livability and improve our natural environment; \$444 million to crack down on crime, boost emergency services, improve access to justice and help keep Victorians safe; and \$1.1 billion for projects across provincial Victoria.

The Victorian economy is strong yet again. The government is helping to keep it that way by looking after the needs of businesses, big and small, through \$1.4 billion in tax cuts, as I said before. We will cut payroll tax from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent. There will be a further 10 per cent cut to WorkCover premiums.

There will also be \$167 million in land tax cuts. This builds on the \$823 million in land tax cuts in last year's budget. These cuts will bring the reduction in land tax since the government came to office to a total of 13 per cent. These reforms mean that most Victorian businesses with site values between \$400 000 and \$3.4 million will now pay a lower rate of land tax than is paid in any other Australian state.

I will summarise our record of tax cuts: there have been payroll tax cuts, there have been land tax cuts, duty on non-residential leases has been abolished; financial institutions duty has been abolished, duty on quoted marketable securities has been abolished, duty on unquoted marketable securities has been abolished, duties on mortgages have been abolished, duty on bank account debits tax has been abolished and business rental duty will be abolished by 1 January 2007. The rates of stamp duty on property transfers remain unchanged.

Payroll tax and maternity leave exemptions were introduced to apply from 1 January 2003. That is a good record of what this government has done in providing relief from taxes on businesses. The government has a sense of obligation to assist the business community of Victoria — and the wider community — so that it can prosper and create jobs that Victoria desperately needs. These cuts mean real savings for Victorian businesses. With these cuts added to the many great initiatives this government has introduced for Victorian businesses over the years, we are helping businesses around the state to face challenges they meet in the national and global economies.

I will talk about the important issue of Geelong. As a member for Geelong Province, every year I stand up in this place and say that Geelong has yet again received record amounts of money from the budget.

Mr Lenders — The Bracks government loves Geelong.

Hon. J. H. EREN — Absolutely; and we have seen that, because the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Geelong has secured a high proportion of the regional budget because it needs it. Geelong is the second-biggest city in Victoria, and there is no doubt that there is a population boom down there and a lot of investment activity going on, which is very good to see. I think the government can foresee the growth, and it is obvious that that investment is very wise.

I am glad to see that the government has listened to the people in my electorate and delivered heavily yet again. There is too much to talk about here, but I will give it a go. Schools in our region are obviously major winners. We have a major boost through this budget. There is the \$300 School Start bonus for prep and year 7 families, but schools themselves in the Geelong region will also get funding boosts with several major multimillion-dollar upgrades. Just going back to the point about the \$300 School Start bonus for children starting at prep and in year 7 — —

Hon. Andrew Brideson — Are you going to accept it?

Hon. J. H. EREN — I am fortunate enough to have gone through that stage of getting my kids through prep and so forth. I am not eligible for any of it. I went through all that myself. Having had five children, obviously we have been very busy getting kids through school. I know well how ordinary Victorians are affected when their children start prep and year 7.

Hon. Andrea Coote — You are getting \$1500. You could go on a holiday with that.

Hon. J. H. EREN — If they were triplets, maybe, but unfortunately they are all staggered, so they are not all eligible. The Leader of the Opposition in another place said that the School Start bonus is a cheap political grab and pork-barrelling, but I think he needs to understand that that money will go a long way towards covering some of the costs that are involved in parents having children starting off in prep and year 7. I think the bonus is very important for ordinary Victorian families who are struggling. The \$300 will go a long way to assisting parents when their children are starting school.

I have already mentioned some multimillion-dollar upgrades to schools in my electorate. There is \$5 million for the Newcomb Secondary College, \$2.9 million for Grovedale Secondary College, \$3.6 million for North Geelong Secondary College, \$2.38 million for Manifold Heights Primary School, \$1.9 million for Herne Hill Primary School, \$500 000 for Torquay P-9 School for planning and design and funding for the future at Western Heights College. It is interesting to note the \$5 million going to Newcomb Secondary College, which has been a long time coming. It is good news for that area.

As far as health is concerned, Barwon Health will share in \$30 million to further improve outpatient waiting lists, and \$25 million will be spent in Grovedale to build a 108-bed aged care facility, which is very good news. The facility is certainly needed in the area, which demographically has an elderly population. Other project funding in the Geelong region includes \$2.6 million allocated towards a \$3.6 million Country Fire Authority facility in Ocean Grove. Again that is welcome funding for the area.

Roads and transport infrastructure are important issues in the Geelong region, as they are to the whole of the state, and that is why the Bracks government has allocated \$10.6 million for duplication of the Midland Highway between Anakie Road and the Geelong bypass and \$6 million to upgrade the same highway between Geelong and Bendigo. Some \$21.1 million has also been set aside for the Barwon Heads bridge project to ensure that once a decision about the bridge has been made the work will be able to commence immediately. There is also \$1.2 million in planning money for the Geelong transit city development. There is a lot of excitement about that, so we are eagerly awaiting — hopefully by the end of the year — progress on those works to see how they will impact on the city of Greater Geelong.

In other words, the Bracks Labor government is looking after the Geelong region. I am pleased to support this budget and look forward to hearing from my fellow members how this budget will help their electorates and regions in the same way it has mine.

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — I am pleased to rise today to make my fourth contribution to debate on budget papers, given that this is the fourth year I have had to endure and suffer a Labor government budget of the sort it spews out each year. It is not necessarily the budget that worries me every time; it is the glossy brochures and the documents. I think this year would have to go down as the winner of the Spin City achievement award, because there are

literally reams and reams of paper going into the record number of press releases upon press releases. Obviously these announcements had already been in the pipeline. I know that one letter was sent to various businesses, and a range of people have been very annoyed by the taxpayer-funded junket used to spread the message.

I have one here from the Premier of Victoria dated 30 May. It is addressed 'Dear proprietor' and is headed:

Making Victoria the best place in Australia to do business

It says things like:

The 2006-07 budget includes:

Further substantial land tax relief ...

I think any small or medium-sized business would look at this and use the paper where it probably best deserves to be used, because we know this government has a history and record of continually applying an additional land tax burden. Despite the facts, the Premier and the government have the gall to send out this piece of paper declaring that there has been substantial land tax relief. I think that would smack of hypocrisy to people in business who are trying to make ends meet, particularly with the overburden this government has imposed on them.

There are other issues in the letter which I will not go into, but do not worry, because there are new measures to cut red tape for businesses by 15 per cent. This is in the document. It says:

New measures to cut red tape for businesses ...

And it is signed by Steve Bracks and John Brumby. But how are they going to introduce new measures to cut red tape? This is *Yes, Minister* stuff. Page 15 of budget paper 3 has the heading 'Reducing the regulatory burden', and guess what, taxpayer: you are about to get slugged \$42 million so this government can save money. Some \$42 million is going to be set aside by this government over the next four years to save money. Does anyone on the other side of this chamber — anyone in government — understand how stupid that sounds? Do they have any understanding that to spend \$42 million to save money is *Yes, Minister* madness?

The reality is that government members will not save money. They will continue to put their snouts in the trough and rip their fingers into the pockets of taxpayers, as I have said time and again. They will strip out any notion of opportunities for investment that Victorians would like to make. It is no wonder that on

every separate indicator we see Victorians are leaving Victoria, leaving their businesses and going elsewhere. Why else would Queensland be one of the growth states? New South Wales has overtaken Victoria in manufacturing. South Australia has taken huge leaps and bounds. Export markets are now going into Western Australia.

The only interesting thing to note is that although the manufacturing sector is one of the largest sectors in this state and the largest employer group in Victoria, there is very limited information or commitment by this government to actually assist and provide support to the sector. Page 17 of budget paper 3 talks about protecting Victoria's workers. The government is going to blow \$8.8 million of taxpayers money on fighting the federal WorkChoices scheme. It is setting up another office to attack the federal government. What it should be doing is saying—

Mr Lenders — We are setting up an office to protect vulnerable workers. There is a bit of a difference.

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA — The minister talks about setting it up, but he is prepared to blow \$8.8 million. It is not his money; it is taxpayers money. It is GST money that has been returned and which the government continually uses. It is going to blow \$42 million on saving money. It is just pathetic.

I heard the rhetoric from speakers on the other side who said that this is the best budget and that the only great Treasurer before Mr Brumby was Paul Keating. Every time I hear it and I am eating, I almost gag. I cannot believe that members on that side of the chamber believe that Paul Keating — the former federal Labor Treasurer who brought in the recession we had to have, who had tens of thousands of people thrown out of their businesses and who brought in high interest rates and high unemployment — was the best. But wait, government members say that Mr Brumby is better. Oh, my gosh! If Mr Keating was the best and now Mr Brumby is better, heaven help us.

The one thing going for this Treasurer is that at least he did not serve under the former Guilty Party; he did not serve under the Cain-Kirner government. Members will remember the joke back in the early 1990s: 'What is the capital of Victoria?'. The answer: 'Two cents'. What did the former Labor government leave us with? It left us with a \$32 billion debt back in 1991–92. The reality is that that is where we are heading now. This is the same budget and the same people who are operating it. If you look at the ministers in this government, you will see that, apart from one or two, they have all served in

some capacity as a ministerial adviser to or worked closely with the former Cain-Kirner Guilty Party government. Their learning base has really been the period that brought Victoria to its knees in the early 1990s. It worries me that budget documents that we have today again reflect that.

When the government came to office, government expenditure was \$19 billion. On page 9 of the financial estimates in the 2006–07 budget it states that the government is expected to spend \$32.125 billion. We have seen huge expenditure increases but have we seen improved delivery of services? That is the point. When we talk about delivery of services and look at what has been delivered, do we see better outcomes in hospitals? No. Do we see better outcomes in services to our schools and literacy standards? No. Do we see an improvement in transport delivery? No. The reality is that even with its spin and rhetoric this government cannot counter what is occurring in the community.

Mr Hall raised the very important point of the reaction of the Victorian community — the taxpayers out there, who realise that after seven years they are being hoodwinked by government. I was trying to work out where Mr McQuilten's speech was going. He was talking about coal, he brought out pieces of coal — hopefully in a few million years it will turn into a diamond for him — and he made a statement about mirrors. 'We need more mirrors for solar', he said. I cannot disagree with him, but rather than speaking to the opposition he should go into the caucus meeting room, because it is full of smoke and mirrors. That is what this government is delivering with this budget — smoke and mirrors.

The government is driving down Victoria with this budget. It has no clear strategy. The government knows it fell into office in 1999 — and it continues to fall about. The harsh reality is that the government fell into office in 1999 with no plan and no agenda and did not know where it was going. It inherited a very prosperous situation but has not done anything with it. Mr Viney should realise that it has failed in every sense.

I note that in budget paper 4 there is a net result from transactions of \$316.8 million. This government, however, was hoping to get \$600 million from the sale of Snowy Hydro Ltd. My calculations are that \$300 million minus \$600 million means the government is about \$280 million short. The reality is that the government cannot deliver on what it promised. The budget papers mention that the government is looking for the \$600 million. It has no money whatsoever for providing the repairs to all the schools it intended to repair. Those promises are just hollow statements now.

The repairs that it promised to deliver to schools are not going to occur. Knowing as I do the history of the previous Guilty Party Labor government, I believe it will probably drive this state back into debt because it cannot manage what is occurring here.

The government has a record amount of money coming in, yet it has already started to spend money it has not got. It has already committed \$600 million that it did not have. Now that has been taken away, what is the government going to do? In its pre-election splurge it has already promised \$150 for parents of schoolchildren now and \$300 next year. That splurge will go straight into the pockets of parents. I suggest strongly that that should have been dealt with differently. The government cannot buy votes the way it is trying to. Next it will be setting up beer halls down the road so it can get votes that way. That is how desperate it is.

The government has a huge number of spin doctors out there involved in everything it does, and you need only look at the budget and all the rhetoric that came out when it was released to see them at work.

Hon. J. H. Eren — It is a great budget!

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA — I find it hard to believe that Mr Eren thinks this is a great budget. The government is going to spend \$42 million of taxpayers money to save money. I think that is magnificent!

Honourable members should look also at appendix C of budget paper 3, which is headed 'Discontinued outputs and/or measures.' I love these appendices, because every year this government tries to hide its incompetence. It tries to hide the fact that it cannot have outcomes that look bad. What happens is all the spin doctors sit around and go through the outputs and look at how they are measured, and if they are not happy with a measurement, it is discontinued.

For example, in the Department of Education and Training there were output measures for the middle years, later years and so on. It looks at the percentage of students assessed at various levels. The reality is that the results are below par, they are sitting at around 80 to 82 per cent. Rather than continuing this measurement, they will get rid of it; it will not be there next year to see. Parents do not need to worry about that; they will not know what the level is. We know we have the lowest literacy levels in the country, so the government removes the statistic. It destroys it.

The Department of Human Services is a classic. One performance measure is of 24-hour emergency

departments. We know they have been hammered. The government came into office in 1999 saying that it would fix the health system, even though later on it said, 'No, we did not say we were going to fix it'. My colleague the Honourable David Davis quoted that minister, which rightfully put her back in her place. The government is going to remove the measure because it is too sensitive. The government knows it has failed on that output so now it will remove it.

There are pages and pages of discontinued performance measures. That shows things are not as good as the government says they are, that they are pretty bad in the state of Victoria. The reality is that what the government is prepared to do is spend literally tens of millions of dollars — in fact \$80 million — in the lead-up to the state election, which is just an outrage. I am glad that Victorians tell me about the outrage they feel when every night they have to suffer a deluge of rhetoric and spin from this government.

The budget has been delivered. I have grave concerns that in the longer term under this government and this administration Victoria is going to go further and further into the black hole. People who were ministerial advisers are now ministers, and all I can say is the quicker we get rid of the mob on the other side, the better off Victoria will be in the longer term.

Hon. J. G. HILTON (Western Port) — It gives me great pleasure to make a brief contribution in response to the budget. My contribution will be brief because I know many other members want to speak on this fantastic document. If I could first of all congratulate the lead speaker for the opposition, Mr Rich-Phillips, because it would be very hard to speak for an hour on a budget which has been so universally praised. He made a valiant effort, particularly given that his health was not the best, but I would like to take issue with him on a couple of points he made.

