

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

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

Wednesday, 18 July 2007

(Extract from book 10)

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The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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(*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Carli, Mr Jasper, Mr McIntosh and Mr Thompson.

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FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Vogels, Mr John Adrian	Western Victoria	LP

CONTENTS

WEDNESDAY, 18 JULY 2007

WILLS AMENDMENT BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	2041
PETITION	
<i>Mordialloc Creek Bridge: reconstruction</i>	2041
PAPERS	2041
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
<i>Anam Cara House, Geelong: opening</i>	2041
<i>WorkChoices: Workplace Authority advertising</i>	2042
<i>Speed limits: advertising campaign</i>	2042
<i>Ford Australia: Geelong plant</i>	2042
<i>Goulburn Valley Health: police memorials</i>	2042
<i>Loyola Jackson</i>	2043
<i>King Street, Doncaster: upgrade</i>	2043
<i>Rail: Epping–South Morang line</i>	2043
<i>Police: Hurstbridge station</i>	2044
<i>Police: Ropes youth program</i>	2044
<i>Parliament House: staff</i>	2044
<i>Aboriginals: federal policy</i>	2044
<i>Buses: eastern suburbs</i>	2045
SUMMARY OFFENCES AMENDMENT (BODY PIERCING) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	2045
<i>Statement of compatibility</i>	2045
<i>Second reading</i>	2046
SELECT COMMITTEE ON GAMING LICENSING	
<i>Assembly members</i>	2047, 2119
RAIL: LEVEL CROSSING SAFETY	2048
STUDENTS: HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION	2063, 2081
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE	
<i>Ford Australia: Geelong plant</i>	2072
<i>Minister for Planning: conduct</i>	2074
<i>VicUrban: affordable housing initiatives</i>	2075
<i>Minister for Industry and State Development:</i> <i>conduct</i>	2076
<i>Banawah Nursing Home, Nathalia:</i> <i>development</i>	2077
<i>Planning: local government</i>	2078
<i>Disability services: vision and hearing loss</i>	2079
<i>Longford gas conditioning plant: environment</i> <i>effects statement</i>	2080
<i>Education: government initiatives</i>	2080
<i>Supplementary questions</i>	
<i>Ford Australia: Geelong plant</i>	2072
<i>Minister for Planning: conduct</i>	2074
<i>Minister for Industry and State Development:</i> <i>conduct</i>	2077
<i>Planning: local government</i>	2079
<i>Longford gas conditioning plant: environment</i> <i>effects statement</i>	2080
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE	
<i>Impact of public land management practices on</i> <i>bushfires in Victoria</i>	2087
PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE: INVESTMENT	2093
ACCIDENT COMPENSATION AMENDMENT BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	2119
CRIMES (DECRIMINALISATION OF ABORTION) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	2120
ADJOURNMENT	
<i>Floods: Gippsland</i>	2120
<i>Water: Victorian plan</i>	2120
<i>Dimboola football and netball club: funding</i>	2121
<i>Disability services: behaviour intervention</i> <i>support team</i>	2121
<i>Rail: station recycling bins</i>	2122
<i>Housing: long-term leases</i>	2122
<i>Planning: Melbourne 2030</i>	2122
<i>Orchards: hail nets</i>	2123
<i>Housing: homelessness</i>	2123
<i>Schools: water-saving initiatives</i>	2124
<i>Mount Arapiles: development</i>	2124
<i>Public transport: Western Victoria Region</i>	2125
<i>Public transport: Upper Yarra</i>	2125
<i>Responses</i>	2126

Wednesday, 18 July 2007

The PRESIDENT (Hon. R. F. Smith) took the chair at 9.34 a.m. and read the prayer.

WILLS AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

Read first time on motion of Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning).

PETITION

Following petition presented to house:

Mordialloc Creek Bridge: reconstruction

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

The petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the problems with the work being undertaken on the Mordialloc bridge, Nepean Highway, Mordialloc, and the daily traffic transport delays that residents of Mordialloc, Carrum and Bayside suburbs encounter.

The petitioners therefore respectfully request that the Legislative Council of Victoria demands that the Minister for Roads and Ports, Tim Pallas, and VicRoads:

1. immediately review the work and schedules of the Mordialloc bridge construction, including the 16 month construction time frame given for the project;
2. conduct a public information session regarding the Mordialloc bridge construction to allow residents of Mordialloc, Carrum and Bayside suburbs to consult with the minister and VicRoads for a timely resolution to the daily traffic transport delays.

By Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) (2035 signatures)

Laid on table.

Ordered to be considered next day on motion of Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan).

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Office of Police Integrity — Ceja Task Force Drug Related Corruption: Third and Final Report, July 2007.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 —

Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Cats 2007

Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Dogs 2007

Victorian Electoral Commission — Report on the Administration of the Victorian State Election held on 25 November 2006.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Anam Cara House, Geelong: opening

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — I was delighted to attend the official opening of Anam Cara House in Geelong on 7 July. It was the culmination of a dream to create a respite and palliative care hospice in Geelong. The project emanated from awareness by health professionals, church and community members of the need for residential and respite accommodation for persons with a terminal or life-threatening illness. The Anam Cara House, Anam Cara being Gaelic for ‘soul friends’, will offer short-term respite and late-life care in a home-like environment, especially for those who do not have a carer. It will also provide support for carers and family members.

The official ceremony was attended by over 300 guests and recognised the transformation of Geelong’s St Mary’s presbytery to Anam Cara House, which will commence serving the community as soon as furnishing and staffing needs are finalised. While the Bracks government ignores funding from the federal government to assist vulnerable Victorians with accommodation and respite care, local families, community and business groups contributed over \$1.2 million to make this facility possible. Anam Cara House demonstrates that dying should be owned by the community, not just the health system.

Founder and chief executive officer Diane Wright and her small volunteer team are to be congratulated for their vision, fundraising efforts and courage in bringing this much-needed facility into reality. Mrs Wright was given the honour of officially opening Anam Cara House on 7 July.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I know that Mr Somyurek was not eating in the chamber, because I know that he knows that he cannot. It was obviously my imagination. I just thought I would forewarn him that we would have a problem if he were to eat in the chamber.

WorkChoices: Workplace Authority advertising

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — On Sunday night, along with my family, I witnessed a barrage of Workplace Authority television advertisements. The federal government has hit a new low in its abuse of power. The first frame of the advertisement enters the debate by stating that the federal government wants to tackle a myth. The advertisement itself essentially admits to the anti-WorkChoices sentiment in the community.

The advertisement says two other things. Firstly, that the federal government has to reduce itself to a political lobby group to get its voice heard, and secondly, it shows the unprecedented politicisation of the public service. Having a senior public servant busting a myth in prime time commercial advertisements is not only despicable but potentially paves the way to a frightening political landscape. Is it because the federal government has worked out that hardly anyone is listening to it on WorkChoices that it now has to resort to tactics such as using the public service to push its ideological barrow to get some sort of credibility for itself? What a sorry state of affairs.

The federal government should spend our dollars addressing the inequities in the unfair legislation that is WorkChoices, not in trying to hoodwink the electorate that these laws are good for them.

Speed limits: advertising campaign

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to compliment the government on its recent advertising campaign on speed limits, particularly the television and newspaper ads which aim to raise people's awareness that 50-kilometre-an-hour speed limits exist in the metropolitan area wherever there are no signs indicating otherwise. Also, the government has run some advertisements in time for the return of children to school and particularly to raise awareness about 40-kilometre-an-hour speed limits. This is particularly important in the inner north part of my electorate, where there are many conflicting uses of the road space — there are many schools, there are shops, there are people parking, there are cyclists. I compliment the government on that particular series of ads.

Ford Australia: Geelong plant

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My matter concerns the likely announcement today about the Ford engine plant closure. If that announcement is made, as is foreshadowed on the front page of today's

Australian, I think it will be a sorry day for Geelong and a sorry day for Victoria. It will be a body blow for the government's manufacturing industry policy, a policy which is not delivering for Victoria. At the same time we are seeing the state government ramp up business costs with a 102 per cent increase in the land tax take and a 63 per cent increase in the payroll tax take. It is no wonder that Victorian industry is struggling and finding it very difficult to be competitive.

It is true that we face a very difficult and competitive international environment, and that is making it difficult for the Victorian manufacturing industry. But the state government's responsibility is to provide a low-cost environment where businesses are not unnecessarily hampered. It cannot be the case that higher taxes under this government — higher land tax, higher payroll tax, higher stamp duties, the full works — have helped companies like Ford to compete on the international stage.

I am very concerned about the workers at that factory. I am of the opinion that this government has not done what it should have done and shown the leadership it should have shown in this case. I hope — I pray — that Premier Steve Bracks is working with the Ford company to ensure that workers are looked after properly.

Goulburn Valley Health: police memorials

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I was pleased on Friday last, 13 July, to officially open and dedicate the new hospital wing of the Shepparton Goulburn Valley Base Hospital to three police officers who lost their lives in the line of duty. I was pleased to be there with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in the other place, Bob Cameron, and also my parliamentary colleagues the member for Shepparton in the other place, Jeanette Powell, and Wendy Lovell, a member for North Western Province, along with a large crowd who attended, which included many police officers. The Eyre-Tynan emergency department and the Ray Denman short stay unit at the Goulburn Valley hospital are a tribute to constables Damian Eyre and Steven Tynan, who were shot dead in 1988, and First Constable Ray Denman, who was killed in the line of duty in 1964. The units will serve as a living tribute to the officers and provide vital medical care to those who are experiencing trauma or requiring treatment at the Goulburn Valley hospital.

We believe that this was a very appropriate location, as some family members of the fallen officers — Ray Denman's daughter and Damian Eyre's father — are

both residents of Shepparton. It was a terrific day and, as I said, well attended by a crowd which included many police officers.

Loyola Jackson

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak today to acknowledge the passing of Loyola Jackson, or Loy as those who knew her and loved her called her. Loy's work for the community of Macedon Ranges was tireless and outstanding, as a long-serving member of the Woodend Lions club and contributor to the Woodend art show, Carols by Candlelight, and Woodend Lions market. She also held a variety of executive positions along with her life partner, Brian. The Lions Club of Woodend will feel her passing. Brian and Loy were instrumental in the establishment of Braemar College at the site of the old Clyde Girls School on Mount Macedon. Many students now enjoy the benefits of this excellent facility because of the vision and hard work of the Jacksons.

Loyola was much loved as a member of the Woodend community and will be sadly missed by all who knew and loved her. She was always busy, and I am sure she never had a moment of boredom in her colourful life of giving to the community and others. She was an inspiration to me; as a young mother I was inspired by her unassuming and humble presentation to a group of prospective women candidates for local government. Loy, the activist, had campaigned against and was successful in stopping the ambulance station from being taken away from Woodend. In true Loy fashion, she not only inspired me to nominate but rolled up her sleeves, offered support and became my campaign manager. As a member of the Hanging Rock Tennis Club and Hanging Rock advisory club her practical approach was always invaluable, as was her input and support as a valuable member of the Woodend branch of the Liberal Party. Loy was a wonderful mother, wife, grandmother and friend — and she was always a lady.

King Street, Doncaster: upgrade

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — On 19 April in the adjournment debate in this house I sought the support of the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place, Mr Pallas, for improvements to King Street in my electorate. King Street is a main street in my electorate and about 12 000 cars use it each day. While I acknowledged the efforts the government had made, I said that more needed to be done to bring this important road up to the high standards that Victorians have come to expect from the Bracks government. King Street is an important local road. It allows people to travel to and from their workplaces, their homes and the shops, and it

allows friends to participate in local community activities. I also urged the Minister for Major Projects to support further improvements to the local road. In view of this I was pleased to be able to announce that \$161 000 had been allocated to road resurfacing along King Street. This will provide a smoother and safer surface. I was also pleased to announce that there traffic lights would be installed at King Street. I put on record my thanks to the minister for positively responding to the concerns of the community in this area.

Rail: Epping–South Morang line

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to talk for the sixth time in eight months about the Epping to South Morang railway line and contrast the Liberal Party's interest in this issue with the four times in eight years it has been raised by the member for Yan Yean in the other place, Ms Green, and the pitiful twice it has been raised by the member for Mill Park in the other place.

The railway was promised by Labor in 1999 and 2002. It lied on both occasions about the line being built. It has not been built and will not be built under this government. What raised my ire was the member for Yan Yean saying in Parliament on 19 June:

... in my electorate in those burgeoning growth corridors of South Morang, Mernda, Doreen and, of course, Epping North. With that enormous growth, you need to make significant investment in infrastructure, and that is where we use the products of state taxation.

Well hello, hello to the missing-in-action Ms Green. She must have forgotten that the most important infrastructure issue in all of the northern suburbs and in her own electorate — the most important infrastructure issue as talked about by the council, community groups and residents — is the train her party promised but has not delivered.

And I can go on. A Labor Party spokesman was quoted on page 1 of the *Preston Leader* last week as saying that to extend the line it was necessary to first duplicate the Clifton Hill to Westgarth line. What rubbish! It is 15 kilometres away on the Hurstbridge line. The member for Mill Park was quoted in the *North Central Review* just this week as saying that to extend the line it was necessary to first duplicate the 'bottleneck' of single track from Keon Park to Epping. More rubbish! Local Labor MPs have their heads in the sand if they think that on this issue they can continue to con and dupe the northern suburbs any longer.

Police: Hurstbridge station

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I recently attended the opening of a new police station in Hurstbridge with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in the other place, Mr Cameron. We were also joined by the member for Yan Yean in the other place, Ms Green. The new police station in Hurstbridge provides a full range of police services, including emergency response and immediate detention. It includes an interview room, watch-house, large public foyer, mess room, administration areas, lock-up garage and, importantly, wheelchair access. The old station was difficult for many in the community to access.

The state government has donated the old station's historic lockup to the Hurstbridge and District Local History Group, which has now displayed it in the grounds of Allwood House. Mr Cameron thanked the Hurstbridge police officers, who operated out of Diamond Creek police station during the construction phase.

The officers at Hurstbridge work very hard and they have helped reduce the local crime rate, which in Nillumbik fell by 15.2 per cent in the 2005–06 financial year. We were told that crime against the person was down by 16.7 per cent, and the streets have been made safer with theft from motor vehicles dropping by 15.2 per cent and behaviour-in-public offences down by 25.7 per cent. State government has also added an additional 1400 police officers to the beat since 1999. Ms Green and I presented Police Sergeant Dave Arthurson with two new flags for the station, the Australian flag and the flag of Victoria.

Police: Ropes youth program

Mr ATKINSON (Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to comment on the Ropes program, which is an initiative that was started by Leading Senior Constable Mick O'Meara and a team at Knox police station. It has now been embraced by number of police stations and courts around Melbourne because it has proven to be an outstanding program in dealing with young offenders and giving them an alternative to the court system and its consequences and penalties.

The Ropes program is aimed at young offenders 18 years and under and it basically works around an activity course. It often involves the original policeman who laid the charges against the offender. The two of them are actually involved in the course and it establishes trust between them. The interesting thing is that the recidivism rate for young people who have

gone through the Ropes program is considerably, in fact dramatically, better than the rate for other diversionary programs and certainly the outcomes of court proceedings.

I think it is a fantastic program. It essentially operates with support from the police force but with little government funding. I hope it continues to receive support.

Parliament House: staff

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I realise that a statement such as this normally comes at the end of the year as we all break for Christmas, but as a relatively new member of Parliament I wish to express my sincere thanks to the wonderful staff who make our lives and the carrying out of our duties so much better.

Whether they be the amazing staff who run the IT section, the brilliant Hansard team, the ever-alert security staff, the wonderful people in the papers office, those at the front desk, in cleaning, the dining rooms or the library, they are so professional and caring. I am certain we all appreciate what they do on our behalf. In many ways they are the silent supporters and workers for the people who elect each of us to office. Without them we would struggle to achieve what is expected of us.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my gratitude and my belief that they have made my transition from the business world to parliamentary service so much easier.

Aboriginals: federal policy

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — As members would be aware, the plight of Aboriginal Australians has been something that has concerned me for many years, so it was with some excitement that I saw the federal government bite the bullet on this matter, particularly in relation to domestic violence and child abuse. The federal Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, and the Prime Minister, John Howard, have decided the time has come to actually do something about it. I would like to warmly congratulate both of those gentlemen for actually taking this on. It is a huge and very important issue. Tackling it is long overdue in my view.

In congratulating the minister and the Prime Minister, I would also congratulate the federal opposition on ensuring that this matter is bipartisan. This really is an issue that needs to be tackled by all concerned Australians. As we know, there are a few on the fringes of reality who have opposed this move. The bottom line

is that this is an issue that absolutely needs to be fixed. I once again congratulate the Prime Minister, the federal minister and the federal opposition on combining to tackle what is an extraordinarily important issue and one that should be tackled by every good-thinking Australian.

Buses: eastern suburbs

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — Again, we find evidence of the lack of commitment by the Bracks Labor government to the residents of the eastern suburbs. In particular on this occasion we see not only its lack of commitment to and rejection of extending the no. 48 tram to the new Westfield shopping centre, but if we look at the improvements to metropolitan bus services by municipality as listed on the Department of Infrastructure website, lo and behold we see outlined improvements in areas where there is a strong Labor presence. I will summarise some of the improvements.

The Brimbank City Council has an additional 10 bus improvements projected or already under way; Darebin has another eight; Frankston has eight; Greater Dandenong has 10; Hume, in the Treasurer's area — surprisingly! — has the most at 15 bus improvements; and Monash, where we know there are some good Labor hacks, has 13. When we go to the areas where it really matters and where people are screaming out for improved bus services, what do we see? One area is Boroondara. How many do members think it has? It has only two improved bus services. The other area is Manningham, which of course is one of the hubs under Melbourne 2030. It has only an additional two services. It is absolutely disgraceful. This government has no idea about services.

SUMMARY OFFENCES AMENDMENT (BODY PIERCING) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Summary Offences Act 1966 to create a new offence dealing with the unauthorised body piercing of a child and for other purposes.

Read first time.

Statement of compatibility

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Summary Offences Amendment (Body Piercing) Bill 2007.

In my opinion, the Summary Offences Amendment (Body Piercing) Bill 2007 is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The purpose of the bill is to insert a new division 6 in part 1 of the Summary Offences Act 1966 to preclude body piercing of a child without appropriate consent of the child's parent or guardian except in certain circumstances such as body piercing when performed in good faith by a medical practitioner, nurse or Chinese medicine practitioner.

Human rights issues

There are at least two separate competing human rights that are raised by the provisions in the bill.

Section 15 — Freedom of expression

- (1) Every person has the right to hold an opinion without interference.
- (2) Every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, whether within or outside Victoria and whether —
 - (a) orally; or
 - (b) in writing; or
 - (c) in print; or
 - (d) by way of art; or
 - (e) in another medium chosen by him or her.
- (3) Special duties and responsibilities are attached to the right of freedom of expression and the right may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary —
 - (a) to respect the rights and reputation of other persons; or
 - (b) for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Section 17 — Protection of families and children

- (1) Families are the fundamental group unit of society and are entitled to be protected by society and the state.
- (2) Every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in his or her best interests and is needed by him or her by reason of being a child.

Background

It should be noted that the common law requires consent before any procedure such as body piercing occurs on an under-age person and the amendment made to the act by this bill will bring focus, in statutory form, to the interests, health

and welfare of children as a paramount concern. In considering this to be the major objective and purpose of the bill it is considered reasonable to displace any competing interest of freedom of expression.

Reasons for considering the best interest of children as the paramount right to be protected by the provisions in the bill include —

The Australian Medical Association has reported that complications arising from piercing procedures can include infections, speech impediments, breathing problems, increased tooth decay and broken teeth.

Infections associated with body piercing can result in blood poisoning, toxic shock syndrome and blocked airways as well as the risk of HIV and hepatitis.

Existing provisions in the Summary Offences Act 1966 already regulate tattooing of persons under 18 years of age; however, the act's ambit does not extend to body piercing and the bill seeks to correct that anomaly.

Further, the provisions in the bill do not envisage an absolute prohibition on body piercing of children but only require that a child's parent or guardian is to give prior written consent to the person who is to perform the piercing. In addition the offences do not cover certain circumstances such as where body piercing is to be performed in good faith by a medical practitioner, nurse or Chinese medicine practitioner registered under the Health Professions Registration Act 2005. Therefore the limitation to any right of freedom of expression is only abridged in a proportionate and appropriate manner that seeks to promote the health and welfare of the child as a paramount concern.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities on the basis that it raises human rights issues but seeks to achieve a fair and proportionate balance between the competing rights of freedom of expression and protection of children. Further, the bill provides reasonable exceptions to the offence provisions.

DAMIAN DRUM, MLC

Second reading

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Body piercing is the practice whereby parts of the human anatomy are pierced so as to create entry and exit holes for the insertion of an object such as a stud or a ring.

The popularity of the practice has increased significantly with the passage of time. As a matter of general course it takes the form of a part or parts of the body such as the tongue, ears, lips, nose, navel or other bodily features being pierced so as to create entry and exit holes through which rings, studs or other such forms of adornment can be passed.

Alarming the incidence of this practice occurring in children is increasing.

The Australian Medical Association has reported that complications arising from piercing procedures can include infections, speech impediments, breathing problems, increased tooth decay and broken teeth. Infections can also result in blood poisoning, toxic shock syndrome and blocked airways as well as the risk of HIV and hepatitis.

In January 2004 the Department of Human Services amended the Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 2001 to require all operators to ensure appropriate health information is provided to all clients prior to any skin penetration procedure being undertaken. The anecdotal commentary to members of The Nationals on behalf of their constituency indicates that the terms of the relevant regulations are not being universally complied with and in any event do not represent a sufficient and effective means of establishing appropriate control in this important area.

The Nationals have received representations from the distressed parents of children who have undergone body piercing without parental consent. It is the intention to ensure that the written consent of a child's parent or guardian must be obtained by the person performing the body piercing before the procedure is undertaken.

Although the common law requires appropriate consent before any body piercing procedure occurs, the amendment of the principal act by the terms of this bill will bring a particular focus to the interests and welfare of children.

Whereas the Summary Offences Act 1966 renders the tattooing of juveniles under the age of 18 years an offence, there is no reference to body piercing. This bill will address that anomaly.

The bill will introduce a new division 6 into part 1 of the principal act. There are relevant definitions of 'body piercing' and 'child'. A further provision precludes body piercing on a child without the prior written consent of the child's parent or guardian.

It is not the intention of The Nationals to interfere with any body-piercing procedure which might be performed in good faith by a medical practitioner, nurse or Chinese medicine practitioner and a specific exclusion to that effect is contained within the bill.

It is imperative that the process of body piercing of persons under the age of 18 years be the subject of

appropriate statutory controls and this bill will deliver that outcome.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned for Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) on motion of Mr Lenders.

Debate adjourned until next day.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON GAMING LICENSING

Assembly members

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house requests the Legislative Assembly to grant leave to the Honourable S. P. Bracks, MP, Premier of Victoria, the Honourable J. M. Brumby, MP, Treasurer, the Honourable D. M. Andrews, MP, Minister for Gaming, the Honourable T. H. Pallas, MP, Minister for Roads and Ports and the Honourable John Pandazopoulos, MP, member for Dandenong, to appear before the Legislative Council to give evidence and answer questions in relation to the committee's terms of reference.

The motion I have just moved arises from a resolution of the Select Committee on Gaming Licensing. The select committee reported in its first interim report tabled yesterday that it has resolved to commence public hearings, with the first hearing scheduled to take place on 30 July. As was reported yesterday, the committee has gone through an extensive process of seeking documents and papers from various witnesses and is now ready to commence public hearings.

The reason for moving this motion today is that the members for whom leave from the Assembly is sought are central to the matters being considered by the committee. The committee has resolved to pursue as its first order of business terms of reference 1.1(a) and 1.1(b), which relate to the lotteries licence process in Victoria and a decision by the Victorian government to extend the existing lotteries licence held by Tattersall's.

Central to the process and that decision have been the office of the Premier, the office of the Treasurer and the office of the gaming minister. Accordingly the committee seeks to take evidence from the Premier; from his former chief of staff, now the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Honourable Tim Pallas; from the current gaming minister, the Honourable Daniel Andrews; from the previous gaming minister, the Honourable John Pandazopoulos; and of course from the Treasurer, the Honourable John Brumby, given the central role the Treasury plays in determining this

process. It has certainly been the case that through public statements the Honourable John Pandazopoulos, the member for Dandenong, has indicated a willingness to appear before the committee. What this resolution in the house today will do is clear the way for those members to give evidence before the committee subject to the concurrence of the Legislative Assembly.

In moving this motion on behalf of the committee I make no judgement on the nature of the evidence that those members may give or on the conduct of the process being investigated, but their participation at public hearings would go a long way to assisting the committee in the discharge of its duties. Therefore the committee seeks the leave of the Legislative Assembly for those members named in this motion to appear before it. Accordingly, I encourage the house to support this motion, as it is central to the select committee discharging the duties with which it was charged by this house in February.

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — This so-called request is pointless and is political grandstanding of the highest order. It is well known and well accepted that this house has no power to summons or compel members of the Legislative Assembly to attend the Council's committees. Members of the Legislative Assembly are immune from the processes of the Legislative Council, and that is a fundamental doctrine on which our system operates. It is a doctrine that is older than this house itself, and the immunity of the Legislative Assembly is confirmed in the Constitution Act 1975. Again, for the benefit of those opposite, I will encapsulate my understanding of the reasons this doctrine has been in place for the considerable period that it has been in place.

The houses of Parliament are independent of each other. Neither house can claim, much less exercise, authority over a member of the upper house. A member of the Legislative Assembly is accountable to, and a minister in the Assembly is responsible to, that house and that house alone. The Legislative Assembly claims the power and privilege of being the sole arbiter of claims against its members, and obviously as part of that the Legislative Assembly claims priority for the attendance of its members to its business. The Legislative Council has no authority over members of the Legislative Assembly, and equally the Legislative Assembly has no power over members of the Legislative Council. One could envisage a situation that were it otherwise the Assembly might seek to call Bruce Atkinson or Philip Davis to explain their actions when they were parliamentary secretaries in the Kennett government, and one could equally envisage

Matthew Guy or Andrea Coote being asked to explain their behaviour as advisers in the Kennett government.

This motion flies in the face of longstanding convention, it flies in the face of practice, it flies in the face of the Constitution Act and it is essentially an insult to this house.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — It is appropriate that we go down this course of issuing an invitation to members of the other house to attend the committee. Chapter 2 of *Odgers' Australian Senate Practice*, headed 'Parliamentary privilege: immunities and powers of the Senate', deals overall with the ability of that house to conduct inquiries and touches on many of the matters that I raised yesterday in relation to this particular select committee. Relevantly it states:

Although the question has not been adjudicated, there is probably an implicit limitation on the power of the houses to summon witnesses in relation to members of the other house or of a house of a state or territory legislature.

Odgers is nowhere near as definitive as the statements just made by Mr Tee; however, at the moment we are not proposing to disturb that particular consensus. In the federal system of course an act and a number of standing orders deal specifically with this, and Odgers states that standing order 178:

... reflects a rule of courtesy and comity between the houses, and as such it ought properly to be observed in relation to houses of state and territory parliaments.

This became of particular interest in the federal Senate in relation to the select committee on the Victorian casino inquiry, which I presume Labor members of the federal Senate must have had something to do with at the time. It presented a report on 5 December 1996 indicating that it had decided not to continue its inquiry because of advice provided by the Clerk of the Senate and by Professor Dennis Pearce in relation to limitations on Senate powers to compel evidence from state members of Parliament and other state office-holders. Before Labor members come in here and throw around words like 'witch-hunt' and 'politically motivated', they should probably at least go back to the debate that was held in relation to the establishment and operations of the Senate Select Committee on the Victorian Casino Inquiry.

For now I would just say that, although as Odgers notes the question has not been adjudicated and although as in most constitutional cases justices will generally look at the balancing of the different considerations rather than the absolute position that has just been presented by Mr Tee, the Greens are not proposing to do anything to upset that particular balance with respect to the

privileges of the two chambers, which in my contribution to debate yesterday I went into some detail to explain and defend.

Motion agreed to.

RAIL: LEVEL CROSSING SAFETY

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I move:

That this house requires the Road Safety Committee to inquire into and report by 29 February 2008 on existing, new and developing technologies for implementation to improve safety at level crossings.

The Road Safety Committee is one of the few committees which has a history of some standing and credibility, not just amongst parliamentarians but in the community widely, as a parliamentary committee that has made a significant contribution to the greater good of the lives of Victorians. It was interesting recently to read Walter Jona's autobiography in which he set out in part a description of the origins of the Road Safety Committee. As a member of Parliament he was a great champion of road safety improvement measures. He made a significant contribution and probably established his political career as a result of that contribution.

The Road Safety Committee is appropriately resourced and has historically taken a bipartisan view on road safety matters. It is therefore with a great sense of confidence that I am happy to recommend a reference to that committee. The matter of level crossing safety has taken on a greater sense of urgency following the tragic collision at Kerang on 5 June between a truck and a V/Line train that was travelling from Swan Hill to Melbourne. Naturally we then extended and I again today extend my sympathy to the families and friends of the 11 people who died in the collision and those who were badly injured. I also extend my sympathy to the local community and friends and relations of those involved in that traumatising event.

But we should also recognise that people working in the rail industry experience trauma. Railway staff involved in those sorts of collisions are not at risk just in regard to those singular events but are at regular and constant risk.

Years of ineptitude and inaction on the part of the government have brought us to a critical point at which an intensive and yet far-reaching inquiry is really the sole remaining option to deal with these complex issues. Collisions at railway level crossings exact an unacceptably high toll. National research examining the problem forecasts that it will worsen. The Victorian

government clearly does not get that message. I am reminded of the Irishman from the Great Western Railway of early last century, who reported the outcome of a derailment with the famous line, 'Off again, on again, gone again — Finnegan'. That of course was representative of a desire at the time by his employers for briefer reports than those he was submitting. If only it worked that well in today's Victoria.

The government has been running on again, off again publicity campaigns that do not seem to be showing any measurable impact. It has been pursuing inadequate and totally ad-hoc programs to upgrade level crossings. In the aftermath of the 5 June disaster near Kerang, the Premier made a rushed announcement of a self-styled major safety program. Closer examination showed the program to be flawed and grossly exaggerated. In framing the program, the government has clearly not been heeding the readily available research findings and expert evidence on level crossing safety.

The collision at Kerang was indeed a call for action. The call for action via a formal inquiry is also timely given that the Australasian Railway Association will oversee the second national rail safety awareness week from Monday. I quote from the association's announcement of safety week:

The recent tragedy at Kerang sadly reinforces the urgency for immediate action from relevant parties to improve safety at level crossings. Level crossing safety is a major national issue ... Therefore, in order to effectively improve safety at Australian level crossings, cooperation is needed between all levels of government, the road and rail industries, enforcement agencies and relevant road safety authorities.

I note that Victoria is supposedly a participant in the awareness events of next week, but as yet we have heard no mention of it from the government. It has issued the media release on the crossings program, and that is it — another problem apparently swept under the mat by a press release.

Let us review the situation that currently exists in Victoria. There is a total of 2267 level crossings and 708 railway pedestrian crossings. In fact 1446 of the crossings of roads and rail lines still have only warning signs, or, as the industry terms it, they are 'passively protected'. In many respects they are not really protected at all. The majority of all crossings, and in particular those that are open or passively protected, are in country Victoria.

Let us examine the incident rate. Potentially the most disastrous and damaging collisions with trains at level crossings involve large road transports. Nineteen people have lost their lives in truck-train collisions in Victoria

since October 2002, 14 of them since April last year. Many more have been injured or traumatised. Based on the work of the national rail cooperative research centre, two-thirds of fatalities have occurred at crossings outside capital cities. These collisions also have a high economic cost in terms of immediate damage to vehicles, rolling stock and freight and disruption of freight services. The Australasian Railway Association calculates the immediate damage from collisions over the last 14 months to be \$200 million nationally — and Victoria accounted for most of that figure. In addition to the actual collisions, the rail operator statistics show more than 90 near misses were reported in Victoria last year alone.

The lines from Geelong to Warrnambool, and from North Shore to Lismore and Ararat, present a particular concern and illustrate the potential for road-rail disaster — for example, there are 55 crossings with only warning signs between South Geelong and Warrnambool, and 57 crossings on the line connecting North Shore, Lismore and Ararat. On weekdays the Waurm Ponds to Warrnambool line carries three passenger trains each way, and one freight train each way; therefore carrying a total of eight per day. There are also cement trains running from Waurm Ponds through South Geelong on the way to Melbourne. On the national standard gauge line from Melbourne through North Shore, Inverleigh, Lismore and Ararat, there can be up to 16 trains a day. These include the Overland passenger trains to and from Adelaide and freight trains of up to 4000 tonnes and 1.5 kilometres in length. They run at all hours, and in places — at Wingeel, for example — trains headed in opposite directions can meet at level crossings.

I want to emphasise the contrast and risk factor between metropolitan and country Victoria. Clearly for people in the city the main problem is that level crossings impede traffic flow and create and cause congestion. However, in the country, crossings are on secondary highways or local roads on which there is a speed limit of 100 kilometres an hour. They are in places that are not served by public transport. In other words, the community is dependent upon motor vehicles rather than rail use, so the intersection between road traffic and rail traffic becomes critical. Country level crossings carry traffic, including school buses, families taking their children to school, farmers transporting produce, carriers such as milk tankers and a full range of through traffic, all travelling at speed. Clearly country areas and drivers who travel regularly in country areas should be the first priority of efforts to improve level crossing safety.

What has the Victorian government done to fix the problem, and what is it doing now? In short, its response is misguided and inadequate. The government has been misleading in the way it has presented its program. Last month the government ran a revival of the 'Don't risk it!' publicity campaign after giving it an initial run in 2005 and again for a time last year. This was in the aftermath of the Kerang tragedy. I note that the crossings program incorporated \$2 million for the awareness campaign, but the transport minister's announcement of 28 May indicated only \$500 000 would be spent on TV, radio and print ads in June. As I said, it is an on again, off again response to a matter of major concern. It is a hit-and-miss campaign that will have minimal impact.

The level crossing upgrade plan was announced in June and is to span the next two and a half years. Here the government has grossly inflated what will actually be done. The Minister for Public Transport in another place and a fact sheet on the Department of Infrastructure website claim 40 level crossings will be upgraded in the current financial year, but the VicTrack schedule for the year lists only 24. On the Geelong–Warrnambool line, which I mentioned before, only 2 of the 55 open crossings will have some form of active protection installed in the coming year. At that rate the job on that line alone will take until 2034 to complete. I suggest that is a totally inadequate response.

The other small problem is that the minister admitted in response to a question on notice in another place that:

Information on traffic volumes at all passive level crossings is not currently available and therefore the 20 busiest 'passively protected' level crossings cannot be identified.

The minister further stated that it will take until the middle of next year to validate estimated traffic volumes at level crossings — in other words, we have a \$33.2 million upgrade program under way but there is absolutely no basis to guide its effective implementation and ensure the money is being spent on the right programs and in the most essential areas.

The government has flagged that it will explore different technology — namely, the installation of trial red light cameras at just two crossings — but there is alternative technology available. And it is not as if this is the first time its availability and likely suitability have been drawn to the government's attention. In June 2006 the chief executive officer of Pacific National, Don Telford, met Victoria's then transport minister in Sydney to present a case for the use of surveillance equipment to improve safety. That was shortly after a Pacific National train was involved in a fatal collision at Lismore. The fact that nothing of substance has

eventuated or even been contemplated until now raises questions about the government's commitment to improving public safety and its real motivation.

First, it has taken the Kerang disaster to trigger more concerted action on safety measures. Second, I think the remaining part of the answer is to be found in the section of the government's package that imposes penalties on drivers who speed to beat trains, including fines of \$3304. As in many other areas of administration, here again we find the attraction of a source of revenue.

What is the path to the most effective solution? The government has spoken in its package about initiating research into improved safety. Again research findings are readily available via the work of the national Cooperative Research Centre for Railway Engineering and Technologies. The CRC has already conducted valuable work. It was recently given a charter and a budget of \$100 million to continue its work for the next seven years. I think the CRC reflects a real focus on the professional and research-driven view about how to create improvements in rail safety. Pioneering research by CRC scientists has found driver behaviour to be a key factor in crashes at road-rail intersections. The CRC questions whether the very high cost of installing barriers at all crossings is worth it. It has identified several high-risk groups of drivers but places truck drivers at the top of the list. The CRC says that because of the time pressure on truck drivers, and given that heavy haulage traffic in the eastern Australian transport corridor is forecast to double in the next 5 to 10 years, there is a clear sign of a growing risk.

Surveillance at crossings is one area of focus for the rail CRC's research — that is, the use of cameras. But it is concentrating predominantly on the development of safety intervention plans to target the different behaviours of the highest risk drivers: truck drivers, younger drivers and older drivers — in other words, awareness or education. The CRC is building towards a national strategy which will centre on awareness programs. It found early in its work on this aspect of the problem that Australia does not have any research-based educational programs to address the need for improved level crossing safety. We do not need to be trialling possible solutions when many of the answers are there to be implemented, if only someone would show the initiative to look in the right place. Therefore the government's response is found to be wanting in the extreme. As we have found so often, it is not substantive and has not been properly thought out.

What I have described points to both poor management and neglect. There is a very real need for this inquiry

and for it to incorporate the valuable work of the CRC towards a national strategy — a strategy for which Victoria should be a strong protagonist and in which it should be an active partner.

To sum up, the matter is an urgent priority. It is seen as critical that the inquiry report at the start of next year. It is essential that it come up with an evidence-based solution and that it be the most practical, effective and cost-effective solution to fit the scale of the problem. It is important that it draw on the substantial body of work already done and ongoing in this field and that it create a lasting impact. I therefore commend the motion to the house.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to speak on this motion as a member of the Road Safety Committee, along with Mr Koch. I must say that in the short time I have been a member of the Road Safety Committee I have been very impressed with the way it is run and the way members of all parties work together to come up with road safety outcomes in their reports. The government will be voting for Philip Davis's motion today. We agree that this is a good reference for the Road Safety Committee. However, I must add, and I will touch on this later, that we do not agree with some of the sentiments expressed in his speech about the ineptness of the government in this area.

I am also pleased to speak on this motion being an ex-VicRoads employee. I was an electrician and worked for VicRoads and for a number of contractors on signals and road safety technology. I was an electrician, but we used to call ourselves traffic signal technicians — it sounds a bit more important. I will touch on some of the technologies associated with road and rail. The Melbourne metropolitan region and the extended regions of Geelong and Ballarat have quite sophisticated computerised systems for moving traffic through traffic signals and monitoring the safety of those traffic signals and any faults that may occur.

