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**FIRST SESSION**

**WRITTEN ADJOURNMENT RESPONSES**

**Tuesday 28 October 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*

**Tuesday, 28 October 2008**

**VicForests: firewood contracts**

**Raised with:** Treasurer

**Raised by:** Mr P. Davis

**Raised on:** 6 February 2008

**REPLY:**

VicForests is responsible for the commercial harvest and sale of timber products from State forests in Eastern Victoria. In doing so it must act on a commercial, competitive footing consistent with its obligations under the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004.

Of the estimated 550,000 tonnes of firewood sold each year in Victoria, studies indicate that approximately 89% is sourced from private property. In terms of the balance that comes from State forests, VicForests is responsible for the sale of around 2,000 tonnes of firewood per year, which represents less than half a per cent of Victoria's total supply. VicForests is not the monopoly supplier in Eastern Victoria, rather it is only responsible for the supply of commercial firewood from forest areas included in the allocation order provided by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), and this represents less than five per cent of firewood sourced from State forests in Victoria.

In operating within its remit VicForests is required to adhere to strict obligations under OH&S legislation. In order to meet these obligations VicForests has ceased the practice of firewood operators harvesting directly from the forests due to the serious safety and logistics concerns that were posed by commercial and semi-commercial operators in the past. The safety of contractors operating in forest areas that fall within the responsibility of VicForests is of utmost concern to VicForests.

I am advised that since its inception in 2004 VicForests has made more than 200,000 tonnes of firewood available at auction and that only 10,000 tonnes has been purchased by firewood operators. VicForests has in that time made significant changes to the way that commercial firewood is auctioned to accommodate the feedback from firewood contractors, including changes to the minimum lot size.

I am also advised that VicForests has worked closely with the DSE, Department of Primary Industries, the Member for Gippsland East and individual firewood producers in order to maximise the amount of firewood available from the DSE determined allocation order under which they operate and that it continues to do so.

Thank you for drawing this matter to my attention.

**Schools: Catholic sector**

**Raised with:** Education

**Raised by:** Mr Drum

**Raised on:** 29 May 2008

**REPLY:**

I am informed as follows:

The Victorian Government recognises the important role the non-government schools sector plays in the education of students in Victoria and supports choice in education as demonstrated by the significant funding and other benefits it provides to non-government schools.

This Government entered into the first funding agreement with Victorian non-government schools, putting funding on a sustainable footing with a four year agreement which runs from 2006 to 2009.

In 2008–09, the Victorian Government will provide an estimated \$420 million in recurrent and specific purpose funding to non-government schools (of which approximately \$290 million will be allocated to the Catholic system). This represents a 72 per cent increase in recurrent State funding to non-government schools since the 1999–2000 financial year.

The Government has recently announced a significant funding boost of \$38.9 million in capital grant funding to rebuild and upgrade nearly 500 Catholic schools, vastly improving learning opportunities for the State's 186,000 Catholic school students. These funds will not only improve physical facilities at the schools, but will free up funds within the Catholic sector to meet additional operational costs.

This funding is in addition to the \$15 million provided in capital grants in 2008–09 to help needy non-government schools upgrade educational facilities, of which approximately \$11 million will be available to Catholic schools.

Substantial support is also provided to parents of students attending non-government schools, including the Education Maintenance Allowance for all low income parents, and the School Start Bonus which is paid to all parents of students at the beginning of Prep and Year 7.

Eligible students can also access the Government's conveyance allowance, school bus service and public transport concessions.

**Tourism: Australian Coastal Wilderness**

**Raised with:** Tourism and Major Events

**Raised by:** Mr P. Davis

**Raised on:** 24 June 2008

**REPLY:**

Thank you for raising the matter of the inclusion of the Australian Coastal Wilderness into Tourism Australia's National Landscapes program. I am delighted that three of Victoria's most spectacular natural landscapes have been included in the program.

The Victorian Government has worked closely with the New South Wales Government, Parks Australia, Tourism Australia, local governments in Victoria and New South Wales as well as the local tourism industry to bring about the inclusion of Australia's Coastal Wilderness in the National Landscapes initiative.

The Victorian Government is very supportive of this project and has planned activities that can leverage this initiative. In particular, the recently released

Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2008–2011 lists Gippsland as a priority region for nature-based tourism development, and the Australian Coastal Wilderness is well-positioned to benefit from this initiative.