These same points have been reiterated by every other opposition speaker. First of all, let me speak about the government's decision to negotiate with Transurban over the payment of the concessionary notes. Mr Rich-Phillips drew a comparison between the discounted cash rate which was applied to the valuation of the concessionary notes and the rates of interest Transurban will pay on its borrowings to pay out the concessionary notes. A discount cash rate is an attempt to value, in present day dollars, receipts which may not be due for many years. In this case some of these receipts are not due until the year 2030. Nobody knows what will happen in that time; in fact it is a possibility that Transurban may not exist as a business in 2030.

These concessionary notes are tradeable instruments. My understanding is that the discount rate applied to these notes was in the order of between 11 and 12 per cent. The government negotiated a discount rate of 9 per cent and was able to book a profit on these concessionary notes of approximately \$150 million.

The other criticism which Mr Rich-Phillips made was on the return of capital by the Transport Accident Commission to the government. It is my understanding — and this was mentioned briefly at the breakfast briefing last week at the Windsor Hotel — that an independent review of the TAC was commissioned, and the review recommended that the TAC had more capital than it required to run its business. It therefore made the decision, which is entirely appropriate in my view, to return the capital, which was in excess of its requirements, to its major shareholder, which of course is the government.

Such a decision is made regularly by commercial businesses, and I fail to see why this should be considered in any way inappropriate. The TAC is a very well-managed organisation. It has a fine board and, may I say, a fine minister. It is operating as a business enterprise should, and I can see no problem with that.

Another issue mentioned many times by the opposition during this debate on the budget papers relates to the fact that we are withdrawing from the Snowy Hydro Ltd sale and creating some sort of black hole. This argument was addressed very well by my own good friend Mr Pullen, but can I say absolutely, with total conviction, that there is no black hole. The ongoing improvements to our school buildings will continue. Victoria remains committed to the remainder of the school building program, but it will, as the Premier has said in the media, take place over a longer time frame — 5 to 6 years as opposed to 3 to 4 years.

The budget brought down by the Treasurer forecast a surplus of \$317 million for 2006–07, and surpluses averaging \$316 million over the following three years. The budget forecast did not take into account any estimated returns or proceeds of the proposed Snowy sale. Therefore there is no impact on revenue estimates. The budget has already provided \$150 million in funding from the sale to be spent on modernising 23 schools, building new and replacement schools, and a big boost to schools maintenance. The fact that the sale is not proceeding bears no impact at all on these projects. The work will go ahead. This has already been factored into the budget estimates.

I also wish to comment on the fact that we are going into debt. Great play has been made of the fact that we are returning to habits of previous years. The debt level has been raised, I believe, to \$4.5 billion. It has been suggested that in some way this is something out of the ordinary. The level of debt will rise, and the debt is serviceable. The debt as a proportion of gross state product is very low by international standards. The rating agencies, which are assured by the main arbiters of the level of debt, have absolutely no problem at all with the increased level of debt. In fact, as Mr Eren is wont to say, 'AAA — here to stay!'

The agencies themselves have said that this present budget actually entrenches Victoria's AAA rating. If the debt is used to provide infrastructure, and the debt levels can be serviced, that is an entirely appropriate use for debt. We are not using debt to fund recurrent expenditure; we are using debt for investment growth — and surely that is how it should be.

If I could just make some brief comments about my own province of Western Port. A significant investment has been made in the schools. Pakenham Secondary College received in excess of \$6 million for the fourth stage of its major upgrade, bringing to over \$12 million the amount that has been received by that school over the last few years. There were commitments made to other schools in my electorate which I would like to describe. The Dromana Primary School received approximately \$1.7 million for its second stage, and the Boneo Primary School received money to replace temporary classrooms with permanent facilities. Over the years since I have been in this place there has been a significant investment in education facilities; in fact, it has been one of my great pleasures to be part of a government that values education, realises that the future of our state is based on our children and puts money into schools, which will obviously benefit all our communities.

I would like to again make a very brief comment on the fact that some members in this place have tried to mount a critique of the budget, which is in stark contrast to the contribution made by the Leader of the Opposition in the other place. I watched the Leader of the Opposition make his speech in reply to the budget. In my view it was a mixture of platitudes, motherhood statements and what our American friends would probably call fortune cookie wisdom. He had nothing of substance to say, and yet this was promoted as his launching pad for the state election in November. If that was the launching pad, I am afraid that the rocket never got off the ground. The final contribution to the debate by the Leader of the Opposition in the other place was that he wanted Victoria to shine. I have absolutely no

idea what that means, and I suspect neither does he. Until the opposition actually brings forward policies in this place and puts some ideas in front of the Victorian people, I can never see it occupying the government benches. It will remain as it has been for the last three years — crying in the wilderness, unloved and certainly unwanted.

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — I rise to make a contribution to the budget debate. I want to look at it in a couple of parts. One is the big picture and the other concentrates on the electorate I represent with my good friend and colleague the Honourable Damian Drum.

First I commend our spokesman on Treasury and Finance issues, the Honourable Bill Baxter, on his budget speech. I thought he did an excellent job. He covered it from the broad perspective, he covered it from the country perspective and he covered it with a deal of vision. May I also comment on the contribution of the Honourable Geoff Hilton. As always, I enjoyed hearing him speak because he obviously puts a fair amount of thought into what he says. I thought his spirited defence of the government's going into debt, which is concerning a number of the constituents I talk to — I suppose it is a fear of the old days when the debt was overbalancing our state's capacity to survive; it is not so long ago that that debt was incurred, and it certainly took some managing to get this state out of trouble — and his efforts to bolster up the image of a government that is managing was commendable. However, I must say that I cannot agree with it. I must admit I was slightly envious when I heard Mr Hilton reel off a few of the statistics from his electorate, because I could not find as many in mine. Perhaps I will touch on those sorts of things as I go along in this contribution to the debate on this year's budget.

From a rural and regional perspective it appears when you look at any part of this budget that it stops at the tram tracks, and I think that is disappointing. I know that is a much-used term, but I cannot think of anything better to describe it. I think the government lacks vision and provides no innovation for country Victoria. There was an opportunity there to build for the future, and that opportunity was missed in this budget. It will certainly be required to be picked up in budgets for the future, whoever may govern this state.

When I think about the budget, I think about the big issues. The big issues are health and education. Those issues are always at the forefront of people's minds with a budget. I think it is at the forefront of their minds in respect of the household budget, health and education — how they can look after their families.

When I had a look at the budget I thought, 'What is in it for education in Mildura, for the capital building program or the refurbishment building program?'. I had a look at the map that was provided in the glossy brochure here. I looked at the north-west of the state and found Mildura South Primary School in the Sunraysia area. That was the only thing I found on this map, which was a great disappointment to me because there are other schools in the area. It is an expanding area — an area that requires good education to ensure that our children who are our future get that good education. Students may wish to go on to tertiary education. Some may wish to go to institutions where they can live around the Sunraysia area and certainly some may wish to go to city environments, but they need a good education. For example, as I said, the Mildura South Primary School has done well. It will get its gym and its library built and its administration area refurbished as well. Good luck to it. The school has done very well.

The other day I visited the senior college, which is desperately in need of refurbishment of its hall. It is a big school that is doing an excellent job under good management — the principal, his staff and the teachers — and doing particularly well. It was a practical request. They said, 'Have a look at the hall'. That hall definitely needs refurbishing. There is a real need, particularly as it concerns the environment and location of those schools. The list goes on and on. As I said, I had a bit of a look at the map that was supplied, and apart from the Mildura South Primary School there really was not much in it for education.

I had a look at the map and it said, 'Mildura rail upgrade'. I thought that was terrific. Do members know that the last time I heard that was 2000-01, when the government trumpeted \$96 million for the standardisation and upgrade of our state's railway lines? Which one was going to be done first? It was Mildura line. When was it going to be finished? Was it in 2002? That is a fair way in the past, isn't it? Not a spike has been driven, not a thing has been done in relation to that railway line. But in this government's budget papers there is no mention of the \$96 million. I do not know where that has gone. I would not have a clue. But all of a sudden there is a \$53 million announcement. I thought to myself, 'That's good, perhaps it is on top of the \$96 million'. I will bet it is not, because if it were that would leave plenty of money for the standardisation and upgrading of the railway line. A few answers need to come from the government.

Where has the \$96 million gone? Is the \$53 million on top of it, or is it going to be the same as it was in 2000

and 2001, when the government made election promises, and so did the member for Mildura, about the return of the passenger train. The return of the passenger train is a long way away. When I eventually delved through the details in the budget — and it takes a bit of doing; if anyone goes through those papers and finds exactly what they want, they deserve a medal — I found it very difficult to find what I wanted. Eventually we got through it, and we found out that there is nothing on the radar for the passenger train.

By 2010 the line will be upgraded, but will it be standardised? There is not a whisper — not a whisper — about standardisation. We have been caught before, and you cannot blame us for being cynical in this area. Last time around we were told the line would be completed in 2002, now we are told it will be 2010. But it will be an el cheapo job. It is not going to be standardised; it is simply going to be upgraded. Upgrading on its own is a good thing, let me be positive about that. If we can get the speed on that line increased, if we can get the axle weights up and if we can get a 20-hour turnaround from Mildura down to the ports and back again, it will create enormous efficiencies. It would be great if we could do that, because there could be one locomotive and two sets of wagons and we could have an efficient turnaround — something we cannot have now. It now takes 17 hours to travel down, and that is an absolute disgrace, particularly when a region like Sunraysia is such an enormous producer.

We are disappointed that this is all just moving along at a snail's pace. We would have sooner seen the government bite the bullet, fulfil the promises it made during the election campaign and standardise the gauge and upgrade the line to world-class standard so we can simply get on with the job. I imagine the passenger service would then be returned, but as I said before, there is not one mention of it in this budget.

Let me talk about a vision for transport. If that line were upgraded and standardised in the future, the commonwealth and state governments could look at linking up — as the commonwealth does with its AusLink program — the ports around Australia. A very good visionary program has been established in Mildura through a number of committees for a new rail line to link up with the transcontinental. It would give not only Sunraysia but other parts of Victoria good, efficient, practical access to all the ports around Australia, particularly Darwin. The efficiency of double stacking could be used on that new line if it were put into place. That is a visionary proposal, and people have laughed at it, but you should never laugh at vision. This is a thing worth doing, and if strong leadership is

displayed, as no doubt it will somewhere along the way, some future government will grasp that issue.

We did a bit of research to find out what we are getting with the upgrade. We have learnt that one in four sleepers will be replaced — one in four. It is not much of an upgrade is it, really, when you come to think of it. But they will be dual-gauge sleepers, so the line can be shifted over later. It sounds okay, but I think in about 2004 the commonwealth said that it would look at putting \$20 million into the system for standardisation. Now it is being asked to contribute to something that is not standardisation. It is not; it is simply an upgrade. I suppose the commonwealth will now have to wrestle with the process of what it gets for its money. If every fourth sleeper that goes in is dual gauged, what about the other three if the system is standardised? It will certainly be a big process to standardise the line beyond where this government will go.

I turn to the issue of the horticulture industry in Sunraysia. It is having a really tough time, and most segments of it are battling very hard indeed. The Mildura Rural City Council and the Shire of Wentworth in New South Wales have joined together, and I think it is great that they have. They have put in place a regional horticultural task force and are looking for some money from state and federal governments to put together a package that will ensure the sustainability of those industries right through into the future. An amount of \$1.5 million over three years is allocated in this year's budget to horticulture, and that is good. I am not sure where it is going, because there is horticulture all over Victoria. I guess we will have to sort that through. During the difficult times we have called for some cash grants for our growers, and those grants have got them over the hump. That has happened in the past in tough times, but that is not available now. All those issues roil around, but there is no recognition of them in this budget.

In the little time I have left I must mention the fact that in the budget I could not find — and I am sure it is not there, unfortunately — money for irrigation upgrades. An amount of \$20 million was put in the pot a number of years ago, and it has taken years to settle. But if a decent amount of money had been put in the budget on an annual basis, and that was leveraged up with the commonwealth money, which we would hope would be available, as well as some resources from the irrigators — such as what has been done in South Australia with what is called the 40-40-20 scheme; 40 per cent from the state, 40 per cent from the commonwealth and 20 per cent from the irrigators — we could have a first-class irrigation system in our area in the years to come. This would be welcomed by the

industry, particularly if the government made a commitment that over a number of years that money would be available so that everyone would know where they are going in the future.

I spoke briefly about this issue on the adjournment debate last night. The Sunraysia Community Health Services, which is a tremendous organisation and does a fantastic job, has had a site earmarked for six years and has had plans in place for virtually three years, but no funding is in this year's budget — not even a start. It is a \$17.5 million project, and I would urge the government to at least give it a start so that when the next budget comes around it can finish off this much-needed project very quickly.

To conclude I will talk about primary industry. I think the government thinks primary industry is a joke. We have a budget of about \$32 billion, and what does primary industry get? — \$45 million. A piddling \$45 million — to a productive area that this state has come to rely on to create employment, export dollars and good, clean, green food for consumers not only in this state and other states, but also internationally.

This budget is a disappointing budget. It does not show the vision I was hoping for. I believe there is enough cash there to do that. Certainly savings could have been made, but I do not have time to talk about those.

I am disappointed. I think this is a city-centric government. I just wonder what it has in its back pocket as we run up to the election in November this year. I certainly hope that future budgets have more vision and sustainability than this one.

Hon. C. D. HIRSH (Silvan) — I would hate to have such a negative attitude to life as I have been hearing from the opposition this afternoon. To hear Mr Bishop adopt such a negative approach to something that is full of excitement — —

Hon. B. W. Bishop interjected.

Hon. C. D. HIRSH — Does he have any neighbourhood houses in his electorate?

Hon. B. W. Bishop — The ones that are left, after the government walked away?

Hon. C. D. HIRSH — This budget is a great and extremely exciting budget. It finally brings to fruition some of the issues I have been passionate about for years. I start off with the neighbourhood house commitment and the programs in the budget for neighbourhood houses. Since the 1980s, when we fought to get any funding at all for neighbourhood

houses, many of which operated on a voluntary basis, many women have gone into education, have had some sort of social life and training, and have developed confidence through being at a neighbourhood house, and many women have started their further education there.

