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FIRST SESSION

WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

31 July 2008

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WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES

Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied by the departments on behalf of the appropriate ministers

Thursday, 31 July 2008

Sewerage: septic tanks

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr Hall

Raised on: 12 March 2008

REPLY:

This question should be directed to the Minister for Water who is the Minister responsible for septic tank management.

Goulburn Valley Water: restrictions

Raised with: Water

Raised by: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 12 March 2008

REPLY:

You have raised the issue that there is a difference in the levels of water restrictions throughout the Goulburn catchment area. The reason there is variation in the level of water restrictions is because the southern towns of Broadford, Clonbinane, Heathcote Junction, Kilmore and Wandong are on a different supply systems to towns such as Seymour and Tallarook. The Sunday Creek Reservoir system which supplies the southern towns has had very little rainfall over the last few years. This means that Stage 4 water restrictions in those towns can not be eased without compromising the water supplies needed for essential use by residents and businesses.

Goulburn Valley Water, the responsible water corporation, has been supplementing the Sunday Creek system with water from the Melbourne and Goulburn systems. This has been done through a temporary pipe from Melbourne (Wallan) to Kilmore and by tankering water from Seymour to Broadford.

To ensure the long term security of water supplies to those towns on the Sunday Creek Reservoir system, Goulburn Valley Water has fast tracked the Broadford pipeline project. This pipeline will connect the Goulburn River near Tallarook to Broadford and should be in place by the end of 2008. Once the pipeline is finished, the security of supply to the Sunday Creek system will help ensure severe water restrictions can be eased.

Bannockburn: community hub

Raised with: Regional and Rural Development

Raised by: Ms Tierney

Raised on: 15 April 2008

REPLY:

I am pleased to advise that on 9 April 2008 I approved a grant of \$250,000 to Golden Plains Shire Council for the Bannockburn community and cultural hub project.

This project, which has a strong community focus, will involve a major upgrade to the existing Bannockburn Public Hall which will result in the development of the Bannockburn Community and Cultural Hub. The grant provides for the:

- Redevelopment of the existing hall to create a 200 seat multi-purpose facility including capacity for performing arts and cinema, and the
- Development of a new adjoining community learning centre and neighbourhood house to be built on to the rear of the existing hall.

The project was announced by Jaala Pulford, Member for Western Victoria Region on Friday 2 May.

Consumer affairs: owners corporations

Raised with: Consumer Affairs

Raised by: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 16 April 2008

REPLY:

Thank you for bringing to my attention the plight of Mrs Foster of Mount Waverley and the difficulties she is facing in relation to owners corporations fees and the behaviour of the management of her particular owners corporation.

Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) has particular focus on assisting the vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community and, having carriage of the *Owners Corporation Act 2007*, is in a position to commence the initial handling of the matter.

CAV would welcome details of the matter to be provided in order for the Residential Accommodation team (a part of the Dispute Resolution Branch) to intervene in the matter.

Parks Victoria: Otways draft plan

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised by: Mr Vogels

Raised on: 16 April 2008

REPLY:

The *Caring for Country — The Otways and You* draft management plans for the Great Otway National Park and Otway Forest Park do propose a review of some fishing sites along the coast. However, the primary reason for the review of fishing access is around public safety, both in terms of the nature of the access track, and the safety of the destination. The intent is to provide safe access for anglers, which will most often also result in improved access.

The review will also address issues of multiple tracks to single fishing sites, by consolidating tracks, where appropriate, to create one improved access track, thus reducing environmental impacts.

I reiterate that the intent is not to close fishing sites, but to improve access. However this must be done safely and with proper management of the environment. In the event that a site cannot be made safe, formal access would not be provided.

Parks Victoria has met with VRFish, and other local recreational fishing delegates, to discuss how a review would proceed and what it might involve. These discussions have been very positive and all in attendance were happy with the outcomes.

During the period for public comment on the draft plans, Parks Victoria consulted widely with the community, and feedback received on the process has been overwhelmingly positive. This process allowed for community input through 'open houses' attended by almost 350 people, and 'e-forums', where almost 50 submissions were received, as well as the traditional method of making a written submission.

Parks Victoria also scheduled meetings with more than 25 stakeholder groups, representing a wide range of recreational interests, to assist them in their understanding of the plans and in framing their submission. These stakeholders included, amongst others: local tourism boards, Friends groups; recreational clubs representing fishing (including VRFish), four-wheel driving, bushwalking, horse riding, cycling, and trail bike riding; and Indigenous and Traditional Owner groups.

Supporting sustainable recreation and tourism is a key consideration in planning for the future of the Otways. The draft recreation and tourism access plan outlines how tourism and recreation will be provided for in the parks, and highlights ten significant new tourism and recreation opportunities for the region.

