

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

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

**17 October 2002
(extract from Book 2)**

Internet: www.parliament.vic.gov.au/downloadhansard

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

JOHN LANDY, AC, MBE

The Lieutenant-Governor

Lady SOUTHEY, AM

The Ministry

Premier and Minister for Multicultural Affairs	The Hon. S. P. Bracks, MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Environment, Minister for Water and Minister for Victorian Communities	The Hon. J. W. Thwaites, MP
Minister for Finance and Minister for Consumer Affairs	The Hon. J. Lenders, MLC
Minister for Education Services and Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs	The Hon. J. M. Allan, MP
Minister for Transport and Minister for Major Projects	The Hon. P. Batchelor, MP
Minister for Local Government and Minister for Housing	The Hon. C. C. Broad, MLC
Treasurer, Minister for Innovation and Minister for State and Regional Development	The Hon. J. M. Brumby, MP
Minister for Agriculture	The Hon. R. G. Cameron, MP
Minister for Planning, Minister for the Arts and Minister for Women's Affairs	The Hon. M. E. Delahunty, MP
Minister for Community Services	The Hon. S. M. Garbutt, MP
Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrections	The Hon. A. Haermeyer, MP
Minister for Manufacturing and Export and Minister for Financial Services Industry	The Hon. T. J. Holding, MP
Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Workcover	The Hon. R. J. Hulls, MP
Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs	The Hon. Gavin Jennings, MLC
Minister for Education and Training	The Hon. L. J. Kosky, MP
Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Commonwealth Games	The Hon. J. M. Madden, MLC
Minister for Gaming, Minister for Racing, Minister for Tourism and Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs	The Hon. J. Pandazopoulos, MP
Minister for Health	The Hon. B. J. Pike, MP
Minister for Energy Industries and Minister for Resources	The Hon. T. C. Theophanous, MLC
Minister for Small Business and Minister for Information and Communication Technology	The Hon. M. R. Thomson, MLC
Cabinet Secretary	Mr R. W. Wynne, MP

Legislative Council Committees

Privileges Committee — The Honourables W. R. Baxter, Andrew Brideson, H. E. Buckingham and Bill Forwood, and Mr Gavin Jennings, Ms Mikakos and Mr Viney.

Standing Orders Committee — The President, Ms Argondizzo, the Honourables B. W. Bishop and Andrea Coote, Mr Lenders, Ms Romanes and the Hon. E. G. Stoney.

Joint Committees

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables C. D. Hirsh and S. M. Nguyen.
(*Assembly*): Mr Cooper, Ms Marshall, Mr Maxfield, Dr Sykes and Mr Wells.

Economic Development Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables B. N. Atkinson and R. H. Bowden, and Mr Pullen. (*Assembly*): Mr Delahunty, Mr Jenkins, Ms Morand and Mr Robinson.

Education and Training Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables H. E. Buckingham and P. R. Hall.
(*Assembly*): Ms Eckstein, Mr Herbert, Mr Kotsiras, Ms Munt and Mr Perton.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables Andrea Coote, D. K. Drum, J. G. Hilton and W. A. Lovell. (*Assembly*): Ms Duncan, Ms Lindell and Mr Seitz.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Council*): The Hon. D. McL. Davis and Mr Smith.
(*Assembly*): Ms McTaggart, Ms Neville, Mrs Powell, Mrs Shardey and Mr Wilson.

House Committee — (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), the Honourables B. N. Atkinson and Andrew Brideson, Ms Hadden and the Honourables J. M. McQuilten and S. M. Nguyen. (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr Cooper, Mr Leighton, Mr Lockwood, Mr Maughan, Mr Savage and Mr Smith.

Law Reform Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables Andrew Brideson and R. Dalla-Riva, and Ms Hadden.
(*Assembly*): Ms Beard, Mr Hudson, Mr Lupton and Mr Maughan.

Library Committee — (*Council*): The President, Ms Argondizzo and the Honourables C. A. Strong, R. Dalla-Riva and Kaye Darveniza. (*Assembly*): The Speaker, Mr Carli, Mrs Powell, Mr Seitz and Mr Thompson.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee — (*Council*): Mr Scheffer and Mr Somyurek.
(*Assembly*): Mr Baillieu, Ms Buchanan, Mr Dixon, Mr Nardella and Mr Smith.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables W. R. Baxter, Bill Forwood and G. K. Rich-Phillips, and Ms Romanes. (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr Clark, Mr Donnellan, Ms Green and Mr Merlino.

Road Safety Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables B. W. Bishop, J. H. Eren and E. G. Stoney.
(*Assembly*): Mr Harkness, Mr Langdon, Mr Mulder and Mr Trezise.

Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables J. M. McQuilten and R. G. Mitchell. (*Assembly*): Mr Crutchfield, Mr Hardman, Mr Ingram, Dr Napthine and Mr Walsh.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Council*): Ms Argondizzo and the Hon. A. P. Olexander.
(*Assembly*): Ms D'Ambrosio, Mr Jasper, Mr Leighton, Mr Lockwood, Mr McIntosh, Mr Perera and Mr Thompson.

Heads of Parliamentary Departments

Assembly — Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Mr R. W. Purdey

Council — Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr W. R. Tunnecliffe

Hansard — Chief Reporter: Ms C. J. Williams

Library — Librarian: Ms G. Dunston

Joint Services — Director, Corporate Services: Mr S. N. Aird

Director, Infrastructure Services: Mr G. C. Spurr

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

President: The Hon. M. M. GOULD

Deputy President and Chair of Committees: Ms GLENYYS ROMANES

Temporary Chairs of Committees: The Honourables B. W. Bishop, R. H. Bowden , Andrew Brideson, H. E. Buckingham,
Ms D. G. Hadden, the Honourable J. G. Hilton, Mr R. F. Smith and the Honourable C. A. Strong

Leader of the Government:
Mr J. LENDERS

Deputy Leader of the Government:
Mr GAVIN JENNINGS

Leader of the Opposition:
The Hon. P. R. DAVIS

Deputy Leader of the Opposition:
The Hon. ANDREA COOTE

Leader of the National Party:
The Hon. P. R. HALL

Deputy Leader of the National Party:
The Hon. D. K. DRUM

Member	Province	Party	Member	Province	Party
Argondizzo, Ms Lidia	Templestowe	ALP	Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne	Melbourne	ALP
Atkinson, Hon. Bruce Norman	Koonung	LP	Koch, Hon. David	Western	LP
Baxter, Hon. William Robert	North Eastern	NP	Lenders, Mr John	Waverley	ALP
Bishop, Hon. Barry Wilfred	North Western	NP	Lovell, Hon. Wendy Ann	North Eastern	LP
Bowden, Hon. Ronald Henry	South Eastern	LP	McQuilten, Hon. John Martin	Ballarat	ALP
Brideson, Hon. Andrew Ronald	Waverley	LP	Madden, Hon. Justin Mark	Doutta Galla	ALP
Broad, Ms Candy Celeste	Melbourne North	ALP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny	Jika Jika	ALP
Buckingham, Hon. Helen Elizabeth	Koonung	ALP	Mitchell, Hon. Robert George	Central Highlands	ALP
Carbines, Mrs Elaine Cafferty	Geelong	ALP	Nguyen, Hon. Sang Minh	Melbourne West	ALP
Coote, Hon. Andrea	Monash	LP	Olexander, Hon. Andrew Phillip	Silvan	LP
Dalla-Riva, Hon. Richard	East Yarra	LP	Pullen, Mr Noel Francis	Higinbotham	ALP
Darveniza, Hon. Kaye	Melbourne West	ALP	Rich-Phillips, Hon. Gordon Kenneth	Eumemmerring	LP
Davis, Hon. David McLean	East Yarra	LP	Romanes, Ms Glenyys Dorothy	Melbourne	ALP
Davis, Hon. Philip Rivers	Gippsland	LP	Scheffer, Mr Johan Emiel	Monash	ALP
Drum, Hon. Damian Kevin	North Western	NP	Smith, Mr Robert Frederick	Chelsea	ALP
Eren, Hon. John Hamdi	Geelong	ALP	Somyurek, Mr Adem	Eumemmerring	ALP
Forwood, Hon. Bill	Templestowe	LP	Stoney, Hon. Eadley Graeme	Central Highlands	LP
Gould, Hon. Monica Mary	Doutta Galla	ALP	Strong, Hon. Christopher Arthur	Higinbotham	LP
Hadden, Ms Dianne Gladys	Ballarat	ALP	Theophanous, Hon. Theo Charles	Jika Jika	ALP
Hall, Hon. Peter Ronald	Gippsland	NP	Thomson, Hon. Marsha Rose	Melbourne North	ALP
Hilton, Hon. John Geoffrey	Western Port	ALP	Viney, Mr Matthew Shaw	Chelsea	ALP
Hirsh, Hon. Carolyn Dorothy	Silvan	ALP	Vogels, Hon. John Adrian	Western	LP

CONTENTS

THURSDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2002

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE	
<i>Manufacturing: small business</i>	427
<i>Youth: government initiatives</i>	427, 431
<i>Natural Resources and Environment:</i>	
<i>reorganisation</i>	428
<i>Ports: reform</i>	428
<i>Electricity: Enviromission project</i>	429
<i>Sport and recreation: campsites</i>	430
<i>Ministers: adjournment attendance</i>	430
<i>Skillsnet program</i>	430
<i>Gas: rural and regional Victoria</i>	431
<i>Supplementary questions</i>	
<i>Manufacturing: small business</i>	427
<i>Natural Resources and Environment:</i>	
<i>reorganisation</i>	428
<i>Electricity: Enviromission project</i>	429
MOTIONS TO TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS	
<i>Manufacturing: small business</i>	432
<i>Youth: government initiatives</i>	434
<i>Electricity: Enviromission project</i>	435
<i>Ports: reform</i>	436
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE	
<i>Answers</i>	437
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS	
<i>Report</i>	438
SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS	
COMMITTEE	
<i>Regulation review</i>	438
PAPERS.....	439
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
<i>Orders of the day</i>	439
BASSLINK PROJECT.....	439, 443, 457
DISTINGUISHED VISITORS.....	443
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
<i>Bob Jane T-Marts 1000</i>	454
<i>Parthenon Marbles</i>	454, 455
<i>Drugs: heroin deaths</i>	455
<i>Justice Geoffrey Flatman</i>	455
<i>Drought: government assistance</i>	456
<i>Gunnamatta: sewage outfall</i>	456
<i>Bali: terrorist attack</i>	456
<i>St Albans Lunar Festival</i>	457
<i>Housing: Port Melbourne</i>	457
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA BILL	
<i>Second reading</i>	471
FEDERAL AWARDS (UNIFORM SYSTEM) BILL	
<i>Second reading</i>	475
NATIONAL PARKS (BOX-IRONBARK AND OTHER PARKS) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	493
BUSINESS LICENSING LEGISLATION (AMENDMENT) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	493
MURRAY-DARLING BASIN (AMENDMENT) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	493
TRAVEL AGENTS (AMENDMENT) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	493
CONTROL OF WEAPONS AND FIREARMS ACTS (SEARCH POWERS) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	493
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
<i>Adjournment</i>	493
ADJOURNMENT	
<i>Schools: Silvan Province</i>	495
<i>Gembrook Primary School</i>	496
<i>Roads: black spot program</i>	496
<i>Schools: East Yarra Province</i>	496
<i>Chisholm Institute of TAFE</i>	497
<i>Arts: Dream Out Loud project</i>	497
<i>Blue Light discos</i>	497
<i>Patterson Lakes: library</i>	498
<i>Responses</i>	499

Thursday, 17 October 2002

The PRESIDENT (Hon. B. A. Chamberlain) took the chair at 10.04 a.m. and read the prayer.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Manufacturing: small business

Hon. W. I. SMITH (Silvan) — What action will the Minister for Small Business take to stop the loss of jobs in small manufacturing businesses and the closure of small manufacturing businesses?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business) — It is an interesting question from the member of the opposition because the Bracks government actually established a Minister for Manufacturing Industry. The previous government considered manufacturing to be an industry that would close down in this state. We have made a commitment to manufacturing. We have developed a package of initiatives in manufacturing to ensure that our manufacturing companies actually look to the new requirements they will have to meet to compete in a global economy.

We are working strongly with the manufacturing sector and industry and have been praised by the Australian Industry Group for the work we are doing with its members to promote manufacturing industry in this state. By contrast, when you ask what the opposition stands for in relation to manufacturing, the answer is nothing. Three years, and nothing; and during its time in government, nothing!

We will continue to value the role manufacturing plays in Victoria, and we will continue to work with members of the industry to ensure that they are preparing themselves for the future of manufacturing and carving out a niche for the Victorian manufacturing industry in a global environment.

Supplementary question

Hon. W. I. SMITH (Silvan) — The minister's policies are not working. Yesterday the Australian Bureau of Statistics released a major report.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I want to hear the supplementary question.

Hon. W. I. SMITH — Yesterday the ABS released a report that it releases every two years on small business in Australia. It said that small manufacturing

businesses are employing less Victorians than they were before 1999. The number of employees in small manufacturing businesses has declined by 22 per cent. Under the Bracks government it has gone from 74 300 to 58 000, a loss of 16 200 jobs, and the number of small manufacturing businesses has fallen. It has had a fall of 1400, from 26 800 to 25 400. The minister's policies are not working. What new policies and initiatives will she be introducing to stop this worrying trend?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business) — I will go through this again. We have developed a policy on manufacturing industry that has seen manufacturing jobs grow; we have seen jobs grow. The agenda for new manufacturing will see manufacturing in this state take on the challenges it has to meet globally.

In fact, manufacturing was struggling under the previous government because it was not prepared to put in the effort and energy to work with the sector to ensure it could meet the challenges. Where was the support for research and development in manufacturing? Where was the recognition of the new technology that manufacturers would need to adopt in order to be competitive? Where was the realisation — —

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Youth: government initiatives

Hon. R. F. SMITH (Chelsea) — The Minister for Youth Affairs has previously informed the house of action the Bracks government has taken to ensure that a whole-of-government approach is being taken to youth affairs. Will the minister outline the government's vision for youth policy and its framework for program development?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Youth Affairs) — The young people of Victoria are often thought of as the future. However, the Bracks government understands that young people are not only the future, they are making a commitment to the community today — right now. The previous government showed absolutely no respect for young people. The opposition continues to talk down young people at every opportunity it is given. It always likes to portray them in a negative manner.

I am delighted to inform the house that I recently had the pleasure of launching the Bracks government's new youth strategy, *Respect*. The *Respect* framework document connects the Victorian government's broad vision of Growing Victoria Together. There are four

key elements in this document: involvement of young people; learning and working; support; and, most importantly, celebrating young people. *Respect* provides a clear indication of the direction and strategies the government is adopting to enhance policies, programs and services for young people. It also clearly shows the ways in which we will demonstrate programs in measuring our commitment. We will demonstrate that the Bracks government encourages the involvement of young people in all aspects of community life.

We have established the successful youth round tables where young people can have direct input to government policies and talk to government policy-makers. This government believes young people should be celebrated. We will continue to work with and support young people to build them up. We have doubled the funding for Freeza, unlike what the Liberal Party did, and we will continue to encourage young people and support them. After the former government defunded the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Yacvic, we re-instituted its funding. We are fostering successful partnerships amongst youth agencies. The Bracks government will continue to ensure that a coordinated, whole-of-government approach is taken to youth affairs. We will continue to show respect to young people.

**Natural Resources and Environment:
reorganisation**

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — I draw the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources to the announcement in recent days by the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment of a departmental reorganisation that has seen the appointment of three new deputy secretaries, increasing the number of deputy secretaries in the department from two to five. Will the minister confirm that these three new departmental fat cats appointed at salaries of up to \$200 000 each will — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house did not permit the Honourable David Davis's last words to be heard. I ask him to repeat the last couple of sentences.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — I ask the minister to confirm that these three new departmental fat cats appointed at salaries of up to \$200 000 each could cost Victorians up to \$600 000.

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) — Of course the opposition has just

reminded everyone of its approach to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment when it was last in government, which was to slash resources to that department, including service delivery and the officers of that department who were responsible for delivering services right around this state in a whole range of vital areas.

This government has a strong agenda which is being delivered by DNRE, and it makes no apologies for providing additional resourcing to that department to service the government and its policy agenda to ensure that the agenda is delivered in all areas and appropriately resourced. This includes, at the behest of the secretary of the department, positions that are necessary to ensure that Labor's policy agenda is effectively implemented. That is exactly what the secretary of the department has done, and the government has ensured that the resources are provided for these positions.

Supplementary question

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — I take that as confirmation that three new deputy secretaries are being appointed and that \$600 000 of public money is being wasted without any outcome for the community. Indeed the minister's own area of responsibility has seen the upgrading of an executive director, Peter Sutherland, to the position of deputy secretary for catchments, community and water. The minister has responsibility for some areas of water, which lies in part in that department. I also note that the disorganisation in the Department of Natural Resources and Environment is ongoing. This is in response in part to the failure over Seal Rocks, and Kevin Love has come to that department from the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Will the minister confirm — —

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Ports: reform

Hon. G. D. ROMANES (Melbourne) — Will the Minister for Ports please advise the house what action the Bracks government is taking in response to the review of port reform conducted by Professor Bill Russell?

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Ports) — I thank the honourable member for her question. In the middle of this year the Bracks government released the full review report, *The Next Wave of Port Reform*, by Professor Russell and a comprehensive government response to that review. I am pleased to report to the house that since the release of that report, work is

proceeding speedily to implement the government's response.

To summarise, Professor Russell found basically that the port reforms implemented by the previous government had serious shortcomings and left our port sector ill equipped to face current and emerging competitor pressures, particularly from the other main and capital city ports of Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Fremantle. In other words, Victoria's ports have been left exposed to interstate competition as a result of the previous government's inaction. The Bracks government is determined to fix this and has been active in turning things around in this sector, which is so vital to the Victorian and national economies.