The budget provides for an increased coordination program, a program of modernisation grants and additional funding for a whole range of wonderful improvements in neighbourhood houses. I will read out the names of the ones in Silvan Province — my colleague is not about and has not been about this week — and the work they do deserves recognition. I am so pleased that the government has recognised the work of neighbourhood houses throughout all of Victoria. Why members of the opposition do not acknowledge this program I do not know, because I think they should.

In Silvan Province there is the central Ringwood community house, Coonara in Upper Ferntree Gully, Donvale living and learning centre on Springvale Road and the Glen Park community centre. The Kallista community house is a wonderful place that I have visited on many occasions. The mountain district learning centre, formerly the mountain district women's cooperative, is in The Avenue, Ferntree Gully. I have been very much involved with that for many years. I am a shareholder in that organisation and have worked for it. At one stage I took classes in literacy. I also taught Victorian certificate of education psychology to a group of women. It is a great place.

Silvan also has the North Ringwood community house, the Olinda community house, Orana neighbourhood house in Wantirna South and the Park Orchards community house. I am also very familiar with the Selby community house and the Basin community house, which is a great organisation. There is also the Warrandyte neighbourhood house and Linkage Incorporated in the Yarrunga community centre in Croydon Hills. These days they are such an important component that community or neighbourhood houses form the heart and core of a society. I remember back when Gough Whitlam was the Prime Minister and these organisations were first funded. The Nunawading neighbourhood house, which was one of the first funded under the Whitlam program, is not in my area now but it was at one stage.

Another fantastic initiative of the Bracks government in the area where I live, although it is not quite in my electorate, is the \$10 million for a state-of-the-art centre for training in sustainability and environmental design at the Wantirna campus of Swinburne University. That

campus was the first Outer Eastern College of TAFE, opened in 1984 by then Premier John Cain. I was a member of the council of that college for a number of years. It is a great asset and has been an enormous resource. It provided the first post-secondary education available to any student in the outer east. The new programs that will be introduced will be of great benefit to training the work force particularly in the Yarra Valley and the industrial areas in Silvan Province. It is a very exciting and innovative program.

Another great centre of community has been recognised by this government in the second stage grants worth nearly \$400 000 to help local communities repair and restore war memorials and honour rolls. What other organisation provides that community core and focus for a group of people? It is perhaps a different group of people from those who use a neighbourhood house — although I think you would find some crossover.

Again, it is very exciting to see the community war memorials and honour rolls in Silvan Province, which go back to World War I, being restored because in fact they are the physical expression of the community's gratitude to those people who gave their lives in two world wars and in other wars. The Boronia Returned and Services League will get \$7000 to relocate the memorial to the other side of the hall to accommodate the increasing numbers attending services. All members will be aware of the increase in the numbers of people attending services at community RSL memorials right throughout the state. That is a great program. The relocation of the Boronia memorial will also improve disabled access to the memorial and the gardens around it.

An amount of \$7000 will be provided to repair the paths and stairs around the Warrandyte memorial cairn to make sure that there is safe access for all those attending commemorative services. In addition, landscaping works will be carried out to the memorial grounds around the cairn. The Croydon war memorial and the Upwey Belgrave RSL war memorial will both be funded for repairs and so on. All that will be in addition, of course, to the \$150 000 announced earlier to redesign the clock tower memorial garden in central Ringwood. That is part of the Ringwood transit city project. Given the increased attendance at memorial services, that great memorial in Ringwood needs upgrading — and it will happen. Those two programs, the neighbourhood house program and the RSL program, epitomise the Bracks government's commitment to community.

In general development, the Ringwood transit city project will get \$2.7 million. I know the Maroondah

City Council is very pleased with that. The mayor is most excited about the money which will, of course, ensure that a new station and interchange are built in Ringwood and that they fit the streetscape and public amenity works on the Maroondah Highway. Currently the undergrounding of the power lines in Ringwood Street are going ahead as a preliminary to doing the work for the Ringwood transit city project. That is a very exciting project. Once EastLink comes through as well, Ringwood will again be a very easily accessible community, residential and commercial centre for the outer east community.

The commitment to seniors is great, with public transport concessions, including free public transport on Sundays. I hope that when I retire at the end of the year I will qualify for a Seniors Card. On a Sunday I will be able to pop into town and go to the pictures or visit the art gallery.

Hon. B. N. Atkinson — Is your pension not sufficient?

Hon. C. D. HIRSH — If I can qualify for a Seniors Card, I will be happy to have one.

Hon. B. N. Atkinson interjected.

Hon. C. D. HIRSH — I said if I qualify.

Hon. B. N. Atkinson interjected.

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

Hon. C. D. HIRSH — Another community-based commitment that is absolutely exciting is that the government has acknowledged universities of the third age (U3As) and is putting in \$1.25 million to upgrade their facilities, particularly in areas of need. One of the main problems that the U3As have had for years has been difficulty in obtaining somewhere to hold their classes. I congratulate former Senator Jean Meltzer, who does a wonderful job in coordinating the U3A programs. I congratulate her on her lobbying and the fact that U3As have been recognised and provided with very good funding indeed.

Another initiative for seniors is further assistance for pensioners and concession card holders who are purchasing a new home. In recognition of the increasing price of housing there will be an increase of \$50 000 in the price of a home that will qualify for a full exemption from stamp duty. The threshold for a full exemption on stamp duty will increase to \$300 000, up \$50 000, and the threshold for a partial exemption will increase to \$400 000.

Another budget initiative is for a group of wonderful volunteers who we could not manage without in the outer east, and that is the Country Fire Authority. The money to help renovate the Bayswater CFA station is again a wonderful initiative for a group of people who work hard for the community in a voluntary capacity. The Bayswater CFA and the Ferntree Gully CFA are great social places when there is not a fire to attend.

We fought for the upgrade of the Queen Victoria Women's Centre when the former Queen Victoria Hospital moved and became the Monash Medical Centre in the 1980s. Victorian women managed to have one tower retained for use as a women's centre, and \$1.9 million, with a \$700 000 one-off expenditure in 2006–07, will be provided to upgrade and provide improved external access, to complete a women's rest garden and to upgrade the eastern courtyard. It will require some funding, so it is a great initiative. It is a community organisation of volunteers.

In the Yarra Ranges \$3.4 million will be provided to upgrade the cultural centre in Glenfern Road, Upwey. That will be exciting also.

In the time I have left I want to say something about the government program of moving younger disabled people out of nursing homes, which is another important initiative. There are many other initiatives, but I wanted to focus on community volunteerism in my contribution. Moving young people out of nursing homes is again a great government initiative. I hope when the opposition is going through the budget it can see some of these wonderful community commitments and programs and give it the credit it deserves.

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — The essence of this budget for me is found in one of the performance measures buried in the budget papers, and that performance measure is that the government brand must be on all events and the expectation of achievement is 100 per cent. This government has a preoccupation with spin and public relations and government by press release, yet a lack of accountability of the executive to this Parliament, as we saw yesterday demonstrated by the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

This late budget process is also an indication of that lack of accountability. To blame it on the Commonwealth Games is a nonsense. Delaying the budget process means there will be a more limited scrutiny of the budget and its outcomes by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, which is unfortunate when the Parliament is unable to effectively give full deliberation to this budget, in part because of

the time constraints that have been imposed in this house, and certainly the process adopted by the PAEC.

This government is not really focused on outcomes or results, it is more focused on achieving that 100 per cent branding of government events. That is really the highlight of the government's approach rather than any focus on things such as the length of hospital waiting lists, dental services that are at breaking point, inadequate public transport services, overruns and late delivery of major projects, such as the very fast trains, the Southern Cross railway station or the synchrotron.

This government triumphantly boasts that it spends more dollars than any other government — that is, when you distil out what the boast of this government is. It is not surprising, given that today it spends more than \$32 billion compared with the \$19 billion that was the state expenditure when it came to office in 1999. Taxes and charges for each Victorian have risen by \$900 in that same period. The government is awash with money as well as with GST revenue. When this government needs a solution to an issue, its approach is to simply throw more dollars at the problem and not to review the delivery of services or their effectiveness and efficiency.

There are some very good things in this budget which are appropriate. In particular I am pleased to note some points which are listed in the budget overview with regard to healthy futures. I welcome the spending on mental health research, on funding for the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, the new Australian regenerative medicine institute, and also welcome some initiatives and increased benefits to senior citizens. Some of the other support packages have been highlighted by government speakers, including the government member who preceded me, Ms Hirsh. A number of those programs are very important.

Ms Hirsh highlighted the community houses program, and I certainly appreciate the additional funding they have been given. I point out that it has been indicated to me that they have had a need for greater funding than has been provided, but I certainly acknowledge that the government has gone some way towards addressing the issues.

I welcome, in the context of my local electorate, the funding that has been provided for the redevelopment of Karoo Primary School and Antonio Park Primary School. Karoo Primary School has been bursting at the seams with the numbers of students in that Rowville area. I am sure there is a need for another school in that area but the government clearly decided that was not a course of action it wished to take. Having done that, the

government ought to have given some attention to the needs of schools in the Rowville area earlier if it expected them to cope with the numbers of students in the area. Karoo Primary School has certainly borne the brunt of the high numbers of schoolchildren in the area, and its facilities clearly do not meet the needs of that school population. I am pleased to see that being addressed in this budget.

However, from the point of view of my electorate, what about Blackburn High School whose facilities are certainly in need of a major upgrade? What about Vermont High School? It has been allocated some funds towards the first stage of a redevelopment but is waiting for confirmation from the government that it might proceed with the second stage of that redevelopment. What about Blackburn Primary School and a number of other primary schools in my electorate which are also in serious need of significant upgrades to buildings that long past outlived their lives? And what is the future of a school like Nunawading South Primary School, which is a rather small school that seems to be on the wrong end of most government funding decisions?

Where are the solutions to traffic congestion in my electorate, particularly the Whitehorse Road and Springvale Road intersection and the railway crossing on Springvale Road? I note that the government is proceeding with grade separation at Middleborough Road. I note also that the government has indicated its enthusiasm to undertake grade separation on the Dandenong railway line. I wonder why the government has not shown similar interest in the Lilydale and Belgrave lines, particularly the Springvale Road railway crossing and other crossings on Mitcham Road, Blackburn Road, Heatherdale Road and Rooks Road, which all might have been addressed with an undergrounding program which has been sought by the Whitehorse City Council. It would make sense in terms of road safety. It would reduce road congestion throughout my electorate and would also achieve improved public transport services.

I am also concerned about the level of road congestion and the lack of public transport services in the city of Knox. I note particularly that this budget does not deliver a tram extension to Knox City. I note that it does not give any hope of a railway connection to Rowville. I note also that where there are bus services provided, the SmartBus on Springvale Road has in recent times had some problems, and I worry where that might go on the future.

I also note that the \$38 million provided for the renal dialysis service at Box Hill Hospital is a rather modest

allocation, well short of the \$500 million announced to local newspapers in election year hype for a total rebuild of this vital hospital.

I note the election primer of \$300 to parents of prep and year 7 students and how indiscriminate and untargeted it is in terms of the actual needs of parents, a point also made by the Australian Education Union. I note the increased dollars for domestic violence programs, which I welcome, but I see that those funds are going to big agencies and we are defunding some of the effective smaller services such as that at Mitcham community house, which I have spoken about before. I note that we are also effectively reducing support to Life Education Victoria by capping its funds at \$400 000 a year, the amount it received back in 1999, although it is doing a very important job in terms of drug and alcohol issues in schools and has been commended by schools in my area. Whilst there are funding pinches for these sorts of organisations, the government is able to provide \$6 million to implement the human rights charter. I wonder just how benign that process is in terms of assurances to the Parliament.

I note that there is no stamp duty reform. I note that the government is scrapping first home buyers' grants. I note the increasing taxes on new subdivisions. All of these are cruelly hurting first home buyers and young people. I note that budget allocations to local government do not reflect the windfall gains this government has had from GST and other revenues from property. I note the draw-down of \$600 million from the Transport Accident Commission. The Honourable Carolyn Hirsh said that she was happy about the hostels that would allow injured young people to move out of aged care facilities, but I think there was an opportunity with funds from the TAC and a real correlation in funding to build more hostels to accommodate young people and separate them from aged care facilities, which are clearly inappropriate.

Given my small business portfolio, I point out that most businesses and business organisations will hardly be cheerleaders for this budget once the smoke has cleared. The yawning chasm between rhetoric and reality is quite significant. It is absurd to propose spending \$42 million to cut waste and red tape when there are no demonstrated savings from that. There is a wishy-washy figure suggesting that it will achieve a 15 per cent reduction in red tape, but there is no apparent saving associated with that 15 per cent.

We have WorkCover and payroll tax savings, but businesses will not pay fewer dollars as a result of those changes in this budget; they will simply pay less than they would have had those initiatives not been taken.

Those cuts represent an opportunity cost to government and the budget but no real saving to small business. In fact if wages growth is running at around 3 per cent or the consumer price index figure, a 2006 payroll that currently stands at \$700 000 paying 5.25 per cent after the threshold premium will incur payroll tax of \$7875. If you allow for that 3 per cent wages growth in 2007, taking that payroll to \$721 000, once you have reduced the rate for payroll tax to 5 per cent under the government's much-vaunted initiative, you find the tax is \$8550, which is \$675 more in real dollars than a business will have to pay. So that initiative is really not a saving for business at all.

The WorkCover premium cut of 10 per cent produces a similar result. Wages bracket creep means that businesses will pay the same or more, and government coffers certainly will not miss out, as even the Mr Pullen admitted in his contribution to the debate yesterday evening.

The land tax changes are more bandaid, short-term measures than reform. As an example of what industry associations are saying I have a media release from CPA Australia that says:

While land tax cuts can provide some relief in the short term, CPA Australia believes that more fundamental reforms are necessary to address the problem permanently in the longer term.

So say I.

There are no reforms on stamp duty, and there is a \$1.4 billion deceit by the government in terms of its headline about advantages for small business when the figures do not actually add up for the 2006-07 financial year unless you include projections over the next four years. That is hardly a proper way to address the reform package.

While we talk about reductions in red tape, \$21 million has been provided to create the Growth Areas Authority, a new statutory authority involving more red tape, and \$7 million has been provided to the Office of the Victorian Workplace Rights Advocate — further red tape. I do not believe it will actually address some of the objectives the government ideologically believed were important in establishing that office.