There are over 250 sets of lights throughout Victoria that are connected to a central computer which is monitored by a control room. That control room can change the sequence of the lights and the flow of traffic going into the city in the morning and the flow of traffic going out. This is done through a number of detectors that are cut into the road at the stop lines. Some of these detectors cut into the roads used to be advanced on the side streets. If you have ever had someone tell you that if you are approaching a red light and you flash your lights it will change, that is false, it is actually the detectors at work. These detectors are all linked up to a computer system, and that is how they monitor the flow of traffic.

There is also a system of alarms that can be sent from the computers at the intersections to the main control room. Those alarms will trigger the control room to call out technicians to go and look at the fault. We used to be called out at all hours of the morning as different types of alarms would be put out. They would ring you up and say there was an FY alarm at a certain intersection, which would mean flashing yellow lights. They would ring up and say there was an NC alarm at a certain intersection, and that would mean that that particular set of lights was not communicating with the rest of the system. The real worry was when they would ring you up and say there was a BO alarm. I used to get that from my wife usually, but in this case it meant the lights were blacked out. It is quite a sophisticated system. It is probably as sophisticated as any anywhere around the world. VicRoads uses a system that is known as SCATS, or Sydney coordinated adaptive traffic system.

I went to the Mainco Electrol building in Richmond, which monitors the power supplies in the rail system. That is quite sophisticated in itself. The control room has quite a large wall which monitors every station, every power supply at every station and every transformer. The rail system works on a direct current rather than on an alternating current on every rectifier and everything is monitored in the system. If one of those circuit breakers is tripped, they can remotely reset the system — or in the event that they cannot reset the system they can feed it from a different direction. It is quite sophisticated. There is also another control room, which I have not had a chance to see, which monitors the signals and the points and can work on them remotely as well in the metropolitan area. That can be monitored quite simply. There is technology which can be looked at, and as a member of the Road Safety Committee I would recommend that we go and look at some of those buildings as part of this reference.

When I was at the Electrol building I spoke to a number of personnel. Many of them have been involved in the rail industry for at least 20 years, with most of them having around 25 to 35 years experience in signalling and technology on the rail system. They are all highly qualified electricians and electrical fitters. There are a lot of dual-trade people there. They are all good guys with a wealth of knowledge of the system. They are also members of the same union that I belong to, which makes them even better! None of them could remember a train-and-vehicle accident occurring due to a fault in the technology. That is something the committee would have to look at with this reference. I believe we have some good technology, but it may need to be further rolled out in certain circumstances.

I am on the Road Safety Committee and I have also worked for VicRoads. VicRoads and Transport Accident Commission policy is that three areas can be looked at to reduce road accidents. The first is safer roads. Sometimes it is as simple as taking a little bend out of a road and making the road straighter to improve visibility for motorists and pedestrians. The second is safer vehicles, and that is a reference the Road Safety Committee is looking at now. It is very interesting, and hopefully some of the new devices can come into the new fleets of cars in Victoria in the future, and that will make cars a lot safer. The third is safer drivers, which comes from education, but it also comes from experience.

One thing about level crossings which some people do not acknowledge is that even though a level crossing may not have a boom gate and may not have bells, it will always have a level crossing sign and a stop sign. It also has a big, wide line on the road that you are supposed to stop at. These are the same stop signs that you come across on a major highway. You do not just come from a side street or a minor street into a major road without stopping; you always stop. We need an education campaign to tell people that they should stop and look both ways for train movement before they proceed.

The government has made a couple of announcements recently to try to improve things in this area, and I believe they are good announcements. We are spending over \$33 million — this is new money — on installing 53 automatic advance warning signs. These are signs which will be placed on the road a couple of hundred metres before you reach a rail crossing. The sign will say 'Train ahead' or give some other sort of warning. I installed a few when I was working on the signals, and I believe they make a difference in waking people up. The other thing is the installation of rumble strips in the road at 200 crossings. When you drive up to a crossing the car rumbles and you wake up, and I think that is fantastic. It is something the Road Safety Committee should look at with this reference. If it is something that works well, then we should roll it out further. We should also make it a crime to try to beat a train. If it is proved that you are playing tiggy with a train, it should be a crime, because if you lose the game, it is not you who is the loser. It is the people on the train who might be affected in a very severe way as well as their families and their communities; they really lose.

When it comes to education, a do-not-risk-it awareness campaign is going to be introduced — a couple of million dollars will go into that. It all goes back to education. You should stop at level crossings and you should look, and we have lost that awareness a bit.

Money is also going into improving the motorist's line of sight. I spoke before about safer roads. If there is vegetation or anything else impeding people's line of sight to oncoming trains, then it needs to be removed. There will also be a trial of compliance cameras. That is new technology, and through this reference the committee will be able to assess whether it is suitable. There are measures which can be put in place.

I am quite happy that the reference is coming to the Road Safety Committee, and I am glad that I have a bit of knowledge of the subject. In his speech Philip Davis pointed to the ineptness of the government in this area. The Liberal Party has lost all respect when it comes to road safety. Its members have no right to come in here and point at government members and talk about road safety. I am not going to go back to the Kennett years; I am not going to say what we did and what that government did. I am not going to go back there. But I am going to go back a bit over six months to the time of the last election campaign when the Liberal Party had a policy of 10 per cent tolerance on speed limits. It wanted a 10 per cent tolerance on speed, so that if you were driving down the Hume Highway you could be banging along at 121 kilometres an hour, which is 10 per cent over the speed limit.

All the money the Transport Accident Commission spent on the Wipe Off 5 campaign would have been thrown away if the Liberal Party had got into government. My maths is not fantastic, but I understood the advertisements the TAC ran about how hard you would hit a truck that pulls out in front of you if you were travelling at 60 kilometres an hour compared with 65 kilometres an hour or the difference between how much you can injure a person if you hit them at 60 kilometres an hour compared to 65 kilometres an hour. I do not know if members of the Liberal Party watched the advertisements, but my maths tells me that a 10 per cent tolerance means that if you going along at 65 kilometres — —

Ms Lovell — On a point of order, Acting President, we are not here to debate what the Liberal Party's policies were at the last state election, but if we are going to debate them, then Mr Leane should declare his government's hidden tolerance so we can compare apples with apples.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! There is no point of order. The member, to continue.

Mr LEANE — Thank you, Acting President, and I will continue. I cannot believe what a stupid policy the 10 per cent tolerance is. If you believe what the

newspapers reported, David Davis was attacked by some of his colleagues for not spending enough time on the policies in his portfolio. Mr Davis should have pointed to the member for Polwarth in the other place, Mr Mulder, and said, 'What about Mr 10 Per Cent? How long could it have taken to come up with a policy that stupid?'. I would be saying — —

Mr Koch — On a point of order, Acting President, I think the motion before the Chair today relates to a reference to the Road Safety Committee pertaining to the safety of railway crossings. It does not relate to the earlier elections and campaign policies which are being put forward by Mr Leane. He is alluding only to road safety and not to railway crossing safety, which is the motion before the Chair.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! I take the point. The member will come back to the subject.

Mr LEANE — I will come back to the subject. I have to say, Acting President, that I did prepare to speak on this motion but was not going to speak on it unless the opposition member who moved the motion pointed the finger at this government on road safety, because he had no right to do so. If the opposition got into government, we would have had 10 per cent added on to speed limits and there would have been special speed signs saying, 'You can go 100 kilometres per hour but we will cop 110'. If you were lucky, you might have seen the Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Ted Baillieu, hanging sideways off the speed signs. This is a good reference, and we are happy to do it, but we will not cop the opposition party pointing in this direction when it comes to road safety after the stupid policy it announced before the election.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — The Nationals support the motion moved in the house today by Philip Davis. We believe the Road Safety Committee is in fact the right vehicle — pardon the pun — or the right group to take this inquiry forward. As an MP for The Nationals who drives around Victoria on a regular basis, I can say that it is amazing how many rail crossings you do come across. It is also worth noting the number of rail crossings you come across where you never ever see a train. Without doubt there is a natural tendency to treat rail crossings on all roads as if they do not exist. The many, many thousands of kilometres that we drive every week effectively creates the situation that if you never see a train over a long period of time you tend to think the railway lines must be disused or that they are lines that are only ever used for a bit of freight here and there and that before the

freight comes through obviously a couple of guards walk out and give you ample warning.

It came as quite a surprise to me just how many times I had driven past the Kerang crash site and had never given a moment's thought to the fact that the line was frequently used by a passenger service. The horrendous tragedy which took place sharpened my focus on and awareness of just how many other rail crossings you cross over in a normal week travelling around regional Victoria. In the wake of the Kerang tragedy, the motion to hand over the reference to the Road Safety Committee so it can conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the best way to go forward is a good one.

There are 2200 rail crossings around Victoria, less than half of which are properly guarded. That is a huge statistic which goes to pinpoint the fact that we have over 1000 rail crossings that have what are called passive warning signals. We all understand that it would simply cost an inordinate amount of money — money that could not be justified — for every rail crossing in the state to have proper boom gates, lights and the like, so we have to look at all the various options. In the wake of the Kerang tragedy a whole range of options were put forward by people calling radio stations and people writing letters to the editors of newspapers.

The whole of Victoria was affected by the tragedy and people were keen to have their opinions on the topic heard. There were people calling for a voice override — similar to the one you hear in the Burnley Tunnel — as you are approaching rail crossings, so that when you are listening to the radio or compact discs an overriding voice warns you of the approaching rail crossing. The rumble strips that Mr Leane spoke about have a resonance with people. Every now and then one comes across a dangerous intersection that has some form of rumble strips, and they do help in jogging one's awareness. Putting the approaching warning lights further away from the crossing is also an option that has been put forward by many people and is one of the options the government has elected to pursue in the immediate future. Bitumen extensions could also be an option, as many rail crossings are on dirt roads which are in close proximity to a highway. Quite often they run parallel to a highway and the rail crossing is on a little dirt road offshoot. There is the potential, maybe without costing too much, to have a bit of bitumen to assist with braking in those emergency situations.

A whole range of measures have been put forward. It would be incorrect for anybody to stand up and assume that they know everything by saying, 'This is what you should do'. It is correct to push this inquiry into the

realm of the Road Safety Committee. It is a committee that worked very well in the last Parliament and, it is pleasing to hear, is working well in this Parliament.

I am keen to see the outcome after having spent a 4-hour stint in what is called the panel office of the Bendigo rail station. In effect it picks up the trains as they leave Watergardens on their journeys north, and takes them in from Swan Hill until they are picked up by the metropolitan system. The staff watch a computerised version of the trains going across each of the respective rail crossings all the way through. The workers, who were previously employed by Connex, were happy to invite me in so that I could see how it works.

On that particular afternoon there were in fact a couple of close calls where the boom gate was a bit slow to come down. While there were no vehicles crossing over, the drivers of the trains were sufficiently concerned to radio that lapse in boom-gate timing back to the control office. Then an alert was put out for the next approximately 15 to 20 trains that left Melbourne, or left Bendigo or Kyneton to go back into Melbourne, to approach every rail crossing at a speed that would enable them to brake unless they could see that the boom gate was safely down. It was comforting to see, there having been a slight scare, the priority and emphasis that was placed on passenger safety, to the extent of throwing the timetable into disarray. The people who are in control of our rail system — in that case it was the Pacific National group — are very careful to ensure that safety comes first.

It is a critical and important issue. There is a great sense of safety when you jump on a regional train and head off to Melbourne for whatever reason. You have a very safe feeling. You do not have to concentrate — you can pick up your work, make phone calls, read a book, or whatever. The last thing on your mind is that you are in any danger at all, and that is a credit to our system.

What happened at Kerang was tragic. We hope that this inquiry going forward will mean that we will never again see such a tragedy on Victoria's regional road and rail system.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I start by saying that I take heart from the comments by Mr Leane that this is a committee that works well together and that this will be a good reference. In principle the Greens support this reference. We think this is an appropriate place for rail crossing safety to be looked at because it is an issue, as I said yesterday, that should go across party lines.

A number of speeches given today have included a lot of technical detail, and I am not going to go back over that. I will touch on, as Mr Drum has done, a few issues about some of the technology and some of the simpler things that may be able to be done until the major works can be done — such as speed humps, underpasses, pedestrian overpasses and removing objects from lines of sight. All these things can be inexpensively done.

I will concentrate my time today on looking at the Western Metropolitan Region in terms of rail safety. Yesterday the Minister for Public Transport in the other place responded to my question on notice regarding rail crossings. The minister has informed me that there is no provision for level crossing upgrades in the Western Metropolitan Region in the current budget, but there is an enormous need.

I refer to three crossings. The first is the Yarraville crossing where unfortunately we had an accident about two weeks ago. There used to be a pedestrian underpass at the Yarraville station. For reasons beyond my understanding, the Kennett government filled in that underpass in the middle of the night, along with — as I now understand — five other pedestrian underpasses at other stations. This was done without consultation with traders or local residents. Now at Yarraville hundreds of people cross the rail line at that crossing because there is no other way to get across. Sometimes they have to wait up to 17 minutes while the boom gates are down, and because Yarraville has an incredibly poor rail service — there is only a train every 20 minutes — people are really desperate to get onto the trains. I know this is bad behaviour and I do not condone it, but it is what happens when you do not provide people with a safe way to get across a railway crossing.

At St Albans there are three major rail crossings that need upgrading, and I congratulate the government on the fact that it has started work on Taylors Road. It is going to cost \$56 million. I accept, and I understand, that rail crossing infrastructure is not a cheap thing. It is something that must be budgeted for and it cannot be done easily or quickly, but my concern about the crossings in St Albans at Furlong Road and Main Road West is that the planning for both of those crossings has not commenced. There was a terrible and tragic accident at Furlong Road in which three people from Brimbank died. The coroner has requested that the government look at ways of making this crossing safer, and the planning for the crossing must be started as soon as possible.

While we cannot change human behaviour, we can do things to make sure that crossings are as safe as

possible. The Kerang example is one where obviously there were lights, there was a railway crossing, but bad behaviour caused a terrible and tragic accident. We have to try to do what we can at all other railway crossings to make sure that at least the infrastructure is in place to stop what we can. But I know, and I accept, that the bad behaviour is something that is much harder to stop. The Greens will be voting for this motion; we think it is a good move.

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I rise to support the motion put forward by Philip Davis. As other speakers have said, this committee is the right place for this inquiry to be conducted. It is across all party lines, and road safety and rail safety should be above party politics. I guess that is why I was so disappointed with Mr Leane's contribution this morning.

Rail safety, particularly rail crossings, are a major concern in country Victoria. In my hand I have about 50 articles on rail safety and rail crossings that have been published in my local papers over recent months. The two most recent tragic accidents we would remember have happened in my region, the first being the recent rail accident on the Swan Hill line just out of Kerang, and of course the second being the horrendous accident in Donald that claimed multiple lives.

We have 2273 rail crossings in Victoria and only 35 per cent of them are protected by flashing lights or boom gates. Over the past 17 years we have had 65 deaths at rail crossings, so we need to do something. This inquiry will look into what can be done to realistically make those rail crossings safer.

I will talk just briefly about the recent accident on the Swan Hill line. First of all, I will just say that this is not Kerang's accident. I am offended that people keep referring to it as 'the Kerang accident'. Even at the memorial service, the front cover of the booklet said, 'Memorial service for Kerang rail accident'. It is not Kerang's accident, it is V/Line's accident. The people of Kerang had raised this crossing as a safety issue. The crossing had been inspected but it was not considered a high enough risk for an upgrade.

Like Mr Drum, I travel through that crossing quite regularly and I am very aware of it. When you are coming out of Kerang there is a bend just before the crossing. I guess those who are travelling on the road regularly are aware of the crossing, but for those who are not travelling across it regularly it is a very dangerous approach.

I also mention the roads in that part of the world. One of the things I have noticed about the roads, especially the Murray Valley Highway, is that a light-coloured, almost white stone is used. Because we have so much sunshine there is a lot of glare on the roads and it is often very difficult to see cars approaching you. I think there also needs to be some sort of inquiry into the types of materials used for roads in different areas.

Just a week before the accident I passed through the crossing on the Murray Valley Highway at which the recent V/Line accident occurred. It was at about the same time of the day as the accident occurred. I admit that when I was driving up to Kerang to attend the memorial service, as I passed through the towns along the way, through Gunbower and Cohuna, I thought about the truck driver and how his life as he passed through those towns on that day had been just like mine — relatively carefree, worried about family and different small things in life — but I reflected on how his life had changed in an instant. I extend my sympathies to the families of all those who were killed or injured in that accident, but I also extend my thoughts to the family of the truck driver and the truck driver himself, whose life has been irrevocably changed by this accident.

Country Victoria has very few trains. Most of them run on schedule, and people tend to become a little bit complacent. We should not be complacent, but the reality is that we are, and we do not expect to see trains. People expect a train at a scheduled time but not necessarily an unscheduled train. A recent article in February 2007 ran in the *Shepparton News*. This issue was raised by a freight-train driver, and the article says:

A freight-train driver and father of two Katunga South Primary School students believes a rail crossing next to the school will claim a life unless it is upgraded.

Shaun Bugler, who has a son in year 6 and a daughter in year 4 at the school, works as a relief train driver and said he feared someone would be killed at the crossing, which runs near the intersection of Numurkah and Hays roads in Katunga South and has no lights or barriers.

'It is one of the worst level crossings between Melbourne and Tocumwal', Mr Bugler said.

The article goes on to say:

Last week, an irregular freight train passed through the crossing at 3.35 p.m. during the school's peak hour when students were being escorted across the crossing by a teacher, students were being picked up in cars, buses were arriving and a truck was approaching the intersection.

School council president David Beer said the council had written a series of letters to the Department of Infrastructure requesting an upgrade for seven years and had been informed the department was looking into it.

I certainly hope the department is looking into that crossing near the Katunga South Primary School and that it will be upgraded in the future so there is greater safety for that primary school. Indeed one of the people from Kerang also said to me that the accident that happened on the Swan Hill line could have been far worse if it had happened at the next rail crossing, which is near a primary school.

The Echuca–Toolamba line is another line about which there has been much contention concerning rail crossings. It was reopened just over 12 months ago, in June 2006. There are about 20 unprotected crossings on that line. There are small signs right on the railway line that announce the reopening of the line, but you do not see them until you get right up to the track. They are very small and therefore are very difficult to see. This line crosses the Midland Highway, where there could be a major accident, but there are also 20 other unprotected crossings, some of which are not very visible. There were no trains running on this line between June 2003 and June 2006, so no-one locally was really expecting to see a train, and the signage that was put up was inadequate. Indeed the whole campaign the government ran to announce the reopening of the train line was inadequate. There were just a few advertisements in local papers. I would like to congratulate one of the local councillors, Cr Kevin ‘Gunna’ Ryan, who did a tremendous job to raise awareness of the reopened line and the dangers it presented. He did a much better job than the government of raising awareness of those dangers.

The *Herald Sun* covered a few of the rail crossings on that line. On Wednesday, 27 June, it ran an article by a journalist from the *Herald Sun* who had been at a crossing near Tatura and had witnessed a four-wheel drive blatantly drive through it at about 9.30 a.m. in front of a freight train that was pulling 17 flatbed carriages from Echuca. The train sped towards that four-wheel drive with its horns blaring. We have a lot of near misses. We have had far too many accidents, but there are too many near misses, and we need much better signage, safety and awareness of rail crossings, particularly in country Victoria but also in the metropolitan area, especially, as Ms Hartland said, in the west. I know the crossing at Yarraville, having grown up in Williamstown. I know it has always been considered a really dangerous crossing.

In the *Shepparton News* there was a report on 6 March 2007 of another near miss:

One resident witnessed a near tragedy on the South Boundary Road crossing near Kyabram during a recent trial run of locomotives.

A train was forced to come to a grinding halt at the crossing because a car drove straight across the railway line in front of the train.

That is another example of the near misses we have in country Victoria at all our rail crossings.

Recently the shadow Minister for Public Transport and member for Swan Hill in the other place, Terry Mulder, also raised concerns about a railway crossing in Benalla where there was an accident about five years ago. It was a fatal accident. It involved a B-double truck colliding with a train. Unfortunately three people were killed in that accident on 13 October 2002. Apparently recommendations were contained in the Australian Transport Safety Bureau’s February 2006 report for the upgrading of that crossing which have still not been implemented. Even when we are getting recommendations for an upgrade, unfortunately they are not always followed.

Following the recent V/Line accident on the Swan Hill line, the *Shepparton News* had an article by Darren Linton that I would like to read. It is only very short. He says under the heading ‘We must review safety’:

Tuesday’s rail disaster is a terrible tragedy and it should lead to a review of all rail crossings in the state.

It would be wrong to think that boom gates and warning signals could prevent another fatal crash. It would also be wrong to suggest that more than 2000 crossings in the state could be upgraded at a cost of \$800 000 each, but cost alone shouldn’t stop us trying to make the worst crossings safer.

Examples aren’t hard to find.

Wyndham Street has boom gates but the rail crossing on Watt Road —

which is the back road from Mooroopna to Shepparton —

does not, even though drivers have no clear view of trains until they are virtually on the tracks.

Lights and bells are not foolproof — a loud stereo and sun glare are enough to induce a fatal error.

I often use the back road and admit to assuming there is no train when the lights are not flashing. I’ll be taking a more careful approach now.

Unfortunately, as Darren has highlighted, when people are approaching a rail crossing they do not always think about a train. If people are now more aware of the dangers that they face when they drive over a rail crossing, one good thing has come of the V/Line accident on the Swan Hill line. I agree with the sentiment of Darren’s article, that cost alone should not stop us trying to make the worst rail crossings safer. I commend this motion to the house.

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I am very pleased to rise and make a contribution to this debate. I am pleased also to be able to say that I rise to support the motion before the house. It does not often happen during opposition business that we are all in furious agreement, but that is the case today. I agree with many things that Ms Lovell has put forward in her contribution to this debate, as I do with many of the propositions put forward by Mr Drum in his contribution.

The very tragic accident that occurred recently at Kerang has really been a big reminder about and has given us all a shake-up as to just how dangerous level crossings can be. It was indeed a tragic accident, that saw the loss of life and many people injured. It is unfortunate that we have to witness fatal accidents and tragedies like that to be reminded that as drivers on our country roads we have a responsibility to be aware there are rail crossings.

The government has of course put forward a package which builds on the work that has already been done by the government and on the financial commitment that is already there to increase protection around level crossings. It is really important that driver education be part of the campaign, so that drivers are made aware of just how tragic the consequences can be if they are not diligent and do not heed the fact that there is a level crossing and the signals and signs that go with it.

The government is building on the campaigns that have already been put in place and has committed a considerable amount of money to them. Recently the Premier announced a package of some \$33.2 million by which every rail crossing on a highway in regional Victoria will have flashing lights and early warning signs. Part of that package includes some new, very tough laws with higher penalties that will crack down on dangerous driver behaviour at level crossings. Most of us who spend any time on country roads in rural and regional Victoria have witnessed some of that dangerous behaviour, with people trying to beat trains.

Even in metropolitan areas we see that when cars are banked up some are parked across a level crossing. In Yarraville, where I previously had my electorate office, there is a level crossing on Anderson Street, the main street through the Yarraville village. The street is quite narrow and the level crossing there is very busy. Because the traffic moves quite slowly along Anderson Street, if you are not really careful you can very easily be caught on those railway lines. Only a couple of weeks ago I was in a shop quite close to that railway crossing when I heard a crash and when I came out of the shop I saw that a car was stuck on the railway line.

Fortunately the train was coming into the station before the rail crossing and the driver was able to stop. The trains were held up there for quite some time. I know that as drivers we are often tempted, rather than waiting, to push our luck to see if we can get across a crossing and squeeze into the line of cars on the other side. A driver education campaign is a vital part of the package announced by the Premier.

As I said, the package contains some extra safety measures for level crossings in addition to the annual program already in place and being implemented by the Minister for Public Transport in the other place. The financial commitment for level crossing safety to be improved over the next two years has been doubled. I want to run through some of the elements of the package. Automated advance warnings, which are flashing signals, will be constructed on the sides of roads at approximately 250 metres prior to the level crossing. Those lights will be activated automatically when a train approaches.

In his contribution Mr Drum talked quite a bit about the installation of rumble strips and said that he thought they would make a positive contribution to people being made aware that they are coming up to a level crossing. I do a lot of long country drives, as I know do Ms Lovell, Mr Drum, Ms Broad and Mrs Petrovich, as members for Northern Victoria Region. When you are driving for a very long time it is easy to be cruising along, concentrating on the music or radio you are listening to or the thoughts you are having. It is really important that as drivers we are aware that we have a responsibility to be taking notice of the road signs and of crossings.

The automated advance warning and signalling that will be put in place will be very helpful, as will the rumble strips which we know alert drivers when they are falling asleep or are not concentrating as they should be when travelling along our highways. When you hit a rumble strip it quickly brings you back to your senses and to the job of concentrating on your driving. Rumble strips will be installed prior to 200 rail crossings, again at approximately 250 metres before the crossings.

Another element of the package will be the introduction of an increase in penalties. Again, one of the ways that people can be made aware of just how serious the government considers the matter of road safety to be is to ensure that people lose the appropriate number of demerit points and incur costs for not obeying the traffic laws and signals. The penalty levels for infringements at level crossings will be toughened up. Fines will rise from \$177 to \$430 and drivers will lose

4 demerit points instead of 3 for an infringement at a level crossing.

New offences will be introduced for speeding to beat a train. We know that this happens on the road and have heard many reports of drivers travelling along a road who can see the train coming in the distance and think they know the road well because they drive it all the time. They see the train coming and they reckon they will make it across before the train. People speed in order to beat the train.

Some people cross tracks when lights and bells are operating. I have seen this happen. I have seen drivers weaving in between the boom gates when I have stopped at level crossings. The boom gates have come down and a driver thinks there is enough room on the other side, because the train is a little way off, so he will weave between the boom gates to get over the level crossing. My heart is often in my mouth when I see that happen. New fines will be introduced with a maximum of \$3304 and 4 demerit points as well as an automatic three-month suspension of one's licence. It is a significant increase in penalties. I think that is justified. We need to educate the public about their responsibility for road safety, and we need to put in place measures that will assist people to be aware of the level crossing and be conscious of the level crossing when they approach it. If they fail to obey the law, the government will impose stronger penalties to ensure people are appropriately punished.

Education is an important part of this whole program, so an advertising campaign is being run around this package and the measures being put in place to ensure that people understand what their responsibilities are, understand what flashing lights mean, understand what the rumble strips are for and understand how important it is that they do not try to beat trains and do not try to make it across the tracks.

Line of sight has been another issue. Ms Lovell raised this matter in her contribution to the debate. Often it just takes the sun to be in a particular spot and your line of vision to be obscured in some way to lead you to misjudge or not see a level crossing properly. A program has been introduced to deal with line-of-sight problems, overgrown vegetation and those sorts of things.

A trial of compliance red-light cameras will be undertaken at two major level crossings — one in the metropolitan area and one in a regional area — to see how that goes. Not only are we looking at this reference to the Road Safety Committee, but Minister Kosky has asked the Victorian Rail Crossing Safety Steering

Committee, which includes a range of experts from the Department of Infrastructure, VicRoads, VicTrack and rail operators, to research new technologies that might help improve level crossing safety. It will particularly look at GPS (global positioning system) devices and radio signalling. People may well get information through the GPS that they are approaching a railway crossing. We know in some European countries you can get information through the GPS warning that a road accident has occurred. I do not know whether you can see that you are approaching a rail crossing, but you can certainly get information about a road accident ahead of you. The radio system is interrupted to let you know that something has happened on the road and you may need to divert. The minister is looking at these new technologies.

While I support the motion before the house, I believe the measures the government has recently put in place in the package announced by the Premier mean this is a good package with good measures. I think many of the changes being made to level crossings and the education program will lead to people being more aware so that fewer accidents happen and more lives are saved. I support the motion before the house.

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to see that all members who have spoken on this motion today are supporting the motion across party lines. I am pleased that members representing the Northern Victoria Region — Ms Darveniza, Mr Drum Ms Lovell and myself — where the most recent tragedy occurred on the Swan Hill line, fully support the motion.

Rural Victorians have learnt to live with the danger of unimproved level crossings, and they live with them every time they travel around the area. I know in driving across the Northern Victoria Region that on many occasions it is easy to be caught going a little fast or not concentrating on unfamiliar roads. It is okay when you are aware of the level crossings, but if you do not have the signage and the boom gates it is very easy to fall into the trap of not focusing on what you are doing. Country Victorians in particular live with the dangers of these level crossings on a daily basis. That is okay when they are familiar with the roads, but if people are travelling on unfamiliar roads and the crossings are not marked, accidents may occur.

I have particular concerns for young drivers. I have a 17-year-old who, in light of recent circumstances, has been made very much aware of the potential dangers of driving on country roads with unmarked crossings. Education is a major factor in preventing these types of tragedies. Young drivers and country drivers in

particular need to be made aware of the potential of these crossings sneaking up on you. I am particularly pleased today to see that we have the potential through various technologies to improve those circumstances. I think there is only one way to do that, and that is by marking the level crossings and putting in boom gates, which we have talked about extensively today, and rumble strips as a warning system. All of these technologies would be of assistance. It is a travesty that only half of our country level crossings have boom gates. If drivers are unfamiliar with the roads on which they are travelling, they have little warning of these unprotected crossings.

Recently every Victorian was touched by the magnitude of the rail disaster on 5 June at Kerang on the Swan Hill line. I personally was touched, along with my colleague Wendy Lovell, who attended the memorial service in Kerang, by the reality of the impact on the communities around that area and the individuals who lost members of their families in that most tragic event. I also have sympathy for the truck driver and his family, who through circumstances have been affected by this. If you drive on these roads, you know there are various conditions and circumstances that will impact on these things. Road conditions, the time of day, the topography of the land and even, as mentioned earlier by Ms Lovell, the type of infrastructure in the road gravel that gives a particular colouring and light can cause problems for vision and being able to see what is going on around you.

The fact remains that, regardless of these individual circumstances, there was no marked level crossing at this particular site. There were no boom gates as a warning system, and currently we are operating with up-to-date rolling stock and increased vehicle traffic moving at speeds that were not envisaged when the rail infrastructure was laid and when these crossings were designed. We have 21st century technology interacting with infrastructure that was really designed to interface with horses and carriages in many respects.

Whilst Kerang is still fresh in our minds, another tragedy which sticks in my mind is the rail accident at Donald, which involved a crossing renowned amongst locals as dangerous, but for people who are unfamiliar with such crossings they are a disaster waiting to happen. In this particular case a local woman caught up in a set of circumstances was killed. That sort of tragedy ripples through a community for many years. There was an announcement made by the Bracks government about improving the crossing at Donald, and I am hoping that that has been seen through. The other hope I have is that there is not a trend that Victorians and families are required to die before action

is taken to improve level crossing safety in this state. If we are committed to providing sustainable transport options for rural train travellers, we still have to make them safe and accessible for all Victorians.

I had an incident drawn to my attention last week where a lady in a wheelchair attempted to cross the railway lines at Broadford, having no alternative as there is no proper pedestrian access to that station. Unfortunately the front swivel wheels of her wheelchair became stuck between the tracks, and she was unable to free herself. If it had not been for the quick thinking and assistance of another individual, we would have had another tragedy to face.

It is important that we see some progress on this issue. I am encouraged to see that the government will be supporting this motion. I was concerned by the politicising of the issue by Mr Leane. I do not think it appropriate to do that, particularly when we are dealing with such a sensitive issue.

I commend Philip Davis for putting this on the agenda. It is my hope that with the information already available to us we can move forward and improve rail crossing safety for country Victorians as a matter of urgency.

Mr PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I will be brief. I was not planning to speak on this motion, but having heard some of the contributions I felt compelled to say a few words. As previous speakers have indicated, the government supports the reference. I was pleased to hear the reasonable and temperate contribution made by Mr Drum, and I think some of the points he made were excellent. It is of course financially impossible to put level crossings and lights at every single railway crossing in the state. That is why it is important for the government, and indeed for all interested persons, to look at whatever alternatives might be out there to improve level crossing safety.

The government, as both Mr Leane and Ms Darveniza have already indicated, has committed to a package of improvements with regard to level crossings. There are some significant and serious matters for the Road Safety Committee to take into consideration, because there is no single right answer about how to improve level crossing safety, particularly in regional Victoria. There are rumble strips, there are speed humps, there are driver distraction campaigns, there is improved signage, and particularly there is how far from the level crossing you place speed and indicator signage.

As was indicated by Mr Drum, there is the issue of technology and particularly voice-over technology that

can be heard in both cars and trucks. From my brief examination of that issue I can indicate to the house that it is not a simple question, and it is a question the committee will have to give some consideration to. Because as I understand it although there is technology that may be available that can cut into a radio, cassette or CD that is turned on it is quite a different matter to have technology that overrides the radio system when it is not turned on. There is technology that can be used in other circumstances but only if the driver has a particular receiver in his or her car. These are all significant matters that I think the Road Safety Committee can properly consider in its deliberations.

Ms Hartland talked about issues in the western suburbs and particularly in the Western Metropolitan Region. In the spirit of competitive parliamentary contributions I feel compelled to say something about the particular matters raised by Ms Hartland. There was an incident at Yarraville a couple of weeks ago which involved a council truck not being able to clear the crossing in time, and there was a collision with a train.

Ms Darveniza, whose office I have inherited, also made some comments about that. It is important to put on the record that that incident had nothing to do with pedestrians or a pedestrian underpass. It was, in the view of most people, an incident primarily related to traffic management issues in Anderson Street, Yarraville. I use that street every day, other than the days I am here, and I can say without hesitation that it is a very narrow street. It has parking on both sides of the street, and it often necessitates drivers having to wait for each other and move aside. If a car is trying to clear the tracks, as I believe was the case in this incident, it may be confronted with a car facing it from the other direction, which makes clearing the tracks very difficult.

Traffic management issues in Anderson Street are, as has already been acknowledged, a matter for council, and I know members of this chamber, including me, are planning to liaise very closely with Maribyrnong City Council about those traffic management issues in Anderson Street, which came to a head recently, in order to try to find a solution and ensure that we do not have a repeat of such dangerous situations.

There was also mention made of a pedestrian underpass at Yarraville, and I have to put on the record my view about this. Pedestrian underpasses are a great convenience but are not unambiguously good. There is a pedestrian underpass at Sunshine which I know from numerous discussions I have had that many residents would like to see closed. I do not want to indicate that there is any suggestion that that is going to happen but simply make the point that underpasses, whilst being a

haven for pedestrians who need to get across a railway line when a train is approaching, can also be, in the wrong circumstances, places where crime, violence and in many cases illicit drug deals take place, and they can be a significant safety issue in their own right. I do not think it should be left unsaid that pedestrian underpasses have their benefits, but there are in many circumstances significant problems that come with pedestrian underpasses in certain localities.

The specific issue of the Yarraville underpass is an interesting one. Ms Hartland was right when she said that underpass was closed in 1997 by the Kennett government and that there was significant community opposition to that closure at the time. It is also true to say, however, that the underpass could not be reopened now in the form it took then. All railway underpasses, and in fact everything that is associated with public transport more generally, must comply with the commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act and more particularly with the disability standards for public transport. The pedestrian underpass at Yarraville as it was in 1997 would not comply — in fact would not go close to complying — with those standards now.

My advice is that given the gradient, the shallow depth that would be required for the underpass to comply with the act and the current standards would mean it would have to be something like 100 to 120 metres long. Anyone who has been to Anderson Street, Yarraville, would know that there is not that sort of clearance on either side of the tracks. There are shops built close to the tracks. My advice is that for the kind of underpass that would be needed to comply with the current act you would be looking at compulsory acquisition and demolition of shops on either side of the railway line.

In regard to the St Albans grade separation project. I think it has been put on the record before that the government, in agreement with Brimbank council going back a number of years, has a three-pronged plan in place to deal with the issue of level crossings in St Albans. The first part of the strategy is to grade separate Taylors Road. As already indicated by Ms Hartland, that project is under way at a cost of \$54 million, and it is very welcome. Of course you cannot grade separate three stations or even two at the one time, because you would be creating absolute and utter gridlock throughout that part of Brimbank if you tried. As I said, there is a council-endorsed plan to do Taylors Road first, then Main Road, then Furlong Road. That has been agreed for many years. I must say that I agree, and the view put by me and by all Labor members of Parliament in the western suburbs is that we would like to see the second tranche of that three-part plan commence at the conclusion of the

Taylor's Road grade separation. I can assure the house that all Labor members in the western suburbs are working very hard to ensure that occurs.

I think it is appropriate to make some comment about the tolerance of speed cameras. I am only doing so because I am mindful of Ms Lovell's interjection. I have got to say that the argument we hear over and over again that speed cameras are about revenue raising and that government should reveal speed camera tolerance is really only an argument that can or would be made from the opposition side. I cannot believe that a responsible member of any government would ever run that line, because, despite all the rhetoric about revenue raising, over the last four years we have had the four lowest road tolls in the state's history and on present projections we are on track to have the five lowest road tolls in history at the conclusion of 2007, if things continue the way they have been going.

In regard to revealing speed camera tolerances, there is no road safety expert and no police officer who would ever recommend that governments should reveal speed camera tolerances. The fact is that whether they are in a 60-kilometre-an-hour zone, an 80-kilometre-an-hour zone or a 100-kilometre-an-hour zone, drivers should drive at the posted speed limits. For any government, or indeed any opposition or any police commissioner from another state, to say that 60 really means something else is pure irresponsibility. There is no other way to describe it.

Finally, Mr Drum in his contribution to the debate said that the Road Safety Committee needs to deal with these issues so that an incident like that at Kerang never happens again. Everybody in this house — in fact everybody in the state — would agree that that ought to be our objective, but even with all the road safety upgrades and all the technology in the world we can never guarantee that an incident like that at Kerang or any other incident involving a car or a truck colliding with a train will never happen again until there is a commensurate change in driver behaviour. There is no substitute for people behaving rationally, sensibly and responsibly on our roads. It is absolutely appropriate that the Road Safety Committee spend a great deal of time looking at infrastructure, safety and technology upgrades as part of its remit. It is also appropriate that the Road Safety Committee, as part of its reference, look at the sort of campaigns we can run as a government and as a community to ensure that driver behaviour is as sensible and as appropriate as it can possibly be.

Governments can do many things, but neither the government nor the opposition can control the

behaviour of every individual on our roads. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure that when we look at the problems related to level crossing safety we place an appropriate emphasis on the way that we as drivers — users of our roads and users of our railway systems — behave and ensure that we are playing our part in making our roads safer for all Victorians.

Interjection from gallery.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I advise members of the gallery that it is unacceptable to interject or to interfere with procedures within the chamber. I understand that it may well be an emotional issue for them, but I would ask them to respectfully refrain from any further interjections. If they do not, I will remove them from the chamber.

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — I firstly want to establish that this is a very sound motion. It is very timely, and I think there would be many in our community who may well say that it is overtly. We have only got to look at what has taken place in Victoria over the last 18 months to see the tragedy that has taken place on our railway lines. Regrettably in western Victoria we had an incident at Trawalla, where a train passenger lost her life. This is a crossing that I use on an irregular basis on my way to places like Learmonth.