Significantly Professor Russell also found that the institutional arrangements put in place under the Kennett Liberal reforms neglected safety and environmental management in our ports and in our state waters more generally. This is not acceptable to the Bracks government. The government's response to the review broadly endorsed Professor Russell's findings and put in place a work program including some 22 key actions to implement a new direction for Victoria's ports. These actions include a strategic planning framework for Victoria's ports. Other priority actions include addressing safety and environmental concerns, areas much neglected by the former Liberal coalition government.

It is somewhat suspicious, to say the least, that a number of opposition members, led by the honourable member for Mordialloc in the other place and now joined by the Honourable Andrea Coote, are professing to be concerned about the environmental impact of developments vital to the future competitive position of the port of Melbourne. I am referring, of course, to channel deepening. Meanwhile, we have a deafening silence from the shadow Minister for Ports.

The Bracks government is managing our ports' governance and future growth in an integrated and systematic fashion to ensure the continuing success of our major ports. It stands in stark contrast to the state opposition, which cannot even get a policy together on the critical task of investigating the feasibility of deepening the approaches to Melbourne's shipping channels — still no policy! I advise that three attempts have been made to approach the offices of the state opposition to brief opposition members on this vital project of channel deepening. No response has been provided by the opposition to this invitation.

In contrast I congratulate the local federal Liberal member for Flinders, Mr Greg Hunt, who has been very

sensible and found the time to inform himself by being briefed on this vital project so that he can develop an informed position, unlike the state opposition, which continues in blind ignorance of this project.

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Electricity: Enviromission project

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — Is the Minister for Energy and Resources satisfied with the efforts of her department to have the innovative Enviromission alternative energy project built in Victoria?

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) — I could not hear the name of the project.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Will Mr Bishop give the minister the name of the project?

Hon. B. W. Bishop — The Enviromission alternative energy project. I can give the minister a bit more detail; it is a 1-kilometre high tower — —

Hon. C. C. BROAD — I am well aware of the project to which the honourable member refers. The advice I have received on this project is that to date the proponents of the project, which is still in what could reasonably be described as the early planning stages, have as far as I am aware received every assistance they have requested from the Victorian government. If there are any matters outstanding on which they are seeking assistance I would be pleased to hear about them. There have certainly been no approaches to me that I am aware of to further this very exciting project proposal to further stages.

Supplementary question

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — I am disappointed with that answer for a number of reasons. One reason is that I have raised the subject of this project in this house four times. It is an innovative project and would have been excellent for Victoria. I read an announcement by the New South Wales government in the *Sunraysia Daily* of 12 October stating:

... the giant Enviromission solar tower power generation project has been given state significant development status.

The state government will now determine the fate of the futuristic proposal to build a 1-kilometre high, \$800 million tower on Tapio station with continued input from —

the Wentworth council. Further:

Granting the project state significance has bolstered the chances of the project becoming a reality.

The federal government has now given the project major project facilitation status.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The question is?

Hon. B. W. BISHOP — The question is: why — —

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Sport and recreation: campsites

Hon. JENNY MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — Will the Minister for Sport and Recreation advise the house what steps he has taken to ensure that all young Victorians have access to quality campsite facilities?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — There are more than 100 000 bed nights each year across five Sport and Recreation Victoria campsites, with the majority of visitors being school-age children. This government has committed \$750 000 in funding to enable priority works to be undertaken at Howmans Gap, Camp Manyung and Mount Evelyn to improve building design and to allow for safer supervision of the users of those camps, most of those being school-age children, as I mentioned.

The projects will address compliance issues, ensuring that all facilities comply with current state legislation industry standards — à la building codes, occupational health and safety, essential services et cetera. These works have been part of an ongoing program arising out of recent technical audits and master planning projects conducted by Sport and Recreation Victoria.

The camps are viewed as benchmark facilities across the state and provide leadership for other private camp owners across the state that provide facilities of this nature. This is an example of the government's commitment and capacity to deliver high-quality services that directly address important issues in the Growing Victoria Together strategy.

These camps should be not underestimated for their vital assistance to many regional areas, particularly with the huge number of visitors staying at the camps. Honourable members will appreciate that there are many services related to the ongoing viability of these camps which link directly into those regional centres. The government is very proud of its commitment to ensuring quality service provision across the state and growing the whole of the state.

Ministers: adjournment attendance

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — I refer the Leader of the Government to the government's bans on all but one minister attending any given adjournment debate. Will all ministers attend the adjournment debate in Benalla on 30 October?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Education Services) — Opposition members are sore losers. I have not thought about it, Mr President, and I will take it under advisement.

Skillsnet program

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Jika Jika) — Yesterday the Minister for Information and Communication Technology outlined a number of outstanding achievements the Bracks government has delivered under the Connecting Victoria policy. One of the achievements referred to was in relation to the community program Skillsnet. Will the minister provide the house with further details regarding the achievements under the Skillsnet program?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Information and Communication Technology) — The Skillsnet program provides free or affordable Internet access and training to Victorians who would not otherwise have access to the technology or skills to be able to take advantage of the benefits of new technology.

The previous government did offer a Skillsnet program. However, that program was not properly targeted to the groups that most required the assistance from government. To effectively close the digital divide in Victoria it is important that Internet skills training is targeted to those communities who most need it or who would otherwise not have access to those facilities.

The Bracks government has delivered an improved Skillsnet program that is better targeted to improve the delivery of programs to disadvantaged groups: disadvantaged communities because of isolation, people with disabilities, older Victorians, indigenous people and people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

The results of this improved program speak for themselves. Skillsnet had a target to provide Internet training and access to 80 000 Victorians by 30 June 2003. This milestone has already been reached — nine months ahead of schedule. To date, over 83 000 Victorians have received Internet training and access under the Skillsnet program. Currently on average more than 1000 Victorians are being provided

with Internet training and access every month through the Skillsnet program.

Hon. M. M. Gould — How many?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON — More than 1000.

I am pleased to be able to announce to the house that there is now a further round of Skillsnet funding: 18 Skillsnet projects will receive almost \$260 000 in funding to establish approximately 56 Skillsnet centres, and 89 per cent of those will be located in rural Victoria.

Just one example of the projects to receive funding is the Smith Family, which will receive \$50 000 to provide Internet training and access to highly disadvantaged groups, including unemployed people and those on low incomes. The project will be delivered in Sunshine, Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Morwell and Shepparton.

The redirection of the Skillsnet program has been a huge success. We are delivering Internet skills and training to people and communities who would otherwise not have the access. Unlike the Liberals, we do not live in a policy-free zone. You cannot even find the Liberal Party's information and communications technology policies in cyberspace!

Gas: rural and regional Victoria

Hon. C. A. FURLETTI (Templestowe) — I refer to the government's gas reticulation network task force, which has been advising the Treasurer for over eight months now, and I ask the Minister for Energy and Resources: when will the government stop procrastinating and take positive steps to bring natural gas to marginally viable towns in country and regional Victoria?

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) — Of course, this is in contrast to the opposition, which is still trying to figure out how it is going to fund all of the promises made by not just the new Leader of the Opposition but the one before him!

There is no question that there is strong interest in country, regional and indeed outer suburban metropolitan areas in relation to gas extensions. This is a matter which this government has taken up very strongly, in contrast to the previous government which, on selling off the Gas and Fuel, which previously planned gas extensions in this state, took no interest whatsoever in providing for future gas extensions. Indeed, it did not even ensure in the sale process that

commitments made by the Gas and Fuel would be honoured by the new private owners of those utilities.

This government has conducted a very thorough examination of the need for gas extensions around this state and the economic opportunities which attach to gas extensions. I am very confident that when this government judges the timing to be appropriate it will be making announcements about future gas extensions, as the government — the Treasurer and Minister for State and Regional Development — has indicated prior to this question today.

So there is no secret that the government is actively considering gas extensions in Victoria, and members of the opposition can rest assured that this government will be acting in the interests of country and regional Victorians and those in outer metropolitan areas, in stark contrast to the performance of the previous Liberal government. This government will ensure that its commitments are properly funded in the interests of maintaining a financially responsible fiscal setting in this state, again in contrast to the unfunded commitments, the billions of dollars racked up by the Leader of the Opposition and his predecessor.

Youth: government initiatives

Hon. D. G. HADDEN (Ballarat) — Can the Minister for Youth Affairs please inform the house of the government's efforts to encourage the youth sector working in partnership? In particular, can the minister provide any examples of the government supporting local communities to collaborate in the delivery of youth services?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Youth Affairs) — I thank the honourable member for her question. As I have indicated in this house on a number of occasions, the Bracks government is committed to supporting communities in their efforts to work in partnership. This is something the opposition does not understand — it does not comprehend this.

The previous government actively prevented groups in the youth sector from working together; it caused young people to break down any collaborations they may have had. Carefully formed community partnerships that were in the best interests of local young people were torn apart by the previous Liberal government. That was because its members did not care about young people. They did not care then; they do not care now.

It was with great pleasure that I recently announced a Community Support Fund grant of over \$1 million to assist the building of the Wyndham youth resource

centre. I have to congratulate the City of Wyndham, which worked collaboratively and collectively with the sector, the community and, of course, the honourable member for Werribee in the other place. Working together, they identified a need in the area. They, together with the government, will be building this resource.

When this resource is built the centre will include a darkroom, a band rehearsal space, meeting areas and Internet facilities for young people. It will also include office space that will be leased to youth-focused agencies. So you will have a centre that is of relevance to the community and to the young people. It will give young people opportunities. If they do have some concerns, they can go into a facility. Without being subjected to what the opposition always likes to do — that is, stereotype these young people as being in need — they will be able to go to a facility and seek assistance from services in the youth sector, participate in Freeza programs or have access to IT facilities. That is the stark contrast between this government and the opposition.

The people of the community of Wyndham ought to be proud of their commitment to their youth. I know they are in putting this proposal to the government. As I said, with the great work of the honourable member for Werribee in the other place and through the Community Support Fund we were able to work collaboratively in partnership for the youth of Wyndham. That shows the stark contrast with what the Liberal Party did when it was in government. We are turning things around for young people. We will continue to work in collaboration. We respect young people.

MOTIONS TO TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Manufacturing: small business

Hon. W. I. SMITH (Silvan) — I move:

That the Council take note of the answer given by the Minister for Small Business to a question without notice asked by the Honourable W. I. Smith relating to small manufacturing businesses.

The answers the minister gave clearly show that she is not on top of her portfolio. She is not really aware of what is happening in small businesses in the manufacturing industry. It is very clear from Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, and I am very surprised she has not seen them.

The ABS releases a report every two years on small business figures across Australia. Yesterday it released a report looking at small manufacturing businesses in Victoria. Those stats show very clearly that small manufacturing businesses in Victoria are employing far less people than they were in 1998 and 1999. It is an incredibly worrying trend: worrying because what we are starting to see is small manufacturing businesses shedding employees. They have shed 22 per cent of employees since 1998–99, from 74 300 to 58 100, a fall of 16 200 jobs in two years.

In that same period Queensland had a rise of 3700 jobs in small manufacturing businesses and New South Wales stayed steady, but Victoria had a decrease, losing 22 per cent of employment in the area in addition to a fall of 1400 in the number of businesses.

One of the reasons for the fall in this area of manufacturing is our poor industrial relations. Between April 2000 and August 2001, 15 major food processing plants closed in Victoria. The Institute of Public Affairs did a paper in its magazine on why this was occurring. It put closure of those 15 food manufacturing companies down to poor industrial relations in Victoria. Many small manufacturing businesses feed off larger manufacturing areas. That has to be one of the reasons why small manufacturing businesses are finding it difficult.

The decreases in jobs and in numbers of small businesses are very much in line with the results of the survey published last month in the Yellow Pages *Small Business Index*. Small business confidence has dropped in Victoria. The 4 August index showed that confidence had dropped considerably when compared to other states, and that small business confidence in the Bracks government had dropped over the previous 12 months. In addition it showed that since the election of the Bracks government small business sentiment towards Labor policies had been negative in every quarter. The index also recorded a negative result in sales, the weakest result in Australia for small business profitability. Something is going wrong in small business in Victoria.

And what is it? The government does not have the policies; it is not pro-business, not pro-small business. Look at what is happening with the taxes impacting on small businesses. Since the Bracks government came in payroll taxes have gone up in real terms by 27 per cent, insurance taxes are up by 49 per cent and revenue from land taxes — which impact enormously on small businesses — is up by 66 per cent.

What is the government doing about these policies? Absolutely nothing! What is it doing about small manufacturing businesses that are closing down and shedding jobs? Absolutely nothing! The minister today, in her response to the two questions, said, 'We are doing really well in Victoria. Our manufacturing industry is growing, our policies are working'. Yet she failed to address the trend that is going on. Small manufacturing businesses are closing down and jobs are being lost.

I condemn the government, which, as I said, is not listening to small business. Its policies are wrong; its Workcover premiums are too high; general insurances are up; there is overregulation; and compliance costs are high. Under this government over the last two years we have had an increase in overregulation and compliance costs that are sending some small businesses to the wall.

It is time the Labor government and the Minister for Small Business actually took some responsibility for some of their policies. She has had the portfolio for three years, and yet small business has not seen any real policy that has assisted it in taxation, Workcover, regulation, red tape or compliance costs. I condemn the government for its lack of interest in and lack of pro-business policies for small business.

Hon. R. F. SMITH (Chelsea) — What a pathetic attempt by the shadow Minister for Small Business! She indicated yet again to this side of the house that she knows nothing about manufacturing; but she in good company with those on that side of the house.

She started by referring to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures. Allow me to inform the house that there are some other ABS statistics for May to August 2002. Those figures show that manufacturing jobs in this state have increased by 8400. Maybe it is a different department of the ABS from the one the Honourable Wendy Smith was referring to; I do not know. However, as I said earlier by interjection, you can make figures say whatever you damned will like. The fact is the ABS stated that in May to August of this year 8400 extra jobs were created. The manufacturing industry in Victoria is worth \$50 billion to the state.

We heard the shadow minister rattling on about small businesses and about how they feed off major companies and so on. She is right, they do, and our manufacturing sector is going gangbusters, clear and simple. It is booming. Our exports are up quite significantly and many industries, including the steel industry and the automotive industry, are enjoying

record exports to the Middle East of cars manufactured here or that have componentry manufactured here.

I know the opposition members do not like the fact that we are winning in this area, creating jobs. The lowest unemployment rate in the country is here in Victoria under the Bracks government. They hate that.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. R. F. SMITH — We know the opposition does not like workers. They hate the fact that most workers in this state and, in particular, manufacturing workers, have federal awards. The opposition would get rid of them if it had the chance — it has demonstrated that. The opposition's hostility towards ordinary working people has no limits.

Earlier in the session we heard attacks on the Bracks government for failing to do what it could to prevent the Ericsson company leaving Victoria and moving to Singapore. Let us have a little more in-depth look at why Ericsson made that decision. The decision was made purely and simply on the basis that the Singaporean government outbid us. How did it do that? It offered Ericsson this deal: for every PhD-qualified person the company employed in Singapore the government would pay the wages for two years. At the end of that time if they did not like their employee they could let them go with no problems.

Is the opposition suggesting that we should have offered the same? I doubt that we would have had qualified people to fill those positions because it could not be done, but the opposition tried to blame this side of the house. The fact is, clear and simple, there is an election in the air. The opposition is trying to talk down the state, implying that the government is not up to it. All the figures, including Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, demonstrate to all and sundry that we are right and the opposition got it wrong — it was a puerile attack on the government.

I suggest that post election the opposition give serious consideration to the people who represent it in these areas. It should get somebody who knows something about manufacturing — although it might be very difficult I might say. Who knows, somebody new might come in. Industry and manufacturing in the state, including high technology projects, such as the Holden V6 engine plant, are good for Victoria. The opposition hated it when we were successful in keeping the project in Victoria, and implied to all and sundry that we are not capable, but we are.

What does the opposition think of the Siemens television commercial talking about the fantastic

opportunities in Victoria, because we have it all here in Victoria — the skills, the resources, exports and the transportation systems. According to that company, we have it all and Victoria is the place to be — how perceptive of Siemens. The opposition hates it because we are delivering.

The spin-off effect is downstreaming to smaller suppliers, such as automotive componentry companies like Siemens VDO Automotive, that rely significantly on what we are doing. But the opposition did nothing to commend VDO; it condemned that company because of its associations with governments and its ability to work hand-in-glove with unions. The opposition does not like that.

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Motion agreed to.

Youth: government initiatives

Hon. A. P. OLEXANDER (Silvan) — I move:

That the Council take note of the answer given by the Minister for Youth Affairs to a question without notice asked by the Honourable R. F. Smith relating to the government's youth policy vision.

The Bracks government's long-awaited youth strategy, *Respect: the Government's Vision for Young People*, which it somewhat misleadingly says is the government's vision for young people has failed to raise even a peep from the youth sector in the state or from young Victorians.

The deafening silence that has come from youth organisations is to be expected given that the government's position was virtually dictated to young people. The document was brought down from the lofty heights of the minister's office, which listened only in a cursory way to the concerns of young Victorians whose concerns it was supposed to address.

For the government this policy has represented three years of wasted effort. For youth organisations it was a disappointing decree and an arrogant attempt to address issues affecting youth without first asking youth what it thought. The most disappointing aspect about the policy's release was that nobody even noticed. So underwhelming was the document that the Bracks government was unable to get youth issues into the public domain for debate for even a single day. It is a patchworked, superficial attempt and young people have not responded to it.