Businesses are also concerned about a return to debt — at least \$7.1 billion dollars over the next four years. Like Mr Pullen in his contribution to the debate last night, I have no objection to moving into debt to fund long-term infrastructure. I think it can be a prudent funding mechanism — in fact I would have funded the Scoresby freeway from debt funds because I think that

would have delivered a better result. I think that would have been an appropriate investment in infrastructure, and I think taxpayers would have been better off long term had the government taken that option. But I certainly have some concerns about the nature of the government debt profile and what the government's intentions are moving forward.

Whilst there has been a significant boost to the level of capital expenditure by this government, it is pretty hard to look around Victoria and find where the dollars have been spent. I think that the figures have been fudged a fair bit.

I indicate to members of the house — and I am very short of time, as members would appreciate — that because of my sport and recreation portfolio I certainly welcome the funding commitment to the soccer and rugby ground at Olympic Park and the redevelopment of that prime sports precinct, which is one of the world's finest. I certainly acknowledge and welcome today's announcement, which will result in support to the Australian Football League clubs in Melbourne to improve facilities and which will also open the facilities up to further access by the community.

At the same time I have a real concern about the lack of commitment to sport and physical activity in schools that is apparent in this budget. Whilst I appreciate that the government has the Go for Your Life program, my experience is that that program has been far more about advertising for and spending dollars on the promotion of the government than it has been on actual activities. It is my experience that VicHealth has been far more effective than Go for Your Life in its targeted funding of sports and physical activities in the community. This budget continues to lack some of the accountability and transparency that we would expect from the government given its rhetoric. Perhaps, as the rumour would have it, it is a good time for the Treasurer to retire.

Hon. R. G. MITCHELL (Central Highlands) — It is an absolute pleasure to rise and speak on this budget. As previous members on this side of the house have said, this budget is a commitment to meeting the state's challenges and is an investment in Victorian families.

The Treasurer, John Brumby, has done a magnificent job over the last six budgets, and this budget is a further example of the quality of the man and his abilities to manage the state's finances while delivering services right across the state, no matter which part of Victoria people live in. We know this budget builds on the work of the government during the last six years. It provides a large investment in infrastructure across all areas of

government. There are some highlights— and I say ‘some’ highlights because you would need hours to go through all of them to see how many have been delivered by Treasurer Brumby — in this budget.

One is the \$4.9 billion record total estimated investment for capital works, with \$12.6 billion to be spent over the next four years. This can be considered in contrast to the seven dark years of the Kennett government, when only \$1 billion per year on average was spent across Victoria, 99 per cent of which was never spent in regional Victoria. Another highlight is the rebuilding of the Royal Children’s Hospital. It is in the city but is of vital importance to people in my electorate and right across rural Victoria. Everyone knows that the hardest time of your life is when you have a very sick kiddie, and it is very important for all families across the state to have somewhere new, clean and safe to take their children.

Savings to Victorian businesses over the next four years will be around the \$1.5 billion mark. The savings are due to cuts to payroll tax, land tax and WorkCover premiums. Government members hear some members of the opposition bleating that those cuts are not enough and that we have not done the right thing, but government members just have to sit here and say, ‘Let us compare apples with apples’, and look at the opposition’s credibility in terms of taxes and charges when it was in government. The opposition when in government was the high tax expert. In seven years the former Liberal-National party government abolished only one business tax, yet this government has continued to deliver tax cuts and WorkCover premium cuts throughout the seven years of fantastic government Victorians have had under the leadership of Premier Steve Bracks.

All Victorian provincial areas are big winners when it comes to education. There is \$170 million over four years for new schools, new TAFE facilities, regional skills, a renewed focus on improving our literacy standards and a new School Start bonus for prep and year 7 students. When new books, new bags, new school uniforms and all those things that students need for school have to be bought it is an expensive time for people in regional areas, particularly for those on farms who are struggling to make a quid. The \$300 bonus per child that will go to those families is a fantastic initiative. There is a \$62 million school and TAFE construction and equipment program that applies across the state. There is \$9.1 million for replacement schools at Newcomb Secondary College and the east campus of Traralgon Secondary College. Regional Victoria will also share in a \$32 million initiative to build at least four new technical education centres at Ballarat and

Wangaratta, and there will be \$48 million for teaching equipment in TAFE institutes across the state.

No matter where you look in the budget, you will find that regional Victoria and provincial Victoria are big winners under the Bracks government. More people are moving to rural areas, and we want to make sure they get world-class treatment close to home. The government is investing another \$116 million to upgrade hospitals right across the state, including services at Rochester, Warracknabeal, Geelong, Shepparton and Ballarat, which will be major winners under this budget. Investing in services in regional Victoria is a major priority of this government. We have always said that health and education are our no. 1 priority. We can safely say that we have been able to deliver that over the last six years.

Regional transport is also a big winner. There will be a \$32.8 million boost to country bus services in the public transport sector, including a \$5 million upgrade to regional bus interchange facilities and \$8 million for a rural school bus program to improve shelters and interchanges. When it is minus 2 degrees Celsius when you get up in the morning, and the poor kids have to walk down to the bus stop half a kilometre away and stand in their school uniforms freezing to death, it is a great thing to be able to give them some shelter.

It was interesting to listen to Mr Bishop, who unfortunately has scurried back to his hole and is not in the chamber, talk about the Mildura railway line. I say good on this government for doing something about it. When has Mr Bishop ever apologised or accepted the responsibility for putting Mildura in that position by closing the line in the first place? It is easy to sit in this house, whinge, complain and carp, but Mr Bishop should stand up and say, ‘Yes, we made a monumental blue by selling off our railways’. We will never hear that response from The Nationals because that would involve a bit of ticker — and we know that there is no ticker in any way shape or form in any of those members from The Nationals.

Our primary industries also get a big tick in the form of another \$44.6 million for some fantastic programs, such as the \$31.6 million of initiatives to assist Victorian farmers that was announced in our *Moving Forward — Provincial Victoria* statement and was delivered in this budget. There is also \$3.2 million over four years to boost recreational fishing and tourism, which was also announced in *Moving Forward*.

Tourism and fishing are two things that are vitally important to my area, particularly in Murrindindi, which is the trout capital. We all love going up there to

fish, and I like going up there with the minister when we release fish, but unfortunately he never lets me put a couple of those nice big 5 or 10-pound trout into my boot to take home.

Hon. E. G. Stoney — Just go and catch one.

Hon. R. G. MITCHELL — I have tried that, but it is not that easy.

Hon. E. G. Stoney — You get a licence first.

Hon. R. G. MITCHELL — I have my licence; I have definitely got that. Murrindindi enjoys the benefits of fishing and tourism, and it is good to see a further boost to them.

I would like to pick up a point made by Mr Dalla-Riva. He was talking about the economy and made some comparisons between the federal and state economies. Today we see in the *Age* that the way the federal government is going — the shining light of the Liberal movement up there — it is looking at losing control of our current account deficit because our ballooning current account deficit is our biggest risk, and our liabilities are unsustainable. The *Age*'s business section has the headline 'Top credit rating could be lost'. Our credit rating is at risk because our debt keeps rising while the rest of the world funds our spending.

Mr Dalla-Riva wanted to compare the Hawke-Keating government with the Howard-Costello government. I say that any time he wants to bring that on, he should bring it on because I will be happy to defend the Hawke-Keating government. You only have to look at what happened. Keating left Costello in what is basically the golden circle of economics — 5 per cent wages growth, 3 per cent productivity and 2 per cent inflation. When Keating left office trend productivity was twice what it was under the Fraser-Howard regime, but now it is back to 1.25 per cent, so we have 3.5 to 4 per cent for inflation. The governor of the Reserve Bank, Ian Macfarlane, knows it, and that is why he keeps the screws on our economy. After 10 years of Howard we have a trend of productivity falling from 3 per cent back to 1.5 per cent.

There is also the issue of our national debt. Do opposition members remember 1996? They were carrying on about the national debt and had their big debt truck — \$199 billion. Now we would have to use a B-triple if we could find a road that it would be able to run on, because it is out to \$473 billion — 51 per cent of our gross domestic product.

Hon. B. N. Atkinson — How much does the government pay?

Hon. R. G. MITCHELL — Mr Atkinson can say we have paid off the government debt, but we did not pay it off. His party sold off Telstra and used that money to cover its bets, but the Liberals are not protecting Victoria and not protecting Australia's economy in any way, shape or form. All it needs is one debt to be called in and we fall over, because the federal government has not invested in wages or in infrastructure. The federal government and the state opposition have done nothing, so 51 per cent of our economy is now borrowed overseas.

Hon. B. N. Atkinson interjected.

Hon. R. G. MITCHELL — We are never going to have a run out of that, are we, Mr Atkinson? We can talk about interest rates. The Liberals run around saying, 'Look at us! We brought in low interest rates'. When John Howard was Treasurer he had the highest interest rates in history — 21 per cent back in 1982. And what did he leave? He gave us a huge recession and 11 per cent inflation. When Keating was in office interest rates were 18 per cent, but there was only 1 per cent inflation. Under Howard there was stagnant growth and inflation.

If you look at the average percentage of people's income spent on their home mortgages, you see it is far greater now than it ever was. But opposition members are having trouble counting past four, because that is the number of fingers they have on one hand. They just do not understand it.

As I said, I am always happy to talk about that, because under Howard we have gone backwards, and we are falling into a position where we are borrowing, borrowing and borrowing, and running the risk of ruining our AAA credit rating. I think only our Treasurer is bright enough to see these things, and not the federal Treasurer. That is why the budget overview document is headed *Victorian Budget Overview — Meeting the Challenges*. That is what this budget is about, because we know it is not going to continue. We cannot keep relying on mineral sands and gold booms to fund our economy.

This budget has shown vision and sets a plan over the next 10 years to ensure that Victoria is safe, and the Treasurer should be commended for that. It would be nice if some of the negative nannies on the other side actually opened their eyes, had a look and accepted that what is being delivered to this state is growing the whole state. Unlike members of the opposition, we are not just sitting in the centre of Melbourne where opposition members were most comfortable.

I am very pleased to be part of the government and to be able to speak on this budget in positive terms, because it is a very positive budget. It is good for Victoria, it is good for families and it will keep us going forward in a positive manner for years to come. I commend it to the house.

Hon. DAVID KOCH (Western) — I look forward to making my contribution to the budget papers. I have to say that it is only a week since the budget was brought down and the Treasurer was being touted by his own as being the world's greatest. That took place on budget night in the company of the Acting President and also Mr Mitchell. We were certainly led to believe that this was an unbelievable budget, something that this country had never seen before, and that it was extremely well handled and put together. We soon came to appreciate that the spending spree was under way. We saw state debt on the increase from \$1.5 billion back up to \$7.1 billion — a great increase of \$6 billion, or over a four-year period something in the order of 375 per cent.

There has been an oversight in all the budget responses I have heard from government members. They all seemed to be in the position of not being allowed to mention the \$600 million black hole, which has certainly made an absolute mess of the budget papers as presented by the Treasurer. To date we have had no indications as to how these funds will be replaced, if they are replaced at all.

We have heard people speak in this house time and again in relation to tax relief being offered to business in the form of land tax reductions and WorkCover premium reductions. There have been some indications that we will have some relief, but, as in the past, we will see that quickly worked over with bracket creep, particularly in those two areas. Of course all those Victorians wishing to buy their first homes are still competing against huge, excessive stamp duties on the purchase of those properties, which is not seen anywhere else in Australia. In many ways there is absolutely no way I could support this budget as being something extraordinary, nor could I see the Treasurer as being the world's greatest.

There is absolutely no doubt that members of school councils are concerned about the school upgrades that were promised under funding that was flagged to come out of the privatisation of the Snowy hydro. Concerns have been expressed by parents about the selective \$300-dollar donation to students in prep and year 7. They have been saying on talkback radio that the bonus discriminates against parents of students who do not happen to fall in those two years. The bonus has been

seen as a vote winner, but from the talkback radio I have been listening to I would say that in many cases where families have students outside those two age groups it could be a vote loser.

Regrettably, I also believe that Victoria is becoming a laughing-stock amongst other states in relation to this black hole that has been created but has not been accommodated. Unfortunately the Premier is stumbling all over the place. He is not quite sure how to handle the situation since the Snowy Hydro Ltd announcement, and I must admit that the Treasurer is not much better. He is indicating that we will just move some of these school developments out a little bit, and I guess that will turn out to be like the rail standardisation that has been deferred indefinitely in Victoria.

It is a really good example of this government cooking the golden goose before it has collected the eggs. That is something that only Labor could achieve. Is he a great Treasurer? I think we will let others be the judges of that at the ballot box.

As in the rest of rural Victoria, there are certainly no winners in Western Province. In the South-West Coast electorate there is the unlikely redevelopment of the Port Fairy Consolidated School and Warrnambool College. There is the gain at Branxholme of a police residence. There have been major gaffes involved with a lot of the re-establishment and redevelopment of police stations. In most cases communities with outstanding police stations have police residences that regrettably are at the point of being condemned, and Branxholme is certainly a case in point. If we can get a new residence in the South-West Coast electorate, I think that will be a great advantage. In Ripon there will be a new Country Fire Authority station at Skipton. Like the situation at Thornton, that one is long overdue. Lots of schools in the Ripon electorate were looking for maintenance schedules that would improve the situation for many of the children and families across the area — and possibly we will see a lot of these deferred. That is where the spending stops in Western Province, because there is nothing for Polwarth and nothing for Lowan.

I think it is important also to look at an overview for regional Victoria, which probably says the same thing. Spending on primary industries has been slashed by an unbelievable 28 per cent. In actual fact, this should have been the other way around. As we all know, primary production is one of the key drivers of Victoria's economy. It is no wonder the people on the ground in regional Victoria are battling. There are certainly no funds for extension, inspectors or research. It is just crazy. This government is certainly city-centric, and I

think the numbers with respect to Western Province reflect that.