Parks Victoria will carefully consider the feedback received from the broad range of stakeholders consulted, to ensure that the final plan takes into account the issues that have been raised.

Solar energy: feed-in tariffs

Raised with: Energy and Resources

Raised by: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 7 May 2008

REPLY:

I agree with your comments that legislation needs to be introduced as soon as possible to define the terms, conditions and price of a feed-in tariff for residential solar installations.

I announced a premium feed-in tariff scheme on 6 May 2008. Under this scheme, Victorian households with solar power systems will be paid a premium rate for excess electricity that they feed into the state grid. The legislation is to be introduced into Parliament by the end of 2008, with the scheme set to commence in 2009, assuming the Bill gets the support of both houses of Parliament.

The terms, conditions and price for the feed-in tariff will be defined in the legislation. The key design features of the Victorian feed-in tariff scheme as currently defined are:

- a fixed tariff of 60 cents per kWh GST inclusive;
- net metered output;
- a cap of 100MW of installed capacity, and not more than 2kW per individual system;
- a 15 year duration for the scheme, commencing in 2009;
- initial eligibility will be all Victorian residential customers;
- legal obligation to pay the premium feed in tariff to be imposed on distribution businesses; and
- customers opting for the premium feed in tariff will not also be eligible for the retail buyback tariffs gazetted under the current legislation.

Roads: Ballarat pipeline

Raised with: Water

Raised by: Mr Drum

Raised on: 7 May 2008

REPLY:

I am advised that Central Highlands Water approached and discussed road usage for the pipeline to Ballarat with relevant Shires, prior to using the roads.

As a result, some roads were upgraded and improved prior to pipeline construction commencing. For example, the road into the Yandoit pump station was upgraded from a dirt track to a blue metal road. In some cases, alternate routes were used to comply with specific local requirements. Central Highlands Water has remained in contact with the relevant Shires, which have confirmed that they have no concerns regarding road usage for the project.

All vehicles associated with the Ballarat pipeline construction have complied with road limits and loading rules and have been within legal limits set by the statutory authorities.

Further, if any road damage is proven to be the result of any pipeline project, then the responsible Water Corporation will reimburse the relevant Shire for any repairs required.

Women: Fitted for Work program

Raised with: Women's Affairs

Raised by: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 7 May 2008

REPLY:

- In May I was very pleased to launch the Fitted for Work Kit at Parliament House. This Kit provides a voice for long term unemployed women to be heard and highlights the benefits in closing the economic gap between men and women. I congratulate everyone who is involved in this program.
- Employment service delivery is primarily the responsibility of the federal government, however the Brumby government supports targeted initiatives to assist disadvantaged jobseekers into the workforce.
- Fitted for Work clients may be eligible for state government employment initiatives including the New Workforce Partnerships program, or the Returning to Earning Program which assists parents, predominantly women, return to work after caring for children.
- Helping long-term unemployed women obtain work, maintain employment and ultimately achieve financial independence is of great importance for each individual and for our community.

Police: Bendigo

Raised with: Police and Emergency Services

Raised By: Mrs Petrovich

Raised on: 7 May 2008

REPLY:

I refer to the matter you raised in the Adjournment Debate dated 7 May 2008.

The Brumby Government is committed to providing safe streets and homes for Victorians by ensuring Victoria Police is highly professional and well resourced.

Since coming to office, the State Government has increased the number of police by over 1,400. Further we have increased funding to Victoria Police to a record budget of more than \$1.75 billion in 2008–09, and funded the construction and refurbishment of over 150 police stations across the state.

The Government's additional support to Victoria Police is showing good results. Victoria's crime rate has fallen 23.5 per cent since 2000–01, with Victoria now having the lowest crime rate in Australia.

However, the fight against crime is ongoing. That is why at the last election the Government committed to a further increase of 350 sworn police by 2010, as well as an additional 50 forensic and specialist investigators. In addition to this, the Government committed to providing additional resources and equipment to assist police in their work, including an extra 100 police cars.

Decisions on the placement of police throughout the state are operational matters and are made by police command on the basis of assessed need. It is important that this process is not subject to political interference. I am assured by the Chief Commissioner of Police that the level of policing across Victoria is continuously monitored by the respective Regional Command Officers, with a view to maintaining optimum policing effectiveness.

Victoria Police deploys first response police across its 56 Police Service Areas using a sophisticated resource allocation model incorporating 12 characteristics of the local community that are used to predict levels of crime and road trauma; the population of an area is just one of these. Victoria Police uses this model to ensure that police resources are distributed equitably and according to demonstrated operational need. It should be noted that, since 1999, the number of first response officers has increased in all police regions across Victoria.