The reason the policy failed to create a ripple was because it lacked substance and failed to address four

key issues of concern for young people. Young Victorians want a real voice in Victorian democracy, and *Respect* made no suggestions. Young people need an answer for youth unemployment, and *Respect* failed to provide any hope on this front. Young people also want the government to address youth suicide, and the *Respect* document contained a one-line glib quote to address this growing epidemic. Young people, of course, are sick of youth homelessness issues, and *Respect* ignored this scourge completely.

What young Victorians wanted from the government was an action plan to address these issues. What they got was a slick and expensive policy document produced by middle-aged bureaucrats who tried to talk the talk but have completely failed to produce anything of substance. Young people in the state should be able to initiate solutions by taking them to government and having their ideas listened to.

The greatest single criticism coming from the youth sector about the strategy was that it failed to spell out a clear action plan. Young Victorians want a clear way forward — a plan that allows them to participate and find solutions to the problems they face on a daily basis. Instead of offering young people a hand in partnership, as the minister claimed in her answer, the Bracks government has yet again offered a superficial strategy which is full of glossy photos but no answers.

As usual, the Bracks government has attempted to window-dress with youth affairs. It has run around the state conducting youth round tables but these have proven to be a complete waste of time for the young people involved. The round tables have resulted in countless documents tabled by bureaucrats but absolutely no action arising from those suggestions.

The ultimate indictment of the government's approach is that *Respect* failed to address concerns mentioned at the youth round tables. The round tables raised issues such as youth unemployment, youth suicide and youth homelessness, but these issues have been completely ignored in this inappropriately named document.

By contrast, what young Victorians want is to be brought to the centre of government. True respect means not only listening but responding to the concerns of young people in a practical way. The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria has advocated placing the Minister for Youth Affairs in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, thus ensuring issues are handled on a whole-of-government basis.

Young people want to see the creation of a coordinating youth policy advisory council to ensure the voice of

young Victorians is not ignored by government. The Bracks government has completely ignored its own auspicing body on these issues.

Young people want their concerns heard and they want a government that is prepared to act on issues that affect them. Victoria needs a real partnership between young people and government. This will require goodwill, commitment and generational change. Young Victorians are waiting for a government that is prepared to bring them to the centre where decisions are made. If *Respect* is anything to go by, young Victorians will have to continue waiting, and when a Liberal government arrives they will receive what they truly deserve.

Hon. JENNY MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — I rise to speak in support of what the government has done in the area of youth services. I was pleased to have been able to attend the launch of the policy *Respect: the Government's Vision for Young People*. It is a very good document, for which both the current Minister for Youth Affairs and the former minister, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, should be congratulated and commended.

The youth strategy document was developed after extensive community consultation that involved young people across Victoria. I was pleased to see many of those young people representing numerous youth organisations attend the launch of the *Respect* document. That indicates the very high level of support for this vision document that exists in the community and in organisations that deal with young people.

I note that it is a framework document. It is a whole-of-government approach to the government's vision as outlined in *Growing Victoria Together*, and it is based around four key themes. The document looks at the government's key achievements and priority efforts in the future around the four key areas of involvement, learning and working, supporting, and celebrating.

I note that in respect of the key theme of involvement, for example, the document talks about what the government has done to date in relation to the youth round tables. The government has established a mechanism to communicate directly with young people, it has held seven youth round tables across Victoria since April 2000 and it has involved over 380 diverse young people contributing their views on a wide range of topics.

Each of these round tables has focused on a specific issue that has been selected according to priority issues

identified by young people themselves and regional youth committees or youth agencies. These youth round tables have provided excellent opportunities for young people to contribute to government policy and program formulation. The youth round tables are giving young people a voice in the formulation of government policy, so I reject the assertion made by the Honourable Andrew Olexander that the government is not involving young people in decision making.

I note that pages 8 and 9 of the document outline future priority efforts in increasing the involvement of young people in decision making, encouraging them to participate and also providing greater access to information above government programs and services.

On page 14 the document also addresses youth suicide and homelessness, so I again reject the assertion made by the Honourable Andrew Olexander about those issues. I advise him that it is not one line; there is in fact quite a detailed section on the issue of mental health and how that fits into the government's mental health strategy. I note that the government has very detailed policies in relation to youth homelessness and youth suicide and that the Minister for Health in the other place recently handed down a mental health strategy. This document provides a clear indication of the directions and strategies the government is looking at in support of young people. It is encouraging young people to participate in all aspects of community life. In contrast to this, the opposition has no youth policy. We are still waiting to hear from the Leader of the Opposition what his policies are. He has not told us what they are.

The opposition has a very poor track record when it comes to a youth strategy. It developed nothing while it was in government. This document is a fantastic contribution and should be commended.

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Motion agreed to.

Electricity: Enviromission project

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — I move:

That the Council take note of the answer given by the Minister for Energy and Resources to a question without notice asked by the Hon. B. W. Bishop relating to the Enviromission energy project.

It is for a number of reasons quite frustrating for me to bring this issue up in the house, and I am certainly keen to ensure that the concept that Enviromission has brought into the commercial world is fully investigated. This should have been enthusiastically picked up by the

government and investigated to the fullest extent, and I believe it could have supported this project quite substantially.

Firstly, if the Enviromission project does go ahead and is built at Tapio Station, it will be only about 25 kilometres from Mildura, so obviously Mildura will share in the employment benefits and the resource opportunities that will flow from such a major project. But that is not the issue; it is not the issue at all. The issue is that in my view this government did nothing. It simply put everything on the backburner like it has done with many other worthwhile projects around Victoria.

This is a good project. It is innovative, it is quite brave and it is deserving of government support, and the New South Wales and federal governments have been quick to grasp the opportunity. I will again quote the *Sunraysia Daily* of Saturday, 12 October, which states that the New South Wales government has announced that the:

... Enviromission solar tower power generation project has been given state significant development status ...

Further:

'Granting the project state significance has bolstered the chances of the project becoming a reality. It now has vital state government backing'. The federal government gave the solar tower major project facilitation status as a project of national significance in August.

So there has been substantial support from both the New South Wales and the federal governments.

Again, this is an innovative project. It is a huge tower. It is 1 kilometre high — 1000 metres. My briefing notes say that the diameter of the tower is 130 metres and that it generates enough power for 200 000 households. There is a collector around the base of the tower that is 5 kilometres in diameter, which is a huge basin, and Enviromission believes it can use hothouses under that structure to grow produce. There are 32 wind turbines in the tower, and when built this will be the largest construction in the world.

The difficulty I have with the government's actions — or non-actions — is that the government appears to me to be hooked on wind power. It certainly has not looked at supporting this innovative project in any way at all, and little or no support has come forward.

The government ought to be searching, and searching quite hard, every avenue of alternative power generation to ensure that every project is given every opportunity to prove its worth in what may well be a

real market niche in the future, as well as making sure that every bit of reusable energy is utilised.

I am really disappointed at losing the chance to investigate this new innovative technology. Most of our electricity comes from black and brown coal, and there are some gas-fired generators, but we do have a shortage. What is more, this Enviromission tower would be in a perfect position to tap into the national grid for the power that is required, and it would fit into that market very well indeed.

I also note that only about 10 per cent of Australia's total electricity is now sourced from renewable energy, and most of that is hydro-electricity, a good bit of which would be in Tasmania and in the Snowy region as well. The renewable energy coming from hydro-electric, solar, landfill, gas and wind sources is essential to the market, so a system like this is well worth investigating. A trial program is going in Spain with a quarter-sized unit which has received substantial testing, and that is the basis of making this a worthwhile concept.

I urge the government to lift its game on this worthwhile concept and join with the New South Wales and federal governments in a joint venture process to ensure this concept gets a fair go into the future.

Motion agreed to.

Ports: reform

Hon. B. C. BOARDMAN (Chelsea) — I move:

That the Council take note of the answer given by the Minister for Ports to a question without notice asked by the Hon. G. D. Romanes relating to the dredging of ports in Port Phillip Bay.

Incorporated in the minister's answer were certain references to the port of Hastings and potential future use of the port of Hastings.

I will say at the outset that it is extremely disappointing that the minister would attempt, in the first instance, to try to politicise this issue by suggesting that there has to be some policy shift away from the government to the opposition. Maybe that is an acknowledgment that the government's policy is totally inappropriate in this regard. Maybe the government is searching for an idea because it does not have any idea in regard to Hastings and its future use and capacities. Maybe it is simply an acknowledgment that the minister and her department are not doing the job they are supposed to be doing in outlining a future strategy to encompass all of the economic and social potential of that region.

It is also disappointing that the minister would try to simplify the whole debate. This is a complex issue both in its size and outcome. The minister cannot suggest that it is an easy argument to be solved through simplified and less detailed policy statements. The whole Western Port region has tremendous potential, not only on a local basis but also on a regional basis. The Hastings area is just one part of that area — a fairly significant part albeit, but one that contributes to the tremendous opportunity to develop in the future socially, economically and culturally.

The minister asked: what is the opposition doing about it? I make it quite clear that the opposition is more than interested in the Hastings area. I have a tremendous interest because I have been fortunate to be preselected and endorsed by the Liberal Party as the candidate for Western Port Province in the upcoming election. I will win that seat together with my colleague and friend, Ken Smith, who will win the lower house seat of Bass.

When the Liberal Party forms government after the next election, it will have a formidable team to represent the interests of that area in stark contrast to the government at the moment. Recently the Leader of the Opposition in the other place made an extensive visit to Hastings that encompassed a detailed briefing from the harbourmaster at Hastings, Mr Dick Cox, who also represents Toll. The Honourable Robert Doyle also met with the chamber of commerce including the port advisory committee. He also met with a number of other community organisations to talk about and witness first hand the issues at Hastings, its potential and its opportunities.

I know the minister has been down there, but has the Premier? Has the leader of the government, the person who is supposed to have the final say on any policy, been there? No, he has not. The Labor Party's announcements to do with Hastings have been non-existent. It has suggested that maybe it is up to the opposition to take up the challenge and the opposition is happy to do that.

The minister also made reference to the federal member for Flinders, Greg Hunt. I commend Mr Hunt. It is refreshing that local Liberal Party members at all levels are taking an active interest in the area and representing the interests of their communities to try to ascertain the best outcomes and Mr Hunt has done that. So has the Liberal candidate for Hastings, Mr Neil Burgess. He has also taken the issue to heart and tried to consult the community as extensively as possible to work out the best way of moving forward on policy.

Hastings is not simply about building a port, it is about the associated infrastructure that goes with it, both road and rail. There is also interest in stevedoring, and in particular private interests need to be considered. One cannot simply suggest that a policy statement on building a port can be taken into consideration.

It was disappointing that the minister tried to infer that there was some division in the opposition because of the comments made by the Honourable Andrea Coote during the adjournment debate last night. I do not think there is an honourable member in this house who would be as environmentally aware as Mrs Coote considering her past experience of serving as one of the directors of Parks Victoria. Mrs Coote is very passionate about those issues. Her interests cannot be used as political leverage to suggest there is some confusion or contradiction within the opposition.

The Liberal Party understands this issue and in conjunction with its federal colleagues it is definitely committed to finding a better outcome. That is why the Leader of the Opposition has been down there and witnessed the area first hand and talked to the people on the ground. That is why the Liberal Party will go through extensive policy deliberations to come out with a platform that will be in the best interests, not only of the region, but of the whole state.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I have answers to the following questions on notice: 2874, 2879, 3299.

Hon. B. C. BOARDMAN (Chelsea) — I seek information in relation to questions on notice 2480 and 2883. Question on notice 2480 was received by the minister on 5 December 2001. It relates to the number of volunteers at a certain date within the Country Fire Authority and also the number of full-time career firefighters in the CFA at certain dates. This question is almost 12 months old. I suggest that the government's processes would make it relatively easy to ascertain an answer to the question. I seek an explanation as to why that basic administrative task has not been completed.

Question 2883 was addressed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in the other place, as was the other question. It relates to the numbers of penalty infringement notices, specific code 2002, and a delineation of which issued from speed camera fines

and which were issued as on-the-spot fines. Again I suggest that it is an easy administrative process and those records should be easily obtainable. This question on notice was received on 18 April and is nearly six months old. I seek an explanation from the minister as to why these questions have not been answered.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I appreciate the honourable member's comments and I will endeavour to obtain those replies from the appropriate minister in the other chamber and make them available at the earliest possible time.

Hon. B. C. BOARDMAN (Chelsea) — Could the minister ascertain when answers will actually be provided, considering the potentially limited amount of sitting time left for the chamber?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I will endeavour to obtain them prior to the next sitting day.

Hon. N. B. LUCAS (Eumemmerring) — I wish to raise a similar issue with the minister. Two days ago I personally presented him with a letter regarding four questions. Yesterday I raised the same issue at this time with the Leader of the Government in this house and have not received answers to those four questions.

The minister is aware of the numbers. He has a letter from me, and I seek an explanation. Of the four questions I refer to, two were to the Minister for Local Government and the others were to the Minister for Planning.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I will endeavour to obtain those replies from the respective ministers in the other chamber and make them available at the earliest possible time. I anticipate that that would be prior to the next sitting day.

Hon. N. B. LUCAS (Eumemmerring) — That is basically the same answer I had yesterday from the Leader of the Government. I am very concerned that I am running out of time to receive these replies. I note the response of the Minister for Sport and Recreation that he anticipates getting them before the next sitting day, so I will take that on board.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Report

For **Hon. C. C. BROAD** (Minister for Energy and Resources), **Hon. J. M. Madden** (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — By leave, I move:

That there be laid before this house a copy of the Victorian government indigenous affairs report, November 1999–October 2002.

Motion agreed to.

Laid on table.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Regulation review

Hon. JENNY MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) presented annual review 2001, together with appendices.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

Hon. JENNY MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

This annual review summarises the operations of the regulation review subcommittee in reviewing the 2001 series of regulations. As honourable members would be aware, the regulation review subcommittee is a subcommittee of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. The subcommittee did not make any adverse reports to Parliament in relation to the 2001 series of regulations. However, the subcommittee sent 27 letters to ministers seeking clarification of issues or raising concerns.

Ministerial responses have generally been prompt and most helpful to the subcommittee. The list of subcommittee correspondence is detailed in appendix 2 of the report, and extracts of the subcommittee's correspondence and ministerial responses are also provided in the report.

The annual review seeks to offer assistance to departmental and agency officers as to the operations of the subcommittee under the Subordinate Legislation Act. The review identifies issues of concern and includes a number of practice notes in appendix 3 of the report. While the subcommittee considers that the quality of regulations and accompanying documentation examined has been of a high standard

there remains scope for improvement in some areas. Many of these concerns are also addressed in the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee report into the Subordinate Legislation Act that was recently tabled in this house.

I take this opportunity to thank members of the subcommittee for their continuing work. The subcommittee has had a particularly heavy workload during this year whilst it concluded its inquiry. I also thank the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee staff who assist the subcommittee in its work, in particular the subcommittee's excellent legal adviser, Ms Jenny Baker, and Mr Simon Dinsberg and Ms Sonya Caruana, who provide organisational support. I also thank Mr Matthew Groves and Ms Fiona Lawandowski for assisting the subcommittee to review the 2001 series of regulations. I commend the report to the house.

Motion agreed to.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Auditor-General — Report on Mental health services for people in crisis, October 2002.

National Parks Advisory Council — Report, 2001–02.

Parliamentary Committees Act 1968 — Minister's response to recommendations in Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report upon the Department of Human Services — Service Agreements for Community, Health and Welfare Services.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Orders of the day

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — I move:

That order of the day, general business, no. 2 be read and discharged.

Motion agreed to.

BASSLINK PROJECT

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I move:

That this house revokes amendment C15 to the Wellington planning scheme and amendment C20 to the La Trobe planning scheme.

Today is D-day — decision day. This debate provides the last opportunity for members of the Victorian Parliament to ensure that the use of outdated, historic technologies — pylons for a particular transmission project — is stopped and that we require the proponents of this particular infrastructure project to use innovative modern technology that is up to date with the current-day expectations for such projects.

As I said, it is decision day. It is now in the hands of this chamber. This is the last chance to ensure that the environmental needs and the wishes of the local community in South Gippsland — and, I strongly believe, the wishes of country Victoria in general — are listened to and acted upon. By moving this particular revocation motion we, as members of this chamber, have the chance to stand up for country Victoria. That is what we will be judged on — how we vote on this motion will indicate whether we are prepared to stand up and support country Victorians.

Amendment C15 of the Wellington Planning Scheme and amendment C20 of the La Trobe Planning Scheme facilitate the use of pylons to carry overhead transmission lines associated with the infamous Basslink project. I use the word 'infamous' because I claim from the outset that this project has generated unprecedented levels of protest from the local community and has been felt by people all around Victoria — not only in country Victoria but I would suggest by people in the city also.

Certainly that anxiety and protest has been felt by we in the National Party who share the views of those people protesting. I am sure the Liberal Party has also felt the anxiety and the concerns which have been expressed by people in country Victoria. I suggest that even members of the government must feel at least the slightest discomfort with the decision taken by their cabinet to approve this project because I am sure that in their own hearts they can see that the particular decision to allow the use of overhead pylons is not an environmentally friendly approach to this project. There are better ways to do it, and they must feel a bit uncomfortable and a little embarrassment about their government having approved the project in its current proposed form. I hope they feel a bit uncomfortable and I hope they listen to comments I and others make in today's debate, and that they then re-think their position.

Basslink has become a landmark issue in a number of senses. Certainly country Victorians generally, and South Gippslanders in particular, feel they have been betrayed by those who have approved and those who have acquiesced in the approval of this project. I will return to that issue and spend some time during the

course of my contribution to the debate expressing the views and feelings of local people and country people in general.

Basslink has become a landmark issue in another sense and probably in a real physical sense because it would mean 180, 45-metre-tall pylons marching across some of the most tranquil, beautiful, scenic countryside in Victoria. They will become a permanent monument and reminder for all to see of a lasting blight on the South Gippsland landscape.