Local government has missed out completely. There is an urgent need for local roads and bridges. Libraries have again been ignored. Quite obviously literacy is not important in regional Victoria. Child care and neighbourhood housing has just been brushed over. The cost of upgrading local roads has been dumped on industry and developers. There are some examples in Western Province. Iluka, with its mineral sands, has done all the road infrastructure out of its own pocket and has not been supported by the state government as a new industry to Victoria. There are no breaks for Iluka. The forestry and dairy industries are also meeting these steadily increasing costs as they move their products around. We know that water for Ballarat and Geelong remains an urgent problem, and the Wimmera pipeline seems to be taking forever, with no finite costs or completion dates having been established. Who is going to pick up the shortfalls as the expected costs escalate? We all know that there will be shortfalls because this government and its agencies are always over time and over budget, due principally to growing red tape and union demands.

Hospital redevelopments continue to be ignored in Gippsland in the south-east and particularly at Warrnambool in the south-west, where the community was certainly hoping for some funding for the redevelopment of the Warrnambool hospital. There are no further funds being made available to support on-time delivery of health services, including for doctors, physiotherapy, podiatry or public dentistry. In south-west Victoria public dentistry now has waiting times of up to 66 months. On some occasions the brilliant hospital at Portland, in a community that desperately needs accident emergency services, does not have sufficient staff.

Nothing has been made available in the budget for rail or road upgrades. Greater funding just seems to be non-existent. It is abysmal that the community in regional south-west Victoria has to put up with this, especially given the recent history of repeated accidents in which loss of life has occurred, especially at level crossings.

Turning to my portfolio roles, the racing industry has been scratched, with no greater funding opportunities being offered. Many of the initiatives that have been mentioned in the budget papers are not new money; they have just been relaunched again and again. Some that have been relaunched now for the third and fourth time include track developments, the reuse of water, horse ambulances that have not been delivered, and the

list goes on. The only thing we have in the racing budget are funds that were an entitlement due to the increased licensing fees on electronic gaming machines coming across in total, whereas last year there was a shortfall of \$1.16 million. That takes up most of it. The balance of the Living Country racing program will be completed in its fourth year, as the budget papers have always suggested. This is unlike the Liberal Party's policy, which offers real opportunities through the return of unclaimed wagering to the racing industry. This government offers nothing beyond a repeat of earlier announcements.

My other portfolio area of forestry has also been ignored, with only consumer price index increases being put in place. Foresters who elected to accept departure packages and were short-changed have not been offered any assistance to ease their plight. It is an absolute disgrace that the families that were encouraged to seek other careers and move away from the industry have not gained that support. That is another burden they have to manage after having spent the packages afforded to them. They now have a tax commitment they were not initially told they would have.

This is not a budget that will receive rural Victorian support. As the dust settles I am sure people in the metropolitan area and the business communities will also see that they have been conned. This is a poor outcome for a state that has seen record taxation growth of over 75 per cent in the last seven years, taking total state revenue from \$19 billion to \$32 billion. Governments of all persuasions took 150 years to gather \$19 billion, but the Bracks government juggernaut has broken all records and perfected the art of growing state revenue to the current dizzy heights that has never been seen before — and it has just squandered the spoils. Unfortunately celebration after celebration has got in the road of real growth and new infrastructure.

Regional Victorians are onto this government, and they are sick and tired of being conned out of their rightful share of state revenue time and again. Shame on the Bracks government. It has again squandered a great opportunity for all Victorians. This government has elected to take the road of more state debt and mediocrity, and it is now recognised as the slumber party of Victorian politics. Bring on November 2006!

Sitting suspended 6.31 p.m. until 8.02 p.m.

Ms MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — It is my pleasure to speak on the state budget papers, and as I am the Parliamentary Secretary for Justice I will be focusing my contribution on budget measures which relate to the

justice portfolio. The Bracks government has a strong record in delivering on a modern and accessible justice system for all Victorians. The Victorian government is also committed to providing for a safer Victoria and safer communities, and in this respect we are on track to delivering 1400 extra police by the end of this year. In addition we are currently in the midst of the biggest ever police station building program in Victoria's history, and most importantly our approach to tackling crime and the causes of crime is producing results, with Victoria currently experiencing a crime rate 16 per cent lower than the national average. The budget allocation in the justice portfolio builds upon this very strong track record of ensuring that Victoria remains a safe place to live.

Our priority in this budget is in addressing issues such as how the justice system deals with victims of sexual assault — for example, the budget initiatives recognise that sexual assault cases can be difficult and time-intensive for the justice system. It also recognises that victims of these cases require specialised assistance and care to ensure that their trauma does not remain an ongoing one. The budget provides for Mildura and Frankston to benefit from \$6 million in funding for a multidisciplinary sexual assault centre to bring together sexual assault police investigation units, new female forensic nurses and victim support services.

Recognising the difficulty and specialisation required by legal staff in dealing with these matters, \$2.7 million will also be provided for the Office of Public Prosecutions to create a specialised unit to deal with sexual offences. Money is also being allocated to train four new forensic nurses and a coordinator who will roll out training for a further 16 nurses and ensure that victims can be examined by qualified female medical practitioners within the crucial 24-hour period following an assault. In addition to this, a new specialised sexual assault list is being established through the provision of a new County Court judge and a new magistrate.

Treatment programs for juvenile sexual offenders will also benefit with \$1.4 million allocated to reducing reoffending. In addition the budget provides for \$3.8 million for further counselling and support for victims of sexual assault, including money for an expanding crisis care response, training for counsellors and support workers with a special focus on young children under 10 years of age. Victoria's first child witness service will be funded through a \$3.2 million allocation over four years, which is intended to provide support to children who are required to give testimony in a trial and in particular deal with the very traumatic experience that that might prove to be.

In this morning's debate on the motion moved in opposition business I spoke about this government's commitment to reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in our criminal justice system. This budget invests \$26.1 million towards the Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement II, which will further expand the Koori court program, extend the mentoring, liaison and support programs and provide capital works to support the establishment of an indigenous residential diversion facility in Gippsland.

This budget also prioritises additional resources for our police and emergency services to enable them to combat issues such as terrorism and organised crime, and \$109 million has been allocated to provide things such as new surveillance equipment, a ballistic safety vehicle and increased security in our courts and in our prisons. This allocation includes, for example, \$4.4 million being spent to ensure that not only does Victoria Police have access to a special ballistic vehicle in emergency situations but also that its members have the latest in personal security with ballistic vests. Victoria Police's security intelligence group will receive \$3.5 million for extra staff and resources to assist it in collecting intelligence and preventing potential terrorist attacks. The police will also be provided with an additional \$6.5 million to fight electronic crime — e-crime, as it is referred to — and \$25 million will be provided for extra security on public transport, including the maintenance of security cameras.

In terms of other initiatives in the police and crime prevention area, \$1.2 million has been allocated to deal with the graffiti problem, building upon a very successful program that seeks to turn offenders into cleaners at graffiti hot spots across Victoria. Some of that funding will also be made available to community groups. Victoria's prison system will be provided with \$8.6 million for an upgrade at the Grevilla unit at Barwon Prison to create a new 27-bed high-security unit, and additional funding of \$12.1 million will be set aside for new staff and equipment to escort terrorism and organised crime suspects to and from court and remand.

I referred earlier to our historic police station construction program. This budget continues to build upon that with a major \$13.9 million complex in Lilydale and upgrades, extensions or replacements for police stations at Yarra Junction, Hastings, Boolara and Branxholme. These upgrades and developments are part of this government's commitment to ensuring that the police have adequate resources and facilities to do their job properly. They are part of a massive program

to deliver refurbished or new police stations at more than 145 locations worth more than \$280 million.

This budget also allocates \$1.2 million towards planning for a new police headquarters, contributing to a cohesive and focused approach to policing in Victoria. The Bracks government has continued to modernise the police force's IT infrastructure with a previously announced \$59 million being committed over four years for replacing the ageing law enforcement assistance program (LEAP). The commissioner for law enforcement data security, who will oversee this new database, is being funded with \$7.2 million to ensure that it and the LEAP database are properly overseen and monitored.

This government has never apologised for the fact that it has sought at every opportunity to make our roads safer, and as a local parliamentarian I have never sympathised with people who have come into my office to complain about speeding fines, because speeding fines are a voluntary contribution. They are a contribution people only pay if they break the law and endanger their lives and the lives of others on our roads. As part of our Arrive Alive strategy and many others, this budget continues our efforts to make our roads safer. The budget allocates \$702 million in this respect. In particular it will improve the ability of the police to test drivers for drugs, to maintain the integrity of the traffic camera network and to reduce speed fatalities throughout the state.

Through the budget Victoria Police will be able to purchase another of the highly successful drug buses which enable it to conduct roadside drug testing. In previous debates in this house we have talked about the new measures, many of us have commented on the alarming increase in the number of drivers who are taking prohibited substances, either in addition to or instead of alcohol, and we have looked at the very high risks to drivers themselves and to other road users of people engaging in this dangerous behaviour. These additional measures will seek to reduce the risks that some drivers are taking at the moment. In addition the budget commits \$4.3 million to allow 100 police cars to be fitted with car video systems, which will provide further protections for Victoria's police while on patrol, and \$138 million will be used to improve the network of digital traffic cameras and ensure new levels of transparency by providing additional verification and testing.

The budget also allocates funding for additional benefits to our fire and emergency services, recognising the essential role they play in ensuring our safety during bushfires and other natural disasters — or manmade

disasters, as some of these bushfires are. An amount of \$32.4 million will be spent on improving Victoria's fire and emergency readiness, including fuel reduction burning, volunteer training, upgrades to fire stations and the new Jaws of Life for the state emergency service to use when dealing with situations such as car accidents.

The final area that I want to touch upon concerning the justice portfolio relates to the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Bill, which is currently being debated in the other house. An amount of \$6.5 million has been allocated over four years for the implementation of the charter, should it be passed by this Parliament. The budget specifically provides for a community education program, human rights training for government departments, and more resources for the Equal Opportunity Commission in anticipation of the public sector being required to implement the charter from 1 January 2008.

In conclusion, the budget builds upon the government's commitment to provide for safer communities. It builds upon increased resources, police numbers, new police stations, better equipment and better technology, and also puts in place legislative mechanisms to tackle crime.

The budget deals with many other areas that will benefit Victorians and their families, and I note that families and constituents in my electorate will benefit greatly by the boost in funding to education, health and transport. I am pleased in particular with the improvements in public transport as they relate to increased rail capacity in the northern metropolitan region and will address train bottlenecks on the Hurstbridge and Epping lines to enable more people to use public transport in the future. I am also very pleased with the increased emphasis in this year's budget on the training area, which will enable more and more young people in my electorate to receive adequate training and increase their employment prospects in the future.

The Bracks government has put together a financially responsible budget. It has struck an appropriate balance. Personally I do not have a problem with the government borrowing funds in order to provide adequate services to the community. The budget is delivering on improved services to Victorians, which is something that all Victorians expect. I commend the budget to the house. I am certain that it will continue to ensure that Victoria prospers, that Victorians have good and adequate services, and that Victoria remains a safe place to live. I commend the budget papers to the house.

Hon. C. A. STRONG (Higinbotham) — On rising to speak on the motion to take note of the budget, I must say that it has been interesting that this government clearly prides itself on its ability to spin and sell things. But it certainly has not done too well in my local area of Bayside.

I will start by quoting from the *Bayside Leader* of 5 June which, when talking about the budget, starts by saying:

It was lean pickings for Bayside in the 2006-07 state budget ...

It was lean pickings indeed. The same article goes on to say:

Bayside mayor Derek Wilson said the Municipal Association of Victoria had advised Bayside council the state budget contained no substantial increases in funding to cover the costs of providing roads, public libraries, maternal and child health services and infrastructure.

So it was lean pickings indeed for Bayside. Of course the quote of all quotes from the *Bayside Leader* was that from Spiro Agnew, my friend Noel Pullen, who is reported as saying the government had also done:

... a remarkable job with land tax ...

It has done a remarkable job on land tax, and I think most people in Bayside understand that it has done a remarkable job on land tax. I am sure that is a quote that will haunt Mr Pullen for some time.

I want to talk a little bit about land tax, because as part of doing a good job on land tax the government has said it will reduce land tax by \$167 million over four years. But over that same four years the government will collect \$3.1 billion in land tax. Of the \$3.1 billion in land tax it is collecting, it makes a great virtue of handing back \$167 million. What an absolute farce! And, let me tell you, people out there know it is a farce. The people on that side would have been better off giving no reductions than a paltry reduction like that, because it is counterproductive. At the end of that four-year period the government will still be collecting more in land tax than it is collecting today. Everybody knows it is a con trick, and nothing infuriates people more than being conned. That extra it will be collecting in the forward estimates is based on the property valuations of today — and we all know that the property valuations in four years will be totally different and that the government will be collecting billions of dollars more.

I will quickly turn to some of the macro figures. It needs to be said that the budget is not an appropriate way to judge financial performance, because it is a

forward projection and it can be manipulated and changed. It is a plan, as distinct from the actual financial reports which report the actual situation and are real. Let me deal with some of the actual situations, because they are quite amazing.

In 2003-04 this government had a surplus of \$3.76 billion. That was a surplus of \$2000 per household. In 2004-05 it had a surplus of \$3.96 billion. That was \$2260 per household. In 2005-06, for which we have not had the end of year financial report but we have the financial report for the three quarters, the government is showing an outstanding surplus of \$4.8 billion. That is \$2700 per household. Although in 2005-06 it made a surplus of \$4.8 billion, what is it giving back? Page 33 of budget paper 2 trumpets that it is giving back \$317 million. It has made a surplus and has taken out \$4.8 billion more than it needs, and it is giving back \$317 million. It is absolutely outrageous. These are unfiddled figures; they are actual figures and are quite amazing.

If we look at the extent to which budgets over the period — and I make this point quite honestly with no political motives — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. C. A. STRONG — I am serious. Members opposite should look at actual figures and not budget figures, because budget figures are projections; they have an element of spin. You cannot argue with actual figures; actual figures are real.