Water: community gardens

Raised with: Water

Raised By: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 8 May 2008

REPLY:

As you may be aware, Stage 3a water restrictions will continue until at least 30 November 2008. These restrictions allow residential gardens to be watered for two hours between 6 am and 8 am twice a week on specified days. This allows the community to keep their gardens alive and continue to produce food at home.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) has received horticultural advice that, provided appropriate preparation work is done in the garden, watering twice a week in the morning is sufficient to allow most varieties of vegetable to grow.

Some measures that can be taken to help vegetable gardens grow include:

- ensure mulch is laid to keep in moisture;
- install drip irrigation to deliver water efficiently to plants;
- plant vegetables suited to the season;
- use alternative water sources such as rainwater; and
- investigate using a large container or similar instead of a garden bed as this ensures the vegetables are not competing for water with other plants.

The Target 140 campaign in Queensland is a voluntary program and forms part of the water restriction regime. This has not been necessary in Melbourne as households, industry and businesses have reduced their water consumption by 34 per cent per capita under Stage 3a restrictions. This has been achieved through conservation programs such as the Water Smart Gardens and Homes Rebate Scheme, water restrictions and the good work of the community.

The Water Smart Gardens and Homes Rebate Scheme provides eligible customers with rebates of up to \$1,000 for the installation of a rainwater tank. The scheme has been designed to reduce the demand on Victoria's mains water supplies. In terms of reducing this demand via the installation of rainwater tanks, the biggest benefits are realised when the tank is connected to internal plumbing such as the toilet or laundry. It is for this reason that the larger rebates are available only in relation to tanks with internal connections.

Under the current water restrictions, a new pool or spa of any size is not allowed to be filled using drinking water. However, an alternative water source such as groundwater may be used.

Our Kids Childcare and Montessori Preschool: payment

Raised with: Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development

Raised By: Mr Atkinson

Raised on: 8 May 2008

REPLY:

I am informed as follows:

This matter does not fall within my portfolio responsibilities.

Bail justices: travel and mobile phone expenses

Raised with: Attorney-General

Raised By: Ms Pennicuik

Raised on: 27 May 2008

REPLY:

I refer to your statement in Parliament on 27 May 2008 calling for the implementation of recommendation 46 by the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) in its Final Report on the review of the Bail Act 1977, including reimbursement of bail justices for their travel and mobile phone costs.

Recommendation 46 states:

“The Department of Justice should institute a reimbursement system for bail justices based on the model used by the Office of the Public Advocate to reimburse Independent Third Persons. Reimbursement should only be made to Bail Justices who conduct one or more hearings throughout the year.”

As you will be aware, the Brumby Government recognises the importance of the valuable work performed by bail justices. Victoria is the only state with bail justices, who are community members who play an important role in the Victorian bail system. They are volunteers who are specially trained to hear bail applications at police stations when courts are closed.

I note that the Commission has recommended the retention of the bail justice system, commenting that this system provides a cost effective service which allows for prompt bail hearings for accused people who would otherwise have to wait for the next court sitting date.

The Government is carefully considering each of the Commission's recommendations in relation to bail justices, including recommendation 46.

I am pleased to confirm that my Department is consulting with bail justices on the Commission's recommendations through the Department's Bail Justice Reference Group. The Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices is represented on this group.

Thank you for raising this important issue.

Your Water Your Say: legal costs

Raised with: Water

Raised By: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 27 May 2008

REPLY:

I refer to the matter you raised during the Adjournment Debate of 27 May 2008 regarding the court case initiated by Your Water Your Say against the State and Commonwealth Governments regarding the desalination project preliminary works.

On 16 May 2008, Justice Heerey dismissed Your Water Your Say's legal action against the Commonwealth and State Governments because Your Water Your Say produced no evidence that the preliminary investigative works would have detrimental environmental effects.

On 13 June 2008, Justice Heerey decided that the Applicant, Your Water Your Say, is to pay costs.

Both Governments have incurred significant expense in preparing for this case.

Your Water Your Say did not seek to challenge the evidence presented by the Government or in any way test legislation by bringing forward credible arguments and evidence. Justice Heerey said the case against the State had even less merit than that against the Commonwealth, with the only material produced by Your Water Your Say, in his Honour's words, being 'spectacularly irrelevant'. It was therefore determined by the Court that the group did not conduct its case in a way that represented the public interest.

The State has a responsibility to protect tax payers from funding frivolous court action and on this basis, the pursuit of payment of costs is being considered.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

Water: government initiatives

Raised with: Water

Raised By: Mr Eideh

Raised on: 28 May 2008

REPLY:

Water conservation is an important part of *Our Water Our Future: The Next Stage of the Government's Water Plan (2007)*. As part of this plan, the Government is encouraging households to continue to conserve water through initiatives such as the Water Smart Gardens and Homes Rebate Scheme, showerhead exchange programs and the WaterSmart Behaviour Change Program.