I am also advised that the Australian Coastal Wilderness Steering Committee, which includes representation from Tourism Victoria, is working to develop a tourism master plan. This master plan will inform a marketing strategy for the region, which will maximise the benefits of its inclusion in the National Landscapes initiative.

I congratulate the Australian Coastal Wilderness on being one of the initial eight National Landscapes regions launched at the Australian Tourism Exchange and I look forward to hearing more on the progress of the tourism master plan.

### **Ambulance services: northern Victoria**

**Raised with:** Health

**Raised by:** Ms Lovell

**Raised on:** 25 June 2008

#### **REPLY:**

The Victorian Government is committed to continuously improving emergency services across rural and regional Victoria. As a part of this process, the Government, in conjunction with emergency service providers, continuously monitors road accident hot spots, ambulance caseload and hospital admissions to enable effective planning for future service developments.

I am advised that Ambulance Victoria will continue to monitor ambulance caseload and other factors, and provide advice to Government to enable effective planning for future service developments in this area.

Ambulance Victoria is in the process of recruiting an additional 100 paramedics to regional and rural areas to provide relief capacity and support to the existing workforce. Twenty-two of these paramedics will be based in the Hume Region. This will build on previous Government investments for the Hume community which has seen new and upgraded ambulance services in Kilmore, Mooroopna, Benalla, Bright, Cobram, Kyabram, Mansfield.

### **Tourism: western suburbs**

**Raised with:** Tourism and Major Events

**Raised by:** Mr Finn

**Raised on:** 26 June 2008

#### **REPLY:**

The Victorian Government is an active supporter of tourism in the western suburbs and commends Western Melbourne Tourism on its commitment to promoting the region.

To further assist in the promotion of this region, on Friday 19 September 2008 I announced that the Victorian Government will provide a one-off allocation of \$50,000 for the promotion of Melbourne's West, subject to a co-contribution from local government and tourism operators in the region.

In making this announcement I was joined by the Member for Williamstown, Mr Wade Noonan MP, the Member for Keilor, Mr George Seitz MP, and the Member for Western Metropolitan Region, Mr Martin Pakula MLC – all of whom have been very active in their support for Western Melbourne Tourism.

An agreed marketing plan is currently being developed between Tourism Victoria, Destination Melbourne Limited and Western Melbourne Tourism, which will allow the co-operative marketing and advertising activities to align with and effectively leverage Tourism Victoria's current image campaign for Melbourne.

This funding provides a fantastic opportunity to highlight the many attractions on offer in western Melbourne.

**Schools: Catholic sector**

**Raised with:** Education

**Raised by:** Mrs Kronberg

**Raised on:** 26 June 2008

**REPLY:**

The Victorian Government recognises the important role the non-government schools sector plays in the education of students in Victoria and supports choice in education as demonstrated by the significant funding and other benefits it provides to non-government schools.

This Government entered into the first funding agreement with Victorian non-government schools, putting funding on a sustainable footing with a four year agreement which runs from 2006 to 2009.

In 2008–09, the Victorian Government will provide an estimated \$420 million in recurrent and specific purpose funding to non-government schools (of which approximately \$290 million will be allocated to the Catholic system). This represents a 72 per cent increase in recurrent State funding to non-government schools since the 1999–2000 financial year.

The Government has recently announced a significant funding boost of \$38.9 million in capital grant funding to rebuild and upgrade nearly 500 Catholic schools, vastly improving learning opportunities for the State's 186,000 Catholic school students. These funds will not only improve physical facilities at the schools, but will free up funds within the Catholic sector to meet additional operational costs.

This funding is in addition to the \$15 million provided in capital grants in 2008–09 to help needy non-government schools upgrade educational facilities, of which approximately \$11 million will be available to Catholic schools.

Substantial support is also provided to parents of students attending non-government schools, including the Education Maintenance Allowance for all low income parents, and the School Start Bonus which is paid to all parents of students at the beginning of Prep and Year 7.

Eligible students can also access the Government's conveyance allowance, school bus service and public transport concessions.

**VicForests: harvesting and haulage contracts**

**Raised with:** Treasurer

**Raised by:** Mr P. Davis

**Raised on:** 31 July 2008

**REPLY:**

Of the estimated 550,000 tonnes of firewood sold each year in Victoria, studies indicate that approximately 89% is sourced from private property.