If members look at the actual figures for the actual surpluses the government has achieved over its seven budgets, as distinct from the budgeted surpluses, they will see surpluses have been achieved of \$13 billion more in actuals than the government projected over the seven budgets. That is real. You can fiddle a budget; you can put in all sorts of assumptions, but an actual is an actual, and the government has achieved surpluses of over \$13 billion more in the seven budgets than it talked about in its actual budgets.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Hon. C. A. STRONG — The Minister for Finance said it was not their fault they made all this extra money and so they have just blown it. I say the government has made that extra money and should have used it effectively. It should have given some of that back to Victorian taxpayers rather than the piddling \$317 million it is giving back out of the \$13 billion extra it has taken over that period. It is absolutely pathetic.

I turn to address quickly a few of the details of the budget which are interesting issues to dwell on. I refer to an illuminating chart which I have not seen before in the budget papers. On page 69 budget paper 2 has a chart which shows the extent of debt over the period 1995 to 2010. Interestingly it shows that in 1995 debt as a function of gross state product was something like 18 per cent. That is what the Kennett government inherited and reduced so that when this government came to power the debt as a function of gross state product was only 3 per cent. So the Kennett government gave this government an incredible flying start, to come into a growing economy.

Another thing that is worth noting as a macro issue — and this is not something that I am criticising the government about — is an interesting commentary on where the states are going. The chart on page 74 of budget paper 2 shows the change in the revenue coming from Victoria's own-source taxation compared to that coming from commonwealth grants. In 1996-97, something like 43 per cent of our revenue came from own-source taxation and something like 38 per cent came from commonwealth grants. In 2008-09 that will be massively changed and something like 47 per cent of our state revenue will come from commonwealth grants. That has very significant implication for state governments across Australia. Unfortunately — I say 'unfortunately' because I believe in the sovereignty of the states — I think we will become more and more creatures of the federal government because so much more of our revenue will be coming from the federal government. Many arguments have been had over many years about representation and taxation. Over the years the fact that so much of our money will be coming from the federal government will have ramifications for our Federation.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Hon. C. A. STRONG — Moving past the interjection of the Minister for Finance, who interestingly understands as few people do the scale of the money that is flowing into the state coffers and the extent to which that is deliberately understated in the budget and deliberately hidden in the financial reports, if members look at the huge amount of paper that makes up the budget documents, they will find it is not until we get to an appendix to budget paper 4 that they will get the third quarter statement of operation or the actuals for the state. They are quite amazing. As I said, the actuals — the revised budget for 2005-06 rather than the result that the government talked about when it introduced the budget about this time last year when it was looking at a surplus of \$324 million — hidden away in the back of the document show a surplus of

\$4.8 billion, about nine times more than the government said it would be. These are not my figures. They are here in black and white for anybody to read, but they are hidden away where nobody will read them.

I will go quickly through a table I have prepared. I have cleared the table with Hansard and the President, and I seek leave to have it incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted; see table page 2184.

Mr Lenders — Your outrageously exaggerated figures.

Hon. C. A. STRONG — These are not outrageous exaggerations; they are figures from the budget papers and the financial statements. I will read them out because they are interesting. In 2003-04 the declared planned budget surplus was up \$225 million but the actual surplus was \$3542 million, an increase of about 13 times. The table documents the extent to which the surpluses that are talked about in the budget are significantly different from the surpluses that actually have been achieved. I counsel all members on both sides to look at the table. This applies to members on the other side as well because probably the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance tell them that they have to be very careful because there is not much money and they have a surplus of only a couple of hundred million dollars. They should look at what the actual —

Mr Lenders — If we had that surplus, we would have spent it — with an election in six months!

Hon. C. A. STRONG — What you have done, Minister, is blown it — that is absolutely true.

Mr Lenders — We would have spent it!

Hon. C. A. STRONG — You have spent is all right; you have just blown it up against the wall. As I said, I counsel members to look at the actual results, as I have tabulated here, rather than the projected results.

Mr Lenders — Mr Hilton is blushing.

Hon. C. A. STRONG — A man in his position should blush. He should look at the actual results rather than just take the figures that are pumped out at budget time.

With those few comments and in the short time remaining to me, I will sum up by saying that, as I indicated, certainly in the bayside area the budget has not gone down very well. I put on the record that I do not believe that the state is at risk of becoming bankrupt or anything like that. I do not believe that debt is a

problem — because the government has so much money coming in. I believe that members of the government are mean and wasteful and that with a surplus of \$4.8 billion this year they are prepared to give back only \$317 million. With the iniquitous land tax the government is prepared to give back nothing. Its members are prepared to insult people by giving back \$167 million over the next four years, when the government is raking in \$3.1 billion. The government is giving back nothing — and, believe me, people will remember that!

The PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Carbines.

Mr Lenders — Finally some sense.

Ms CARBINES (Geelong) — Thank you, Honourable Leader.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms CARBINES — I am really pleased to speak tonight on the budget. I am absolutely delighted to speak in support of the state budget delivered last week by our great Treasurer, the Honourable John Brumby. It is a budget that delivers for all Victorians — all families and businesses, our young people and people who live in metropolitan Melbourne, in our regional cities such as my city of Geelong and in rural Victoria. As is clearly demonstrated by the budget delivered last week, the government is meeting the challenges facing our state. The budget has a record \$4.9 billion worth of investments in infrastructure projects — a huge investment in the future of our state. Importantly, the government has been able to retain the state's AAA credit rating, so that is a huge star for the Treasurer.

As a member for Geelong Province, I am really pleased with not just the statewide initiatives which all my constituents will benefit from but particularly the initiatives outlined in the budget that are specific investments in Geelong and the future of our great city. I would like to talk about some of those initiatives in the budget that I know my constituents will benefit from enormously.

The budget yet again demonstrates that the Bracks government's no. 1 commitment is education. It is the key priority for the government and has been from the time we were elected. In an attempt to turn around the degradation of state education under the former Kennett government we have invested hugely in state education, and this budget is no exception.

We have seen a significant investment in families as part of the education budget, with a \$300 bonus to be given to the families of prep and year 7 students from

the start of next year, and those families who have children in year 7 and prep this year will receive \$150. This is a great thing, because as anyone who has had a child start school, be it primary or secondary school, knows, there is considerable expenditure on the items that that child needs to start his or her school life, and the \$300 School Start bonus will make a difference and assist all families. That is a fantastic investment in the future of our state.

I was particularly pleased to see the \$500 new trade bonus that was announced in the budget this year. I live next door to a young man who is in his first year as an apprentice painter and decorator in Geelong, and he is doing it hard, because apprentices do not get very much at all. He is delighted to be learning on the job as an apprentice and looks forward to his future career as a painter and decorator, but I know Sean would have loved to have received \$500 this year to assist him finish off his apprenticeship. I am sure he will finish his apprenticeship, because he is a very dedicated man. We have the \$25 apprentice training accommodation allowance, which is up from a paltry \$9. These are all good investments in our young people.

In Geelong we have seen significant infrastructure investment in our primary and secondary schools, with \$5 million for the Newcomb Secondary College to upgrade its facilities. I congratulate that school, because it is a fantastic school dealing with children from the suburbs of Whittington, Newcomb and Leopold. The principal, Toni Sharkey, does a great job. Also \$2.9 million has been allocated to Grovedale Secondary College, a school that is not far from where I live. The principal, Jeff Cooper, has turned that school around; it is a fantastic state secondary college.

It was particularly pleasing to see the investment in North Geelong Secondary College. That college is a school where many of the new migrant families send their children. It has a fantastic program for new migrants and for refugees. We visited there a couple of weeks ago. My colleagues the Honourable John Eren, the member for Geelong in the other place, Ian Trezise, the Minister for Education and Training and I toured the school with the principal, Russell Elliott. The government has allocated \$3.26 million to upgrade North Geelong Secondary College, a worthy recipient of investment.

Some \$2.38 million was allocated for the Manifold Heights Primary School and \$1.9 million for the Herne Hill Primary School. Importantly we have seen significant investment in the future of Torquay Primary School. A key issue that the Bracks government has addressed is the provision of secondary schooling in

Torquay. We will provide secondary schooling from years 7 to 9 for Torquay Primary School, and \$500 000 has been allocated to that primary school to plan and design for the secondary provision at that school.

A school that is close to my heart because I used to teach there is Western Heights College. The budget allocated planning money for the future of that college, which is preparing an absolutely state-of-the-art plan to aggregate all its facilities on one site and provide incredibly progressive education for the students who live in the northern suburbs of Geelong. Last Friday we saw \$6 million allocated for Deakin University to redevelop its building to house about 1000 extra students in the health sciences area.

It is great to again see in Geelong investment in health. There is \$25 million for an aged care facility at Grovedale that Barwon Health is building. Grovedale is one of the southern suburbs in Geelong and is expanding rapidly, and aged care provision is surely needed in those southern suburbs. It is great to see that the government is investing in our human capital. In Geelong we were pleased to see \$850 million allocated to the Royal Children's Hospital, because when our children are sick in Geelong and needing acute care we go to the Royal Children's Hospital, so Geelong will benefit from that investment. I was very pleased to see \$30 million allocated across the state to address some of the critical issues confronting outpatient waiting lists, and I look forward to Barwon Health receiving an appropriate amount.

Victorians have said time and again — and Geelong is no exception — that community safety is extremely important to them so far as emergency services are concerned. We have allocated \$2.6 million towards a new Country Fire Authority facility in Ocean Grove, and that will be very warmly received by peninsula residents.

We have invested significantly in road infrastructure in this budget, and Geelong has benefited from that with \$10.6 million to duplicate the Midland Highway between Anakie Road and the Geelong bypass, which is much needed. We also look forward to the \$737 million upgrade to the Monash–West Gate corridor. The West Gate Bridge is a key issue for Geelong residents, particularly those who commute to Melbourne to work. It is a daily grind approaching the West Gate Bridge. We often listen to the radio to hear how the traffic is travelling, and it is bad luck if there is a breakdown on the approach to the West Gate Bridge because it means that you will not get to work on time. Upgrading that corridor is a timely investment, and I know Geelong residents and people who live in the

western suburbs and the south-west will benefit from that.

The budget also saw \$21.1 million allocated for the Barwon Heads bridge, which has been a contentious issue in Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove. How do you adequately provide a new bridge in Barwon Heads, where should it be and what should it look like? The jury is out at the moment. An advisory panel has been set up to give advice to the Minister for Planning as to what is the preferred option. If you ask 10 residents in Barwon Heads or Ocean Grove you get 10 different answers, but the money is there ready in the budget for whatever the option, and I am looking forward to that.

Something that I am very interested in, because I have been working on it as Parliamentary Secretary for Environment, is the Geelong transit city project, which is a plan to revitalise the Geelong activities area and the western wedge, is that the budget allocates \$1.2 million to plan for the Geelong transit city development. That is a welcome investment in our city, and I know that all Geelong people will look forward to the outcome of the planning work that will take place.

We have seen significant investment in businesses across the state. I have recently participated in the MPs in Business program run by the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I spent the day with Landlink in Geelong, which is a company that values land. It is commissioned by many municipalities across the state to prepare valuations for them. One of the key issues that workers at Landlink raised with me was payroll tax. They asked me, 'Do you think the Treasurer will ever reduce payroll tax?', and I said, 'Well, it would be great if he did'. Lo and behold, the next week in the budget we have a reduction in payroll tax, so I am really looking forward to seeing those Landlink business employees next time to be able to say, 'You asked; we delivered'. The rate of payroll tax has been reduced from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent. Another very welcome initiative of this government was the 10 per cent reduction in WorkCover premiums.

All in all it has been a fantastic budget across the state. It has delivered incredible infrastructure investment to my city of Geelong that builds on the investment which has taken place across our two terms in office. Right from the start we have made health, education, community safety and public transport key issues, and we have continually over the last six years and seven budgets invested significantly in those major areas that make a difference to ordinary people.

People say to us, 'We care about education. We care about health. We care about community safety'. We

have listened right from the start, acted on what we have heard and delivered many times. Indeed in every budget we have significantly built on our previous investment. I say well done to the Treasurer for delivering such a fantastic budget that will make a significant difference to the lives of the people in my city and across the state. We have been rising to the challenges that confront our state by investing significantly in our human capital, our people, and by delivering services that they care about. In this budget we have had a \$4.9 billion investment in our infrastructure projects across the state. On top of all that, the icing on the cake is that we have maintained our AAA credit rating. Well done, Treasurer Brumby! It is great to see this budget.

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) — One of the sad things about the Bracks Labor government is that its well-intentioned, honest members appear to be absolutely delusional and think this is a good budget. It is not a good budget. It fails to deliver a vision, it fails to deliver meaningful reforms and it fails to deliver infrastructure services. As a matter of fact it is only one week since the budget was delivered, but in that week it has sunk without trace in a black hole of debt and delusional spending, because any organisation that takes a capital payment and puts it into recurrent expenditure is acting unwisely. At this time last week the budget was premised on the receipt of the proceeds the state government expected to get from the sale of the Snowy Hydro organisation. That is gone, and we are left with a budget that has a \$600 million black hole in it. We are looking at what appears to honourable members on this side to be the beginning of the Cain-Kirner frights — the experience where debt compounds. The budget forecasts debt rises in the period ahead.

Mr Smith — AAA!

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN — I do not think the AAA rating it is going to stay because this is the beginning of a rerun of the Cain-Kirner experience. Mr Smith must get used to the fact that the Labor Party will be in opposition, because that is going to happen when the public starts to understand that this is a rerun of the Cain-Kirner early years of budget irresponsibility.

On 31 May the *Herald Sun* came out with an interesting editorial. I will quote a very small portion of it. It states:

Victoria needs a government with vision but given the big delays and cost-overruns dogging major projects taxpayers will hope for greater discipline.

Nor do they want money squandered on vote buying.

Watch this space.

On the day after the budget was presented the editorial of a major state newspaper said, 'We are not terribly impressed'. That is one interpretation of the editorial — and I think the paper got it right. An article in the same edition is headed 'Labor lays election nest egg'. I think that egg has very doubtful egg characteristics.

It is interesting that the budget expenditure is reported to be \$32 billion. In the coverage of the budget at page 4 of the *Herald Sun* of 31 May under the heading 'The key numbers' the budget cost is reported to be \$32 billion. It is not a long time — only seven years — since the budget expenditure was \$19 billion. Under the Bracks government expenditure has gone from \$19 billion to \$32 billion. I think honourable members should pause and ask themselves, 'Are we that much better off?'. I do not think so. I am certain of it. The difference between \$19 billion and \$32 billion is huge.