There is a problem at that crossing in sighting trains as they come out of a ravine. Prior to that accident there was quite a deal of undergrowth there which created a vision problem. Some of the issues with the crossing have been attended to. This crossing has no electrical safety devices. It has a stop signal, and although the accident I referred to involved a transport truck, it is difficult for anybody stopping at that crossing to actually see a train coming out of the ravine and to cross safely without being struck, if the train is in close proximity.

The other incident was at Lismore, where there was a major derailment and the loss of a transport truck driver. Again, that is a crossing without electrical devices. On that occasion, on a very foggy morning, the driver missed seeing the train. Recently we have seen the tragic incident at Kerang. I am sure that everyone in this house joins me in offering support to those who have suffered bereavements and disturbances to their own families and communities and those who are still suffering from injuries.

I think we have had some excellent contributions from members on all sides of the house. I compliment my leader, Philip Davis, on his opening address in the

debate on this motion. I think he outlined very well the circumstances of this motion and the reference that he intends members should give their attention to. I support Mr Leane's earlier comments in his address prior to his moving away from the motion. Although he has a very good background in the electrical industry and outlined what takes place in the metropolitan area, in regional Victoria on so many occasions we do not enjoy the luxury of many of the safety devices that are installed at crossings in our provincial cities and the metropolitan area.

To give some indication of how often trains encounter crossings, I know that when I travel the Hamilton Highway at 100 kilometres an hour and happen to meet the train on the Melbourne to Adelaide line at the Lismore crossing, as I regularly do, I invariably also pick it up at the next three crossings. Without the warning devices that are installed on that route, I am sure further tragedies would occur.

I think the motion before the Chair and the proposed reference is terribly important. As a deputy chairman of the Road Safety Committee, along with Mr Leane, I look forward to the opportunity of receiving the reference. But, as I earlier indicated, there has been support from members in all parts of the house. I urge the government to make resources and funding available for the Road Safety Committee to undertake this reference and report back at the earliest convenience.

Mr VOGELS (Western Victoria) — I support the motion before the house requiring the Road Safety Committee to inquire into and report by 29 February 2008 on existing, new and developing technologies for implementation to improve safety at level crossings. It seems that everyone is supporting it, so that is an excellent outcome.

Most of the Labor speakers concentrated a fair bit of their speeches on speed limits on roadways and condemned the Liberal Party for its policy before the last election of a 10 per cent tolerance on speed limits. The only thing I would say about that is that at least the policy announced by the Liberal Party is open, accountable and transparent, and under it everybody would know what they could and could not do. However, Labor's policy, which is supposed to be a 3-kilometre-an-hour tolerance, is a furphy. The tolerance level is much higher than that. In fact the Liberal Party's policy would have actually decreased speed limits in built-up areas. For speeds of up to 80 kilometres an hour, for example, 40 kilometres an hour would become 44 kilometres an hour, 50 would

become 55, and 60 would become 66 et cetera, which is well under Labor's tolerances.

With regard to fatalities at level crossings I intend to concentrate for a few minutes on my electorate of Western Victoria Region. We all remember the fatal train crash near Lismore in July last year, when more than 800 metres of train was crushed into a space approximately 128 metres long and 45 metres wide. The level crossing in question was always an accident waiting to happen but nothing was done about it. We have had the Trawalla level crossing disaster, when a V/Line train collided with a truck in April 2006 and two people were killed. In July 2005 a fatal accident occurred when a car and a train collided at the Mininera railway crossing, and the life of an 18-year-old was extinguished — and the list goes on.

Last month the Minister for Public Transport in the other place, Lynne Kosky, claimed that 40 level crossings are scheduled for upgrade in 2007–08. There is some debate because the VicTrack works programs for 2007–08 gained under freedom of information show that only 24 Victorian level crossings would be upgraded from warning signs to either flashing lights or boom barriers or from flashing lights to boom barriers. Of the 55 level crossings between Geelong and Warrnambool with just warning signs only two are scheduled to receive an upgrade this financial year. Under this scenario it will take 27 years to get through the lot of them.

A few years ago I had the privilege of being in a locomotive with a couple of train drivers on a train from Warrnambool to Melbourne. It was an eye-opener looking at things while driving down the railway line. You come up to level crossings very regularly, and it is amazing to see drivers trying to speed across in front of the train. No doubt the train drivers are very aware, and they do an excellent job. There are also a number of crossings that train drivers have to be aware of that are not actually road crossings but are farm crossings where cattle cross railway lines. Locals often move their stock knowing basically the time trains are due. They set their program for the farm for the day based on those sorts of issues. The train I was on happened to be 2 hours late, so that made it even more hazardous for the train driver and the motorists using the crossing.

Obviously I regularly travel up and down the Princes Highway. The Warncoort level crossing is an accident waiting to happen. Work to install boom gates commenced probably 12 months ago, but for some reason the boom gates are still lying beside the highway and have never been put up. This level crossing on the Princes Highway is on a bend just out of Colac, and the

main Birregurra road heads off from there as well. I hope those boom gates can be installed sooner rather than later.

The recently announced upgrade to install rumble strips before level crossings on all highways — assuming high speed — completely overlooked the four highway crossings on the Ararat–Portland line. They are the crossings on the Glenelg Highway at Moutajup between Dunkeld and Hamilton, on the Henty Highway at Mona Vale between Hamilton and Branhholme, on the Henty Highway at Condah and on the Princes Highway at Heathmere. These level crossings do not even feature on the upgrade list. In a good grain year this can be a very busy line. At present container wagons are having asbestos removed at Portland, so there are occasional, unpredictable train movements between Maroona, south of Ararat, and Portland. These crossings were not even mentioned.

In conclusion, I fully support this motion. I think it is an excellent motion for the Road Safety Committee to have a look at this and come up with a plan of action in the near future.

Motion agreed to.

STUDENTS: HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — I have much pleasure in moving:

That the Education and Training Committee be required to inquire into, consider and report no later than 30 June 2009 on geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education.

If you live and go to school in country Victoria, you are less likely to go on and study at university than a student who lives and studies in Melbourne. That is a fact. It is also a fact that there are regions within the Melbourne metropolitan area that produce greater or lesser numbers of university undergraduates. There are no genetic reasons for these differences. I do not think anyone will argue in this debate here today that country students are less intelligent than city students. Nor do I think anyone will argue that there is a difference in intelligence between students who go to school in the inner east of Melbourne and those who go to school in the outer east. The evidence suggests very strongly that where a young person lives, and a whole range of associated factors like the socioeconomic levels experienced by students and their families and the levels of measured disadvantage in those communities, influences educational outcomes.

I propose to address this issue in three stages in my contribution to this debate. Firstly I want to establish the existence of such differences in educational outcomes; secondly I want to argue why those differences are important for the Parliament and the parliamentary committee to consider; and finally I want to canvass, without coming to any conclusive position, what may be influencing these differences in educational outcome. In going through those three steps I hope to convince members of the chamber of the value of the parliamentary Education and Training Committee undertaking this particular reference.

First of all I want to go to the issue of establishing the fact that there are differences in educational outcomes depending on where you reside. To do that I go to the government's statistical information on this fact — that is, the On Track data which the government has been producing since 2003. Between 2003 and 2005 the government undertook a most worthwhile exercise in analysing that data at a regional level as opposed to a metropolitan level. The On Track survey follows where students who exit year 12 go — whether they go on to further education, whether they go on to employment or travel or take a year's leave or whatever. As I said, it is very useful information to look at in the context in which I am moving this motion today.

I refer the house to that On Track data. If you look, for example, at the 2005 figures, you see that the percentage of students who studied in rural schools and went on to university was 33.7 per cent. The same statistic for those studying in the Melbourne metropolitan area was 46.6 per cent. Between 2003 and 2005 the figures for country students are 34.6 per cent, 34.1 per cent and 33.7 per cent respectively, showing a slight decline in the proportion of country students going on to university. The figures for metropolitan Melbourne for 2003 to 2005 are 44.5 per cent, 44.7 per cent and 46.6 per cent, so a slight trend to increase. Although I could not find published on a government website On Track data beyond that for 2005 I noted that an article in the *Age* of Wednesday, 4 July, included a small table headed 'Class of 2006 — where are they now?'. It gave the source of its information as the Victorian Department of Education. This article suggested that of the class of 2006, 52.1 per cent of students in the metropolitan area went on to university while the comparative figure for rural and regional students was 33.9 per cent.

Let me say a few things about these statistics. First of all, I do not believe that going to university is the holy grail and a necessary outcome for education. However, it is an important one, as are vocational education beyond secondary education and employment. They are

all important outcomes for education. However, there should not be any significant difference between the number of students in the metropolitan area who go on to university, vocational education or seek employment and the number of country students who go on to university, vocational education or seek employment. There are issues there that I think need to be explored. The On Track data suggests very strongly that there is a significant difference between the proportion of country students who go on to university and the proportion of metropolitan students who do so.

I also claim that there is a significant difference between where you live in particular areas of Melbourne as to your chances of going on to university. I am grateful for some statistics provided to me by one of my local learning and employment networks. It provided me with some On Track data for 2005 school leavers within metropolitan education regions. The figures for students who completed year 12 in 2005 indicated that around 65 per cent of those in the inner east actually went on to university. If you compare that to the outer east, you find the corresponding figure is just over 40 per cent — a huge difference. If you compare it to the Mornington region, which is also classified as part of the metropolitan area, you find the figure for year 12 graduates in the Mornington area who went on to university was only 30 per cent.

There is a significant variance between the metropolitan regions when it comes to whether students go on to university or not. If you compare those figures to some of the country regions, you see that Goulburn is one of the poorest of the country regions. Only 30 per cent of Goulburn students went on to university. In Gippsland it was just over 30 per cent — not much different to Goulburn — and in Barwon it was about 35 per cent. The best of the country regions was the Loddon region, which was about 40 per cent.

There are some significant variances within rural regions but also some significant variances within metropolitan regions. In verifying the fact that there are differences one needs to go no further than look at the government's own On Track data. If you wanted you could also look at the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) data which supplies information on the number of students who go on to university. I will not quote the number of students; I just want to look at the trend of those who go on to university. VTAC has tracked them at least from 1998–99 right through to 2005–06 and gives the percentage variations, for example, in some of the country regions.

Between the years 2001–02 to 2005–06 in the Barwon region there has been a 6.6 per cent increase; in the

Central Highlands region there has been a 20.4 per cent increase. But in the Mallee region there has been a 17 per cent decrease; in the Ovens-Murray region there has been a 20.3 per cent decrease; in the Western District region there has been a 23.5 per cent decrease; and in the Wimmera region there has been a 10.2 per cent decrease. Overall in country Victoria there has been a 4.3 per cent decrease in the proportion of year 12 completers going on to university.

It is interesting to note that in places like Central Highlands, where there has actually been an increase, it is probably due to the presence of Ballarat University in that region. Other regions had a slight increase — for example, Loddon had a 2 per cent increase. Again the presence of La Trobe University in Bendigo has probably made a difference in terms of the availability for a tertiary education for those school leavers.

But the trend is alarming. Over the years 2001–02 to 2005–06, there has been a 4.3 per cent decrease in the number of students from country Victoria attending university. In terms of the first stage of my argument, I think it is clear that the government's own figures demonstrate there are significant differences and the likelihood of students going on to university is dependent upon where they live. I will leave that stage of my argument there.

I want to move on by arguing to the house why these differences are important. As I said before, a university education is not the only desirable outcome from a secondary education, but it is important for a number of other reasons not the least of which is because of the skill shortages that exist in parts of Victoria. If you represent a country electorate you would know very well that country electorates are forever short of doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, town planners and accountants. Those professions are much in demand. They are all professions which require a university degree. The fact is that if students who train in those professions live and grow up in country Victoria they are more likely to come back and practise in country Victoria. That is a very good reason to address the skill shortages. We need to have country students studying professional degrees. Certainly the vocational areas are important, and we have skill shortages in vocational areas as well, but I would claim that the skill shortages in some of those professional areas in country Victoria are greatest.

The government's own figures verify that fact. If you look at, for example, the work that the government did in its regional skills shortage survey of 2006, you will see this comment was made:

The increasing tightness in the labour market has resulted in the emergence and increased severity of shortages in a number of skilled professions, including most trades, many professional health sector occupations, accountants, child-care workers and civil engineers.

That is a direct quote from the government's own report on the regional skills shortage survey of 2006. It is an extensive and very valuable report, and I commend the government on it, but it highlights the concerns that I am expressing that we have significant skill shortages which will only be addressed by improving the number of students from country areas who go on to university.

I also make the point that attending university is important because of income levels as well. If you look at the income levels in country communities compared with the rest of Victoria, you will see there are some very significant differences. Some of the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures that I have had a look at and analysed, and succinctly put to the house this morning, are that the metropolitan average income — and this is for the ABS figures of 2003–04, which are the latest figures I could find on the ABS website — is \$41 245.30 compared with the rural average income of \$33 300.80. There is a difference in average income between rural and metropolitan areas of somewhere in the order of 20 per cent to 25 per cent, and that is significant. It is often a reason for social disadvantage in many of our rural areas of Victoria.

Why is it important that university education be available to students in country areas? Graduates of a university tend to earn higher incomes than those who do not graduate through a university. Again, income levels are an important reason why we should be encouraging young people to participate more in higher education.

I also want to look at the area of disadvantage. I do not like using the word 'disadvantage' for country Victoria. In some ways it carries a negative connotation, because I think that living and growing up in country Victoria is a very positive experience. I do not like talking about disadvantage, but the sociologists in our society do. They talk about disadvantage and measures of disadvantage. I like to say that country Victoria and country Victorians have different needs to those who live in a metropolitan area rather than say they are disadvantaged. However, the term 'disadvantage' is universally applied as a measure of social standing, so I will refer to it.

One of the interesting findings on this particular subject of disadvantage was obtained by Dr Tony Vinson, who wrote a report for the Jesuits entitled *Dropping Off the*

Edge — The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia. The report states at page 23:

Research has generally indicated that the number of years of formal schooling is among the best predictors of good health (Stacey 1998). People with higher levels of education also experience better mental health, including low levels of depression and psycho-physiological illness.

Again, it will be of advantage to their health and wellbeing if more country Victorians study at university level.

I also want to refer the house to some comments made by Anne Langworthy, who is the director of the Centre for Regional Development at Swinburne University of Technology. She put together a brief paper, which I found, and quoted references to a series of facts and statistics which she had compiled from various research work done by others. Very quickly, some of the dot points are that graduates live healthier lifestyles, are less likely to smoke, are less likely to be obese, are 40 per cent less likely to suffer from depression and are more likely to report excellent health. Another dot point states that higher education qualifications are associated with less physical decline, depression, loneliness, social loss and are positively associated with continuous growth in ageing people.

She also makes a point that the benefits of higher education are intergenerational. Graduates are more likely to take an interest in their children's education and be involved with their children's school, which are predictors of schooling success, and it goes on. In her paper she points out the many advantages for people who have a graduate education. Again, because country Victorians are less likely to have such an education, they are disadvantaged to the extent of those points I have just quoted from the paper prepared by Anne Langworthy. There are some very strong health and social reasons why we should be encouraging more country students to participate in higher education.

I now turn to the third stage of the argument I want to put to the house this morning, and that is the cause of those differences in educational outcomes. I was careful in my preliminary comments as I do not want to pre-empt the role of the Education and Training Committee. After all, if we knew the answers conclusively already, there would be no point in having a further inquiry. The role of the committee is to undertake intensive research into this — to go out, talk to and consult with people to learn about their experiences and understand why fewer country students go on to a university education, why fewer students in the outer east of Melbourne go on to a tertiary education and why fewer students on the Mornington

Peninsula go on to a higher education. That is the role of the committee; it is not our role. But it is appropriate for us to canvass those reasons and give some indication of some worthwhile areas the committee could further explore.

The first issue that I believe is a significant barrier to higher education is the cost factor. There is no doubt about that. Somebody who has to leave home and stay in a city far away incurs significant expenses in living away from home, finding accommodation and finding support. Those of us whose children have gone to university know that it is a costly exercise, particularly if you have to support them living away from home. That has been the case for many years. The only reason I was fortunate enough to undertake a university course was that I gained an education department studentship that bonded me to teach with the department. Without that I could not have afforded to go to university. In fact I got into an arts-law course at Monash University but was unable to take it up because mum and dad could not afford to send me to university. The only way I could go was to take up an education department studentship. They would not let me do an arts-law course; I had to do a straight arts course. The situation has not changed significantly for many families in country Victoria, particularly as incomes have been low because of drought over recent years.

The cost factor is significant. I do not think I would get any disagreement from government members about the cost factor because the Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment in the other place, Minister Allan, has been quick to blame the whole issue on the federal government's lack of support for children attending university, especially when they have to live away from home. In part she is right, but a whole range of other factors are associated with this. An article in the *Age* of Wednesday, 4 July, on page 5 of the news section, is headed 'Uni costs turn rural students off'. It is a good article, and I agree with its content, particularly when it says things like:

Thirty-seven per cent of regional students told the survey for state government initiative On Track they were waiting to qualify for an independent youth allowance before studying, compared with 15 per cent of city students. The easiest way to qualify is by earning about \$18 000 over 18 months before starting.

We are seeing a ludicrous situation of many kids being forced to defer their university studies for a year, go out into the work force and earn a minimum of \$18 000 and then claim their independence and so qualify for a youth allowance. I think that is crazy. We in The Nationals have argued very strongly with our federal colleagues that there should be ways for students to

access that youth allowance without having to defer their studies for a year. We will do as Minister Allan has suggested and keep lobbying our federal colleagues about the matter, because for country students the cost barrier to their accessing higher education is very significant, and we do not shy away from that. However, that is not the only barrier or issue the parliamentary Education and Training Committee should explore. There are others, and I will quickly canvass some of those.

The first of those is retention rates. I suggest that the committee would be interested in exploring the pattern of retention rates, because it is a fact that less students complete year 12 in country Victoria than in Melbourne. You have to look at the reasons for that, and that is a responsibility of the state government, not the federal government. After all, you have to complete year 12 before you can go to university. If country students are not completing year 12 in the same numbers as city students are, there needs to be a reason for that and the committee should explore that reason.

If you look at retention rates from 2002 right through to 2006, for example — I am using figures provided by the government in its own summary of statistics for Victorian schools — you see that the number of students in government country schools completing year 12 is 68.5 per cent compared with the figure for those in government metropolitan schools, which is 84.4 per cent. There is a significant difference between the number of country students completing year 12 compared with the number of metropolitan students completing year 12. Why is that? I suggest there is a whole range of reasons, but two may be the breadth of curriculum offered and the failure to attract sufficient qualified teachers into some country areas. This is a serious problem which is the direct responsibility of the state government and which it needs to look at. Hopefully the committee will explore that issue and provide some guidance to the government and the Parliament on how it may be addressed.

If you are looking at employment rates and why completion of year 12 is important in terms of employment rates, you need to look at the research done by other organisations. Some research I have looked at was done by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, and I refer to the key indicators in its report *How Young People are Faring 2006*. This company has done a similar report for a number of years now. In its 2006 report it made this comment:

In May 2005, 20 per cent of school leavers who had completed year 12 were not fully engaged in study or work compared with 40 per cent of year 11 completers and nearly 50 per cent of year 10 or below completers.

That means that if we can encourage country students to complete year 12 and put in place programs to help them do that, their employment prospects will be improved. Again, this is an important reason for this government to focus on improving the retention rates of students in country Victoria.

I will make one further reference to this very point about why we need to encourage country students to stay on at school. There is a report authored by Stephen Lamb, Anne Walstab, Richard Teese, Margaret Vickers and Russ Rumberger entitled *Staying on at School — Improving Student Retention in Australia*. The report, which was completed in August 2004, was funded by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. Some of the conclusions on page 3 of the summary are:

Existing research indicates that potential policy influences on retention include the following:

1. schooling policies such as age of entry, numbers of part-time students, compulsory leaving age, grade repetition;
2. curriculum and accreditation including certification, assessment practices, teaching and learning programs;
3. school organisation such as senior secondary colleges, middle school programs, selective-entry schools, location and size ...

Six policy issues are identified in the report that state governments, which are responsible for education, should give careful consideration to to improve retention rates for students in rural and regional Victoria and consequently improve the prospects of their attending university. I make the point that the experiences and aspirations of country students may also impact on whether or not they go on to university.

When I talk about aspirations I make the point that some in country Victoria do not have the same experiences and therefore perhaps do not set their goals as high as those in the city. They do not believe it is possible to go on and become a brain surgeon, a highly qualified aeronautical engineer or whatever, because they do not have that cohort of people around them to give them that inspiration. Again, this is an issue that state governments need to work on: improving the range of experiences and perhaps lifting the aspirations of those who live in country Victoria as well.

I have completed the three stages I set out to examine: to prove beyond doubt that there are geographical differences associated with educational outcomes, particularly for those going on to university; to argue why it is important; and to canvass some of the reasons which may influence the differences in those

educational outcomes. All I need to say now is that improving educational outcomes is important to all of us, no matter where we live and no matter whom we represent. It is a fact that some outcomes are determined by where you live and by the socioeconomic level that you experience.

The inquiry proposed in my motion would seek to identify and recommend actions to address differences in educational matters. Such inquiries have traditionally been bipartisan in their approach. I was pleased to have some informal feedback before this debate to the effect that this motion is likely to be supported by all parties in Parliament. I welcome that, because the future of young Victorians is the responsibility of all of us. I urge all members to support this motion.

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I commence my contribution to this debate by indicating very squarely that I support the motion before the house. It is a very timely inquiry proposed by the member in relation to better understanding the geographic disadvantage faced by students in obtaining a tertiary education. I note that in his contribution Mr Hall made it clear that whilst he represents essentially a rural community — The Nationals indeed represent the rural community — he is also interested in the geographic disadvantage which is quite evident in the metropolitan area, where there are obvious disadvantages for students from the northern and western suburbs going on to higher education. I will come to that later.

I say initially that geographic disadvantage reflects a broader issue, which is of course social and economic disadvantage. The two are in a sense inextricably linked. For country members of Parliament who are immersed in their country communities this is intuitively understood. I am sure that my colleagues in this house who are from the country will agree that we see disadvantage as we know our local citizens and mix with our friends, acquaintances and associates. Often the children whom one thinks of as being very bright with a lot of ability are dissuaded from achieving their academic potential simply because of the degree of difficulty in the transition that goes with relocating from their family home to what for many is a daunting and foreign environment in Melbourne in order to go on to tertiary education.

Not only is it daunting for them, it may indeed be economically impossible, because the advantage that students completing their Victorian certificate of education in Melbourne have is that they can continue their education while simply continuing to live at home. They simply go to a new educational institution and avail themselves of the public transport system to get

there. Children from the country face the barrier of the tyranny of distance. That means for many of these children that they are leaving home forever at 17 or 18 years of age, whether or not they are mature enough to go out on their own, to live alone or at least to live independently of their families.

On top of that, as Mr Hall alluded to, there is the additional difficulty for country students that because of the cost of living independently they need to avail themselves of the maximum opportunity to be financially independent. Going with that is often a choice to defer university entrance for a year to undertake what has become known as a gap year for the primary purpose not necessarily of travelling and developing life skills but of building up an economic base. They need to qualify for the federal government financial assistance that comes with the youth allowance and save some money so that they have got something behind them when they start at university.

In that gap year many of these students, indeed many quite outstanding and exceptional students, find frankly that it is all too hard and that they do not actually have the capacity to go on and complete the enrolment they have deferred. I think particularly of a discussion I had only several weeks ago in Warragul. For many people who are familiar with Gippsland, Warragul would not seem to be very far from Melbourne. Because of the growth corridor it is almost a suburb today, and more than 18 per cent of the citizens of the Baw Baw shire now are employed outside the municipality, mostly in Melbourne, so there is a lot of commuting by rail and road. But even in Warragul very high-achieving students are not going on to university. It is simply too difficult to find a way to transition into a new environment because of the need to leave home and be financially independent.

I think in particular of the discussion we had about the young man who was dux of Warragul Regional College last year who has indicated to the senior teachers and the principal at that school that he is unlikely to go on to tertiary education because of the degree of difficulty confronting him. He is daunted by the prospect of relocating to Melbourne. To me that represents anecdotally one of the real challenges for country children who really need to be assisted much more than they presently are.

I have to say I speak on this with some real understanding and conviction, because it happens to be that I have a daughter who is at university at the present time and another one who will complete her Victorian certificate of education this year. In both cases for us as a family it is a major issue that our children are

effectively leaving home at 17 or 18 years of age. The reality is that no matter how much I would aspire for them to complete their tertiary education and return to pursue a career and life in my country town of Sale, the statistical probability of that occurring is not high. That is the tragedy for country Victoria. I do not want to dwell on that particularly, but it is an important point that the Leader of The Nationals made that needs to be reinforced.

The evidence is in that there is underrepresentation in universities of students from areas of low socioeconomic status. That is irrefutable. Indeed that is acknowledged by Melbourne University in its Access Melbourne program, which explicitly sets out to facilitate assistance directly to schools and regions that are underrepresented. Under this program many young students have been given a slightly easier ride in recognition of the difficulty of obtaining a sufficiently high equivalent national tertiary entrance rank score if they come from a disadvantaged area. Melbourne University has put into practice a policy which acknowledges the challenge for students from disadvantaged areas.

At the end of 2004 it was revealed that, according to statistics from the federal Department of Education, Science and Training, in the period from 2001, six of Victoria's eight universities experienced a drop in the participation rate of financially disadvantaged students starting degrees. Debate surrounding this decline has been divided along two lines. The first is that students of lower socioeconomic status cannot afford the costs associated with going to university and are unable to support themselves whilst conducting full-time study. The second is that students of lower socioeconomic status are unable to obtain the marks necessary to enter tertiary study because of poor primary and secondary school education.

In addition there are the insurmountable logistical challenges for children from rural communities who may have no present connection through friends or family in particular with the city. Regardless of the reason why there is underrepresentation of students from poorer family backgrounds at university, recent research has revealed the existence of a crisis in the government school system in Victoria. The crisis includes, but is not exclusive to, a distinct disadvantage that broadly speaking can be drawn along geographic locations.

Research undertaken by Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia entitled *Dropping off the Edge — The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia* was published on 28 February 2007. The

correlation between disadvantage and inadequate schooling, early school leaving and the failure to complete year 12, which leads to lower university participation by students of lower socioeconomic status, is made clear in the report. But before I go on I just want to recite something from the preface to the report by Father Peter Norden that I found quite challenging. He referred to having recently been at a workshop in the United States of America, where it was explained that the state of Louisiana was using the reading scores of 10 to 12-year-old children to predict how many prison cells they needed to construct in 10 years time.

I personally find it a confronting and shocking matter that the impact of poorer educational attainment as a predictor of what will inevitably be a life of despair, poverty and social dysfunction is acknowledged in such a blatant way and known so well that it is used by government regulators as a planning factor without there being an actual response to the remarkable need for social intervention to deal at a societal and community level as well as at an educational agency level with that factor.

Of course I am relatively new to the portfolio of education, so I find that anything I read today is very much a treasure trove of fascination for me as I gradually immerse myself in the education portfolio. I do not claim to have any great expertise at all. I have set out on a journey of inquiry and learning, and that is one of the joys of parliamentary life. I was amazed to find in this report that it has been demonstrated and illustrated in research by Carnahan in 1994 that it is possible to predict with 80 per cent accuracy which students will drop out of school. It seems to me that debate about social disadvantage — and in this case the purpose of the motion moved by the Leader of The Nationals is to talk about geographic disadvantage in respect of higher education — highlights the fact that we as legislators and those with executive government responsibilities have a very high obligation to use the resources of known research to apply proper public policy to overcome disadvantage for all of those in society.

Therefore, it seems to me that, as important as it is, in a sense the motion before the house is but a very small step in a journey which we as legislators, and in particular the government of the day, must embark upon to change the fundamental basis upon which children are given a start in their lives.

There is certainly empirical evidence that students who live in poorer suburbs are underrepresented in university. In the report to which I have referred,

Emeritus Professor Tony Vinson, who is the primary author of the report, observed:

Our profiling of Australia's most disadvantaged communities using social, health and economic indicators, highlights the central importance of limited schooling in triggering and sustaining concentrated local disadvantage.

In other words, there exists a strong link between systemic disadvantage and poor education.

Professor Vinson noted also:

Those who start their skilling well behind taws, whose participation is spasmodic and who leave at the earliest opportunity, face an uphill battle.

He said further:

... education is not destiny but our findings show an unmistakable pattern associated with inadequate education and training — unemployment, low income, poor health and 'making ends meet' by criminal means resulting in high rates of convictions and imprisonment.

The report cross-referenced low social demographic areas with such categories as poor health availability, unemployment and prevalence of crime. Each category or key indicator of disadvantage is underpinned by poor primary and secondary education. Again, Father Peter Norden, who was the project manager for the inquiry, noted:

We knew from our casework with young people and families that the path to lifelong disadvantage for many individuals came from early school leaving, no further training, low job skills, long-term unemployment and then decades of involvement with mental health services or the criminal justice system.

The point here is obvious: the slide into disadvantage starts with poor education or, at the very least, is compounded by poor education. Each of the key indicators of poor education, such as lack of accessibility to computers, early school leaving and failure to complete year 12, are at their most prevalent in low socioeconomic status. This is confirmation of a widely held belief that poor areas provide a poor education. They are areas that can be broadly defined as the northern, north-western and western suburbs of Melbourne and of course most of regional Victoria.

Take for example the situation in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. A report in the *Age* published on 12 June revealed that about half the secondary schools in the Northern Metropolitan Region are in the bottom 20 per cent of the state when it comes to Victorian certificate of education achievement. The same figures reveal that almost 40 per cent of north suburban primary schools are in the bottom 20 per cent of the standard reading benchmarks. Therefore it does not come as a surprise that, according to the *Dropping Off the Edge — The*

Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia report, the most disadvantaged locality in Victoria is Broadmeadows. Nor should we be surprised that the northern suburbs of Heidelberg West and Campbellfield are rated in the top 20 of Victoria's most disadvantaged localities.

What can be done to address the crisis? There is a failing on the part of the Bracks government to disclose information across a range of levels to allow us to properly ascertain the actual standard of our schools. I have to say with some feeling that, notwithstanding the efforts that are made through questions on notice and freedom of information requests, this persists as a major challenge for the shadow Minister for Education.

Because the Bracks government obdurately refuses to disclose the learning and numeracy standards of each school there is a cloud of uncertainty in the public arena about which schools in what areas are struggling, according to student outcomes. Because of the obdurate refusal to disclose information pertaining to truancy figures and drop-out rates specific to locality, we do not know exactly what school attendance figures look like across the board. Because the government again obdurately refuses to disclose information pertaining to violence, bullying and illicit drug use in schools specific to localities, we do not know how serious the issue of discipline in our schools is. Anecdotally, and on the weight of past figures, we know that across each of the categories of truancy, standards and discipline the government is failing miserably across the board.

We know for certain, through freedom of information requests, that Broadmeadows schools alone are labouring under a cumulative backlog in maintenance of nearly \$6 million as of 30 June 2006. We also know that the maintenance audit recorded that there is a backlog in maintenance in the Northern Metropolitan Region of more than \$30 million. In my view, on the basis of my firsthand inspection of schools — which is one of my great joys — the backlog maintenance challenge can be said to be undisclosed by the Department of Education by a factor of at least 5 and probably 10 in many cases because the backlog maintenance requirement is clearly significantly underestimated. It is quite often a surprise to stakeholders in schools that I visit when I report to them what the assessment by the department happens to be as to backlog maintenance compared to what the real needs are. The dilapidated nature of many schools is such that it is clear that the assessment is grossly underestimated.

There appears to be a correlation between the dilapidation of state schools in northern metropolitan

Melbourne and the poor academic standards in the north, as reported in the *Age*. But this is only part of the picture. Decaying buildings alone do not fully explain the story and nor will bricks and mortar solve the crisis. For one thing, the Bracks government needs to come to the party and fully disclose all information pertaining to standards, truancy and discipline in government schools specific to localities. So comprehensive and successful has the government's smoke-and-mirrors spin doctoring been that there is a commonly held belief that our government school system is in reasonable condition. I can attest to the fact that it is not. We can see that clearly in the VCE results that were referred to earlier. With the hoodwinking of the Parliament and the community at large as to the actual state of our schools and the actual literacy and numeracy standards of Victorian students, there is no way that this catastrophe can be addressed.

Therefore the motion before the house touches on one indicator of disadvantage — that is, drawing a link between university participation and geographical location — but of course it is but one aspect of what is substantial social disadvantage as a consequence of failure in government policy. I support the motion of my honourable colleague the Leader of The Nationals for the purpose of having a very much improved understanding about the link between university participation and geographical disadvantage, and I hope that in its inquiry the parliamentary committee will have a great deal more success in drawing information out of the minister and the department than I have had to date. I commend the motion to the house.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — The Greens support this motion that the Education and Training Committee be required to inquire into the geographical differences in the rate at which Victorian students participate in higher education.

Mr Hall referred earlier to a document prepared by Ms Anne Langworthy, and he was kind enough to give me a copy of it. Mr Hall quoted some benefits that people get from higher education. He mentioned healthier lifestyles, health outcomes and intergenerational benefits, but Ms Langworthy mentioned also that:

Graduates are more likely to participate and accept diversity in their communities and are over three times more likely to be a member of a voluntary organisation than non-graduates.

They are also more likely to participate and accept diversity in their communities and have better health and wellbeing. They are less likely to be involved in crime. They are also significantly more likely to hold positive attitudes to race and gender equality.

As Mr Hall said, while higher education is not necessarily appropriate for all students, the issue is that students should not be denied access to higher education if that is what they wish. There have always been differences in the rate at which Victorians participate in higher education, based on geography, demography, social, economic, cultural and family factors. What is concerning is that in this day and age these differences are not diminishing as they should be, but are worsening as we see an increasingly stratified education system in Victoria and across Australia.

Mr Hall referred to the On Track data, so I will not repeat it, but in 2002 the Centre for Population and Urban Research released a report that explored changes in the outcomes for students completing Victorian year 12. It found an increasing gap in the achievement of students completing year 12 between the independent and government school sectors that was leading to a substantial difference in terms of entry to university. There was also considerable differentiation with outcomes in the government school sector. Areas of low socioeconomic status were struggling academically, as were most of those located in outer suburbs.

In 2005 the centre reported that there had been increasing stratification in the academic performance between schools sectors and within the government school sector since the early 2000s. It showed that government schools had suffered most from the decrease in the provision of university places in terms of gaining admission to university. The report says the situation worsened in 2006, when access to university places for government school students in the outer suburbs of Melbourne decreased dramatically — it says this was probably because of the intensifying competition for university places due to deficiencies in the funding of places by the federal government — while at the same time more university students were completing school and applying for university places. More students are applying and fewer places are available. The report found these changes were particularly detrimental in south-eastern outer Melbourne, which had the lowest number of university offers in 2005 and the Melton-Wyndham area, which experienced the largest percentage point decrease in university offers.

Stephen Lamb, under the heading 'Residualising the poor' in his 2007 study on school reform and inequality in urban Australia, showed that an affluent student from an eastern Melbourne government school in, say, Kew, Camberwell or Hawthorn had seven times the chance of getting into a medical course of a poorer student from a western Melbourne government school and that

an affluent student from an eastern suburbs independent school had almost 16 times the chance of getting into the same course of a poorer student from a government school in the west. The study shows that social differences in achievement appear early in primary school and steadily widen.

I have spoken to Mr Hall about this reference to the committee, particularly in relation to the term 'geographical differences'. I am concerned that in its work the committee will pick up differences in the rate of Victorian students participating in higher education based on factors other than geography, given that there are correlations between geography and socioeconomic status, and in that respect they will become apparent to the committee in its deliberations.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Pursuant to sessional orders the time for general business has expired.

General business extended on motion of Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan).

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — As I was saying, there are factors such as culture, demography and family background which may not always be as strongly connected to geography. They have a bearing on participation rates and therefore should not be excluded from the committee's deliberations and inquiries.

The Greens believe education is a human right and a public good. We believe, as most Australians do, that a quality education system promotes equality, social justice and economic and social wellbeing. It is the responsibility of the state to provide a fully funded and well-resourced public education system, and if there are gaps in access, equity and outcomes for individuals or groups of students, it is the responsibility of the government to target the causes of those gaps and to put in place measures to overcome them. The evidence shows that the gaps exist. Mr Hall and Mr Davis gave figures from the government's statistics that support the evidence that the gaps exist.

I have looked at that data, and I will not repeat what has already been said by Mr Hall and Mr Davis, but it should be the task of the Education and Training Committee to report on what those gaps are, what the causes are and to consult with people in the field — educators, academics, parents and students — about the best ways to reduce those gaps and to ensure that all students have access to quality education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential according to their interests and ability.

The Greens believe education funding models should address inequities between schools and not disadvantage government school students. Whatever the aims of the Kennett government's Schools of the Future or the Bracks government's Blueprint for Government Schools, little has been achieved in terms of addressing inequity in outcomes. In fact, as has been discussed already, those inequities are increasing. We have the situation of competing schools. The Greens believe government schools and the technical and further education sector should be free from funding students and resources in order that we maintain equity as a primary goal in education. Funding models should ensure access for all through additional funding for students in need — the students most in need and the areas most in need.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.03 p.m.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Ford Australia: Geelong plant

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Industry and State Development. I refer to the announcement by the Ford Motor Company that it will cut 600 jobs from its Geelong motor plant, a clear indication that the Victorian manufacturing industry policy has failed, and I ask: what action has the government taken to save these jobs and what changes will it make to the Victorian manufacturing industry policy?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and State Development) — Can I say first of all that the government of course expresses its concern at the announcement by Ford of 600 jobs going at its Geelong plant in 2010. I reject completely the assertion by the honourable member that the industry policy in this state is not working. That is just his way of talking down the state, as he normally does. I am not going to enter into a dialogue with him about his view of the industry statement. His view on everything that the government does is a negative one, so no-one listens to him, and I am certainly not going to listen to him in relation to what is a very positive industry statement that was accepted as such by the industry when it was released.

This is a specific issue in relation to Ford in Geelong. I am very happy to answer serious questions about this matter that are not asked in a partisan way, as the honourable member tends to ask his questions. I look

forward to getting a good, serious question on this issue.

