

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Tuesday, 26 February 2008

(Extract from book 2)

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Select Committee on Gaming Licensing — Mr Barber, Mr Drum, Mr Guy, Mr Kavanagh, Mr Pakula, Mr Rich-Phillips and Mr Viney.

Select Committee on Public Land Development — Mr D. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Kavanagh, Mr O'Donohue, Ms Pennicuik, Mr Tee and Mr Thornley.

Standing Orders Committee — The President, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr P. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Lenders, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Viney.

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Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Council*): Mr Leane and Ms Mikakos. (*Assembly*): Mr Delahunty, Mr Haermeyer, Mr McIntosh, Mrs Maddigan and Mr Morris.

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Electoral Matters Committee — (*Council*): Ms Broad, Mr Hall and Mr Somyurek. (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr O'Brien, Mr Scott and Mr Thompson.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Petrovich and Mr Viney. (*Assembly*): Ms Duncan, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Ingram, Ms Lobato, Mr Pandazopoulos and Mr Walsh.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Council*): Mr Finn, Mr Scheffer and Mr Somyurek. (*Assembly*): Ms Beattie, Mr Perera, Mrs Powell and Ms Wooldridge.

House Committee — (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), Mr Atkinson, Ms Darveniza, Mr Drum, Mr Eideh and Ms Hartland. (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Ms Beattie, Mr Delahunty, Mr Howard, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Scott and Mr K. Smith.

Law Reform Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Kronberg, Mr O'Donohue and Mr Scheffer. (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Clark, Mr Donnellan and Mrs Maddigan.

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Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Council*): Mr Eideh, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Peulich and Ms Pulford. (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Carli, Mr Jasper, Mr Languiller and Mr R. Smith.

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FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Darveniza, Ms Kaye Mary	Northern Victoria	ALP	Pakula, Mr Martin Philip	Western Metropolitan	ALP
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Eideh, Khalil M.	Western Metropolitan	ALP	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
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Kavanagh, Mr Peter Damian	Western Victoria	DLP	Thornley, Mr Evan William	Southern Metropolitan	ALP
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Tuesday, 26 February 2008

The PRESIDENT (Hon. R. F. Smith) took the chair at 2.03 p.m. and read the prayer.

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent on 11 February to:

Equal Opportunity Amendment (Family Responsibilities) Act

Fair Trading and Consumer Acts Further Amendment Act.

SHADOW MINISTRY

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I advise the chamber of and update it on a number of shadow cabinet changes. My responsibilities will be environment and climate change, and I will remain responsible for scrutiny of government. Richard Dalla-Riva will have responsibility for industry and state development, major projects, and freedom of information. Mr Guy will have responsibility for planning; Ms Lovell, for country Victoria, housing, children and early childhood development; and Mr Rich-Phillips, for finance, including the Transport Accident Commission and WorkCover, community development and information technology.

The coalition has been announced, but this will involve two independent parties working together. In that context I look forward to Mr Hall announcing the responsibilities for The Nationals.

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — I wish to advise the house that, notwithstanding the announcement on 13 February, Mr Drum and I respectively remain Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Leader of The Nationals. In addition to that, in line with the announcements by Mr Baillieu, the Leader of the Opposition in the other place, and Mr Ryan, the Leader of The Nationals in the other place, of the formation of a coalition in opposition, I will accept the shadow responsibility role for tertiary education and training, and skills and workforce participation; and my colleague Mr Drum will be the shadow parliamentary secretary for regional and rural development, which will complement the chairmanship that he currently occupies of the all-party parliamentary committee.

Mr Pakula — On a point of order, President, I seek clarification from the Leader of the Liberal Party in regard to the announcement he has just made. The

Liberal Party website indicates that the shadow Minister for Small Business is Louise Asher, the member for Brighton; the shadow minister for roads is Terry Mulder, the member for Polwarth; the shadow minister for ports is Denis Napthine, the member for South-West Coast; and the shadow Minister for Community Services is Mary Wooldridge, the member for Doncaster — all in the other house.

However, The Nationals website indicates that the shadow minister for roads and ports, Victorian communities and small business is Paul Weller — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! What is the point of order?

Mr Pakula — The point of clarification I seek is: which of the two is correct? One says Paul Weller, the member for Rodney in the other place, holds those shadow portfolios, while the other says other individuals do.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is no point of order. I remind Mr Pakula that points of order are meant to be serious. It is clear to everyone that that site is out of date and needs to be amended; I am sure the Leader will do so. I remind the member that members of this house — including me, in a prior life of course — have been removed from the chamber for taking frivolous points of order.

Mr Pakula — Just on the point of order — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I remind Mr Pakula that there is no point of order, and there is no opportunity for debate.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Water: north–south pipeline

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Planning, and I refer to the minister's decision not to undertake an environment effects statement on the north–south pipeline, finding that 'potential effects on biodiversity, landscape, waterways and other matters are not likely to be so complex or significant as to warrant detailed scoping or major new studies'. I also refer to the decision of the federal Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on the project, which says, 'The project is likely to have a significant impact on listed threatened species and communities'. These interpretations are at odds. Which one is correct?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I do not think Ms Lovell understood my previous answers in relation to this issue. Basically one of the things about any pipeline as opposed to many other projects is that, when a project is submitted, the project is located in a particular location, definitively in a location, and hence that location determines all the relevant aspects that need to be considered. In this circumstance, not unlike the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, the project can be adjusted accordingly in relation to the layout.

It is critical to the undertaking as the relevant authority to have a different procedure in relation to this project. As I have mentioned previously, this is not to say there will not be effects, because there may well be effects of all sorts. But we do have a different mechanism to deal with these matters, and I have encouraged members of the community who feel strongly to submit to this process and to make relevant comments, as I do with all projects of any description where there is a public process.

I will receive the report at the end of those submissions and they will be given consideration. I look forward to members of the community who feel strongly making submissions to that group. Likewise I encourage Ms Lovell — if she wishes to make a submission or to make submissions on behalf of any constituency that may be concerned about this — and her constituents to make submissions. If people feel strongly about having the pipeline, they should make submissions, because it is a public process. It will draw out the issues that need to be considered, and they will be part of the information provided to me in the making of any decisions in relation to this project.

Supplementary question

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — Will the minister revise his position in light of the federal government contradicting his statement?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I suggest to Ms Lovell that the position of the federal government can be interpreted in a range of ways. She wishes to interpret it as contradictory, but I do not believe it is contradictory. I believe the mechanism we have and the public process we are undertaking can complement the concerns of the federal government and the state government in relation to this project. No doubt whatever information comes to us and whatever decision is entered into will inform the federal government in relation to any aspect of this project that it may wish to be involved with or have an interest in.

Employment: growth

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Industry and Trade. Will the minister inform the house of any recent figures about jobs growth that demonstrate the strength of the Victorian economy?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and Trade) — I thank the member for his excellent question. Can I indicate to the house that the Brumby government is delivering on jobs for Victoria. In saying that can I say this also: when looking at our social policy we are interested in developing health services, education services and a range of other services for the benefit of the community. It is often said that the best service you can provide to somebody in the community is to actually provide them with a job. It is about giving Victorians the sort of feeling that comes with having a job. The self-respect, the capacity to earn money, the capacity to be a part of the community — all that comes from having a job.

I am pleased to say that over the last 12 months 90 400 — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Listen to the figure: 90 400 new jobs were created by the Brumby government. That is 90 400 new jobs in 12 months. That is more jobs than even the resource-rich states of Western Australia and Queensland. It beats every other state in the country. That is the record this government has in relation to creating jobs.

It does not come about easily, it comes about by aggressively going out and working with business, working with the community that creates these jobs, building major projects and getting the private sector to invest in major projects. That is how this kind of figure comes about. Some of those major investments include the ANZ headquarters at Docklands, the new John Holland aviation centre at Tullamarine airport, the HRL-Harbin coal-drying pilot plant and Tiger Airways, just to name a few of the many, many businesses that have invested in Victoria and have created the sort of wealth and the sorts of jobs that we are so keenly seeking.

In fact during 2006–07 the Victorian government facilitated \$3.54 billion worth of new investment in Victoria. That is the record.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — You might think that somehow you are able to represent business and somehow that the Liberal Party has some connection with business. Let me remind members opposite that business has left them far behind. Business knows that the party that will deliver jobs, growth and prosperity is not the Liberal Party, it is the Labor Party. It is certainly not the coalition!

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — You don't like that; I know you do not like it! The fact is that Victoria's economy grew at 2.7 per cent last year, and we have had an average growth rate of 2.9 per cent over the last eight years. You can look at economic growth, job growth or population growth — and Melbourne's population grew faster than that of any other city in the commonwealth. People are coming here because there are jobs and there is economic prosperity. That is why they are coming here. Most importantly, they are also going to regional Victoria, because in regional Victoria — —

Mr Guy — No, they are not. They are coming to Melbourne.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Just listen! In the last eight years of the Bracks and Brumby governments we have created 138 000 jobs in regional Victoria alone, which is an average rate of 17 200 jobs every year in regional Victoria. What was the average under the previous coalition when the then National Party and the Liberal Party were holding hands? The average at that time was 5800 over seven years. So it is 5800 versus 17 200. The people of regional Victoria are not dunces; they are not stupid. They know that if they want jobs — —

Mr Atkinson — On a point of order, President, the rules of this house specifically prevent a minister from entering into debate in his response to a question, and I think that the minister has very clearly stepped over the mark.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — On the point of order, President, my question from Mr Elasmar asked me to inform the house about jobs growth in the Victorian economy. I have been outlining the nature of jobs growth over the last eight years compared to the previous seven years.

An honourable member — That's debate.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — It is not a debate at all; I am pointing out the figures. I am perfectly entitled to point out the average figures for job growth.

I do not need to mention the Kennett government — I just need to mention the dates, between what years — but it just happens to be the case that those years coincide with the coalition being in government.

Mr Atkinson — On the point of order, President, the minister is now debating the point of order.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister is aware that he has no capacity to debate questions during question time. Although I would not suggest that at this point of time he has actually got to that stage, he is skating on reasonably thin ice. I just remind him of that. However, the question does require or can require quite an expansive answer. I think the minister is currently in order.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Perhaps I can simply put it this way: between 1992 and 1999 the average number of jobs created in regional Victoria was 5800. Since 1999 the average number of jobs created has been 17 200. That is the record. You cannot change the record. We believe people of regional Victoria will consider very carefully, as will all the people of Victoria, the economic record of this government and the way it has created wealth and jobs and security and improved health and education for the people of Victoria when it comes to the next election in 2010.

Planning: land supply

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. Does the minister stand by his previous statements to this Parliament and to the broader community that Melbourne 2030 has provided enough residential land supply for the next 25 years?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I welcome Mr Guy's question, and I welcome his interest in this issue. I am always happy to take questions in relation to Mr Guy on planning policy, because I know there is a shortfall on the other side, and that is compounded by the coalition. I am always happy to answer questions of policy. I am happy to answer on Melbourne 2030, and I am happy to answer on land supply.

What is critical in relation to Melbourne 2030 is that it is a policy and a plan to assist in the management of growth. What we have seen in Melbourne in recent times is phenomenal growth. The Minister for Industry and Trade, Mr Theophanous, has just mentioned the phenomenal growth in regional Victoria. We have seen likewise that phenomenal growth in metropolitan Melbourne. Of course that sort of growth will always put pressure on the system, but it is good pressure.

What we are doing in making Melbourne and Victoria more competitive, more affordable and more attractive as places to live means that people are voting with their feet and coming to Victoria. The 1000 to 1200 people who come to Melbourne and Victoria every week are a glowing endorsement of what we are doing in terms of managing that growth.

One of the critical factors in managing land supply within the urban growth boundary is to make sure that we have sufficient land going forward. That is particularly important, because if we can maintain a reasonable price for land, then it makes housing more affordable right across the board, but certainly out in the growth areas and the growth corridors. We will continue to do that, we will continue to work on that and we will continue to ensure that we assist councils to facilitate zoning of land within the urban growth boundary so that we can make sure that we have got a plentiful supply of land going forward into the future.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. Noting our population is growing 50 per cent faster than Melbourne 2030 forecasts, can the minister explain how current land supply will accommodate above-forecast population growth without dramatically redrawing the urban growth boundary?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — It is interesting, is it not, that Mr Guy's position — and I think it was the position of the opposition previous to the coalition — is to do away with the urban growth boundary. I am not sure if that is still the case. I know the shadow Treasurer, Mr Wells, the member for Scoresby in the other place, has publicly stated on the record that a Liberal government would do away with the urban growth boundary. The Liberals have made that quite clear and they have stated it upfront.

Mr Guy — On a point of order, President, I asked the minister a very specific question about redrawing the urban growth boundary. It appears the minister has seemingly forgotten this question and is referring to Liberal Party policy, and I ask you to bring him back to the question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is no point of order. The minister is answering the question — he has not finished; he has unlimited time — and if he wants to expand on his answer, that is entirely a matter for him, although I remind the minister that if he chooses to answer, which he has done, his answer should be relevant.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — I take up Mr Guy's point. I can understand why he might be embarrassed by that policy. If the opposition's policy is to do away with the urban growth boundary, I can understand that Mr Guy may not want me to raise it in this place because it is in contradiction, I suspect, to where the coalition may be in the future on this matter. Can I just say that we have always made it clear that the urban growth boundary is to contain urban sprawl, but we have also made it clear in the announcements around the urban growth boundary that, if at some time in the future it needs to be reconsidered or it needs to be monitored or it needs to be managed, we would always be aware of that. We have never hidden that. Our position is clear. We have and will continue to have an urban growth boundary.

Members of the opposition do not want an urban growth boundary. They have made that quite clear. They are happy to do away with an urban growth boundary. What would doing away with an urban growth boundary do to the green wedges? What would that do to good agricultural land? Being the shadow parliamentary secretary for regional and urban development. Mr Drum, I am sure, would not be that excited about that, but I suggest that he investigate that matter with his colleagues now that he is in cahoots with them.

Can I just make this point abundantly clear: we will support and maintain an urban growth boundary. The opposition has declared it will not. We know that it wants urban sprawl as far as the eye can see. We know that we want to manage growth and we want to provide housing opportunity and housing diversity so that we can continue to attract the 1000 to 1200 people to Melbourne and Victoria that we currently are. People are voting with their feet, because they know this is a great place to live, work and raise a family.

The PRESIDENT — Order! During the minister's robust answer I think he may have referred to Mr Guy by his first name of 'Matty'. I may be wrong, but I thought I heard that. If I did, I just remind the minister and the house that it is inappropriate for anyone on their feet to refer to another member by their given name or to be so referred to.

Hon. J. M. Madden — On a point of order, President, there may have been a comment across the benches, but I would never pretend to be so familiar with Mr Guy as to refer to him as 'Matty'.

Mr Guy — It is mutual, don't worry.

National ICT Australia: transceiver

Mr THORNLEY (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Information and Communication Technology. Can the minister inform the house of recent groundbreaking achievements that have again highlighted the performance of Victoria's world-class information and communications technology industry?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Information and Communication Technology) — I thank the member for his question, and I am sure he will be very interested in the answer. Last Friday I was at Melbourne University, where I announced a breakthrough in semiconductor technology which has been developed by the Victorian research laboratory of National ICT Australia. This groundbreaking technology is essentially a chip that is 5 millimetres by 5 millimetres; it is so tiny that it is less than the size of a fingernail. This tiny chip was developed by a group of dedicated scientists at Melbourne University. I think it has the potential to have worldwide implications for the way we deal with technology.

This chip is something called a transceiver, which means it is capable of both transmitting and receiving information. The chip also has a number of capacities built into it. To give you an example of the possible use of this chip, having one installed in a mobile phone or any other device which has a bit of memory attached to it would mean that at some time in the future a person would be able to walk into a DVD hiring shop — probably it will only be a kiosk then — hold up their mobile phone and, once they have selected the movie they want to hire and take home, within a matter of seconds have an entire high-definition movie transmitted from the kiosk onto the mobile phone.

Then they can go home, stick their mobile phone or storage device on the table in front of their plasma screen, or whatever it is that they are going to watch it on, and immediately be able to watch the DVD, because the plasma screen would have a chip in it and pick up the signal.

I was very proud when I went to the university last week. There is a team of people led by Professor Stan Skafidas, who was attracted back to Australia from overseas to head up this team. Imagine that: there are 27 people at the University of Melbourne, 10 of them PhD students, working on this project for the last four years. They have come up with a chip which eventually might be incorporated into every one of our electronic devices, to therefore allow us to overcome problems involving moving information, the amount of wiring

required and so forth. It would eliminate wiring, and it would allow for a whole range of applications — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I will take that up: the Greens sit in this house and make derogatory comments about a dedicated team at the University of Melbourne. If you want to sit and think about it a little for a minute, the applications of this technology and miniaturisation would be such that you might actually help the environment. If you got rid of DVDs and cabling, which costs a fortune to make and impacts on the environment — like making a whole range of DVDs does — and if you could simply transmit information in a different way and increase our capacity to do research, it might actually help the environment. All of these things are possible from this invention, which is being developed in Victoria by a dedicated group of people. I think it is appalling for the Greens to come into this chamber and criticise a group of people who are so dedicated.

I was very proud to be the minister announcing this project. I look forward to it being commercialised, because if it is commercialised and kept in Australia it will allow us to have a substantial industry emerge and assist in the development of our information and communications technology industry for many years to come.

Questions interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT — Order! I wish to draw to the attention of the house of the presence in the gallery of the Irish ambassador to Australia, Mr Máirtín Ó Fainín, and an Irish delegation from the Irish Dáil led by Mr Noel O'Flynn, TD, chair of the working group committee of chairs and chair of the members interests committee. Welcome, gentlemen!

Questions resumed.

Land Victoria: electronic conveyancing

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. My question relates to the state government's continuing failure to secure major stakeholder support for its bungled electronic conveyancing system, which is forcing consumers to rely on paper-based conveyancing. Given that all paper-based conveyancing transactions now cost families an additional slug — in some cases, up to 30 per cent more for

conveyancing — is it not true that the government stands to make windfall gains of the order of \$6 million a year despite having botched the introduction of electronic conveyancing?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Environment and Climate Change) — The premise of the Leader of the Opposition's question has a number of false aspects to it. The introduction of electronic conveyancing is a project I inherited. It was a long way down the development and implementation stage by the time I arrived as minister.

Mr D. Davis — You are walking away from it now.

Mr JENNINGS — Not at all. In fact I have been very active in that space. In the last few months I have spent a lot of time and effort talking to jurisdictions across this nation to galvanise the cross-jurisdictional delivery of this program.

All Victorians and all Australians will benefit from an electronic system that streamlines conveyancing regimes and can be used by the financial institutions to enable the appropriate transaction of important information that, up until now, has been bedevilled by virtually Dickensian-type administrative practices.

Mr D. Davis — But reliable.

Mr JENNINGS — If Mr Davis had been talking to people in the sector, he would be aware that financial institutions want to move to electronic conveyancing. In fact all jurisdictions recognise the value of moving to an electronic conveyancing system. They want to make sure the platform is available for the widest variety of transactional programming within those financial institutions and that this can be shared across jurisdictions.

The Victorian government has invested significantly in the development of this software and system — and in fact we are the only jurisdiction in the nation that has done so.

Mr D. Davis interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — Indeed, millions, Mr Davis. It is our unswerving commitment to deliver a national system that has seen a buy-in by financial institutions and other jurisdictions. One by one, the other states have shown an increasing preparedness to engage. We are very close to receiving endorsements of the application of this system in a number of jurisdictions. A number of jurisdictions across the nation have been using our software in trialling their accounting

practices, and their land transfer and conveyancing procedures across the nation.

I am confident that once a critical mass of state jurisdictions has been brought into this process and financial institutions are available to trial the software and the various applications — despite some teething problems in terms of getting a national buy-in to the rollout of this important program — at the end of the day the Victorian people will be well pleased that we will be at the heart of a national electronic conveyancing system which will have maximum compliance with other jurisdictions and financial institutions.

In terms of the ongoing financial arrangements that underpin the establishment of this platform, the state of Victoria has been prepared and has been very willing to share its platform, which was developed at great expense to the people of Victoria with minimal return to the state, because we believe there will be national benefits from the rollout of the program.

Supplementary question

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I note that the minister in no way disputes my figure of a \$6 million windfall or that there are additional costs for paper-based conveyancing. Will the minister outline to the house when he expects the government's electronic conveyancing system will win the support of major banks and the Law Institute of Victoria, and will he now commit to removing last November's cost increase for paper-based conveyancing until such time as there is movement on this endorsement?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Environment and Climate Change) — Specifically the answer to the last part of the question is no, because there needs to be some incentive within the regime that will enable the take-up of this process to be seen not only to be electronically and administratively efficient but also, ultimately, to lead to savings. The cost structures that underpin the scheme were not designed by accident; they were designed on purpose to try to drive initial compliance and buy-in across the sector, with the regime embedded in ultimately cheaper cost structures and a greater applicability of the electronic conveyancing system.