In the metropolitan area, showerhead exchange programs are administered by the water retailers.

In regional Victoria, the Government has recently extended the Showerhead Exchange Program by providing an additional 25,000 showerheads to the regional urban water corporations. The corporations will shortly be running exchange programs with their customers.

A water efficient showerhead is one of the cheapest and most effective ways to cut household water use; three star showerheads help households save water, cut greenhouse gas emissions and save on energy bills.

Werribee Open Range Zoo: theme park

Raised with: Tourism and Major Events

Raised By: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 28 May 2008

REPLY:

In late 2007, Village Roadshow Limited (VRL) put forward a proposal to the Victorian Government to develop a theme park at the Werribee Open Range Zoo.

Having previously identified a major theme park as a 'gap' in the State's tourism offering, the Victorian Government deemed VRL's proposal worthy of further investigation.

Accordingly, an Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC), chaired by the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, and comprising representatives from all relevant agencies, including Zoos Victoria, was established to assess the merits of the proposal. The IDC presented its report to Government in early June.

Following careful consideration of the issues raised in the IDC report, the Government has decided not to proceed with the proposal. While the idea had obvious tourism appeal, it was found that, in its current form, the proposal did not represent good value to the State. There would also have been a number of other hurdles for this project to work, including additional infrastructure requirements and governance arrangements with Zoos Victoria regarding the management of animals.

The Victorian Government is committed to attracting high-level investment in the State's tourism industry, and so it is appropriate that VRL's proposal was given careful consideration.

Princes Pier: restoration

Raised with: Major Projects

Raised By: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 28 May 2008

REPLY:

The important Princes Pier restoration project has not been abandoned.

This is a delicate project and the demolition works have been temporarily slowed due to the extent of deterioration of the existing structure which only came to light as part of the demolition process.

The Victorian Government has committed \$14 million to Stage 1 of the project to be completed by the end of 2009.

Planning: Ninety Mile Beach land

Raised with: Planning

Raised By: Mr Guy

Raised on: 28 May 2008

REPLY:

On 18 December 2007, an interim control for coastal land between The Honeysuckles and Paradise Beach came into affect through Amendment C48 to the Wellington Planning Scheme. The amendment gives effect to the Wellington Shire Council's *Wellington Coast Subdivision Strategy* and is due to expire on 1 July 2009.

That Strategy reflects many years of research, public consultation and planning strategy development by the Wellington Shire Council.

Wellington Shire Council requested the interim controls after VCAT set aside decisions made by the Council to refuse applications for development on the basis that the *Wellington Coast Subdivision Strategy* was not adequately incorporated in the Planning Scheme.

A State and Local Government Project Control Group is working to assess compliance of the Council's Strategy with Government policy and to undertake further assessment of risks and costs, funding implications and to develop an implementation action plan.

I consider that providing exemptions to land owners at this time would negate past and current efforts to find an appropriate, long term solution to this complex land use matter.

Devilbend Reservoir: land sale

Raised with: Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Raised By: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 28 May 2008

REPLY:

The Department of Treasury and Finance finalised the sale of the 42 hectare block of land adjacent to the Devilbend Natural Features Reserve on 13 February 2008. The Government is committed to using the proceeds of sale to conserve, restore and develop the reserve.

Parks Victoria has appointed a Devilbend Reservoir Advisory Group to provide direction and advice in relation to the reserve. The expenditure of the land sale proceeds will not commence until the completion of the management plan as it is this document that will determine the blueprint for the reserve's conservation and development. Parks Victoria proposes to release for public comment a draft plan in September 2008 and to finalise the plan by March 2009. Therefore, it will be another 12 months before any major changes to the reserve are apparent.

The plan will present a strategy for restoration of the reserve.

Water: Creswick supply

Raised with: Water

Raised By: Mr Vogels

Raised on: 28 May 2008

REPLY:

Due to the high cost of treating wastewater in Creswick for local recycling, Central Highlands Water (CHW) will pump the wastewater via a new pipeline for treatment at the Ballarat North Water Reclamation Plant (BNWRP).

This pipeline is under construction and due for completion in October 2008.

A return pipeline to deliver recycled water from the BNWRP to Creswick would cost an additional \$1.7 million, plus an annual operating cost of \$53,000. With potentially only three recycled water customers in Creswick using around 14 ML per annum, the cost of recycled water would be around \$14,500 per ML.

As such, the cost of supplying recycled water to Creswick from the BNWRP would be a significant impost on CHW and all its customers.

Central Highlands Water held several meetings with the Hepburn Shire Council, community representatives, the Catchment Management Authority, the Environment Protection Authority and the local Member of Parliament in arriving at this decision. The Environment Protection Authority also granted CHW an extension of time to address Creswick's wastewater management to ensure adequate consultation before implementing the project.