I can tell members that many of the constituents of South Eastern Province are not impressed with the expenditure. 'Where is the money going?', is the question I hear from time to time. I think it is a very good question. We are back to the Cain-Kirner experience. What has Labor done with the money? We do not know. We have not got much to show for it. We have not got any major project results or huge infrastructure investments, but we are paying a lot more.

As is explained in the budget, debt is set to rise from \$1.5 billion in June 2005 to \$7.1 billion in June 2010 — that is, a 373 per cent increase in just five years. Hang onto your hat! We are now into a Cain-Kirner style of irresponsible Labor spending. It is just beginning, but we are already on the roller-coaster.

We have a problem with law and order. Despite the promises and the rhetoric, we do not have enough qualified police officers in place. Victoria Police is a fine organisation, but despite the force's image and all the promises, this government has not delivered the proper level of law and order through police numbers on the ground. A sad aspect of the budget is highlighted on page 5 of the state budget review in the *Herald Sun* of 31 May. An article under the heading 'Fines on the rise' says:

Speeding drivers are expected to pay an extra \$100 million in police fines next year.

Budget papers forecast that infringement penalties will jump 32 per cent — up to \$416 million ...

One of the scary things about this issue is that this greedy, irresponsible, big-spending, high-taxing Labor government is expecting Victorian motorists to provide \$416 million in traffic revenue fines. Therefore this state government, contrary to what one would philosophically expect, hopes that many people will deliberately break the law so it will meet its budgeted number, which I think is far too high. I recall that in 1999, the last year of the Kennett government, actual traffic fines were less than \$100 million — I would be pleased to be corrected, but I believe that is the figure. This state government is pushing towards the half-a-billion-dollar mark — over \$400 million — for infringement fines. That is using speed cameras and other devices as revenue raisers; it has nothing to do with safety and is cynicism in the extreme.

This big-spending, high-taxing, irresponsible, Cain-Kirner style financial management we are now starting to see is based on pokies taxes hitting \$1 billion. This government is hooked on gambling, which is a big concern. According to the budget numbers gambling taxes now make up 9 per cent of the state revenue. That is indeed a worry, a problem and not a good look.

I wish I had more time to speak, but members in this chamber do not have adequate time because of the changes the Bracks government brought into the upper house. We do not get adequate time to properly represent our electorates because of the changes — not reforms — the Bracks government brought into the Legislative Council a few years ago. I would like to just mention the failures of this budget in relation to the constituents I represent.

Firstly, the increase in debt is statewide, which of course affects South Eastern Province. I am not happy about this, and many people have made comments about it. I think it is a black mark against the government. Members have spoken about transport. Public transport arrangements to enable people to commute between the Mornington Peninsula and parts of metropolitan Melbourne are poor. If you live in the Rye-Rosebud area and commute from the southern peninsula to the city, it is probably not possible reliably to expect to start work between 8.00 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. There is a very poor coordination of those transport facilities. I understand it now takes almost the same time — there is a few minutes difference — to go from Frankston to the city as it did in the steam train days. The timetabling is a disgrace and has not been addressed over a long period of time.

I am also concerned that there is no reflection in the budget of a philosophical vision for and stress on

councils to be more responsible. There is no real concern about the rate increases which have been talked about freely. The present government's lack of action and lack of fiscal control of some of the council procedures allows councils to charge whatever they want for parking. I think that is absolutely terrible. The press yesterday said the figure for the revenue that councils receive from motorists who use public space is now around the \$200 million mark, which is getting to be outrageous.

There is a subject I know a little bit about — not much — that I have mentioned occasionally: it is roads. I think the roads are a disgrace. There has been underinvestment in roads. If anyone can tell me that the efficiency, performance and reliability of the Monash Freeway is acceptable, I will not believe it. It is a slow-moving conveyor-style car park. It is a disgrace. I am tempted to raise the subject of the Monash Freeway in this house and talk about it from time to time because it is a disgrace. The link between Monash Freeway and Western Port Highway and the abject failure of VicRoads to act responsibly and protect the efficiency and capacity of Western Port Highway are both disgraceful. This state government needs to be condemned. It is true that in the budget there is some funding for some duplication from the Cranbourne-Frankston Road intersection south to North Road. That is to be welcomed. It is good, but it is not enough. It is far too little too late. In terms of the Thompsons and Halls roads intersections and the lights at Moreton Bay Drive, which have to come out because of safety issues, the performance of this state government through its agency VicRoads is an absolute and total disgrace.

Page 19 of the February 2001 edition of the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria magazine *Royal Auto* lists black spot intersections in Victoria. And guess what? No. 9 on that list is the Baxter-Tooradin Road-Fultons Road intersection, which is right next to the Baxter Hotel. This is a black spot I have mentioned many times. It is not a new subject in this chamber, but what has the Bracks government done? It has done nothing. This intersection is no. 9 on the list of horror intersections in a 2001 article headed 'Our roughest red spots'. There is no money for this intersection in this budget; it is a failure.

I will not talk about land tax except to say that unrealistic and unwelcome land tax feeds itself back into the economy and into the cost structure of doing business. It has to be decreased. It has not been decreased; that is spin. Spin about education from the state government in this budget is amazing. Somerville secondary college is a year late, a year behind where it

should be, because of mismanagement regarding indigenous artefacts. Only two weeks ago the federal government offered to purchase 1.5 acres of land for an urgently needed oval.

What did the Bracks government do? It ignored the commonwealth offer and forgot to even acknowledge it by the due date. That land has now been lost to a private sale, so for the next 50 years — maybe 100 years — the students do not have an adequate oval. This state government, through its budget process, through its lack of vision, through its lack of commitment and lack of understanding and its woolly headed, socialist thinking, cannot understand reality.

Payroll tax has to be reduced if we are going to be able to retain our pre-eminence as a manufacturing state and a state which provides a wide spectrum of performance and encouragement to employment. Small decreases in payroll tax are welcome, but they are nowhere near enough. Under the negotiation of the states with the commonwealth, the goods and services tax was to work towards the elimination of a whole raft of taxes and charges, and this state is tardy.

This is a disappointing and unacceptable budget. It is a rerun of the early stages of the Cain-Kirner performance — black holes, high expenditure, high taxes, unrealistic infrastructure spending and a totally bare performance. It is also a lack of vision. We have almost gone full circle. On behalf of my constituents in South Eastern Province, I think this is a total and abject failure as a budget and something that the state government should be ashamed of.

Mr SMITH (Chelsea) — As someone who lives in the South Eastern Province let me start by saying that I am really pleased with this budget. As a matter of fact I think this is the best Labor budget handed down in this state in living memory.

Ms Carbines interjected.

Mr SMITH — Without question it is the best Labor budget, and it hits all the traditional targets that we like to hit — education, health, services, police et cetera. It is a beneficial budget principally for working people. In addition, we have spread it around to even distribute to the top end of town, whether it believes it or not.

When I was listening to the contribution of Mr Strong, who was saying that the poor people down in Brighton are really suffering and that there was nothing in the budget for them, I was thinking to myself that I would remember that next time I drive down that road and maybe hit a bump or see a pothole. I have not seen one for a long time down there, but clearly they are doing a

lot worse than I thought they were. I must go down and check it out.

However, we have spread the wealth, if you like, far and wide, and not just in the metropolitan area but across the state and into the regions, which the opposition neglected when it was in government. It paid dearly for ignoring the regions.

One of the small things the government has delivered in the budget is the \$300 School Start bonus for families of children starting prep and year 7 to help them in their early years and when starting secondary school. I was a bit bemused to hear the comments coming from those opposite. They said, 'That is right! The owners of Grocon, who sit on their millions, will be able to get the bonus for their kids'. I thought that was a bit strange, given that is exactly what happened with the federal government's largesse, if you like. They dished it out like it was going out of fashion. I have to admit that initially I had a bit of a problem with that and about calling it middle-class welfare or not means testing and those sorts of things. However, I did accept the view that kids are kids and that educational benefits should flow across the board, and that is what we are doing. We are providing a social benefit, particularly to those families with kids who need it more than anyone else.

Another thing of interest is that young people I know who work, including those who are in decent jobs, do not seem to be complaining that there was nothing in the budget for them. They seem to be getting on with it. But it is really important to parents, particularly those with young kids. To them it is a huge plus. We have extended education funding with grants of \$500 to help retain young men and women in their chosen profession or apprenticeship. I am more than sure those grants are extremely welcome.

I want to refer to the \$11 million that was allocated to Frankston as part of the Transit City program. I am reliably informed by local councillors that they are very grateful for this grant from the government, so much so that they believe it will help them reduce the coming increased rates, which I think were being forecast at about 6 per cent. They think they could take up to half a per cent off as a result of the grant from the state government.

Another aspect of this budget that interests me greatly is the increased funding for extending the Monash Freeway. Mr Bowden has been rabbiting on for — I cannot remember — at least 12 to 15 months about what needs to be done on the Monash Freeway. Here we are doing it, yet he still complains. We are going to put in about \$780 million to add a lane both ways,

which will have an enormous impact on traffic flow. When combined with EastLink, I am sure it will do the trick to a very large degree. But was the government given any credit from Mr Bowden? Not at all; there was just criticism. He said it was not enough, that we need more roads and that there were not enough roads. He also said we need more traffic lights. We do not need traffic lights. I do not know where he is coming from half the time. I am just wondering whether he lives on the same peninsula I do. Maybe he goes home a different way; I do not know.

In his contribution the Honourable Chris Strong attacked us over what we have done in the area of tax. I know Mr Strong was actually joking and just having a lend of the house as a parting gesture for when he leaves us later in the year. He had to be joking; he could not have been serious. I will contradict a number of things that Mr Strong said. I will refer to what the government has done over the last five years in the area of tax. The government has actually cut payroll tax, land tax and WorkCover premiums. It has abolished duty on non-residential leases, quoted and unquoted marketed securities and financial institutions duty. Duty on mortgages and bank accounts debits tax have been abolished, and we will abolish business rental duty from 1 January next year.

Payroll tax is a favourite hobbyhorse of those opposite, because that is their constituency, their support base of employers and businesses. The payroll tax cuts in the 2006-07 budget are worth \$533 million over a four-year period through a reduction in the rate from 5.75 per cent to 5 per cent. That brings the total cut in payroll tax rates since 1999 to 13 per cent. I thought that was pretty good and wondered if anyone else in the country was doing better than that. Lo and behold, they are not. I looked around and I saw that no state is actually doing better. Standard and Poor's and similar institutions have tried to enhance our AAA rating, but we have certainly maintained it. We have been saying for a few years now that our AAA rating is here to stay, and it would appear that we are on the money.

We are in very good stead in terms of financial or fiscal responsibility in this state as a result of the sort of financial leadership from both the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance. They are doing a great job. I know it is cutting into the heart of the conservatives, because they see financial control as their domain and as the soft underbelly of Labor governments, but we have turned that around and the record is there for anyone to see.

Land tax has been another hobbyhorse of the opposition, and the government has managed to do

something about it. It has increased the threshold at which land tax is paid from \$85 000 to \$200 000 so that a huge number of investors who were expecting to pay land have been exempted, particularly pensioners or self-funded retirees who have a small investment property, on whom it could have a reasonable impact. Those people will get some real relief in that area. There are major cuts to the middle land tax brackets. By 2007-08 we will reduce the top rate of tax from 5 per cent to 3 per cent — two years earlier than originally scheduled.

WorkCover premiums have come down 10 per cent three years in a row. This is nothing short of outstanding. What a performance it is in terms of financial management. The list goes on of all the different tax cuts, particularly in the area of business. What do opposition members do? They complain that it is not enough. I do not get it. Would they be happy if no-one paid any tax at all? Maybe they would, because they are not particularly keen on having a public service or service industries et cetera. We have seen what they did when they had the opportunity — they sacked people left, right and centre.

That is enough about the government, let us now talk about opposition's record on tax. Members of the coalition government were high tax experts. If we look at their federal area, we see that the coalition government under the leadership of John Howard and Mrs Coote's mate Peter Costello, the highest taxing Treasurer ever, is the highest taxing federal government ever. I suppose that is something to aspire to but it is not a road that we are going to go down. In the seven years of the former Liberal-National party government in Victoria only one business tax was abolished.

Where are those three pages of cuts I just rattled off? The former government abolished one tax. What a joke! Rather than provide tax relief, the previous government lowered the land tax threshold, which saw more than 70 000 land-holders caught in the land tax net. When the opposition was last in power it scooped in another 70 000 land-holders who had to start paying land tax.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SMITH — As I said, 70 000 more land-holders had to pay tax under the opposition when it was in office — and opposition members want to lecture us! That does not compute. Even though payroll tax was lowered, the former government also changed the payroll tax system to include superannuation in the tax base. This resulted in 2556 additional Victorian employers having to pay payroll tax for the first time —

and opposition members want to talk to us about payroll tax! I say bring on the debate; I am very happy to make the comparison at election time.

When Robert Clark, the shadow Treasurer and member for Box Hill in the other place, was Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer in the Kennett government the top rate of land tax was increased to 5 per cent. Someone is making a mistake here, something is going wrong, because it is heading the other way — it is consistently being reduced. The reality is that the opposition had seven years in government to provide real taxation relief for Victorians, and it only abolished one tiny business tax. I am sorry, but I am not going to take any lectures from the opposition on any tax, because it has no credibility. There is no question that this performance by our Treasurer can only be described as extraordinary. By national standards it is way out in front; the big V is performing on centre stage. Despite the fact that New South Wales government members are comrades in arms, I have to say that on any comparison that state simply pales into insignificance on financially responsible performance.

Mr Lenders — They haven't got over the Rum Rebellion.

Mr SMITH — The Rum Rebellion is still reverberating around the state, I imagine. Queensland is performing extraordinarily well, riding on the back of Victorian GST revenue. I do not want to get started on the subject of the 86 cents in the dollar. Who knows what the federal government has against Victorians, but it is spreading our money far and wide.

In closing, I will reiterate that as a Labor politician, a Labor voter and a Labor man all my life, I am proud to stand up and support the government's performance in delivering this budget. It is a great budget for Victoria.

**Debate adjourned on motion of
Hon. W. A. LOVELL (North Eastern).**

Debate adjourned until next day.