Planning: residential zones

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. Last year the Brumby government released its five-point priority action plan to implement the *Making Local Policy Stronger* report.

I ask the minister to advise the house on the progress made towards implementing these priorities.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I welcome Mr Scheffer's interest in this matter. I know that this is one of those sorts of local issues, particularly in relation to planning, that Mr Scheffer works on very strongly in his local area. Many members in the chamber would be aware that last year I released the *Making Local Policy Stronger* report. This is really a report that identifies a range of measures that we need to progress to move forward on planning matters. In particular it was released with a five-point priority action plan for implementation, and it was applauded by stakeholder and industry groups. The Municipal Association of Victoria even described the initiatives as 'potentially the most significant and positive change to the planning system in a decade'.

The first priority outlined in our action plan is to prepare a revised suite of residential zones. If any of the opposition parties are really interested in local planning matters, as sometimes they pretend to be in this chamber when it suits them, they would be paying close attention to this report. The report and the new residential zones proposed for discussion will provide councils with better tools to implement policy. They will provide local and state policy, and they will give councils and local communities more responsive controls that better provide for local housing needs.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — It is interesting to hear the opposition comment on housing affordability and local planning matters, but they are linked. You cannot have the best of both worlds. You have to have local policy and state policy which reflects those issues. As well as that, it is important in all those areas to provide a simpler, streamlined process for permit applications that meets council housing strategy objectives and also other relevant criteria.

Unlike the coalition — and I can see that when I use the word 'coalition' it inflames opposition members because they still trying to work it out themselves — we want community input into this. It is not like the coalition days of old when there were Maclellanesque planning decisions and where there was very little consultation, very little explanation and a ham-fisted approach to planning. It is undeniable that we want to make sure that this reflects the values of local communities, providing the opportunity for more housing and also complementing initiatives like sustainability and housing affordability.

I suspect that, like most planning matters, it will stimulate robust public debate. Can I just compliment those who have worked very closely on this and have monitored this very closely. In the seven business days since a discussion paper was released I understand there have been over 2000 hits on the new residential zones website and there have been over 1000 downloads of the discussion paper. I would encourage everybody with an interest in this matter, particularly in local planning issues, if they are really committed to certainty in the planning process rather than using it for political gain, to have a good look at this, read through it and educate the local community or inform the local community so that we can have a discussion around this and make local policy stronger and make Victoria an even better place to live, work and raise a family.

Water: desalination plant

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Treasurer. Has the government factored in the rising cost of debt for infrastructure projects in putting together its proposal for the \$3.1 billion Gippsland desalination plant?

Mr LENDERS (Treasurer) — I thank Mr Rich-Phillips for his question and congratulate him on his sole spokespersonship for the new invigorated and enlarged coalition on matters financial in this house. No longer, President, are there two spokespeople. There is just one — Mr Rich-Phillips — so I congratulate him on that. I also thank Mr Rich-Phillips for asking me a question on infrastructure, because infrastructure is one of the things that this Brumby Labor government takes extraordinary pride in — that is, building on this state of Victoria.

The fact that Mr Rich-Phillips mentioned the \$3.1 billion desalination project raises a number of interesting questions. This is a long-term project for the future of Victoria, and I guess it raises a question of what would happen in 2010 if there were a change of government, because part of the coalition supports a desalination plant and the other part of the coalition does not support a desalination plant.

Mr Rich-Phillips asked a question about debt on the desalination plant. In answering Mr Rich-Phillips's question on debt and the levels of cost of funding, an element of certainty would come in here. So it is not only that part of the potential government in 2010 supports a plant and part of the potential government in 2010 opposes a plant, there is a further question that part of the part that supports the plant does not know

where it wants the plant. There are issues of business uncertainty that Mr Rich-Phillips rightly raises.

Mr Jennings — Some of the parts are less than a whole.

Mr LENDERS — Some of the parts are less than a whole, and all the parts are definitely less than a whole!

The issue Mr Rich-Phillips raises is a good question, because issues of business certainty, issues of debt and issues of economic activity are all predicated on governments and alternative governments actually having economic plans that are sustainable. I say to Mr Rich-Phillips that the main response to his question will be that when you have an alternative government that has \$10 billion of promises of recurrent expenditure — \$10 billion of promises of recurrent expenditure! — that is a greater danger to any budget or any project in this state than the issue Mr Rich-Phillips raises.

This Labor government will continue to invest to make Victoria a better place to live, work and raise a family, and that involves a reliable supply of water for this state. The opposition does not know whether it wants it or not — and if it does want it, it does not know where it wants to put it.

Supplementary question

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — The Treasurer's response on the issue of debt costing is deafening in its silence. I simply ask: given the cost blow-out with the Royal Children's Hospital, which is apparently \$150 million over budget, will the Treasurer assure the house that the desalination plant will not exceed the \$3.1 billion that has been quoted?

Mr LENDERS (Treasurer) — I find it interesting; the Royal Children's Hospital will be an absolute landmark, benchmark, state-of-the-art facility that children and families in this state will welcome, not just because it is a modern, efficient, new hospital but also because it is best practice. At this hospital, for example, parents who want to stay with their child because their child is ill will be able to take advantages of important things like a hotel next door, single rooms for patients and the like. I invite Mr Rich-Phillips to bring on in general business, whenever he chooses, a debate on the Royal Children's Hospital. He will find the project a good, value-for-money project; he will find a project with great service delivery; he will find a project that is better managed, I would say, than any project — and this is not an idle boast — that came out of those shameful seven years of the Kennett government.

This government manages debt. This government manages infrastructure. We have government debt at the lowest level in 50 years — 50 years! — and that includes the entire Bolte era, the entire Thompson era, and the entire Kennett era. It includes the lot. Not only that: this government is building and investing in infrastructure in the general government sector at \$4 billion per year. We inherited from that shameful black-handed Kennett coalition government infrastructure investment of the order of \$900 million.

This government will invest in infrastructure — the Royal Children's Hospital is an example of it, as is the desalination plant — because we are determined to make Victoria a better place to live, work and raise a family. That will mean governing for the whole state, and it will mean targeted resources in the economic, social and environmental areas. We will look at the best value for money for the taxpayer. I am really surprised that Mr Rich-Phillips is questioning this, because his mentor, Mr Stockdale — I think he still has a poster of him on the wall — is now the president of the federal Liberal Party.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LENDERS — His federal president is looking at him from under those bushy eyebrows and keeping an eye on him! I can assure Mr Rich-Phillips that we will continue to govern for the whole state, and we will invest in good infrastructure as a way of improving the lives of and job opportunities for all Victorians.

Food: regulations

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Treasurer. Can the Treasurer inform the house on how the Brumby Labor government is helping community organisations by reducing the regulatory burden?

Mr LENDERS (Treasurer) — I thank Ms Pulford for her question and her ongoing interest in reducing the regulatory burden on community groups and on business.

Mr D. Davis — Tell us about the tax burden too!

Mr LENDERS — David Davis sorely tempts me by asking me to tell him about the tax burden, but I will save it for another time. I will resist talking about the four cuts to the top rate of land tax that he voted to increase from 3 per cent to 5 per cent.

In response to Ms Pulford, last year the Victorian government, through the then Treasurer, now the Premier, commissioned a report to be prepared by the

Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission into food and the cost of food handling. This falls not just on the community sector that Ms Pulford raised but also on the 370 000 Victorians who work in the food industry.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr LENDERS — I take up Mrs Peulich's interjection. The Brumby Labor government has saved the sausage sizzle! If she was in any doubt about a sausage sizzle getting strangled in red tape, I proudly say that this Brumby Labor government has saved the sausage sizzle. Mrs Peulich can rest assured that the sausage sizzle is safe.

The reason I say the Brumby government has saved the sausage sizzle is that a lot of community activities were being strangled in red tape. Ms Pulford and I were in Ballarat last week to attend a number of community functions — and we were not the only ones in Ballarat last week, as the shadow coalition cabinet was there also. As an example, had the organisers of the shadow cabinet wanted to organise a sausage sizzle in Ballarat they would have had to go to the City of Ballarat to seek a permit. That permit could have involved 40 pages of paperwork for the organisers to read, whereas under the proposals from the Brumby Labor government we are talking of simply walking into the City of Ballarat office and registering that a sausage sizzle is going to be held. It is quite a material difference — and saving the sausage sizzle goes to this area.

That may be more complicated than it sounds. Organising a community event normally involves a functional committee of management. In this community event, if you wanted to organise some water, you would have to choose whether the shadow Minister for Agriculture, Mr Walsh, or the shadow Minister for Small Business, Ms Asher, both in the other place, were doing it — the answer would be whether it was in the city or country, presumably — and you would also have to have a functional body. That is but one example of what the sausage sizzle would involve.

Even more than that, if somebody happened to follow the shadow cabinet with a mobile food unit and happened to sell them, for example, cappuccinos or lattes — and they probably consume quite a lot of those under the existing regime — —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Through you, President, I say to Mrs Peulich that the Brumby Labor government is

pleased to have saved the sausage sizzle — we do not hide from that. I am using the example of a mobile food van. Under the food regulations we inherited from the Kennett government, a mobile food van from, for example, my municipality of Glen Eira would need to get a new permit if its operator planned to stop four or five times on the way to Ballarat. What we are proposing is that, if a mobile food van is registered with the City of Glen Eira, it can actually trade in Ballarat without its operator needing to re-register the van in every municipality.

In response to Ms Pulford, we are cutting red tape so that community organisations can go forward and do the business that is best for them — because one size does not fit all.

Mr Guy interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Mr Guy may be a defender of the previous government, but you do not need the same level of food regulation for organising food in a nursing home as you would if you were organising a sausage sizzle for the shadow cabinet.

This government is reducing the regulatory burden on stallholders — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LENDERS — Had Ms Pulford wanted to organise a barbecue for the shadow cabinet, because she is more functional than the shadow cabinet, it would have been easier, with less red tape involved. The business of fundraising is to raise money for an organisation, not to fill in paperwork for the municipal government.

Manufacturing: profit sharing scheme

Mr KAVANAGH (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Industry and Trade. There are continuing pressures on Australian manufacturing, as demonstrated by the recent closure of Mitsubishi and also the demise of smaller Victorian manufacturers.

In view of the demonstrated and proven potential of profit-sharing schemes with workers, and indeed share schemes with workers, what is the Victorian government intending to do to promote profit sharing on a voluntary basis by companies with their workers to increase viability, productivity and profitability, and also to enhance the prosperity of workers themselves?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and Trade) — I thank the member for what I

think is his first question to me as Minister for Industry and Trade, and I thank him for his interest in the manufacturing sector. I might say that in answer to a previous question I talked about increases in the number of jobs in Victoria, and a large number of those jobs are of course in the services industry. But we are still holding our own in the manufacturing sector in Victoria, despite what happened with the closure of the Mitsubishi plant, which has had a very minor impact in Victoria. We are working as much as we can to try to ensure that the motor car industry has a long-term future in this state, which now has become the centre for manufacturing for not only the motor car industry but also many other industries as well.

The member asked an interesting question. It is a question which — —

Mr Finn — That you are really wishing you had some sort of decent answer for.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I know it is a question that the Liberal Party and the coalition would not be interested in, because they would never be interested in anything that had to do with workers sharing the benefits of their productivity with employers.

In relation to the specific question the member asked me, the government would encourage that kind of profit sharing. I know that there are many progressive companies which have in the past recognised that their employees are increasingly their most important asset. Anyone who is in the information and communications technology industry, for instance, would recognise that as being the case.

In many other industries the name of the game at the moment is: how many skilled people can you get into an industry to keep it productive? The value or profitability that is being created in many of these businesses really comes from the skills and capabilities of their own workforces. Increasingly businesses are recognising that that is the case. What I would say to businesses is that profit sharing is one mechanism whereby you give a variety of benefits back to your employees.

However, if you do not share the benefits of this kind of strong growth, particularly in the sunrise industries but in many other industries as well, people will not be inclined to work as hard for you as they might.

Therefore I certainly agree with the sentiments that the member has put to me, and I would indicate on behalf of the government that I would encourage employers to take that attitude with their employees. Of course this is

not an area where you can mandate this kind of approach. It always has to be voluntary, and I think the member is acknowledging that in his question, so I would simply say to him that I am happy to talk to the member about other ways that we might be able to move this even further ahead. We think sharing it with the people who actually create that wealth is a way ultimately to increase productivity and increase the amount of wealth — the net cake, if you like.

Supplementary question

Mr KAVANAGH (Western Victoria) — Does the minister intend to use any influence he might have on the commonwealth to enlarge existing schemes that promote sharing between companies and their employees?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and Trade) — I thank the member for his supplementary question. I might say that I am not sure how much influence I will have on the current government. I had very little influence on the previous government, and I am looking forward to a great deal more influence with the current government. My counterpart, Kim Carr, the federal Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, with whom I am developing a very close working relationship on a range of these matters, is somebody that I know. Anyone who knows the background of Kim Carr would definitely know that he is somebody who defends workers rights, and I am sure he would be interested in ensuring that workers get a fair share.

He is also somebody who wants to make sure that we have a profitable business sector and a sector which is actually invigorated and working. The main goal nationally will be to ensure that we have continued economic growth, low inflation and a range of other parameters in place, but I look forward to building on my relationship — —

Mr Atkinson — On a point of order, President, it might be a minor thing, but I note that the minister is directing most of his answer to the backbench of the government party and not through you or indeed even to the person who questioned him.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I actually expect a little more from Mr Atkinson. There is no point of order.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I assure the member that I will be working with the new federal minister, Kim Carr, with whom I have had a number of meetings, and I look forward to more meetings with

him and to developing a very strong working relationship for the benefit of workers in Victoria.

Energy: low-emission technology

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Gavin Jennings. I refer to the recent release of Professor Ross Garnaut’s interim report, in which he highlighted low-emission energy technology as the critical driver of deep emission cuts in Australia, and I ask: what role are the Brumby Labor government and Victoria playing in the research, development, demonstration and commercialisation of low-emission energy technology?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Environment and Climate Change) — I thank Ms Broad for her question and her concern about the wellbeing of the planet in terms of addressing the great climate change challenge that Ross Garnaut has recently reported on. He has provided very useful reference material and guidance for this nation in terms of establishing a national emissions trading scheme, establishing market mechanisms to determine the price of carbon and playing our role not only in establishing national markets and national regulatory responses but also on the international stage.

That piece of analysis and those recommendations will subsequently be followed by a further report commissioned from him later in the year, which will be augmented by work undertaken by the federal Treasury and work already undertaken by the states and territories in Australia, to form the heart and the architecture of how this nation responds to the climate change challenge. We in Victoria want to make sure that we are at the leading edge of national reform. In fact the state of Victoria has been a prime mover in terms of policy development. We have provided a lot of support for Ross Garnaut’s work, and we will continue to provide support for that work on behalf of this nation and indeed the global community.

Professor Garnaut has made a series of recommendations and given guidance to all jurisdictions about how we should respond to this issue, and he has been particularly mindful of equity questions in relation to the potential to dampen down the Australian economy. He is aware that in introducing market mechanisms for the price of carbon there may be adverse price effects on consumers and households, and he is very concerned about those equity questions. But he is also very concerned about equity on a global scale, and in relation to the targets that are endorsed for Australian jurisdictions — leading up to 60 per cent reductions on year 2000 levels by 2050 — he has

indicated his support for those targets. But he has also indicated, as part of our international obligations, that subject to international negotiations and settlement, those targets may need to go further.

So he is not gilding the lily in relation to any of the equity considerations or any of the other considerations that are in place. We in Victoria want to ensure that we respond to a variety of those aspects of policy development in the next few months in establishing the architecture of the national emissions trading scheme, and that we contribute in a very tangible way to technological breakthroughs and the technological transformation of the energy sector.

The Brumby government has supported a number of those initiatives. The most prominent of recent days is the announcement that took place yesterday, where we saw significant investment in the Solar Systems energy system, which will be developed in north-west Victoria, involving 154 megawatts of solar electricity generation. This will be one of the largest of such facilities in the world. Following the support of our government in providing \$50 million and a contribution by the federal government, TRUenergy entered into an equity arrangement with Solar Systems yesterday and made a contribution of \$285 million. It is a major investment by a major generator in this country which recognises the value of establishing a world-class solar energy generation capacity in north-west Victoria.

But that is not the only project that the Victorian government has supported. We have supported a number of other smaller projects which are nonetheless all valuable in terms of driving technological reform, and they range from the wind turbines at Hastings, the biogas at Tatura, the solar sound barrier at Essendon, the Mantra Blue geothermal heating facility and the green waste recycling in Dandenong to the mini hydro in Hallam. These are examples of a range of technological solutions which will change the ecological footprint of our energy generation.

Also part of the emissions technology innovation scheme is a significant contribution by our government to support more efficient ways of capturing and storing, or sequestering, carbon. This will be maintained as a particular emphasis of the government to ensure that we have a comprehensive range of measures to respond to the technological challenge. From my vantage point, working with my colleagues within the Brumby government, I am absolutely determined to maximise the degree of transformation that occurs within the energy sector and to do so in a way that maintains the leadership role of Victoria and protects the wellbeing of Victorian industry in the years to come.

Mr Hall interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — I congratulate Mr Hall. It may be difficult for me to identify what his status is in the Parliament, whether he is the deputy deputy or something else, but I know that he is a man who is listening and I thank him for that. I appreciate the interest of any member of this chamber and any member of the community in the range of technical solutions that will be at the heart of this transformation in Victorian industry in the years to come. I welcome any travellers in relation to that important undertaking, because it is one of the biggest undertakings that the people of Victoria will be embarking upon in the years to come.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr LENDERS (Treasurer) — I have answers to the following questions on notice: 421, 431, 544, 566, 614–21, 772, 773, 775, 791, 809, 846, 915, 916, 961, 970, 1013, 1075, 1092, 1117–22, 1183–91, 1255, 1268, 1270–90, 1309, 1310, 1357, 1360–9, 1377, 1379, 1381, 1382, 1384, 1387, 1398–1405, 1415, 1542, 1569, 1601, 1604.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Gaming: Cardinia

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

The petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the residents of Officer and Beaconsfield strongly reject any move to bring and install electronic gaming machines ('pokies') into their community.

The Shire of Cardinia has received applications to install over 200 gaming machines at three separate locations in the townships of Beaconsfield and Officer. If these applications are successful, these townships will have a concentration of electronic gaming machines that is significantly higher than the community desires.

The petitioners request that the state government of Victoria recognise without delay the effect their gaming policies are having on local communities. The petitioners request that the flawed state government gaming policies, which allow the proliferation of gambling, be changed so that local communities such as Beaconsfield and Officer can remain free of electronic gaming machines ('pokies').

By Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria)
(841 signatures)

Laid on table.

Ambulance services: Castlemaine

To the Honourable the President and members of the Legislative Council assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the Castlemaine region is in desperate need of a 24-hour ambulance station.

The petitioners therefore request that the government, as a matter of urgency, commit the necessary funding to allow the Castlemaine ambulance station to be staffed on a 24-hour basis.

By Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) (244 signatures)

Laid on table.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 2

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) presented *Alert Digest No. 2 of 2008, including appendix.*

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

Legislation Reform (Repeals No. 2) Bill

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) presented report, including appendix.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 — Minister's Order of 21 February 2008 giving approval to the granting of a lease at Bells Beach Surfing and Recreation Reserve.

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 — Minister's Notice regarding the amendment, commencement and availability of the Poisons Code and Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Drugs and Poisons, No. 22 (three papers).

Murray-Darling Basin Commission — Report, 2006–07.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — Notices of Approval of the following amendments to planning schemes:

Baw Baw Planning Scheme — Amendments C48 and C49.

Brimbank Planning Scheme — Amendments C89 Part 2 and C101.

Cardinia Planning Scheme — Amendment C109.

Colac Otway Planning Scheme — Amendment C50.

Corangamite Planning Scheme — Amendment C16 Part 1.

Greater Shepparton Planning Scheme — Amendments C71, C80 and C101.

Hepburn Planning Scheme — Amendment C40.

Hume Planning Scheme — Amendment C96.

Indigo Planning Scheme — Amendment C34.

Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme — Amendments C26 and C58.

Manningham Planning Scheme — Amendment C65.

Melton Planning Scheme — Amendment C76.

Moria Planning Scheme — Amendments C26.

Victoria Planning Provisions — Amendment VC46.

Road Management Act 2004 — Order pursuant to clause 4(1)(a) of Schedule 5A to the Act.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament:

Fisheries Act 1995 — No. 4.

Magistrates' Court Act 1989 — Nos. 5 and 6.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — No. 3.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Ministers' exception certificates under section 8(4) in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 3 and 6.

A Proclamation of the Governor in Council fixing an operative date in respect of the following Act:

Liquor Control Reform Amendment Act 2007 — section 13 — 7 February 2008 (*Gazette No. G6, 7 February 2008*).