The Hepburn Shire Council has acknowledged to CHW that a local recycling option for Creswick is not viable due to small volumes and high costs.

Creswick will also benefit from additional water from the Ballarat component of the Superpipe that may in the future enable outdoor recreation and sporting facilities to be watered.

Melbourne Water: charges

Raised with: Water

Raised By: Mr Vogels

Raised on: 29 May 2008

REPLY:

With the extension of Melbourne Water's boundaries, the waterways and drainage charge will now be paid by all property owners in the Port Phillip and Westernport region. The charge will fund:

- Improvements to river health through replanting, weed removal, erosion control and managing environmental flows;
- Grants for property owners and community groups to improve their waterways;
- Management and improvements to larger, regional drainage assets;
- Improvements in flood management and flood warning systems;
- Provision of infrastructure to service urban growth using the principles of sustainable development;
- Monitoring and investigations to improve knowledge and understanding on the region's waterways and the threats to their health;
- Protecting and improving water quality through improved stormwater management and assistance to local government;
- Increased community and stakeholder engagement and involvement.

These works are informed and prioritised by a number of strategies which have been developed by Melbourne Water in close consultation with stakeholders and customers.

Given the absence of a regional authority responsible for waterways in the extended area in the past, the health of the waterways in this area requires urgent attention. Therefore, over the next five years all funds that are raised

within the extended area will be spent within the extended area. A significant proportion of works for the whole regional area will be carried out in the extended area.

For some councils such as Moorabool and Macedon Ranges, where considerable expenditure on river health and flooding, and development related issues is required, the expenditure will significantly exceed the money collected in charges.

Dandenong: Little India precinct

Raised with: Planning

Raised By: Mr Somyurek

Raised on: 29 May 2008

REPLY:

Revitalising Central Dandenong is a major urban renewal project delivered by the Victorian government, through VicUrban and in partnership with the City of Greater Dandenong. An Urban Master Plan has been developed through a consultative process providing a framework to deliver the \$290 million, 15–20 year vision for renewal.

I recognise the many important elements within Dandenong which have developed over the years and, whilst there will be significant development as part of the Revitalising Central Dandenong initiative, the preservation of these elements is fundamental to the project.

Little India, specifically, is recognised as a key component of the retail and cultural fabric of Dandenong and its integration into the Revitalising Central Dandenong project is a key priority. Working with retailers within this precinct is an important aspect of the consultative process which VicUrban has instituted to ensure that those retailers have every opportunity to continue their business and retailing presence in Dandenong.

VicUrban advises that it has consulted widely with all the retailers and businesses within the redevelopment zone on a one to one basis and it is the intention of VicUrban to approach the retailers to establish a working group.

This working group will represent the traders affected by future redevelopment works. The group will meet on a regular basis to facilitate input to how the Little India precinct should be managed during the redevelopment works and to determine how the retailers themselves would like their precinct to evolve during the revitalisation project. In particular, the working group will consider the possible location, components and presentation of any future precinct.

VicUrban is strongly committed to ensuring that any impact on Little India during the redevelopment period is minimised and that the viability and vibrancy of the precinct is safeguarded. In the longer term, VicUrban wants to ensure that Little India is a strong building block of a thriving Dandenong.

It is VicUrban's intention to continue to consult widely with all stakeholders to ensure that the revitalisation of central Dandenong is appropriate, sustainable and forward looking.

Consumer affairs: children's clothing

Raised with: Consumer Affairs

Raised By: Ms Pulford

Raised on: 10 June 2008

REPLY:

I refer to concerns which you raised in the Legislative Council on 10 June 2008 about knee length high-heeled boots for children.

First, let me say that I share your concern about the inappropriate messages sent by dressing young girls in clothing which is designed for adults. However, there is no head of power in the *Fair Trading Act 1999* to ban products which are essentially in bad taste.

As the safety of infants and children is a top priority for this government, I asked Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) to further investigate the potential health and safety risks posed by these boots.

The high-heeled boots in question are supplied in Australia through the retailer Betts and Betts Kids with their head office located in Western Australia. This particular product has been available in the market place nationally for the past two years in children's size 7–12. These sizes generally fit children 4–14 years of age. There have been 370 of these boots sold from 33 stores nationally. The boots are produced for 'special occasions', not for everyday use or intended to be worn for long periods of time.

CAV have not received any complaints from consumers in relation to this product and are not aware of any complaints in other jurisdictions. There is no evidence in Australia or overseas of any serious injuries reported in relation to this type of product and the health concerns raised would apply to repeated long-term use.

From a safety perspective there is no available evidence that these boots pose an increased risk to children if worn as suggested by the manufacturer and under parental supervision. As the Commonwealth, States and Territories are now moving toward a national regulatory system for consumer product safety, I have asked the Victorian representative on the Consumer Product Advisory Committee to raise this issue for future consideration.