Supplementary question

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — The minister might not like the question, but I ask: is it a fact that the government's automotive manufacturing industry strategic plan was due for mid-plan review in June 2005 as outlined on the Business Victoria website as late as today, and is it not also a fact that the government's delay and dithering in updating this critical automotive plan has contributed to the loss of hundreds of automotive industry jobs?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and State Development) — I am really tempted to show the house the honourable member's own website. It says, 'Site under construction — Check back soon!'. That is David Davis's website. I do not know when he expects us to check back on his site. For David Davis's information, I was not the minister responsible in June 2005, so I do not have any idea what it is that he is talking about, and maybe — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — No, that is not the problem. The problem is he does not have any idea of what he is talking about. That is the problem. If he had any idea of what he was talking about, he would produce a website and tell us what he was talking about. He is still constructing his website. President, let me tell you that we did not have this problem with Bruce Atkinson. He knew exactly what was on his website. You would be able to get at least a bit of information from Bruce Atkinson's website. This matter of the Ford workers is of course an issue for the government, and as I said, I will be very happy to answer questions which are relevant to the concerns of those Geelong workers as they come up.

Ford Australia: Geelong plant

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Industry and State Development. Given my history prior to coming to this house and indeed because Geelong is in my electorate, this issue is of incredible importance to me and to Ford workers at Geelong. Can the minister advise the house of the details of the package announced today by the Premier and the federal Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and State Development) — I thank the member for her sensible question in relation to this

issue and for what I know is her very strong and passionate interest in what happens in Geelong. As members would already know, Ford Australia's president, Tom Gorman, today announced that from 2010 Ford will import a new V6 engine for use in the company's locally made Falcon, Falcon Ute and Territory model lines. As a result the company will discontinue its Australian I6 engine operation in Geelong in 2010.

Ford has advised the Victorian government that this decision was driven by changes in consumer behaviour, including lower demand for large cars and the increased popularity of small imported vehicles. The Victorian government is obviously concerned by the Ford announcement. We have had detailed discussions with Ford, and I have personally spoken on a number of occasions with Tom Gorman about the issues involved here. We have canvassed options, and I have also spoken to my federal counterpart about the issues going back some time. No-one remains unconcerned about this. The only person who I think is gleeful about this may be the opposition spokesperson, David Davis. He seems to be pleased every time he hears about job losses in this state, but I have never heard him at any time congratulate the government when the opposite occurs.

I have expressed the concern of the government in relation to those job losses. We have been working with my federal counterpart. As a result of that the Premier, along with Minister Macfarlane, has announced the establishment of a new fund for Geelong which will involve a federal government contribution as well as a contribution from Ford. The focus of the fund will be on creating jobs in Geelong. It will be called the Geelong Investment and Innovation Fund and will inject \$24 million into the Geelong economy to help generate new investment and new jobs for that region. The fund will be led by an advisory committee which will be chaired by a local business person and will also include representatives from both the state and federal governments.

Our discussions with Ford have also led Ford to make some additional commitments. These include, firstly, maximising redeployment opportunities across its manufacturing operations for the 600 people affected by today's decision. Those not able to be redeployed will be offered a voluntary separation in the first instance. Secondly, there will be a continuation of its remaining Victorian manufacturing operations, including the employment of 1400 people in Geelong and 3000 people in Campbellfield. Thirdly, its new R and D centre will be completed by year's end as part of the \$1.8 billion Australian investment program

announced in 2006. Fourthly, it will continue to grow investment programs in new emissions laboratories and wind tunnel technology at its testing facilities in Lara.

In addition to establishing the new fund, the Victorian government will work closely with unions — and I have met the union on this issue as well — with employees at the Ford engine plant and with the Geelong community to ensure that any impact on Geelong is minimised. We will do everything possible to assist those affected. We will assist in identifying new opportunities for employees and helping them to obtain new skills, if needed. We will continue to develop and execute a comprehensive regional plan that will identify and exploit opportunities to attract new investment into the region.

Let me say broadly about Geelong that under the current government it has gone from strength to strength. It has excellent jobs growth and continuing population growth in the region. In the last year alone almost 6000 new jobs were created in that region as a result of actions by regional, state and federal governments and all of the people involved.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I have expressed concern about the 600 jobs, but I am trying to put it into some context. I know the member does not want to hear about the context.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Maybe the member should go and talk to his federal counterpart, the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources, Ian Macfarlane. According to what he said, he knew about this a month and a half ago. I do not see him having great success in changing the decision of Ford. The fact is that both the federal government and this government have tried to work with Ford and have established this fund to try to minimise the impact on the Geelong community. The context is that the Geelong economy is growing. It has been growing. Its population growth has been extensive, and its jobs growth has been extensive as well.

It is important to note that it was pointed out by Laurie Miller, the head of the Geelong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, that it is a very different Geelong at the moment. It is a lot different to when Ford had 5500 jobs in Geelong out of a total of 70 000 jobs in Geelong, and any impact from job losses at Ford at that time would have been absolutely devastating. Today there are 110 000 jobs in the Geelong work force and there are 230 000 people employed in the region. Whilst we

regret the 600 job losses, it should be put in the context that the Geelong economy is a strong economy. It is a growing economy; it has a growing population base. We believe the \$24 million set aside by a combination of the state and federal governments and Ford itself to assist the Geelong economy will have the effect of minimising the impact on Geelong workers.

Minister for Planning: conduct

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. Will the minister explain to the house the purpose of the \$1450 lunch he demanded at the swank La Trouvaille restaurant in London and what direct value Victorian taxpayers received for his extravagant expenditure.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I welcome David Davis's interest in planning matters. I am not sure whether this question is relevant, because it is a question which has been asked of me in my former role as Minister for the Commonwealth Games. As members of this chamber will appreciate, from time to time I was required to travel overseas under that portfolio responsibility. I think on one occasion I travelled to London as the Minister for Commonwealth Games with the chairman, Mr Ron Walker, and a working party in relation to the launch of the Queen's baton relay in London. Of course we know the Commonwealth Games were a success, and if members of the opposition want to talk about the Commonwealth Games I am always happy to be very nostalgic about the Commonwealth Games.

On that occasion the Agent-General organised a luncheon for quite a number of business representatives from a number of industries in London who were interested in potentially being involved with the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I ask the house to come to order. It is almost impossible for Hansard staff to hear — and I can see the look of concern on their faces. I expect the house to respect the fact that they need to do their job. If members cannot, I will do mine.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — I welcome that, President, because I know that in trying to answer this question or any question I tend to raise my voice from time to time, but it is only so that I can speak over the rabble on the other side of the chamber.

Can I just reinforce that on that occasion, because of the profile of the Commonwealth Games at that time in London with the launch of the Queen's baton relay, and

of course with Her Majesty there by Mr Walker's side — and what a great moment that was — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I warn Mr Guy.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — The Agent-General organised a luncheon on that particular occasion for a number of industry and business representatives to be briefed by the Commonwealth Games minister in relation to the events that were happening and were going to happen in Melbourne in 2006. It was a great chance to profile the Commonwealth Games, which as we all know were the most successful Commonwealth Games ever. No doubt it shows that the groundwork that you do, the preparations you make with business and industry to gain their support, turns into a highly successful event. It was an event where we underspent by somewhere in the order of \$20 million or \$30 million.

Any way you look at it, any way you slice it, any way you dice it, these were the most successful Commonwealth Games ever. I am not exactly sure of the relevance of this to the planning portfolio, but I am always happy to relay nostalgic moments in relation to the Commonwealth Games. I am happy to continue answering David Davis's questions and, I suspect, supplementary questions in relation to the Commonwealth Games.

Supplementary question

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My supplementary question is to the minister. Why was the full list of those in attendance and the purpose of the luncheon not disclosed on the request for reimbursement?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — This is a question which is no doubt of interest to the member opposite because of course he would like to know all the attendees from the respective industries at the luncheon. Can I just say that this was a luncheon organised by the Agent-General. That is the responsibility and one of the duties of the Agent-General. I know that the Agent-General himself has organised luncheon events and business meetings for members of the opposition. I suspect even Dr Napthine, the member for South-West Coast in another place, when he was travelling in relation to the Manchester Commonwealth Games, also met with the Agent-General, as have a number of opposition members who have dealt with the Agent-General and have had functions or events organised for them. This was not unusual, given his role.

Can I just say that, given the number of attendees that were there and the way in which the results turned into a highly successful Commonwealth Games event and given the scepticism of the opposition in relation to the investment that you need to make to get business behind the games — the high level of sponsorship, the high level of support, the high level of international business — I can understand why it is light years away from ever doing anything of significant consequence in this state. We will continue to make sure that the investments needed in this state are made so that Victoria is a great place to live, work and raise a family.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I want to alert the house to the fact that I am cognisant of a ruling made in the Assembly in relation to questions asked of ministers in their previous portfolios. In fact the ruling was that it was disallowed. We do not have a similar ruling here. I just want to alert the house to the fact that I am going to take it on advisement to look at that particular situation, given that the reality is that we could be asking questions of ministers in portfolios from 10 or 12 years ago. I am not sure that that is relevant today. Anyway, I will be looking at that.

VicUrban: affordable housing initiatives

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Major Projects. Can the minister inform the house how the Bracks government is working to provide affordable housing for Victorians through VicUrban?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Major Projects) — I thank the member for his question. Affordable housing is a major issue for Victorians. It is a major issue also for VicUrban. I have followed with interest the public debate that has been taking place, particularly the comments made by the federal government in relation to affordable housing. I must say its attempt to try and blame the states is just a transparent political exercise in the lead-up to the federal election.

I thought that as a result it might be of interest to the members here — I am sure it is of interest to members on this side of the house — to know what the Victorian government is doing to assist young couples and other people with affordable housing. In terms of my responsibility, I have responsibility for VicUrban, and VicUrban has a number of objectives under —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Just be quiet and listen, and you will learn something.

Affordable housing is part of VicUrban's goals. Its aim is to deliver affordable housing to households on the margins of home ownership. Under the Victorian Urban Development Authority Act 2003, VicUrban is actually charged with contributing to improvements in housing affordability in Victoria. The act also requires VicUrban to act commercially. It has the twin objectives of assisting with affordable housing and of acting commercially and in the best interests of the state.

Traditionally VicUrban's affordability contribution has been to deliver affordable land. However, more recently VicUrban has developed an affordable housing action plan, which includes a range of strategies for the delivery of affordable house and land packages on VicUrban estates. The action plan targets 40 per cent of VicUrban allotments being delivered to the market in the lowest quartile price range for local markets. VicUrban now delivers more than 50 per cent of all lots in the lowest quarter of the market. Just think about this: if you look at the lowest quarter of the house and land market in Victoria, you see that VicUrban delivers 50 per cent of those packages. This really shows how we are using the Victorian government developer to assist people with affordable housing.

Consider this for a moment: considering the price of housing at the moment, VicUrban is able to get people into house and land packages for somewhere between \$250 000 and \$270 000. If you think about that, you will realise it is a huge contribution to keeping the cost of house and land packages down for Victorians. It delivers to people who otherwise would not be able to get their own house and land and live the Australian dream.

I am pleased and proud to be part of what VicUrban is doing in delivering these house and land packages. I must inform the house that we are also looking at new innovations with respect to VicUrban. We recently initiated the own home affordable housing plot. For those families who cannot even afford that level, we are looking at a pilot program — it is only 100 houses at the moment — where we will take these very cheap houses and give them to people at 75 per cent of the price of the house and land package, with the remaining 25 per cent equity being held by VicUrban in a joint equity approach. This package has allowed some people to get into their own homes who would never otherwise than in their wildest dreams have been able to do so. It is a pilot program, but it shows that once again through VicUrban we have been able to deliver affordable housing to Victorians who want to build or get into their own home in this state. It is a very

important initiative, and we are pleased to be a part of it.

**Minister for Industry and State Development:
conduct**

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Industry and State Development. I refer to the minister's use of a chauffeur-driven S-Class Mercedes on his London trip of March 2004, which was billed to the Victorian Agent-General's office. Why has information on who travelled in these limousines been expunged from the invoices? Will the minister explain precisely how Victorian taxpayers benefited from his limousine trips?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am seeking a point of clarification from the minister. I assume the minister did not have the same portfolio back in 2004 as he does today.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Correct.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister does not administer the Agent-General?

Mr D. Davis — He does.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister does now. This now confuses me. The member is asking the minister a question relating to a time when the minister did not administer the Agent-General. I think this falls into the category that I referred to earlier, when I said I had a concern about the asking of — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order!

Mr D. Davis — Can I provide a point of clarification?

The PRESIDENT — Order! Not yet. It raises the issue I alluded to before — that is, that the rulings in the Assembly have taken into account the fact that a member cannot ask a minister a question in relation to a portfolio they no longer administer. I said I would take it under advisement, and I have taken my own advice. I am reading the guidelines for questions, and they state quite clearly that questions may be put to ministers of the Crown relating to public affairs with which the minister is connected or to any matter of administration for which the minister is responsible. I think that is pretty clear. I think that refers to their current portfolio. However, before I rule I will hear what David Davis has to say.

Mr D. Davis — On a point of order, President, in reaching his ruling the President may be interested to be aware that the Agent-General is the responsibility of the current minister. The question also relates to a current FOI application put in to the Agent-General in the area of responsibility. To the extent that Mr Theophanous is responsible here, the Buckingham review of the trade and activities of our overseas business offices is something that he has been intimately connected with. David Buckingham is the Agent-General currently in London. I would argue that this fits squarely within the minister's current portfolio responsibility. It also relates to previous activities of the minister.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — On the point of order, President, can I make this clear as it may help your deliberations on the point of order. Were there a question asked of me about the functioning of the Agent-General's office in relation to the expenditure of the Agent-General or what the Agent-General does, that might be appropriate as a question in my current portfolio responsibilities. As I understand the question being asked of me, it is specific to some limousine use which I had access to in a previous portfolio under a completely different ministry. Therefore I do not think it has anything to do with my current responsibilities. I think it should be ruled out of order.

Mr D. Davis — Further on the point of order, President, and as a further point of clarification, this relates squarely to an FOI application to the minister's department in which information has been deleted.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member made that point in his original question. I want to make it clear that in future I will not allow questions to be asked of ministers relating to their previous portfolios. However, I am of the view that Mr Davis has convinced me that this question is in order because it relates directly to current issues within the minister's portfolio, and in particular to the Agent-General and the freedom of information application et cetera.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and State Development) — The member has been provided with information about expenditure by the Agent-General in relation to a range of activities which the Agent-General commissioned and undertook and for which the Agent-General accounted in his sets of expenditure. That information has been made available to the member opposite. I cannot add anything further to that information.

Supplementary question

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — The FOI application I have is dated 24 March 2004. It relates to an S-Class Mercedes trip by Minister Theophanous with Mr Buckingham and another passenger. The department has made the decision to delete the name of that passenger. I seek from the minister an explanation as to who that was and why his department has chosen to expunge that information.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and State Development) — I am trying to be helpful to the honourable member within the context of the President's ruling. The only way I can be helpful is to say that I am responsible for the Agent-General. The Agent-General reports to me. A report has been made available not only in relation to expenditure on limousine hire and whatever else the Agent-General does within his annual budget but also in relation to a whole host of things the Agent-General does, including providing assistance to other members of Parliament and to members of the opposition when they visit London. I am not going to go into answering questions as to the detail of specific expenditure by the Agent-General. I do not believe it is a requirement for me to do that.

I am responsible for the Agent-General only in the sense of his responsibility to report to me. He reports to me on a fairly regular basis about his activities. What I can say is this: the Agent-General and the activities of our overseas offices are an absolute success story for this state. The member opposite might want to come in here to try to identify these niggly issues about a limousine here or a lunch there or whatever. I want to put this back to him. It is true that it costs us several million dollars to run our overseas offices — it is in the budget and everyone knows how much it costs — but the figure the member opposite hates hearing is this one: \$8.7 billion. He hates hearing that figure. Why does he hate hearing that figure? It is because that is the amount of investment that has been attracted by our overseas offices into this state — \$8.7 billion.

David Davis might want to go on about the fact that a limousine — and he wants to call it a limousine; I do not know whether or not it was a limousine, but a hire car — used by the Agent-General —

Mr D. Davis interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Does Mr Davis know what ordinary Victorians care about? They care about the \$8.7 billion. They care about the fact that \$8.7 billion has meant that thousands and thousands of

jobs have been created in this state as a result of a very small investment by the state in our overseas offices. That is what they care about.

I am happy to be judged on how we perform in terms of the investment that is attracted by our overseas offices. I am happy to report to this Parliament and publicly on the costs of running the Agent-General's office in London and all of our overseas offices. It comes to several million dollars. If members want the figure, I will get it to them. What I want to be judged against is how much value we create for this state as a result of running those overseas offices. At the moment the value we create is \$8.7 billion.

If Mr Davis is so keen on bagging the way these offices are run, I want him to come out and say that he is prepared to forgo the \$8.7 billion by closing those overseas offices and creating a state which does not engage with the rest of the world, a state which is insular and which does not create any jobs and a government that never goes out and tries to get business for this state. If that is the model David Davis wants to put before the people of Victoria, let him go out and say that the opposition is going to close all the overseas offices and never have a minister go overseas. That is what the opposition is going to do, and it is going to forgo \$8.7 billion of investment in this state. That is the opposition's model; it is not our model.

Banawah Nursing Home, Nathalia: development

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — I have a question for the Minister for Community Services, Gavin Jennings, about a matter of great interest to families in northern Victoria. I ask the minister to update the house on the Bracks government's election commitment to develop the Banawah Nursing Home in Nathalia.

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — I thank Ms Broad for her question and for her concern about the wellbeing of people in northern Victoria. In the spirit of full disclosure I want to let everyone in the chamber know that at the event that I am about to describe, from memory I had a weak black tea and half a date scone. When I am back in Nathalia I will be able to report the sheer envy that was obvious on the faces of the members opposite when I disclosed that I had been the beneficiary of a welcome by the senior citizens of the Nathalia district, the great morning tea they put on and the time I shared with them.

Mr Atkinson — What about the vanilla slices?

Mr JENNINGS — Mr Atkinson is just teasing this matter out a little further. I stopped off at Brereton's cake shop in Nathalia to augment the date scone, and I can give testimony to the good cakes on sale there. And no, I did not seek reimbursement for the doughnut that was purchased at Brereton's.

Importantly the great welcome that was provided by the Nathalia health service and Alan Sage, who welcomed me and other members of the community to this great community event, was to celebrate the announcement of a new \$18 million redevelopment of the Nathalia District Hospital and aged-care facility. There will be 26 high-care beds as part of this brand-spanking-new state-of-the-art facility that is going to be built at the western end of Nathalia. The service will move from the antiquated building which has served the community well but which has been in existence for over 100 years and which needs a lot of refurbishment and upgrading.

It was terrific to be in the company of Alan Sage and the team but also to be with the chief executive officer of both the hospital and Goulburn Valley Health, Greg Pullen, and community members, who celebrated this great commitment of our government to make sure older members of the Nathalia community receive top quality care in the years to come.

Members of this chamber and members of the community will know that this is not an isolated commitment. During the life of the Bracks government we have committed over \$420 million to redevelop 45 residential aged-care facilities throughout the state of Victoria, and indeed 42 of them are in rural areas.

Ms Lovell interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — I cannot quite hear the squawking from the member opposite, but if I can incorporate the squawking into my response, I shall — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister is pushing the boundaries!

Mr JENNINGS — In the spirit of the fact that this question time has had the capacity to go off the rails on a number of occasions, I will stay pretty much on the right side of the wind in my response.

The Bracks government has made commitments to rural members of the Victorian community regardless of where they live to make sure it provides appropriate residential aged-care when people need support. In fact I was able to leave Nathalia and drive not too far down the road — after stopping at Brereton's — and stop off at Numurkah, where I visited the residents of Baala

House Nursing Home, which we redeveloped during our last term in office. I was able to take that opportunity to announce a further extension to the aids and equipment program, which will reduce, if not eliminate, the waiting list for aids and equipment for people in the Hume region.

It is very important that we provide support and encouragement to older members of the community at times when they need assistance in getting about their daily lives and help people with disabilities and frailties remain mobile. I was very grateful to be in the company of the great citizens of the north-east to celebrate this commitment of the Bracks government, and I look forward to going back and sharing their hospitality when the work is done.

Planning: local government

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. I refer the minister to the commitments he made in this chamber in December last year and to comments made by the Premier last November. They both stated that councils would not have their planning powers slashed. I ask: does the minister still stand by these comments?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I welcome any questions from the opposition in relation to planning, but I also welcome questions from the opposition in relation to council planning powers and council controls. Our government's position is in stark contrast to what the opposition would propose at any time. As I said on that occasion, we would collaboratively work with councils for continuous improvement, and we stand by that. We will work collaboratively with councils for continuous improvement. That is in stark contrast to the opposition, because potentially we could sack 1600 elected councillors or appoint commissioners or slash 11 000 local government jobs. We could do those things, but we will not. The opposition did that when it was in government, that is its record.

Our record shows we work collaboratively with local government for continuous improvement. We are committed to improving the efficiency of the planning system. The opposition even yesterday asked a question about housing affordability. Its members like to talk about housing affordability. One of the critical things we can do to improve the efficiency of local government, to improve the efficiency of the planning system and to improve housing affordability is to improve the planning process, and we are committed to doing that.

Can I just say that when opposition members ask questions like this about council control or about council powers, we know they are completely disingenuous, because their track record is there. It still stands, and it lingers like a stench, even today!

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — Go and talk to local government about what you did. The stench is still there. The stench and the acrimony and the bitterness — they are still there! Not only that, they reside in the hearts of the opposition. They reside there.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Jennings — Where are those hearts? Where are they?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — It is a very small heart, but you will find it all there. We will continue to work collaboratively with local government. We will look at other models to see where we can take on best practice and where we can work collaboratively with councils to improve the planning system. But what we will not do is conduct ourselves like the opposition did in its seven dark years of government.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — It was a very interesting reply. Given that councils and the broader community loathe the minister's failed Melbourne 2030 planning strategy, I ask: is it not a fact that he intends to gut councils of their planning powers as an expansion of this failed policy?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — We are a government that plans, we are a government that plans for the future, and we are a government committed to continual improvement. If there is an alternative plan, if others in this Parliament have an alternative plan, if they have an alternative proposition, if they have something to offer to the debate, I suggest they throw it in, but members of the opposition are completely disingenuous when it comes to local communities. We will continue to work collaboratively and to commit ourselves to continuous improvement so that we make Victoria a better place to live, work and raise a family.

Disability services: vision and hearing loss

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Community Services. Can the minister explain to the house how the Bracks government is investing in improving the lives of

people who have hearing or vision impairments or who may be deaf or blind?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — I thank Mr Elasmr for his concern about the wellbeing of Victorian citizens who may suffer from or have to endure living with a hearing or vision impairment. There are significant numbers in the Victorian community who have to live each and every day with some degree of disability or impairment in relation to sensory loss. In fact it is estimated that about 66 000 people in the state of Victoria have significant hearing loss and 43 000 have significant vision loss, if not total blindness.

That is a very significant number of people, and each and every one of those great citizens of the state of Victoria should have the right to participate as fully in public life as they possibly can — to immerse themselves in the knowledge that is available in the media and through written language and to be exposed to technological advancement that enables them to learn, grow and develop, to share stories and to laugh and to cry on the basis of the transference of knowledge that is available to those citizens because of communication.

I am very pleased to say that recently I augmented the \$25 million that the state of Victoria allocates to programs and services that provide support to people with visual and hearing impairments with a \$3 million program. I was joined by great providers of communication technology in both the hearing loss community and the vision impairment community at a great event at Vision Australia. Part of that \$3 million announcement was to provide for significant investment to roll out the further implementation of a program that we have been working on with Auslan Australia to provide for broadband and audiovisual material that will assist those with hearing loss and ensure they receive appropriate connections through internet-based services. That will enhance the transference and availability of knowledge to the citizens who may be using that service. An amount of \$2 million is allocated over four years for that purpose.

There is an additional \$750 000 in support of the Vision Australia program that will provide what I described at the event as a more sophisticated version of an iPod — it is about the same size as an iPod. I do not want to give any preference to Apple technology, but most people will know how big iPods are. This is technology that goes beyond that — it is in a similar format and of a similar size — to enable people to tap in wirelessly to the internet and gain access to digital storytelling and a vast array of information that is stored through digital

recordings on the internet and is available through Vision Australia.

It is a fantastic program. It is absolutely awe inspiring to see how — as you can imagine — very quickly individuals can be empowered by the use of this relatively simple and portable technology to assist them to receive information. I had the good fortune to be able to pass over the 5000th of these playback recording devices to Maria Robinson, an inspirational woman from Moonee Ponds who is employed as a community liaison officer with the Victoria University. She is engaged in indigenous studies there and wants to take her studies further. She could demonstrate to me firsthand the benefits that have come into her life through being able to access this information in a totally user-friendly way, whereby she can instantly command and instantly have access. It can clearly make a difference to the quality of her life, and this program will make a significant difference to the quality of life of people in the Victorian community who have vision impairment or are blind.

It was inspirational to be in the company of people who are service providers in this field in terms of the emerging technology and providing assistance to people in our community who have disabilities and impairments. I congratulate Vision Australia, I congratulate Auslan and I congratulate VicDeaf for being part of this announcement. I look forward to visiting members of the community to see the joy that wells up in their hearts from the use of this important information technology.

Longford gas conditioning plant: environment effects statement

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Planning. It is in relation to the Longford gas conditioning plant, for which a referral for an environment effects statement was made to his department on 15 March. Subsequently, on 2 May, his department requested further information from the proponent. Can he detail for us what information was requested and in relation to what aspects of the project?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I welcome Mr Barber's question. I do not have a substantial amount of information in front of me in relation to this matter, and I am happy to provide the member with a briefing in relation to it, if he is interested.

I think currently, if I recall the status of that project, normally where there is a matter of this sort of

consequence or significance I make a request of the proponent for additional information so that the department can assess that information and determine whether any further information is warranted or any further action is warranted on the basis of that information being provided or whether or not there is a likelihood that an environment effects statement will be necessary. Without having the information immediately in front of me, I inform Mr Barber that I suspect the request I may have made would have been made in relation to further information to see whether or not there was sufficient information about any potential effects of any proposal for that project.

Supplementary question

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — The proponent's documentation says that the project will emit a million tonnes of greenhouse gasses, which is quite sufficient to wipe out the full effect of the Victorian renewable energy target of which the minister's colleague, Mr Theophanous, is inordinately proud. The minister's own guidelines for environment effects statement (EES) assessments suggest that any project emitting more than 200 000 tonnes will need an EES. Is that guideline sufficient to ensure that this project will require an EES?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I acknowledge the member's interest in relation to this particular issue. Without having the information in front of me, if I recall the correspondence, and I do not recall much of it, but if I recall some detail, it might be in relation to the potential effects around issues like that, so I suspect that might be the sort of information that has been requested of the proponent — that is, to seek clarity on the potential impacts and how it might manage any offsets in relation to those impacts. I am happy to provide the member with further information once I have acquired that from the department.

Education: government initiatives

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Education, John Lenders. Can the minister inform the house how the Bracks government is ensuring that the Victorian education system is modern and responsive to community aspirations and expectations?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I thank Ms Mikakos for her question and her ongoing interest in education, and particularly in what the government is doing to make education just that bit more relevant to the 21st century and to the aspirations of Victorian

parents and students, who are very important to everybody in this government.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Mrs Peulich talks about self-praise. The only praise I am giving is to the parents and the students in Victoria who want a great education system, and this government will facilitate that. We will not leave a stone unturned in facilitating better outcomes for Victorian students and keeping Victorian parents absolutely focused on their education, which is a great segue into the answer to Ms Mikakos's question about what we are doing about it.

For members of the house who do not recall — and I guess no-one will recall — in 1872 this Parliament passed the first education act in this state. Not even Mr Baxter, a former member for North Eastern Province, was in this house that long! In 1872 this Parliament passed an act of Parliament bringing in an education act in Victoria. That act remained in place, with a series of amendments, right through to the year 2006, when this Parliament passed the Education and Training Act, which consolidated all those previous pieces of education legislation into one act in a way that put some really powerful principles in place for Victorian education.

We maintained some things, like a free, secular and compulsory education system — we maintained that and enshrined it. But also we dealt with other things that are highly relevant. Firstly, we changed the leaving age so that Victorian students now need to remain at school to age 16 and not 15. Why is that important? Education is the starting point in life, the building block, and every bit of research shows that the longer a student stays in school the more likely their opportunities are when they leave school.

We also enshrined a guarantee that every student would have either a place in a school or a post-school education area until the age of 20. Again, we are committed to education in schools. In our quest to remove red tape, we also brought in a single Victorian registration and qualification authority for schools, whether they be government schools, non-government schools or training organisations. We also dealt with home schooling where home schooling is required to be registered. Anybody who was in this house — and new members may not recall this — when this bill was going through in 2006, would know there was great interest in home schooling. It was not just in Victoria; a lot of interest came from compatriots in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and a range of other places that

entered into the debate. However, a lot of Victorians were very serious about it.

These things were particularly significant. Among the things we did the most significant was enshrining in the Education Act the right of the parent to information, so that now every parent — any parent — can look at a school's annual report to find out information about the school.

These are the sorts of things the government has done, in response to Ms Mikakos's question, to try to improve these areas in education. It was that extraordinary amount of work by my predecessor, the former Minister for Education and Training in the other place, Lynne Kosky, and the team around her, that made education more transparent and more informative, which is part of the Bracks government's plan to make Victoria an even better place to live, learn, work and raise a family.

STUDENTS: HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION

Debate resumed.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — Before lunch I was telling the chamber that there was plenty of evidence in the government's On Track data, the VTAC (Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre) data and the many academic studies that were referred to by Mr Hall, Philip Davis and me that there are gaps in retention rates in secondary education and in participation in higher education based on geography, demography, socioeconomic status and family circumstances. I stated that we have a situation in Victoria now of competing schools. The Greens believe the government schools and TAFE institutes should not be forced to compete for funding, students and resources. We think that funding models should ensure access for all, with additional funding to students who are most in need and in areas of most need.

Schools that are struggling should receive priority funding and support. Appropriate and adequate funding is critical to ensure all students have equal opportunities. I refer to the Department of Education's website and fact sheets about the principles of education, which are articulated in the education and training format to which the minister just referred in his answer to a previous question.

This website states that:

The government believes that all Victorian students should have the opportunity to receive a quality education.

... irrespective of the education institution they attend, where they live or their social and economic status, (they) should have access to a quality education that maximises their potential and achievement, promotes enthusiasm for lifelong learning and allows parents to take an active part in their child's education.

The website also says that a principle underlying the government education system is the right of every child to attend their designated neighbourhood government school. In the majority of cases that will be the school that is nearest to a student's permanent residential address. If they had the choice, most people would choose to attend their local neighbourhood school, but we know from the academic studies and data referred to before that access to quality education, diversity of curriculum and the opportunity to go on to higher education are not equal at neighbourhood schools.

The 2007 Productivity Commission report based on 2004–05 figures shows that Victorian students are funded less than the Australian average on a large number of measures. I would like to make some brief comments about choice. The Department of Education website fact sheet on one of the principles under the act, the principle of choice, says:

Although the neighbourhood school remains the cornerstone of communities and the choice of many parents, the reality for contemporary school education is that parents and students do choose between government and non-government schools, as well as between individual government schools and individual non-government schools.

It goes on to say that:

Parents want and should be able to choose the educational environment that most suits the learning needs of their child.

It also says:

... the government acknowledges the ability to exercise choice is not dependent only on the capacity of education providers ... but also depends on the geographic and economic circumstances of the family.

One could just as easily say that a lack of choice is also impacted on by geography and the economic circumstances of families.

The issue of choice is worth looking at. 'Choice' is a word that is much bandied about. Choice may sound fine in theory but in practice many people, especially those in disadvantaged areas, have in effect no choice. People who have choice are usually wealthier and from areas with a high average family income. The principle of choice has been given equal weight with the principle of access. I ask whether this is correct. How can this be so? The question must be asked: if government focused on ensuring equality of access, provision of quality and a diverse curriculum in all

government schools, would there be a need for so much so-called choice? I wish the committee well. I will follow its deliberations with interest.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I rise to support the motion moved by The Nationals calling for the Education and Training Committee to inquire into and consider geographic differences in the rate of participation in higher education by Victorian students. I think it is fabulous that The Nationals in doing this are hoping to use a joint investigatory committee as the appropriate forum for us to proceed into some serious investigation and consideration of this issue in a collaborative approach. From my perspective it is great to see The Nationals joining with the Bracks government in recognising that this is an area of concern and that prospective rural university students have been left out of much higher education action as a result of the federal government's failure to meet its responsibilities in rural and regional Victoria.

Mr Hall spoke about the type of education he had in regional Victoria. We often talk these days about the importance of early childhood education. It seems an appropriate time to pay tribute to a kindergarten teacher I had in Castlemaine in country Victoria. My kindergarten teacher was none other than Mrs Dot Hall, Mr Hall's mother.

Mrs Peulich — Oh, that's cute!

Ms PULFORD — Yes, it is a wonderful thing. We certainly all know and recognise the importance of early childhood educators, including Mrs Hall, in helping to lay the foundation stones of education and what we will learn for the rest of our lives.

Mrs Peulich — Mr Hall wouldn't have been in the kindergarten group because he's a bit older.

Ms PULFORD — But I am sure Mr Hall's mother taught him a thing or two as well along the way. More metropolitan students who complete year 12 go on to attend university than students in rural and regional Victoria. According to the latest findings of the education department's On Track survey, of those regional students who complete year 12 only one-third go on to university compared to half in Melbourne. Of those regional students who do not go on, almost half cite living or study costs as the key reasons for not pursuing further studies.

Certainly in the household in which I grew up it was an absolute expectation that at the end of year 12 we would move to Melbourne to pursue study opportunities. It was an absolute expectation. So at the age of 18 years and 2 weeks I packed my bags and

moved out of home, as did my sister four years later and my brother two years after that. This was an expectation that many of my friends felt and followed through. It was an all-too-common thing.

We know the cost of education is very significant, and it is not something that vast numbers of young people in regional Victoria can access. The results of the 2006 On Track report show that at 33.9 per cent compared to 52.5 per cent in metropolitan areas, fewer young people in country Victoria go to university. As members know, regional and rural students face significant economic and financial barriers to undertaking university study, because obviously accommodation and cost-of-living expenses are far greater for them than they are for those who have the option of staying in the family home.

The greater pressure on country students is evident in their higher rates of deferral. Students in rural and regional Victoria defer at twice the rate of metropolitan students. The On Track report identifies some of the reasons for so many students deferring. One reason is that they would have difficulty coping with the work, as stated by 24 per cent of students in metropolitan areas compared to 18 per cent in non-metropolitan areas. That is the one difference in the criteria.

The other criteria include: 'Course I wanted not offered locally', which 42 per cent of non-metropolitan students compared to 23 per cent of metropolitan students cited as being a reason for not being in study; 'Costs of study are a barrier' was a reason for 45 per cent in regional Victoria and 32 per cent in metropolitan areas; 'Difficulty supporting myself' was 47 per cent compared to 31 per cent; 'Too much financial pressure on family' was 39 per cent to 23 per cent; 'Qualifying for youth allowance' was 37 per cent to 15 per cent; and 'Have to leave home' was 42 per cent to 12 per cent.

Members can see this study shows that the only area where there is a greater disincentive for study among students in Melbourne than those in regional Victoria is the matter of coping with the work required by the course. In every other respect where the impact is far greater on students from regional or rural Victoria, the causes are external to their study. They are essentially issues of economics and geography.

The decline in the participation by young people from regional and rural areas in higher education is a national trend. As members well know, responsibility for funding higher education — university students and universities — rests squarely with the commonwealth. Responsibility for funding universities was transferred from the states to the commonwealth in 1974. There

has been a decline in funding for higher education in this country. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's *OECD Factbook 2007* notes a 6 per cent decline in expenditure per student in Australia since 1995. That places us in a group with Poland, the Czech and Slovak republics, Brazil and Portugal, whose economies in recent times have experienced significant transitions or difficulties.

Whilst public investment in higher education in Australia has been in decline, by contrast between 1995 and 2003 investment in the other OECD countries increased by 48 per cent on average. For regional and rural students and universities, the effect of this is far more pronounced than it is in metropolitan areas, given that there are higher costs in delivering education and in undertaking university study in regional and rural areas. The Victorian government has repeatedly advocated for greater financial assistance from the commonwealth government for regional universities and those with regional campuses. Recently La Trobe University estimated that the costs per student of delivering course material at regional campuses are greater than those for metropolitan campuses by as much as 25 per cent.

The state government has an excellent record of supporting students in higher education. Some of the research that Mr Hall spoke of earlier and that I have undertaken in preparing my contribution today refer to a significant gap in university attendance. The state government has done a great deal to assist people to have access to higher education, specifically in vocational education and training. Through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) the state government has provided significant capital support for universities in regional Victoria. That includes funding for Deakin University of \$1.9 million towards the establishment of a technology precinct at the Geelong campus and \$6 million towards increasing the capacity of the Geelong waterfront campus by an additional 1000 students.

La Trobe University has received \$2 million towards the establishment of a Shepparton campus, \$1.5 million towards the creation of the Centre for Research and Training in Environmental Science at its Albury-Wodonga campus, \$3.12 million towards the establishment of a visual arts precinct at its Bendigo campus, \$2.5 million towards the creation of a distinct La Trobe University campus incorporating the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre's Lower Basin Laboratory, \$3.2 million towards the development of an ICT (information and communications technology) centre at its Bendigo campus, \$3.46 million towards the establishment of the Central Victorian Innovation Park at its Bendigo

campus and \$250 000 towards the establishment of the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities at its Bendigo campus.

RMIT University and the Southern Grampians Shire Council have been provided with state government assistance of \$3.135 million towards the establishment of the RMIT Flexible Learning Centre and the RMIT Centre for Regional and Rural Development. Through RIDF the University of Ballarat has received \$1.5 million towards the establishment of the IBM Asia-Pacific business solutions centre and \$2.6 million towards the development of an information technology cluster, which has been a stunning success. I have some experience of that, having recently visited that tech park.

The Victorian government has also committed \$14.5 million to build a new dental school at La Trobe University's Bendigo campus. It has also provided one-off funding of \$30 million to support an additional 220 rural medical student places. That includes \$18 million for a new medical school at Deakin University's Geelong campus and infrastructure funding for Monash University's Churchill campus in Gippsland.

As previous speakers have indicated, in order for us to have professionals, particularly in areas such as medicine, practising throughout regional Victoria, it is critical that we provide students with training in a familiar environment and not so far from home as might be the case if they had to go to Clayton or Parkville for their studies. That certainly is a major factor in the location of specific campuses and courses, and it is absolutely a link to the retention of students.

As members have heard on many occasions, and I am sure Minister Lenders will happily agree, education is our no. 1 priority and has always been.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Ms PULFORD — It is our no. 1 priority. That is why we have funded 7300 additional teachers and staff and invested over \$7.3 billion in education and training since 1999. I have spoken about the significant investment to assist regional universities through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. That is also why the government has provided 48 per cent of total education and training revenue, compared to the commonwealth government's 18 per cent.