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Verney Road School: teachers and facilities

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — On 14 February, the day many of Victoria's school teachers were on strike because of the Brumby government's failure to sit down with them and negotiate a reasonable remuneration package, I had a visit from three students from the Verney Road School, Brayden Guascoine, Ben Richards and Nicki Grogan. The Verney Road students have special needs and visit my office regularly as part of their community access program. After explaining to the students what a member of

Parliament does I asked if there was anything they would like me to advocate for. On this occasion Brayden, Ben and Nicki argued that their teachers deserve better pay and better working conditions. When I asked them why, they said because they are hard workers and care for the students, they help to get students out in the community, and because they teach them many skills. I thought this was very appropriately timed considering many teachers were on strike, but these three students were accompanied by two teachers, Brian and Hayden, who were actually embarrassed when Brayden, Ben and Nicki advocated on their behalf.

Another issue the three young people raised was a desperate need for improvements, such as the construction of permanent classrooms to replace the four portables, at their Shepparton school. These students have foresight and believe more needs to be done to ensure their school is able to provide for future generations of children with special needs. On behalf of Brayden, Ben, and Nicki I call on the minister to assist Verney Road School to achieve better infrastructure and pay conditions for their dedicated staff.

José Ramos-Horta

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — The Greens hope and pray for a full and speedy recovery for the President of East Timor, Mr José Ramos-Horta. His country needs him back on his feet. He is a man of peace and was, of course, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Those who have met him, as I have on two occasions, find him to be not only a very down-to-earth, friendly and jovial person but when it comes to the important issues of his nation, full of steel.

By one measure at least, East Timor is the fourth poorest country in the world, and it is desperately in need of leadership. It is a great tragedy that these events occurred. I am sure every member of this place will agree that East Timor needs all the leaders it can get. I am sure that is a sentiment also shared by many people in Victoria, particularly with our large East Timorese diaspora.

Sport: Timboon grants

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — Last week I had the pleasure of announcing two grants under the Country Football and Netball Program. In Camperdown, \$20 000 has been allocated for the extension and widening of two netball courts as well as improved and expanded change rooms and suitable shelter for players and spectators at Leura Oval.

It was a delight to meet with Peter Reilly, the president of the football-netball club, and to have the opportunity to talk with the netballers last Wednesday about how they believe the improved facilities will enhance their game.

The Timboon Demons Football Club was also granted \$60 000 for a new umpires change room and home team change rooms, as well as improved kitchen and canteen facilities. I want to acknowledge the Corangamite Shire Council for its contribution of \$25 000; and the club itself, which provided \$4500. I am looking forward to celebrating the completion of the improvements there with Michael Hunt, club president, and other community members. The new facilities will enable larger community functions to be organised and local fundraising to be made easier.

So far the Labor government has invested over \$6 million towards the redevelopment and construction of more than 150 community sporting facilities, especially for country communities. This government knows the importance of country communities and how local football and netball teams are often the heart of the community and their organisational centre.

Bushfires: unpaid invoices

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I draw the attention of the Parliament to what I think is disgracefully shabby treatment of constituents of mine in East Gippsland. A bus line and a fire services contractor in Bairnsdale have been refused claims for payment for stand-by time to assist the firefighting effort during the Gippsland bushfires just over a year ago. These contractors acted in good faith. They were asked by the Department of Sustainability and Environment to provide stand-by services.

Firstly there was the case of Ian and Glenda Gillick of Gillick's Buslines, who were requested to have buses on stand-by. Their stand-by time and wages bill amounted to \$19 000. The department refused at the time to document its verbal request and subsequently denied the request had ever been made.

I have raised this issue in the Parliament before. The minister recently responded — in my view, unsatisfactorily. He wrote that the department 'has not been provided with any documentation or correspondence or spoken to any individual that could confirm whether the department requested the services in question'.

Strickland Ridder, which provided earthmoving equipment up at Dargo, has an outstanding bill of

\$26 000. Similarly the minister has responded unsatisfactorily, claiming there was a lack of documentation or evidence of services being requested. The fact is that both of these contractors kept their own records. It seems to me that the behaviour of the department has been appalling. The minister should take action to deal with it.

Federal member for Aston: conduct

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to share the concern Mr Leane raised in relation to the actions of the federal member for Aston, Mr Chris Pearce, whose electorate is in the same area as mine. My concern is about reports that Mr Pearce read a newspaper throughout the proceedings in Canberra when the Prime Minister delivered his apology and that he refused to join in the numerous standing ovations.

That event was, as members know, a momentous day in the history of our nation — a day when 1.2 million Australians watched the proceedings on television. It was also a day when Mr Pearce's behaviour bordered on contempt. In view of the significance of the occasion, I think his behaviour was disrespectful to the Prime Minister but also a slap in the face to the federal Leader of the Opposition, Mr Nelson. I think Mr Pearce owes an explanation to his electorate. I think he needs to make his position clear in terms of whether he supports the reconciliation process and the apology. He should explain why he was on that occasion missing in action. He should apologise and in particular provide an explanation to the local Wurundjeri people — —

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

Gaming: Cardinia

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — When Joan Kirner, in the dying days of her reign as Premier of Victoria, introduced electronic gaming machines or poker machines to Victoria many people thought they might serve a useful purpose and provide alternative sources of entertainment and revenue for the government. However, as time has gone on, more and more people have become aware of the significant impact that electronic gaming machines or poker machines can have on local communities. In that context I congratulate the residents of Officer and Beaconsfield, who have rallied to oppose the installation of over 200 gaming machines into their local towns.

There are currently three applications before the Shire of Cardinia. If the applications are successful, the

township of Officer will have a concentration of 70 poker machines per 1000 residents — one of the highest concentrations in Victoria. This is allowed because of the state government's policies that only look at gaming machine allocations on a local government area basis. This is wrong. It does not give a voice to local communities. The state government should be ashamed of the way it disregards the wishes of local communities. I call on the state government, the Premier and the minister, to listen to the wishes of the 841 people who have signed a petition that has been presented to the Parliament today, not to impose these electronic gaming machines on these communities and allow these communities to be pokies free.

Heidelberg Primary School: Go for Your Life campaign

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak about a visit I made to the Heidelberg Primary School on 13 February. The purpose of the visit was to meet the principal and children of the primary school and to distribute Go for Your Life gifts as part of the campaign initiated by the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs in the other place, the Honourable James Merlino. I was able to speak to the children and pass on a strong message on the benefits of exercise and a healthy lifestyle, but they were all looking at the large box I had carried into the school. I suspect they were thinking about what was in the box. I left it to the school principal, Ms Carol Ross, to distribute the goodies. I also took the opportunity to present the principal with a new Victorian flag.

Aichi Prefecture: delegation dinner

Mr ELASMAR — I was also delighted to attend a dinner on 11 February hosted by the President of this house and leader of our delegation to Japan last year, the Honourable Robert Smith. The dinner was organised to welcome to Melbourne a delegation from the Aichi prefecture in Japan. We had a wonderful evening together, and I especially congratulate our President for his knowledge of Japanese culture and for his natural ability not only to warmly welcome our distinguished Japanese guests but also to make sure that every person felt at ease.

National Sorry Day

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — On 13 February the member for Albert Park in another place, Martin Foley, my colleague Johan Scheffer and I had the privilege of joining together with representatives from the City of Port Phillip at a particularly moving ceremony for National Sorry Day.

It was a great opportunity for us to meet with our local indigenous community. After the ceremony the people involved joined the large number of people who had congregated in Federation Square. Carolyn Briggs, an elder of the Boonwurrung people, put us into the frame of mind of thinking about what the major issues were.

Amongst other things I said that in our community are mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters whose lives have been affected and that we had gathered as leaders of our respective communities to say sorry. We want indigenous Australians to know that we recognise the depth of their sorrow and that we did not truly comprehend its depth. We said that we are sorry, but it is how we work together into the future that is the gift in our collective hands, and that is very important. I concluded by saying that the page had been turned and that the City of Port Phillip welcomed a new dawn. Together we will face the future in mutual recognition and support. I thoroughly enjoyed working with Mr Scheffer and Martin Foley on this issue.

Aboriginals: federal government apology

Mr PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I watched the Prime Minister's apology to the stolen generations on 13 February with a mixture of pride and relief. In fact if I had been writing the headlines for the next morning's papers I would have been tempted to write, 'See? That was not so hard, was it?', because I wondered how we as a nation could have been so reluctant to apologise for taking children from their parents. I have heard in response, 'Yes, but they thought they were doing the right thing at the time'. Maybe so, but when has that ever been the measure of whether a policy was right or wrong? The other justification for not saying sorry is, 'This was not done by our generation'. Two weeks ago I was at the Australian War Memorial, and in that place we celebrate, as we should, the bravery of men and women who are not of our generation. The passage of time is not a barrier to pride, nor should it be a barrier to regret. To those who remain unconvinced — to people like Wilson Tuckey, who proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is a relic whose time has passed — I say that if they can absorb only one part of the Prime Minister's speech, let it be the part where he simply asked us to imagine how we would have felt if it had happened to us.

Major projects: government performance

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to now be the shadow Minister for Major Projects. One of my first objectives was to look at some of the major projects that this government has delivered

and to compare them with those that the former Kennett government had provided. I came up scratching for some of the major projects that this government has delivered on time and on budget. What I found was that the former Kennett government had delivered on a range of projects: Telstra Dome, the City Museum in the Old Treasury building, the Melbourne Museum, Crown Casino, the Eastern Freeway extension, the demolition of the Gas and Fuel Corporation buildings, the commencement of Federation Square — and the list goes on and on.

I then decided I would look at some of the major projects that are under this government. Let me outline some from this government's list of major projects. Parliament House catering is listed as a major project. That is fantastic. Also on the list is the upgrade for the Commonwealth Games of the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre. Fantastic! Some of the items on the list are tragically small compared to what the former Kennett government did. You would think that the Minister for Major Projects would be responsible for the \$750 million north-south pipeline, but it is not on his list, and neither is the \$3.1 billion desalination plant. It is amazing that the Minister for Major Projects does not have responsibility for the real major projects in this state.

Bushfires: Ash Wednesday commemoration

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — We are now in the last week of summer and, through both good management and good fortune, we have so far survived the season without a serious bushfire. After the massive devastation of the 2006–07 season we should pause to acknowledge this fact and also remember the tragedy of the Ash Wednesday fires that began on 16 February 1983 — 25 years ago. The fires swept through South Australia as well as Victoria and 75 people lost their lives. Conditions for the massive conflagration were optimal — a period of drought, parched soils, tinder-dry forests and a strong hot northerly wind. There had been serious fires right through the summer, beginning in the previous November. February 1983 was the hottest February ever recorded. The winds lifted 200 000 tonnes of dust that moved across southern Australia and, combined with the fire smoke, blocked out the sun in Melbourne, giving people little warning of the approaching inferno.

On Ash Wednesday, 16 February, the temperature rose to 40 degrees, and by midafternoon dozens of fires were forming into a single long and narrow front that moved south. In these conditions it was extremely difficult for firefighters to control the blaze. During the evening disaster struck when the wind changed and the

fires merged into a wider front, and this was where so many people lost their lives. Some 25 years on it is very important to remember those who perished, those who survived and those whose magnificent work finally brought the fires under control.

Buses: Marysville

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — My matter concerns the public transport service, or lack of it, offered to the Marysville community. At the moment if members of this community want to travel to or from Melbourne, they have one bus service in the morning that goes from Eildon — all stops — through to Southern Cross station. It leaves Eildon at 8.30 a.m. and Marysville at 9.30 a.m., arriving at its destination at 12.15 p.m., which does not leave an awful lot of time in the day.

Coming the other way, the bus service leaves Southern Cross station at 3.00 p.m. and arrives at Marysville at 5.25 p.m. There is no other public transport option. It is too bad if you have to get to Melbourne at night or Marysville during the day. This one-and-only bus service stops at Lilydale station — a railway station that has an hourly service to and from Melbourne. The people of Marysville and other towns along the route want to know why the bus cannot just go to Lilydale station, pick up and drop off passengers and then do another run later in the day, rather than the bus doing the one run into Melbourne and chasing the train that is already going there. This would double the service that is currently available.

This is a sensible, logical alternative to the current arrangements and would provide the residents — not only of Marysville but also of Alexandra and Eildon — with a vastly improved service. I would hope we could apply common sense to provide a better solution for country Victorians, in particular for the people of Marysville. Please let us put some practicality and common sense back into getting Victoria moving again.

Goulburn Valley FamilyCare: coach-the-coach training program

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I was really pleased to announce in Shepparton recently a \$20 000 grant to the Goulburn Valley FamilyCare organisation. This was for an extension of its coach-the-coach training program. The terrific program, using mental health first aid as an early intervention, is aimed at reaching groups at high risk of suicide and self-harm. It is about training football coaches to identify signs of mental illness so that they can put in place some intervention. Anecdotally they have some

very good stories to tell about how this program has worked.

Members know that the length and severity of the drought being experienced in rural and regional Victoria means that more demands are being made on volunteers, and volunteering is becoming increasingly complex. The coaches and people who are involved with the football teams in regional and rural centres often work in a voluntary capacity. I congratulate all those who have been involved. As I said, this is about extending the program. Those who have been involved in the program to date have been doing a terrific job, and I wish them well in the extension of this very important program.

Crime: assaults

Mr VOGELS (Western Victoria) — Following the release of crime statistics by Victoria Police after an ongoing FOI battle with the Liberal Party, I am not surprised that this Labor government wanted to keep the numbers secret. The incidence of violent crime against the person — that is, assaults, sexual assault, rape, homicide, robbery and kidnapping — has skyrocketed in my electorate of Western Victoria since Labor came to power.

The percentage increase in crimes against the person by local government areas as verified by official Victoria Police statistics from 2000–01 to 2006–07 show that Moyne has had an increase of 97.9 per cent; Glenelg, 92.4 per cent; Hindmarsh; 75 per cent, Ararat, 63.4 per cent; Surf Coast, 60 per cent; Buloke, 59.1 per cent; Moorabool, 38.0 per cent; Colac-Otway, 29.1 per cent; Southern Grampians, 26.1 per cent; Central Goldfields, 23.3 per cent; Ballarat, 22.5 per cent; Warrnambool, 20.9 per cent; and Horsham, 14.2 per cent. At the same time the incidence of crime in Melbourne has increased by approximately 2.5 per cent.

We only have to look at today's *Herald Sun* to see what damage crime is causing in the central part of Melbourne, yet the incidence pales into insignificance compared to that in my country Victoria electorate — where it is no longer a very nice place to live, work and raise a family. I hope this government gets on not with closing but with establishing more police stations and police residences.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (ANAPHYLAXIS MANAGEMENT) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 7 February; motion of Mr LENDERS (Treasurer).

Mr PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to make a brief contribution to debate on this bill. Anaphylaxis risk is a growing problem, and it is likely that every member of this house knows somebody who has suffered from an anaphylactic episode or is at risk of one. A friend of mine whom I grew up with died when still a young woman after an anaphylactic reaction to shellfish. Now a former colleague of mine is at risk of anaphylaxis from chickpeas; and another friend has a child who is allergic to eggs, dairy products and peanuts.

The problem is that nobody is quite sure why anaphylactic risk is increasing, but it is almost undeniable that it is. In 2001 admissions to the Royal Children's Hospital for anaphylactic reactions numbered 23, but by 2006 that figure had risen to 71. According to the latest reports, 35 per cent of schools have at least one student at risk of an anaphylactic episode.

I am a parent of young children. One is two years old, and the other is a newly enrolled prep student. Frankly I cannot imagine the stress as a parent of having a child at risk of anaphylaxis and having to send them off to school every day. Schools, kinders and crèches can put in place all kinds of safeguards, and they do; they do it, by and large, very well. There are rules against sharing food and rules against other children bringing in peanut products or peanut butter but as a parent, if I had a child at risk of anaphylaxis, I do not think I would be satisfied that that was enough. With the best will in the world you cannot guarantee that a child who is at risk will not inadvertently eat something they should not or that a child who is not at risk will not inadvertently bring something into the playground that will place another child at risk — after all, we are talking about children.

I think everybody in this house was shocked and saddened by the Alex Baptist story. I know that in my family and in families all over Victoria our hearts went out to the parents of that young boy. I remember thinking at the time what a terrible thing it would be and how helpless you as a parent would feel if you had a child as unfortunate as that young boy was.

I do not think it will ever be possible for any government or any Parliament to give the parents of children with anaphylactic risk 100 per cent peace of mind. But we do have, as legislators, an obligation to give those parents and their children the greatest level of peace of mind that we possibly can. Ensuring that schools have an anaphylactic management policy in place and ensuring that staff have appropriate and up-to-date anaphylaxis management training is, quite frankly, the least that we as a Parliament can do. This legislation has been supported by the Australian Medical Association. It is a good bill, and it deserves the unanimous support of the house.

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — I think it is salutary to remind ourselves what we are dealing with here, because it is some time since we commenced this debate. The purpose of the Children's Services and Education Legislation Amendment (Anaphylaxis Management) Bill 2007 is to require all children's services and schools with a student diagnosed with anaphylaxis to have an anaphylaxis management strategy in place by the commencement of term 3 in 2008 at the latest. The management program will establish mandatory minimum first aid training for teachers and staff and establish storage guidelines for the EpiPen, an anaphylaxis drug treatment.

Following on from what Mr Pakula said, it would only be one family that would have to suffer from a child who died from anaphylaxis for all of us to understand the significance and the horror of such a circumstance. Our thoughts would be with any family that experienced such a dreadful occurrence.

I am pleased that the minister has brought in this bill. The bill mentions the training of teachers and staff, but I would like to add to that list: I think it is important that we as members of Parliament understand what the issues are. We are in public places on a regular basis. It is important for us to understand what is needed in case there is an emergency. We should make it our business to find out more about how the EpiPen is administered in case we have to deal with a situation such as this. I would like to suggest that we in this place are given the opportunity of understanding a bit more about it.

I remind this chamber that anaphylaxis is a severe and life-threatening allergic condition that affects a significant number of children. It is interesting to note, if we cast our minds back 30 years, that women who were having children at that time did not have the luxury of ultrasounds; they used to have x-rays only. They did not understand what the potential birth defects could be. They had no idea whether their children were going to be born with the right number of fingers and

toes. We have come a long way in medical research. Today, with the advent of ultrasound, we are able to detect severe in utero defects in children. Much of the latest technology is so sophisticated that doctors can fix situations such as heart conditions in utero, which I think is quite extraordinary. Anaphylaxis is even more worrying to see today when we look at the huge milestones that have been reached in medical technology and the way as a community we have come to expect that a child born into our community in this state is going to live a healthy and happy life.

But we have to look at what has been happening. There has been an increase in anaphylaxis, in autism and in ADD and ADHD. For the record, it is important to have an understanding of anaphylaxis. The term 'anaphylaxis' was introduced in 1902. That is over a century ago, yet there are still children in this state who are dying from this condition. The medical progress has not kept up with this particular issue, if you ask my opinion. I think it is important that significant funding be put into looking at remedying this situation.

As an aside, autism was defined in 1943 by Leo Kanner of the Johns Hopkins Hospital in the United States. More recently ADD and ADHD were defined in 1980. A lot of research is being done into autism and a lot of research is being done into ADD and ADHD. Anaphylaxis has been with us for over a century, and it is important that we make certain that additional resources are put into finding a cure and a really failsafe method for dealing with it. EpiPens are a very good start, but I would suggest that we need to be even more vigilant and have a greater understanding of this issue.

It is important to understand, as Mr Pakula stated, about lifestyles. An article by Carol Nader in the *Age* of 15 April 2007 gives a very vivid explanation of a family whose child is affected by anaphylaxis. I will read some excerpts from this because it is helpful to understand the impacts that something such as anaphylaxis has on quality of life, on a family and indeed on a community. Her article states:

It was just the tiniest bit of formula, but it was enough for her four-month-old baby's face to swell. It was the first time Belinda Anson had given her son anything other than breast milk. Within minutes of adding the formula to some rice cereal, Scott's face swelled and went very red.

Two months later he was diagnosed. He has multiple food allergies, and it is difficult for his family. These are some of the impacts that it has:

The impact on his family's life has been profound. Belinda Anson has to carefully prepare everything Scott eats.

He is not allowed to buy food from the school canteen. When he goes to a birthday party, he brings his own food.

The family can't eat out. Belinda Anson spends a lot of time scrutinising food labels in supermarkets, and sometimes has to ring the food manufacturer to double check the food doesn't contain any forbidden ingredients. Even planning a family holiday is difficult.

The family has to make sure that, if they go away, they stay somewhere close to medical facilities just in case.

...

'It is very difficult', she says. 'You always have to keep your wits about you and be rigorous in your approach to caring for him. I think one of the most difficult things for people to understand generally, and for us to understand when he was first diagnosed, is that such a basic activity like eating can have such lethal consequences'.

It is very pleasing to see this bill, although there are some concerns that we, the Liberal Party, have had with the bill and its implementation. It still needs some clarification, and there is also some uncertainty about how it will be rolled out and who will receive training and when.