Thank you for raising this issue with me.

Police: numbers

Raised with: Police and Emergency Services

Raised By: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 10 June 2008

REPLY:

The Brumby Government is committed to providing safe streets and homes for Victorians by ensuring Victoria Police is highly professional and well resourced.

Since coming to office, the State Government has increased the number of police by over 1,400. Further we have increased funding to Victoria Police to a record budget of more than \$1.75 billion in 2008–09, and funded the construction and refurbishment of over 150 police stations across the state.

The Government's additional support to Victoria Police is showing good results. Victoria's crime rate has fallen 23.5 per cent since 2000–01, with Victoria now having the lowest crime rate in Australia.

However, the fight against crime is ongoing. That is why at the last election the Government committed to a further increase of 350 sworn police by 2010, as well as an additional 50 forensic and specialist investigators. In addition to this, the Government committed to providing additional resources and equipment to assist police in their work, including an extra 100 police cars.

Decisions on the placement of police throughout the state are operational matters and are made by police command on the basis of assessed need. It is important that this process is not subject to political interference. I am assured by

the Chief Commissioner of Police that the level of policing across Victoria is continuously monitored by the respective Regional Command Officers, with a view to maintaining optimum policing effectiveness.

Victoria Police deploys first response police across its 56 Police Service Areas using a sophisticated resource allocation model incorporating 12 characteristics of the local community that are used to predict levels of crime and road trauma; the population of an area is just one of these. Victoria Police uses this model to ensure that police resources are distributed equitably and according to demonstrated operational need. It should be noted that, since 1999, the number of first response officers has increased in all police regions across Victoria.

The Government acknowledges the important achievements of Victoria Police members in reducing crime throughout Victoria. The new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement negotiated with police includes a new career structure to allow Victoria Police to retain experienced police officers, as well as a number of other significant initiatives including additional part-time positions to tackle peak periods on Friday and Saturday nights, and shifts of variable duration. These changes will create extra flexibility in the rostering of members and ensure greater availability of manpower during times of greatest demand.

Police: Geelong

Raised with: Police and Emergency Services

Raised By: Mr Koch

Raised on: 10 June 2008

REPLY:

The Brumby Government is committed to providing safe streets and homes for Victorians by ensuring Victoria Police is highly professional and well resourced.

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Decisions on the placement of police throughout the state are operational matters and are made by police command on the basis of assessed need. It is important that this process is not subject to political interference. I am assured by the Chief Commissioner of Police that the level of policing across Victoria is continuously monitored by the respective Regional Command Officers, with a view to maintaining optimum policing effectiveness.

Victoria Police deploys first response police across its 56 Police Service Areas using a sophisticated resource allocation model incorporating 12 characteristics of the local community that are used to predict levels of crime and road trauma; the population of an area is just one of these. Victoria Police uses this model to ensure that police resources are distributed equitably and according to demonstrated operational need. It should be noted that, since 1999, the number of first response officers has increased in all police regions across Victoria.

Victoria Police advises that it is satisfied with the number of frontline police serving the Greater Geelong community, which have increased in number by 19.2 per cent since 1999. Furthermore, crime in Geelong has decreased significantly falling by 33.5 per cent between 2000–01 and 2006–07.

Solar energy: rebate

Raised with: Environment and Climate Change

Raised By: Mr D. Davis

Raised on: 10 June 2008

REPLY:

The Brumby Government is committed to maintaining a secure, efficient, affordable and sustainable supply of energy. We have developed a comprehensive climate change policy package, which supports renewable energy, energy efficiency, low emissions technologies and a national emissions trading scheme.

Development of solar power will contribute to increasing the diversity and sustainability of Victoria's electricity supply and can play an important role in meeting Victoria's peak load demand without producing additional greenhouse emissions. In addition, there are significant development opportunities in the manufacturing and installation of solar systems.

On the 6 May, 2008, the government announced the introduction of a premium feed-in tariff to take effect from 2009. Through the new premium feed-in tariff scheme, households will be paid 60 cents for every kilowatt hour of power fed back into the state electricity grid, which is almost four times the current retail price for electricity and the highest feed-in tariff offered in Australia.

I can advise that Victoria, through the COAG Working Group on Climate Change and Water, is actively engaged with the Australian Government in developing a harmonised approach to State feed-in tariffs. A harmonised approach between States would be expected to reduce the regulatory burden and costs imposed on electricity market participants as well as on consumers who wish to install solar power systems.