The Bracks government has boosted staff numbers in regional and rural schools by over 1900 and committed funds to build 23 new replacement schools. Members would be very familiar with the government's

commitment to continue that work over coming years. There has been \$540 million in additional funding for school capital improvements. Regional apprentices have been supported by an increase in the apprenticeship accommodation allowance from \$7 to \$25.

Since 1999 the government has presided over a 42 per cent increase in the number of young people in vocational education and training in rural and regional Victoria, and a 61 per cent increase in young people in traineeships and apprenticeships, and skills development and training, which is essential for prosperity throughout the state and by no means any less important in rural and regional Victoria.

We know that more rural and regional students defer their places at university compared with their metropolitan counterparts. According to the vice-chancellor of the University of Ballarat, Professor David Battersby, less than half of the students who have deferred their studies at his university in previous years have returned to take up their university positions. These inequities have always existed, but I fear they are becoming all too common. Members will know of the anecdotal evidence of students not taking up tertiary study because of the additional hardship their families have experienced recently due to the drought.

It is terribly expensive to go to university as a regional student. The very fact that students must live away from home creates enormous financial strain. The money has to come from somewhere. I looked into how much it costs to send a child away from home to university. This is a topic that is often raised with me by parents who are struggling to meet that commitment. Leaving aside the very significant higher education contribution scheme (HECS) debts that many graduates have when their studies conclude, the daily and weekly costs of supporting a child are immense.

To compare three options, a student at a university in Melbourne living at home or in a shared house or residential college faces staggering costs. Assuming that the family does not require board from the student, a student funding his or her own lunches, education and study needs and medical costs for one year is estimated to need between \$6000 and \$7000. These figures were obtained from the cost of living summary in the *Student Financial Aid* published by the University of Melbourne. In terms of the advice that is provided to students by other universities there is consistency in this across the board. In a shared house with two other students — this brings back some memories; they were glory days and a lot of fun, but often a chaotic mess — it is estimated by the University of Melbourne that the

cost to a family supporting a young person in Melbourne is between \$16 000 and \$20 000. Again that is in a shared house with three people.

In a residential college, including books, equipment, entertainment costs and 32 weeks a year in residence, the costs are estimated to be about \$20 000. This varies a little depending on the college or the on-campus residence attended. These figures will be slightly lower in regional areas due to lower costs, but regional students often do not have the luxury of the first option. To attend university they are often forced to pay two to three times more than a metropolitan student for their day-to-day living expenses. They are also dealing with separation from family and often friends and living in an unfamiliar environment. This requires a massive adjustment and can be traumatic, isolating and lonely, though sometimes it offers glory days and a lot of funny experiences. Many students are also such a distance from home that popping in on the weekends is a difficult thing.

Parents in regional and rural areas, to support their children at university, may be looking at a massive weekly addition to their own household expenses of between \$300 to \$400. This is the equivalent of servicing a second mortgage. How can moderate income earners afford this, let alone those struggling with basic family and household costs? That is something to think about as the committee considers this issue. If parents are not able to fully support their child — many would not be able to — the child is forced to find work and their studies may often suffer. They may not be able to buy books or attend lectures because of their work commitments in juggling two or three part-time jobs.

There has been a great deal of research into the impact of student poverty on student results over many years. We know kids are missing out as the pressure of the drought takes its toll on their families and communities. Some education leaders have warned of a whole generation of rural children being left behind. Regional universities are in a unique position because they are part of these communities. I am pleased to inform members that some of them have responded to the needs of their communities — for example, the University of Ballarat has offered 50 drought relief scholarships. The opportunities already provided by inland and regional universities go some way towards addressing these issues and obviously involve a lesser separation from students' familiar environments.

I want to comment on the retention rates in regional communities after graduation. We cannot underestimate the educational, social and cultural

importance of university campuses thriving in regional Victoria nor the investment they make in country Victoria's young people and the impact they have in fuelling the economies in which they are located. This issue is much bigger than purely providing an education for country students. The rate at which these students participate in higher education has a flow-on impact on the level of retention of the students in regional Victoria after they have graduated and the long-term prosperity of the communities in which they hopefully settle.

The University of Ballarat graduate destinations report reveals that home location is a determining factor in where graduates get their first jobs. Almost 70 per cent of graduates are initially employed in regional areas, including 24 per cent of graduates with a metropolitan home location. However, when you consider that 84 per cent of Ballarat graduates are from regional areas in the first place, there is still a net loss of regional students to cities after graduation. We can only imagine what the loss would be without those campuses located in some of our regional centres.

There was a similar report commissioned by Charles Sturt University, and it confirmed that strong links exist between the home locations of students and the locations of their employment after graduation. Seventy-five per cent of Charles Sturt students are from regional areas and 60 per cent of graduates are initially employed in regional locations. While those figures reveal that students in regional Victoria are provided with an introduction to their professional lives in regional Victoria, they also reveal a net loss of regional students. Certainly insofar as I have looked into this issue I do not believe there is a large number of comparative studies, and I think this is something that very few universities ask their graduates. They certainly all track where their graduates go and what they do, but I think there are not very many at all that are asking questions about their place of residence before, during and after studies. I urge the committee to consider this an opportunity to perhaps provide us with a little more information over the years on where our young regional students are going after their studies.

What does all this mean? Regional universities play a critical role in preventing the brain drain from regional Victoria to the city. They are a critical means of filling the rural and regional skill gap and providing opportunities for young people to be nearer to home while enjoying a university education and the benefits that can come from that. There are undeniably differences in the rate at which students from different geographical locations participate in higher education, and I congratulate The Nationals on raising this issue. It is certainly one that is very dear to my heart. I urge the

committee to give this very important issue serious consideration. I urge Mr Hall, who moved this motion, and The Nationals to continue to lobby their federal colleagues about the role that the federal government has played over recent years in making this problem worse.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to make a few brief comments in support of this motion, although the brevity of my comments in no way reflects the depth of my support for the motion moved by Mr Hall. As a fellow member of the Education and Training Committee I certainly look forward to the committee getting this particular reference, if indeed the house agrees to it today, because it is something that is very close to my heart as well and is something that directly affects the area I represent, the western suburbs of Melbourne.

It has to be said that for a long time higher education, university education, has not necessarily been a part of the culture of Melbourne's west. That is not to say there have not been some extremely high achievers from the west go through university, but generally speaking I think it has to be said that it is not a part of the culture. It is a pity that the Minister for Education has just left the chamber, because this is something that the minister likes to tell us is rule 1, that from the government's point of view education has to be the highest priority and all that sort of thing. It does seem very strange to me that it is the Leader of The Nationals and not a member of the government who has felt it necessary to move this motion. One would have thought the minister, if indeed education were such a high priority, would have jumped on this one some time ago and that the Education and Training Committee would already be investigating this very important area. I make that comment by way of observation. As to what people may make of it I will leave to their own imaginations.

As I said, the west has not necessarily had a university education as part of its culture, and I really see that as something that needs to change. I am not suggesting that everybody should go to university. Not everybody is cut out for university. For example, I did not go to university. In fact where I came from, the farm down in the Western District, nobody went to university. We just left school and went to work, and that was it. But I have heard what Mr Hall said earlier, and I think that is rapidly changing as well. We need a change of culture in a whole range of areas but perhaps nowhere more than in the western suburbs of Melbourne, if we are to implement rule 1 — that is, that education is the number 1 priority of any government.

There is a definite poverty cycle in the western suburbs and indeed in Mr Guy's area of northern metropolitan Melbourne as well. What we need to do is break that cycle. It is a very sad state of affairs when you see, as I have seen, families that have not worked for generations, whose members have not had any employment for generations. They go to school, leave school and go on social welfare benefits. When they get married and have kids the same thing happens. There might be two or three generations of a particular family that have never had any meaningful employment, that have had no interest in education and for whom university is something that has never entered their heads. It is something that has never been a matter for consideration at all. I see this motion as very important in breaking that poverty cycle. If we are to give the people of western Melbourne the fair go they deserve, we really do need to smash that chain, and educational opportunities — higher educational opportunities in particular — are a very important part of doing just that.

I would like to commend Victoria University in particular, with which I have had a long association over many years, for the work it has done and is doing in bringing higher education to the west of Melbourne. I am sure that will continue, because I know that Victoria University, being the fine institution it is, really does have the interests of the west of Melbourne at heart, and I am sure the people of the west will benefit as a result of Victoria University's continued efforts in that regard. It is very important that this house support Mr Hall's motion. It affects not just country areas, as Mr Hall has discussed, but also a number of metropolitan areas, mine in the western suburbs of Melbourne being one. I sincerely hope we — as a committee, I emphasise — will be able to get hold of this reference and put the amount of work into it that it deserves, come up with the appropriate recommendations and see those recommendations put into action, maybe not by this government but certainly by the next. I am looking forward to that as well. It is really important that we find out the causes of these problems and fix them very quickly indeed.

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — I want to thank members who contributed to the debate for their support for this motion. I might say it is pleasing to have an indication that this resolution will be unanimously supported by the Parliament. I think that is a jolly good start for any parliamentary committee inquiry that is about to take place. I want to acknowledge the fact that a whole range of issues was raised by those who participated in this debate, issues that impact on participation in tertiary education. While this particular motion is focused specifically on geography, I noted in particular that Mr Davis,

Ms Pennicuik and Mr Finn raised the issue of disadvantage. In response to that I say, as I think the other speakers acknowledged, there is probably a high correlation between disadvantage and geography and in many respects these matters will be encompassed in the committee's deliberations on this matter.

I am sure the other issues that were raised by members will be given a fair hearing and due consideration by the committee. This debate was important because the debate that takes place towards the establishment of an inquiry gives the committee some direction about the wishes of the Parliament. Again, I thank members for their contributions, which will provide that assistance to the parliamentary committee. I hope the committee can undertake this work as soon as possible. As Mr Finn said, it is a very important topic, and the sooner we can get to work on it the better off young Victorians will be.

Motion agreed to.

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Impact of public land management practices on bushfires in Victoria

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I move:

That the resolution of the Council of 14 March 2007 requiring the Environment and Natural Resources Committee to inquire into the impact of public land management practices on the frequency, scale and intensity of bushfires in Victoria be amended by inserting the following paragraph to follow paragraph (13):

‘(14) The consequent impact of bushfires on the June/July 2007 Gippsland flood.’

Quite clearly, as I set out to make the case in support of this motion, I will talk broadly about the devastating impact of floods which were primarily the result of the inundation of about 13 inches of rainfall on the Macalister and Mitchell catchments on 27 June. What is coincidental but interesting is that this flood event occurred almost to the day on the anniversary of the 1998 floods which so affected East Gippsland.

Before I go into that level of detail I think it is important for the record for me to note something that is of some significance in relation to all these matters. It concerns the flood recovery process, which is critically important to communities in Gippsland and on which the government has made a slow but significant start. I refer especially to the impact of the deluge in the Macalister Valley and the flood event which changed the course of the Macalister River, knocking out three

bridges, removing one altogether. It removed a large part of the road access from Heyfield to Licola. Of course Licola has been isolated from Jamieson because the Licola-Jamieson Road has been closed since the massive landslips and mudslide earlier this year which followed the bushfires. Licola, as we know, has had a pretty tough time with bushfires, mudslides and then floods. The town has been completely isolated.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I must interrupt Mr Davis because the time for general business has expired. I require the house to determine an extension of 1 hour, and I invite that motion.

General business extended on motion of Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria).

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — To describe the situation: we have had bushfires that burnt 90 per cent of the Macalister River catchment; we have had mudslides as a result of a high rainfall event subsequent to the bushfires, and because there was no vegetation the topsoil ran off the mountains and ended up in the river and going through the township of Licola. We have had a major deluge which has impacted on the Macalister Valley and changed the course of the river. It has blown away three bridges and removed a large part of the road, and as a consequence Licola has been isolated. It has effectively been isolated from Jamieson since the bushfires earlier this year, and it has been isolated since 27 June from Heyfield.

To its credit, at the urging of the community and particularly the opposition, the government did respond, and VicRoads put in a temporary Bailey bridge at the township of Licola, allowing a couple of land-holders who live south of the township to have some access to Licola. But the fact still remains that two bridges are missing across the Macalister River between Heyfield and Licola and a large part of the roadway has been demolished. In fact the only way into Licola, north or south, is by a 5-hour drive along a four-wheel drive track called the Target Creek track, and this is only permitted by way of a Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) permit. Effectively Licola is Victoria's most isolated town.

What I found extraordinary when reading in *Daily Hansard* the report of question time in the Legislative Assembly yesterday was that the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place responded to a Dorothy Dixer about Licola from a Labor member in these terms. He said, ‘I am pleased to report to the house that access was restored to Licola on 14 July’. At the risk of drawing the ire of members of the government benches — or the few who are present — I think it is

fair for me to say that the Minister for Roads and Ports has misled the Parliament. Whether he intended to or whether it was by omission, I think it was an act of negligence.

In effect what I am saying is that a minister who is part of the flood recovery task force and to whom the Premier has allocated \$30 million to expend on to bridges and roads throughout Gippsland that have been destroyed by the floods who says that in the Victorian Parliament clearly fails to understand the consequences for and the impact upon the Gippsland community of the floods, because everyone knows that Licola is going to be isolated for many months and has been isolated since 27 June.

While I will give the benefit of the doubt to the minister that perhaps he simply did not understand the detail of what he was reporting to the Parliament, I think it behoves him to inform himself of these matters given that he has an administrative responsibility to ensure that the people of the Licola township have access to the rest of Victoria. At the present time access is limited to four-wheel drive vehicles that have a Department of Sustainability and Environment permit to traverse the 5-hour four-wheel drive route. That community is totally isolated. For the minister to stand up at question time and give this answer, presumably to a question which he wrote for the member who asked it, is frankly beyond my comprehension. It is an indictment on the competence of the minister that he would give such an answer.

What I would say to that minister is that he needs to get out of the helicopter, which is obviously the only way he has had a look at Licola, and actually try to drive in there himself and experience the frustration of those people who are in just the most difficult circumstances imaginable. It is therefore with some regret that I put that on the record here, but I think it is a necessary matter to refer to before I go on to deal with the substantive debate in relation to these terms of reference.

The motion before the Chair is simply for an addendum to the terms of reference of the inquiry into the impact of public land management practices on bushfires that this house adopted. I have to say that there was a good deal of bipartisan effort to get this inquiry on track after the fires. Credit must go to the Leader of The Nationals for instigating a resolution, which in the end had widespread support and, by negotiation, was amended satisfactorily to obtain the support of all parties in the house. I probably would have been more sympathetic to a select committee of the upper house running such an inquiry, and, indeed, my colleague John Vogels

proposed such an inquiry. Anyway, we decided that we would proceed to support this joint parliamentary committee investigation, and hopefully something useful will come out of it.

As a matter of fact that inquiry is running a series of public hearings. Its members are undertaking visits to various bushfire-affected areas and providing forums for residents to make submissions as part of the public hearing process. I am advised that that committee will be visiting Gippsland for public hearings in a fortnight, between 1 and 3 August. Therefore it is quite important in the context of all that is being said about bushfires and the context of how the bushfires affected the way in which the flood event occurred that evidence be able to be taken from those people in Gippsland who wish to comment on the two related issues. I give credit to those people who are undertaking the bushfire inquiry, because it is quite an onerous project involving the investment of a lot of time. I think it is very important. I think we need to have a better understanding of land management.

The motion before the Chair does not affect in any way the substance of the inquiry that is under way. What it does is slightly expand the terms of reference by adding a further reference to the existing 13 points by inserting the words 'The consequent impact of bushfires on the June–July 2007 Gippsland flood.'. The question is: what is the case for expanding the terms of reference? That case, in my view, is very clear.

In summary there was a massive rainfall event on 27 June which centred over Mount Wellington. There are two water catchments nearby — the Macalister in the west and the Mitchell in the east. The water flow into the Macalister came off a catchment area that was 90 per cent burnt by the bushfires. It was so badly burnt of course that it had no vegetation to bind the soil and slow down the flow rate of water. Normally catchments work a bit like a sponge. In this case it acted more like a slab of concrete. If you pour 13 inches of rain onto a slab of concrete, it is going to come off pretty quickly, which in fact is what occurred. Not only did it come off very quickly, it carried with it a huge amount of fire debris. A lot of the burnt and destroyed timber was carried with it downstream. Because there was no vegetation binding the soil, it carried a lot of topsoil with it. The volume, the velocity and the material in stream flow had such energy as to change the course of the Macalister River bed.

As I said earlier, it destroyed bridges and roads along the way. Eventually that water arrived in the Glenmaggie Weir as we know it in Gippsland — others might call it a dam. It is a dam that was built in the

1920s for the purpose of creating the Macalister irrigation district for irrigation agriculture. At the time the water arrived Glenmaggie was already about 50 per cent full. The flood peak inflow was 300 000 megalitres per day. The dam itself only holds 190 000 megalitres, therefore it was pretty simple arithmetic to work out that whatever happened there was going to be a significant flood downstream. However, that flood downstream was significantly exacerbated by the rate of inflow, because as I said the water flowed more quickly into the dam. But it flowed very quickly out of the dam and downstream and affected downstream land-holders and communities, in particular the hamlet of Newry. It is not a very big township, but it had not been flooded since 1971. There are questions as to why this all occurred. Even downstream of Glenmaggie the floodwaters carried so much material that timber blocked bridges, particularly Hagens Bridge, and created another weir. Water flowed around that weir and was diverted from its normal course, which again impacted on the flood at Newry.

If you move a little to the east and the eastern side of Mount Wellington and look at the Mitchell River catchment, you see it was the same thing — bushfires, denuded landscape and a very powerful flow of water at an accelerated rate compared to what would have occurred if not for the fires of last summer. The power of the Mitchell River in full flow is something to behold. Again there was a change of watercourse, and a lot of damage was done to the Mitchell River flats, at Lindenow in particular. This had a huge impact on the vegetable growing industry in that area. We have to be realistic and accepting to some degree about these events. They are part of the natural cycle — there are droughts, there are fires, there are floods — but the question is whether a better land management regime could have reduced the impact and consequent dislocation of the Gippsland communities which have been severely affected. Those Gippsland communities include virtually all of the townships of the Gippsland Lakes, because of inundation, particularly Lakes Entrance. They include the various villages and farming communities along each of the rivers that were in flood.

These flood events have also impacted severely in terms of the tourism industry, which has been devastated. I will read an extract from the *Lakes Post* of Wednesday, 11 July. This is the local Lakes Entrance newspaper. The heading is ‘Holiday cancellations phenomenal’. They sure are. My colleague Wendy Lovell and I were in Lakes Entrance this time last week, a little later in the day perhaps, and you could have fired a machine gun down the Esplanade in Lakes Entrance and not hit anybody. Regrettably the tourism operators are in a lot of strife. The image of Gippsland

that has been portrayed on television has created a perception that Gippsland is closed for business. I will read from this newspaper article:

A straw poll of the Lakes Entrance accommodation businesses that are all so reliant on the school holiday trade reveals what many expected — tourists are staying away in their droves after the highly publicised flood event in the Gippsland Lakes.

... That image was one of a total shutdown of Lakes, which, as the local community knows, is far from the truth.

...

People ringing to cancel bookings have indicated they are staying away for various reasons, including roads still being closed and the drinking water being contaminated.

I might say that both these things are untrue, with the exception of the road that the Minister for Roads and Ports in another place does not seem to know anything about — the road from Heyfield to Licola. That road is absolutely, definitely closed. It is factually, indisputably closed, except the minister in Victoria responsible for it does not know that. I might also make the segue that neither does his department, VicRoads, because it has removed any mention of Licola from its website. Normally there is road closure advice on the VicRoads website, but apparently Licola no longer exists. The Department of Sustainability and Environment does not acknowledge that Licola exists and that you have to get a permit from it to go use the road. It has not bothered to inform the public through its website that this permit is required. Anyway, that is an aside. I make the point that it is quite clear that something needs to be done urgently on behalf of the tourism industry in Gippsland. It is not just Lakes Entrance, it is the whole of the tourism industry. More than 30 per cent of the economic activity in East Gippsland is tourism related.

The government did what it does best — it made an announcement about a recovery package and then left town. What it failed to do was provide an adequate recovery package, in particular in relation to getting Gippsland’s business profile going again. It only provided for urgent media communications in regard to the Open for Business campaign with \$20 000 for immediate use. That is a pittance that would not buy four television advertisements in Melbourne. It is quite clear that the government’s response, while perhaps well-intentioned, has been ineffectual. It has certainly been ineffectual as far as road management is concerned, as I have demonstrated.

I do not believe I need to reprise all the matters relating to the impact of the Gippsland floods that were so devastating to many communities in the region. The purpose of this motion is not to have a broad debate

about all those matters; the purpose of this motion is to give the Environment and Natural Resources Committee of the Parliament the opportunity not just to complete its work on its inquiry into bushfires and land management but, in tandem with that, to understand how the impact of the bushfires accelerated and magnified the effect of that natural phenomenon, the classic east coast low, which came over Gippsland on 27 June, as often it does, with a massive water dump.

The impact for farmers, in summary, is in the order of something less than 2000 sheep — about 1800 sheep have been lost. I understand about 1500 or 1600 beef cattle and 200 dairy cattle were lost. However, to put the fencing issue in context, I am advised that if you started fencing the Princes Highway at Melbourne and fenced both sides to Bairnsdale and back you might just about replace the fencing that was lost in this flood event. There has certainly been a major impact on individual farming families through various stock losses, asset losses and building losses. There has been a lot of nuisance value for people who for some days have had their usual access put out of action.

However, the big impact has been on a lot of householders, many of whom would never in their lives have expected to experience a flood. I am incredibly disappointed with a couple of insurance companies with whom I am in fairly regular contact on behalf of some of those constituents. I have been urging them to process these people's claims urgently. It is now nearly three weeks since the flood event. We have people who have been unable to return to their homes because they have been severely impacted on by the floods. For them the stress of not even knowing whether or not they will be able to afford to refurbish their homes and return to them has exacerbated and compounded the stress they are facing.

It is probably inopportune today to mention the companies that are behaving in a fashion I regard as recalcitrant, but I have been speaking with them and I will be speaking with the insurance council again tomorrow. My view is that the insurance companies have a major obligation to just accept the fact that this was not an event which is in the typical classification of a flood. It was a massive storm. There are questions which will need to be raised and examined by the emergency services commissioner as to the effectiveness of the flood warning arrangements, because in some cases people were not advised until the peak flood flow was no more than 50 minutes away from them, when in fact they could have been advised some many hours before but were not. Further, there are issues to do with the management of the way that water was released from the Glenmaggie Weir, and

whether or not it could have been done in a slightly different manner to slightly reduce the peak flow is something that is open to question. Again, I am sure there will be an adequate review of that by the emergency services commissioner.

All these matters need examination. Some of them are appropriate to be considered by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee in relation to the acceleration and magnification of the impacts of the flood as a result of bushfires, and therefore the opportunity should be afforded to it.

Now that I have warmed up I could speak about this at length. I wish to make the point that there is a significant recovery process to undergo, and the best way for the community, apart from the physical infrastructure to be repaired and, if you like, the physical assets to be healed, is something that local government and state government have an obligation to pick up and deal with. It is important for those communities to see that government is connected to and understands the problems. I have noticed a couple of disconnections. It took some effort to persuade the government that you could do something about temporary bridging, and I have to claim some credit for the opposition in that respect in regard to the government at least acknowledging that you could use temporary bridging — that is Bailey bridging — albeit the Minister for Roads and Ports does not quite understand that you need to fix more than one bridge to get access to Licola; you have to fix three.

As I have earlier alluded to, there is the issue of an inadequate response to the Gippsland Open for Business campaign. I might make the point that in 1998 the then government, within seven days of the flood emergency having been concluded, rolled out an advertising blitz on Melbourne television and in newspapers and with a brochure campaign which was funded to the extent of \$300 000. The first television advertisements went to air seven days later. It was a \$300 000 campaign in 1998. The member for Brighton in the other place, Louise Asher, was then the Minister for Tourism and she took responsibility for making sure that happened. Regrettably, the best the Bracks government has been able to do is to put out a press release saying there will be \$20 000 available for an urgent Open for Business campaign. I think that is a paltry, embarrassing and uninformed response, and the region deserves better. There will be tourism operators who do not survive financially simply because of the failure of the government to respond in an appropriate manner.

The government has been tardy in responding to the needs of farmers. Again, in 1998 — and I do not necessarily think you can compare like with like; I accept that — within two days of the task force being set up, vouchers were provided for farmers to obtain fencing materials for boundary fencing so that they could urgently re-fence to contain stock. I was in discussion with one of the people I am dealing with in regard to an insurance claim only yesterday who was telling me that she was so concerned about her husband that she had to go out looking for him at 1 o'clock in the morning because he had not arrived home from work. She was driving around the district looking for him and eventually found him. He had run off the road while avoiding wandering livestock. The point is that livestock wander if they are not contained by fencing. With all the fencing down and the government taking no interest in it, what does it expect will happen?

At Lindenow we spoke at length with a number of vegetable growers who, again, welcomed the offer of some assistance from the government in the form of low-interest loans, and I welcome that too. The government has offered loans capped to \$200 000 at 3 per cent for five years. These vegetable growers are people whose businesses are of such scale that \$200 000 will not go anywhere near it, and their losses are between \$500 000 and \$1 million. It would certainly also apply to at least one farmer on the Macalister River near Licola who has lost much of his river flat pastures — that is, the river has changed its course — but who has also lost an enormous amount of fencing which was brand new, having been replaced after the fires in January and February. He has lost his fences, he has rebuilt them and the flood has taken them away again. It would be of enormous assistance if the government was to reconsider the cap and raise the level of loans so they were more proportionate to the scale of the losses and the scale of the business.

As I said, I could speak at length about this issue. I feel very strongly about it because I feel for those people who have been affected, as I know do a number of my colleagues here. Others will want to contribute to this debate, but I really want to come back to the need to satisfy the concerns of the people who have felt the impact of these floods. They need to have the opportunity to ensure that the connection between the bushfires and the flood is understood and that the Parliament at least has the opportunity, through its parliamentary committee, to review all of that. Therefore, I will conclude by commending the motion to the house.

Mr VINEY (Eastern Victoria) — I only wish to speak very briefly; I do not need 32 or 33 minutes to

make my contribution on this. Of course the government will be supporting the proposed reference. I also happen to be a member of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, and I think it is sensible in its current review of the bushfires to have a look at the floods, in particular because there is a direct relationship between the loss of vegetation and the increased water flow into the river systems and dams.

I was a little disappointed by Mr Davis's contribution when he criticised the government. It was not the time either then or now, when we are still fully in the recovery stage, to be scoring cheap political points. Let me just make a couple of comments. The response of the government was neither slow nor inadequate. I, along with Mr Scheffer, as local members, genuinely share the trauma that has been suffered by a number of people as a result of these floods.

But what is interesting is that at the community cabinet visit there on Monday last week — which was I think about a week or so after the most severe flooding, although there was still considerable water around in East Gippsland — there was an acknowledgement by the government, by all of the ministers and by the Premier, of the devastation that was created by the floods. I attended the community cabinet, and I can report to the house that it was extremely successful. There were full briefs from both the Shire of Wellington and the Shire of East Gippsland, and the Premier, Treasurer and ministers met with local organisations, farmers and townspeople and heard first hand of people's experiences and concerns.

Victoria's contribution to the recovery package is \$60 million, and in all of the consultations, discussions and contact I have had with representatives of organisations and the local communities, people have been extremely appreciative of the immediate response of the government and the direct indication of concern that the government, and ministers in particular, showed by taking the trouble to visit the region so quickly after the floods and while it was still in recovery mode. I must say that is in contrast to some of the public comments that were made by opposition members suggesting that the cabinet should not have gone down there at that stage. Certainly that was not the view of the locals that they shared with me. They were very appreciative of it. I remember being at a door-stop conference where one of the locals in Newry was expressing considerable support for the government coming down and some distress at those comments that had suggested that the cabinet should not have been there.

I conclude by saying that the government will support this reference. It is a relevant reference to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee in its current review of bushfires, and I look forward as a member of that committee to receiving submissions and being able to make appropriate recommendations to the Parliament through its report.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise and speak in support of the motion in the name of Mr Davis, the Leader of the Opposition. I will start by picking up a couple of the comments made by Mr Viney. I do not think the situation on the ground was as clear cut as Mr Viney represented. When I was in Newry last week with the member for South-West Coast in another place, Dr Naphthine, Ms Lovell and Mr Davis, we heard varying accounts from the locals of Newry and other towns and communities we visited.

Whilst the support package announced by the government has been welcomed by communities in Gippsland affected by the floods, the fact remains that that package should only be seen as a start, because much of the damage done to infrastructure in Gippsland as a result of the floods has still not been properly assessed and determined. In fact the announcements made by the government in its relief package really address only the immediate and apparent physical infrastructure issues that exist. They do not analyse or quantify the impact on roads, bridges and other infrastructure. It will take time before the full extent of damage done to that sort of infrastructure is known.

I make the point that while the package that has been announced is welcome, it is only a start in relation to that physical infrastructure. It is disappointing that funds were not provided for fencing, given there is a clear link, particularly in the minds of the locals who live in the area, between the fires, the subsequent run-off as a result of the floods and the destruction of hundreds of kilometres of fencing. It is a pity that funding to repair fences was not provided.

But perhaps the biggest disappointment in the relief package is in relation to the tourist industry, as Mr Davis said. In the minds of Melburnians, Gippsland is closed for business. Unless the government takes immediate and swift action to address that perception, the tourist operators of Gippsland who have missed out on a summer tourist season and who have now missed out on a winter school holiday tourist season will miss out on a September school holiday season — and if that happens they will not be around for the Christmas holiday season coming up. The government has a lot more to do. The announcements it has made are welcome, but it has a lot more to do.

The debate about the quantum of the damage from the floods is one side of the issue. To my mind the thrust of the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition really goes back to the issue of analysing what impact the fires had on the floods and what impact the burning of over a million hectares had on the run-off when the rains came. When the rains came there was nothing to absorb the water, there was nothing to stop the flow of those rivers. Because of the ash and the debris that was caught up in the run-off as a result of there being nothing to slow it down, trees, refrigerators and other household appliances, fencing, ash and tonnes and tonnes of topsoil and other debris washed through the homes of Newry residents, washed through properties of farmers in the Macalister irrigation district and washed down through crops of vegetable growers of the Lindenow Flats and elsewhere, taking everything in its path.

There is a real need for an examination of the connection between the fires and that run-off so that we as a Parliament better understand the impact that land management has not only on bushfire events and on public land but also on the consequent effects of rain events like those of two weeks ago. I am pleased to speak in support of this motion, and I commend it to the house.

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — As the mover of the motion that the Council agreed to on 14 March 2007 to establish this inquiry, I thought it appropriate that I make some remarks on the additional term of reference to the committee's inquiry suggested by Mr Davis. I indicate that I am happy to support it on the basis that in my mind there is no doubt that there is a link between the severity of flood damage caused by the significant rain event that occurred in Gippsland in late June and into early July and the bushfires some six or seven months earlier. I believe there is a definite link between the two of them.

The severity of that flood damage had to be seen to be believed, and as other speakers have indicated in their various journeys around Gippsland they have witnessed some events and some significant damage that, as I said, needs to be seen to be believed. I journeyed around a large part of Gippsland during the course of those floods and certainly I was shocked by the amount of damage caused in the Macalister Valley for instance. The erosion that has taken place in that area is something the magnitude of which I have simply never seen before. The debris that has been washed down — and this is where the direct link between the bushfires and the floods occurs — the Macalister and Mitchell rivers and other rivers around Gippsland is absolutely

phenomenal. The extent to which that debris has caused damage to buildings, again, is absolutely phenomenal.

In the Macalister Valley I saw buildings that had been demolished by having timber and debris battered against them, and some of them will need to be pulled down. I saw the camp belonging to the Peninsula School — the school is based at Mornington — where nothing of the camp was left except for the concrete slabs that once held buildings and huts. Along the Mitchell River we saw caravans, even a home on stilts in one case, that had actually been picked up and washed downstream.

This substantial damage was made worse by the fact that we had bushfires in the Licola area and other parts of Gippsland only six or seven months prior to the flood. There has been a compounding effect of those two dramatic events, and that is why it is relevant that this term of reference be added to the committee's inquiry. I sound one sense of caution about the addition of this term of reference to the inquiry, and that is that I would not like to see this take the place of a more substantial review of the floods. Certainly I think somebody — and it has been suggested that the essential services commissioner might be appropriate — needs to have a much longer and harder look into a whole range of aspects associated with the floods throughout Gippsland. They need to look at whether the flood-warning system is sufficient and whether the responses by various authorities immediately and over a longer period of time have been adequate. There needs to be a more detailed look at a whole range of aspects of the floods that occurred almost three weeks ago this evening.

I hope this term of reference does not take the place of a more substantial inquiry. I will certainly be writing to the essential services commissioner and to the government to ensure that a proper review of the response and the preparation for flood damage in the Gippsland region is undertaken. However, as I said, I strongly believe there is a correlation between the severity of the damage caused by the floods and the bushfires of the 2006–07 summer, and for that reason I am happy for the Environment and Natural Resources Committee to take on board this further term of reference in its current inquiry.

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I want to make some very brief comments, firstly to acknowledge the contributions made by members to this debate. My colleague, Mr O'Donohue, and the Leader of The Nationals, Peter Hall, made very positive contributions, but I want to pick up some observations made by Mr Viney in particular when he said that the

community cabinet and the announcements all went very well. I am sure they had a jolly fine time as he said, doing doorstops. I am not sure that the people living with friends and family or families that were split up in order that they could find somewhere to live were as comforted as Mr Viney implied about the fact that a well-orchestrated media bash took place.

Indeed in reference to that, particularly on the night that those announcements were made, I saw the Premier in television grabs talking about the magnificent response by the government to the event. I can say that notwithstanding the Premier's view that this is the most substantial response, as he claimed, in the history of Victoria, when he talked about \$60 million, it is a matter of indisputable fact that in 1998 the then coalition government committed \$62.1 million to the flood recovery effort in East Gippsland, and that was a flood which affected only the East Gippsland shire.

The flood in 2007 has affected a geographic expanse that is double that area, and bearing inflation in mind, the value of the 1998 dollar was twice as great as that of the 2007 dollar. I suggest that, rather than claiming credit for providing community support, which it is an obligation on government to deliver, because that is what governments are elected to do — they are elected to administer the state on behalf of the people and to provide an appropriate response when the community is in crisis — the Premier should be more interested in holding his ministers to account to ensure that there is not just a press announcement, but action is taken to restore the community to a satisfactory position.

I suggest in respect of the Premier's announcement that it is but an announcement, and there needs to be a good deal more follow-up. Mr Viney should not take comfort in seeing himself and his colleagues on television and reading about himself in government-sponsored press releases and therefore media articles, he should actually talk to the people on the ground about how their lives have been destroyed and how it is that they are looking for the government to provide support so that they can restore their lives to some normality.

Motion agreed to.

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE: INVESTMENT

**Debate resumed from 20 June; motion of
Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern
Metropolitan):**

That this house notes the failure of the state government, over seven years, to facilitate the required investment in public

infrastructure to ensure the security of supply and reliability of water, electricity, public transport and the road network.

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — This is the resumption of an ongoing debate where there is an allegation that the state government has failed to invest in public infrastructure in relation to water, electricity, public transport and so on. I rise to speak on this motion, which is classically both misguided and inaccurate. The suggestion that the state government has failed in relation to public infrastructure simply does not stand up factually.

The motion essentially requires a comparison of the performance of this government with that of the previous government to demonstrate two essential things: first, that this government standing in its own right has done a very impressive job in relation to infrastructure, and second, by way of comparison, what could have been had the outcome of the election of 1999 not occurred. The motion ignores some \$16 billion that this government has invested in infrastructure since 2000–01. This level of investment is double the annual average investment made in the last six years of the Kennett government. Looking ahead, this motion ignores some \$13.3 billion of investment which will be made over the next four years. That is an annual investment which is nearly three times that of the previous government. In broad terms the motion makes no sense.

Dealing with a number of specific issues that are addressed in the motion — and I will start with investment in the power industry — the motion fails to take into account the wrecking ball that the Kennett government put into power generation in Victoria. The Kennett government wrecking ball meant that the Bracks government, when we came into power, inherited a run-down, clapped-out and very debt-ridden power generation industry. By way of its privatisation the Kennett government cost the Victorian power generation industry some \$30 billion, most of which was taken out of the industry and returned by way of debt.

The Kennett policy for the power industry was both irresponsible and short-sighted. That policy by way of debt crippled the power industry with interest payments. So lumbered with debt was the industry that it could ill afford essential maintenance and there was very little, if any, new investment. The training of workers and the employment of apprentices took a back seat as the industry suffocated under a mountain of debt. The industry was being run down, safety standards were being eroded and instead of growing the power industry the Kennett government oversaw a

system where the cutting of corners and costs became the name of the game.

Under the Kennett government's privatisation the industry stagnated. Not one new power station was built while the previous government was in power — not one. Instead a steady stream of international companies deserted the Victorian industry. They were simply unable to make a go of the clapped-out system the Kennett government had put into place. The Kennett system was not good for the power industry, and it also delivered absolutely nothing for the Victorian power consumer. Instead of obtaining a better — or even the same — service, consumers ended up footing the debt bill. As any competent government would have realised, the power industry debt burden was always going to be paid by the Victorian consumer.

And so it was that in 2002, nearly 10 years after the Kennett government's botched privatisation, household consumers were paying more for their power than they were prior to the privatisation. In January 2002 the *Age* newspaper compared the power costs paid by Victorian households with those of New South Wales. The *Age* found that over the 10 years power costs had increased in Victoria. At the same time in New South Wales power costs under public power generation had fallen by 8 per cent. The *Age* article in fact concluded that the New South Wales industry had clearly delivered greater efficiencies than the Victorian industry.

Thankfully we had the election of the Bracks government in 1999 and a new era for power generation. It was in effect a ray of sunshine after many years of darkness. The new Bracks government charge was led by a renewable energy target that the industry warmly embraced. The renewable energy target put in place a focus for new and clean power generation. Since 2001 some 2007 megawatts of additional capacity has been added to Victoria's energy grid. This capacity includes no less than 13 new power stations, including 8 wind farms.

This capacity is set to grow even more. Twelve new wind farms generating an additional 1141 megawatts of power have been approved but are yet to be constructed. While the motion suggests that the government has failed to facilitate infrastructure to ensure security of supply, when you look at the facts you see that nothing could be further from the truth. Instead this government has taken the moribund power generation industry it inherited and turned it into a dynamic industry which is growing in the provision of environmentally friendly green power.

Tragically the story of devastation of the power industry by the Kennett government was repeated time and again and no more so than in public transport infrastructure, which is the other matter referred to in this motion. As with the power industry, the Kennett government left a legacy of flawed and incompetent privatisation in Melbourne's public transport system. The Kennett government privatised the railways on the flawed assumption that over time it would continue to reduce government subsidies and that in time the system would not require any such subsidies. That was clearly a flawed assumption which ran totally counter to both reality and international experience. I think it was the current Premier who said at the time that it was a bit like living in a fool's paradise.