Also I suggest that ongoing monitoring needs to be particularly vigilant. If in effect we are going to make changes in the future, it is important to get some empirical data together so that we can make proper suggestions and proper research based on empirical evidence rather than anything that is anecdotal. There is a training budget of \$1.3 million that has been put aside by the department, but I suggest that this needs to be enhanced both in its rollout to make certain that people can in fact learn more about this affliction and also for research. The position statement of the AMA (Australian Medical Association) regarding this issue says:

Governments across the country should introduce guidelines that aim to protect children who suffer from medical emergencies The guidelines should incorporate:

mandatory training for all staff at child care, preschool and school settings in first aid;

specific treatment of anaphylaxis, including administration of an auto-injecting pre-filled adrenaline delivery system —

in other words, the EpiPen —

a management strategy for affected children ...

ensure school employees can administer medication (as per child's treatment plan).

I believe much of what the AMA has suggested has been covered in this bill. It is a bill to be commended. The Liberal Party certainly supports it. I leave this chamber again with the thought that for just one family

to lose a child to anaphylaxis in this day and age is one child too many. I commend the bill.

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — As a member of this house I rise to speak on and support the Children's Services and Education Legislation Amendment (Anaphylaxis Management) Bill 2007. This amendment bill seeks to put in place a proper and clear process for child minders, be they teachers in a school or proprietors of children's services. We have all read about the increasing death toll of our very young from the syndrome known as anaphylactic shock. This occurs when a child, usually after eating, goes into a severe shock caused by an allergic reaction. It is so serious that it can cause the death of a child in minutes.

Children may be allergic to all kinds of foods and snacks. Insect bites and some medications are also known to induce anaphylaxis in children. However, when an attack occurs in the care of an outside service provider, the organisation must have a management strategy to limit the physical harm of such an attack to the child. Unfortunately in our world today, because of pollution and food additives, this shock syndrome is becoming more frequent. Figures show that 1 in 20 children has been diagnosed as being at risk of anaphylaxis. That is about 5000 Victorian children who are currently at risk.

It is becoming so commonplace that legislation is needed to ensure processes are put in place to properly manage these incidents in our schools and within organisations who provide children's services. Staff, who have prime responsibility in the absence of parents for the care of children, must be trained properly to recognise symptoms and then put into action an emergency plan designed to minimise stress and harm to the child. Whether schools are government or private, individual action plans for each diagnosed child must be devised and then implemented. Only through education, training and knowledge will this legislation be truly effective. The object of the exercise is to save as many young lives as we can and to minimise the suffering of our children. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I join this debate in support of the Children's Services and Education Legislation Amendment (Anaphylaxis Management) Bill 2007. The objective of this bill is to provide for the explicit management of anaphylaxis in children's services and schools, including minimum safety standards and mandatory training which is in line with the commitment made by the former Premier, Mr Bracks, on 22 October 2006.

On a personal level, I am the father of a child who suffers from severe allergies which have not quite ever been diagnosed as anaphylaxis. Nevertheless my son's allergies were so severe that one day when we were travelling on an interstate train the train had to stop and we had to wait for medical assistance to arrive. As a consequence of this legislation parents such as myself, whose children suffer from severe allergies or anaphylaxis, can have their minds put at ease when their children attend school because this bill requires all schools to have individual management plans for children diagnosed as being at risk of anaphylaxis and a communication plan for staff and parents.

All on-duty staff at schools where an enrolled child has been diagnosed at risk will be required to have comprehensive anaphylaxis management training. In addition all school staff, regardless of whether there is a enrolled child at risk, will be required to have education in the use of an adrenaline auto-injecting device. That is important because the parents of children who have severe allergies do not always know about anaphylaxis nor are educated about it. It is important for teachers to be trained in that area; teachers might help to detect allergies. All schools with an enrolled student diagnosed at risk of anaphylaxis will be required to have an anaphylaxis management policy in accordance with ministerial order.

The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority will have responsibility for monitoring compliance with the legislation. All schools will be required to demonstrate evidence of compliance to the authority as part of their regular five-year school review process. Any new school seeking registration will have to satisfy the authority that it has an anaphylaxis management policy in place as well as procedures to ensure the appropriate training of staff.

There are similar amendments to the Children's Services Act, which I will not delineate here due to time constraints. Any parents reading the minimum safety standards and mandatory training provisions introduced in this legislation will feel more at ease in sending their children to school or preschool.

Before I conclude I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the late Mustafa Ilhan in bringing public attention to the issue of anaphylaxis. Mustafa's child suffered from anaphylaxis, and as a consequence he, through the Ilhan foundation, contributed \$1 million towards the establishment of an anaphylaxis centre at the Royal Children's Hospital. In view of the above, I commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) —
By leave, I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

I understand the opposition wanted clarification in regard to a few matters. Some advice on these matters has been provided to me by the department. I am happy to put this on the record, as it might assist Ms Lovell in regard to her request. While I have not seen the letter that Ms Lovell wrote, this advice has been provided to me on the basis of that letter.

I understand Ms Lovell raised three areas of interest in relation to this matter. The first was:

Will school bus drivers be required to be trained to respond to a possible anaphylactic reaction on a bus?

I am advised that parents are responsible for developing management strategies for children at risk of anaphylaxis for a range of non-school settings and situations, including their transport arrangements to and from school, be it by bus, tram or train. This legislation will only apply to schools and early childhood services.

The second question asked by Ms Lovell was:

What does 'ought reasonably to know' mean in the amendment to the Education and Training Reform Act?

I am informed that above all, parents have an obligation to inform schools of their child's condition. However, schools have an obligation to be proactive in seeking, on enrolment, information from parents about the particular health needs of the student. 'Ought reasonably to know' means that schools are reminded of the need to take reasonable steps to find out whether their students have a severe allergy, for example, as part of their enrolment procedures. This is the practice in schools already, and it is a requirement in the anaphylaxis guidelines.

The third question related to funding for Catholic and independent schools for training. I am informed that in Catholic schools training has been funded since 2005 by the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria. Independent schools have funded training through their own budgets. I am also informed that the department has worked closely with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria to support them in responding to anaphylaxis in schools, including through

the provision of resources, kits and advice. Any request for funding support for training will be considered through existing departmental procedures for consultation and liaison with the non-government sector.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

MOTOR CAR TRADERS AMENDMENT BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 6 December 2007; motion of Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Environment and Climate Change).

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — It is a pleasure to make a few comments on behalf of the Liberal Party on the Motor Car Traders Amendment Bill 2007 and to say from the outset that the Liberal Party will be supporting the bill. The purpose of the bill, as members will no doubt be aware, is to amend the Motor Car Traders Act 1986 by implementing further legislative changes recommended by the 2004 Pullen report. It is interesting to note that the Pullen report was produced by the former member Mr Noel Pullen, but it was tabled in November 2004, so it has taken some three years to get from stage 1 to actually debating this motion here today —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr GUY — Mrs Peulich is right: the government seems to be in neutral, or maybe just in first gear, when it comes to reform or change. It has certainly taken some time to get to this chamber.

None of us want to buy a dog when buying a new car. The motor vehicle industry in Victoria is huge. I am informed it is Victoria's largest export industry. Cadillac is coming to Victoria. Soon you will be able to buy your own Caddy, which is quite novel. People of Mr Madden's size will be able to fit into a Cadillac, no problem. People of my stature can be happy with a Honda Civic. The industry is important to Victoria, and very important to our economy. As I said, no-one wants to buy a dog of a car. That reminds me of other dogs that have been identified lately, like TipStar. You are lucky TipStar is not a car, because otherwise you would be certain to purchase a dog, that is for sure.

Car dealers, like politicians, have a profession that has been much maligned over the years. It is a shame that a

few bad eggs spoil the reputation of many people in the industry. It is fair to say that the vast majority of motor car traders do a very good job, are upstanding and honest and try their hardest to present a good product to consumers in that market. It should be noted that a vehicle is the second largest asset that most people will purchase in their life. People buy a house, and in many cases they buy a car. In many cases, as I said, it is the second largest asset they will buy in their life. We are talking about a very large investment for many Victorians, so the purchase of a motor vehicle should be treated with a degree of seriousness.

The bill as it stands aims to remove the bad eggs from the industry and create an industry in which we can all feel confident. It has three key points: strengthening consumer protection through new cooling-off periods post car purchases; strengthening industry and professional reputation protection; and reforming the way claims can be made on the Motor Car Traders Guarantee Fund. I will just make a couple of comments on those three points.

The bill prohibits traders from employing people who have had a claim admitted against the Motor Car Traders Guarantee Fund without the permission of the Business Licensing Authority (BLA), or as an associate or partner of the company which has admitted the claim. That, in effect, is a way of saying that the bill is safeguarding those who are in the industry and certainly safeguarding consumers to ensure that motor car traders are reputable people in the industry and are providing a service or a quality of service that is second to none. It is very important that is done and it is one of the reasons why the Liberal Party strongly supports the bill. Consumer protection and, indeed, professional protection should always be to the fore when we are considering bills like this one.

The bill also requires traders to have police checks done for new staff who would be working in a customer service capacity before they are employed. Obviously traders cannot employ a person who has been disqualified from holding a motor car traders licence or been found guilty of a serious offence such as fraud, dishonesty, drug trafficking or violence in the last 10 years. It is very important that those points are factored into this bill.

Those points will ensure that the motor car industry is weeding out the bad eggs that have given it a less-than-perfect reputation over a number of years. The provisions will go a long way towards strengthening the reputation of motor car traders and people in that industry; they will provide reassurance to the purchasers of motor cars.

Traders will be prohibited from having dealings with anyone under the age of 18. The bill will stipulate that electronic forms of advertising be classified as an offer to sell. The bill will provide an offence of not having an up-to-date dealings book. In essence, the bill is certainly making sure that people under the age of 18 cannot be exploited by bad eggs or, to put it the other way around, cannot themselves engage in any kind of activity which leads, for example, to a motor car trader wasting their time dealing with someone who obviously cannot purchase one of their products.

Traders also must have available at their offices for inspection by Business Licensing Authority inspectors the business records relating to their past three years of trading. That is another point which goes a long way to focusing on transparency in the industry, a better regulation of the industry and to looking at the industry from a stronger point of view when it comes to enhancing professional reputations.

The Business Licensing Authority may change the condition of a trader's licence at the request of the motor car traders claims committee. The bill allows the committee to seek information from third persons such as the police in deciding a claim, and it may initiate legal proceedings on behalf of the committee with regard to claims by an individual. No doubt this is another measure which goes a long way to safeguarding those who participate in the motor car trader industry; indeed that point has the strong support of the Liberal Party.

On consumer protection issues, new cooling-off periods will be introduced for the sale of new cars. Although it can be waived by the purchaser, the cooling-off period is an aspect of the bill that has created some consternation, and I will come to that later. It is certainly new to the industry, but it does not apply to commercial vehicles. I understand that \$400 or 2 per cent of the purchase price, whichever is greater, can be retained by the dealer if the sale has not been completed.

Traders are to ensure that consumers understand the cooling-off provisions when they are purchasing a new car. That is very important, because the last thing we want is a situation where the consumer has an unfair advantage over the licensed motor car trader who has the right to sell a vehicle but not to be led on by a consumer who then might go to another dealer and get a better price. In that instance the licensed motor car trader would have kept the vehicle when he could perhaps have made a sale. He will have kept it for the person who, as I said, then goes and gets a better deal from someone else. The licensed motor car trader is

then worse off. It is very important that not only is there a cooling-off period but that that protection is provided for the motor car trader as well.

The bill prohibits dummy bids at car auctions. However, vendor bids by the auctioneer are still permissible, if they are announced as such. The auctioneer must record the details of the seller and the purchaser of the car; it is good that transparency is being factored in to any sale. Certainly people will know if dummy bids are being made unlike, what has been happening in the past not only at vehicle auctions but at auctions of residential and commercial properties; they have not always been above board. We support the provisions in the bill that will ensure transparency, that people are not being ripped off when it comes to dummy bidding.

The bill also removes the existing requirement to display the name and address of the former owner of a vehicle on what is called the form 7. The information is available on request and is to be supplied by the trader, if requested. That provision is because of privacy considerations, which is a very important issue; we support that provision in the bill.

I will make a brief comment on the Motor Car Traders Guarantee Fund. The bill restricts the people who may claim on the fund, to ensure only consumers can access compensation. Bodies restricted include motor car traders, public statutory authorities and finance brokers; that is an important aspect. It ensures that government and other statutory authorities cannot use it as some sort of slush fund as has been the case with similar funds held by governments in the past.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr GUY — Mrs Peulich is right. The government certainly loves slush funds; if it gets its hands on these kinds of slush funds, it tends to go a little haywire. Everyone knows what Labor governments are like when it comes to having unfettered funds available.

There are some areas of concern I want to point out. The VACC (Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce) expressed concern that the cooling-off provisions for new cars may lead to consumers entering into contracts for new cars and then using those contracts to shop around for a better price, as I mentioned earlier. While the introduction of a cooling-off provision will certainly give consumers something of an upper hand, or certainly a good hand, in dealing with a motor car trader, it is important that the original contract is honoured, with some guarantee

going back to the licensed motor car trader, and that is where the 2 per cent or \$400 provision comes in.

It is important to insert that provision into the bill to ensure that consumers are not shopping around at the expense of licensed motor car traders. It certainly would be unfair if consumers were shopping around to obtain a better deal when a licensed motor car trader has a vehicle that is available for sale but has to refuse offers on the grounds that the consumer is willing to purchase. It would be most unfair if the consumer was not willing to purchase and was running around trying to get a better deal for themselves. Imposing a financial penalty on those using the cooling-off provisions should act as a disincentive for this type of conduct. We certainly believe it will, and the government obviously does because it is inserting this into the bill.

It is important that in imposing new regulations on motor car traders we do not shift the balance against the trader. As I said, it is important that we do not pass a bill that makes the profession unviable, and that is the VACC's concern. It has expressed its total opposition to the cooling-off period. It has its concerns. That is something that the Liberal Party has taken on board, and we will be watching very closely over the next few years to ensure that licensed motor car traders are not left in the lurch by consumers who are shopping around.

Having said all that, as I stated at the outset, the Liberal Party supports the bill. The bill improves consumer protection for motor car buyers, it restricts the ability of criminals and other undesirables to operate in the industry and it will clean up a lot of the bad eggs that may be in the industry. Some 99 per cent of the people who are in the motor trade industry are good, honest people doing a decent job, working as hard as they can to make a living and to pay the ever-increasing tax bills that this government is imposing on them. The worst thing we could do would be to pass legislation that would hurt their industry. This bill will strengthen the reputation of their industry and improve the conduct of good business between consumers and motor car traders. As a consequence, the Liberal Party is in support of the bill.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — The Nationals will not be opposing this legislation. The Motor Car Traders Amendment Bill is further testament to a former member for Higinbotham Province in this place, Noel Pullen, who spent a considerable time working through the motor car industry while he was in this place. He came back to this house with a reasonably strong and detailed report containing some 38 recommendations, and it is fair to suggest that

Mr Pullen was disheartened when the government failed to act on many of them the last time legislation of this sort came into this house and failed to put some of his recommendations into legislative form. There were a couple of goes at it previously, where we took maybe one or two recommendations at various times, but the vast majority of the recommendations of the report were left out until now, when quite a few of them have been brought forward.

The bill can be divided into three main areas. There are the new requirements that are going to be put in place so that motor car traders operate within a certain framework; there is an element of providing more protection for all Victorian consumers as they deal with motor car traders in relation to purchasing vehicles; and there is an element dealing with the Motor Car Traders Guarantee Fund. I will quickly go through those particular areas, although a lot of the detail has already been covered.

It is important to realise that motor car traders will have to be much more careful in the way they employ people and bring them into the industry. There are going to be decisions about the people who will be seen to be worthy of working within the industry and restrictions on who can and who cannot work in the industry. Employing somebody is going to entail a police check to ensure that anybody who, over the last 10 years, has been disqualified from holding a motor car traders licence or has been found guilty of a serious offence — fraud, dishonesty, drug trafficking or violence — is ineligible to work and hold a licence to trade in this industry. That will provide more consumer protection.

Throughout its history this industry has had a reasonably poor reputation, but when you deal with a lot of car dealers you realise that those who have been in the industry for a long time understand the need to be honourable and honest, because otherwise they simply will not get the repeat business they need to survive. They are no different to real estate agents: sometimes real estate agents do not tell you the whole truth. However, when you look at those industries, you see that those agents and those car dealers who have been in their industries for a long time are the ones who rely on repeat business, and the only way they are going to get that repeat business is by dealing with their customers with sincerity, integrity and honesty. It is worth looking at those individuals in the industry who have been able to persevere and sustain their businesses over a period of time.

Traders are also going to be prohibited from entering into contracts with people under the age of 18 years. That is becoming a bit of a growing trend, with young

people now becoming more affluent. I would imagine that 80 per cent of 17-year-olds are now holding down part-time jobs. By the time they reach 18 and get their licences, many are in a position to purchase a vehicle, and many of the kids are prepared to purchase a car prior to turning 18. It is important we put that protection around them and have them wait that little extra time to help them make good decisions, in effect. So many of the decisions these young people are making have been leading to financial difficulties. In the telecommunications field kids are getting themselves into a fair amount of strife with phone contracts.

There will also be some other aspects of consumer protection. We all know there is a cooling-off period when you purchase a house, and there is a cooling-off period when you purchase a used vehicle. Importantly this legislation will expand the provisions so that there will be a cooling-off period when you purchase a new car.

Some concerns were raised by the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce about the potential for people to 'contract shop' — that is, to sit down and work out a hardened deal with one particular dealer, then take that deal off to someone else; they try to continually beat the price. To walk away from a deal will now cost you in the vicinity of \$400. We believe the disincentive to contract shop is sufficient that the customer who may be tempted to go and look around once he has in effect done a deal can maintain integrity. We think that will offer the traders enough protection against the many people in the community who may want to do a deal but then change their minds.

The bill will also prohibit dummy bidding at car auctions. However, if a vendor wants to put up their bid, they will be able to do that providing they disclose the fact it is a vendor's bid. The bill will also remove the requirement to publicly display the name and address of the previous owner of a vehicle. The trader will be able to give out that information if and when it is needed.

We have to be careful with this legislation that we do not tilt the balance against the trader. We know that buying vehicles can be a very tricky business. We have seen many sensational stories on evening television shows about people who have bought a lemon and have taken the vehicle back time and again to have it fixed, but who at the end of the day simply say that the car is an absolute disgrace, they want their money back, and they no longer want a car that has been fixed 25 or 30 times. We need to put those protections around consumers, but we need to do it in a fair way that will enable our vibrant vehicle industry to prosper and grow.

While we are happy with those areas, a third area I will mention is the Motor Car Traders Guarantee Fund. The fund, which was specifically set up, has a significant amount of money in it — I believe it is in the vicinity of \$1 billion. That is an amazing amount of money to be available. It is there specifically for the protection of consumers who have been left high and dry by the fact that a dealer may have become insolvent and may have taken off with their money.

That protection is there for those consumers in that instance. We have heard, specifically in the other place, that some statutory authorities have been accessing that fund. I think some serious amounts of money were taken out of the fund by VicRoads. That is certainly an area that we need to clamp down on, and this bill will do that by making more restrictive the ability of those types of organisations to get their hands on the money. Hopefully that will quarantine a larger portion of the money for the people who truly need it — that is, those consumers who have been poorly dealt with.

I congratulate Noel Pullen, who was very interested in this industry. He had some strong views, which often we agreed with and often we did not agree with, but on this particular issue he put his mind to going right through the motor car traders industry. He wanted to come up with a balanced report. The first aspect of his report, which we have already dealt with in this chamber, was about effectively speeding up the process by getting rid of paperwork for what could be done by electronic transactions.

That is the sort of thing Mr Pullen was interested in doing. He wanted to make some tangible differences to the way businesses do their work. Now the government has elected to take on board some more of his recommendations which will give the industry some surety but will also put some restrictions on the industry as to who can work within the industry and who can access the fund that is set up for consumers. That will also give consumers a bit more confidence that when they buy a car, they will be dealing in an industry that is quite well regulated and well governed.

The Nationals will not oppose this legislation. I hope more of Mr Pullen's recommendations will make their way through this house.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — The Greens will support this bill.

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to support the Motor Car Traders Amendment Bill 2007. I wish I could be as succinct as was

Mr Barber, but unfortunately I will go on for a few minutes more than he did.

The purpose of the bill is to implement legislative recommendations from the Pullen report that were supported by the government in its response to the report. The recommendations of the Pullen report, supported in the government response released in May 2006, were intended to achieve a more effective and less burdensome regulatory environment for licensed motor car traders.

The Report on the Motor Car Traders Act Consultations, prepared by a former member of this place, Mr Noel Pullen, and released in December 2004, presented a range of administrative and legislative recommendations to improve the regulatory framework following an extensive consultation process with industry and consumer stakeholders undertaken by Mr Pullen in 2004. The recommendations in the report, supported in the Victorian government's May 2006 response to Mr Pullen's report, were intended to achieve a more effective and less burdensome regulatory environment for licensed motor car traders. A business impact assessment (BIA) examining the costs and benefits of the legislative proposals was undertaken; only those proposals supported in the BIA have been included in this bill.