They will become a monument to the utter disregard that the Premier, the Minister for Planning in the other place, every single member of cabinet and every member of the Labor government showed for the needs and aspirations of people in country Victoria. They will also become a landmark to the Liberal Party's refusal to prevent this outdated, historic monstrosity occurring.

Everybody who drives along the South Gippsland Highway and sees the emergence or the beginning of the 180, 45-metre-tall pylons marching across that beautiful countryside will remember that the Labor Party approved this project. They will remember that the Liberal Party acquiesced in this project, and it will be a lasting thought in their minds. I assure the house that it will be the task of the National Party to ensure that at the next election the people of Victoria — particularly those in country Victoria — are reminded who actually allowed this to happen.

I will canvass a number of issues in my contribution to this debate this morning. I start by providing background information on the Basslink project. I will also talk about my personal views and those of the party I represent, the Victorian Nationals, on this issue, and I will talk about the views of local community. I will inform the house of the history and the commitment that people in our local communities in South Gippsland have dedicated towards stopping this project.

I will talk about the process — because it has been a complicated one — and where we are at today. I will talk about why we believe the joint assessment panel (JAP) — that is, the panel that was established by the Tasmanian, Victorian and federal governments to steer this project through to the point of approval — got it wrong and why we believe the Victorian government has got it wrong in accepting the recommendations of the JAP.

Finally, I will canvass some alternatives. We are not simply going to say it is a project that we reject outright, but if the project is to proceed, we will not

stop its proceeding. We will use the best of our endeavours to put forward arguments to suggest that there are alternative and feasible technologies available.

With that in mind, I will start. What is Basslink? One probably hardly needs to describe in detail what Basslink is all about. Anyone who has not heard about Basslink and does not have a fundamental idea of what it is all about does not live in the real world. It has been in the newspapers, it has been in the media, we have had protests at the front of Parliament House, we have had representations from the proponents of this particular project — and I am sure every honourable member would have received those — it has been in the daily newspapers circulating widely in the state, and it has been in national newspapers circulating throughout Australia and in local Gippsland newspapers.

For the record, Basslink is a 400-kilovolt interconnector extending for some 360 kilometres between the Latrobe Valley in Victoria and George Town in Tasmania. In simple terms, to use an analogy it is a giant electricity extension cord linking Tasmania with Victoria — nothing more, nothing less.

I understand that 280 kilometres of that 360-kilometre interconnector will be under Bass Strait through the use of undersea cable. On the Victorian land section, 6.5 kilometres will be undergrounded and it is proposed that 60 kilometres will be above ground within the state of Victoria. Basslink will have a peak capacity of 600 megawatts of electricity into Victoria and 300 megawatts from Victoria into Tasmania.

An important point that needs to be remembered is that Basslink is claimed to be a \$500 million project. I say 'claimed' because the cost is unclear. We have seen some changes which must in turn escalate that cost, but they have not been verified by the proponents at this point in time. The proponents of the project are National Grid, a UK-owned company. Basslink is a Tasmanian initiative, supposedly to secure Tasmania's power needs with claimed benefits — and I emphasise 'claimed' because that is disputable — for Victoria in meeting energy needs in periods of peak demands.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Do you want to scuttle it?

Hon. P. R. HALL — I will not respond to every inane interjection I invariably will receive from Mr Theophanous, but I will respond to that one. He asked me if we want to scuttle this project altogether. At the very start, I say clearly that no, the National Party does not want to scuttle this project. It supports

this infrastructure project but its support is conditional on using the best, the most modern technology possible — technology that is environmentally friendly, and it is possible.

Our objection today, while we seek to revoke these planning scheme amendments, is purely because it is proposed — and the Victorian government has allowed it — to use overhead transmission lines supported by 180, 45-metre-tall pylons. They do not have to happen. It can be put underground.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — At what cost?

Hon. P. R. HALL — You would be better off shutting your trap for a while and starting to listen, Mr Theophanous, instead of interrupting. I will not put up with your interjections throughout this debate. This is a serious issue.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — You don't need to do that.

Hon. P. R. HALL — And you don't need to interject. Why don't you show some manners?

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — At what cost?

Hon. P. R. HALL — And listen to the contribution to this debate. I won't put up with that crap from you.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Hall! Mr Theophanous!

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — At what cost?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order!

Hon. P. R. HALL — I will come to the issue of costs quite clearly and I will spend some time on costs. There is no doubt about that. If people wish to be patient and listen to my argument which I am going to put very comprehensively to this house, I am sure I will cover the issues of concern to Mr Theophanous and other honourable members. I will return to where I was before the interruption.

The Basslink project is a \$500 million-plus costs project by a private company to link Victoria and Tasmania's electricity supplies. That is essentially what it is. It has been a longwinded process started many years ago and pursued in earnest towards the end of 1999. It has been a seriously considered project for the last two years with extensive evaluation work and community consultation. A number of issues have arisen during that process which have caused great consternation. First of all, the choice of route in Victoria has caused concern to some local people.

Various options have been discussed and now a final route has been selected.

The technology proposed for the underwater cabling was causing consternation to a range of people and again that has caused changes to the original design. The use of overhead transmission lines supported by those 180, 45-metre-high pylons has certainly caused the greatest concern and, as I said before, this will be the landmark issue of this project. I will come back to look at some of those points in a little more detail in the course of this debate.

It is important that early in this debate I put on record my own views about this project because I represent that area and have a great interest in it. I have participated personally in the process that has led us to where we are today — that is, I have taken the opportunity on two occasions where public submissions were sought to express my view about this project. My first submission was made to the Basslink Joint Advisory Panel on 11 July 2001. It was a submission on the draft integrated impact assessment statement. I posed the question, right up front in my submission: do we need Basslink? I have to say to honourable members, if I am to be open, up front and honest, that my conclusion was, 'No, we do not need Basslink'.

I pointed out that in the months prior to my making this decision the Minister for Energy and Resources announced in this house something like 1300 megawatts of new generation capacity in Victoria. Some were gas-fired power stations and some were using renewable energy sources, but the minister announced 1300 megawatts of new generation capacity in Victoria just last year. That is just starting to come on line. Many of those projects are welcome new investments in their local areas. Some are in Gippsland; some are in other parts of Victoria. The National Party welcomes them. I claimed in my submission that if there were a future need for power capacity here in Victoria then we have the resources to develop and meet that demand ourselves. That would create important new investment in the state by investing in new generation capacity, whether it be by gas or coal or renewable resources. I welcome new investment. My concern is that Basslink will probably defer any such future investment in Victoria, so in terms of the benefits of investment I say that we would probably be better off if we invested in our own generation capacity.

The question is asked: what about Tasmania? I reflected on its position as well. At that time a natural gas link by Duke Energy was under construction between Victoria and Tasmania. That has now been completed and Tasmania now has the ability to have its

own gas-fired generation facilities. Indeed, it is converting one of its electricity generation facilities — I think it is in Bell Bay in Tasmania — to a gas-fired power station. With the connections of natural gas now to Tasmania it has the capacity to provide for its own power needs in terms of extra gas-fired generation capacity. Further, Tasmania has a wealth of wind. It probably has more wind than Victoria, and if renewable energy technology is the way to meet future power demands Tasmania is ideally placed to take advantage of the advances in wind-generated power. This is not an issue for Tasmania in terms of having to meet its needs. Particularly with the Duke Energy gas connection to Tasmania there is plenty of capacity to meet its own future power needs.

Then I went to the issue of overhead or underground supply in my submission and was totally adamant in reflecting the views of the people I represent — that it must be put underground. I pointed out in that submission the reasons for putting it underground and essentially they were environmental reasons. I will talk about this in my contribution today. There is a very powerful argument on environmental grounds alone to require this project to be put underground. I am really surprised that the government did not see this to be of sufficient environmental importance to require that in its planning scheme amendments that it has put forward and which we are talking about today.

My second submission was to the draft report of the Basslink Joint Advisory Panel and I reiterated some of the things I had said in my first submission and re-emphasised those, except that I did concede that there had been strong support for this infrastructure project. Therefore I did not pursue my opposition to the proposal as a whole. But I certainly pursued more strongly the need for the land section to be put underground. It is important that people understand where I come from in this debate, that even today I do not think this project is necessary. However, if others think it is necessary and it is to proceed, then so be it, but it must be done with the best of technologies, taking into consideration the views of the people who are going to be directly affected by this project.

The National Party's position on this has always been unequivocal. It has clearly said its support for Basslink is totally dependent on the entire Victorian transmission section being underground. That has been the view of the National Party throughout this debate. That is why we are here today seeking the revocation of these planning scheme amendments. We want the project to be underground, and that particular provision is conditional on our support for this particular project.

That is my position and my view. That is the view of the party I represent. What about the views of the local community in South Gippsland? As I previously stated, this project has caused unprecedented opposition from the local South Gippsland community. If there has been one small positive that has arisen out of the Basslink process, it has been that it has galvanised a lot of the local community in its support of the one aim and objective, and that is to prevent the use of pylons for this project. It has brought a lot of people together, and that is a minor positive out of the project.

As I said before, if people do not know about Basslink and about the feelings of the people of South Gippsland, then they have had their heads in the sand and do not live in the real world. We have had protests on the front steps of Parliament House. Honourable members will remember the dogs that barked in unison as the placards were held up with 'No Basslink' written on them. We have had protests every time a state or federal minister has visited the Yarram area. I have to add that there have not been too many visits by state government ministers to the Yarram area in the past 12 months. I think they are scared of what they might face down there. Certainly the Minister for Planning, who signed off on this project, has not been down to South Gippsland.

A further indictment against the government on this matter is that not one Victorian state government minister has ever inspected the proposed route for this Basslink project — not one. There have been plenty of offers to drive them along the route and to show them what sort of impact it will have on the South Gippsland landscape, yet not one Victorian minister, from the Premier down, has accepted that invitation to come down and cast an eye across the area that will be blighted by this project — not one. That is typical of the government's disregard for the needs of country Victorians. It could not care less. All it is concerned about is ensuring that the people in Melbourne can run their airconditioners at peak times in summer. Having airconditioning flowing through every government office in Melbourne is more important to this government than coming down and having a personal look at where this project will blight the South Gippsland landscape.

With respect to the community views on this, communities need leaders, and with regard to Basslink there have been many who have demonstrated outstanding leadership and committed their time and energy over the last several years in a commendable effort to lead their community's opposition to this project. At the risk of omitting some I shall name just a few of those individuals, people like Rosemary Irving,

who has headed the No Pylons group in Gippsland; Colin McAllan, who has headed the Concerned Citizens on Basslink group; and other people such as Ian Onley, Lesley Joyce, Robert Burns, Peter Jennings, Jeff Robbins, Madelon Lane — the list could go on because many individuals have stood up and been counted.

Debate interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — On behalf of the Legislative Council and the Parliament of Victoria I welcome a parliamentary delegation from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, led by Dr Nguyen. We welcome you to our house and wish that your stay in Victoria is fruitful.

Debate resumed.

11:20 **Hon. P. R. HALL** (Gippsland) — As I was saying, a lot of local individuals have committed a great deal of their time and effort in leading the community in its protest against this project. I commend every one of those people, not only those I have mentioned but others who have worked tirelessly to represent their community on this issue.

I also pay tribute to some of the local media that has been most supportive in expressing the views of the community at the highest levels, particularly the *Yarram Standard News*, the *Leongatha Star*, the *Foster Mirror*, the *Gippsland Times* and the *Latrobe Valley Press*, all local Gippsland newspapers that run stories on this project almost on a weekly basis. I notice the front page of today's *Yarram Standard News* carries the same sort of headline we have seen on front pages for the last couple of years: 'Locals support Hall's last stand on Basslink'. This is the last stand, as I said in my opening. It is our last opportunity to stop this project in its current form. That article is typical of the great work local newspapers have done in broadcasting the message of their communities.

I also pay tribute to some of our electronic media. The Gippsland ABC, WIN TV and radio stations 3TR, 3GG and Gippsland FM have taken the issue on board and ensured that the views, concerns and information required about this project have been well aired across the community. I thank them for that because it has helped the people of Gippsland and the people of Victoria generally to better understand the project and enabled them to have their views expressed.

A number of community groups have worked on this. Views among groups have varied a little. Some have expressed the view there should be no Basslink at all; others have focused their attentions on simply a no-pylons stance. Collectively they have kept a lot of pressure on the proponents of this project and the process throughout and have had some significant wins along the way — and good on them, they deserve some of those wins. For example, there have been some route changes to what was originally intended. A larger section has been undergrounded than was originally intended with the first proposals, and there has been a change in the technology for the seabed link of the project, all due in part to the pressure being applied by local people and local media, so there have been some wins along the way.

The one thing they are yet to achieve is the abandonment of the historic technology of pylon use. Today they are appealing to every member of this chamber to achieve their final goal. As I said, this house has one last chance to support the people of South Gippsland and the people of country Victoria and to join with the National Party today in revoking these planning scheme amendments. It is not often you get a second chance in life, but today the Liberal Party has its second chance to join with the Vic Nats in supporting country Victoria. I hope it has rethought its position on this.

I am getting a bit of chatter on my left. I point out that the Labor Party also has one last chance. It unilaterally approved this project. It just ticked it off without any conditions and said to a privately owned company, 'Yes, it is okay for you to go ahead and string 180, 45-metre-high pylons across the countryside'. People should not think the Labor Party has not had a part in this. It ticked off on this project and said, 'Yes, you can go ahead without any restrictions whatsoever'. It is not getting off the hook at all. I want to go back to the issue that this is our last chance.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. G. B. Ashman) — Order! Mr Theophanous, we do not need a debate across the chamber.

Hon. P. R. HALL — I am aware of the Liberal Party's position that it will require Basslink to go underground if it wins government at the next election, but there is no guarantee with that. There is no guarantee it will win the next election, but more so, if it does, there is absolutely no guarantee that Basslink will put this project underground. To see that one only has to look at the commentary from a Basslink

representative in the *Yarram Standard News* of Wednesday, 9 October, headed 'Basslink will talk but not go underground'. The article states:

Despite the fact that the Liberal Party has promised to put the Basslink cable underground if they win the next state election, due to be held in December this year, Basslink Pty Ltd has revealed today that they still intend to put the cable on pylons.

A spokesman for Basslink, John Richards, told the *Standard News* today that the firm had not given any undertaking to the Liberals other than that they would be prepared to talk to them about the project if they won power.

'However, we stand by the finding of the joint advisory panel as accepted by the three governments, Tasmania, Victoria and the commonwealth, that the project should go aboveground in Victoria,' said Mr Richards today.

He also agreed that there would be no planning or legislative opportunity for a new state government to require Basslink Pty Ltd to place the cable underground.

No opportunity! All they have agreed to is to have a chat to them. The commentary very clearly is, 'We'll go through the exercise of having a chat, but we're not going to put it underground and you won't be able to make us'.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — The horse will have bolted.

Hon. P. R. HALL — The horse will have bolted, as Mr Baxter says. Let's make it clear where we are today. This is the last opportunity, because Basslink has said it is not going to put it underground even if there is a change of government at the next election. This is the last chance for members of the Labor Party to join with the Vic Nats in voting against these planning scheme amendments, and it is the last chance for the Liberal Party to join with the Vic Nats in representing the people of South Gippsland on this particular issue.

In talking about this I have used the term 'country Victorians'. I have not used the words 'South Gippslanders' because this debate is more than just a South Gippsland issue. Country Victorians generally have an affinity with the position of their Gippsland brothers and sisters on this matter. It is a classic case of the government sacrificing country Victoria for the comfort of city dwellers and the profits of multinational companies. If it is not an icon issue now, then the Vic Nats will make sure it becomes an icon issue in the run-up to the next election. As I said, it is about more than South Gippsland. Country people understand that once again with this particular issue they have been trodden on, and unless somebody takes a stand then governments, whoever they are, will keep treading on them. The Vic Nats are not going to stand by and let that happen without a fight.

The government claims that we need Basslink because of projected increased demand for electricity. Interpret that as, 'We need Basslink because we don't want people in Melbourne complaining if there are any restrictions on or shortages at all of power supply in Melbourne'. What about doing something about addressing the demand? Where is the government's electricity demand strategy? Why does the government not cater for that, rather than imposing this monstrosity on people in country Victoria? Why does the government not facilitate more environmentally friendly investment in the generation capacity in Victoria, rather than lumping this project on people?

The Vic Nats say, 'If you want it, you can have it — but just put it underground'. This government, though, unilaterally declared on 13 September, 'No. Basslink's going ahead'. The government could not care less. Members of the Liberal Party say they care, but they can give us no guarantees on the issue. As I said, the community is strongly behind the National Party on this issue. The people say to all political parties, 'This is your last chance to demonstrate that you do care for people in country Victoria'.

I want to briefly mention the process that has led us to where we are today with this particular project. First I should mention that Basslink is a wholly owned subsidiary of a United Kingdom transmission company, National Grid Group. I did mention before that a privately owned company is undertaking this project. This is not even a government or publicly owned piece of infrastructure; it is a privately owned piece of infrastructure.

Steering the process has been a group called the Basslink Joint Advisory Panel, which has members appointed by three governments: the Victorian, Tasmanian and federal governments. It has responsibility for developing the guidelines, drawing up the draft integrated impact assessment statement and the final impact assessment statement on this project, giving a final report and making recommendations to the three governments. That has been the role of the joint advisory panel.

In Victoria a Basslink consultative committee has been established. It is made up of a variety of people, including some local community members in South Gippsland. Their task has been to advise the joint advisory panel of some of those local views and keep a watch on the process being adopted by the joint advisory panel.

It has been a long-winded process. The preferred proponent was selected almost two years ago. There

have been a number of stages involving guidelines being drafted and final impact assessments. Then we had the final report towards the middle to latter part of this year. Finally, on 13 September the Victorian government gave its approval for this project, and on the same day the federal government gave its approval for this project.