The only way that the new contractors or private providers could make a go of the shambles was by running down assets and eroding safety standards and service delivery. Not only was the Kennett government's system untenable but, worse still, when the Bracks government came to power the system was on the verge of collapse. Shortly after the election one of the service providers, National Express, indicated that it was unable to make a go of the flawed system put in place by the Kennett government, and it pulled the pin less than 3 years into its 10-year contract.

The Bracks government inherited a flawed system. All it could do initially was prop up and then slowly rebuild the public transport system. That required a significant rescue package, including a financial injection of \$1 billion just to keep the trains moving. Since then there has been a line-by-line, train-by-train and station-by-station rebuild and an expansion of the public transport system. That rebuild culminated in the \$10.5 billion Meeting Our Transport Challenges initiative, which is an extensive program for more trains and buses, new and upgraded stations and extra rail lines.

Essentially we have a tale of two very different approaches. One is the approach of those opposite and of the Kennett government, which involved the ripping out of vital infrastructure. It is a tale of total incompetence. The other is the very different approach of those on the government side, which is about service delivery and service expansion. It is an approach about meeting the needs of the community.

This motion is timely in the context of the water initiative which was recently announced by the Premier on behalf of the government. It will provide a significant boost to Victoria's water infrastructure needs. It will secure Melbourne's water supply by increasing our water capacity by up to 50 per cent. As

the Premier announced, it is a \$4.9 billion plan as part of a long-term vision to secure Melbourne's water supply. That vision includes Australia's largest desalination plant, major irrigation upgrades and an expansion of the water grid. Once again, with water we have seen a timely and effective investment in public infrastructure. The water initiative is another example of government action that shows up the hollowness of the motion, which is completely devoid of merit. The motion demonstrates a lack of understanding by those opposite, who have failed to recognise the devastation their policies in the previous government caused. In stark contrast, the Bracks government has been about service delivery and expansion.

Finally, I think it is true that the electorate knows that unless those opposite will admit to the flaws of the Kennett government and the flaws of their past and present infrastructure policies, they would be liable to repeat those mistakes if they were ever elected into government again. For those reasons, I utterly oppose and reject the motion.

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to support my esteemed colleague Mr Rich-Phillips's motion:

That this house notes the failure of the state government, over seven years, to facilitate the required investment in public infrastructure to ensure the security of supply —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mrs Kronberg, I am sorry to do this, but pursuant to sessional orders, time has expired.

General business extended on motion of Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan).

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — I support my esteemed colleague Mr Rich-Phillips's motion:

That this house notes the failure of the state government, over seven years, to facilitate the required investment in public infrastructure to ensure the security of supply and reliability of water, electricity, public transport and the road network.

The paucity of investment in our roads is a reality for motorists right across the metropolitan area. It is a great pity that my colleague on the other side Mr Tee, who also represents the Eastern Metropolitan Region, has just been on his feet and had the temerity to praise the government's investment in infrastructure when just yesterday he was talking about the need to upgrade King Street in Doncaster. It seems to me that it does not matter how much he tries to inveigle this government into doing so, it is not prepared to spend any money in the eastern suburbs, especially in Liberal-held

Doncaster. I place on the record that I feel that the government underestimates the intensity of feeling about and the level of attention that people in Melbourne's east actually pay to this government's duplicity.

If we look at the road system, we have to say that Melbourne's road network is in a state of gridlock. I can attest to a significant amount of experience of dealing with transport problems and road congestion in some of the world's great cities. Because I have family living in London, my trips to London involve me living there as a Londoner, not being shuffled around under the aegis of the Agent-General and having afternoon tea at the Ritz Hotel or canapés at the Dorchester Hotel. My experience with the traffic congestion in London is that Melbourne's congestion is infinitely worse, yet the people in London think that their traffic congestion is extremely bad. I believe that they think their traffic congestion is so bad for the simple reason that they actually have a rapid transit system to move vast numbers of people in a huge number of directions all day, every day.

It is the contrast with the rapid transit system that actually makes them feel their so-called traffic congestion is a serious problem. Yes, there is traffic congestion but it really does not measure up to the traffic congestion we experience every day in Melbourne's gridlock. I suggest next time members of the government go to London, they actually behave like a Londoner and travel on the tube, on the Docklands light rail, connect with a few buses, be dazzled by the performance of that system and come home with some ideas as to how to apply it to our metropolitan network.

People see no end in sight. One can only describe the intransigence of the government while members of the public face continued delay and endless frustrations as they attempt their north-south passage along arterial roads that are interrupted by level crossings such as those along the Belgrave and Lilydale lines. The problems with Springvale Road as it intersects the rail line at Nunawading are emblematic of a constellation of similar problems right throughout the metropolitan area and especially in Melbourne's east. The government's failure to invest in level crossing upgrades and grade separations around the state have, as we all know, led to disastrous consequences and the mourning continues for the lives lost as a result. The irony is that at the time the public is stampeding onto trains because of the high cost of petrol, what is their reward? They have to cram into rolling stock which lurches around our moribund system and which is frankly an affront in the 21st century in an economy such as ours.

Drawing upon my personal experience of rail networks in the United Kingdom, France and Israel, I ask why it is that Australia cannot have a decent standard of rolling stock to provide clean, comfortable, rapid transit options for its population? In the state of Israel, if you are a commuter in a city such as Tel Aviv, you can actually go into a railway station that is spotlessly clean and graffiti free. You could eat your meal off the floor of the station. It is safe. The trains arrive on time. I know what it feels like to see a fast train. Unfortunately to see a fast train Australians have to go to Israel or France. Fast trains move fast, and when they stop to pick up passengers one is delighted by the fact that one can get into something that is more like a cruise liner than a train. People can read newspapers in hushed environments with no noise. People indulge themselves, and it looks like they are having a VIP cruise down a river, but they are actually on the local train. The contrast between the rolling stock that other developed economies provide for their patrons and what we have here in Melbourne reveals a yawning abyss.

The frequency of trains cannot be improved because this government has failed to plan ahead because of level crossings. We come back to the old hoary chestnut of the Nunawading level crossing. It is festering away year in, year out, with nobody caring and nobody doing anything about it. If the trains were more frequent, the boom gates would be down across the north-south traffic even more than they are now. It is an interesting problem for Connex. It cannot ever improve its timetables because it would have to have trains running through major roads with boom gates down constantly. What would that do for traffic flow? We know what it does with traffic flow now, with the constant rhythm of traffic up and down Springvale Road.

I do not know whether any members of the government have taken the time to travel between Whitehorse Road and Canterbury Road on a Friday afternoon at any time between 3.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. just to experience what the congestion and frustration are all about. I recommend it highly if members have not indulged themselves. Please do it just to catch up and see how the acute suffering really occurs there. If you think about it, it is almost as if the system is geared for non-paying passengers. The people are expected to pay ever-increasing fares and what do they get for their money? They get crowding, cancellations, delays and uncertainties, which are the order of the day for Victoria's travelling public.

What about the much-lauded and somewhat delayed Myki card system, the smartcard to provide transport

access for our failing network? It seems that the Myki card will be introduced sometime in 2008 at an expected cost of \$500 million. As of yesterday our research has not yet been able to find an introduction date for the system. My understanding of Myki is that it has a lot in common with the system that has been used in London since 2003 called the Oyster card. The Oyster card mirrors a lot of the features that have been extolled for the Myki system.

The statistics reveal that 10 million Oyster cards have been issued since it was launched in 2003 and that 80 per cent of the journeys travelled around the London transport system now result in the use of the Oyster card. That means 38 million journeys a week are made using this smartcard system. The system has been up and running successfully with the bugs ironed out. I pose this question to the government: why are we reinventing the wheel? Why can we not just pick up the Oyster card and customise it for our system? It cannot be that difficult. Why are we indulging in such expenditure and reinventing the wheel?

Some members in this chamber probably do not appreciate that my background includes 12 years in executive search and that many of the briefs I had from my customer base, which included high technology companies, included the quest to find specialists who could sell technological offerings to government. What surprises me is that this government, after being in power for seven years, still does not have the wherewithal to be able to deal with the strategies and the craftiness of technical specialists providing technological offerings to government and not be snowed by these people.

The government still seems to be falling for the same old tricks that I am aware of that have been rolled out in government procurement for the last 25 years. I suggest the government get some smarter operators who can actually deal with the smart hombres who are selling things, because I believe this government is constantly snowed on its technological decision making and is constantly buying vapourware.

The government is funding the development of a proprietary product that it will never own. Members should make no mistake that this lack of investment is noticed, and no matter what spin this government puts on any one incident it must face the fact that Victoria is being watched by the investment community. Where is the proposed \$2 billion to redevelop Melbourne's freight hub? It is a bit like the knee bone being connected to the thighbone that is connected to the hipbone in this remake. It is conditional on the delayed

channel deepening, so it goes on and continues in a downward spiral.

What about our airport-city rail link that was promised by this government eight years ago. That is yet another example of this government's infrastructure vapourware — a hazy, ephemeral, conceptual type of infrastructure, which is the signature infrastructure of this government. Many in this chamber will have benefited from rapid transit systems serving the world's great airports. Overseas travellers to Tullamarine must surely be amazed that this modern metropolis of Melbourne does not yet have a train connecting the central activities district with its only international air link. It makes one cringe to think of the comparisons visitors must be making with the once most livable city on earth. We have accepted that Melbourne, because of its size, can never be a first-tier city, but the likelihood of us hoisting ourselves out of our third-tier status to be a second-tier city becomes more remote with every passing day.

Whilst the government is currently indulging itself, backslapping and high-fiving its way through its surprise attack on the people of Wonthaggi, a total lack of planning will mean that the much-needed desalination plant will take years to commission, if it actually goes ahead at all. Lack of water infrastructure, due to years of dithering, continues and will continue to inflict suffering on the people of Victoria. Our very life source over the next five years is still dependent on climate-driven precipitation. This government continues to lose ground against its competitors. Who are its competitors? The lack of infrastructure spending by this state government is extreme, even when compared to other Labor state governments. Before the worst drought in a century, other states with which Victoria competes for investment were seriously committed to water infrastructure investment. In 2005–06 New South Wales spent \$1.3 billion and Queensland spent \$1 billion. Contrast this with spending here in Victoria in 2005–06 of \$426 million.

A dreadful pall hangs over this state. Many fear that at a time when decisions need to be made, investment attracted and confidence restored, this government will repeat history in that it will fuff around with publicity announcements, launches and studies, and when these stunts wear thin the government will resume its bleating that the desalination plant should be partially funded by the federal government, just as it expects to happen with the level crossing at Melbourne's busiest intersection — here we go again — Springvale Road, Nunawading.

The Yarra stormwater project has been dumped, and the Latrobe recycling project has been put on hold. The desalination plant will draw focus away from Gunnamatta, where sewage still gushes out into the sea in horrendous volumes. Without doubt the hiatus in decision making on critical infrastructure spending is further evidence of this government's paralysis through analysis.

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to oppose the motion. I have been heartened by the number of contributions that have been made to this debate across all political parties. In particular I want to revisit very briefly some of the contributions made from the government side of the chamber. Members will recall that so far we have had six contributions from government representatives. The first to speak from this side of the chamber was Mr Leane, who was essentially the opening batsman for the team. He provided a general overview and the political context for the debate. He provided two specific examples that went to the very heart of the mismanagement of infrastructure by the Kennett government. One was in relation to privatisation and the lack of maintenance, and I quote:

... in their urgency to privatise most of these areas and with their lack of foresight they failed to put anything in place to compel the private companies to which they sold the services to commit to actually maintaining the existing infrastructure to any decent standard or to make provision in their budgets to put some of their profits into improving ... the infrastructure.

He went on to mention another fatal problem with respect to the Kennett government's management of infrastructure. He described its most villainous act at the time as putting nothing back in place to fill the void in relation to skills. We now have the situation, and have had for some time, as a result of the lack of foresight in those days, of not having the number and diversity of skills to ensure that the maintenance of our infrastructure is kept up to speed. It is a very difficult and onerous task for the current government to handle that situation.

The second speaker on the government side was Ms Broad, who put a very succinct and detailed account of the Bracks government's record with respect to infrastructure. There is one paragraph in her contribution that in lots of ways says it all:

The Bracks government has over the past seven years invested — —

Mr Dalla-Riva — On a point of order, President, the member is reading from *Hansard*. Clearly she

should not be reading direct quotes from a report of the current sitting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Dalla-Riva is correct. Members may not directly quote another member's contribution from *Hansard*. Paraphrasing or summarising is acceptable.

Ms TIERNEY — I am more than happy to do that, President. Ms Broad put it very succinctly, outlining exactly the dollar amounts that the Bracks government had spent during that period of time and highlighting that the Kennett government had provided very little compared to what the Bracks government has done. She also highlighted the commitments that were given in the recent state budget.

We then heard from Mr Pakula, who gave a very detailed summary of the road network infrastructure and concentrated on the plans that have been put in place in respect of that as well as into the future. Mr Thornley, the government's fourth speaker, presented a very detailed economic analysis of the infrastructure outlay that the Bracks government has committed to over that period of time, then Ms Pulford concentrated on rail freight, regional rail and water infrastructure. Today we have heard from Mr Tee, who again went over the same facts that have been presented by government members.

I was also able to hear most of the contributions from the other political parties during this debate, and I particularly listened to the Liberal Party's contributions because I could not fathom why there was such wild disparity of opinion between the Liberal Party and the Labor Party with respect to infrastructure investment. Without quoting Mr Finn, he made a statement in his contribution that he thought he was living in another world when he heard the debate, so I went back and re-read the contributions, and in particular those of Ms Broad and Mr Thornley.

Essentially, I have determined that there are no grey matters at all. The dollars are very clear; they are up front and there for all to see. I am now of the view that not only do we live in different worlds but we cannot even get the opposition to agree to a set of facts. Where there is no agreement it is a common practice to have a mediator who would try to at least get the base level of agreed facts on the table. Unfortunately that does not seem to be the case in this chamber, and that is a very sorry state of affairs.

We have been taken through the infrastructure investment in this state since 1999, and I have experienced during my short time in office further

infrastructure investment which provides another level of compatibility with what this government's agenda has been. We have seen the 2007–08 budget announcement in recent months. That was quickly followed by the announcement on water — a massive injection of infrastructure funds into this state. Since this house last sat, which is only three weeks ago, I can point to numerous examples in the electorate of Western Victoria Region that I have personally witnessed and experienced, starting with the turning of the sod by the Premier at the White Swan Reservoir north of Ballarat, a project which will result in the connection of the water pipeline between Ballarat and Bendigo.

We have also had major announcements about and ongoing work in the port of Geelong. The Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place, Mr Pallas, was in Geelong on Friday to make a number of announcements and meet with stakeholders. We also had the opening of the platform for the Geelong ring-road on Friday which provides an opportunity for members of the local community to go to a safe area and witness the progress and the development of that infrastructure that is so needed. It was well worth waiting for, not just for the locals but for people who travel through that area.

It is a pity that we still have not received official word or received the moneys from the federal government to finish the last stage. I am advised that if the Howard government does not step up to the mark fairly shortly we will be facing a \$4 million shortfall that will throw the construction timetable out completely. So far, so good — we have been able to deliver that project essentially on time. The ball is in the federal government's court in respect of infrastructure investment.

In conclusion, I have a number of points to make, and I will go straight to them because I understand there are other people who are eager to speak on this matter. The facts have been stated on this side of the chamber time and time again. There is nothing that can really be said to demonstrate that we are not telling the truth. I cannot understand the intent of the original motion. If the original motion sought to somehow embarrass the government, I would sincerely put it to the mover that that has failed. I think the motion really has achieved the reverse. It has provided members on this side of the chamber with an opportunity to explain, describe and give details as well as talk up the infrastructure agenda of the Bracks government and to remind the house of the years of neglect when the Kennett government reigned over this state and did not provide the necessary

infrastructure. It has taken an enormous amount of time and money to make up for that lost time.

I congratulate Mr Rich-Phillips for putting this motion and giving us an opportunity to demonstrate the government's agenda yet again. I look forward to similar motions that provide us with an opportunity to highlight the planning for growth, the infrastructure agenda and the vision this government has for the future, not just in delivering services to all Victorians but in constantly working for all Victorians.

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I have listened to some of the extraordinary contributions made by Labor members to this debate, and I would like to set the record straight for some of the new Labor members who obviously have no recollection of what has gone on in Victoria over the last 25 years. In the last 25 years in this state we have had 18 years of Labor government and only seven years of a Liberal government.

Ms Darveniza — Seven bad, dark years!

Ms LOVELL — They keep referring back to the seven good years of Liberal government, but they like to forget what went on in the Cain and Kirner years. We should look at what did go on then. Victoria lost the State Bank, thanks to the state government. We saw Pyramid go belly up just a matter of days after the Labor government had guaranteed that it was sound. The Liberal government began the privatisation of the State Electricity Commission and sold the Loy Yang power station. It established the gaming industry in Victoria and sent this state almost bankrupt, leaving the incoming Kennett government with a \$35 billion debt.

In seven short years the Kennett government transformed this state. It took it from rust bucket to solid gold. It totally transformed the road network in Melbourne. It established major projects such as Jeff's Shed, the new museum and many others. It turned this state into the place to be. In fact I remember in 1999 when I was coming down to the grand prix there was a young guy on the radio who kept referring to Melbourne being such a great place because of the activity in Melbourne and the amount of infrastructure that was being built around Melbourne. My sister and I kept yelling at the radio, 'Say "Thank you, Jeffrey"', because it was Jeffrey Kennett who turned this state around.

Jeff Kennett took the state from the rust bucket that the Labor Party left it as and turned it into solid gold. He left this government \$2 billion to carry on with. He did not leave it with the debt that the Cain and Kirner governments had left to him. He left it with a sound

base of projects that were going on, but we have not seen too many new projects established under this government. It is disappointing to the people of Victoria that things are now standing still in Victoria. I congratulate Gordon Rich-Phillips for bringing this motion into the house. It is a very important motion, and it is something that has created a lot of interest. Many speakers have wanted to speak on this issue, because we are suffering in our local electorates in the way of infrastructure.

I would just like to talk about a few of the issues in my electorate. The Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway is a major road that connects Shepparton and Mooroopna as part of the Midland Highway. It had been neglected and desperately needed to be upgraded. I fought very hard to get that road upgraded, and I was grateful when the government announced that the upgrade would go ahead. A report was put together that recommended either six or eight options for upgrading that road. It included everything from a very basic upgrade that would provide a four-lane road with 3.5 metre lanes but no lights or centre divide through to a six-lane road — three lanes each way — with a centre divide and lighting. Unfortunately what this government chose to do was to give us the minimal upgrade.

What we had was a road that was built in the days of tray trucks and milk cans and was not designed to take the large transport trucks or the 35 000 vehicles that travelled on it daily. Some of the lanes were only 2.7 metres wide. A semitrailer, from mirror to mirror, is actually 2.9 metres wide, so it was a very dangerous road. The government only committed \$6.4 million to that road to give it the very basic upgrade that would just provide four 3.5-metre lanes, with no centre divide and no lighting. It missed an opportunity to provide a safer road that would service the community of Shepparton and Mooroopna into the future. It is a road that travels through bushland. Ms Darveniza would know the road well, because I know the Darveniza family was originally from Mooroopna.

Ms Darveniza would know how dangerous the road is at night and the desperate need for lights on it. The causeway upgrade report identified that the cost of putting lighting on that road was only \$300 000, yet the government chose not to provide lights. Unfortunately between announcing its \$6.4 million and actually getting on with the job, which was a couple of years later, the cost of the causeway upgrade blew out to \$10 million. At least it is well under way now, and we will see a better road. But we will not get a safer road. We will not get a road that will service our community into the future. I think that we will be back in this place

fighting for further upgrades to that road in the very near future.

The Murray Valley Highway is another road that I spoke about earlier today. The highway is not in particularly good shape. I spoke about the section of it near Kerang, where white stone that has been used in the construction of the road makes it very glary and dangerous because it is difficult to see oncoming cars. There are dangerous intersections dotted right along the length of Murray Valley Highway. Certainly every time I visit the Shire of Towong locals mention various intersections of the Murray Valley Highway in their area where they are most concerned about accidents and visibility. We know that there are black spots along the entire length of this road and that more needs to be done to ensure the safety of Victorians and other Australians travelling on that road.

The Kilmore bypass is another road that is desperately needed in my electorate. The town is actually gridlocked. The old Hume Highway travels through the middle of Kilmore. It is a very narrow section of road right on the shopping strip. I think I spoke about it during the last sittings of Parliament. I talked about stopping to visit someone at the Carpet Court shop in Kilmore and it taking quite some time before I could get across that road. It is a very dangerous crossing. It is not good for the shopping centre. Kilmore desperately needs a proper bypass in order for the town to grow and prosper, but this government has talked about all sorts of other options, all of which would still result in the bottleneck that exists in the middle of the town.

The Yarra Glen bypass is another road that is desperately needed in the Northern Victorian Region. We have seen the federal government put \$5.5 million in funding on the table for that bypass, but there are no state funds. Ben Hardman, who is the member for Seymour in the other place, has had a particularly bad attitude to this. He has basically said, 'So sad, too bad'. I would just like to quote from an article that appeared in the *Mountain Views Mail* of 22 May. It says:

The state government does not have \$9 million to fund the Yarra Glen bypass.

The revelation comes as McEwan MP Fran Bailey delivered her part of the bargain in last week's federal budget, which contributed \$5.5 million to the project.

Seymour MP Ben Hardman has since been forced to admit that the state government cannot fund the project.

'Our budget has been and gone', Mr Hardman said.

...

His latest admission comes just a week after he said that the state government did have the money for the project.

He was out there telling the people of Yarra Glen that the state government was going to fund the project but — surprise, surprise! — it did not. The article goes on to say:

Since the state election last year the Bracks government had given the impression that while it had the money for the bypass, the federal government was to blame for the delay.

The federal government actually had its money on the table, ready to go, for the construction of this bypass. It is the state government that has let down the people of Yarra Glen because its money is not on the table.

Of course we all know the slogan used by VicRoads — country people die on country roads. Unfortunately that is very true. One of the reasons for this is the state of our roads in country Victoria. It is also because the good roads run north–south. The good roads are the major highways — the Hume Highway, the Northern Highway and the Calder Highway. However, the east–west roads are just like country lanes and can be quite dangerous. We have two highways running east–west — the Murray Valley Highway, which I have already talked about and which needs a tremendous amount of upgrading, and also the Midland Highway. I talked about a portion of it earlier. The Midland is not in quite as bad a condition as is the Murray Valley Highway, but it could do with improvements in some areas.

However, what is really needed in country Victoria is assistance to local governments to help them to upgrade the road network. The federal government is trying to contribute to this through the Roads to Recovery program, which local government loves. That money has been put to very good use in country Victoria. The Liberal Party at a state level had a very good policy which would have been unprecedented: a state government would have contributed to assisting local councils to fund local roads. I encourage this government to look at that policy and to adopt it. Our councils are finding that they really struggle with our network of roads and they need assistance desperately.

During the 2002 election this government made a number of promises about delivering natural gas in my electorate. Those promises have not been fulfilled. I would like to cite a few of the towns which were promised natural gas but have not received it from the Bracks government. I am just having trouble finding the paperwork — —

Mr Pakula — You should know them off by heart.

Ms LOVELL — I should know them off by heart but there are so many of them and I do not want to miss one.

Mr Thornley — Just give us a few.

Ms LOVELL — Okay. During the 2002 election, through either a media statement or candidate announcement, the communities of Wandong, Bright, Beechworth, Myrtleford, Alexandra, Bonnie Doon, Eldorado, Porepunkah, Nathalia and Yea were all promised that they would be connected to natural gas. To date not one of these communities has been connected to natural gas. It gets even worse than that because on page 11 of its 2002 policy for north-east Victoria and the Goulburn Valley, Labor said:

Labor will ensure that a range of communities in north-east Victoria benefit from the Bracks government's \$70 million statewide program, from the RIDF, to extend the reticulation of natural gas to small communities in regional and rural Victoria.

Given that not one community in the Goulburn Valley and north-east has been connected to natural gas under this program, I would say that that is very much a promise broken by the Labor government. We see far too many promises broken by this Labor government.

This morning I spoke at length on rail crossings in country Victoria. I am pleased that all parties supported the motion put forward by Philip Davis for a reference to be given to the Road Safety Committee to inquire into and report on existing, new and developing technologies to improve safety at level crossings. As I said this morning, we have crossings dotted right throughout country Victoria which have very poor visibility. The recently reopened Toolamba–Echuca line has around 20 unprotected crossings. Very poor signage was put on those crossings to announce that the line had been reopened after being closed for three years. We also had very little promotion of the reopening of that line by this government. People were unaware that trains would be coming through there. I cited a couple of very close misses on that line which were reported in our local papers. I would like once again to congratulate Cr Kevin 'Gunna' Ryan for his campaign to raise awareness of the danger and the need to upgrade some of the crossings on that line. He has done a tremendous job, a much better job than this government has done.

Unfortunately we saw the recent horrific accident on the Swan Hill line. I will not go over that accident again; we have spoken enough about it in this house. However, it does highlight the need for this Road Safety Committee inquiry. This accident was the

catalyst for the inquiry being adopted. We hope that if anything is to come out of the accident on the Swan Hill line, at least we may see some recommendations for improvements to safety at many of our level crossings. Only 35 per cent of Victoria's 2273 level crossings have flashing lights or boom gates. We all know that it is cost prohibitive to provide the flashing lights and boom gates at all of these level crossings. But as I said this morning, cost alone should not prevent us from trying to make our most dangerous crossings safer.

Rail tracks in country Victoria have also been the subject of a lot of media reporting. They are desperately in need of a major upgrade. At various times the speed limit for trains is reduced to 40 kilometres an hour due to the need for maintenance on these tracks. This makes the trains run late. The fast rail in Bendigo, which was hailed by this government as an upgrade, is actually really a downgrade to the rail there. We used to have two sets of tracks; a set of tracks going to Bendigo and a set of tracks going to Melbourne. We now only have one set of tracks.

Water is the biggest issue in northern Victoria. We have seen seven years of failure by the Bracks government on water infrastructure. It has totally ignored the needs of not only country Victoria but also metropolitan Melbourne for the last seven years. It has done nothing. It was only when Melbourne looked like having to go on to level 4 restrictions that the government had a knee-jerk reaction and decided that it needed to do something and to do something rather quickly.

What was the government's response to the water crisis? What did it do? Looking back over the past seven years the response has been to place all responsibility on householders and industry to create water savings. As I said, the government has done nothing to contribute to infrastructure to create new storages or additional water. Many towns in country Victoria have been on level 4 restrictions for many months, but the government could not have cared less. It has not even attempted to assist those towns. At 7.30 a.m. on 4 May Euroa ran out of water completely. Residents of Euroa got up, they turned on the tap to have a shower and there was no water. They turned on the tap to make a cup of tea and there was no water. What a desperate situation when a whole town has no water whatsoever. Even the hospital was without water. It had to truck in bottled water in order for the hospital staff to bathe their patients.

Mr Pakula interjected.

Ms LOVELL — I do not see how Mr Pakula thinks this is a funny issue. For the people of Euroa, running out of water was not a funny issue; it was a very serious issue for them. As it was in Wangaratta when at one stage this summer the town only had two weeks of water supply left. It has been a very serious issue for the people of Bendigo for a number of years. The people of Bendigo have been on level 4 restrictions for over 12 months now. This government did nothing until the Liberal Party announced a policy that would solve Bendigo's water crisis. This government then adopted that policy.

Mansfield is a town right at the foot of Lake Eildon. It was on level 4 water restrictions before Christmas and received only a little relief in May when those restrictions were reduced to level 3. The Bracks government's big answer for Melbourne is to pipe water from the Goulburn River out of Eildon to Melbourne but to not allow towns like Mansfield, which is right at the foot of Lake Eildon, to have access to that water.

When it seemed that Melbourne was going to reach level 4 restrictions the government looked for an answer. What was the answer it came up with? The first thing it did was to copy the Liberal Party's policy of building a desalination plant — a policy that it had mocked during the election. Even after the government decided to build a desalination plant, it thought, 'Where the hell are we going to get plans for this because we have done nothing about planning for it?', so it dug out plans that dated back to 1975. But of course a desalination plant will take some time to construct before it can produce water, if indeed it is ever constructed because we have heard bureaucrats making noises suggesting that perhaps the government is going to walk away from this project.

What else did the government announce? It went for an easy target and aimed at the Goulburn Valley. It said it would construct a pipeline to pipe water from the Goulburn River to Melbourne. That is not a smart plan. I had a look at the Victorian government's water grid fact sheet and its diagram of the statewide water connection. What it looks like to me is a funny straw. When we were kids and mum wanted to encourage us to drink milk, she had funny straws that had twists in them and went all over the place, and that is a bit what this statewide grid looks like: a funny straw. But all the water from this giant funny straw will lead to Melbourne.

I have news for the government. Eildon is not Melbourne's answer. The Eildon Dam is a climate-dependent catchment, and certainly at the

moment our reserves are much lower than those of Melbourne. You cannot pipe dust through a pipeline. When the Thomson Dam is empty, the Eildon Dam will always be empty. Melbourne needs a much more secure water supply. It is a fact that when the Thomson is empty Eildon will always be empty, but there are times when Eildon is empty and the Thomson is full, but that is never reversed. There is never a time when the Thomson is empty and Eildon is full. You cannot take water from a climate-dependent catchment and an area that is already suffering. The government has committed only \$600 million to this project, but we know that to upgrade the irrigation infrastructure in northern Victoria and find any savings at least \$2.2 billion needs to be committed. If state Labor had signed up to the federal proposal, this work would have been done and the water would have been shared between the irrigators and the environment. But the government did not sign up because it did not suit Labor's plan to steal the wealth out of the Goulburn Valley. Governments are — —

Mr Thornley — It did not suit the Treasury.

Ms LOVELL — That is right, Mr Thornley, it did not suit the Treasury because it would require the government to spend money elsewhere to find water for Melbourne. Under the federal government's plan the water would stay in the Murray–Darling Basin, it would stay in the catchment where it belongs. Governments are supposed to build infrastructure to add to a region's economic prosperity, not to pilfer its wealth.

A good example of this is when governments have built freeways and road systems like CityLink or the West Gate Bridge or the Western Ring Road in Melbourne. These roads have provided easy access to areas of Melbourne and they provide important transport routes for industry in those areas. No other community has ever been asked to give up part of its wealth or its industry in return for infrastructure, so why is this government asking the Goulburn Valley to give up its water in return for investment in infrastructure which is owned by the state?

Last year the Goulburn delivered only 354 gigalitres of water to the entire system. Our irrigators received only 29 per cent of their supply, and many of our towns have been on level 4 water restrictions for many months, yet this government thinks it can take almost 25 per cent of that water and pipe it to Melbourne. Our irrigation infrastructure is in desperate need of enormous investment, but that investment needs to be made just to deliver the entitlements of the system now. It will not deliver additional water for Melbourne. It also needs to

be made to allow for urban growth in regional towns and cities and to provide for the additional environmental flows this government has already identified.

When he was addressing the water services committee chairs and the food bowl group in Shepparton on the Thursday before the government announced this plan, the Treasurer said, 'We do not have to do this, because Melbourne has other options'. So why not use those other options instead of stealing the Goulburn Valley's water and stealing our wealth? What will Victoria get from Labor's grand announcement? Neither of these initiatives will deliver any water until at least 2010, and in the case of the desalination plant much longer. Farmers will have received more promises but will receive less water. Melburnians will receive bigger bills and will be carting buckets for at least four more years.

You have to ask yourself how the people of Mansfield, which is situated right below Lake Eildon, feel today, when they are facing restrictions for many months. They have been told they are not going to be able to access Eildon's water because the government is going to pipe it to Melbourne. Seventy-five gigalitres of water will flow straight past them to flush Melbourne's toilets. It hardly seems fair. How do the people of Kilmore and Broadford feel? They have been on level 4 restrictions for many months. They have not had access to water from Eildon or from the Goulburn River — they have had to truck in water — and the Treasurer's funny straw will just take that water straight past them and deliver it to Melbourne.

The government's announcement has totally ignored the plight of country communities on level 4 restrictions. In fact on the very day that the government announced it would build a pipeline to pipe Goulburn water to Melbourne the government's own water authority, Goulburn Valley Water, wrote to 33 towns to inform them that they were to go on to level 4 restrictions from 1 July. The towns named in that letter were Alexandra, Avenel, Barmah, Bonnie Doon, Cobram, Colbinabbin, Congupna, Corop, Dookie, Eildon, Girgarre, Goulburn Weir at Baxters Road, Katamatite, Katandra West, Kirwans Bridge, Kyabram, Mangalore, Merrigum, Molesworth, Mooroopna, Murchison, Nagambie, Rushworth, Seymour, Shepparton, Stanhope, Strathmerton, Tallarook, Tatura, Tongala, Toolamba, Tallygaroopna and Yarroweyah. What an insult to those communities to receive such a letter dated 19 June from the government's own water authority, Goulburn Valley Water, on the very day this government said, 'We are going to pipe water to Melbourne from the Goulburn system'.

In its press release the government hailed it as a historic project and said it would 'provide much-needed water to farmers' — that is a joke — 'stressed rivers and Melbourne households and businesses'. Melbourne households and businesses! What about the households and businesses in northern Victoria that the Labor government has totally ignored? Why should it not be to our advantage for growth and to enhance our ability to grow because we have the water? It should be our competitive advantage to attract industries out of Melbourne to northern Victoria where the water is. We should have the ability to do that, but no, Melbourne is going to steal our water. It is going to bring it down here and keep the industry in Melbourne because this Labor government is a city-centric government.

What was the government's response when the people of Shepparton raised the fact that we were to move on to level 4 water restrictions while Melbourne still remains on level 3a? An article in the *Shepparton News* of 29 June said:

The move to stage 4 will mean Shepparton residents are on the strictest bans in the state, while Melbourne will stay on stage 3a.

Residents will be banned from watering lawns or gardens using town water or using it to wash their cars, other than windows, mirrors and lights.

Goulburn Valley Water chief executive Laurie Gleeson said the restrictions were necessary due to the extremely dry conditions and record low inflows into storages during 2006 and the first half of this year.

Mr Gleeson said the move to stage 4 restrictions was part of contingency planning for the Murray–Darling Basin.

A spokesperson for Victorian water minister John Thwaites said the state capital —

Melbourne —

could remain on the newly created stage 3a restrictions because the city's water storages levels were better than Goulburn Valley's.

Yet the government is saying, 'Your storages are lower than Melbourne's, but we are still going to take water out of your storages and pipe it to Melbourne'. What an insult. I do not know how this government can even consider this plan when our storages are more depleted than Melbourne's and when we are in such dire straits. We have lower rainfall than Melbourne's catchments and we need the water to stay in our system to supply the entitlements that are there now, to allow for growth of industry and urban development in northern Victoria and to provide water that has already been identified as being needed for the environment of the Goulburn and Murray system. This is a flawed plan. The state government should sign up to the federal proposal,

which would deliver at least double the investment in infrastructure and double the savings, which would be shared among irrigators and the environment and stay in the Murray–Darling Basin.

Labor falsely claims there is support for this project. It says there is support for it in the Goulburn Valley. There is not. It has a sham consultative group. Almost 1000 people rallied in Shepparton on a day of very poor weather. The rally was supposed to be outside and there was no time to notify people that it would be held inside because of the weather. I think at least double the number would have attended if people had known it was being held inside. There were almost 1000 people at that rally and there were almost 1000 people at the information meeting a couple of days before the rally. The government claims it has the support of Northern Victorian Irrigators. Northern Victorian Irrigators has more than 850 members, yet in the vote that was taken that day only 106 people voted in favour of the motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Vogels) — Order! Pursuant to sessional orders the time for general business has expired.

General business extended on motion of Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan).

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — The motion that was actually put at the Northern Victorian Irrigators meeting did not mention the pipeline. It just asked, 'Do people support investment into infrastructure in the Goulburn-Murray region?'. Of course people support investment in infrastructure, but not at the expense of our water being piped to Melbourne. Again, we had a large rally in Kerang last week, which was attended by about 800 people. The government was due to hold a community cabinet in Kerang, but it clashed with the rally, so the government ran away and abandoned its community cabinet. Even though the communities of Gannawarra and Swan Hill had put an enormous amount of time into planning for the community cabinet to come to their region, it did not come.

We also have a petition that has been signed by about 14 000 people so far. That petition will continue to grow as sheets come in over the next few weeks. There are 14 000 people so far. That is a tremendous number of people who have signed the petition that was instigated by Eiril Rathjen, who is a farmer at Colbinabbin. Win TV ran a poll saying, 'Ring in and tell us whether you are for or against the Bracks government's plan to construct this pipeline'. Ninety-seven per cent of all respondents who rang in said that they were against.

Mrs Peulich — How many?

Ms LOVELL — There were 97 per cent against it. Only 3 per cent rang in and said they were for it, and there was probably a concentrated effort by the local Labor Party branch to muster that many calls. So government members do not have support for this flawed plan. Labor should abandon the plan to steal water from the Goulburn Valley and should instead invest in infrastructure and keep the savings that may be generated from that in the valley. There have been no guarantees from this government that savings will ever be found, yet its press release states that 75 gegalitres will flow to Melbourne anyway. That is the only guarantee we have — 75 gegalitres will go to Melbourne. We have no guarantee that the savings will be generated, we have no guarantee of a continued investment in infrastructure in the region and we have no guarantee that there will not be a second or third pipeline built.

We are hearing from people who are in the know about this project that the reserve that has been allocated for the pipeline is being put aside with enough area for three pipelines to be put in. The chief executive officer of Melbourne Water said just a couple of days after the government went up and held its meeting with Northern Victorian Irrigators in Shepparton that this plan is not enough to provide for Melbourne past 2011, so we can see exactly what is going to happen. We can see that a second pipeline will be put in, if the Bracks government is still in power, because that will be its easiest option. It is not good for northern Victoria. The two Labor members for Northern Victoria Region, Kaye Darveniza and Candy Broad, should be opposing this plan and should be standing shoulder to shoulder with the people of northern Victoria, who do not want to see our water piped to Melbourne. It is not that we do not want Melbourne to have additional water but that we believe this government must invest in other proposals for Melbourne. It must invest in recycling, it must invest in desalination and perhaps it even needs to invest in new dams. Has it explored that? No, it has just taken the easy option, which will deprive the people of northern Victoria of water.