Amendments already made to implement the recommendations of Mr Pullen for legislative change to facilitate the keeping of purely economic dealings by motor car traders have resulted in an ongoing burden reduction for licensed motor car traders of \$7.5 million per annum. The proposal in the bill will achieve further efficiencies for licensed motor car traders as well as more effective protection for persons who deal with them.

Amendments to reduce the burden of imposts on traders include the proposals to restrict the persons who may claim on the Motor Car Traders Guarantee Fund, to no longer require traders to display certain details on vehicles that will be required from a trader or special trader, and to prohibit dummy bidding at motor auctions.

Almost 70 per cent of vehicles sold at auctions are sold to trader buyers. The issue of the cooling-off period is an interesting one. As Mr Drum pointed out, there was some resistance to this. There is a strong rationale for the extension of the cooling-off period or the cooling-off rights to new car sales. It allows for cool consideration of the contract and it enables the purchaser to finalise finance arrangements or to review the terms and conditions of finance where this has been

arranged or negotiated by a trader for what is often the second largest purchase, as Mr Guy said, that any one consumer will make during their lives.

There is also evidence of the need for a cooling-off period from the 2005 Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (VACC) and Royal Automobile Club of Victoria survey, which found that many purchasers were not aware of the actual price of the vehicle they purchased until after they had signed the contract. I assume that that is referring to the various add-ons and take-offs, and I have been in that same situation myself, where you think a car is a particular price, but when you end up finalising the purchase, you find it is far from the price that you thought you were paying.

The adoption of the penalty for exercising the right nominated by the VACC represents a significant compromise from the Pullen report's proposal, as consumers will now incur a significant cost in exercising the cooling-off right. The extension of cooling-off rights to new cars is the main consumer protection initiative in this bill, and is an important component of the overall package in terms of achieving a reasonable balance between reducing the regulatory burden on industry and more effective consumer protection.

That particular issue was raised by Mr Guy and Mr Drum. Both members were concerned that the balance might be tipped more in favour of the consumer; however, they were not concerned enough as to not support the bill. But I agree with those two speakers — we do need to be mindful of that. Having said that, I believe this bill stops short of tipping the balance too far. In his contribution Mr Drum said that consumers will pay \$400 as a penalty for forgoing the contract of the purchase of the car. This is good because it will actually prevent consumers from engaging in contracts that they do not seriously consider taking up.

I now move on to the consultation process. This bill follows on from a two-stage consultation process involving face-to-face consultations and written submissions in the consultation stage by Mr Pullen, and then written submissions following the release of Mr Pullen's report. Cabinet approved further consultation with key stakeholders on the proposed bill prior to consideration of the proposed bill by cabinet; and further consultation was undertaken with the VACC and the RACV, as I mentioned previously, and the privacy commissioner, the Business Licensing Authority and the Motor Car Traders Guarantee Fund Claims Committee. The stakeholders consulted were generally supportive, although as I said at the outset of my speech the VACC does not support the extension of

cooling-off rights to new cars. With those remarks I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My intention is to make just a few brief comments on the basis that I have had some feedback from people in my electorate and, as Matthew Guy mentioned, the car industry is a very significant industry and is important to Victoria. It is the largest export industry and naturally a fair bit of that is in the mutual electorate shared by Mr Somyurek and myself. Generally speaking this particular bill has been well received. Obviously it has been a lengthy period of consultation. In fact one person with whom I was discussing the bill thought that there was an undue, unnecessary delay, but he also mentioned that he was not surprised, given the fact that the Labor Party is not renowned for moving at a fast pace.

The report was presented in 2004 by Noel Pullen, a former member of this house, and was lauded by the Labor Party. Given the acclamation, I guess many of us were a little surprised that the Labor Party found it fit to shaft Mr Pullen. He lost his preselection and now has been placed on a convenient board — in the good old Labor Party tradition.

Nonetheless the introduction of the bill has been a little less rapid than many in the industry would have hoped. Whilst most members have commented that the motor car traders sector is, generally speaking, a conscientious and quite often community-minded sector — not exclusively but nonetheless it sees itself as being part of the community — this bill does not condemn the entire industry. However, it does contain some strong provisions which enable the industry to be cleaned up. A number of clauses beef up provisions relating to those who can be employed in the industry and also increase protection for consumers. Of course we have all heard of instances where car dealers have enjoyed a lesser reputation than many other professions — a little akin to politicians. We all know of people who probably should never have been employed in the industry but somehow have been able to slip through the net and work in the motor car industry and have been responsible for ripping people off.

As was pointed out, a motor car is the second largest purchase that most people make, and that includes younger people. Often that purchase is made either through a personal loan or a hire-purchase arrangement, so the interest to be repaid can be quite high. Therefore it is very important to have strong consumer protections to ensure that people are not ripped off and that there is that cooling-off period that the bill brings forward.

As Matthew Guy pointed out, the Liberal Party and some traders have also raised the concern that perhaps this cooling-off period can be used by consumers to shop around, and that in fact there can be some detriment to traders, but that is to be monitored closely and we will see how that pans out. In the past Victorians have had their privacy violated by the unnecessary display of their private details to all and sundry who browse through car lots, and this bill does away with that requirement.

I want to commend the particular provision relating to the extension of the cooling-off period to all new car sales. That provision clearly excludes commercial vehicles, as ought to be the case. Improved information is to be provided to purchasers of light goods vehicles about the fact that such vehicles are not covered by the statutory warranty. It is really important that this bill prohibits dummy bidding at motor vehicle auctions and generally provides greater transparency and clarity for traders as well as for consumers. The bill amends the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 to insert a new definition of ‘insolvent under administration’ and makes a range of other consequential amendments.

I commend the bill to the house. It is certainly long overdue. The Labor Party took a long time to enact the Pullen report. Certain aspects of the bill need to be monitored, but I wish it a speedy passage. Motor car traders now will have the opportunity of enjoying an industry that will perhaps be a little less known for some of the rip-off deals and fraud that have often given the industry a bad reputation.

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — This bill arose out of concerns expressed from within the motor car traders industry, and the Brumby Labor government is responding to ensure greater protection for honest traders and for consumers. The bill is aimed at ensuring greater honesty and integrity among traders and their employees to the benefit of those who seek to purchase vehicles. Sadly, corrupt persons — there is no better way to describe them — have misused the existing legislation to hide behind others in gaining licences and then ripping off consumers. In the state where consumer protection laws have always led the nation, this government has again proved that we act on behalf of the people, and this amendment will add significantly to such protections.

There are many other amendments contained in this bill designed to protect the privacy of previous owners, to prevent dishonest persons from gaining employment in the industry, to extend some cooling-off periods, to extend consumer protection regarding light vehicles — and more. As is the case with house auctions, this bill

will make dummy bidding illegal, which will further protect the consumer.

There are various other changes and minor modifications to bring the main act up to date. They combine with the changes I have already referred to to ensure greater protection for those who buy vehicles and a more honest system. I commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Environment and Climate Change) — By leave, I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

In so doing I thank members for their contributions to the debate.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

ANNUAL STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Environment and Climate Change) — I move:

That the Council take note of the annual statement of government intentions for 2008.

In so doing I seek to support the statement made by the Premier of Victoria, John Brumby, in the other place earlier this month, which outlined for the people of Victoria the government's agenda for its legislative program and other aspects of programmatic support to the Victorian community in this calendar year.

It builds on a number of reforms that have been undertaken by the Bracks government and then the Brumby government in ensuring that there is a greater degree of accountability to the Parliament of Victoria. Indeed the Parliament itself has become more representative during the life of this Labor administration following our reforms to the constitution which made this chamber a chamber based on proportional representation and reduced our mandate to be aligned with the mandate of those elected in the Legislative Assembly.

From that fundamental building block of reform of this chamber and the parliamentary systems we have had

other reforms that have seen various powers and statutory operations of parliamentary institutions in the state of Victoria, whether they be through the Auditor-General, the Freedom of Information Act, other management regimes such as financial management or public sector management accountability to the Parliament. We have seen increasing presentations of government ministers before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, which is only a fair and reasonable degree of accountability from our perspective but not one necessarily undertaken by our predecessors.

We believe in the years to come our government will build on the statement that has been presented to the Parliament this year to enhance our degree of accountability and to try and find mechanisms by which members of the community can engage in consideration of the preparation of the legislative program in a better-informed way and in a way that provides them with greater opportunities to be engaged in consultation around the various elements of the legislative program and indeed encourages the ongoing interest and engagement of our community in our parliamentary institutions.

The government's agenda as tabled is spread far and wide in terms of its application to the lives of Victorians regardless of where they live in terms of ensuring that there is a legislative foundation to the wellbeing of our citizens going forward. The priorities and emphases of the government were outlined, which can be seen if you run through the structure of the document and the various pieces of legislation that are attached to it. On many occasions people in the Victorian community and indeed people in this chamber will hear that education is the no. 1 priority of our government. That is reflected in the structure of the document, because the first series of legislative reforms relate to delivering an integrated approach to education and include reform in relation to early childhood development, integration of preschools and preschool support to our young people moving into the school system. That legislative reform builds upon major ministerial realignments and responsibilities that have been established since Premier Brumby came to office. Our commitment to the education system means we are also interested in reform of the university sector.

Unsurprisingly, members of the community would anticipate that our government's unwavering commitment to improving the quality of the health care system is the next priority that is reflected in our legislative agenda. The innovative pieces of legislation trying to provide for preventive health measures and

promoting public wellbeing are among a suite of measures designed to support our health care system.

The fact that our government takes seriously its responsibilities to those in our community who are either vulnerable or may experience disadvantage and require some statutory or regulatory support is indicated by a range of measures designed to support equal opportunity rights and consumer rights. There will be opportunities to provide for greater access to reproductive technology and surrogacy to try to ensure that equal opportunity provisions apply to those areas. There will be legislation to protect the rights of residential tenants. There will be a measure to enhance the rights and opportunities through the prism of multiculturalism within Victoria, and there will be a measure that my colleague the Treasurer referred to earlier today in question time — drawing some notoriety — to lessen red tape for community organisations.

The government's major investments in infrastructure programs and its approach of trying to ensure that it grows the whole state — the mantra of the Bracks and now Brumby Labor governments' time in office — have been underpinned and supported by legislative approaches to the integration of transport and transport legislation, which again will be a feature of this year's agenda. The government understands the importance of the appropriate alignment of development issues. Whether it is with respect to transport or to the appropriate ways in which we can deliver infrastructure in a timely and efficient fashion to our citizens, there will be a basket of legislation relating to improving urban development — —

Mr Barber — Nice cabinet leak, that one.

Mr JENNINGS — I am glad to see that there are members of this chamber and members of the community who are well informed of the government's agenda and its intention to deal with the appropriate regulatory environment around infrastructure.

It is very important for us to provide for safer communities, and there has been a major commitment during the life of this government to provide for greater safety and for safer environments for its citizens. There will be a series of law reform amendments to Victoria Police legislation, the Crimes Act and the sex offenders legislation, and laws relating to the appropriate modernisation of the coronial system and other procedures that relate to the powers and opportunities for police and other statutory officers to compile evidence.

In terms of a solid foundation to support the social and economic wellbeing of our community, it is only appropriate that there be some parts of the reform agenda this year that contain our ongoing commitment to financial prudence in terms of the management of the budget. We want to make sure that our strong budget position and the credit rating that Victoria has come to enjoy are maintained whilst we are growing budget programs and delivering on the infrastructure projects I have been talking about in the last few minutes. The state budget to be produced in May will provide an opportunity for that certainty going forward. This year there will be a major emphasis on making sure that we provide for the appropriate frameworks in dealing with a review of the Accident Compensation Act to provide for the appropriate balance between occupational health and safety reforms, legal rights and opportunities for safe workplaces and aspects that relate to adverse impact in the workplace and the community under that law.

In terms of outcomes from the budget there will be a number of significant infrastructure programs that will be delivered by the government. Most commentary at the moment is around the channel deepening project, which is a major redevelopment of the capacity of the port of Melbourne to address our economic development and delivery of port operations into the future. The channel deepening project is a major infrastructure program but by no means on its own. There are other major pieces of infrastructure such as the water projects that are being undertaken in a variety of parts of the state to provide greater certainty on the availability of water for all members of our community, regardless of where they live.

Our government commenced a commitment to this important area of endeavour through projects such as the Wimmera-Mallee pipeline and other improvements to rural water systems. Those continue to this day with the reform of the Murray-Goulburn irrigation system to make sure that there are greater efficiencies within that system and the food bowl. The bowl is an important part of Victoria in terms of the communities it supports and the agricultural production it underpins. Major irrigation works will be undertaken within that system to try to provide for greater certainty for agricultural production in those communities going forward and so that the water savings that will come from that major redevelopment can be shared between the social, economic and environmental goals within our region and within Victoria.

Another major infrastructure program will be, subject to environmental considerations and approval processes, the establishment of a desalination plant to

provide for certainty in Victoria's water supply. Whilst the major beneficiaries of that reform and that investment will be in the metropolitan area, by no means is that the limit of the availability of the supply that would come through the desalination plant — indeed it would support the availability of water into the Gippsland and Geelong regions of Victoria.

Within my own area of responsibility I am pleased to say that there are some pieces of legislation in preparation to deal with significant issues, such as climate change. Indeed during question time today and on many other occasions in this place I have talked about the importance for this community and the Victorian economy of responding positively, actively addressing the challenge of climate change and not shirking our obligations as global citizens to participate in reforms to the energy sector, to industrial practices and to the way in which our households conduct their resource use to ensure that we all play a role in reducing our ecological footprint and our greenhouse gas emissions. Beyond mitigating the worst impacts of global warming, we must also take timely action to adapt to what those circumstances of climate change already mean, whether it be for agricultural production or the consumption of precious water resources. It is very important for us to consider that whole suite of issues, and consideration is being given to a climate change bill to deal with many of those elements in a legislative or regulatory framework.

Most members of this chamber will know that the key elements of the price of carbon and dealing with a carbon economy will be establishing the mechanisms of a national emissions trading scheme, which will be taking place this year. Important considerations that will come from that work will by and large guide the appropriate Victorian legislation which will augment the efforts of that national scheme.

Importantly within the environment portfolio there are specific commitments for us to reduce our industrial waste to try and prevent contaminated materials going into landfill and to introduce reforms to drive that further. Indeed, as is the usual practice for our government there will continue to be reforms in relation to the management of our natural environment and natural systems to augment our system of glorious national and state parks through the state of Victoria and to add to our rich array of natural assets that are protected through the auspices of the National Parks Act, and that will occur during the course of this year.

We are very committed to ensuring that the state of Victoria plays its role within the COAG (Council of Australian Governments) framework that will be

dealing with ongoing regulatory reform, harmonisation of jurisdictional responsibilities and reform efforts. Victoria has been a leader in the development of national reform agendas, and we will continue to play a very positive role in relation to that initiative. We look forward to the opportunity of operating in a very collaborative fashion between all states, territories and the commonwealth at a time when Labor governments are in office in all of those jurisdictions simultaneously. We think the productive work that has been a hallmark of COAG in the last couple of years will proceed at a great pace.

A basketful of measures are outlined within the statement, ranging over consumer product safety, trade measurement, business name registration, personal property securities, rail safety cooperatives, national food regulation, national gas and electricity legislation and transport of dangerous goods. All of these underscore a national agenda of reform in which Victoria will play its role and will have supporting legislation within its jurisdiction.

We believe in high degrees of accountability, and we know that from time to time there are very high community expectations on our ability to deliver, as there should be. In this year's agenda of our government there are a number of refinements to financial management, freedom of information, public administration and an important piece of legislation relating to the conduct of local government councillors, which will be introduced during the course of this year. This will add to our parliamentary institutional armoury for dealing with the expectations that members of our community have of us and of a lot of people working within the local government sector. Hopefully, as a Parliament, we will rise to meet the opportunity to demonstrate not only our commitment to reform but also our unswerving commitment to live up to those expectations and increasingly become more accountable over time.

It is with that outline of the government's intention that I, along with my colleagues who form the government benches within this chamber, will fulsomely support the intention of our government to move forward with this agenda. I welcome the opportunities for the Council to consider this annual statement of government intentions, as indeed I will look forward to any opportunity to debate with rigour and with full determination any of the substantive measures that are contained within the statement of government intentions as those bills arrive in this chamber during the course of 2008.

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise to make a contribution to the debate on the annual statement of government intentions, February 2008 — so-called Delivering for Victoria. This statement was delivered by the Premier, and we are dealing with it in this house as a take-note motion, the debate on which is fairly free ranging since it covers the whole of the government's legislative program and makes reference to many other matters that the government claims are part of its activities.

In the first instance I will make some general comments, and then I will zero in on some specific sections of this statement, mainly those relating to the environment and climate change portfolio; and I will make some comments about the government's performance in that area. I will also make some comments about freedom of information and the need to ensure greater transparency and accountability in government.

However, in the first instance I want to put on the record my concerns — and the opposition's concerns — about the approach that has been taken by the government with this statement of government intentions. I think it is indicative of the growing arrogance of this government that the statement was simply jumped on the Parliament in the lower house. We were very much informed of this as things proceeded. There was a very brief opportunity to contribute to a procedural debate in this place — late last year, as I recall it — and there was no debate or discussion with the opposition before this new and novel procedure was introduced.

I am aware that the Premier felt there was a need to introduce a setpiece opportunity for him to present the government's legislative and other programs for the year, and this in a sense has been crafted around the need for one man to strut his stuff, as it were. I think that is not the best use of the Parliament's time or the best use of the government's approach to this Parliament.

I do not think this novel procedure has helped the Parliament or the people of Victoria, and I note that in the community this document has, in effect, sunk without trace because it is designed to spruik the government's position rather than engage with the community in a fair way. This is more and more the approach that this government is beginning to take.

I note for the house that some similar procedures are adopted in the Tasmanian and Western Australian parliaments, but this is an unusual approach for Westminster parliaments. It is more reminiscent of the

State of the Union address that is delivered by the American President. I do not know whether the Premier thinks he fits into a similar category, but I would put to the house that this statement falls a long way short of the excitement of a State of the Union address. I have to say I do not think this has added anything to public policy debate in Victoria. I do not think it has added anything to the position of the government in the long run.

The area I want to draw attention to today is the area surrounding the climate change and environment portfolio. I note the section in this document that deals with that. There are a number of steps that are flagged for consideration. I think it is important to place on the record that a number of other developments are occurring in this area at the moment. Members and the community will be aware of the Garnaut report that was brought down in the last few days. The *Garnaut Climate Change Review — Interim Report to the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments of Australia* has made a number of significant statements about tackling climate change. I compliment Ross Garnaut on much of the work he has done. It is a timely report that I hope will be seen as more than input — the unfortunate statement by Minister Wong at a federal level, where she dismissed Ross Garnaut's contribution as just another 'input'.

If you look back to the way the Rudd government came to power, you see it was very much on the back of climate change, which was one of the key areas where it differentiated itself from the then Liberal-Nationals government at a national level. I concede that there were points lacking in the Howard government's approach on climate change. I, for one, accept that climate change is occurring, and I accept that there are significant steps that we have to take at a national and a state level to address that. I accept that there is significant debate around the science of climate change. I accept that people of goodwill and knowledge and significant contribution within the scientific community have different views on the rate at which climate change is occurring, the causes of that change, and what can be done to abate or mitigate the changes that are occurring.

I in no way dismiss as insubstantial or unwelcome the challenges to what might be called the 'accepted' position on climate change, because by having people of authority and knowledge provide that challenge, the underpinnings and the science is tested and refined. I think that process of refinement is extremely important.

I quote from page 42 of the statement of government intentions. Under point 12, 'Protecting the Environment', it says:

The Victorian government recognises the enormous impact of climate change and is committed to playing a leading role in the global process of mitigation and adaptation. Due to the nature of our ecology, economy and geography, Victoria is highly vulnerable to such impacts that will worsen the damage of natural ecology, disasters such as drought, flooding and bushfires.

That is a correct statement. It is a statement that I believe, in one sense, summarises some of the challenges for Victoria. It is a statement that is supported by what Ross Garnaut had to say last week in his interim report. I have no doubt it will be supported as we go forward and he comes to delivering the final report.

I will make a number of comments about Ross Garnaut's work. I have spoken with him at some length and was appreciative of the conversation that I had with him. I look forward to a detailed briefing being provided to the opposition, which he has generously indicated will be provided in the next week or two. I think his step of providing that briefing to the opposition will be helpful for us further understanding where his review is going and understanding the recommendations that he seeks to make.

He makes the point very strongly that Australia in general and southern Australia in particular is amongst the most vulnerable terrains in the world in terms of the impact of climate change. I am persuaded by his work and other work that I have read in coming to that conclusion.