What did we get after the thousands of submissions and the thousands of hours that people spent poring over this documentation, making an input into the process? What did we end up with here in Victoria? What we got in Victoria was 6.6 kilometres of high-voltage direct-current underground cable — referred to as HVDC underground cable. We got 60.8 kilometres of high-voltage transmission lines, and we also got 180, 45-metre-high pylons. That is what we ended up with.

Let me move to the next section of why the members of the National Party believe the Victorian government has got it wrong. What anybody should expect from government is first and foremost some consistency in decision making. This decision by the government to approve Basslink in its current form with the use of pylons is certainly inconsistent with a number of decisions the government has taken in the past and inconsistent with its own proclaimed environmental credentials.

It seems to me that different rules are applied by the government, depending upon where you live. I can recall when David White was a minister and there was an issue about transmission lines in the Burnley–Richmond area. It was proposed that they be overhead transmission lines. Do you know what happened at the end of the day? I think David White was the minister at that time. He required that those transmission lines be put underground because they were in the Burnley–Richmond area here in Melbourne. So it is okay if you live in Melbourne — the government will not allow you to put transmission lines overhead in Melbourne; it will make you put them underground. A former Labor government insisted on that.

If you live in a new housing subdivision anywhere in this state, you will not see overhead distribution lines; they are all undergrounded. If you want to connect your farm to electricity, generally speaking the electricity companies will not allow you to use overhead distribution lines into your farm; you are required to put them underground.

But if you are living in country Victoria, it does not matter; Basslink can put them overhead. That is what this government will allow a foreign multinational

company to do — put 180, 45-metre-high pylons across the South Gippsland landscape to string up its transmission lines. If you live in the city you are made to put them underground; if you live in a new housing estate, your electricity lines are put underground; if you want to connect your farm, they are underground. It depends on where you live. If you live in rural areas of Victoria, this government does not care what you think, it just goes ahead and does what it wants to do.

As I said, this is a private company and it will be allowed to use overhead transmission lines. I just wonder what would have happened had this been a government-owned infrastructure project. What if this were a public infrastructure project? Would the companies have been allowed to put in overhead transmission lines or would they have been required to put them underground? When David White was minister he made them put transmission lines in Burnley–Richmond underground. Is there one rule for private companies and another for public companies? Who knows? Perhaps the government could explain that particular position.

I thought members of this government liked to claim they are environmentally friendly. With this decision they have blown completely all their claims to being environmentally friendly. This is a government that just last year made some amendments to the Environment Protection Act of 1970. It put in a whole series of what it called principles of environment protection. Let me remind the chamber of some of these principles the government lauded when it imposed them through the Environment Protection Act. The act states in part, and I quote directly:

Sound environmental practices and procedures should be adopted as a basis for ecologically sustainable development for the benefit of all human beings and the environment.

Sound environmental practices! Is the use of pylons a sound environmental practice? I claim not.

The government put in place what has now become quite famous and what it now uses for its advantage, the precautionary principle. That says it all:

If there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

That is the greatest contradiction of this government's argument in defence. I will talk about technologies later, but the government says the use of HVDC Light has not been adequately tested at this point in time. Yet in its own claims when it put these principles of environment protection into the bill it states that 'lack

of full scientific certainty' should not prevent the use of best environmentally friendly technology. Those are the government's words written into the act, yet they totally contradict the decision taken to approve the Basslink project.

Some other clauses — clauses of the Labor government's making — say:

Decision making should be guided by —

- (a) a careful evaluation to avoid serious or irreversible damage to the environment wherever practicable ...

Well, pylons! Pylons 45 metres high, 180 of them, are going to cause serious, irreversible damage to the South Gippsland environment.

Further, in a statement on the principle of accountability, the act states that:

The aspirations of the people of Victoria for environmental quality should drive environmental improvement.

Yes, they should; and we should look to what the aspirations of the people of Victoria are. I do not believe anybody in Victoria aspires to 45-metre pylons or thinks they are a good thing. They are terrible things; and when there is an alternative, underground technology, why not use it?

I move now, therefore, to consider the issues. The government has put on the record what it thinks about environmental issues and how Victoria should adopt the precautionary principle and have regard to the aspirations of the people of Victoria in considering those issues.

The question is whether the use of pylons is an environmental issue. Do pylons impact on the environment down there? The answer to that question is provided by the Minister for Planning herself. I refer the chamber to a case that was heard by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) on 20 and 22 March this year. The case was an application to develop a telecommunications facility, being a 35-metre high mobile phone tower in Narre Warren, in the City of Casey. The council knocked back the application by the company and in its notice of refusal said that one of the grounds for refusal was that, in the words of the VCAT decision:

The proposed facility will have a detrimental impact upon the existing streetscape.

In rural Victoria we do not have streetscapes, we have landscapes, so for 'streetscapes' read 'landscapes' when you apply the decision to the Basslink project.

What I found extraordinary about that VCAT decision was, and I quote again from the VCAT report:

The tribunal was advised just prior to the commencement of the first day of the hearing that a submission was sought to be made by the Minister for Planning.

So the Minister for Planning decided she would have a go at this! She said, 'I need to have a go at this because I am not too happy about a 35-metre high mobile phone tower being imposed upon the people of Narre Warren'. The minister off her own bat made that personal decision. Her submission said, in part:

I support the council's decision and believe that it reflects, as expressed in the state planning policy framework, a reasonable balance between the provision of important telecommunications services and the need to protect the environment from adverse impacts arising from telecommunications infrastructure.

The minister said there that towers impact on the local environment. She went out of her way off her own bat — no-one asked her to do it — to go in and make a submission to support the City of Casey on environmental grounds because she thought a 35-metre high telecommunications tower would have an impact on the local environment.

What are we to conclude from that? Why does she not therefore consider that not one but 180, and not 35-metre high towers but 45-metre-high towers, are not going to have a significant impact on our streetscape, our landscape, out there in country Victoria? The Minister for Planning went to the trouble of making a submission to the inquiry but would not even come down and have a look at what impact the pylons might have on the South Gippsland landscape. That stinks of hypocrisy. There are different rules depending on where you live: if you live in the city the government will look after you, but if you live in the country, bad luck! You are by yourself.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Rubbish!

Hon. P. R. HALL — It is rubbish? Let us hear the defence. Why did the minister make a voluntary submission to the VCAT hearing and yet fail to stand up for the people of South Gippsland when the problem was more than 180 times larger than the problem in Narre Warren?

I turn to the issue of environmental groups and whether they have come out on this particular issue. I am extremely disappointed that the answer to that question is that no environmental groups have come out on this issue. I wonder why we have not had one single environmental group think that 180, 45-metre-high pylons marching across the South Gippsland landscape

will have any impact on the environment. It is a sad reflection on how those environmental groups tend to operate. They operate when there is a political reason to do so, but in this case they, like the government, seem to not care less on this particular issue.

I turn to technology and costing. The most galling thing about this decision by the Bracks government is that there are alternatives. You do not have to use overhead transmission lines with this particular project. As part of the process, which I outlined before, there have been some changes, particularly in the use of the seabed cable technology. When we had protests from big organisations, like Esso, Gippsland Water and Duke Energy and professional fishermen in that area, we saw a change in technology, and Basslink Pty Ltd decided that it would change the technology used for the seabed cable to a magnetic return cable at an estimated extra cost of something like \$70 million to \$80 million.

I said at the start of my contribution that this is a \$500 million project and Basslink has claimed throughout that at \$500 million the success of the project was marginal in terms of its finances, and if it got to anything more than \$500 million then, 'We would probably not be able to proceed with it because there would not be the cost margins in the project'. Yet Basslink changed its mind suddenly and there was an extra cost of between \$70 million to \$80 million and it is still proceeding with the project at that extra cost.

Once again it knocks the reputation that Basslink has to its former promises or commitments. It said it would not wear any extra cost, yet readily wore an extra \$70 million to \$80 million to change the technology used in the seabed cable section. This is a project that can be put underground. That is a fact. Even Basslink said, 'Yes, we can put it underground', but it claimed that it would cost too much.

What is Basslink's record like on cost. When it spoke about the change of technology for the seabed cable, it said in its document *Final Environmental Impact Statement and Supplement to the Draft Integrated Impact Assessment Statement* of June 2002 that:

In hearing exhibit VE10, BPL and Tas-Vic estimated that the net cost of a metallic return configuration after deducting the cost of sea electrodes was A\$75–100 million.

Basslink says that by changing the technology it would cost an extra \$75 million to \$100 million. Further, it states:

Since the 2001 panel hearings —

it talks about having a relook and rethink about all of this —

... is now expected to be in the range of approximately a half to two-thirds of the above number.

Is it a half of \$75 million or a half of \$100 million, or two-thirds of \$75 million or two-thirds of \$100 million? It does not know. It has no idea exactly what the cost will be. Here it says that it will cost an extra \$75 million to \$100 million, but now it is saying it may be only half that amount. Who knows what the extra cost will be and who knows who will pay for the extra cost. Basslink said \$500 million was its limit. Who will pay for the extra cost of the seabed technology?

When it says to us that it will cost an extra \$90 million or thereabouts to put the project underground on the Victorian land section, do I believe it or do the people believe it? Here it is making outrageous claims. It could be half that much or even less than half that much. If it considered other technology then it could be — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Hon. P. R. HALL — Not according to the reports that your government has received on this. It could be even less than that. Who is to believe it? That is Basslink's record on costs. It simply has no idea. I claim that it has been totally inappropriate to rule out undergrounding this project on costs alone because nobody knows, least of all Basslink.

I believe there is alternative technology that could be used. At the time Basslink was first proposed some years ago there was never such a product called HVDC Light, the form of technology used now for a number of projects in Australia and in other parts of the world. I have examples of what this technology looks like, and if any honourable member would like to have a look at what it physically looks like I would be happy to give them a look of a sample of the product of HVDC Light because that particular product has been used on Murraylink, a 177 kilometre, 220 megawatt interconnector cable between Victoria and South Australia linking their electricity supplies. That particular project was the overall winner of the 2002 Case Earth award for environmental excellence. We support that and think it is terrific, but here we have an underground interconnector capable of carrying 220 megawatts for this particular project which won an environmental award.

In commenting upon the awarding of this particular award, project director Mike Farr said:

Underground cable was chosen instead of overhead transmission lines to ensure minimal visual and environmental impact — and a rapid means of getting the project onto the market.

This national environment award is proof positive that communities need no longer suffer overhead transmission cables.

Murraylink is now a working reality that proves the capability of underground power transmission. Three years ago this level of undergrounding was new technology. Today Murraylink proves that long-distance undergrounding is technically and economically feasible.

He admits that three years ago this technology was not available but today it is. Transenergie, the company that is involved in the construction of Murraylink, has told us, the joint advisory panel and the government that the technology which is capable of carrying 330 megawatts would be simple to use for the conveyance of a 600-megawatt capacity on Basslink by laying two of the cables that they use for Murraylink side by side in the same trench.

Murraylink is but one. In Australia we also have Directlink, a connector between New South Wales and Queensland. In the United States of America the Transenergie company is involved in a number of other projects: a 330-megawatt link called the Cross-Sound cable project; one that takes up to 975 megawatts called the Lake Erie Link project; and another one up to 660 megawatts called the Harbour Cable project. Each varies in capacity. Some are not as big in capacity as the Basslink project will be, and none of them extend 360 kilometres like it is proposed for Basslink, but they extend up to 177 kilometres as Murraylink has. Transenergie has told Basslink, the joint advisory panel and the government that there is simply no barrier for using its technology, HVDC Light, to complete the entirety of the Basslink proposal.

I turn to the cost factors. Murraylink, a company put in place by Transenergie to construct Murraylink, has written several submissions to the joint advisory panel to give it an idea of what it believes the true cost would be. In one letter to the joint advisory panel on 28 May this year it says in part:

Based on Transenergie's recent Murraylink experience, an average project cost is approximately \$60 000 to \$70 000 per kilometre. Our knowledge of the proposed route through Victoria suggests much lower costs than the panel appears to have been advised of.

Let us accept for the sake of argument that Transenergie is saying that the use of HVDC Light would cost in the order of \$60 000 to \$70 000 per kilometre; multiply that by 60, which is the distance of the ground section here in Victoria, and you get somewhere between \$36 million and \$42 million. The government's own report — I will come to that report — suggests the overhead costs for that section are \$33.1 million. When you compare \$33.1 million

with \$36 million, or at the most \$42 million, there is not much difference in a total project cost of \$500 million-plus. It could be \$3 million extra or it could be \$9 million extra out of a \$500 million-plus project. Mr Theophanous asked me about costs: there are some cost figures.

We in the National Party claim that the cost of putting this project underground is at most only marginally more than the cost of stringing it up overhead if the government and Basslink were prepared to look at some of the technology being used today in projects around the world. That is the issue about costs.

Let me pursue that a little bit further by looking at the efforts of the joint advisory panel and the government to investigate this issue. I refer the house to a report by Halliburton KBR Pty Ltd entitled *Independent Cost Estimate for the Basslink Victorian Land Route Development*. This is a report commissioned by the Basslink joint advisory panel to give it some independent estimates of the costs of various technologies.

The first two pages of the report — there are only four other pages — has what is called a 'Limitations statement'. It is important that I read to the house from that statement some of the limitations imposed upon this so-called independent report:

That scope of services was defined by the requests of the client —

the client in this case being the joint advisory panel —

by the time and budgetary constraints imposed by the client and access to information.

Halliburton KBR derived the data in this report from the document entitled 'Submission 1 of 3 Victorian land route optimisation' prepared by Basslink Pty Ltd and dated 28 March 2002, technical information provided by BPL —

that is Basslink Pty Ltd —

similar South Australian transmission line projects, and budget quotes provided by vendors of electrical supply equipment ...

In preparing this report, Halliburton KBR has relied upon and presumed accurate certain information (or absence thereof) relative to the Basslink project provided by the client and others identified herein ...

This so-called independent report relied on the advice and the information and costings provided by the proponent. How can you get an independent evaluation of the various costings of the project if the information you are relying on is supplied to you by the proponent? It will only tell you what it wants to tell you. There is no independence in this report at all.

But even so, on page 3 of its report Halliburton KBR gives a conceptual cost estimate for each option. It clearly says that the estimated cost for the overhead option using the proposed measurements suggested in the final report is \$33.1 million. That is in this report, and that is where I got the \$33.1 million I referred to earlier. It said the overhead cost would be \$33.1 million. It claims that the underground cost using HVDC technology was estimated at \$91 million. It was not able to even consider the use of HVDC Light technology because the scope of the reference given to it by the joint advisory panel simply did not allow it. So much, we say, for the independent advice sought by the joint advisory panel.

I turn to the last document I want to consider in this debate. What did the government do? Did it rely totally on the joint advisory panel for its information? The answer to that is no. It actually went out and got further advice on this. I have in front of me a report by PB Power entitled *Basslink — Preliminary review of HVDC technologies — Confidential — Prepared for Department of Natural Resources and Environment*.

PB Power gave some independent advice — supposedly — on reviewing different technologies and comparing HVDC and HVDC Light. What did it conclude? This is what it concluded in its confidential advice to government:

HVDC Light is a developing technology with rating and transmission distance abilities not yet proven for the Basslink requirements by commissioned similar projects worldwide.

So the government just says, 'Because no-one else has done it before, we're not going to have a go at doing it'. This government is not prepared to be a leader in this matter.

The report goes on to say:

It should theoretically be able to accommodate the requirements of Basslink. However, the use of developing technology implies higher technical and commercial risk to the owners.

There we go. I read this report and I can see that it concedes that the use of HVDC Light technology is technically possible and will probably work, but because no-one else has had a go at it the government is not going to have a go at it over this distance because it may impose more commercial risk to the owners — more commercial risk to that private multinational company. That is what this government shied away from. That was the advice given to it, and it has shown no initiative and no — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Don't you care about commercial risk?

Hon. P. R. HALL — Absolutely, but there is no estimate of the commercial risk involved in this — no estimate at all. The proponents of the \$177 million Murraylink project say there is no commercial risk at all. What you are saying is, 'We are going to make the people of country Victoria, the people of South Gippsland, pay for all the commercial risks in this particular project. Stuff you. We don't care about your environment. We will proceed the way we want to and not put any requirements on these people to actually care for the South Gippsland environment'.

I will conclude by drawing together some of the points I have made here today. What a farce it all is. What a farce this decision is to approve the use of pylons for the Basslink project. I will state some facts. The first fact is that the use of 180, 45-metre-high pylons is not necessary for this project. It can be put underground at a cost comparable to the cost for the change in the sea cable technology.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — So you say.

Hon. P. R. HALL — No, so they say. They said that the change in the seabed cable technology was going to cost \$75 million to \$100 million. If Mr Theophanous had listened he would have known that I read that out. Now the independent reports say that even if you use HVDC technology it will cost an extra \$90 million to put it underground. We changed the seabed technology; why can't we change the land-based technology? There is no difference. That was the second fact: it can be put underground at a cost comparable to the cost for the seabed change.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Hon. P. R. HALL — I will listen to your argument; I hope you will listen to mine.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Hon. P. R. HALL — If there is a commentary to make, I will listen to it with great interest in debate. The project can be put underground at a cost comparable to the cost of change in the sea cable technology using HVDC technology, or at virtually no extra cost if using HVDC Light technology.

The third fact is that if the house does not support the motion I have moved today, then the people of South Gippsland will be condemned forever to the sight of 180, 45-metre-high pylons, and one of their great

natural assets in South Gippsland — the beauty of their countryside — will be blighted forever. Fact!

The fourth fact is that the result of the next election will not change the outcome, and the Liberal Party is kidding itself and trying to hoodwink country Victorians if it thinks it can require Basslink to go underground. Legally, it will not be able to do that. It is as simple as that, and I argued that in the debate.