The balance is sourced from State Forests. As indicated below, both the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and VicForests have responsibilities in relation to sales of firewood from State Forests. DSE manages the majority with VicForests responsible for the sale of around 2,000 tonnes of firewood per year, which represents less than half a per cent of Victoria's total supply.

Non-commercial / domestic firewood sales are managed by DSE. Firewood for domestic purposes can be readily accessed via DSE once a firewood permit is obtained.

VicForests is responsible for the commercial harvest and sale of timber products from State forests in Eastern Victoria. In doing so it must act on a commercial, competitive footing consistent with its obligations under the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004.

VicForests will continue to work closely with DSE, the Department of Primary Industries and individual firewood producers to attempt to streamline access by commercial operators. DSE is currently undertaking a detailed review of firewood management that will seek to address any issues with the current arrangements.

Pricing of commercial timber lots is determined by the market using a competitive sealed bid auction process managed by VicForests. The fact that this can be up to four times the royalty charged by DSE for domestic firewood collection reflects the different point of sale. DSE sells domestic firewood which the individual then collects from the forest, whereas VicForests sells commercial firewood delivered to the purchasers' premises and therefore incorporates the cost of harvest and transport.

VicForests has undertaken to ensure that adequate supplies of firewood are supplied to the commercial market. Since its inception in 2004, VicForests has made more than 200,000 tonnes of firewood available at auction of which only 10,000 tonnes has been purchased by firewood operators.

At the last firewood auction held in April 2008, VicForests put 45,000 tonnes up for sale, of which only 600 tonnes was actually sold.

VicForests has also undertaken a number of changes to the way in which commercial firewood is auctioned, including significant changes to the minimum lot size. This has not resulted in any noticeable increase in the amount of firewood sold at auction.

In operating within its remit VicForests is required to adhere to strict obligations under OH&S legislation. In order to meet these obligations VicForests has ceased the practice of firewood operators harvesting directly from forests due to the serious safety and logistics concerns that were posed by commercial and semi-commercial operators in the past. The safety of contractors operating in forest areas that fall within the responsibility of VicForests is of utmost concern to VicForests. This is the same model that is used for supplying logs to other customers.

Thank you for drawing this matter to my attention.

### **VicForests: harvesting and haulage contracts**

**Raised with: Treasurer**

**Raised by: Mr P. Davis**

**Raised on: 19 August 2008**

#### **REPLY:**

VicForests have advised that supply to Hallmark Oaks YTD is in line with their annual Buyers Operations plan which is agreed to by both parties. However, the company operates two mills that have a combined production capacity that exceeds their contracted volume with VicForests.

VicForests have recently taken measures to consolidate Harvest and Haul services in East Gippsland through the current harvest and haul tender where an additional three harvesting and haulage contracts are being let on an ongoing basis.

VicForests produced more total product in 2007/08 in the East Gippsland Forest Management Area (FMA) than in the final year that saw millers managed the harvesting operations (2005/06).

VicForests is contracted to supply sawlogs to one mill in Eden, NSW. Blue Ridge Hardwoods in Eden has received wood under contract since 1st October, 2007. For 2008/09 this mill is contracted to receive 6% of sawlog production from East Gippsland FMA. Similarly sawmills in East Gippsland, including Hallmark Oaks, also

purchase sawlogs from VicForests counterpart in NSW, Forests NSW. Importantly, VicForests is required under contract to supply all sawlog customers on an equitable basis, including the customer in Eden NSW. VicForests continues to monitor this issue daily and provides regular updates to customers.

VicForests is required to comply with a range of legislation including Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004. The performance of the organisation is in the public domain via the annual report and associated publicly available documents such as the Sustainability Report. VicForests is also subject to parliamentary oversight and is monitored on a regular basis by the Department of Treasury and Finance.

### **Breastfeeding: Best Start program**

**Raised with: Children and Early Childhood Development**

**Raised by: Ms Pulford**

**Raised on: 20 August 2008**

#### **REPLY:**

The 2006 Best Start Community profile data identified that in Ballarat breastfeeding rates have been declining over the past five years. The data across Victoria also shows a similar trend. In Ballarat the data indicates that 67 per cent of mothers are breastfeeding on discharge from hospital and that by six months this has dropped to 34 per cent.