The people of northern Victoria have no other option — our water comes from the Goulburn or the Murray system and we have nowhere else to go for water. We do not have salt water that we can desalinate, we do not have areas where we can put additional dams, as have been identified for Melbourne, and we do not have the huge recycling projects that are able to be generated here in Melbourne. We are going to be deprived of our water just in order for the Bracks government to find a quick fix. But the people of

Melbourne are even saying to the people in northern Victoria, 'This is not right; the Bracks government should not be stealing your water. It should be investing in real infrastructure in real projects that will find additional water for Melbourne'. On that note I think I have probably said enough, and I will conclude my contribution.

Mr KAVANAGH (Western Victoria) — I wish to take the opportunity to express some views on the matters raised by this motion. Although I am sympathetic with a lot of the intention of the motion, it is my intention to vote against it. I feel that the motion is rather negatively expressed, and being non-ideological in nature it seems to me that a more cooperative approach from the chamber than is represented by the motion is warranted.

In response to opposition claims about the inadequacy of infrastructure, government members have repeatedly claimed that large amounts of money have been expended on infrastructure in Victoria. Mr O'Donohue sometime ago made a point which has often occurred to me, which is that the amount spent on infrastructure is not the point. The point is what is actually gained by that expenditure and the achievements. To say that the government has spent \$16 billion on infrastructure is not a defence — and it is certainly not a boast — if that money has not been wisely spent, and it seems to me that the money has not been very wisely spent.

The government is crisscrossing the state with pipelines for water. As I have raised in the house before, a former water minister as well as other former members of Parliament from western Victoria have been urging the government to consider using some of the water from the Otways, 93 per cent of which presently flows into the ocean. The analysis they have done, which I have referred to in the past, shows that the water would be much cheaper than the water from the desalination plant.

On the desalination plant, according to the *Age* the cost of the desalination plant is going to be about two and a half times higher than it would have been if the government had taken action 18 months or two years earlier because of the increase in demand around the world for desalination expertise. This seems to me to be a lost opportunity for Victorians. Victorians are going to face approximately a 100 per cent increase in their water charges when, with better planning, increases could have been limited to about 40 per cent.

In Melbourne the road network is obviously deteriorating. It seems to me to get worse by the week. As I mentioned in my budget reply speech, western

Victoria is in very strong need of upgrades to its highway system, particularly the Western Highway.

Public transport in Melbourne is at the point of collapse. At peak hour people cannot even get onto trains anymore. This seems, as I have said before, to be an embarrassment even to a Third World city. We also have among the slowest trams in the world. People coming into Melbourne from Ballarat are forced to stand for long periods while high speed trains travel 100 or so kilometres. People who get on the train in the morning from places like Ballan and Bacchus Marsh are not able to get a seat in those high speed trains.

Today it was revealed that because of the cold weather last night, Melbourne's gas network has come under severe strain. According to reports on the radio this morning, the gas supply has failed in parts of Melbourne today. This all seems to point towards an infrastructure system which is inadequate. Although I will not be voting in favour of the motion, I seriously urge the government to improve Victoria's infrastructure.

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise to make a contribution to this debate regarding infrastructure. I will be opposing the motion before the house. I will particularly talk about water infrastructure which the government has put a lot of time, thought and money behind. There is a whole range of issues that could be spoken about, and that have been spoken about by members on this side of the chamber and by members opposite, but I will particularly talk about water.

I am pleased that Ms Lovell raised the issue of water because we on the government side of the chamber are happy to discuss and talk about water, our plans for water and the things that we have done to preserve, conserve and plan for water into the future, at any time. We believe that in the past we have put in place not only infrastructure and strategies that have led to significant water conservation, but also that our plans for the supply of water in the future are very sound and good, and are supported by Victorians both in metropolitan Melbourne and in rural and regional Victoria. We are more than happy to talk about it.

I will first of all talk about the most recent infrastructure projects that have been announced by the government. They are the desalination plant and the food modernisation projects, which are very big infrastructure projects which will ensure that we have secure water into the future, even given the fact that we are facing climate change and we have experienced

severe drought over a long period, and possibly will continue to experience.

We are not out of the drought yet, even though it is very refreshing to experience the amount of rain that we have had in recent times. Of course that cannot be said for the amount of rain that they have had in Gippsland, where they have experienced floods. But this is the first time for many years that it has really felt like a winter, where we have had some cold weather, the ground is soggy underfoot, and you need to wear a coat and take a brolly.

I refer back to the infrastructure debate. Under its water plan, which is contained in *Our Water Our Future — The Next Stage of the Government's Water Plan*, the government will in fact make a \$4.9 billion statewide investment. As Mr Kavanagh said, it is not just about money. It is not enough just to say, 'Here is the money; we are going to throw it at a problem because that will fix it'. That is not the issue. You need to have a government that is prepared to put money behind the projects, but you have got to make sure that they are the right projects. You have not got an infinite amount of money so you have to choose your priorities, and choose the money that will go into those priorities. The \$4.9 billion statewide investment is a significant investment. We believe it is a very well-thought-out investment not only for the short term but for the longer term.

One of the world's biggest desalination plants will be in operation by 2011. In her contribution Ms Lovell talked about the fact that our government stole the Liberal Party's plans for a desalination plant, but I can tell Ms Lovell that we did not steal its plan. The Liberal's plan was to build a desalination plant for Melbourne, but its budget was \$400 million. It was less than half of what it would actually cost. The Liberal Party committed funds in its election promises, but the funds were not enough; they were significantly less than what we are committing and would not have actually met the cost. Members of the opposition never said where they were going to put it. If they were going to put one in place, they never said where it was going to be and exactly how it would operate.

This will be one of the world's biggest desalination plants. This is not just Victoria's but Australia's biggest ever irrigation upgrade for our food bowl in northern Victoria. It is very significant. It is the biggest upgrade ever of our irrigation system, which provides water for an enormous number of farmers and fruit growers and a whole range of horticultural areas. There will be 375 billion litres of new water. It is not just about throwing money at a problem; it is about saying, 'Here

is the money we are going to put into infrastructure projects. This is what the projects are and this is what the outcomes and results will be'. There will be 375 billion litres of new water. That is going to be a 50 per cent boost to Melbourne and Geelong's supplies. There will be 250 kilometres of new pipelines taking water around the state to areas where it is needed to regions such as Hamilton, Western Port and South Gippsland. They are very significant infrastructure projects.

The desalination plant, which will be in the Wonthaggi area, will cost some \$3.1 billion and will be in operation by 2011. This will be one of the largest desalination plants in the world. Sufficient renewable energy will be purchased to offset the anticipated needs — some 90 megawatts of electricity. This plant will be carbon neutral, which is very significant when you think about the fact that we are in climate change and we need to take the amount of greenhouse gases and energy that we are using into consideration with any of the infrastructure projects we are putting in place.

The desalination plant will deliver the single largest boost to Melbourne's water supply since the Thomson Dam was constructed. It was the biggest water project of its time, and it was built some 25 years ago. This desalination plant is an equivalent infrastructure project to the creation of the Thomson Dam. It will provide more than one-third of Melbourne's yearly water supply without relying on rainfall in our catchments. We are putting the money into this particular piece of infrastructure, this desalination plant, that will deliver water to Melbourne, which means we will not have to rely on rainfall for one-third of Melbourne's water. We know that we are seeing less rainfall now than in the past — in fact, we have been seeing some of the driest years in living memory.

I want to talk about the food bowl modernisation project. It is a really good project and is welcomed by irrigators. It shows lot of foresight by the government in putting money into an infrastructure project that will see the irrigation system in that food bowl modernised. We know that some 900 gegalitres of water is lost in that irrigation system every time the system flows. It does not matter whether that system is flowing at 10, 20, 50 or 100 per cent — every time the system runs 900 gegalitres is lost through leakage, evaporation and overruns. Anybody who knows that irrigation system and has been out there and looked at those irrigation channels knows that this is an old system which has been in place for some 80 years now. It is in desperate need of modernisation. Normally the individuals who are responsible for the infrastructure are the users of

that infrastructure. Normally it would be down to the irrigators to actually meet the cost of that infrastructure, which is enormous. The Bracks government recognises that there is a need for an upgrade to the irrigation system.

The propositions were put forward to the government by irrigators from the food bowl group in northern Victoria. They came from irrigators and people who actually use the system. They came up with the idea and put the proposal to the government. We listened to what they had to say. We looked at their proposal, and what we have done is to put the money behind this infrastructure project. It is a historic opportunity to ensure the future prosperity of the region. We recognise the prosperity of that region and the amount of food it produces. We recognise the very significant contribution it makes not only to the local economy but also to the economy of Victoria. Through major new investment in modernising very ageing infrastructure we will create a world-class irrigation system.

This is something that the northern irrigators in that region want and support and it is a project that the food bowl group wants. Recently Mr Lee has come out and said that the Sunraysia irrigators support the project.

Mr Drum — You're kidding!

Ms DARVENIZA — Mr Drum says that I am joking. I am not joking. There is no doubt that there is growing support for the project, as people understand exactly what it will deliver for irrigators and for that region. They understand the significant contribution that the government is making and that members of the government have been listening to what irrigators say they want up there in an upgrade of their irrigation system. As I said, Danny Lee, the chair of the Sunraysia Irrigators Council, said:

One of the positives for all Victorian irrigators on both the Murray and Goulburn rivers is that currently no allocations are made until the water for the total losses of 900 gegalitres —

as I said, 900 gegalitres are lost whenever the system runs —

is in account. Once the project is completed, the losses will have been reduced to 450 gegalitres, so allocations will be able to be made far earlier in each irrigation season.

Mr Lee is right. He is on the money there.

The government will commence the first stage of the project, which will secure savings of 225 billion litres annually. That is an enormous amount of water that will be saved with the new state funding of \$600 million

that the government is putting in. It is a very big commitment of dollars to this project and there will be a further contribution for water authorities and associations that will take the project up to a \$1 billion upgrade. So \$1 billion will be spent on upgrading the northern irrigation system.

Ms Lovell — Not enough!

Ms DARVENIZA — Ms Lovell interjected, saying 'Not enough'. I ask Ms Lovell: what did the Liberals and The Nationals do when they were in government for seven years?

Ms Lovell interjected.

Ms DARVENIZA — What did you do to in any way upgrade that irrigation system? I will tell you what you did: zero, zilch, nada, nothing! That is what you did! What are we doing? We are listening to what those irrigators are saying they want. We have been out there and we know that the irrigation — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Vogels) — Order! Ms Darveniza will address the Chair.

Ms DARVENIZA — We know that the irrigation system does need upgrading, and we are putting our money behind it. Extra water will be shared equally between the irrigators — —

Mr Drum — Melbourne!

Ms DARVENIZA — Between the irrigators, the environment — and Melbourne. That is right. It will be shared a third, a third, a third. By 2010 a 70-kilometre pipeline will be built from the Goulburn River to the Sugarloaf Reservoir at a cost of \$750 million to allow the transfer to Melbourne of 75 billion litres of water. As I said, we are losing up to 900 billion litres of water through leaks, evaporation and inefficiencies. It will take up to eight years to complete the upgrade and it will involve a total investment of \$2 billion.

Ms Lovell also talked about some plan for extra pipelines to be built. I can say that the desalination plant will be built in such a way that it will be able to deliver twice as much water as it will in the initial setup. What I can say to Ms Lovell and others is that if they are correct and in future we need more water, then we would not be looking at the cost of building another pipeline from the Goulburn to Sugarloaf. It will be far cheaper and much easier to simply upgrade the desalination plant, which will be built so that that can happen.

I wanted to talk a bit about our rivers. I could talk about a range of things that the government has done, including the measures that the government has taken to save or conserve water, the rebates that the government has put in place and the excellent job that all householders have done in the conserving and recycling water. That has often been under initiatives put in place by the government, but it has taken a lot of readjustment by householders, which they have done — and householders right across Victoria are to be congratulated on that. I could talk about that, but I will not.

I do want to mention very quickly the environment, because it is important. We all know that our river systems have suffered because of the drought. There has been an additional \$1 million over four years for river health. It is a significant amount of dollars for the specific purpose of making our river systems healthier. The government has provided \$115 million for the Murray River environmental flows. Victoria is the first state to have identified its water savings for the Living Murray initiative. An extra 18 gigalitres for Murray River environmental flows have been delivered to assist with the river red gum watering. There has been more than \$200 million for returning Snowy River flows. The first target of delivering extra water in the Snowy River was achieved on time — and that was 38 gigalitres in 2005. More than \$600 million has been provided for the Yarra River package, including investigations of pollution hot spots, litter traps, septic tanks and sewer upgrades. I know that this is something that Mr Drum often talks about, and it is one area where the government has put money. There is 10 gigalitres of extra flow to the Thomson River. Those have all been delivered.

Members of the opposition are in no position to say about water and other infrastructure projects that this government has not been doing enough. More than \$100 million would be wasted if it put in place the plans put forward by the opposition before the last election to build on the Maribyrnong River a dam that would be empty most of the time. That was a plan put forward by Ms Lovell and Mr Baillieu, the Leader of the Opposition in the other place: to build a dam that would have no water in it. The desalination plant proposed by the opposition was underfunded, and the opposition never said where it was going to place it or how it would operate. Not only that but what members of the opposition would have the government do — Ms Lovell mentioned this in her contribution so I want to mention it as well — is sign up to the Howard government's ill-conceived Murray-Darling Basin plan.

Mrs Peulich — That's just playing politics with water, isn't it?

Ms DARVENIZA — It is not playing politics with water. That plan is ill-conceived because it is really not about ensuring that our water stays here. Ms Lovell says that what she is on about is ensuring that Victorian water stays in Victoria. If we signed up to that plan you could be damn sure that our water would not be staying in Victoria. It would be going to New South Wales or further down the Murray to South Australia, where people are looking eagerly for us to sign up to that plan. Mark my words on that. This is a bad motion. It does not deserve to be supported by anybody in this chamber.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — This important debate has continued over three weeks. I have listened to most of the speakers or have read what they have had to say in *Hansard*. In the debate about infrastructure we have heard a lot of words such as 'productivity', 'competitive advantage' and 'projects', which is probably one of the biggest words we have heard. We have a focus on big projects such as pipelines, desalination plants and gas plants being the order of the day. A lot of figures have been thrown around in the debate — millions or billions of dollars, megawatts and gigalitres.

Mr Vogels — What is a gigalitre?

Ms Lovell — A thousand megalitres.

Ms PENNICUIK — Thank you, Ms Lovell. There is a mindset in this debate if you listen and look at the whole thing that infrastructure equals big projects and big dollars spent. That is not to say we do not need large investment in our public transport system, for example, but references to the environment and climate change were few and far between. I believe I can say that Mr Barber, Mr O'Donohue and Mr Atkinson made some reference to those issues. The definition of infrastructure rarely looks at the natural system that supports our way of life on earth. There has not been much mention of the preservation of forests or the health of our rivers, estuaries and coastlines. The preservation of species diversity is central to any discussion on infrastructure.

In my inaugural speech I made the point that the economy is dependent on the environment and healthy ecosystems and not the other way around. These vital assets are continually run down and when in competition with development, including infrastructure development, often local communities have to fight for their preservation. Some speakers have touched on the

need for long-term planning. Decisions made or not made by government cast long shadows. For example, in the middle of the last century land was set aside for public transport on the outskirts of Melbourne but in the 1950s and 1960s that land was sold off. I will leave people to work out which government it was that did that. It was sold off for housing, and we are now living with the impact of that decision because whereas previously railway lines, light rail or other transport modes could have gone further out into the suburbs that cannot happen now because the land has been taken up for other uses. If we had our time again we might not build on flood plains so that we would have less issues with floods.

The Greens have been talking about issues like climate change and water for a long time. People were not taking notice and no plans were made to deal with these issues. We are now trying to deal with them during a water crisis and a crisis caused by climate change. The decision to focus on roads over public transport has cast shadows which we are seeing now, and it will cast further shadows when we run out of oil, as scientists who are studying peak oil demands are telling us we will.

A focus in this debate has been on supply and assumes ever-increasing consumption. We are a consumer society. We consume goods, we consume energy and we consume water — and we consume them copiously. It would have been encouraging to hear in this debate more about the impact of the paradigm of the consumer society on our ecological systems that support life on earth and consequently on the type of infrastructure that we think we need. We think that way and think we need to build the infrastructure, but it is not necessarily the case that we have to continue consuming more and that the demand curve we see ever rising will continue to rise. We can think differently and reduce our demand for goods, our demand for energy and our demand for water.

It would not be right if I did not take this opportunity to mention the ill-conceived channel deepening proposal as a fine example of something that is predicated on the spurious need for bigger ships so that we can continue to consume more and more things that we do not need. As I said, we should not just go on consuming more power with the demand curve going up and the need that we have heard about in this debate to produce more electricity mainly to deal with peak load requirements in summer when people turn on their air-conditioners. Instead we should be doing things like designing houses, offices, schools, hospitals and other buildings to be more energy and water efficient so that we do not need to build more power and water infrastructure.

There seems to be an assumption in the debate that water restrictions could cease and we could start splashing water around if only we could have more dams, pipes and a desalination plant to secure supply. In fact people have been saying for many decades that Australia is a dry country — the driest continent on earth besides Antarctica — and that we actually have to live within our means in terms of water. We have to supply local needs from local resources and not ship it around through pipelines or rely on our needs being met by the supply that is not there. It is about rethinking the way we live with water and thinking about living with less water. It does not need to be a hardship; it is a matter of thinking and acting differently from the way we have thought in the past. We need to think differently and to live within our means. We have to live with the constraints of the natural environment and with the problems that we have brought upon ourselves such as climate change and species loss. We need to factor these issues into the discussion on infrastructure. The environment is under stress, infrastructure is under stress and people are under stress. The debate we have been having over the last few weeks is not going to help with those issues unless we change our thinking and live more sustainably in the environment in this state of Victoria in the country of Australia on this planet that we all share.

I remind the house that the Greens will not support the motion, not because there is not some truth in the motion — that is, that the government has not lived up to its infrastructure requirements for the state — but because we would rather support motions that have a positive outcome of action and something to do rather than motions that simply note the failure of or condemn the government.

Sitting suspended 6.28 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — It has now been several weeks since this debate was first introduced into the house by Gordon Rich-Phillips, and I rise in support of the motion noting the failure of the state government over seven years to facilitate the required investment in public infrastructure to ensure the security of supply and reliability of water, electricity, public transport and the road network. Noting also that a number of members of Parliament have had throat tickles, colds and viruses, I was very proudly keeping myself pretty healthy until about 15 minutes ago, when suddenly there was a tickle in my throat, and I thought Mr Pakula must be delighted. He has probably been spreading his germs in the hope of curtailing my contribution. However, that is not to be. This is probably one of the most important debates that I as a member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region

could participate in, because if there is one outstanding need, it is precisely to do with infrastructure.

Mr Pakula — Like building the Mordialloc Creek Bridge.

Mrs PEULICH — We will hear a little bit more about the Mordialloc Creek Bridge, but Mr Pakula may be interested to learn, in light of the debacle of what was the Mordialloc bridge reconstruction, that I received an SMS message about an hour ago advising that a truck has lost its tyre and as a result the Nepean Highway and Beach Road have been totally closed and emergency services have not been able to get through.

The bungling of the Mordialloc bridge reconstruction, the concept, the execution and the lack of consultation are in many ways typical of the failings of the Bracks Labor government. I would like to make a comment before I get into specifics, and of course there are many. In fact I was contemplating bringing in a wheelbarrow, because there are so many cases and so many infrastructure causes and issues that each of the 11 seats requires and deserves representation on.

Whilst all the lower house MPs — and I am generalising and being generous here — who represent the South Eastern Metropolitan Region are nice people in themselves and some work harder than others, what has struck me beyond belief is the lack of vigour in the representation of those communities. That should be contrasted with, for example, the vigour with which many members of the opposition who were acting in a lower house capacity took it right up to our own government and kicked its backside when it failed to deliver on many occasions. I have not yet seen any evidence of active and vigorous representation by current lower house MPs across the south-eastern region. Notwithstanding that no doubt there is some behind-the-scenes representation, I think many of the MPs have really been hiding underground for quite some time.

Mr Pakula interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I noted that the preceding couple of speakers, and Mr Pakula, who has had ample opportunity to speak on this, indicated that they plan to oppose the motion, in particular members of the Greens. I respect their views and I respect their priorities. In particular, Ms Pennicuik mentioned that previous governments often cast very long shadows and that it was the communities that often bore the brunt of those early decisions. There is no doubt about that, and of course the Kennett government came under considerable attack. But let me say that the shadows

cast by the Guilty Party when we took office in 1992 were very long and far reaching. I know that is not what Mr Pakula wants to hear, but Victoria was left virtually bankrupt, with record unemployment and inflation, despair and fiscal irresponsibility. Debt levels were up and financial performance was down. That is really what we were left with, so no doubt the shadows of the Guilty Party were certainly very dramatic in their impact on Victoria and Victorians.

Ms Pennicuik also spoke about the fact that she recognises that infrastructure is under stress, the environment is under stress and people are under stress. The comment I would like to make to Ms Pennicuik is that voting for this motion does not mean you are being negative. The process of democratic debate in any chamber, including this one, is that the government will put on its best spin, however unconvincing it may be — and we hear it regularly.

The role of opposition parties, or non-government parties, is to highlight the deficiencies in the hope that in the melting pot of democratic debate we give the ministers, the government and the bureaucracies an opportunity to fix some of the outstanding issues and some of the bungles and stuff-ups — some of which may be due to ministerial ineptitude, some of which may be due to ministerial laziness, some of which may be due to the bureaucracy itself or to sheer chance — before those problems take the government down. We are actually providing the government with a service. We may not be providing all the solutions, but we are providing a great service. A good minister will always listen to the contributions of members of the opposition and act on them, because that is how they stay ministers, and former ministers who no doubt had a guiding hand in their development would be able to attest to that.

What is infrastructure? It is our physical capital, and one truth is that in order to develop our social capital we need physical capital in place. A perfect example is that we all have needs to fulfil with our families, employment, friends and activities in the community. If you cannot minimise the amount of time you consume travelling from point A to point B because of poor infrastructure, and if you cannot get to a doctor to have your medical needs attended to, then your social needs are not going to be fulfilled. You cannot speak of social needs being addressed separately from the physical and capital needs of our community. One facilitates the fulfilment of the other. I have the highest regard for Mr Kavanagh, and I am very pleased to have got to know him and enjoy his friendship, but on this matter I think he is making an error.

This is an opportunity for all of us to highlight those things which will help our communities, our families and Victorians to get a better deal. This ought to be the case in affluent times in particular. Somebody asked, ‘What has the Kennett government done?’. The Kennett government made a very significant contribution to changes in Victoria. It addressed the debt level and improved the state’s financial performance, and all of these have been contributing factors to the Bracks Labor government being able to lay very solid foundations for the delivery of its key priorities.

Mr O’Donohue — High on the hog.

Mrs PEULICH — Absolutely. Of course we have had affluent times. We do have rivers of gold flowing into government coffers. We have had \$57 billion coming in from GST returns, so there is no excuse why infrastructure should be neglected. I am not talking about major projects per se; I am talking about things like train services, like schools, like the building of hospitals, like the building of roads, like the improvements to our train services, like developing an integrated transport network and, perhaps, some other major and more contentious project. Infrastructure is a very broad term, and I cannot for the life of me see how anyone could possibly vote against this motion, but of course I will respect their right to do so.

In affluent times our basic services should be better. I spoke at length during my last contribution in the house about policing, about education and about water and electricity, so I intend to touch only very briefly on some of those. The most significant part of my time will be devoted to talking about train and road services affecting the South Eastern Metropolitan Region, which are at crisis point. Our investment in our future physical infrastructure should be much stronger. It is in good times that you invest in your community. The member opposite has a very successful business. He knows that a very successful year means that you can set aside some capital for the future development of your business, and this is how it should be for the government. When you have a lot of money coming in, that is when you lay strong foundations for future years that may not be so good, so this is a very important debate for Victorians and for the prosperity of our state.

Unfortunately this government’s history on infrastructure has been long, extensive and largely lacklustre. In many instances it has been based on short-term needs. Many of them have been patch-ups or botched-up jobs. The costings have blown out, and there has been a substantial amount of money wasted. One may look for the reasons why that has occurred.

There are ample examples, and one is the bureaucracy and the minister not being in communication. I raised that yesterday and used a local example. Five days after the manager of VicRoads told me that the construction of the Dingley bypass was on track I received a letter from the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place, Mr Pallas, saying there was no longer anything like the Dingley bypass and telling me that we will have the South Road extension and the Dandenong bypass but that two significant chunks — stage 2 and stage 4 — of what was previously known as the Dingley arterial, which is supported by both the Dandenong and Kingston councils, are not on the agenda.

The government has demonstrated a lack of wisdom in not connecting major arterial flows, not only because that would enhance the social capital of people going to work, driving their families around and going to doctor appointments but also because it would protect our environment. We need to consider the number of people who spend more time now in cars that are guzzling petrol and polluting our environment when our roads are so poorly developed and so poorly integrated. The government's greatest failing is not connecting those major arterial flows, and those opportunities have almost been lost. I urge members of the government to place pressure on members of the cabinet and their ministers to make sure this is the highest priority.

It is about more than just having a plan or a strategy. It is about more than taking out an expensive advertisement or having a plan or a pamphlet. As I said before, it has to be an integrated plan, it has to be a common-sense plan that addresses needs, it has to be funded and it has to be implemented and managed carefully. People ask why the Bracks Labor government has been so bad? They say, 'They are spending more money but we are getting less'. Of course that was the linchpin of Mr Thornley's argument — given that the Bracks Labor government was spending more, it must be delivering more in infrastructure. Mr O'Donohue blew that out of the water. He countered by saying that clearly it is the outcome, not the input, that counts. I concur with that completely.

Where do we see this waste? We see it, for example, in the money that has been set aside for school maintenance in the past, not under the present minister but under the previous minister. There has been deliberate underspending on maintenance so that it can be rolled into a future year to create a surplus. Those types of accounting techniques, despite people trying to conceal them, are blatantly obvious. Poor

administration is a major reason. There is also the poor administration of contracts. Labor is adamant and has been emphatic in criticising various privatisations which the Cain and Kirner governments began and we continued. But the lost opportunity was in the poor administration of those contracts by current government ministers, who just do not have the experience or the commitment required.

There is also sloppy ministerial performance. We know that there are some ministers who are exceptional, and we know there are a number of ministers who are absolute duds. Fortunately the Premier has moved some of them on, but I suggest that he has a few challenges to face in the future. One of them has been responsible for water. I will not go into great depths with that — to use a pun.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs PEULICH — I am glad Mr Pakula is not asleep. There was no desalination plant. Multimillions of dollars have been committed but the Treasurer could not enunciate to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee what some of those water projects are.

Inside sources tell me that Rob Skinner may in actual fact have some grave reservations about this, which have been broadcast in the papers, as well as some reservations about the desalination plant. Other sources suggest that the costing for the desalination process in itself has been inadequate because it has not taken into account the cost that will be required to increase the electricity capacity and build another substation to be able to fulfil the desalination electricity requirements. It is for those types of reasons that major projects blow out in time, and the only way the government has learnt of keeping them under contract is by downsizing those contracts by getting rid of an extra lane of road or getting rid of the shoulder roads as a way of containing costs. But that is to the detriment of those projects and of those roads.

Does Victoria have a blueprint? We have certainly heard a lot of spin and rhetoric. However, from all the surveys that I have had undertaken in the South Eastern Metropolitan Region, Victorians are now telling me that water is a key priority. They are not convinced that the government has done anything to secure that water supply. The future of electricity supplies are linked to that. If we have drought conditions, and it was confirmed in a report, we can look to the further crisis of securing energy. The opportunity to have spent that money wisely has been lost after eight years. We now have a crisis in water, a crisis in power and a crisis in transport.

The bungles and failures mean that we are not investing in our physical capital to maintain the competitive advantage Victoria has had previously in what was a very strong transport sector. Previously Victoria and Melbourne had a very good transport network with good roads linking the city and the ports. This is of course going to be the government's economic challenge. Local businesses are suffering as a result.

There is concern about the EastLink project and the impact its opening will have on businesses in Braeside and Moorabbin in the South Eastern Metropolitan Region as competing businesses seek to relocate along its length. There is the failure to plan for the emptying out of EastLink, say, into Frankston, the failure to construct the Mornington Peninsula freeway extension to take traffic away from Wells Road, the failure to complete the Dingley bypass — the list just goes on and on. There is also the bungling of the Mordialloc Creek Bridge reconstruction, to which I will return a little later. It shows that in actual fact the government has failed that huge test.

In 1837 Robert Hoddle planned the layout of Melbourne streets to cater for future growth. Mr Hoddle argued with the Governor of the day for wide streets. He wrote:

... upon my urging the Governor and convincing him that wide streets were advantageous on the score of health and convenience to the future city of Victoria, he consented to let me have my will.

Robert Hoddle's foresight in wide roads benefited Melbourne for over 150 years. Why is it that new roads designed and built today are lucky to last a decade before they are outdated. Under Labor our roads are underdesigned, underbuilt or not built at all. EastLink has been constructed to cater for over 1 million families today, with only three lanes at its widest point. A lot of this road will only be two lanes each way. With an additional million families, countless businesses are planned to move into that EastLink catchment area over the next 25 years, resulting in this road being clogged in a matter of years, needing more money thrown at it to increase its capacity. Labor, as I said, traditionally does not design and build infrastructure and roads well.

Who can forget the time back in the days of John Cain when the world's first freeway with traffic lights was opened with much fanfare. The then South-Eastern Freeway between Toorak and Warrigal Roads had four sets of traffic lights. This design created massive congestion on Melbourne's main south-eastern traffic road.

In 2000, for example, to ensure that the Hallam bypass was opened on time, the Bracks government ordered the removal of an additional lane and a number of entrance ramps, resulting in reduced capacity for roads servicing Victoria's population growth corridor. Within two years of this road opening, urgently needed attention has not been received.

Other major arterials being designed and built, such as Clyde Road in the city of Casey, will only be two lanes without any road shoulders or emergency lanes. What happens when a car breaks down in peak hour traffic? Of course there will be nowhere to go if you do not have those emergency lanes. VicRoads and the government have to stop cutting back on these things, because they are not long-term solutions. Clyde Road is touted by the Bracks government as being the major feeder road for traffic travelling from Melbourne to Phillip Island and the rest of South Gippsland. It is estimated that this road will carry more than 40 000 vehicle movements each day, including heavy transport vehicles, while being designed as a two-lane road without road shoulders.

An honourable member — Who is writing your speeches?

Mrs PEULICH — I was actually writing them over the dinner break.

The failure to address and improve railway crossings across Melbourne is a significant constraint to improving traffic as well as train services. I have been contacted by so many people in the electorate about rail crossings at which three or four trains pass before people can cross. It seems to me that the signalling system that controls the trains needs to be addressed. If you do not do that, our train services will continue to suffer as well as our commuters in cars. The other reason those railway crossings are down for longer is that the speed of the Siemens trains has had to be reduced because of brake failures. Again, everyone is suffering from the inferior rolling stock.

Roads and public transport are interconnected. All the transport gurus say that the key plank of effective transport is to give — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Pursuant to sessional orders the time for general business has expired.

General business extended on motion of Mr KOCH (Western Victoria).

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — There may be some members who are keen to vote

against the extension, but we sat listening to their contributions and now my time has come.

I am alarmed that the government has not moved to upgrade that signalling system, because it certainly is impacting on train services. I am concerned that roads and transport will continue to break down as they are currently. Railway crossings throughout Melbourne are a good example. The government has moved to 2030, it has moved to creating business precincts and districts with higher and medium density, but it has not funded the grade separation of railway crossings in those built-up areas where clearly there will be more pedestrian movements and more vehicular movements to improve safety. This is very short-sighted indeed. You cannot have a plan or a strategy without funding it and without making sure it is implemented.

We need to fix the congestion and to do that we need to do a number of things. We need to build roads properly, not underbuild them. We need to connect arterial flows. We need to have work schedules for those roads prepared in such a way as to minimise the negative impacts on commuters and pedestrians. That seems to have gone out the window. Most construction now seems to be happening during peak-hour traffic. The impact that has is horrendous. The Kennett government built CityLink predominantly during the night. Contractors can do this, taking heed of occupational health and safety conditions of course. It makes no sense whatsoever to reduce the Nepean Highway or Beach Road to one lane of traffic each way during peak hour at the Mordialloc bridge. It is just nonsensical.

We need to build third rail lines where necessary to allow express trains to overtake trains that are stopping all stations and therefore giving a fuller service. We could have more trains. We could have longer trains. We could have more trains with three entry points as opposed to many which only have two entry points. This would allow faster embarkation and disembarkation. We could have more car parking at railway stations to encourage people to use trains. At the moment if you do not get there by 7.30 a.m. in many instances you do not have a chance. There are so many small things — they are not major infrastructure projects — that are just not being done. This government is wasting opportunities to make the lives of all of us less frustrating.

The south-east has many growth areas and new estates that will have little or no transport into the city and little or no transport across suburbs. In particular I am talking about Cranbourne, Narre Warren, Endeavour Hills and Lyndhurst. The release of land by VicUrban, which is a government instrumentality, for development needs to

be accompanied by plans for infrastructure and transport that will be funded and delivered, not just promised. The transport challenges document the government put out was full of rhetoric. I think Mr Atkinson said it was very threadbare when it came to tangibles and detail. I completely concur with him.

An issue which has exploded in the electorate the President and I share is the reconstruction of the Mordialloc bridge. My office has been inundated with calls from people who have lost an additional 1 to 1½ hours on each leg of their journey during peak-hour traffic when they are taking the kids to school or going to work. The VicRoads plans show only one lane in each direction on this bridge when in reality there were two lanes in each direction. Closing down one lane in each direction during peak hours basically blocks off Beach Road and the Nepean Highway, which are major connecting roads from the city through to Frankston, Hastings and Mornington and vice versa. This reconstruction has knocked out 50 per cent of those connections because the only alternatives are Wells Road and Boundary Road, which are now chockers. It seems absolute lunacy.

However, the most frustrating part is that the reconstruction of this bridge has been scheduled to take 16 months. The impact on local traders in particular has been devastating. They are small traders, some of them immigrants who are working hard to build a better life, and in the first week of this bungle they have had a 30 per cent decline in their turnover. Some of them have said they can withstand this for six to eight weeks, but they will go broke if it lasts any longer. When they hear the 16-month time frame, they just cannot believe it. This is a bungle of major proportions.

Today I tabled a petition with over 2000 signatures of local residents concerning this bridge. It does not include the signatures of drivers who were stuck in the traffic jam. It would be a breach of the law to give them anything, to canvass their vote or to obtain their signatures while they were in their cars. However, let me tell the house the radio waves and the grapevine are very active. What has infuriated people the most is the fact that the changes to the road alignment and the construction were advertised in the paper several days after the construction began. That is mismanagement. It does not make sense. That just typifies that in many instances the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.

I received. We have had some extensive coverage and lots of emails about the Mordialloc bridge which I will have to summarise. People are losing in excess of 10 to 15 hours a week in addition to their normal transport

time. It is time that would otherwise be spent with their families. It is also money. Petrol is being guzzled up, and the environment is being damaged as a result.

The failure to build the Frankston bypass is another huge disaster in the making. The residents of Frankston are horrified by what is going to happen when EastLink empties out in Frankston after it opens next year. In October 2006 the Liberal Party committed \$250 million to build the Frankston bypass toll free. This bypass would alleviate that traffic congestion throughout the Frankston local government authority area. The Labor Party has only committed to a feasibility study. This will happen early next year. The timing is just not there. There is a need to get on with it. It is not a suck-it-and-see exercise. We know what is going to happen when thousands of cars empty out into Frankston. The effects on that community will be devastating.

I referred to the Dingley bypass. The Liberal Party has been chasing the completion of that bypass for a number of years. As I mentioned, I received a letter from the Minister for Roads and Ports in another place referring to the matter I raised in the adjournment debate on 1 May 2007 in relation to the completion of the Dingley bypass. It is said in the letter, in brackets, that this is now referred to as the Dandenong South bypass. Let me place any conflict of interest on the table: I am going through the process of purchasing a house in Dingley, and I have had the opportunity to speak to a lot of people in Dingley. Dingley is nowhere near Dandenong South.

Basically this means the government has ditched the Dingley bypass, it has ditched Dingley Village and has turned its back on the electors of the Mordialloc electorate in particular. It is an absolute travesty. It is not only a betrayal, it is poor logic when it comes to what we need — that is, the connection of arterial flows, including from the Dandenong South bypass, which is not being built with government money, between Perry Road and the South Gippsland Freeway, as well as the connection of the section between the South Gippsland Highway and the freeway. The government should not forget about that. Nor should it forget about the Pound Road–South Gippsland Highway intersection, which becomes clogged causing a huge problem for local commuters.

All the issues I have raised have generated petitions. All these petitions are on my web page for constituents of those electorates to download and sign as a way of placing some additional pressure on the government to do the right thing.

I contacted one local council to find out what infrastructure projects are outstanding in that municipality. I got an A3 list with, dare I say it, very fine print. That is just from one council out of five. These are very significant roads on a list from the City of Casey. There are main road duplications and upgrades — Clyde Road between Kangan Drive and High Street; Hallam Road between the Princes Highway and Pound Road; and the completion of the duplication of Thompsons Road. There are so many roads that the government has clearly not progressed.

One thing the government has done is introduce a new development levy of \$8000 per development. This is pay-as-you-go for needed infrastructure. As I said, this government is raking in a lot of dough, much of it through GST — \$57 billion since the introduction of the GST. We should have roads of gold, not the clapped-out system that we have.

One small matter is sound and safety barriers for the Princes Highway in Berwick and Beaconsfield. Communities along the highway have been fighting for the installation of sound and safety barriers for a number of years. I certainly hope that VicRoads constructs those barriers without further delay. The council supports them, and there have been a number of meetings over some time on this issue.

The public transport system is in crisis. The government has failed on a number of fronts, and I have mentioned some of them. The system needs to be more expansive, but now it is just more expensive; it needs to be more reliable, but now it is less reliable; it needs to be safer; and of course there has been inadequate infrastructure investment. I think Alex Makin of the Public Transport Users Association said that the 10 trains promised by however many years down the track will not meet present needs let alone future needs.

Public transport accounts for 9 per cent of all commuter trips currently. I think the government has set itself a target of having 20 per cent of all commuter trips by public transport by 2020 yet the system is breaking down now, so the government is way off there. The government is leaving many of these things far too late, which of course is the reason they become crises. Commuters are being forced onto train services by traffic gridlock. Traffic gridlock is forcing people onto inadequate train services. The community does not know where it is at. The environment, families and everyone are suffering collectively.

As I mentioned before, train station car parks are inadequate and are always full. There is insufficient public transport for new estates such as Lyndhurst and

nothing has happened with the Cranbourne rail extension. All of these things have been on the drawing board but have not been progressed at all.

There is one outstanding issue that perhaps the former Kennett government could have done more about, and certainly preceding governments could have done more about — that is, establishing some sort of fixed line link to Monash University. The university is stuck out there at Clayton with no fixed tram line or train line servicing it. It seems to be the result of poor planning, and I certainly hope we discourage future planners from developing significant institutions and facilities of that nature without making sure they also provide the transport that is required.