This government has completely jettisoned country Victorians with its decision. It does not want to take the risk, as I said before, of Melburnians complaining about any power shortages in future summers, so it is making people in country Victoria — in this case, people in South Gippsland — pay. The city people take our water from Gippsland, they take our oil and gas from Gippsland, they take our coal from Gippsland, and now they want to take the landscape from Gippsland. It is as simple as that. They simply do not care. Today the Labor Party — —

Hon. J. M. McQuilten interjected.

Hon. P. R. HALL — You are not concerned about the landscape? You do not think it is a natural asset? If you are concerned about the landscape, then you will ensure that these monstrosities are put underground. We do not have to have them, there are alternatives.

Today the Labor Party has one last chance to prove its claimed environment credentials and the Liberal Party has one last chance to show that it cares about country Victorians and country communities. Today the National Party has a further opportunity to demonstrate that it is the only party prepared to stand up for country Victoria and country communities.

Hon. J. M. McQuilten interjected.

Hon. P. R. HALL — We will not be letting our people down and if anyone from the Labor or Liberal parties has a conscience or at least a little bit of heart to support country people, then we will welcome their support on this side of the house.

I urge all honourable members to join the National Party in revoking these planning scheme amendments and to show that country people count. They do not deserve to be abandoned by political parties who claim they care but by their actions show that they simply do not.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Jika Jika) — The one thing I would say about the contribution of the Honourable Peter Hall is that I agree with his statements that the Liberal Party is trying to hoodwink

country Victoria. The Liberal Party is trying to have two bob each way on this project. It shows again that the Liberal Party is not fit to govern the state: it cannot show any leadership.

I am not sure what the federal National Party is doing because some of them supported the national government which supports the Basslink proposal with overhead pylons. I am not sure whether there is a division between the Vic Nats and their national counterparts. At least members of the Vic Nats are standing on some sort of principle by saying that they believe Basslink should go underground. They are not so much concerned about cost, but they are standing up for the principle that they do not like the look of the pylons in country Victoria.

For its part the Liberal Party is showing absolutely no leadership on this matter, none whatsoever. If it had some leadership, its members would get up and say, 'We support the state government's position and we support the position of the national government which has entered into the same arrangements with Victoria and Tasmania and decided to support the proposal and made the tough decision'. Instead the Liberal Party tries to have two bob each way, and the reason why it can do that was intimidated by Mr Hall in his contribution. The Liberal Party can have two bob each way because it knows it is not going to win the next election. It knows it will never have to implement its policy and try to negotiate putting Basslink underground. So rather than scuttle the proposal and be seen to be at odds with their federal counterparts, Liberal Party members have taken an expedient, unprincipled position and said, 'We do not support the proposal but we are not going to block it. We are going to allow it to go through, but in the unlikely event that we are elected to government, we will look at whether we can put it underground then'.

Hon. R. F. Smith — I'd like two bob each way on that!

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I do not think you would get two bob each way. I would say that the odds would be pretty high, Mr Smith.

That is where the Liberal Party is coming from. What about the National Party and its position on this? The first thing that must be said about the position adopted by the National Party, notwithstanding the comments I made about the principles it is trying to outline, is that it is wrong. It is wrong on the principles and it is wrong in relation to this particular project. The most striking thing is that it is playing populist politics. That is what this is about. It is a desperate attempt by the Honourable Peter Hall to get himself elected this time around

because he is in desperate trouble in his electorate. Let me show why this can be exposed as populist politics. Mr Hall and his party had no concerns at all when the issue was the laying of — —

Hon. K. M. Smith interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I am interested to hear where you stand, Mr Smith, but I will get around to you in a minute. There is plenty of time for you. The fact is that the National and Liberal parties had no problem with overhead cables when the Portland link was built.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — It is absolute nonsense to rely on the technology argument. You either say, 'We do not support overhead cables in country Victoria' and that is your position — —

Hon. K. M. Smith — That is what you are allowing. That is what you are supporting.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — No, I am saying what the National Party says. It either says that or it turns around and says that it was prepared to allow a huge long route going down to Portland. It is a massive distance — and I do not know exactly what it is but I bet it would be as long, if not longer, to go from the Latrobe Valley to Portland than it is to go from the Latrobe Valley to where the link to Tasmania is taking place.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — You've got no idea of the geography of Victoria, have you? You haven't got a clue!

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — If you want to say that it is not as long, Mr Baxter, I am happy for you to put your argument. You do not like people pointing out your hypocrisy. You were prepared to support it back then — —

Hon. R. M. Hallam interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Mr Hallam says, 'You've got to go back 20 years to find it'. Mr Acting President, I do not know what you think, but I bet the people of country Victoria who see those overhead lines all the way down to Portland have their own thoughts about this. Mr Hallam might explain to those people why he was prepared to sell them out back then. He and his party suddenly have some sort of a position which says, 'We want to protect the people of Victoria down in Gippsland'. Let's not go overboard with the arguments put up by the National Party, because it, very

simply, is a party which has no leadership associated with it whatsoever. It is playing populist politics in this matter in a desperate attempt to hang on to the few seats that it is likely to have after the next election.

By way of background I will explain how the solution that has been proposed came about. A Basslink joint advisory panel, comprising two members appointed by the Victorian government, two members appointed by the Tasmanian government and one commonwealth government-appointed member, submitted its final report to the three governments in late June this year. This independent panel recommended a Victorian land route using mainly overhead cable from the Loy Yang terminal station along the valley of Merrimans Creek across the coastal plain to cross the coast at McGaurans Beach. The proposal arose from an independent body made up of the three governments involved.

The government's proposal included a requirement to develop a strict environmental management plan. It is a \$500 million project that will employ 550 people in its construction phase and improve the security of supply to Victoria. It will give Victoria access to an extra 600 megawatts of power and provide a major boost to the development of the renewable energy sector in Australia.

Mr Hall put three arguments — and I intend to address each of them: firstly, that this was an environmentally questionable proposal; secondly, that there was no additional cost involved in putting it underground; and thirdly, that new technology could be used for an underground cable.

First of all let me say some things about environmental practice. If this proposal does not go ahead, if we do not have a link with Tasmania, we will have difficulties with the availability of supply in this state. I will explain what that means. A link to Tasmania of 600 megawatts means that we will not have to build another power station. It means that we will not have to build a dirty, environmentally much worse than anything else you can use, coal-fired, brown-coal power station — yet another one — in the Latrobe Valley. We will not have to build that because 600 megawatts of power will be available for peak load.

From the environmental point of view is it better for Victoria to have access to 600 megawatts of clean hydro power or is it better for Victoria to build yet another power station, pump even more rubbish into the atmosphere, make itself even more compromised in greenhouse issues and go down that particular track? That part of the equation is not mentioned by Mr Hall in his argument about whether the pylons are visually

unattractive. Of course in an ideal world people would prefer not to have the pylons and would prefer to have the whole lot underground! I live in Northcote and we have overhead powerlines going down the Merri Creek in a built-up area in a most appalling situation because of what past governments have done. While I have sympathy for the people of Gippsland, there are existing overhead powerlines that are in built-up areas and have an effect on a vast number of people, and those are not being put underground at the moment.

Mr Hall says, 'I don't care what happens to you in Northcote or to the people in Melbourne because they're not my concern. I'm only concerned about my paddocks in Gippsland. That's what my concern is. I'm not concerned about any other Victorians'. The reason Mr Hall's party is marginalised is that it does not care about all Victorians, it only cares about one segment — and even then it makes decisions which in the end are not even in their interest because he would rather have another coal-fired power station in the Latrobe Valley further destroying our environment than get access to 600 megawatts of clean hydro power from Tasmania.

So much for the environmental argument put up by Mr Hall. More than that, if you have an interchange and link between Tasmania and the mainland you bring Tasmania into the national grid. That has the effect that when prices in Victoria go through the roof as a result of shortage of supply or when there is peak demand, that load comes in from Tasmania and not only does it assist in maintaining the power supply it also has one other effect: it reduces the price of electricity. Mr Hall wants to condemn Victorians to facing higher electricity prices, because there would be no access to these forms of power. Mr Hall's proposal would result in environmental damage, and it would result in higher electricity prices for the people of Victoria. That is the first set of arguments that have to be put.

The second set of arguments relate to the use of high voltage direct current (HVDC) technology. A review was conducted by PB Power. The report states:

HVDC Light is a developing technology with rating of transmission distance abilities not yet proven for the Basslink requirements by commissioned similar projects worldwide. It should theoretically be able to accommodate the requirements of Basslink. However, the use of developing technology implies higher technical and commercial risk to the owners.

Mr Hall says — —

Hon. P. R. Hall — So be it.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — 'So be it, let the owners have this higher technical and commercial risk', but he is not prepared to say it would be at a higher

cost. He is not prepared to add that. I will give Mr Hall a lesson in commercial risk.

Hon. P. R. Hall — I don't need lessons from you.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I think you do. If you are asking a private company to accept a very high level of commercial risk, there is a cost with that.

Hon. P. R. Hall interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — The fact that Mr Hall has been lobbied by a company that did not get the contract to build Basslink is no reason why we should take his word for something like that. I do not usually come in here and support one company over another, unlike Mr Hall, but I will tell Mr Hall something about the company he wants to promote. It is simple and straightforward. It had an opportunity to put in a bid, like all the other companies. It had an opportunity to put its bid in, and if it had been able to put in a bid that was cheaper and better than what had been put up by Basslink I am sure the independent panel that reviewed the bids would have accepted it. For that company to come running to Mr Hall saying, 'We can do it now. We have now discovered somehow that we can do it', is not an argument. Mr Hall has lost the argument in relation to the technical capacity.

Hon. P. R. Hall — I have lost the argument?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — You have lost the argument because the basis of your argument is a company with a vested interest that failed in its bid.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — It did not even put a bid in; it was not interested.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — It certainly had the opportunity to put in any bid it wanted, Mr Baxter.

I will go on to other issues in relation to this proposal. The other thing to be said about the proposal is that the federal government has accepted it. I will read from a letter from the Honourable David Kemp, federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage, who is part of the federal Liberal-National coalition government, which is a party to this proposal. I do not know what goes on in the National Party, but obviously the Victorian National Party is totally irrelevant so far as National Party policies are concerned because its national counterpart is not listening to it. Either that is the case or it has, in a callous way, decided to try to take a politically opportune approach where the Victorian National Party takes one position and the National Party federally does something completely different by allowing this proposal to go through.

I refer to what David Kemp says in his press release dated 13 September 2002:

All of the evidence before me confirms that as long as the proposed monitoring and management arrangements are implemented the Basslink project will not have an adverse impact on the environment.

That is what David Kemp, not the Labor Party, says on behalf of the national government, which includes the Liberal Party and the National Party. The media release further states:

Dr Kemp said the decision was taken after a rigorous commonwealth environmental assessment of the project under the Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974 and the development of a number of recommendations as part of the joint assessment panel report and recommendations made by Environment Australia.

Dr Kemp is convinced that the environmental issues have been addressed. I look forward to the National Party getting up and telling the house how the federal government, of which it is a part, made the wrong decision on this, and attacking Dr Kemp. The press release goes on to say:

The commonwealth has endorsed all conditions of both state government decisions.

It has endorsed all the decisions, including the overhead powerlines. Normally I am not a great fan of David Kemp, and I think he did a pretty ordinary job in education, but on this issue he has taken the responsible decision, which is the decision of all three governments.

I have to comment about the Liberal Party's position because the Liberal Party has waxed and waned on this and has not been able to make up its mind about any of it. I will comment on some of the points that have been made by some members of the Liberal Party. The then shadow minister for natural resources, energy and ports, the Honourable Carlo Furletti, and the Honourable Philip Davis were interviewed about Basslink by the *Yarram Standard News*. It said that a spokesperson for the Basslink Concerned Citizens, Colin McAllan, said Messrs Furletti and Davis strongly reiterated that this was the opposition policy on Basslink — fully underground or not at all.

Of course Mr Philip Davis is going to do a complete backflip on that position. He thought that if he went out and said the Liberal Party would not support Basslink unless it went underground he would somehow be able to have it both ways. He knew full well that he could go out, make this sort of statement and never have to face the consequences. I urge the Honourable Philip Davis to adopt a leadership position on this and to start showing that the Liberal Party actually can lead. I urge

him to get up and say that the Liberal Party is happy for the proposal to go ahead, as its federal counterparts have done.

I hope Mr Davis can bring himself to the point of saying that the proposal will go ahead as has been proposed in contractual arrangements, with an overhead pylon component. Let us see if he is going to try to mislead the people of this state into thinking that somehow — in the very unlikely event that his party got into government — he would put this cable underground. He knows very well he has no intention, none whatsoever, of putting this cable underground in the unlikely and unfortunate event of his party getting into government. The best thing he could do would be to show a bit of leadership and moral fibre and get up — —

Hon. R. F. Smith — Timely.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Yes, very timely, Mr Smith, for the Honourable Philip Davis to show a bit of leadership, because it is a bit lacking on the other side of the house at the moment, and he might do himself some credit if he were to show that level of leadership.

That is the position that was adopted by the Liberal Party at that time. The *Latrobe Valley Express* of 27 June also quotes Mr Philip Davis:

Liberal MLC for Gippsland Province Philip Davis is standing firm on his 'no pylons' position ... 'it should be all underground, nothing else', he said.

Let me make it absolutely clear: if the members of the Liberal Party want this to go underground and it is underground or nothing, they should take up the offer of the National Party and vote against it, because that is the way of guaranteeing that it will not get through. You know something, Mr President, they are not going to do it. You know why? Because ultimately they know that it is going to be pylons, and they have not got the honesty or the courage to go out to the people of Victoria and tell them the truth. They have not got the capacity to do that. I look forward to the contribution of Mr Davis because I am sure he is going to wax lyrical about how he expects his party to get into government, and when it does — and so forth. It is absolute nonsense.

Hon. Philip Davis — You can't bear the thought that we will do something that you are not capable of doing!

Hon. M. R. Thomson — Victorians can't bear the thought.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — That's right, the Victorians can't bear that thought.

But if there is one thing the National Party said that is true, it is that the opposition has the opportunity to stop it in its tracks right now but it is not going to do that because it has no intention of putting the cables underground. It is simply trying to hoodwink — I think that is the word the Honourable Peter Hall used — country Victoria. The government can only concur with those words.

The Labor Party has adopted a position on this. It understands that the National Party does not like that position. It understands that the National Party has a different view. We have considered the views of the independent panel very carefully in determining our position, and it is a very complex issue.

I want to refer briefly to some of the issues dealt with in the final panel report on the Basslink proposal. It says:

Basslink is one of a number of proposals, of varying degrees of development, to augment Victoria's electricity supply capacity and to overcome predicted shortages at times of peak demand.

That is the fundamental reason that we need to have this link. The second reason is, as the report says:

The Tasmanian electricity generating system faces immediate and long-term supply and demand balancing problems, with current average demand (1128 MW) exceeding the long-term capability of the hydro system (1105 MW).

So there is a problem also in Tasmania. The report goes on to say:

... it is unlikely that any major expansion of demand in Tasmania could be met —

and I add 'by other means', which the report outlines. It continues:

Basslink would help to meet growing electricity demand in the state and improve reliability of supply, while at the same time enabling Tasmania to enter the NEM —

the national electricity grid —

and earn significant revenue.

It improves competition between the states. It will allow the Tasmanian electricity to be sold on the national electricity market, it will allow an effective exchange of electricity overcapacity which is vital to the system, and it will be to the benefit of the people of Victoria and Tasmania.

In conclusion, the National Party has correctly said that the Liberal Party is trying to hoodwink country Victoria

by the position it has taken, because it has taken a completely unprincipled position. On the other hand the National Party is simply following populist policies in relation to this because it is part of a national government which has taken the decision alongside Victoria. It is trying to have two bob each way by pretending that somehow the Victorian Liberals are different from the national Liberals. They too have shown no leadership and no understanding of the issues involved in this project, which will benefit the people of Victoria and Tasmania.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Sitting suspended 12.59 p.m. until 2.02 p.m.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Bob Jane T-Marts 1000

Hon. G. R. CRAIGE (Central Highlands) — I congratulate Mark Skaife and Jim Richards for a magnificent win on Sunday in the Bob Jane T-Marts 1000, which was held at Mount Panorama, Bathurst. This was a great win for Victoria, not only the win by Mark and Jim but also Bob Jane from Victoria. I also congratulate Jason Bright and Tomas Mezera who came third in a Holden Racing Team vehicle. I also place on record my congratulations to Rick Kelly and Nathan Pretty of the Holden Young Lions. Holden Racing Team deserves to be congratulated. It is a Victorian Melbourne-based organisation and it did an excellent job.

Many Victorians go on an annual pilgrimage to Bathurst. It is a special event, but the organiser, the International Marketing Group (IMG), deserves a raspberry. IMG has made this an absolute disgrace year after year. I want to say to Bathurst council, and to V8 super cars, change and get an organisation that can properly manage an event like the V8 racing at Bathurst. Change and get somebody else so that we can enjoy our racing properly.

Parthenon Marbles

Hon. JENNY MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — I condemn the Liberal Party for its hollow words and utter hypocrisy on the issue of the return of the Parthenon Marbles from the British museum to their rightful home in Greece, an issue that has had longstanding bipartisan support until now. It is an absolute joke that at last night's annual general meeting of the Victorian branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association the Liberal and National party members present combined to defeat a reasonable proposal by Premier Bracks that

CPA members, when undertaking study tours funded by this Parliament, advocate and lobby for the return of the Parthenon Marbles when meeting with British parliamentarians and the CPA secretariat in London. Despite this, all Labor members will continue to support this issue at every opportunity, including CPA study tours.