The City of Ballarat is taking a leadership role on this issue by educating and promoting the benefits of breastfeeding and the Ballarat Best Start project has become the vehicle to raise community awareness in Ballarat.

The City of Ballarat is one of 30 Best Start sites across Victoria. Best Start is a prevention and early intervention project which aims to improve the health, development, learning and well being of all children from pregnancy through to eight years old.

The Ballarat Best Start partnership is aware of declining breastfeeding rates in Ballarat and has been very active in developing strategies which educate and promote the benefits of breastfeeding in the local community. In 2007, a five year Best Start Breastfeeding Action Plan was developed to continue to support and strengthen the work which has already been undertaken.

The underlying philosophy of the plan is based on core health promotion values including the need to create supportive environments, strengthen community actions, develop personal skills and re-orient health services.

A reference group is overseeing the implementation of the Action Plan with representatives from St John of God Hospital, Ballarat Health Services, Ballarat Community Health Centre, the Division of General Practice, Maternity Coalition, Australian Breastfeeding Association and City of Ballarat, Maternal and Child Health Program.

The goal of the Action Plan is to increase breastfeeding rates in the City of Ballarat and to achieve national breastfeeding targets for exclusive breastfeeding of 95 per cent at initiation, 80 per cent at three months and 60 per cent at six months. The ultimate vision is that Ballarat will become a baby/child and family friendly city in which breastfeeding is highly valued and supported by the whole community and its importance is widely understood.

A Breastfeeding Promotion Facilitator has been employed for one year to support the implementation of the Action Plan. This position is funded by Ballarat Community Health Centre and reports to the Best Start Facilitator and Breastfeeding Action Plan Reference Group.

In 2008 the City Of Ballarat became the first Victorian Local Government Authority to gain Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation, which is administered by the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

I recently approved ongoing funding of \$50,000 per annum for the Victorian Branch of the Australian Breastfeeding Association to continue its important work in promoting and sustaining breastfeeding among new

mothers. The Australian Breastfeeding Association is also available to assist businesses to become breastfeeding friendly workplaces, an initiative supported by the Ballarat Breastfeeding Charter.

To coincide with World Breastfeeding Week held in August 2008, the City of Ballarat launched the Ballarat Breastfeeding Charter. The Charter, developed by the City of Ballarat and Best Start partnership calls on the wider community such as businesses and local community service organisations to look at ways breastfeeding in the workplace can be supported. Reversing Ballarat's declining breastfeeding rates requires a community response and the Charter aims to engage the wider community.

I am pleased to support and encourage the work that is being undertaken by the City of Ballarat and the Best Start partnership.

### **State Emergency Service: funding**

**Raised with:** Police and Emergency Services

**Raised by:** Mr Rich-Phillips

**Raised on:** 20 August 2008

#### **REPLY:**

The Brumby Government is committed to improving community safety and strengthening the capacity of our emergency services. The Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) is a Statutory Authority and therefore has autonomy over how it allocates funds, including dealing with fluctuations in costs. Since 1999, the annual budget of VICSES has increased by 171 per cent, from \$9.7M to \$26.3M in 2008–09; this ensures that the emergency services have flexibility to address cost pressures.

The 2008–09 Budget provided \$2.9M to replace or upgrade essential equipment. This builds upon record funding from the previous year of \$48.8M, which provided VICSES with a new information technology system, broadband access, new and upgraded VICSES Units, vehicles and other equipment.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

### **Planning: Mount Eliza land**

**Raised with:** Planning

**Raised by:** Mr O'Donohue

**Raised on:** 9 September 2008

#### **REPLY:**

Amendment C87 to the Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme affects land bounded by the Nepean Highway, Humphries Road, Moorooduc Road and Canadian Bay Road, Mt Eliza. The area is referred to as the Mt Eliza Woodland area.

The amendment as adopted by the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council proposes modifying the existing Design and Development Overlay — Schedule 4 (DDO4) to remove the provision which enables the consideration of applications for subdivision into no more than two lots for every 2,600 square metres of site area in conjunction with an application for the development of more than one dwelling on a lot in the Mt Eliza Woodland area. The adopted amendment would have the effect of requiring a minimum lot size of 2,500 square metres for any new lot within the area. The amendment would also introduce new limits on the form of second dwellings which may be considered in the Mt Eliza Woodland area.