STATE TAXATION (REDUCTIONS AND CONCESSIONS) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

**Read first time on motion of Mr LENDERS
(Minister for Finance).**

ADJOURNMENT

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Campaspe: drought recovery officer

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (North Eastern) — My adjournment issue is for the Minister for Community Services in the other place, the Honourable Sherryl Garbutt, and it is regarding funding for the community drought recovery officer in the shire of Campaspe.

The effect of the drought on the communities that make up the shire of Campaspe was and continues to be absolutely devastating. The communities are uncertain about their future and are lacking in confidence. The drought recovery officer, Alana Brennan, has, over the past three years, played an important role in assisting the communities to survive what have been and continue to be very difficult times. At this point I would like to congratulate Alana. Of all the drought recovery officers I have come across, Alana stands out. She has done a tremendous job. Through her efforts the Campaspe program has reached approximately 27 000 people, and the community is very grateful to her.

However, her job is not finished, but unfortunately the funding for her position ceased last month. The Shire of Campaspe has, through its own budget, extended the position until the end of June but is not able to continue to fund the position past June. Unfortunately there is still a lot of work to be done to get the communities in the shire of Campaspe through the difficult times the drought has presented to them. We have irrigators on the Campaspe system who for the past two years have only received 31 per cent and 39 per cent of their water right.

Some of the other issues of concern in the community are uncertainty for the future, a depressive attitude about the weather, anxiety, stress and depression, family break-ups and the need for counselling assistance, and we found the best and most effective method of getting farmers to talk to a counsellor has been cold-calling by the drought recovery officer and a counsellor just visiting the family.

Financial stress is also a major concern due to lack of money, and most of the farmers have not recovered from the debt they incurred during the drought years and are still struggling just to pay the interest on their loans. The non-farm business sector is under financial stress as well. One of the leading farm supply businesses has reported that his debtors are out to 60 days and 90 days and beyond. In effect the non-farm

business sector is being used as a third bank by many people in the community.

Schools are still supplying money for breakfasts and school uniforms. We have a saying in northern Victoria: the drought is not over until the dams are full — and our dams are far from full.

The community drought social recovery strategy is still desperately needed. The action I seek from the minister is to extend the funding for the drought recovery officer in the shire of Campaspe to allow Alana to continue her excellent and much-needed work to assist the community to get through these difficult times.

Barwon Health: waiting lists

Ms CARBINES (Geelong) — I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Health in the other place, the Honourable Bronwyn Pike. It concerns the Auditor-General's report into access to specialist medical outpatient care, which was tabled in Parliament last week. As a member for Geelong Province I was very concerned to examine the Auditor-General's findings relating to Barwon Health — the Geelong region's major public health provider.

Statistics contained in the Auditor-General's report indicate an excellent outcome regarding oncology outpatient services at Barwon Health, showing that our waiting time for the next available oncology appointment is well below the state average and among the best in Victoria. However, this is not the case for patients waiting for a urology, orthopaedic, ophthalmology or ear, nose and throat appointment, where the Auditor-General found that Barwon Health is far above the state average for each of these services.

Disturbingly, our patients have the longest wait in the state for urology and ophthalmology appointments. This is unacceptable and a cause of much concern to the individual patients and the wider community. It is very important that this issue is addressed, and I was therefore very pleased to see that \$30 million was allocated in last week's state budget to address the issue of outpatient care statewide.

I therefore ask Minister Pike to ensure that Barwon Health receives its fair share of this funding to address its waiting times for urology, orthopaedic, ophthalmology and ear, nose and throat specialist care.

Snowy Hydro Ltd: sale

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Finance. I seek his assistance in providing some

information. On Monday the Premier appeared before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, as he does, and he spoke — —

Mr Lenders — Unlike his predecessor!

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — That is true, Mr Lenders. As the minister points out, the Premier does indeed appear before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and one day we hope he will actually start answering questions.

The Premier, during his presentation, spoke about the hole that is now in his government's commitment to education capital funding as a result of the federal government's decision not to proceed with the sale of Snowy Hydro Ltd. When asked how that would be filled, the Premier indicated that some of the \$450 million would come from unallocated capital and the rest would come from future dividends from Snowy Hydro.

I have looked back at the history of dividends paid by Snowy Hydro, and for 2002 and 2003 no dividends were paid; since 2003 some dividends have been paid. However, given that the state government is a minority shareholder, given that it does not have control of Snowy Hydro and given that one of the reasons advanced for the sale of Snowy Hydro was so that it could recapitalise, as that recapitalisation is not going ahead there is every prospect that Snowy Hydro will be required to call on its own resources — that is, it may well call on funds that would otherwise flow as dividends.

I am therefore concerned to know the basis on which the Premier expects the so far intermittent flow of dividends to the state of Victoria to continue into the future at the same rate as he indicated so that those funds can be used for education capital works.

I ask the Minister for Finance to provide me with the advice on which the Premier is relying when he makes the claim that the government will have access to continuing dividends at the same rate as in the last two years to fund the government's education commitments.

Domestic violence: government initiatives

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA (Melbourne West) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of Ms Broad, the minister who has been responsible for the family violence announcements recently made and in her capacity as Minister for Local Government. The issue I wish to raise concerns funding and services being made available, particularly for people who come from

culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people who have migrated to Victoria.

I am particularly keen to see that women from these communities have access to the services this significant amount of funding has gone to, and I am interested in the programs and services that will be delivered not only to the constituents in my electorate of Melbourne West, which has a very high proportion of migrants who have English as a second language but also to families and women in rural and regional areas. I am particularly concerned about the Loddon-Mallee region around Mildura, Swan Hill and Robinvale, which has a very high proportion of people from migrant backgrounds, and about the Goulburn Valley area, another area which, like the Loddon-Mallee area, has had wave after wave of migration for many years.

Specifically I am interested in the Loddon-Mallee area, the Hume area, and my own constituents in Melbourne West; the types of services and programs the minister is going to see developed to address the issue of family violence; and how they will be directed towards meeting the needs of women and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation: forum

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Premier. My query relates to Australia hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in 2007. This forum will culminate in the APEC 2007 Australian economic leaders meeting, which will be held in Sydney in September 2007. This will bring together the 21 APEC member economies as well as many thousands of delegates and support personnel and media representation.

To give the Premier an understanding of why I am raising this, the APEC member economies represent a region of over 2.6 billion people, 57 per cent of the world's gross domestic product and 45 per cent, or roughly US\$7 trillion, of the world's trade. This is significant. The APEC economies include Australia and a range of significant countries, including Canada, the People's Republic of China, many Asian countries, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Russian federation, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam, to name just a few. The interesting point is that just this day

I understand the indicative program for the APEC meeting schedule has been issued. For the Premier's information, it can be found at [www.apec2007.org/meeting schedule.html](http://www.apec2007.org/meeting%20schedule.html). That indicative program sets out the series of events and

functions. There are events and meetings in the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia, Tasmania, South Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales. There is no mention of Victoria.

This is a significant event, and I think it is a shame that Victoria is not involved. I raise this matter tonight to request that the Premier take urgent action to ensure that Victoria is recognised at the significant APEC 2007 Australian economic leaders meeting and at the APEC forums in general.

Melbourne Airport: hire car operators

Mr SOMYUREK (Eumemmerring) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport in another place concerning the alleged poaching of passengers by members of the hire car industry at Melbourne Airport. I have received a number of complaints from concerned taxi operators and taxidriviers that people they have identified as hire car drivers have been poaching passengers at Melbourne Airport.

The taxidriviers I have spoken to have allegedly seen this first-hand and have also had passengers complaining that people that represent themselves as taxidriviers have gone up to them and asked them whether they needed a lift for a discounted price. This is not fair when you consider that taxi operators, with the car and taxi plates combined, have to fork out an investment of about \$400 000. When you invest nearly \$500 000 you do not want your investment to be devalued by predatory trade practices. For the poor old taxidriver who has to do the right thing, wait in a queue for an hour at the airport and on average earn about \$6 an hour, it is no fun having your lunch cut by the activities of people who are essentially not only queue-jumping but also, if all reports are correct, acting illegally.

On a final point, this minister has done a lot to clean up the taxi industry and the hire car industry. A good taxi industry is essential for the state. We saw with the recent Commonwealth Games our taxi industry really lift its standards and provide a valuable service to the many thousands of tourists who visited Australia. I ask the minister to investigate the complaint I have made today.

Planning: Macedon Ranges

Ms HADDEN (Ballarat) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Planning in the other place. The matter relates to state

significance and state planning protection of the magnificent Macedon Ranges. The Macedon Ranges have a unique combination of features and resources which are valued by people. They are of striking natural beauty, with potable water catchments, high-quality agricultural soils, ground water and recharge areas, heritage and history, high-quality landscapes and geological factors, headwaters of important river systems, state forests and parks, rare flora and fauna species and high quality native forests. There are major constraints for growth and development — namely, fire, mountains, infrastructure and water shortages, natural hazards, catchment protection et cetera.

The Macedon Ranges are in urgent need of state policy protection because of their close proximity to Melbourne, which is generating intense pressure for suburban-style growth and development along the Calder Highway. The need to protect the state-significant features and resources of the Macedon Ranges was recognised in 1975 by the introduction of state planning policy 8. SPP8 was an integrated policy which recognised and identified the Macedon Ranges as an area that is off limits to urban development and set out principles for limiting development and priorities for development compatible with conserving areas of state significance.

However, state planning policy 8 was lost when the Shire of Macedon Ranges was forced to adopt the so-called discretionary Victoria planning scheme in June 2000. In contrast, the Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges retained their state significance planning protection. The shire of Macedon Ranges is now having to accept outer Melbourne suburbia being pushed onto it through its green wedges and into the rural ranges, yet *Melbourne 2030* clearly states in appendix 1 that the Macedon Ranges are off limits to urban development.

The beauty of the Macedon Ranges has been described as a great opportunity for the speculator and land developer to make a fast buck to carve up this magnificent rural landscape for a quick profit. However, the Macedon Ranges must be safeguarded and protected as a high-quality area, a feature that was recognised by SPP8 in 1975. The action I seek from the minister is to urgently restore the state significance policy protection status for the Macedon Ranges before the local communities and magnificent rural land and ranges are lost forever.

Manufacturing: Geelong Province

Hon. J. H. EREN (Geelong) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Manufacturing and Export in

the other place. It concerns the issue of negative public perceptions of the Victorian manufacturing sector. The Victorian manufacturing sector employs over 344 000 Victorians — or 13.8 per cent of total employment in our state — and contributes \$29.9 billion to the Victorian economy.

I was pleased recently to learn that one local company in my electorate of Geelong Province was inducted into the Victorian manufacturing hall of fame by Minister Haermeyer. Air Radiators was established in 1974 and has a reputation as the market leader in the provision of heat transfer and air movement solutions, designing and manufacturing customised industrial radiator systems for various markets, including the power generation, rail, mining and heavy truck industries. Major customers for Air Radiators include Cummins, Caterpillar, Kenworth, Iveco, Mack and Bombardier Transportation. It is worth noting that this fantastic company is actively exporting to Asia, the Pacific, Europe and the USA, contributing to an annual turnover of \$30 million.

The action I am seeking is for the minister to take the necessary steps to ensure that he positively promotes the Victorian manufacturing sector, particularly in Geelong, so that regional Victorians can benefit from the potential jobs it will bring.

Responses

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — Ms Lovell raised a matter for the Minister for Community Services in the other place regarding a drought recovery officer in the Campaspe region. I will pass that on to the minister for her attention.

Ms Carbines raised a number of issues for the Minister for Health in the other place regarding specialist needs, particularly in outpatient care, at Barwon Health in her electorate. I will certainly raise that for attention of the Minister for Health.

Ms Darveniza raised an issue for the Minister for Local Government regarding funding for family violence services, particularly for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. I will certainly pass that on to the minister for her attention.

Mr Dalla-Riva raised an issue for the Premier regarding Australia hosting an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. I will certainly pass that on to the Premier for his attention. I suggest that perhaps Mr Dalla-Riva also ask the federal government to help with some funding.

Mr Somyurek raised an issue for the Minister for Transport in the other place regarding hire car passenger poaching at Melbourne Airport. I will certainly raise that with the minister for his attention.

Ms Hadden raised an issue with the Minister for Planning in the other place regarding Macedon Ranges issues. I will pass it on to the minister for his attention.

Mr Eren raised a minister for the Minister for Manufacturing and Export in the other place regarding public perceptions of Victorian manufacturing. I will definitely pass that on to the minister for his attention.

Finally, Mr Rich-Phillips raised an issue for me regarding education funding and future dividends of Snowy Hydro Ltd. Mr Rich-Phillips noted that the Premier turned up to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing. As I interjected, unlike his predecessor he does turn up and is not afraid to face PAEC scrutiny. He was certainly there.

Mr Rich-Phillips may not have liked the Premier's answers, but the Premier will front up to PAEC, face it for 3 hours and take the questions, as any good Premier should.

Specifically the member sought from me the advice the Premier had on the Snowy Hydro situation. While I would love eloquently to wax lyrical in this place for hours about these issues, it is outside my portfolio. Perhaps Mr Rich-Phillips should consult his colleague Mr Strong, who was saying we had \$4.8 billion salted away secretly in the budget. Mr Strong sent the wrong message. I suggest the two of them get together and work out whether there is a surplus or a deficit. The basis of my response is that I am not at liberty to give the Premier's advice to Mr Rich-Phillips.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 9.40 p.m.

**Table showing difference between
Budget Suplus & Actual Surplus**

Financial Year	Budget Suplus (1) \$Millions	Actual Whole of Gov. Suplus (2) \$Million	Difference (Actual - Budget) \$Million
1999/00	\$129	\$1,815	\$1,686
2000/01	\$592	\$1,003	\$411
2001/02	\$509	\$607	\$98
2002/03	\$521	\$54	-\$467
2003/04	\$225	\$3,766	\$3,542
2004/05	\$545	\$3,961	\$3,416
2005/06	\$325	\$4,800	\$4,475
2006/07	\$317		

(1) Budget Papers 1999/00 - 2006/07

(2) Annual Financial Statements 1999/00 - 2004/05 &
Quarterly Financial Report No.3