The statement of intentions makes another comment. On a per capita basis Victoria is responsible for a disproportionate share of global greenhouse gas emissions. The new commonwealth government has followed Victoria's lead and is now committed to a national target of reducing emissions by 60 per cent by 2050. I make the point that Garnaut pushes for faster and heavier reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. It is interesting how quickly the statements in the government's intentions are challenged by new material coming forward. I make no judgement about the government on that matter, because I think this is a genuinely difficult area, and the science is moving very fast indeed.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — You do not have a lot of support on your back bench. Have a look at how many people are here.

Mr D. DAVIS — Mr Theophanous, you may not think this is a serious issue, but this is a very serious issue for Victoria. The statement of intentions goes on to say:

Victoria will need to pursue policies that prepare households and businesses for the impact of the introduction of a price on carbon and will formalise this through a *Climate Change Bill*. We will promote innovation and work with industry to ensure that it improves resource efficiency and reduces emissions. We will assist families and individuals to reduce their environmental impact, and ensure that our response to climate change is consistent with our broader commitment to social justice.

Some government members may not have heard the earlier part of my contribution where I pointed to the thinness of this document, its weakness and the fact that it is fundamentally a stunt. To be honest, the opposition does not want to overly grace this document with anything much.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Mr D. DAVIS — No, Mr Theophanous, we do not want to overly grace this with anything much. 'The state of union address' is what we call this statement of government intentions. In his new-found role the Premier has airs and graces that are far beyond his station; he thinks he is the equivalent of the President of the United States, needing his own special platform to make a pre-emptive announcement about what he will do. I have to say that this fell flat in the community, as I said before. I will again quote the sentence from page 42:

Victoria will need to pursue policies that prepare households and businesses for the impact of the introduction of a price on carbon and will formalise this through a climate change bill.

We look forward to that bill and seeing what it will actually do. The task that the government is finally embarking on will be very complex. The statement then says:

We will promote innovation and work with industry to ensure it improves resource efficiency and reduces emissions.

I want to make a point about this. I wish to incorporate into *Hansard* a copy of the government's greenhouse emissions record. I have spoken to parties, including the Minister for Industry and Trade, other parties and *Hansard* in regard to this. There is no objection. I hope to incorporate the chart by leave.

Leave granted; see table page 287.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr D. DAVIS — I have spoken to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Mr Jennings, and he, I think, is very happy to debate this topic in this way.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — And Hansard?

Mr D. DAVIS — Yes, to Hansard and other parties.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — If you talked to Hansard, we're in.

Mr D. DAVIS — Yes, I have. Members can have a copy of this chart. It clearly shows that in 1999 greenhouse emissions in Victoria were around 118 megatons of carbon dioxide equivalent. The source of the information is the Australian Greenhouse Office's document 'State and territory greenhouse gas inventories 2005'.

It is clear that the state government's performance in this area has not been good across 1999 to 2005. The government has talked richly and long about this issue and used a lot of rhetoric about what it will do about greenhouse gas emissions, but the amount of carbon dioxide-equivalent megatons has grown very much during its period of governance. That is its record.

Mr Thornley interjected.

Mr D. DAVIS — This is Mr Thornley's government and this is its greenhouse gas emissions record when in government. Around the world many cities and regional governments including in the USA and elsewhere, have committed to greenhouse gas reductions separate to what national governments have done. They have gone their own way; they have been prepared to take steps. I have to say that this government has not been able to reduce greenhouse gas emissions during its period of governance; its record is one of growth in greenhouse gas emissions across its period in government. It is very interesting to look at its record in terms of — —

Mr Thornley — What's your record?

Mr D. DAVIS — We have not been in government for the last eight years, Mr Thornley. This may surprise Mr Thornley: in Victoria first Steve Bracks and now John Brumby have been in government. The Labor government has had its hands on the levers. It could have controlled greenhouse gas emissions in Victoria. It could have taken steps to control greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, it allowed greenhouse gas emissions to rise year after year throughout that period.

I will now quote from the 2002 document 'The sustainable state: Labor's plan for a greener Victoria — Bracks. Listens. Acts'. It says:

Specifically, over the next four years the Bracks government will:

...

implement the important measures already committed to under the Victorian greenhouse strategy, with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by up to 8.3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide.

Mr Thornley — By when?

Mr D. DAVIS — Four years. The report was written in 2002 — and four years on from 2002 is 2006. I do not have the 2006 figures from the Australian Greenhouse Office because they are not yet published, but they will be soon. I do not believe there will be an 8-megaton reduction in the next year shown in this graph. Do you believe that, Mr Thornley? Do you think about greenhouse gas emissions — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Through the Chair!

Mr D. DAVIS — President, I accept your counsel on that matter. The record of the Bracks and Brumby governments is an increase in greenhouse gas emissions that harm our environment and a lot of rhetoric and hot air but no action of substance in Victoria. There is much that the government could have done.

I will give the government some gratuitous advice about where it might start. I will refer to the document *An Australian Cost Curve for Greenhouse Gas Reduction* by McKinsey and Company. I do not doubt that Mr Thornley knows this document. I congratulate the McKinsey group on the international work it has done on this issue; I wish the group many consultancies and lots of work, but I think this is a publicly minded step to actually get some of this stuff on the agenda. I think it has done extremely well.

Mr Thornley interjected.

Mr D. DAVIS — No, I am just giving it a compliment. I am making the point that in Victoria and Australia, the group has begun to put some very useful points on the record about how the government might tackle these issues. I have to say that some of them could have been taken up by the government during its eight years of governance. With or without federal or other international assistance, it could have taken up many of these measures in Victoria and dealt with them over its eight years of governance.

Let me start here and make some points. As I said, I am referring to the McKinsey & Company Australia summary document. I want to draw the attention of the house to the document under the name of Adam Lewis, managing partner, and Steve Görner, principal, McKinsey & Company Australia. In the interests of brevity, I will zero in on the particular areas that a state government ought to focus on in the period ahead — in fact what it ought to have been focusing on in the previous eight years.

Exhibits 4 and 5 on pages 14 and 15 of this document show Australian greenhouse gas abatement cost curves. Exhibit 4 details the abatement cost curve for Australia until 2020. Very sensibly, the document looks at the cost impacts of the various abatement strategies that could be considered to get Australia to a reasonable level. A number of broad categories are listed in the document: commercial air conditioning, residential water heating efficiency, car fuel economy, commercial lighting efficiency, residential stand-by savings, residential lighting efficiency, biofuels, refrigeration efficiency, residential heating and ventilation efficiency and a number of others. Each of these are negative in terms of cost to the economy. According to the McKinsey documents, you can take these steps in a way that is positive for the economy. By improving air-conditioning efficiency in commercial buildings you can get a positive outcome for the firm, the community, the state and the globe. This is a very useful way of structuring the information to assist the community to understand some of these things.

Other interventions will be more costly in terms of impact on economic output. I make the point that many of these interventions are ones the state government could have taken alone over this period, but it has not taken them.

Mr Thornley — Give us your policies.

Mr D. DAVIS — Mr Thornley's party has been in government for eight years, and I am judging its record and giving what I hope is some useful advice from a useful source regarding the framing of the forthcoming bill that is referred to in the statement of government intentions.

It seems to me that the focus should be on these negative-cost opportunities. The document talks about economic impacts and scenarios. It is worth putting some of this figure work on the public record in this chamber. At page 17 it looks at gross costs per household. This calculation suggests that achieving a reduction in Australian greenhouse gas emissions of 30 per cent below 1990 levels will cost \$290 per

household per year in 2020. Reductions of 60 per cent on 1990 levels by 2030 would cost \$590 per household per year — I have added in that last bit. I make the point that there will be significant costs for the community in achieving these outputs. It is necessary that they be undertaken. I am happy to put the McKinsey recommendations on the public record in an abbreviated form.

Mr Thornley — I think they are already on the public record.

Mr D. DAVIS — Not in this Parliament, Mr Thornley, to my knowledge. Members are looking at the statement of government intentions, and they ought to be aware of these recommendations.

Mr Thornley — You are not the first person who has ever read it.

Mr D. DAVIS — You may have read it, and I may have read it, but many others in this chamber and in this Parliament may not have read it.

The Australian cost curve work implies three important steps for the government: set an aggressive but realistic target for greenhouse gas reduction soon, rapidly pursue negative-cost opportunities, fast-track the commercialisation of promising technologies — these are all deeply sensible steps — and accelerate practical information campaigns to induce a change in consumer behaviour. I make the point that the modelling undertaken by McKinsey is not dynamic. It is static modelling that looks, within the current context, at what would happen if you took this or that action and none other, and then sums it up.

My point is that greenhouse gas abatement can be achieved, but it has to be achieved responsibly, in a way that deals with those negative-cost options as a matter of urgency and also implements other strategies that are aimed at achieving minimal impact on businesses and families. Victoria and Australia need to maintain their competitiveness, and we need to be cautious about schemes or approaches that are ill thought through or that jump at quick solutions. Many of the solutions will not be quick and easy, despite some being low-hanging fruit, as it were. I also make the point that while the McKinsey analysis is not dynamic, many more steps can be taken that will achieve dynamic or behavioural responses that will also lead to efficiency outcomes. One example might be a better public transport system in Victoria. If you model that, it is a complex task. Those of us who catch trains and trams in Melbourne know that if you have clean and efficient trains and trams which come on time and are not overcrowded,

the likelihood of consumers using them is great. This government's failure in an area like public transport begins to have a direct impact on greenhouse outcomes for the state. Because of its failure to invest in public transport, to run an efficient system and to provide a satisfactory public transport system, people are forced to use cars.

Mr Guy — I cannot get on the train.

Mr D. DAVIS — Mr Guy is also a regular user of the trams and trains, and he related to me in this chamber just a week or so ago how the train had been incredibly crowded. When people from this chamber and elsewhere use public transport, that is the experience. It is no wonder people will then seek to use vehicle transport. I am putting on record another example of where this government has failed. This government could have done much better. I look forward to seeing what it does in terms of greenhouse strategy, and I make one brief further comment.

The Department of Infrastructure planning and policy section put a tender on its website very recently — 'Transport energy implications of transport usage and behaviour' — and that project brief looks at a whole range of financial and other systems and incentives to tax and force people into one transport mode as opposed to another. I hope, as the government does this, that it does much better than it did with its last attempt at a congestion levy. The \$40 million annually it is wrenching out of the so-called congestion levy, which is really a parking tax, is a casebook study in how not to introduce a system that would encourage people to take public transport and not use their cars. There is not a jot of evidence that anyone has transferred to public transport because of that tax, but there is evidence that the state government has raked in tens of millions of dollars each year.

Mr Guy — How much?

Mr D. DAVIS — Forty million in round figures, Mr Guy.

Mr Guy — That is a disgrace.

Mr D. DAVIS — My point here is that it is possible to make a big mistake in these areas and have a significant effect on the economy and some businesses. In making those big mistakes the impact is severe and the upside — the achievements in terms of greenhouse outcomes — can be very poor or non-existent, as in the case of the government's parking tax. I have given the government, in this case in debate on its statement of intentions, some examples of where it has done things very poorly. I have given it also some examples of

things it could do effectively. There is a lot to be done. This is an area where a measure of bipartisanship would be welcome, and I think most in this Parliament think this is an important area. It is my hope that the government will get some of this right, because it has a significant responsibility, and unless it gets it right it is going to be very unfortunate for Victorians.

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — I welcome the opportunity to make some comments on the statement of government intentions. When I first heard that the government planned to produce and deliver this statement of government intentions, I thought the concept had some merit — and I still think that: I think the concept has some merit.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Mr HALL — No, no there is no story to tell here. I speak my own views in this chamber and always have. I am saying in respect of this statement of government intentions that I thought the concept had merit, and I still do. The presentation of a business plan or a work program is good practice, and there are many businesses that effectively adopt such principles. Let us face it, government or Parliament is a business in itself. Certainly some of the practices applied by private businesses can be usefully translated across to public businesses such as we are.

The production of this document in itself is useful to some degree. It is certainly handy for us to know as a Parliament what pieces of business we are likely to be transacting for the remainder of the year, and to that extent, as I said, I think the document itself has some use. But it was not the great event that the government made out that it would be. I was one of those who was prepared to give the government a chance, and I supported the adjournment of the business of this chamber for 1 hour so that we could go and listen to the Premier deliver this statement of government intentions. I was one of those who actually went across there and sat in the gallery and listened to it. I would not support the adjournment of this house for a period of an hour again, because as a presentation, as an event, it certainly was not worth our giving up an hour of the time we could have had in this chamber debating some other measure.

I do not believe this statement in itself was of such magnitude that it warranted the suspension of the operations of this chamber. Despite my acknowledgement of the usefulness of having an indicative legislative work plan — and that is what this document is, an indicative legislative work program — I was somewhat disappointed by both the content and

the way in which this document was presented. I want to outline some of the reasons why I felt some disappointment.

It was claimed that this statement of government intentions was the next step in the new democracy of Parliament, and some of the words used by the Premier and the Deputy Premier in their message in the foreword of this printed document that we have before us say that it will increase accessibility and accountability, engage the community and strengthen trust. They spoke about participatory government. There are comments from both the Premier and the Deputy Premier in the message printed as a foreword to this statement.

I am disappointed because this is not a major step in new democracy and it is not a step that will be inclusive of all Victorians, because what a government does is only partly reflected in the legislative program that it has. Probably the things that impact more on people are the things that governments do by way of practice without resorting to legislative means. For example, the expenditure priorities in the budget will probably have more influence and impact on people than many of the legislative changes foreshadowed in the document that we are debating and taking note of this afternoon. We do not need new legislation to put, for example, quality teachers into the system or to build new infrastructure. Legislation is not required for those sorts of things, but they impact on the way people live more deeply than a lot of legislative change.

Things like the north—south pipeline or the desalination plant have not required legislation to bring about those particular projects. In the simple things that impact upon country people, like the ability to collect firewood from public land, again no legislation is required for that, but what the government does in practice impacts on the very livelihood of those people. In terms of giving people more say in things, the statement goes only part way towards doing that, because there are a lot of things that impact on people's lives that are not the result of legislative change.

Also, in terms of a comment about being an inclusive government, it was clearly said by the Premier in delivering this statement of government intentions that people would have the opportunity to express a view on legislation or government policy by way of website www.yoursay.dpc.vic.gov.au. I had a look at that website, because I need to be informed of how the government is going to give the people of Victoria a say. I found it interesting that in order to make comment on any of the items on the website you first of all have to register and then you have to log in each

time you want to say something. In terms of the registration process you have to give your name, your username, your email and your password before you can make comment on any of the particular items on the website. Again, I question why people need to go to that length — why they have to be registered users of this website — before they can make a comment on government programs.

I note at page 2 of the Premier's speech he says:

... ministers will be required to report on public comment when presenting the final proposed bill to cabinet.

Given the fact that when you go to that website you cannot see what anybody else has said with respect to any of the initiatives on the website and you cannot see other people's submissions to legislation or to policy or anything that is covered on the website, how can you believe the minister is going to give an accurate representation of those comments when he or she introduces legislation to the Parliament? If the government's views are totally open and accountable, transparent and democratic, then I would think that the views of all of those who have bothered to comment should be available for people to read and make their own judgements on. With respect to having a say on that website, it is somewhat cumbersome and regulated to the extent that you need to pre-register before you can make any comments, and then you are unable to view comments made by anybody else on any of those particular topics. I think that is a deficiency in terms of an open, transparent and inclusive process.

The concept of being inclusive and allowing people to have their own say comes a bit too late with respect to some major decisions. It is rather hypocritical of the government to now claim that it is very inclusive, allowing people to have comment, when in respect of major items that are at the moment already causing much division in Victoria people had no say whatsoever. I specifically refer to two of the major water infrastructure projects proposed by the government, being the north—south pipeline and the desalination plant. It was this government that went to the last election with a promise to the people of Victoria that it would not take water from the north of the state to supplement Melbourne's water supply. It made no comment about building a desalination plant in the west of Victoria — people had no say nor did they have any forewarning that this was about to take place — yet now the government claims it is going to be very consultative, inclusive and give people a say on some of the major issues that affect their lives. There is valid reason for the people of Victoria to be very cynical about those promises.

I want to make some quick comments on some of the items mentioned in the statement that will be considered by the Parliament in 2008. I turn first to the issue of education, which appears at page 5, and the government's comment on early childhood development. In particular I note the comment that the government has brought the preschool system under the department of education and called it the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and it also foreshadows what might be contained in a children's legislation amendment bill to be considered by the Parliament.

The Nationals have long held the position that preschools should be part of an education system and not a community services system. We welcome the fact that the administration of preschools has now been included with administration for school education here in Victoria. We are bitterly disappointed about the fact that that in itself does not go far enough: many parents in Victoria will still struggle to afford to pay for their children to attend preschool; many parents will still struggle to find the time, given the fact that they are looking after young children, to serve on committees of management for kindergartens and run their preschool; we will continue to struggle to have enough qualified preschool teachers in this system when preschool teachers do not have pay parity with other teachers in this state and there seems to be little incentive for people to take up preschool teaching.

It seems the government has taken one half step forward in bringing preschools under education, but it has failed to tackle the real issues in preschool education — that is, to provide pay parity, to take the administrative burden off parents, to provide greater assistance for parents to be able to afford to send their children to preschool and to attract enough preschool teachers to the system.

In my new responsibilities as shadow minister for tertiary education and training I welcome the fact that there will be a review of university legislation throughout this year 'to ensure consistency with the agreed national protocols for university governance', to quote the words on page 7 of this document. That will be an interesting process given the fact that all university acts have recently been amended to ensure that they conform with the national agreement with respect to those matters. I am not sure what further refinement of those pieces of legislation is required, and I will watch that with developing interest.

I turn to page 10 under the heading 'Food regulation' and note that the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission has just finished a review of food

regulation in Victoria. This afternoon in question time we heard the Treasurer announce that his government was the saviour of the sausage sizzle. I would welcome that if the government is indeed the saviour, but I wonder what the processes will be from here on in to reduce the red tape and the administrative burden of holding a sausage sizzle in Victoria. As I understand it, as the statement says, the process will be:

Further consultation will be carried out with stakeholders from industry, local government and consumer groups in developing the proposed legislation.

So it seems that we are a long way from saving the sausage sizzle at this point in time, when further consultation is required and draft legislation is required to be developed before we can reduce that red tape.

I turn to page 21 of the report headed 'Planning and the environment', and note that the government intends to review the Planning and Environment Act 1987. I say: about time. This was promised pre-1999 — by a Labor opposition at that point of time — and it has taken it over eight years of being in government to put in place a further promise to review the act. The review is well overdue. It was promised eight years ago; let us hope it is done efficiently and effectively now.

I notice, starting on page 22 of the document, some comments about making communities safer and a raft of legislation in the area of police and criminal procedure and judicial procedure to make our communities safer. But what I do not see is any mention of an independent commission against crime and corruption here in Victoria — a commission that has long been called for by the opposition parties, by the public in general and by the Police Association. It seems that everybody but the government recognises a need to establish an independent commission against crime and corruption in Victoria. I am sure that that will go a long way towards making our communities safer. Another significant measure to make our communities safer is putting more police on the streets. That is what people are looking for; that is what people need. That does not require legislation; it simply requires an action from the government, and until it does that it cannot be serious about making our communities safer.

I turn to page 30 and the heading 'Tattooing and body piercing'. This is an issue that was set to go. The Nationals introduced legislation in this Parliament over six months ago on this particular matter. Now the government has decided to put out a discussion paper, which it has now circulated. By the time we get legislation back here we will be about 12 months behind where we well could have been with the private

members bill that my colleague Mr Drum put before this Parliament sometime ago.

I go to some of the water initiatives that are listed on page 39 of this document. Once again I note the lack of any serious consideration of water recycling or conservation measures in the government's water plan. Essentially its \$5 billion plan is being hung on a north-south pipeline and a desalination plant. I am appalled that this government seems to be making little effort to bring about an increased level of recycled water use or stormwater harvest use in this state. There is much more to be done in a more environmentally conscious way that this government seems to simply ignore. I also note there will be legislation on water entitlements, which makes me a bit nervous without going through the details of it. It is something we will watch with great interest.

Finally, I go to page 45 of the document under the heading 'National parks'. While I have never been a great fan of national parks in this state, there is one glaring omission — that is, the consideration of Goolengook in East Gippsland. Goolengook was the subject of a VEAC (Victorian Environmental Assessment Council) inquiry. I made a submission to that inquiry prior to the last election. As a policy announcement leading up to the last election the government pulled the VEAC inquiry and said, 'No matter what VEAC comes up with, we are going to make Goolengook a national park' — much to the disappointment of all of those who had made a submission to that inquiry. It made a farce of the inquiry process; it made a farce of the consultation process.

An inquiry by VEAC had been initiated by the government and had been started. Submissions had been called for. People had presented their submissions to VEAC in good faith, and the government suddenly circumvented that process by making a policy decision that it would be a national park. Yet, despite all of that, in this document there is no mention of legislation with respect to that area. Despite the fact that there is legislation with respect to Point Nepean and Cobboboonee in western Victoria becoming national parks areas, there is no reference to Goolengook whatsoever.