Liberal Party members have been exposed as the hypocrites they are. Despite rhetoric in the past from former Premier Kennett, former Liberal Party leader Napthine, and the honourable member for Caulfield in another place, Mrs Shardey, when it came to the crunch and they had the opportunity to support a practical measure that would assist to bring about the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece they failed to deliver. As for the CPA Victorian branch, it needs to dust off the cobwebs and make itself relevant to and value for money for all Victorians.

Hon. Bill Forwood — You are a disgrace!

Hon. JENNY MIKAKOS — No, you are the disgrace. You are a pack of hypocrites.

Parthenon Marbles

Hon. W. R. BAXTER (North Eastern) — We just heard the word ‘hypocrites’ thrown across the chamber by Ms Mikakos. I will expose her hypocrisy. She came to the meeting last night with some of her colleagues. We welcomed them to the CPA meeting as we do not often see them. We had a letter from the Premier suggesting that CPA members would be required, as part of their duties, to lobby the British government for the return of the Elgin Marbles. I moved a motion suggesting that members were perfectly at liberty to do so, and that they would be encouraged to make representations on any issue they so chose, bearing in mind the usual courtesies. But we did not believe it was appropriate that they be directed so to do.

That was widely debated with a lot of contributions. Even Ms Mikakos agreed with the objections Mr Strong put forward. My motion was subsequently passed. Ms Mikakos oddly asked for her dissension to be recorded. Then she and some of her colleagues did not have the decency to remain for the rest of the meeting; they got up and walked out. They spat the dummy and did not have the common courtesy to remain at the meeting, which then almost failed through lack of a quorum. It is outrageous that she would come in here today and endeavour to paint an entirely false picture of what occurred.

Drugs: heroin deaths

Hon. J. W. G. ROSS (Higinbotham) — I wish to take note of the so-called heroin toll published in the *Herald Sun* today showing 48 deaths so far this year. The Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine prepares these figures. Such deaths do not always occur at the time of heroin abuse and can be due to secondary causes such as pneumonia where death may occur in hospital some weeks after the designated fatal overdose of heroin.

Definitions aside, that figure is still too high and I urge the community to maintain the fight against drug abuse. In particular I applaud the commonwealth government for its tough-on-drugs campaign. That policy has resulted in a number of significant drug seizures and has reduced the availability of heroin. However, it is timely to compare, using the same data, today’s figure with the projections of the Drug Policy Expert Committee and its chairman, Dr David Penington. Figure 3.9 in the committee’s stage 2 report predicted that by now 400 deaths would have occurred, and that greatly influenced the government’s decision to introduce legislation to provide up to five heroin injection facilities around the Melbourne metropolitan area. That legislation was defeated in this house.

The truth is the declining death rate from heroin overdoses was apparent at the time the legislation was being prepared. Today’s figure of deaths from heroin overdose is nearly 350 less, and only 13 per cent of what was predicted by the Drug Policy Expert Committee. It completely vindicates the decision of this house to refuse passage of such inappropriate legislation.

Justice Geoffrey Flatman

Hon. D. G. HADDEN (Ballarat) — I pay tribute to the life of the late Geoffrey Flatman, Justice of the Supreme Court. Justice Flatman died in office on 18 September 2002. Geoff Flatman was sworn in by the Governor as a judge of the Supreme Court on 18 July 2001. His Honour was born on 7 July 1944. His father was a bank manager and as a result Geoff grew up in a number of rural townships. He was educated at various country schools, including Merbein State School and Mildura High School, and then as a boarding student at Wesley College. He graduated from Melbourne University with degrees in arts and law in 1969. He served his articles of clerkship with J. H. Trotter, was admitted to practice in 1970 and then worked as an employee solicitor at Sackville Wilks and Co. In 1971 Geoff was called to the Victorian bar and read in the

chambers of Michael Black, now Chief Justice of the Federal Court.

Geoff developed a substantial civil and criminal practice which had begun in the Magistrates Court and moved quickly into trial work in the County Court, much of it on behalf of the Public Solicitor and the Legal Aid Commission. Then he went on to Supreme Court trials and appellate work in the Criminal Court of Appeal and the High Court.

Geoff Flatman was well known as an able, hardworking and astute advocate. He was appointed Chief Crown Prosecutor in 1994 and the Director of Public Prosecutions in 1995, and in the same year he took silk. Geoff Flatman had a remarkably inclusive style, leading by example and encouraging cooperative effort.

Geoff's appointment to the Supreme Court in July 2001 was seen as a natural extension to a distinguished legal career. I extend my sincere condolences to Mrs Margaret Flatman and family.

The PRESIDENT — Time! I point out that when I call time, the recording goes off, so there is no point in honourable members going on.

Drought: government assistance

Hon. E. J. POWELL (North Eastern) — I rise to bring to the attention of city people in Victoria the seriousness of this drought and to make them aware of a situation which has never been seen before in irrigation areas. Irrigators in the Goulburn system, which is in the area the Honourable Bill Baxter and I represent, are the worst affected.

This is the first year that irrigators have not received 100 per cent of their water right. The price of water has now reached \$451 a megalitre. This will have a huge impact on food production. Our Goulburn Valley is known as the food bowl of Australia. The dairy farmers who cannot afford to buy water will now have to sell their cows. In horticulture, farmers may not put their crops in or their crops will fail and they will sell their water instead. If fruit and vegetable growers cannot buy water, their production will collapse.

With five years of low rainfall, not much rain recently and given that we are now coming into summer, our water storages are at the lowest level on record for this time of year. Our producers are facing really tough times, and I call on the government to do all it can to support them.

Gunnamatta: sewage outfall

Hon. B. C. BOARDMAN (Chelsea) — Last Sunday in excess of 2000 people attended a very important rally on the Mornington Peninsula, protesting about the Gunnamatta outfall. In my capacity as the local Western Port candidate, with Mr Martin Dixon, the candidate for Nepean, I attended the rally and addressed the crowd. In addition to our addressing the crowd, members of the Clean Ocean Foundation, the Surfriders Association and the Gunnamatta Action Group spoke at the rally.

There was not a single representative of the government at that forum. This is undoubtedly one of the most — if not the most — important issues facing the community on the Mornington Peninsula and indeed the whole of Melbourne. It is extraordinary that the government did not bother to send a single representative. Nonetheless it did have a member of the Labor Party there. The Labor candidate for Nepean got up and in a quite inappropriate and opportunistic manner decided she was going to solicit votes from the crowd. Not only did members of the crowd howl her down and give her a very clear message that they were not impressed by her opportunistic statements but they sent an equally clear message to the government: the people of Gunnamatta, the people of the Mornington Peninsula do not want the outfall extended. That was quite clear.

This government had better come back with a better proposal and a better policy than it has at the moment or the resonance at the ballot box — whenever that may be — will be much stronger than 2 kilometres of pipeline underwater.

Bali: terrorist attack

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Jika Jika) — I wish to put on record my outrage at the cowardly attack on Australians in Bali and pass on my condolences to the families of those confirmed as dead and my hope for recovery of the injured.

I want to make mention of some Greek Australians and their families. There are four young Greek Australian women from Sydney still missing, two of whom went to Bali after the wedding of their sister. They are Dimitra Kotronakis, 27; Elizabeth Kotronakis, 33; Christine Betmalin, 29; and Louisa Zervos, 33. Confirmed dead are David Maheridis and Dave Mavroudis, 29, who went to Bali with the Dolphin Beach Football Club. Sofia Karagiannis, 27, from Carrum, Victoria, was injured, and she has stated that she feels very lucky that she escaped with light burns. Sofia is a dental nurse. She went to Bali for a holiday

with her boyfriend. They both escaped the blast and were until yesterday in a hospital in Bali. They are expected to return to Melbourne today.

I am sure I speak for all honourable members in expressing our hope for all the missing and injured and our view that the perpetrators must be brought to account as soon as possible.

Honourable Members — Hear, hear!

St Albans Lunar Festival

Hon. S. M. NGUYEN (Melbourne West) — I would like to take this opportunity to praise the work of some Asian traders in St Albans. Last week I attended the fundraising dinner for the lunar festival at St Albans. Four years ago I and my colleague in the other place the honourable member for Keilor, George Seitz, were involved in setting up the festival with a group of traders and the Brimbank City Council.

The festival has been very successful in the last four years. Last year about 40 000 people attended. One aim of the festival is to promote the culture of the Vietnamese community to the larger community. The second aim is to promote business in the area. Every year the traders work with the council and other community organisations to make sure the festival is a success.

I wish the committee all the best in the coming years. I would like also to take this opportunity to encourage the Brimbank City Council to work closely with the traders to ensure the festival goes ahead.

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Housing: Port Melbourne

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — I was pleased to read in the *Port Phillip Leader* of 14 October that the Department of Human Services claims that the demand for public houses in South Melbourne has fallen in the last three months. That is all very well, but while there are 208 people less on the waiting list, that does not hide the fact that 2320 people are still waiting and 556 of them are high priority, waiting for emergency public housing.

Sally Jope from the Brotherhood of St Laurence stated that although the figures have dropped in the last three months they still indicate the need for more public housing in the area. I concur with that.

In Port Melbourne the shortage of public housing stock has been made worse by the removal of 64 family-size

public houses when the Bracks government demolished the Raglan–Ingles public housing estate in May 2001. While I agree that the estate needed to be refurbished as it was in a very bad condition, it has been 18 months since the Raglan–Ingles site was demolished and there is no sign of construction. In fact, it is a paddock with grass on it, as it has been, and a sign saying ‘This is the place to be’. It is not the place to be, and there are 64 families without homes.

BASSLINK PROJECT

Debate resumed.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — Today I picked up a newspaper clipping with the headline ‘Government to bury powerlines’. I was very impressed by that article because I guess that is really what the whole debate is about: what is the government’s attitude to dealing with high-voltage transmission lines?

A Labor minister on 14 September 1990 clearly indicated the Labor Party view about electricity lines on pylons or poles or in any other form. The Honourable David White, who was the Minister for Industry and Economic Planning, made it quite clear as far back as 1990 that we were in a phase of transition moving from conventional technology and to a new way of delivering electricity reticulation. That article particularly states:

Melbourne’s unsightly powerlines and poles are set to disappear under government plans announced today.

The first stage of the radical project was launched today by the Minister for Industry and Economic Planning, Mr White, who claims the scheme will beautify Melbourne’s suburbs while saving money.

...

The move follows the recent development of technology that has greatly reduced the comparative cost of overhead and underground power cables.

The chief general manager of the SEC, Mr George Bates —

the now late Mr George Bates —

said the scheme offers several benefits.

Electricity supply will be more secure, there will be much more attractive streetscapes, and underground supply is easier and therefore more economic to install.

...

A spokesman for the Australian Conservation Foundation, Mr Peter Allen, said the move was welcome, but long overdue.

‘We’ve been calling for underground cables for at least 10 years’, he said.

That article is a reflection of the values of the time, some 12 years ago. It was pertinent to a government attitude reflected by the then Labor government to what was appropriate for its Melbourne citizens.

The debate in this house today on Basslink brings into contrast quite sharply the differing values that seem to exist between the present government and country constituents. On 13 September this year the government announced its decision to approve the Basslink proposal using pylons for the land leg in Gippsland, which means that 180 pylons of some 45 metres height will be constructed to carry cable from McGaurans Beach through Giffard, up through the Merriman Creek valley, through Willung to Gormandale and across to Loy Yang.

The debate raging on this matter for some three years has been torrential. The process that led to the government announcement has been long and arduous and, on a personal level, it has been quite a journey for me. Many of the people who have been directly involved in the issue are not just known to me as constituents but are my neighbours and friends. From a personal perspective I found this one of the most difficult issues I have had to deal with as a member of Parliament. Because of that intimacy I am familiar with the impact the project will have on the local community.

I refer to people such as Dan Boland, who is the owner of the farm where Basslink comes ashore at McGaurans Beach; John and Winkie Mactier, who for 27 years were my next-door neighbours and whose property Basslink will traverse; Peter and Nicki Jennings, who have been very actively involved in the campaign, both of whom are very good friends of my wife and me and their children are very close friends of my children and attend school together; Graeme and Frankie MacLennan, who were involved in the campaign for a period; and, of course, one could not overlook Rosemary and Fergus Irving. Dr Rosemary Irving has been the face and the voice of the No Pylons campaign since January 2000. I have broken bread and shared a meal and a discussion with all those people on many occasions, so I have found the challenge to find a solution to this enormously difficult issue a very personal one.

Many other people who I know well have been involved in the campaign. Going back to the inception of the Gippsland community campaign against pylons I must mention Rob Liley and Don Fairbrother from Fish Creek. Rob Liley and I served together on the Victorian Farmers Federation pastoral council for a long period, and I know Rob particularly well. I have also known

Don Fairbrother through the VFF. Keith Borthwick, who is president of the Basslink Concerned Citizens group, which has a position not only against pylons but in favour of stopping the whole Basslink project, is known to me and was a neighbour in my former farming district of Giffard. Jeff Robbins lives not too far away from where I farmed for 27 years and is known to me as well. These people are not just constituents, they are people with whom I have an intimate familiarity; so I understand very personally how they feel about this project.

There are many people who have been engaged in this debate who I know also, but not as well. Many have been strong advocates. They are reasonable, sensible human beings simply trying to get on with their lives undisturbed by the impact of a major project that is going to inevitably change their quiet enjoyment of their landscape. I place on the record as a matter of fact that there is nobody in this chamber, absolutely nobody — indeed, nobody in the Parliament of Victoria — who has such an intimate involvement with the people whose lives this project will affect.

It is important to give some background to what the issues are. Basslink is a major energy initiative that will allow Tasmania to enter the national electricity market — that is, the wholesale market where electricity generators can compete to sell their output. It will link the electricity grids of Tasmania and Victoria by a combined subsea and overland high voltage direct current interconnector that will run from Loy Yang across Bass Strait to Bell Bay in northern Tasmania.

Basslink will have the capacity to operate at 480 megawatts continuously, or up to 600 megawatts capacity for some hours to provide peak export current. It will enable Hydro Tasmania to export to Victoria, and that will create a capacity to maintain off-peak power flows into Victoria.

It includes a fibre-optic telecommunications cable between Tasmania and the mainland, and the construction cost is approximately \$500 million. There are issues to do with security of supply into the southern Australian area defined by Nemmo, basically Victoria and South Australia, with a forecast shortfall of supply for 2003–04 and beyond. This shortfall can be addressed by Basslink or by utilising peak-load gas turbines; for example, in a submission the operators of a recently commissioned 300 megawatt gas turbine at Loy Yang have indicated that it is interested in further developments, and AES has recently deferred a decision to proceed with a 500 megawatt station at Stonehaven because presumably the market conditions are not right.

This issue has attracted widespread community, media and political interest across Gippsland, and to some extent in Melbourne, but largely the debate has raged with a singular focus in Gippsland. There will be people across the state who will be familiar with the issue in the sense that they understand what the broad concept is but hardly have any understanding about the level of community concern about the matter.

A number of community groups have operated independently and as a coalition to oppose the project selectively, mostly opposing the use of the 45-metre-high pylons and overhead cables, but there is one group opposed to Basslink in its entirety. All local members of Parliament, including the Minister for Agriculture, have spoken out against Basslink and/or pylons, and opposition has also come from the Wellington Shire Council, the Latrobe City Council, the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council, electricity unions and generator companies. There are no known advocates for the project in Gippsland.

Repeated requests to government ministers to inspect the Basslink route and to meet with local groups and residents have been denied, and correspondence has not been entered into.

Hon. P. R. Hall — Not one.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — As Mr Hall interjects, not one Victorian minister of the Crown has either met with a deputation or inspected the route. I shall give some further background about the project. The concept of linking — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — Mr Theophanous, if you quietly enjoy my contribution you will establish at the conclusion that undeniably the position that the Liberal Party has set out is a responsible approach to solving this dilemma. The background to this project is that the concept was first of linking the Tasmanian and Victorian electricity grids and has been under consideration since the 1950s. Following the establishment of the national electricity market, the Tasmanian government committed to join the national electricity market via an interconnection with Victoria.

In February 1998 the Tasmanian government established the Basslink Development Board to facilitate development of the Basslink project. The Basslink Development Board sought expressions of interest from potential proponents to build, own and operate Basslink. At the same time the board set up Basslink Pty Ltd as the nominal proponent to initiate preliminary environmental planning and impact

assessment studies in advance of the selection of the ultimate proponent.

An initial shortlist of 4, drawn from 14 competitive bids, was announced in November 1998 followed by a further reduction to this in November 1999. The Tasmanian Premier announced the preferred proponent on 28 February 2000 as National Grid International Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Grid group which acquired Basslink Pty Ltd from its interim owner, the development board.

It is important always to put the background on the record. There is a chronology of what I will describe as community reaction to this proposal, which I will come to shortly, but this is a project which has been approved by the Victorian Bracks Labor government. On 13 September the government announced by way of a media release and by then issuing formal notices of approval in relation to the planning schemes which are under discussion today that this project would proceed.

So far as we know, no Victorian government minister has ever traversed the land affected by this project. They have certainly never indicated by any thought, word or deed that they even had any interest in the project. There has been a total policy vacuum on the part of the Victorian government. One may ask why is the Gippsland community so widely galvanised against pylons? There are numerable reasons. I suppose those who forced the Labor government of the 1980s to underground the high-voltage transmission lines in the vicinity of the Merri Creek in Richmond did so for exactly the same reasons that members of the Gippsland community have been advocating for the past three years.

Hon. P. R. Hall — Depending where you live; in Melbourne they look after you!

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — That interjection is again worthy of consideration. In recent times I have found myself in vigorous agreement with much of what Mr Hall has said in this house, and much of the contribution Mr Hall has made today is indeed fine and worth while. There are some points at issue, however, between us, and I will come to them momentarily. Before I do so I would like to continue about some of the reasons why Gippsland citizens are opposed to pylons.