Drought: government assistance

Raised with: Premier

Raised By: Ms Lovell

Raised on: 11 June 2008

REPLY:

- I agree with Ms Lovell's statement that 'drought-stricken communities need continuity'.
- That is why when we announced the *Local Government Drought Coordinator Program* in October 2007 we ensured that it was fully funded to provide 20 of our most drought-affected municipalities with a drought coordinator until 30 June 2009.
- So I can assure Ms Lovell that drought coordinators will retain their positions beyond June 2008 and that this was always part of the Victorian Government's policy of assisting our farmers, rural communities and rural businesses to tackle these challenging climatic conditions.
- In addition to this, as announced in May this year in the *Future Farming* statement, the Victorian Government has provided \$2.18 million to extend the *Sustainable Farm Families Program* for another 4 years. This very successful program will continue to support the physical and mental health and wellbeing of farmers and their families.
- We also have extended the *Rural Futures Initiative* by another 4 years. The Victorian Government will provide \$3.74 million to assist communities, agricultural industries and farmers to make well informed choices about their future and support their adjustment to change.

- We have also provided funding for new initiatives such as the creation of a *National Centre for Farmer Health*. With a commitment of \$2.4 million over 4 years from the Victorian Government, the centre will conduct research and education and training into improving the health and wellbeing of farm workers and their families across Australia.

Police: Preston

Raised with: Police and Emergency Services

Raised By: Mr Guy

Raised on: 11 June 2008

REPLY:

The Brumby Government is committed to providing safe streets and homes for Victorians by ensuring Victoria Police is highly professional and well resourced.

Since coming to office, the State Government has increased the number of police by over 1,400. Further we have increased funding to Victoria Police to a record budget of more than \$1.75 billion in 2008–09, and funded the construction and refurbishment of over 150 police stations across the state.

The Government's additional support to Victoria Police is showing good results. Victoria's crime rate has fallen 23.5 per cent since 2000–01, with Victoria now having the lowest crime rate in Australia.

However, the fight against crime is ongoing. That is why at the last election the Government committed to a further increase of 350 sworn police by 2010, as well as an additional 50 forensic and specialist investigators. In addition to this, the Government committed to providing additional resources and equipment to assist police in their work, including an extra 100 police cars.

Decisions on the placement of police throughout the state are operational matters and are made by police command on the basis of assessed need. It is important that this process is not subject to political interference. I am assured by the Chief Commissioner of Police that the level of policing across Victoria is continuously monitored by the respective Regional Command Officers, with a view to maintaining optimum policing effectiveness.

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Although you indicate that a local newspaper poll found that many residents of Preston felt it had become unsafe, between 2000–01 and 2006–07 the local government area of Darebin experienced a 25.4 per cent reduction in its crime rate over this period.

Australian Childhood Foundation: funding

Raised with: Community Services

Raised By: Mrs Kronberg

Raised on: 11 June 2008

REPLY:

The Government understands the importance of children having timely access to counselling to help minimise the impact of sexual assault and family violence.

In relation to sexual assault services, the 2007–08 State Budget allocated \$850,000 (\$1.7 million over two years) to provide additional sexual assault support services to children and young people aged 0–18 years who have been sexually abused. This is in addition to the one off funding boost of \$1.05 million that the Government provided in 2006–07. The Government's commitment to address immediate demand builds on new funding announced in the 2006–07 State Budget that included an additional \$4 million over four years for additional counselling for children and adults who are victims of sexual assault.

In 2007–08 the Government also provided new funding of more than \$900,000 to provide treatment programs for children and young people under 15 years of age who exhibit sexually abusive or concerning behaviour.

Building on Victoria's already substantial commitment to tackling family violence—over \$50 million since 2005—a further \$24.7 million over four years (\$6.13 million in 2008–09) across the whole of government has been committed as part of the 2008–09 State Budget. In 2008–09, approximately \$3.4 million will be provided across the State for counselling and support programs for women and children affected by family violence. One third of this funding is targeted specifically for services for children.

Over the past two years the Australian Childhood Foundation has received additional funding to provide more counselling services for children who have been sexually abused or who exhibit sexually abusive or concerning behaviour as well as new funding for family violence counselling services. In 2007–08, total funding provided to the Australian Childhood Foundation for all these services is approximately \$656,000. In 2008–09, the Australian Childhood Foundation will receive further funding of approximately \$50,000 for family violence counselling services for children.

The Department of Human Services is continuing to work with service providers to identify strategies to more effectively manage service demand. These will include development of referral pathways and partnerships with other services as well as additional training for staff who work with children who are victims of family violence and sexual assault.

Water: Powelltown supply

Raised with: Water

Raised By: Mr O'Donohue

Raised on: 11 June 2008

REPLY:

I am advised that Powelltown, while within Yarra Valley Water's area, is presently outside the area of the metropolitan reticulated water supply system.

I have requested that officers of the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Human Services and Yarra Valley Water meet with the Powelltown Residents Water Association to review the situation and examine options for securing the system.