I do not need to recap on the Frankston line services. They have been appalling. The service level is down by 1.7 per cent on preceding years and reliability is down by about 6 per cent. The same applies to the Dandenong line service. Train services on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines are also in decline. The mismanagement of transport problems in the city of Casey in particular has continued to grow over the years with little change to the number of train services operating during peak hours. As Casey's population continues to grow — and I think it is the second-fastest growing city in Australia — our existing public transport services come under greater pressure. Urgent investment is needed in this now neglected infrastructure.

While, as I mentioned before, the state government has allowed new estates to be built in places like Lynbrook, Lynbrook Heights and Hampton Park, it has failed to commit to building the Lynbrook train station before 2011. Instead there is the Lyndhurst toxic tip. The community has been run over by the minister and by a council that obviously has very close links to members of the government. Although the council disagrees with the process and would like to have some assurances about the safe operations of that tip, it is not going to rock the boat. I think that is to the detriment of the community.

I have mentioned the Cranbourne East railway station on the Cranbourne train line. The government said it was going to build it after 2010, but I think if it is serious about this transport plan it needs to be brought forward. The headline in a recent article in the *Age* stated 'Councils plead to fill gaps in public transport network' and I would just like to read what a councillor from the City of Casey is quoted in that article as having said. The article states:

City of Casey councillor Steve Beardon said the municipality, which includes Cranbourne, was booming and expected to be home to 20 000 more residents.

Labor promised to extend rail services to Cranbourne East in 1999 but broke its promise.

Yet another one! It continues:

'The area has always been planned as an activity hub. We definitely need the station,' Cr Beardon said. 'It's been promised and it needs to be delivered'.

The article goes on to bemoan the fact that this community has been let down. But do we actually hear any of that in either of the parliamentary chambers? Do we hear the local members speaking about it? There is not a word or a whimper. Do we hear it here? We certainly do not. Do we read it in the glossy publications that the government puts out? The member for Narre Warren South in the other place, Judith Graley, has put out a glossy publication, although not too many members have put them out.

Mr Rich-Phillips — Where does she live?

Mrs PEULICH — I think it is still Mornington, but I am not sure. The Speaker, Ms Lindell, the member for Mordialloc in the other place, Ms Munt and of course the member for Frankston in the other place, Dr Harkness, are the only ones across the region to have put them out. There is not a word in them about any of these infrastructure projects that the community has been campaigning for and has focused on for a long time.

In closing, because of its growth the south-east corridor, which of course is filling up with many young families, deserves a better go than it is getting currently. Many of those families are on lower incomes and have little disposable income. Housing affordability is an issue for them, but the increasing cost of petrol, on which they are reliant, is making severe inroads into their disposable weekly income and their lifestyle, and they deserve greater support.

I am mindful of the fact that a number of members need to speak on this very important issue. In closing I say that although the government likes to make much of climate change and urban growth boundaries and the need to protect the green wedge, we have to recognise that public transport and roads are critical ingredients in how we respond to climate change in Victoria. An efficient and effective road network is imperative if we are going to reduce congestion, which I think is a critical plank in protecting the environment in our urban environment. The government must have some appropriate objectives, strategies and action plans and

then make sure its ministers and its departments implement them in a way that causes the least amount of inconvenience to the community. It is easy to rake in the money and spend it, but it takes much greater discipline to make sure you are working to a purpose, particularly medium and long-term purposes. Trying to rectify a problem — a botch-up — is always much more costly. Once it is a crisis, it is too late.

The government also needs to undertake an immediate review of its Melbourne 2030 policy, particularly in light of the census results, to make sure that our growth suburbs and new estates do not remain stranded, which is what is happening currently. This government needs to be driving the plans, setting the sensible policies and responding to the short-term, medium-term and long-term needs of Victorians. Drift is no longer an option for any of our communities. I urge the government not to ignore this debate, because that merely condemns it. I urge it to use the debate as an instructive opportunity to really listen to what the community needs and to make sure that it delivers on those investments.

Mr VOGELS (Western Victoria) — I had not intended to speak on this motion on the lack of public infrastructure investment. However, since the election of the Bracks government and the miserable attempt of Labor members opposite to justify their lack of vision for Victorian infrastructure, I would like to point out a few facts, mainly relating to Western Victoria Region.

I had a look through some of the budget figures, and since its election in 1999 — eight years ago — this Labor government has collected and expended some \$250 billion. Over the next three years it will collect and expend another \$110 billion. All up, that is \$360 billion over 11 years. If you break that down you see that it is roughly \$100 million a day or roughly \$4 million an hour. From the speeches of Labor members opposite you would conclude that the fact that no water infrastructure was built over eight years or that there was no upgrade of rural rail networks, road infrastructure, energy generation and so on was all the fault of either the federal government or the previous Kennett government.

I would like to remind Labor members opposite that in Victoria over the last 28 years Labor has been in power for 75 per cent of the time — 21 years Labor, 7 years Liberal — so to blame the lack of infrastructure et cetera on the previous Kennett government, which was last century on my reckoning, is just an absolute cop-out. These guys have had control of the purse to deliver infrastructure to Victoria for 75 per cent of the time. In addition, I have always been under the

impression that the states are the lead agencies in providing vital infrastructure for their citizens. No doubt they often get extra support from the commonwealth, but in general infrastructure development is a state responsibility.

Recently I travelled to China. There were two infrastructure developments that I was very interested in when I got to Shanghai: one was the deepening of the port and the other was the link to the airport from the railway station. We know that when it was elected in 1999 the Bracks government was going to build a link to the airport, which has since failed — it has not got off the ground — and after three, four or five years we are still talking about deepening the channel in Port Phillip Bay. I compare this to Shanghai. Rather than the big super-tankers or whatever being brought into Shanghai, a port has been built on an island 32 kilometres out to sea at the edge of the continental shelf, so the water is obviously very deep. A six-lane bridge was built 32 kilometres out to the island. That was all done in two years and it is now a finished, working and active port. When we left Shanghai we got on the train at Shanghai station and went to the airport. It is 30 kilometres away; it took 7 minutes. The train got up to 430 kilometres an hour. They are the sorts of things that governments do if they are serious about tackling these issues.

Water is one of the main things I am interested in. Having been a farmer my whole life and still living on the farm, I know the importance of water. Not many years ago Victoria was known as the garden state. We have had many droughts and dry seasons before, I can vouch for that. Governments and farmers have acted in response to natural phenomena, such as dry seasons, which sometimes in the past have gone on for two, three or four years. This government says we will achieve our water supplies by making water savings. We have heard about bucketing water around the garden and showering with a friend et cetera. Recycling has been put on the backburner, with approximately 90 per cent of Victoria's greywater pouring into the ocean. Sewage outfalls are still the go in Victoria, with tens of millions of litres a day being sent down sewage outfalls. What Labor has promised consistently are no new dams for the next 50 years, no desalination and no pipeline from the north of the Great Dividing Range to the south. Two of these promises have been ditched.

The stupidity of no new dams was clearly shown up by the member for Narracan in the other place in a great article which was published in the *Herald Sun*. I would like to quote a couple of paragraphs from that article:

Streamflow records from the government's own department show that since 19 June the run-off from the Mitchell and Aberfeldy rivers totalled 538 000 megalitres.

Astoundingly, this is 100 000 megalitres more than Melbourne's total annual urban water use in 2005–06.

To put this waste into perspective, the run-off from the Aberfeldy River since 19 June has been 82 000 megalitres.

That was over just three days and is more than Steve Bracks intends taking from the Goulburn River and Shepparton irrigators each year.

Much of the environmental devastation and economic damage in Gippsland caused by the floodwater could have been prevented.

The run-off from the Aberfeldy and Mitchell catchments during this time shoots holes in the logic of the Bracks \$5 billion desalination plant and north–south pipeline plan.

His plan fails to provide any option to harness water supply from the most basic economic and environmentally friendly source ... rainfall.

An inspection of Melbourne Water's online catchment figures for the Thomson Reservoir show a 3.7 per cent increase, or a 40 000 megalitre net gain, since 19 June.

Had the flood run-off from the Aberfeldy River been available as well as Mitchell River water, the Thomson Reservoir would be 71.6 per cent full.

Melbourne Water had suggested harnessing this water as far back as the 1970s.

I think that story is very enlightening.

In western Victoria the Otways enjoy the highest rainfall of the state on an overall basis. The government's own green paper *Securing Our Water Future*, published by the Bracks government in August 2003, shows that only 3 per cent of the average natural flow of 750 gegalitres of streams along the Otway coast are diverted for irrigation, stock and water use. That 750 000 million litres per annum of beautiful, clear, fresh rainfall — water that spills into the Southern Ocean — will continue to find its way down the coast to Wonthaggi, where it will then be desalinated and pumped back to Geelong. That is pure economic madness.

I would like to quote from a letter — I heard Peter Kavanagh mention it before as well — I received from Glyn Jenkins, a former water minister. It says:

This morning we awoke to read the details of the third plan to solve Geelong's water crisis.

In October 2005 Minister Thwaites visited Geelong with the first set of plans complete with maps and details showing that our share of the Lal Lal Reservoir would be diverted to help Ballarat solve their water problems and other ways were being found to secure our water future.

Just prior to the 2006 state election a new overall water plan was announced — 'A \$100 million plan for Geelong' — and the key to solving our water crisis and ensuring a secure water supply for the future lay in the bores to be sunk at Jan Juc/Anglesea and in the Newlingbrook aquifer in the Lower Gellibrand catchment.

A pipeline to connect Geelong to the Melbourne supply was mentioned as an afterthought and then only if the Anglesea and Newlingbrook aquifers proved to be inadequate.

This skirted skilfully around the pre-election problem of fluoridated water being piped to Geelong. The possibility of water being diverted to our city from the Thomson River in Gippsland or from the Murray-Goulburn system was carefully avoided.

Meanwhile the Liberal plans for a desalination plant or a link to the Gellibrand River or a new dam in the Barwon catchment as suggested by Rod Mackenzie and myself to supplement our supplies were ridiculed or ignored.

Now at enormous cost we will be linked to the Melbourne supply system with a diversion of water from the Goulburn and Gippsland river systems which are already stressed and supplemented with water from the proposed desalination plant. All by 2011!

It goes on to say:

With good planning, Geelong and district should be capable of standing on its own so far as future water supplies are concerned.

The third Bracks-Thwaites water plan for Geelong is a triumphal display of government ineptitude, poor engineering and financial practices and political prejudice.

We now await the bleating from the Bracks government in the lead-up to the federal election if the commonwealth will not share the costs —

of these idiotic schemes.

The Bracks government's no-dam policy for the next 50 years should also be condemned for the fact that the government is happy to steal water out of dams north of the Divide to quench Melbourne's thirst. What hypocrisy! The water supplies out of the dams — built by governments which had the guts, in the world's driest continent, to actually think of the future and build the Thomson Dam and all the dams in the water supply catchment areas we now have — are now going to be flogged off to Melbourne because the government does not have the guts to build a dam itself.

Before the last state election we also heard the minister say regularly that there would be no water coming from north of the Great Dividing Range to south of the Divide — that it would never happen. We now know this is not true. I am personally doubtful about the desalination plant being built. Once water can be pumped from the Goulburn Valley to Melbourne the

temptation to steal water from north of the Divide at a much cheaper cost will obviously prevail.

In closing I mention the rail freight network in the Western District which is not up to scratch. I was a member of Parliament in the Legislative Assembly when the Treasurer, John Brumby, announced that he would spend \$96 million on standardising Victoria's rail system. Six years later not a sleeper has been laid and not a spike driven — and I do not believe it will ever happen.

Before the election we heard that the government was going to buy back the rail network from Freight Australia, but what it did not say was that the freight users or the farmers would have to pay a 22 per cent increase in freight costs to pay for it. The end result will be that farmers, instead of shifting their grain to the ports by rail, will go back to using roads, and our road infrastructure, which is already in dire straits, especially country roads, will be more damaged.

Prior to the 1999 election, the Kennett government made a policy commitment to upgrade the Princes Highway to Colac to a dual highway by 2010. All we have heard from this government is continual bleating that this road, which is known as the Princes Highway West, should be funded by the commonwealth.

Earlier in my contribution I mentioned the fact that the Bracks government will have overseen the expenditure of \$360 billion by the time the next election comes along. I, for one, can find very little infrastructure in place to see where this money has gone. In conclusion, I support the motion moved by Gordon Rich-Phillips and commend it to the house.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 17

Atkinson, Mr	Koch, Mr
Coote, Mrs	Kronberg, Mrs
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Lovell, Ms
Davis, Mr D.	O'Donohue, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Davis, Mr P.	Petrovich, Mrs (<i>Teller</i>)
Drum, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Finn, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Guy, Mr	Vogels, Mr
Hall, Mr	

Noes, 23

Barber, Mr	Pakula, Mr
Broad, Ms	Pennicuik, Ms
Darveniza, Ms	Pulford, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Scheffer, Mr
Elasmar, Mr	Smith, Mr
Hartland, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Somyurek, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Tee, Mr
Kavanagh, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Theophanous, Mr

Leane, Mr
Lenders, Mr
Madden, Mr
Mikakos, Ms

Thornley, Mr
Tierney, Ms
Viney, Mr

Motion negatived.

ACCIDENT COMPENSATION AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

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

SELECT COMMITTEE ON GAMING LICENSING

Assembly members

**Message received from Assembly disagreeing with
Council's resolution.**

Assembly's message:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that the Legislative Assembly has refused to consent to the request for ministers and a member to appear before the Legislative Council Select Committee on Gaming Licensing and notes that the request represents interference in the operation of the Legislative Assembly and its members and undermines the traditional Westminster principles that underpin our parliamentary democracy.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I desire to move, by leave:

That a message be sent to the Assembly informing them that the Council, having considered the message from the Assembly refusing to consent to the request for ministers and a member to appear before the Legislative Council Select Committee on Gaming Licensing, regards the intemperate language of the message as unacceptable and contrary to the long-established principles of the Westminster system of responsible government, reaffirms the right of the Legislative Council to act in accordance with its standing orders and notes that the Legislative Assembly standing orders confer similar powers on that house in relation to requests for members and officers of the Legislative Council to be examined by the Legislative Assembly or its select committees.

Leave refused.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — Leave having been refused, I give notice of that motion, and I move:

That the message from the Assembly be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

CRIMES (DECRIMINALISATION OF ABORTION) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Crimes Act 1958 and to ensure the provision of safe and competent health services to women having abortions and for other purposes.

Read first time.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Floods: Gippsland

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place. In so doing, I say again, as I said earlier today in this place, it is amazing to look at the impact of the floods in Gippsland that commenced on 27 June. But what is more remarkable is the endeavour by the Minister for Roads and Ports to mislead the Parliament yesterday in his response to a question without notice in the Assembly — in fact a question from a government member, which presumably was written for her by the minister himself. In his response, the minister said in part — and I report accurately what he said — that:

I am pleased to report to the house that access was restored to Licola on 14 July — —

Mr Jennings interjected.

Mr P. DAVIS — In saying that I am reporting accurately what the minister said during question time yesterday. I say again — and I will deal with the minister's interjections appropriately by dismissing them as irrelevant and trivial — that this is a serious matter. The community of Licola has been isolated since 27 June. The Minister for Roads and Ports came into the Parliament and claimed that access had been restored. The only access to Licola is by a four-wheel drive track that takes 5 hours to traverse and requires a Department of Sustainability and Environment permit to use. The Minister for Roads and Ports made a claim

yesterday in the Parliament that access had been restored. He is a joke!

What I call on the Minister for Roads and Ports to do is actually get up to Licola by road and see that it is a fact that you cannot access Licola other than as he has done, by helicopter. Indeed the community of Licola is in a distressed state because of the incapacity of the minister to do the job for which he has been appointed. What I suggest the minister do, and I ask him to do so immediately, is look at the two river crossings that have bridges yet to be restored and look at the road that has been washed away and then deal with the facts and not some briefing note he has been given by his ministerial advisers. He shows by his reading of it that he does not understand his brief — he does not understand the job he has in front of him to restore access for that isolated community. It is a tragedy for them that he does not understand what he has to do.

In the remaining 32 seconds, I again ask the Minister for Roads and Ports to restore access by road between Heyfield and Licola. I remind members that the access to Licola from Jamieson was obliterated in the landslides that occurred after the bushfires in February this year. Therefore, the simple request is for the Minister for Roads and Ports to do his job.

Water: Victorian plan

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment question is for the Minister for Agriculture in the other place, Joe Helper. It is in relation to the so-called modernisation project for the Goulburn system around Shepparton, where the government has made claims that up to 225 gigalitres of water are available in savings in that region should the government spend in the vicinity of \$600 million. What the government wants to do, of course, is take the first 75 gigalitres of those proposed savings straight to Melbourne. As the house has heard today, it will take eight years for those savings to come on line — that is, by 2015 — and yet the water will be taken to Melbourne the very second that the pipeline is completed.

We have been privy to comments made by the Premier, who has said that he is holding out on signing the national water initiative. We know that federal funds are available to modernise the whole Goulburn system as well as other parts of the Murray–Darling Basin. All that Victoria has to do is sign up and that water will in fact be saved and it will not have to go to Melbourne. The water will in fact be able to be shared between the irrigators and the environment. This government does not want to sign up to the national water initiative because it has always had its eyes on taking Goulburn

River water to Melbourne to try to quench the problems that exist here in Melbourne.

The people in the regions of the Goulburn Valley and northern Victoria generally should always have been wary about being represented by upper house members who live and are based in Melbourne and yet purport to represent northern Victoria. Their worst nightmares have now come true, because they are not getting any respect at all from their upper house members who are supposedly representing northern Victoria — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I remind Mr Drum of the guidelines on debating during the adjournment.

Mr DRUM — Thank you, President. This project is going forward with a large degree of uncertainty. The Minister for Regional and Rural Development in the other place has put forward that some 225 gigalitres of savings will be made available by spending the \$600 million. These figures have been refuted by Goulburn-Murray Water and there is some real doubt that the savings are available. We still have to put 150 gigalitres of savings into the Living Murray project to fulfil our commitment there. As more than 2000 jobs will be lost from the Goulburn Valley system in the future because of these potential water losses, I call on the Minister for Agriculture to insist that an economic impact statement be prepared and reported on to Parliament prior to the pumping of any water out of the Murray-Darling Basin to satisfy those Melburnians who are yet to experience the water restrictions that those in northern Victoria have been living with for some four years.

Dimboola football and netball club: funding

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs in the other place, James Merlino. The Dimboola football and netball club is seeking \$15 000 to help construct an all-weather shelter and clubroom facility for netball players and officials through the country football and netball program. That program aims to provide funding for grassroots football and netball clubs in outer metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. One of the criteria for funding is that it can positively impact on participation rates in the area. In my view this project certainly fits the bill.

Netball is already one of the most popular participation sports in the country, and in a rural community like Dimboola a netball club functions not only as a way for people to keep fit, active and have fun but also serves in making major social activities available in a tight-knit community. The building would encourage

participation by facilitating two basic player and umpire change and storage areas. As netball in rural areas is an outdoor sport, we can all appreciate how important it is that this facility is built. If the facility can be built, it will be in line with the already excellent record that the Bracks Labor government has in encouraging Victorians to be active and to get and/or stay fit. It also ties in with the government's commitment to encourage young people to stay in regional and rural areas of this state, in part because promoting recreational activity is but one way of helping to keep rural youth in rural areas by providing opportunities for them.

In that spirit, I ask the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs to fund the Dimboola football and netball club's grant application for \$15 000 to build this important facility.

Disability services: behaviour intervention support team

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment issue is for the Minister for Community Services, who is actually in the chamber tonight. I have received a letter from a constituent who has a major concern about her child who is 44 years old and is in a group home. Because of her own age and disabilities, this woman has been advised to put her son into the group home. The 44-year-old has a mild intellectual disability. He also has an excessive eating disorder and he has some serious health problems as a consequence of this.

This is quite complicated so I would like to read a couple of excerpts from her letter, which I am very happy to give to the minister because I think it is easier to understand. The letter says:

My son is in a DHS —

Department of Human Services —

group home in where, despite having a strong service level and quality scrutiny policy, the department's practice is to actively discourage family involvement, or families from questioning their member's health and quality of life.

There appears to be two standards in this state. One for neurotypical people and one for those with a disability.

The letter goes on to talk about obesity:

Given freedom of choice, a person with an excessive eating disorder will naturally demand more and more food!

When my son was living with me, I was able to keep his weight and health under control by doing what every mother does to encourage their family to do what is in their best interest. I developed strategies to help and encourage my son do what was in his best interest.

The DHS, disability services, has a BIST (behaviour intervention support team).

I am sure the minister knows about that.

Their role is to develop strategies, 'behaviour management strategies' ... to encourage people with limited understanding to do what is in their best interest ... Yet the department is refusing to allow BIST intervention for my son!

The letter goes on to say:

Last year, I managed to persuade the DHS ... to have an independent inquiry. Finally they agreed, but only if they paid. Subsequently I discovered why. So they could manipulate the organisation to produce findings in their favour. None of what I said ever got into the final report!

My constituent asked me:

Trusting you can directly assist, as the DHS has awesome legal and financial power over people, being untouchable in every manner, shape and form.

I am sure the minister would be concerned to hear those strong words. I know the minister is interested in making certain his department does deal with people with significant issues such as this. Tonight I ask the minister to intervene in the abovementioned situation and ensure that this young man's total health issues are adequately dealt with.

Rail: station recycling bins

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Public Transport in the other place, the Honourable Lynne Kosky. I have observed that there are no recycling bins at train stations in Melbourne. There are too many recyclable materials being thrown into general rubbish bins or otherwise scattered on trains or in and around train stations. This is particularly true regarding *MX*, a free newspaper that is more commonly known as the advertising tabloid being distributed of an afternoon. In contrast, recycling bins installed by the Melbourne City Council in Swanston Street and nearby areas have been highly successful. We can draw lessons from this project, and I request that the minister investigate installing recycling bins at train stations.

Housing: long-term leases

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs in another place, Mr Andrews, concerning the protection of the rights of tenants who wish to have a lease for more than five years. Compared to the rest of the developed world the homeownership rate of the Australian and Victorian population has traditionally been high.

However, the current crisis in housing affordability means that more and more Victorians are being forced on to the rental market. The chances are that these people will be long-term tenants unless there is a dramatic change in housing affordability. The shift to long-term rental leaves tenants exposed because in Victoria any lease of over five years is not covered by a number of important regulatory protections.

I therefore request that the minister direct his department to investigate the regulatory framework that applies to tenants who are renting for periods of more than five years.

Planning: Melbourne 2030

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — I seek action from the Minister for Planning. The issue I am seeking action on relates to his department's promotion of the failed Melbourne 2030 planning strategy. All Victorians know that this government is a shameless self-promoter. In fact it is doing a good job with all our money to make many of its mates rich.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I advise Mr Guy that I have already alerted other members in the house about debating adjournment matters.

Mr GUY — President, I want to point out to the house that I would like the minister to provide an answer about some of the Melbourne 2030 monthly email updates which appear on the internet and which I understand are widely distributed. I would like the minister to explain the criteria for inclusion of material in the Melbourne 2030 update.

I will advise the house of the material that has appeared in the update and about which I want clarification. Firstly, the September 2006 bulletin — I will get more contemporary later — says Ballarat gets a second train station. It is clearly a piece of propaganda. We have the Premier, Steve Bracks, talking about a train station in Ballarat and somehow this is supposed to be related to Melbourne 2030. Somehow this was good enough to be included in the Melbourne 2030 update and sent out during the election campaign to a whole range of people — no doubt there are thousands — who are on the update lists.

The second example is in February 2007. This is very interesting and happens to relate to transport, and again I seek clarification from the minister as to how it features in the Melbourne 2030 planning update. It refers to Echuca being on track to benefit from a daily rail service. I seek clarification and an explanation from

the minister on how this somehow relates to Melbourne 2030.

The third issue, which is what set me off to ask about these issues tonight, is the latest update of June 2007. It said there were new transport solutions for Nillumbik — that is fair enough — Benalla and Mansfield. I seek action from the Minister for Planning to explain to me what are the criteria for his department to place items on this update — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Guy has continued to go on about seeking action, replies and whatever. A reply is not an action. I want a specific request for a specific action. Asking for a response, a view or an opinion does not cut it. The member must ask for action.

Mr GUY — The action I seek from the Minister for Planning is to write to me to explain to the Parliament what the criteria is for material to be included on the planning update, because the material included on the update has nothing to do with Melbourne 2030 and I believe it to be propaganda. Thus I am seeking clarification from the minister and action in this Parliament by his writing to me or talking to me. The action I seek is for the minister to stop putting this material in this bulletin. I hope that pleases Minister Jennings too.

Orchards: hail nets

Mr VOGELS (Western Victoria) — I raise an issue for the Minister for Planning, the Honourable Justin Madden, concerning the erection of hail nets to protect orchard growers' fruit crops. The Shire of Yarra Ranges recently fined an orchard owner, his mother, brother and the company concerned for erecting the posts and structure and starting the nets without a planning permit. Council has since withdrawn the fines imposed on the three individuals, but the company has to pay a fine of \$1500. No-one in the valley had any idea that a planning permit was required for the installation of hail nets. They have been used for quite a while without any problems. They are a tool to make sure fruit is not damaged during a hail storm, because such an event can effectively wipe out a whole year's crop. No doubt an objector has gone to council to complain about the loss of visual aspect et cetera and a planner has decided that a hail net is a horticultural structure. If this ruling stands, bird and bat netting will also be a problem into the future.

If the council continues to be obstructive or forbids any sort of netting, rural industries are in for a battle. The Shire of Yarra Ranges planning department believes

that permits are required because it considers netting to be permanent structures, in the same class as igloos and greenhouses, when in fact the netting may only be in place for a short part of the year. To me, this is another case where a rural industry is impacted upon because certain residents believe their rights, visual aspects and so on are more important than the farming practice taking place. The action I seek from the minister is to investigate whether netting of orchards in a farming zone complies with the state planning rules, and if so, to tell the council to back off and allow orchardists to get on with what they do best — supply fruit for Victorians to consume.

Housing: homelessness

Mr PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — My matter is directed to the Minister for Housing in the other place. Like Mr Finn, I recently spent an afternoon with Les Twentyman, and it was an eye-opening experience. I spent some time at the Open Family office at Madden Square in Footscray. I inform the house that that place operates as a back-to-school centre, a medical clinic, a computer laboratory, a rehabilitation centre, a reading library and a post office. The workers there do remarkable work, and I can assure Richard Tregear and his staff that as a local member I will assist them in any way I reasonably can. I also went to Sunshine station. I did not witness the scenes Mr Finn witnessed, but I am prepared to concede that that was because it was school holidays. Like Mr Finn I am sympathetic to Mr Twentyman's desire for more youth workers on the ground in Sunshine.

By far the most confronting experience that I had was 'touring', if I can use that word, through the derelict Buckley Street theatre in Footscray. I can tell members that it was not an exercise for the fainthearted. I was not concerned about walking through this building until it became pretty obvious to me that Les was concerned. He looked worried indeed. The building would have been absolutely magnificent in its heyday, but it now looks like a scene from the movie *12 Monkeys*. It is broken, abandoned, dark, with pigeons nesting and no roof over a large part of it. Around every dark corner, up the staircase and in the bleachers there are syringes and sleeping bags. I do not know how long it has been a squat, but the place is both terrible and a godsend. It is a terrible reminder of the ongoing reality of drug abuse and homelessness, but it is a godsend because for those unfortunate people who use it it is shelter, if nothing else.

I understand from Maribyrnong City Council that it has now been purchased — not for the first time, I should say — by a developer. That is in one sense good,

because no building should be left in that state, but it will mean eviction for the squatters when that building is redeveloped.

The state government has made significant investments in social housing. There are rooming houses in the west in Droop Street, Footscray, and Rooney Street, Maidstone, and one is planned for Central Avenue, Altona Meadows. It has not been easy, with the federal government cuts of more than \$1 billion since 1994–95. I am aware that there is more than half a billion dollars in this year's budget for social housing, but my request to the minister, with the redevelopment of the Barkly Theatre in mind and the consequent eviction of the people who use it, is that he commence a process to allocate new funds to expand and extend services to homeless young people in the western suburbs.

Schools: water-saving initiatives

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change in the other place, John Thwaites. There are a number of primary schools in northern Victoria that are not connected to the mains water supply. Therefore it could be argued that these schools have led the way in water-saving techniques for many years with their reliance on tank water. Yet incredibly, because they are not connected to town water, they are ineligible to receive any Victorian government funding for the installation of rainwater tanks. So, while many primary schools can get a government grant to install a rainwater tank to water their gardens, small schools such as Willowmavin Primary School just outside Kilmore cannot get a grant to install a water tank to provide drinking water for their students.

The Australian government has just announced a green-vouchers-for-schools program which will provide \$50 000 to every school to install solar hot-water systems and rainwater tanks to improve energy and water efficiency. If the federal government can recognise that all schools are equal under its scheme, why can the Victorian government not do the same? Why should smaller schools have to go without? Harvesting rainwater should be universally encouraged across the board, including in homes, schools, hospitals and businesses.

Can the minister explain to me and the many schools and kindergartens throughout Victoria how this is fair when they have no other source of water, unlike their metro counterparts, which can join the spin and become sustainable and be subsidised for their efforts? The action I seek from the minister is that he stop

discriminating against rural communities and provide the tank rebate to all schools and kindergartens regardless of whether or not they are on reticulated water supply.

Mount Arapiles: development

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — My matter is for the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change in the other place and concerns a feasibility study into future development options for Mount Arapiles. This tourism study is currently being undertaken by Parks Victoria, Horsham Rural City Council and Tourism Victoria and includes the Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park, the township of Natimuk and nearby Mitre. Consultants Connell Wagner are contracted to investigate the strengths and opportunities of the Mount Arapiles area by developing a feasibility study and precinct plan. This study will be completed by October 2007. While the objectives of the study are to identify and look into opportunities that will encourage visitors to stay longer in the region, it will also look at ways to plan for future development.

The study is being promoted as an information-gathering exercise, but there is concern in the local community and amongst those who enjoy this spectacular recreational area that this is the first step towards developing significant tourist facilities in the Mount Arapiles precinct. The concern centres around invading this sensitive and unique area with what could become an ecological disaster. The spectacular abutments of Mount Arapiles rise sharply from the Wimmera plains as part of the 5060 hectares of the Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park. Mount Arapiles is internationally recognised as the top rockclimbing and abseiling destination in Australia. With more than 2000 climbs, Mount Arapiles has the largest concentration of high-quality climbing in Australia and some of the best climbs anywhere on the planet. It is one of the finest climbing areas in the world, and aspiring climbers recognise it as an essential inclusion in their conquests.

But you do not have to be a rockclimber to enjoy this beautiful environment. Numerous walking tracks connect the camping ground at the base to the summit, and a sealed road provides direct access to the main lookout. This is certainly a distinctive place where visitors can enjoy views across the Wimmera and Grampians region. One of the main attractions of Mount Arapiles is that the current camping and picnic facilities are very basic, and the local community is opposed to any development of new tourist facilities that would alter the beauty of these natural surroundings. It is therefore critical that the local

community and those who enjoy this magnificent icon are consulted and have the opportunity to voice their concerns.

The action I seek from the minister is that he ensure that the community is kept at the forefront and consulted about any proposals affecting development of the Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park.

Public transport: Western Victoria Region

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Victorian Communities in the other place. Regional Victoria, and the western region in particular, has experienced decades of government neglect in the provision of public transport, and this has led to economic stagnation, social isolation and reduced life expectancies due to the difficulty in accessing services. The Bracks government set about rectifying this appalling imbalance in services from the moment it took office. The \$18.3 million Transport Connections program is one of many aspects of this commitment to improving local transport in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas. The program is an initiative under the \$3 billion A Fairer Victoria social policy action plan.

Recently the minister announced two funding boosts under these plans for projects in my electorate. Funding of \$244 874 has been announced for the Golden Connections project and another \$300 000 for the Building Bellarine Connections project. The Golden Connections project has run since 2003, and in that time it has set up a community transport system that has transported more than 6000 people to a variety of locations. This has been accomplished using volunteers and community buses. There is a regular route service from Rokewood to Ballarat every Thursday that allows users to spend 3 hours in Ballarat for medical appointments or shopping. Young people are also taken to a number of social events. Door-to-door ferrying of older residents to medical appointments and other specialist activities is also part of the project. All in all this has been a massive boost for people in my electorate, and I am glad to see the government's continued commitment to such an effective project.

The new Building Bellarine Connections will use existing infrastructure such as taxis, school and community buses and volunteers to fill the gaps in existing services. This will improve the peninsula's access to services in Geelong, and older residents will be able to participate in community activities, attend appointments and enjoy some mobility.

I call on the minister to keep statistics on how many people take advantage of the Golden Connections project and to measure whether its use is growing with the public's understanding of the government's ongoing commitment to public transport. I also ask the minister to keep statistics on the Building Bellarine Connections project, especially as it is a start-up project, and I ask in particular that the demographics be collected so that Victoria can continue to benefit from an integrated transport policy.

Public transport: Upper Yarra

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Public Transport in the other place. When we think of isolation we often think of country communities hundreds of kilometres from Melbourne or other urban centres, country communities such as Licola, which is currently isolated. The sad reality is, though, that many communities not far from Melbourne are also very isolated.

With the closure of services in the Upper Yarra by the Bracks government, the communities of the Upper Yarra have to rely for such things as health, employment and retail services predominantly on Healesville and Lilydale. Unfortunately linkages from towns such as Yarra Junction, Launching Place, Millgrove, Wesburn, Don Valley and Warburton are provided only through intermittent bus services down the dangerous Warburton Highway towards Lilydale. Not only is the service irregular, passengers travelling beyond Allsops Road, Launching Place, have to purchase another ticket because the Met system does not extend further, notwithstanding the relatively short distance from Launching Place to the end of the line at Warburton.

But at least people travelling down Warburton Highway have the opportunity to catch public transport. For people looking to travel across to Healesville there are no bus services, so the people of the Upper Yarra who work or use services in Healesville either have to drive themselves or be driven by someone else, as there is no public transport. This terrible situation is made all the worse because of the declining job opportunities in towns such as Warburton. This increases the isolation felt by many people in the Upper Yarra area.

The action I seek is for the minister to, firstly, extend the Met from its current boundary at Launching Place to include all the towns up to Warburton, and secondly, to initiate and fund a six-month trial of a bus service from Yarra Junction to Healesville twice daily in each direction.

Responses

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — Thank you, President, for the opportunity to respond to a series of matters members have raised. I will draw them to the attention of my ministerial colleagues for their responses.

Philip Davis raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place. He drew the attention of the house to the isolation experienced by residents in Licola and the difficulty of restoring road access to the town. He asked the minister to ensure the speediest restoration of a traversable road to Licola so that that community does not continue to be isolated following the influence of fires and floods.

Damian Drum raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Agriculture in the other place and asked him to commission an economic impact study on the government's proposals in relation to the water initiative and the current proposals to provide for water throughout Victoria and to provide some certainty for ongoing economic activity, particularly in the Goulburn Valley region.

Jaala Pulford raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs in the other place, seeking his support for a \$15 000 grant to the Dimboola football and netball club, which proposes to provide a community-based facility to enhance the work undertaken in that community by the club and the pre-eminent position it plays in the local community.

Colleen Hartland raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport in the other place, seeking her support for the introduction of recycling bins at train stations throughout Victoria. She also drew attention to a matter on which I share her concern, and that is what seems to be the terribly wasteful distribution of the *MX* newspaper on the public transport system. I share her views about the numbers of those papers. I see them when I travel on public transport, so I know what she is talking about.

Mr Elasmarr raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs in the other place, seeking his support in protecting the residential tenancy rights of residents who want to enter into long-term leases in excess of five years, particularly in a climate where affordable housing continues to be a major concern within our community. He wants to ensure that people have a sense of security of tenure in their residential tenancy arrangements.

Matthew Guy raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, seeking action on a variety of subjects. I think what he probably wants is either a closer correlation between the initiatives announced in the Melbourne 2030 email updates or for the minister to provide him with some explanation about the creative ways in which those email bulletins are put together.

Mr Guy — I will take either.

Mr JENNINGS — Good luck! Mr Vogels also raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, seeking his examination — particularly within the Yarra Ranges — of the restrictions being applied by the local council in relation to nets that have been installed to prevent hail, birds and bats from damaging the fruit crops in the region and whether they are appropriate short or long-term features in the landscape to protect that agricultural activity. If they are consistent with the planning scheme, he would like the council to be advised accordingly.

Martin Pakula raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing in the other place, who is also the Minister for Local Government. He is concerned about the wellbeing of homeless people or people who might otherwise be homeless and are sheltering in the Buckley Street theatre. He mentioned a film that I quite like called *12 Monkeys* that takes place in a stark setting and conjures up a fairly hostile and threatening environment. If that is true, I hope the Minister for Housing can respond accordingly and add to the stock of social housing within the area and provide alternative accommodation for those people.

Donna Petrovich raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change in the other place, seeking his support in ensuring that all schools in Victoria are eligible for the installation of tanks to provide water for drinking and other purposes in schools and that there is no discrimination in determining whether or not schools are eligible for that support.

David Koch also raised a matter for the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change in the other place. For a second I actually thought Mr Koch had joined the Greens because it is a very rare occasion when a member of the Liberal Party seems to be intervening on behalf of his community. He has asked the minister to make sure that the environmental values of Mount Arapiles are protected at a time when there are proposals for potential redevelopment in that area.

Gayle Tierney raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Victorian Communities in the other place,

drawing attention to the valuable role played by the Transport Connections program within what otherwise might be isolated communities throughout Victoria. The program provides some social cohesion and support for communities so that residents can participate in community events and community life. Ms Tierney seeks the minister's ongoing analysis of the benefits of that program, particularly in relation to the Building Bellarine Connections project, and asks him to provide the appropriate support to the community and feedback about the value of that program.

Mr O'Donohue raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport in the other place, specifically calling for the extension of the Met boundary from Launching Place to Warburton. He is also calling for a bus trial to be undertaken in the area.

Last but not least, there is a matter raised by Mrs Coote, who happens to be celebrating today. I am sorry that she has not found an alternative venue for her celebrations, but hopefully she will shortly.

Mrs Coote interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — I thank Mrs Coote for that. She has indicated that she will furnish me with further information so that I can examine the wellbeing of a person with an intellectual disability who also has a number of other behavioural issues to deal with. He currently resides in a community-based setting under the auspices of the Department of Human Services, for which I am responsible. Mrs Coote outlined that there might be some degree of reflection or intervention required to make sure that the resident's needs are catered for and responded to appropriately. I will do my best to achieve that outcome.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 9.47 p.m.