They are some direct comments on the legislative work program as defined by the government in its statement of government intentions. As I said earlier in my contribution, legislative change is not the only thing that impacts on people's quality of life in Victoria. Government decisions and government policy implemented without any requirement for legislative

change have more of a chance of having a far bigger impact on people's lives.

I will mention a few that are running hard in the electorate I represent. 'Police houses face chop', the headline of a local newspaper article, refers to one of those very hot issues in the constituency that I represent. I know for a fact that the government is proposing to sell off 44 police station houses in Victoria. Some of those are in my electorate, at Foster, Inverloch, Korumburra, Toora, Yarram, Cowes, Koo Wee Rup, Heyfield, Lakes Entrance, Drouin, Maffra, Trafalgar and Orbost. I am not sure if I have got all of them, but that is a fair start right across the Gippsland region.

I can tell you that the community safety of the people in country regions is enhanced by the good-quality police officers we have in those country areas, and one of the ways of attracting police to serve in those areas is to supply some housing for them. It is an appalling decision by this government to now propose to sell off many of the police houses which have been dedicated to police officers who occupy positions in small towns in country Victoria. That will impact more significantly on people's lives than many of the legislative changes outlined in the government's statement of government intentions.

I also turn to the issue of racing and how it appears many country race clubs will be losing particular race day programs — again, across country Victoria. In my electorate the Moe Racing Club will lose a meeting, the Latrobe Valley Racing Club will lose a meeting, the Stony Creek Racing Club will lose a meeting and the Bairnsdale Racing Club will lose a meeting. The Sale Turf Club will gain two, but there has been a significant net loss in racing opportunities for those clubs in my electorate. For some of those the impact of that is severe.

The Latrobe Valley Racing Club, which races at Traralgon, has only three race meetings per year, yet it will lose one of them. That will hardly make it viable into the future. The Moe Racing Club has an extremely well-patronised race day over the Labour Day long weekend, where it is combined with the local jazz festival. Now Racing Victoria proposes to remove that racing date from its calendar. Stony Creek lost a racing calendar day last year and has again this year. There has been a 25 per cent reduction in the number of race programs that it is able to run.

These are the sorts of things that will impact significantly on country communities. The government seems to just ignore the issue and not get involved at

all. If it was really serious about looking after country Victoria, I would have thought police station houses and country racing dates are the issues it would be involved with.

Another significant issue in the constituency I represent is the significant change and pressure that is being imposed on the timber industry. The Labor government has been the worst friend of the timber industry. It has not helped it in any way at all, and there are some really serious issues that the government needs to address. I refer to VicForests and the directions it has given the timber industry to contract out wood supplies and now to tender out harvest and haulage contracts. If the government lets VicForests continue in the way it has, that will be the demise of and the final nail in the coffin for the timber industry. There are some serious issues that need to be addressed.

We had the industry transition task force in the Western District, in the Colac area, only a week or so ago. Last week the task force was in East Gippsland and some serious issues have been coming out of that inquiry, which I know the Treasurer has been alerted to. The government needs to address some of those issues as a matter of priority if we are to maintain a viable timber industry in this state. I hope to have a talk with the Treasurer privately this week on ways we can look to address some of those issues.

Another significant issue was the recent revelation that irrigators in the Macalister irrigation district will have to pay for infrastructure damage caused by the midyear floods of just last year. I was one of the first to applaud the government for its \$60 million commitment to help flood-affected victims. I do not think that \$60 million has been expended. At the last count only something like \$30-odd million of that \$60 million had been expended. Yet when Southern Rural Water applied for some government assistance to repair some of the infrastructure damage to the irrigation system, it was told no, it would have to be paid for by the users of that system, being the Macalister district irrigators. I think that is appalling. The government should come clean on this issue and tell us where exactly that promised \$60 million has been expended if it has been expended, and reconsider the needs of those irrigators who have been badly affected by the June 2007 floods.

There are lots of other issues I could comment on. Another one that I have raised previously in this house is the need to review the planning guidelines for wind farms. This has been a strong issue in South Gippsland. I was reminded by one of my constituents, Ian Lyon, from Foster that the Dollar wind farm panel report of 2005 made a direct comment to the government

suggesting that it was time these wind farm planning guidelines were reviewed, yet there has been no response at all from the government with respect to that issue.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Is this coalition policy? I don't think it is.

Mr HALL — I am just telling you what the government should be doing. I do not think anybody on this side of the house would mind at all; they would see there is a need for the government to go back and revisit those wind farm planning guidelines which have been in place for some time now and which have proved to be grossly deficient in many ways. The planning panel recommended in 2005 that we review those guidelines.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Mr HALL — The government has not lifted a finger, and it is about time it did.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I did not hear what Mr Theophanous said — by convenience. In other words, he called a member by his first name. He knows the President's ruling on that. I will ignore it on this occasion, but I ask him to please stop interjecting. I ask that he let the member continue his contribution and to be careful about interjections.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — On a point of order, Deputy President, without wanting to in any way detract from your ruling, I just think it is important for members to know what the rules are. My understanding of the ruling of the President is that when a member is on their feet and speaking they cannot refer to another member by their first name, nor can the member who is not speaking refer to a member on their feet by their first name, but in the normal banter of the house between people who are not engaged in the debate my understanding is that that does not apply. I certainly seek clarification of that for the purposes of ensuring the orderly running of the house in future.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Theophanous is hung by his own admission. The reality is that interjections are disorderly, and what he has basically said is, 'I was interjecting and involved in a conversation with a member who was not on his feet and not part of the proceedings'. I ask Mr Theophanous not to interject.

Mr HALL — I just want to raise one further substantial issue. This is an example of a decision by government which impacts on the quality of people's lives. The last issue I want to raise concerns the

proposed Traralgon bypass route. I was absolutely nonplussed by a decision announced by the government on 11 January this year that it has accepted the supplementary planning panel's report on the proposed route for the Traralgon bypass. I need to explain why this is important. In 2004 a proposed bypass route for the city of Traralgon was determined. People understand the need for such planning, even though a bypass build may be up to 20 years away, so that it gives some security and certainty for people whose land will be affected by a decision on where a bypass route might go. The 2004 decision was accepted pretty well by the community, even though some people would be displaced ultimately when that bypass route was constructed. So that 2004 route quarantined, set aside or made unwinnable a small area of one of the vast amounts of coal deposits that currently exist in Gippsland.

In fact in Gippsland the government claims we have 500 years of brown coal reserves available to be mined in future. This particular bypass route takes away or quarantines 2 per cent of those known coal reserves. Consequently instead of 500 years of brown coal reserves left, we have only 490 years of reserves left. My view is that if, in 490 years time, we do not find an alternative way of generating electricity or using brown coal for the purposes we now use it for, there is something wrong with us as a nation and as a race. None of us will be around here to see it, but there is insignificant difference between 500 years supply and 490 years supply. So the decision by the government was to accept the supplementary planning panel's recommendation to change that bypass route and to make available the full amount of 500 years of reserve brown coal. But what it actually did was prohibit a lot of development opportunities in the Traralgon–Morwell corridor. People who know the Latrobe Valley area would know there are not a lot of development opportunities around there, given that we have significant areas of open cut brown coal mining — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — It is actually the quality of the coal, not just the amount.

Mr HALL — No, it is not the quality of the coal. I have the planning report in front of me. On the whole issue about whether that coal is of better quality than other coal — it is not. On whether it is economically more winnable than some of the other areas of coal — again it is not. It is significantly deep coal that is not of any great quality, yet the government has accepted a decision of the supplementary planning panel to move the bypass route determined in 2004. It is an appalling decision, and it means there will be a lost development opportunity for that area.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Meeting

The PRESIDENT — Order! In accordance with the sessional orders I now interrupt business. I have received a letter from the Deputy President, Mr Atkinson, as chair of the Legislation Committee, advising me of the committee's intention to meet this evening.

Mr ATKINSON (Eastern Metropolitan) — I move, by leave:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as to allow the Legislation Committee to meet at 7.00 p.m. this day.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The PRESIDENT — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Doctors: Bendigo

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I wish to raise an issue for the attention of the Minister for Health in the other place regarding the chronic shortage of general practitioners in Bendigo. The action I seek is for the minister to put in place a recruitment program to attract general practitioners from interstate and overseas to Bendigo to alleviate the chronic doctor shortage. Bendigo's chronic doctor shortage is a well-documented issue that continues to get worse under the current state Labor government. The severity of Bendigo's health crisis was affirmed in a recent study by the Australian Medical Association which found that the regional city was in desperate need of more general practitioners.

A search of the website of the Rural Workforce Agency Victoria reveals there are 11 GP vacancies in Bendigo and one in Strathfieldsaye. This means there is a current shortfall in the Bendigo region of at least 12 GPs. The state Labor government is so bad at attracting doctors to Victoria and keeping them here that since 1996 Victoria has added just one extra GP to its ranks.

Other states and territories, including Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory and New South Wales, offer relocation packages of up to \$34 000 to help attract doctors to their regional and

remote areas. Victoria does not offer a relocation package to doctors. In fact the total package of support offered to newly recruited doctors in rural Victoria is a maximum of \$3500, compared to up to \$34 000 in South Australia. The Brumby government is simply not doing enough to attract Australian-trained and overseas-trained doctors to Victoria and it must put in place a recruitment program.

Bendigo's battle for more doctors is a symptom of the Brumby government failing Victoria's regional and rural communities, and with a number of Bendigo doctors recently deserting a health clinic in Kangaroo Flat, action must now be taken to solve the city's looming medical crisis. The health minister must immediately introduce a recruitment package to attract GPs to Bendigo, including the introduction of relocation packages similar to those offered by other states.

It is a great disappointment to the city of Bendigo, which should have three voices advocating for it at the cabinet table — its former federal member and current Premier, John Brumby, two local members, Jacinta Allan, the Minister for Regional and Rural Development and the member for Bendigo East, and Bob Cameron, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, who is the member for Bendigo West. Unfortunately those three voices at the cabinet table are absolutely silent when it comes to doing anything to solve the looming medical crisis that is facing the Bendigo community due to a lack of general practitioners. Many constituents have contacted our office telling us they have moved to Bendigo in recent times and cannot get onto a doctor's list to seek medical advice or medical services. This is a crisis that is about to explode in Bendigo and must be solved as soon as possible.

Francis Street, Yarraville: trucks

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place, Mr Pallas. On 20 February I attended a rally organised by MTAG, which is a group I work with and support. The Maribyrnong Truck Action Group and Yarraville residents have ongoing concerns about damage to their health by exposure to diesel emissions that come from 20 000 trucks that go through the city of Maribyrnong each day.

On the day of the rally a number of government ministers and other members of Parliament, none of whom actually live in the area, dismissed the residents' concerns — basically telling them that if you live in the

west you just have to cop it. The action I ask of Minister Pallas is to meet with the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group to discuss how the government can reduce the number of trucks going through Maribyrnong, especially along Francis Street.

Energy: outdoor lighting

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Mr Gavin Jennings. During the early weeks of January I made a conscious decision to travel to a number of shopping precincts in the electorate I represent to observe the commercial use of outdoor lighting during daylight hours.

Surprisingly, what was evident was that on cloudless, hot summer days a percentage of banks, convenience stores, bakeries, travel agencies and other types of stores have illuminated signs, and in some cases large, floodlight fittings, outside their premises turned on. I have since written to a number of corporations to urge them to implement a policy to ensure that outside lighting at their premises, including signage and floodlighting, is switched off when not necessary.

Using my own very conservative calculations I have advised in letters to the NAB and the ANZ that they can individually save over 2 million black balloons of carbon emissions a year by simply having their outdoor lighting off during the day when you can hardly tell that the lighting is on. I have also advised 7/11 that having the lights off during the day at its city stores alone would save over 1 million black balloons of carbon emissions.

Now that we know the potential dire consequences that global warming can bring to our future generations, we have to accept that commercialism does not have to be so bright and shiny to the point that illuminated advertising signs are burning up energy and producing greenhouse gases at a time of day when, as I said before, you can hardly tell if they are on. The action I seek from the minister is for his department to investigate ways to get the message out across Victoria to all commercial premises about the potential savings in carbon emissions by simply switching off outdoor lighting during daylight hours and to investigate what other actions can be taken to ensure this happens.

Taxis: multipurpose program

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — My matter is for the Minister for Public Transport in the other place and concerns the subsidy caps on the multipurpose taxi program administered by the Victorian Taxi

Directorate. The multipurpose taxi program was designed to improve transport access for Victorians who have a severe and permanent disability by providing them with a 50 per cent discount on taxi fares. However, a maximum subsidy of \$30 per trip and an annual subsidy limit of \$1045 operate. These subsidy caps harshly penalise people with disabilities living in rural and remote areas, many of whom have no access to other forms of transport.

Parents often struggle to cope with the challenge of caring for their young and adult children with severe and permanent disabilities. This is especially so for those living in rural and remote areas, who are often isolated and caring for their loved ones while struggling to make ends meet on limited incomes. The daily problems associated with caring for children with disabilities can become extremely stressful, and the pressures of keeping their families and marriages together, along with protecting their other children from neglect, often make it difficult to provide a normal family environment.

This is where disabled and support services become very important for providing additional and often much-needed respite care. In Hamilton support and education services are provided by the Hamilton Special Development School for children up to the age of 18 years and through the Mulleraterong Centre, which provides day programs for adults with disabilities. There are over 70 families in the Hamilton district alone caring for a young or adult child with a severe disability. Many of these families live up to 50 kilometres from Hamilton, and it is these isolated families that most need access to these support services.

Those who must rely on the local taxi service to access educational, respite and day programs in Hamilton, in some cases up to five days per week, have a constant struggle to meet the cost of the taxi fare, despite the \$30 subsidy. The subsidy falls far short of half the cost of the fare when the fare for a single one-way journey can be more than \$70. This major financial burden impacts on family budgets and limits opportunities for disabled people in rural and remote areas.

My request is for the minister to increase the maximum multipurpose taxi program subsidy and the annual cap for children and adults with disabilities who need and deserve this support, especially for those living in rural and remote areas, so that the burden of the high cost of transport can be reduced.

Great Ocean Road International Marathon: funding

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Tourism and Major Events in the other place. For the last three years in May the Great Ocean Road International Marathon has been run between Lorne and Apollo Bay. The event is promoted as a festival of distance running and encompasses four events over two days for runners of all abilities.

The inaugural Great Ocean Road International Marathon was held in May 2005 when Tourism Victoria supported the events with an allocation of \$20 000. In 2006 and 2007 Tourism Victoria supported the marathon with funding of \$25 000 for each year. This event has historically attracted a large number of competitors, increasing each year since its inaugural year. In 2005 there were approximately 1275 runners, with the number of competitors increasing in 2007 to almost 2000, including the minister himself, as well as 34 overseas competitors and 163 interstate competitors. In the past this event has proved to be very successful in its promotion of the state's sports-tourism strength, and has indeed attracted some national and international media interest.

I strongly encourage the minister to consider funding the event for a fourth year and reinforcing the state government's commitment to supporting regional events and further promoting the Great Ocean Road.

Doctors: East Gippsland

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Health in the other place relating to the urgent need for a substantial program to overcome the dire shortage of doctors in country Victoria. East Gippsland is one of the half dozen or so areas with the lowest ratio of doctors to patients in Victoria. That problem is accentuated in East Gippsland particularly because of the region's long distances, the mountainous terrain and the poor standard of roads in some respects.

Around 90 doctors in East Gippsland are serving an average of 1400 patients each—several hundred more than would apply in most of the metropolitan divisions of general practice. As you move closer to Melbourne, you find doctors in Central West Gippsland and South Gippsland serve about 1225 patients each. The equivalent figure for a distant region such as East Gippsland is probably higher than is reflected in the statistical analysis, because there are generally unfilled positions in hospitals and private practices. The East

Gippsland division's website currently lists six vacancies for GPs.

On the shortage issue, the Australian Medical Association's recommended figure is 1 doctor to 1000 patients. For that ideal position to be met, East Gippsland would need another 35 doctors, about a 40 per cent increase on the present number. People are waiting many weeks, if not months, for routine consultations. Many are resorting to visiting hospital emergency departments, which are experiencing extreme stress and overload.

In the next decade, the problem will worsen because 40 per cent of doctors working in country areas are about to reach retirement age. Doctor numbers are not keeping pace with the population increase in country Victoria. The Victorian government appears to be doing little that is targeted at addressing the problem. There needs to be a long-term strategy for the overall improvement in country health services and for recruiting doctors.

The AMA has a rescue package proposing the training of more doctors, provision of incentives packages to attract them to country practice, support to attract international medical graduates, increased hospital staffing, more reasonable on-call ratios and more competitive pay rates. It is pretty clear that there should be a strategic GP and health services plan for regions experiencing the most severe shortages, such as East Gippsland. It should be developed in consultation with the local communities, councils and health service providers. It is imperative that funding be provided through the budget.

I request that the Minister for Health urgently implement an effective strategy to recruit more doctors to country Victoria, especially East Gippsland.

Food: regulations

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — Tonight I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Treasurer, John Lenders. It goes to the issue of the government being the saviour of the sausage sizzle that the Treasurer spoke about in response to a question without notice today. In particular he was talking about the government's response to the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission's last report, *Simplifying the Menu: Food Regulation in Victoria*.

I have had a look at the government's response to this particular issue, because the saving of the sausage sizzle is an important issue for me as a person who represents

country communities, which frequently rely on a sausage sizzle to raise money and feed the troops.

I read the government response fairly carefully, and I must say I fail to understand exactly where the process for saving the sausage sizzle was referred to in this report. I think it may come under recommendation 12.2, although that is not specifically clear. My request of the Treasurer tonight is for him to give the Victorian community clear direction as to exactly how the government is going to implement these recommendations, how it proposes to save the sausage sizzle, whether an amendment to the Food Act is required and, if so, what time frame the government has in respect of that. We want to know when the sausage sizzle is going to be saved.

Rail: freight network

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Public Transport in the other house. Earlier today the Premier and the Minister for Public Transport announced a \$20 million package for Victoria's rail freight industry to help keep containers and export grain freight on rail. This two-year rail freight support package will provide a temporary rebate for regional container freight. As families and businesses in the Mildura area in particular know only too well, Victoria's rail freight network has faced many challenges. The drought in particular has led to declining freight volumes, which has severely affected intermodal terminal operators as well as grain handlers. On top of that, in December, Pacific National announced a review of its regional rail freight operations.

For our part, the Brumby Labor government is committed to ensuring that Victoria's rail freight industry is competitive, and we continue to support regional Victorian economies. That is why in May last year the Bracks Labor government bought back the regional rail freight network from Pacific National. That buying back of the track involved an investment of \$133 million. Also, the government commenced immediately to invest in priority upgrades, including \$53 million to upgrade the Mildura line. These investments are in line with the Brumby Labor government's commitment to ensuring the competitiveness and sustainability of Victoria's regional rail freight operations.

This is in marked contrast to the disastrous — 'failed', you would have to say — privatisation by the former Liberal-National coalition when it was last in

government and the consequences we are now suffering as a result.

The action I seek tonight from the Minister for Public Transport is to provide me with information about what regional intermodal terminal operators and grain handlers contracting to provide freight services on nominated rail lines have to do to access the rebates announced today in the rail freight support package.

In conclusion, I thank the Premier and the Minister for Public Transport for listening to the concerns of the Mildura community and for their efforts in developing this rail freight support package in a very short period to help ensure Victoria's rail freight industry is competitive and continues to support regional economies.

Buses: Pakenham

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — My matter is for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport in another place. As members of the house would be aware from matters raised in previous adjournment debates, over the next 20 to 30 years the Pakenham growth corridor will generate approximately 50 000 jobs through the zone.

The provision of access to those employment opportunities is critical not only to the business providers and the businesses that establish themselves in that area but also to the towns that surround the Pakenham growth corridor, so that they have access to that economic activity and to the growth that will be generated.

Currently the towns of Lang Lang and Koo Wee Rup are connected to Cranbourne via a bus service that originates from the Bass Coast and continues through to Melbourne. There is no public transport at all from Lang Lang and Koo Wee Rup through to Pakenham. The same can be said for the towns of Emerald, Gembrook and Cockatoo. Traditionally these towns were focused on Monbulk, Fountain Gate and elsewhere towards Melbourne, but as the Pakenham growth corridor grows and job opportunities present themselves, these towns need public transport access to that area. As I said, at present there is no public transport available.

I note that the member for Gembrook in the other place has cited the failure of a bus trial from the hills to Pakenham as a reason why such a bus service would not be viable. I contend that this is not the case and that what we need is a trial of bus services from both Lang Lang and Koo Wee Rup, and Gembrook, Emerald and

Cockatoo to Pakenham, so that these areas can be linked.

The action I seek from the minister is to commit to a 12-month trial of seven-day-a-week bus services from Lang Lang and Koo Wee Rup to Pakenham and from Emerald, Gembrook and Cockatoo to Pakenham.