Ambulance services: western suburbs

Raised with: Police and Emergency Services

Raised By: Ms Hartland

Raised on: 12 June 2008

REPLY:

Matters relating to ambulances are the responsibility of the Minister for Health.

Local government: planning powers

Raised with: Planning

Raised By: Mrs Coote

Raised on: 12 June 2008

REPLY:

Development Assessment Committees will comprise 1 independent Chair, 2 State Government nominees and 2 Local Government nominees.

We are currently consulting with the local government sector on the implementation and operation of Development Assessment Committees before they are established.

Water: Geelong supply

Raised with: Water

Raised By: Mr Koch

Raised on: 12 June 2008

REPLY:

The Victorian Government's contribution of \$20 million for the Melbourne–Geelong Pipeline is part of *Our Water Our Future: The Next Stage of the Government's Water Plan*. The pipeline will secure Geelong's water supply by connecting it to Melbourne's water supply system of existing dams, the new desalination plant and the Sugarloaf pipeline.

Barwon Water has completed the functional design for the pipeline and is preparing a business case to submit to the Government in late 2008. Construction of the pipeline is scheduled to commence in 2010, with completion in late 2011.

The Government has committed a further \$12.98 million to Barwon Water for the following projects:

- \$0.36 million to deliver a functional design for the pipeline;
- \$9.22 million for the Northern Water Plant (with co-funding of \$20 million from the Commonwealth); and
- \$3.4 million to deliver an implementation plan for the Anglesea Borefield and Newlingrook and Gellibrand Groundwater Management Areas, including functional designs for these projects.

The Government does not support the construction of new dams. New dams do not create new water. They take water from rivers and downstream users. Any new dam in the Otways would also have significant impacts on environmental and community values.

Barwon Water's groundwater licence for the Barwon Downs Aquifer is primarily to provide a drought reserve to augment Geelong's water supply. The Aquifer is not capable of yielding the volume needed to meet Geelong's long term water needs.

Barwon Water is investigating the Newlingrook Aquifer as part of a broader resource appraisal in the Otway basin to ensure Barwon Water and the Victorian Government are fully appraised of the status of this resource. There are no plans to use this water to supply Geelong.

Commercial Ready program: funding

Raised with: Innovation

Raised By: Mr Guy

Raised on: 25 June 2008

REPLY:

Biotechnology is regarded as one of the keys to Victoria's future prosperity with the potential to generate enormous economic, health and environmental benefits.

The Victorian Government supports the (business) environment to facilitate and expedite the development and commercialisation of biotechnology research, as part of its goal to establish Victoria as one of the leaders in the global knowledge economy.

The Victorian Government's Biotechnology Strategic Development Plan was released in October 2007.

The Plan clearly articulates the actions required to drive further growth in the Victorian biotechnology sector and increase business innovation by building successful, substantial and sustainable biotechnology firms.

In particular, the Plan focuses on developing the strategic partnership between government and the biotechnology sector to deliver eight outcomes across four Action Areas:

- Creating a competitive business environment;
- Building a bio-economy;
- Making Victoria a preferred place to live, work and learn; and
- Delivering access to high quality infrastructure.

My Department has already convened meetings of each of the four industry Working Groups and the Competitive Business Environment Working Group in particular is working to develop (1) Appropriate regulatory frameworks and (2) Improved access to investment capital.

The Chair of the working group and a number of its members are from Victorian biotechnology companies, and there are also representatives from AusBiotech and the venture capital community.

The Competitive Business Environment Working Group has already discussed the impact of the Commercial Ready decision and is seeking ways to position Victorian IP to take advantage of any new grant programs anticipated from the Commonwealth Government's Innovation Review.

The Victorian Government has a number of complementary initiatives already in place that could potentially facilitate supply of early stage capital to biotechnology opportunities including the Medical Research Commercialisation Fund and the Trans-Tasman Commercialisation Fund which was announced at the recent Bio 2008 Conference in San Diego.

Water: Smart Water Fund

Raised with: Water

Raised By: Ms Broad

Raised on: 26 June 2008

REPLY:

Rural communities are being assisted to find innovative ways to conserve and recycle water through two important statewide funds.

On 25 June 2008 I launched Round 6 of the Smart Water Fund, which closes on 22 August 2008. Round 1 of the \$10 million Stormwater and Urban Recycling Fund closed on 29 May 2008. A second round of the fund will be launched later this year.

In order to encourage applications from regional stakeholders, information sessions were held in the major urban centres of regional Victoria between 30 June and 8 July 2008. Direct contact is also being made with prospective applicants by the water corporations.

Technical support for the development of stormwater and urban recycling projects is being provided by a series of workshops across the State later this year and early in 2009.