An independent Panel was appointed to hear and consider submissions to the exhibited amendment.

The Panel recommended the amendment be modified before adoption or alternatively Council consider a new amendment to encompass a more comprehensive review of the provisions of DDO4 to address all issues of character, as detailed in the Planisphere report (Mount Eliza Woodland Neighbourhood Character Study Report (Planisphere 2006)).

The Department is currently in discussions with the Council to progress resolution of the amendment as soon as possible.

### **Transport: south-east growth corridor**

**Raised with:** Premier

**Raised by:** Mrs Peulich

**Raised on:** 9 September 2008

#### **REPLY:**

The Government is committed to ensuring transport links for growth corridors in metropolitan Melbourne. By the end of the year, we will release the Victorian Transport Plan, which will take a state-wide view of our transport and infrastructure needs, including public transport and freight priorities. Importantly, it will coordinate urban development and transport infrastructure, in recognition of the challenges of population growth and the impact of climate change.

No decisions on specific projects have been made as yet, and the projects that the RACV proposes for the south-east growth corridor are under consideration for inclusion in the Victorian Transport Plan. In developing the Victorian Transport Plan, the Government has made it a priority to consult with those who actually use our transport network. More than 2000 individuals and organisations responded to the call for public comment following the release of the East West Link Needs Assessment. An online forum and a final Transport Summit have also engaged many Victorians and stakeholders.

We also held regional and suburban Transport Forums, including one in Dandenong, and a number of MPs have held their own forums with constituents and local community groups. Our Government has been listening and will continue to listen to the community and key stakeholders about how we can improve our transport system.

### **Schools: walking bus program**

**Raised with:** Health

**Raised by:** Mr Vogels

**Raised on:** 10 September 2008

#### **REPLY:**

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) is established under the *Tobacco Act 1987*. It is a body corporate consisting of 11 members appointed by the Minister for Health.

The members are responsible for promoting VicHealth's objectives. VicHealth's membership is distinct from most other like bodies in that there are three members who are also elected members of the Victorian Parliament.

Their position on the VicHealth Board is through election jointly by the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly, currently represented by Richard Dalla-Riva MLC, Hugh Delahunty MP and Kirstie Marshall MP.

Since 2001, VicHealth has provided time-limited, seed funding to establish and evaluate the effectiveness of the Walking School Bus program.

VicHealth funded the program for 2 years and then entered into a dollar for dollar cost-sharing agreement with councils for 3 years. Councils were informed of the funding commitment in their service agreements with VicHealth.

53 councils across Victoria received a \$55,000 grant over 2 years to implement WSB Program. After 2 years, \$27,000 (\$9,000 per year) matched funding from councils was granted for an additional 3 years. For the first group of councils this ended in June 2008.

VicHealth has an ongoing commitment to the program that continues until June 2011. Some councils have informed VicHealth that they will continue supporting WSB program.

In January 2008, VicHealth communicated with councils, sending them a reminder of the end date for their funding agreement and informing councils of the outcomes of a review they had undertaken.

Based on the WSB Program review findings and advice of the Active Transport Advisory Committee, the VicHealth Board made the decision not to continue to invest in WSB as a stand alone program beyond the present funding commitments. Instead, VicHealth has built on the successes and challenges of WSB to develop a more comprehensive and flexible program to increase the levels of children's activity.

The Streets Ahead Program will support communities to create supportive environments that enhance children's active transport and independent mobility in all aspects of their community life. The main aim of Streets Ahead is to increase physical activity in children aged 4 to 12 years through active transport and independent mobility in all aspects of their community life, not only to and from school.

VicHealth has funded six councils to implement the Streets Ahead program from July 2008 to June 2011: City of Greater Bendigo, City of Brimbank, Shire of Cardinia, City of Darebin, City of Greater Geelong and City of Wodonga.

In addition to this, the VicHealth Board has decided to invite expressions of interest from those local governments that completed their WSB Program funding in August 2008 and are continuing to support the WSB Program in their municipality to apply for one off funding of up to \$5,000.

This funding is to provide support and assist in the documentation of sustained approaches to the WSB Program in the municipality and document the activities that lead to sustainable outcomes, how the outcomes will be monitored in the longer term and how volunteers will be supported, registered and insured.

This documentation will be available on the VicHealth website in 2009 for other councils to use as they move to sustainable funding.