Buses: Shepparton

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport in the other place. The matter concerns and relates to bus services in Shepparton. I begin by noting the good work that has already occurred in providing some bus services in and around Shepparton. As part of the Moving Forward package, Shepparton bus services were extended to Hawkins and Aquamoves. This latter service has been very much appreciated, particularly in the warmer months. The pool in Shepparton and some of the other facilities around it are a focal point for the city, a great meeting place and a great place for activities to occur, and, as I said, the bus services have been appreciated.

Shepparton is continuing to grow and, like many of our regional cities and towns, it is growing at a fairly significant rate. We have quite a bit of new housing where I live in Shepparton, particularly to the north-west of the city, out above the golf course.

My request to the minister is that she and her department consider not only expanding the services that already exist but also ensuring that not the existing bus services stay. Too often when we are discussing public transport, particularly in rural and regional areas, the concentration can be very much on the heavier rail services rather than the public transport needs of everyday people who want to get around their towns and their cities so as to participate in community life. In many of our regional cities — and this is true for the city of Shepparton — buses play a vital role in enabling individuals to get around. The expansion of bus services to developing areas aids people in being able to get out and stay in contact within their communities, not only socially but also for their work, and enables them to access a full range of opportunities and leisure activities.

I am asking the minister to look at this expanded service, and I also ask her to recognise the genuine appreciation that the Shepparton community has — —

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

Ms Lovell — On a point of order, President, I believe I can answer Ms Darveniza. She is probably aware that there is a current review — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Lovell knows full well the procedures and times she can raise a point of order. If she wants to pull a stunt using points of order, I will remove her from the chamber.

Firearms: licensing

Mr VOGELS (Western Victoria) — I raise an issue for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in the other place. It concerns the impact of the proposed changes to fee structures for firearm dealers licences and not allowing more than five persons to shoot on private property if that activity is carried out continuously for more than 3 hours without police having been notified.

Members of the Victorian Rifle Association and gun clubs inform me that the new proposed fee structure is onerous and would cause many members and dealers to withdraw from the industry and the sport — in fact it would be driven underground. The private property provision will impact on clubs operating ranges throughout the state, and each in its own right is an owner-occupier. It would directly affect rifle ranges at Warnambool, Wellsford, Bendigo, Bacchus Marsh, Werribee and Geelong. There has been an interpretation of the definition of 'private property' that includes government-owned Crown land. If this is the case, it would affect every shooting range, whether it be clay target, rifle, pistol or any other firearm participant sport.

The action I seek from the minister is to ensure that Victoria's legitimate shooting and gun clubs are consulted widely before action is taken to change the present regulations. I fully support the present gun laws brought in by the Howard government with the support of all state governments. We now have a legitimate register in which all members are registered, not to mention the firearms that they own. Let us not drive our sporting shooters completely into oblivion.

Crime: Monash

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter this evening, for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in the other place, concerns the city of Monash. I have some major concerns in the city of Monash, particularly in relation to violence. I have been known at other times in this chamber to speak about Monash and violence. In this instance it concerns the revelation that a group of young men went on a 7-hour crime spree, which involved

stealing cars, arson, breaking and entering, and dangerous driving.

Much has been said in the newspapers lately about police numbers and crime statistics. I would like to say that crime statistics in Monash show that the incidence of assault has increased by 11.4 per cent, from 481 cases in 2005–06 to 536 cases in 2006–07. The number of homicides increased by 300 per cent, from 2 cases in 2005–06 to 8 cases in 2006–07. The incidence of burglary has increased by 25.3 per cent and drug offences, by 34.1 per cent. This is totally unacceptable.

It is indicative of what is happening right across metropolitan Melbourne. In other parts of the Southern Metropolitan Region we are seeing a similar situation. However, it is Monash and its residents I am particularly concerned about at the moment. They need and deserve to work, to live and to raise a family in a safe, secure community. It is incumbent upon this government to ensure that that actually happens.

The action I am seeking tonight is for the minister, as a matter of priority, to ensure that additional funding is provided so that more police can be allocated to streets in the city of Monash.

Electricity: regional and rural supply

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place and relates to power outages. City residents take for granted the continuous, uninterrupted supply of electricity to their homes and businesses. In fact if any suburb in Melbourne suffers a blackout, it instantly becomes headline news on our radio and television stations. This happened last Wednesday when storms resulted in power outages in a few suburbs.

However, in country Victoria blackouts are increasingly becoming the norm, with many towns in country Victoria worse off than Third World countries. In October last year the Essential Services Commission released figures that showed some areas in country Victoria, including Kinglake, Murrindindi, Mount Beauty and Merrijig, averaged more than 600 minutes without power in 2006 compared with the central business district and inner Melbourne, which had less than 60 minutes of power outages over the same period. Country Victoria is 10 times worse off. According to reports from my constituents, it is not getting any better.

The Marysville and District Chamber of Commerce recently told me that businesses in the area have had to

suffer the consequences of more than 40 power outages in the past four months, including one that lasted 13 hours. These outages have devastated many local businesses in this tourist destination; they have lost thousands of dollars in ruined food, lost custom and cancelled bookings. Many of those businesses that depend on a reliable source of electricity have had to purchase their own generators. This is unbelievable in the 21st century, and it is something my city colleagues have not experienced.

While the service is getting worse, the profits of the power providers have increased. Yet despite this lift in earnings, distributors are spending less on operating and maintenance expenditure than they said they would. Even the chairman of the Essential Services Commission, Greg Wilson, has called on the distributors to increase their expenditure on network improvements in these areas.

The action I seek is for the minister to investigate the reasons for these power outages and to insist that the electricity distributors upgrade their infrastructure to provide reliable, state-of-the-art electricity services to country Victorians.

Consumer affairs: telephone banking

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Consumer Affairs in the other place. This is an issue that I have been trying to resolve for many years. I have asked representatives of the banking industry about this issue, both privately and, in a previous life, on radio, but unfortunately I have not to this point received a straight answer, which I am sure will surprise some who know representatives of the banking industry.

The matter concerns telephone banking. I have to say that I find this particular form of banking a very convenient way of paying bills. Whenever I use it, however, it always leaves me with one big question in my mind. I will give you an example to illustrate my point: if I have a water bill for \$270, I would pick up the phone and dial in my account number and all that sort of thing. I press the button and the \$270 disappears from my account. However, that \$270 does not immediately go into the account of the water company. It can take up to four or five days for that money to make its way to where I want it to go, which is into the account of the company whose bill I wish to pay.

I ask the minister to investigate where this money goes for that four or five days. I ask the minister to investigate whether banks are using customers' money without their permission for the bank's own purpose—

perhaps on the short-term money market. I ask the minister to investigate if this contravenes any law. If so, I ask the minister to refer this matter to police for further investigation and possible laying of charges. Bank customers are much used and abused. I ask the minister in his capacity as Minister for Consumer Affairs to ensure, at least in this case, that consumers of these services are protected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am of the view that the issue Mr Finn wants the minister to deal with fails on about five different criteria. I am just investigating that to confirm it, but the member would be aware that banking acts and so forth are federal matters. This may come as a surprise to him, but we no longer have a state bank. I do not believe it is within the scope of the minister to deal with his particular adjournment matter.

The Clerk is beavering away to give me some additional information or ammunition, but at the minute the matter seems out of order. I will give the Clerk a bit of time so he is not too hassled. At the end I will rule formally, but I think Mr Finn may be in a bit of bother.

Dandenong South bypass: signage

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place. It relates to the new Dandenong South bypass which was opened earlier this year as a part of the EastLink project.

I have received representations from Mr Roy Aspinall, the chairman of the Dandenong Retail Traders Association, with respect to signage on the new Dandenong South bypass. The issue that exists is the lack of traffic volume on the new bypass; traffic continues to use Cheltenham Road and Greens Road rather than the new Dandenong South bypass. In fact the volume of traffic on the new road is minuscule compared to the volume on the other two parallel roads.

Mr Aspinall is urging VicRoads to ensure that greater signage is erected on Springvale Road, Chapel Street and Perry Road where they intersect with Cheltenham Road to the north and Governor Road and Greens Road to the south, so that those in traffic, particularly those in heavy traffic, are aware that the Dandenong South bypass actually exists and is open.

Mr Aspinall wrote to the Minister for Roads and Ports on behalf of the traders association in December and received in January a response from the acting chief executive of Southern and Eastern Integrated Transport Authority, which is responsible for the EastLink

project. It indicated that it had sent out brochures to local households and all of that sort of thing. But that frankly misses the point. Most of the traffic on Cheltenham Road and Governor Road is heavy traffic, not local residential traffic. Those who are involved in heavy traffic clearly are not aware that the new road is open and are not taking advantage of the new road.

On behalf of the traders association, I ask the minister to recommend or instruct VicRoads to erect relevant signage on those other major north-south roads and intersecting roads to make sure those involved in heavy traffic are aware that the Dandenong South bypass is open and that they can use it in preference to Cheltenham Road and Governor Road.

Youth: alcohol abuse

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment issue tonight is directed to the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs in the other place. I spent last week travelling around the state consulting with school-age children in relation to a private members bill about smoking, which I will be introducing into the Parliament. Conversation invariably turned to other social issues such as parties and under-age drinking. It was quite sobering for me — excuse the pun! — to simply realise how many of our 17-year-olds are drinking on a regular basis and are happy to put their hands up in a classroom to acknowledge that they drink.

Those of us who have 17-year-old children need to be aware that when children go to parties, somewhere in the vicinity of 80 to 90 per cent are having a drink there. We do not know what quantities they are drinking, but they are drinking. If we pretend that they are not, then we cause them just as much harm — we are leaving them in a position where they can cause a lot of harm to themselves — rather than facing up to the fact that there are a lot of young people putting themselves at real risk and harm on a weekly basis.

I have spoken to youth workers who are trying to compromise with the youth in the regions. When they put on alcohol-free events, in a lot of regions the kids simply do not turn up, or if they turn up they will have already been drinking at another place. They will turn up to these alcohol-free events for the last hour and work out where they will go after the event. These young kids are very quickly embedding themselves in a culture of alcohol.

If we are able to succeed in some instances in keeping kids off the drink at an event, we then run the very real risk of these young kids popping a pill and getting their

kicks in another way. We tend to grossly underestimate what is happening out there. A report by the Australian National Council on Drugs, which was made available this morning, states that 1 in 10 teenagers aged between 12 to 17 years binge drink weekly. There is a whole range of scary statistics which we need to be inclined to work out to determine what is going on.

I call on the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs to put together a task force to investigate youth drinking trends. It could report back to the government on action which could lead to positive outcomes regarding youth drinking and propose possible solutions that could offer our youth an attractive night out in a safe environment.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Before I call the minister to respond, I want to rule on Mr Finn's matter. It is my view that there is no scope whatsoever for the minister to deal with the matter raised by Mr Finn regarding banking. Therefore I rule his matter out of order, but I am prepared to offer him some advice: he may have more success with the banking ombudsman.

Responses

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and Trade) — Can I firstly indicate that I have a response to the adjournment debate matter raised by Mr Rich-Phillips on 5 February 2008, from Mr Holding, Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission in the other place. The adjournment matter is about WorkCover and audiology. The response says:

I refer to concerns raised by you regarding the Victorian WorkCover Authority's (VWA) hearing service policy.

I can advise that following extensive representation in relation to this issue, the VWA has put on hold its decision to change this policy to allow further time for consultation with stakeholders.

Quite a number of matters — in fact 16 — have been raised in the adjournment debate today. They will, of course, all be read by the respective ministers and their officers. The ministers concerned may or may not decide to supplement the responses which I intend to give to the issues and questions which have been raised. But I believe, in keeping with your previous rulings, President, that if I answer the questions, that in effect disposes of the requests.

Ms Lovell raised a matter — which was also raised by another member — in relation to general practitioners in Bendigo. The government has an ongoing program of trying to attract general practitioners into regional Victoria, and it continues to have it as a priority.

Ms Hartland sought a meeting between the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place and the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group. I can tell the member that the minister meets with many such groups and is aware of the issues in relation to the effects of truck fumes. It is something that he monitors on an ongoing basis.

Mr Leane raised a matter for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change in relation to the illumination of signs. I am sure that the minister has a similar view — that if the excessive use of power can be eliminated, it would be a good thing.

Mr Koch raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport in the other place concerning the disabled taxi subsidy limit. I noticed that Mr Koch did not put forward any suggestion as to what the limit should be or whether it should be open slather and unlimited, so that someone could travel between Mildura and Melbourne by taxi, for example. He did not specify that. I am sure the minister is aware of this issue and monitors it from time to time.

Ms Tierney raised a matter for the Minister for Tourism and Major Events in the other place about fundraising for the Great Ocean Road marathon and its continued operation. I am sure that the minister has similar views to those of the member about the importance of that project.

Philip Davis raised a matter in relation to general practitioners, and I give him a similar answer to that given to Ms Lovell.

Mr Hall raised a matter for the Treasurer in relation to the sausage sizzle. I think this is an attempt by Mr Hall to get a second bite on a question that was dealt with by the Treasurer in question time. If the Treasurer feels the need to respond to him, then let him do so, but I think it was a frivolous question by Mr Hall.

Ms Broad raised a matter about rail freight to Mildura. I assure her that the minister is very supportive of the actions that have been taken in relation to the rail freight package and is constantly vigilant in ensuring that this government delivers rail freight into regional Victoria.

Mr O'Donohue raised a matter concerning bus services in the Pakenham growth corridor. Bus services have been a great success for this government, and they continue to be a great success story. Maybe the member has rushed off from Parliament to catch a bus home, and that is why he is not here to hear this response.

Ms Darveniza also raised a matter in relation to bus services in Shepparton. I assure her that those services are also a priority for the government.

Mr Vogels raised a matter relating to the new shooting arrangements. He put the view that shooting will be driven underground. The government rejects that view. We believe these arrangements are appropriate and will lead to better management in this area.

Mrs Coote raised a matter for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in the other place. It relates to violence in the city of Monash. We all agree that violence is unacceptable, no matter where it is. The government has a very strong policy on maintaining police numbers on our roads and across Victoria in order to address this issue.

Ms Petrovich raised a matter in relation to power outages and tried to suggest that Victoria's energy system is similar to that of a Third World country. The government believes that is absolute rubbish and an attempt to make a comment that is patently untrue. It reminds me of a comment made to me when I was energy minister by some Cubans who were suffering energy shortages for 6 hours every day. One of them managed to get through to the energy minister and asked what the minister would do about it. The minister told him, 'You ring up to complain about the 6 hours of power that you do not get, but you do not ring up to thank me for the 18 hours of power that you do get'. That is the real Third World; it is nothing like what we have in Victoria, and it does not help for the member to try to make such analogies.

Mr Finn raised a matter in relation to telephone banking, which the President ruled out of order.

Mr Rich-Phillips raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place involving signage on the Dandenong bypass. I am sure the minister has that in hand.

Mr Drum asked a question in relation to youth and a task force to monitor youth drinking trends. Again, this is an issue that we all face with our own the children, and I am sure that the minister involved is very mindful of the need to address that particular issue.

President, I believe I have answered all the questions that have been raised today.

Mr Rich-Phillips — On a point of order, President, I seek your clarification or ruling in due course on sessional order 4(1), which requires that:

A response to a matter raised by a member must either be given at the time the matter is raised or provided in writing within 30 days.

The intent of that sessional order was for the house to receive fulsome responses where matters are directed to ministers who are either not attending the chamber or are in the other chamber. I seek from you a ruling as to whether the response given by Mr Theophanous to matters raised this evening that are not his portfolio but are other ministers' portfolios, where Mr Theophanous has essentially restated the matter raised and made a comment about it, constitutes a response under sessional order 4(1) such that a written response would not be required from the minister to whom the matter was actually directed.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — On the point of order, President, the member is correct in identifying sessional order 4(1), but that sessional order is very clear. It says that:

A response to a matter raised by a member must either be given at the time the matter is raised or provided in writing within 30 days.

I have given responses to each question that has been raised with me today. There is nothing in the sessional orders which says that that response has to be of a certain type or of a — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I think I have the gist of the point of order raised by Mr Theophanous. I am prepared to rule. Under sessional order 4, 'Responses to matters raised on the daily adjournment debate', sessional order 4(1) states:

A response to a matter raised by a member must either be given at the time the matter is raised or provided in writing within 30 days.

I think that has been complied with, and also, based on numerous decisions made by previous presiding officers on ministers' responses, that disposes of the matter. The adjournment debate is similar to question time with ministers free to respond to matters raised in the manner they deem appropriate. The minister's response disposes of the matter and I think that is quite clear.

RULINGS BY THE CHAIR

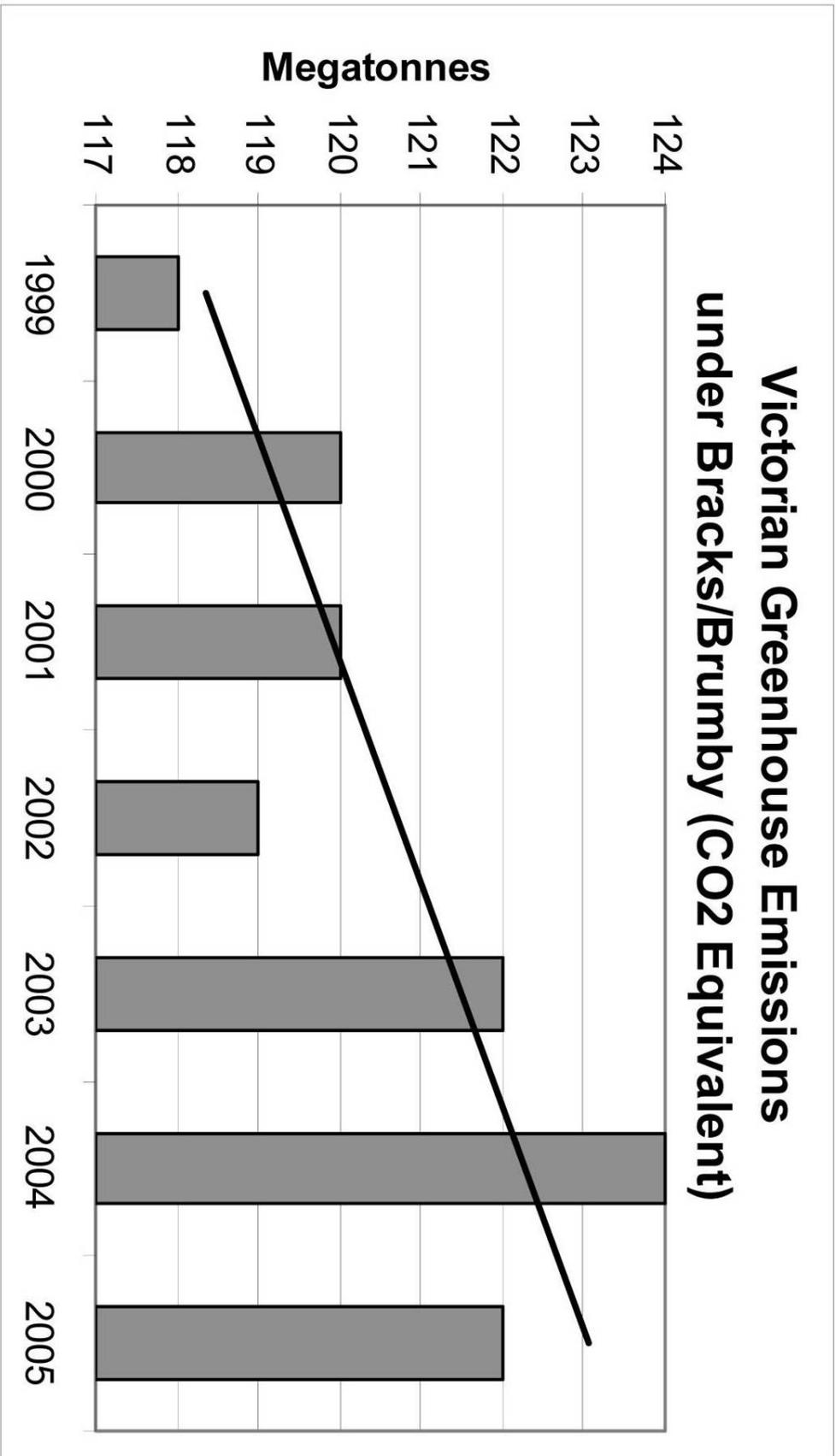
Adjournment responses

The PRESIDENT — Order! On 7 February 2008 Mr Dalla-Riva raised a point of order in the house concerning the status of adjournment matters raised by members in the event of a quorum not being present

and, as a consequence, the Council being adjourned until the next sitting day. If this does occur, I will rule that all adjournment matters which in my view are in order and were raised prior to the quorum being called will be required to be responded to by ministers in accordance with sessional orders 4 and 5.

The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.54 p.m.



Source: Australian Greenhouse Office - State & Territory Greenhouse Gas Inventories 2005
Table prepared by David Davis, MP, Member for Southern Metropolitan Region