Overhead cables are reviled because of their impact on the landscape, environment and amenity values. Pylons have a visual impact many kilometres from the viewer. Contemporary community values and attitudes strongly favour undergrounding of electricity cables, as is

evidenced, as mentioned in the introduction to my contribution, going back to 1990 when it was a Labor energy minister, David White, who announced that the reticulation of electricity in urban areas would be in future confined to underground options.

The community, particularly women, are alarmed about health risks from electromagnetic fields which are associated with overhead cables. Having served as a shadow energy minister I am familiar with the dichotomy that exists between the various parties that argue the point about whether there are risks to human health. It was only as recently as 8 October this year that an article in the *Age* made the direct link between powerlines and cancer. The article, headed 'US study links powerlines to cancer,' states:

Overhead powerlines and household electrical appliances increase the risk of cancer ...

The Californian study, the largest held into the effects of EMFs on health, suggests that hundreds of thousands of people, particularly children, are at risk from life-threatening illnesses linked to the emissions. Pregnant women are also at greater risk of miscarriage.

I am not a scientist, but I am well familiar with the reality of the concern which the community expresses about this issue. Whether ultimately another study will contradict the one that I have just referred to, as has been the history of the debate around this issue for probably 70 years, we will have to wait and see. For the time being, however, it is worth while being cautious.

There is no doubt that Gippsland citizens see that undergrounding Basslink would preserve landscape and economic and social values. Undergrounding Basslink would also reduce the impact on farm operations, and, due to narrow easement requirements for underground cables in comparison to overhead transmission lines, it would have less impact on land-holders. Underground cables would not be affected by bushfires as would overhead lines. Maintenance costs for insulated underground cables would be only a fraction of the cost of maintaining overhead lines.

Given that the electricity industry is now largely operated by the private sector there is a reasonable expectation, in the community at least, that there is an obligation on the Crown to meet some costs in relation to community values. It is certainly the case that the government has community service obligations in respect of citizens who are of straitened means in the form of a series of energy concessions dealing with gas and electricity and, indeed, water concessions. Those concessions are seen as a community service obligation on government, and there is no doubt that the citizens of Gippsland look to government to provide that sort of

assistance to them to ensure that their amenity values are not impacted upon. There is therefore an argument that the state could contribute to the cost of undergrounding Basslink.

Further, with the rapid development of HVDC Light technology, Basslink may be one of the last major transmission projects constructed with conventional technology. This is evidenced by the commissioning of Directlink and Murraylink with HVDC Light projects in Australia; indeed, Murraylink recently received an environmental award. There are many international examples of the use of HVDC Light underground projects, including the Cross-Sound cable project, which has a capacity of 330 megawatts and a cable route of approximately 41 kilometres — which is under sea and under land; the Lake Erie Link project being developed by Transenergie US, with approximately 13 kilometres of cable underground and 110 kilometres under sea; and the Harbour Cable project, with a capacity of 330 to 660 megawatts and approximately 10.5 kilometres of cable underground and 25 kilometres under sea. In these cases HVDC Light with underground cables has been proven to be commercially and technically more attractive than conventional overhead lines. These projects clearly indicate trends away from the conventional technology and towards HVDC Light underground, which is indeed proving to be cost competitive.

I will reflect a little on the process that has occurred over the last several years. The first public introduction of this project was at a public meeting convened on 8 September 1999. That public meeting was to offer the opportunity for the project to be explained to the Gippsland community. Before that meeting occurred there was a meeting between the Basslink development board represented by the executive chairman, Dr Mike Vertigan, local government representatives, and all Gippsland members of Parliament.

I well recall that at that very first meeting, which was at about 5.30 p.m. on 8 September 1999, after Dr Vertigan had explained the proposal to the local members of Parliament and received the appropriate response from everybody in the room, I put my hand on the map that was on the table and said straight out to him that it was my view that this project would never ever be built on the route alignment that had been proposed at that time by the Basslink development board — that is, coming ashore at Cape Liptrap and through West Gippsland. I told him that the community views — even without the community having been informed about the project — were such that that project would never proceed. I then dragged the map across the table and, with the detailed geographic knowledge I have as a local member, put

my finger on the map right on top of the location where my farm was and said, 'That is where this project will eventually be built, because every other route will have such opposition to it that you will never be able to persuade anyone to build it there'.

The point I was making was that it was the line of least resistance. It was where the fewest land-holders would be impacted on by such a proposal. There was no doubt in my mind about that at that time. But we went through this farce where, for three years, the whole of the Gippsland community, virtually from Leongatha to Longford, were engaged in an extremely stressful process, while the clever people worked out the line of least resistance so they could push this project through at a cost to Gippsland citizens. I am disappointed, frankly, that the effort, the financial resources and the intellectual knowledge were not applied in a practical way such that the thousands of people who have had their lives disturbed for some years could have avoided that pain, which could have occurred had the clever people worked out where they really wanted to put the project in the first place. That is a great shame.

In any event, as I predicted, that is where it ended up, and I had no doubt from the outset that that was where it would be. When that meeting adjourned and we moved to the public hall, 1300 people attended the public meeting that evening and roundly condemned the project and made it clear that Gippsland citizens did not want to see pylons built through Gippsland. I give credit in particular to Rob Liley, whom I mentioned earlier, for convening that initial stage of the protest.

Then, of course, most Gippsland citizens worked out very quickly, just as I had, where along the coast this project was more likely to be a threat. It was then that the No Pylons group was established by Dr Rosemary Irving and began its long campaign against pylons. The Wellington shire indicated its concern at that time by refusing to meet with the Basslink board, preferring to meet with the community to ascertain its concerns.

In January 2000 a crowd of 360 persons attended a public meeting at Woodside to pledge their opposition to pylons on the proposed Reeves Beach. Then the citizens of Gormandale and Carrajung also united against Basslink. In February 2000 — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Theophanous should sit in his seat or leave the room.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — In February 2000 more than 500 people marched down the main street of Yarram, and I was one of them. The Minister for

Agriculture, who also attended that rally, indicated his opposition to pylons and said he had written to the Premier to tell him so.

Hon. W. R. Baxter interjected.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — I would say it carried a huge amount of weight, given the apparent result. The fact is that no responsible government minister ever met again with anybody who was involved in this debate.

There was a rally in Traralgon in March of 2000 attended by 150 persons. National Grid International then confirmed that it was the preferred tenderer for Basslink and that its project brief provided no flexibility for underground cables. At that point the terms of reference were being established by the Victorian government for the joint advisory panel process, and the Victorian government was delinquent in not requiring that an underground option be considered when setting out the terms of reference at that time.

Ever since March 2000 there has been significant debate about the opportunity to use underground cables as an option. Even as far back as then, a company by the name of Olex Cables claimed that undergrounding was a viable option, expecting that it would add only \$30 million to the \$500 million project cost.

In April 2000 the No Pylons group welcomed a directive from the then Minister for Planning that the joint advisory panel must consider the underground option. It was delinquent at first but at least responded to the representations by the community.

In June 2000 Bob Brown threw the Australian Greens party's weight behind the anti-Basslink push at a public meeting at the Woodside hall, which I can testify was well attended. There was concern among fishing communities about the impact on access to fishing areas and there were meetings between National Grid and fishermen at Port Albert during July 2000.

In August 2000 new routes were proposed and concerns were expressed by farmers at Darriman, Giffard and Stradbroke, with people being briefed on the details of the proposed new routes. Indeed there was a silent protest at the Woodside hall in view of the consultative committee which was established, which Mr Hall alluded to earlier, to deal with the environment effects statement process. In September 2000 the Wellington shire launched its campaign against Basslink and announced the formation of the Wellington No Pylons Coalition. In October 2000 Basslink Pty Ltd named its preferred route and in

November 2000 conservationists protested about pylons through the Mullundung State Forest.

In November 2000 the Gormandale community backed a no-Basslink stance at a meeting at the Gormandale hall. There were concerns about and fear of flooding and environmental damage at Jack Smiths Lake. In December 2000 National Grid announced that it would use 45-metre-high pylons to carry Basslink through Gippsland — and so it goes. I can recite the chronology in some detail, but it comes down to the fact that there was a series of developments that progressively engaged the whole of the Gippsland community from Leongatha to Longford. The most regrettable aspect of the management of the issue by the proponent from the outset of the establishment of the Basslink Development Board was that it was completely insensitive to the concern and alarm that it engendered within the Gippsland community.

Numerous meetings were held and representations were made during the submission processes while the joint advisory panel was undertaking its duties, but at the end of the day there has been no involvement by the Victorian government. In July 2002 the No Pylons group urged the Minister for Planning to at least acknowledge its letters and again asked her to visit the area to talk to residents and inspect the route before making any decision.

It is important to note in respect of that matter that I have made representations to the Minister for Planning on three separate occasions through the course of this year inviting her to meet with deputations from the No Pylons group. On not one occasion has the Minister for Planning responded to my correspondence. On one occasion there was no response at all. On another occasion the acting minister, the Minister for Local Government in the other place, signed a response that was dismissive, and on the third occasion the minister's chief of staff responded to my correspondence by suggesting that the moment had passed, a decision had been made and there was no further point in the minister having any contact with the community.

I would like to talk about the other actions I have taken to represent the views of the citizens of Gippsland on this matter. As I said earlier, on 8 September Dr Mike Vertigan addressed some meetings in Leongatha. I advised him that in my view this project would not proceed in the manner in which he had proposed, and I have been proven correct. On 6 September 1999 I wrote to the Premier of Tasmania, the Honourable Jim Bacon. In my letter I said:

Please be advised that whilst I support the Basslink development and entry of Tasmania into the national

electricity market in principle, I cannot support a proposal which will have adverse effects on the local community within my electorate.

The use of pylons to carry powerlines through privately owned farmland would be extremely detrimental in terms of social amenity as well as having an economic impact on the region in respect to destruction of visual amenity, and therefore land values.

Significant representations have been made to me by my constituents — from Leongatha to Woodside — on this matter.

It is noted that the Basslink Development Board — the auspicing agency for the promotion of this proposal — is a Tasmanian government statutory authority, and therefore this project is sponsored by the Tasmanian government.

Whilst I recognise that the joint approvals process — Tasmania, Victoria and the commonwealth — may deal with many of the issues of concern, pylon transmission lines will not be acceptable to the community.

So far as the Victorian/Gippsland onshore route is concerned, I support my constituents' urgings that pylon transmission lines not be used.

Not only did I make representations to the Tasmanian government, I also made representations to the Victorian government in the form of a letter to the Minister for Agriculture, who is a Gippsland member of Parliament as well as a minister in the current cabinet. In my view he was just the person to take up the Gippsland cause on behalf of citizens who were feeling threatened by this proposal.

I reflected on his comments to the rally held in Yarram on 11 February 2000, which I referred to earlier. At that rally I heard the personal commitment by the minister to a no-pylons option for the Basslink project. So I wrote in those terms to the Minister for Agriculture, the Honourable Keith Hamilton, to ask that he take this matter up and ensure that the Tasmanian government and the Victorian government would not sponsor such a proposal.

Mr Hamilton responded on 21 February 2000 by saying:

... I did tell the Yarram meeting of my preference for the underground option for the project ...

Over the next period of time I proceeded in the Parliament to raise the matter with the Minister for Energy and Resources. By referring to *Hansard* I find that I have raised this matter with her in the house on not less than six occasions, and on three of those occasions I have invited her to inspect the Basslink pylon route. Needless to say, I have not had a responsive approach from the minister. I have written to the minister on two separate occasions in relation to

those inspections further extending the invitations. On not one of those occasions — three invitations in the Parliament of Victoria and two by personal correspondence — has the minister seen fit to meet with any members of the community or inspect the route.

It is a great disappointment to me that on all of those occasions — 25 and 30 May 2000, and 19 March, 16 April, and 8 and 16 May 2002 — when I have raised the matter with the minister she has been disinclined to participate in any constructive way. Having written to the minister on 4 April and 11 April, again, I found it disappointing that she did not respond in any positive way.

Following letters to the Minister for Planning on the same issue — that is, meeting with deputations from the No Pylons groups — on 25 March, 12 April and 11 July of this year — the minister was completely unresponsive.

What further actions could I have taken? I have been active in whatever public debate it has been possible to be involved in — and there has been plenty of it, I can tell you. I have attended all the meetings which were relevant or to which I had been invited. I advocated within the Liberal parliamentary opposition about the issue, and my parliamentary colleagues well know my views on this matter.

In July last year I went to the United Kingdom and met with members of the senior management of National Grid to talk to them about international interconnector projects that they have under way, but I especially talked to them about Basslink and clearly articulated the view of the local community. I was pleased to have that opportunity, and I am grateful that National Grid did accede to meet with me and allow a very free and frank discussion. I had already had discussions in Victoria at a local level because I have been meeting continuously for three years with the local representatives of National Grid.

While I was in the UK I also met with the Rural England Versus Overhead Line Transmission group, known as REVOLT, which is based in North Yorkshire. In North Yorkshire an interconnector project, sponsored by National Grid, has been under way — at least so-called under way — for about 12 years. It is an interconnector transmission project carrying cables on pylons, the purpose of which is to connect different transmission systems to secure electricity supply between transmission districts in the Yorkshire area.

The North Yorkshire project, as it is well known, has met with stiff community opposition. What I found there was completely analogous to my experience and observation in Gippsland. There is absolutely no doubt that the community opposition is intense and real and strongly supported by wide community networks in the local government area, the farmers union and the community at large.

The chairman of that group was a mathematics professor by the name of Mike O'Carroll. He was very gracious to me and invested considerable time in going through the issues, which I found completely pertinent to the experience of dealing with the Australian issue. I inspected the route, met with a large number of land-holders and entertained discussions on the project with representatives of various organisations at local government and other levels. The reason that project has been under way in North Yorkshire for 12 years is that community opposition is so strong that the proponent has been unable, as yet, to successfully complete the project. The opposition by the community has been so intense and vigorous that for all of those years the project has been frustrated.

When I was there in July last year I do not think any pylons had been completely erected. I understand as of now that about 100 have been constructed, but each access to a farm property is met with a challenge and the company has to go to court to seek a way leave order so that it can enter the property to undertake its work.

This is not just an isolated issue for Gippsland and Victoria. There is a universal and growing disdain for this technology, because people are becoming more concerned about environmental, social and amenity values. We have seen that absolutely reflected in the standards that are now applicable in relation to urban development where powerlines are put underground. No more do we see bundles of wires being strung up in association with new housing developments. It is not a standard that the community finds acceptable and in a modern society we have to accept that that is a reality.

That brings me to what the Liberal Party should do about this matter. I can tell the house that for my part, as I said earlier, I have been active in informing members of the opposition about the issue. I have tried to inform members of the government but they will not listen. I have certainly been frustrated by the lack of response from ministers of the Crown who have particular responsibilities in this area, but I will leave that because the government really does not have any interest in or care for country Victoria.

What I have done is spoken at length with my colleagues who hold portfolio responsibilities in the opposition. At least three shadow ministers — in particular, from the other place the honourable member for Brighton as the shadow Minister for Major Projects and the honourable member for Hawthorn as shadow Minister for Planning, and from this house the Honourable Carlo Furletti as shadow minister for natural resources and energy — have visited the area, inspected the district and met with people involved at the community level in this campaign. They inspected the route and understand the background to the project. That helped particularly to inform the opposition in working its way through a response. When one is in government one thinks that being in opposition might be a lot easier. That has not been my experience.

Hon. M. M. Gould — Nor mine either!

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — On this issue I am quite convinced that there is no easy solution to a complex problem and while the government has chosen not to engage in trying to solve the problem, the opposition has. The Liberal Party therefore has had some informed and sensible discussion simply because the Liberal Party made sure it was informed. That informed and sensible discussion has been proceeding in the context of full knowledge that when the decision by the government to approve the project was announced, we were also conscious of the announcement made by the Leader of the National Party in the other place that he would be seeking to stop the project with a motion of disallowance to the planning scheme amendments.

As a matter of fact there has not been a planning scheme amendment disallowed in the Parliament of Victoria for 10 years. Most Gippsland projects of significance require planning scheme amendments. When one thinks about Gippsland one often thinks of rolling hills and agricultural districts, but that is not the end of it. Gippsland is the energy core of Victoria, with major brown coal generation, now a significant quantity of gas-powered generation and, of course, Gippsland hosts the Bass Strait oil and gas fields. Therefore we have significant offshore and onshore processing facilities. Gippsland has major large employers in the form of the pulp and paper mill at Maryvale with 1000 employees. There are endless food processing businesses. All of these projects ultimately need planning scheme amendments.

The conundrum for the Liberal Party has been: 'Should we just bend to the populist passion of the moment and simply stop a major project of half a billion dollars with 1000 construction jobs attached, with the prospect of reducing the average pool price of electricity by 6 per

cent, and with the implications that any further proponent seeking to sponsor a major investment in Victoria would be uncertain as to having complied with the processes that the government of the day have laid down to find that the planning scheme amendment would be knocked over for populist political reasons?'

That was a big question for the parliamentary Liberal Party. Why would we want to approach it from that perspective? While we were working through what we should do, no doubt Basslink Pty Ltd which has invested on any conservative estimate at least \$50 million on the process of the development of this proposal was very anxious about its position because it has complied with what the Victorian government requested of it. Unfortunately, the Victorian government had declined to engage in the process. So Basslink itself has been working in a vacuum with no policy direction from the government about this important question of utilisation of pylons versus underground cables. So it was in a conundrum.

Basslink made representations to the opposition. In a letter to the Leader of the Opposition in the other place, dated 26 September 2002, Basslink in the form of Geoff Singleton, the chief executive officer of the company, on no less than three occasions recites that should the planning scheme amendments be blocked then the project would be abandoned entirely. In that context I will quote from his letter. In one part he says:

Should the Victorian parliamentary Liberal Party revoke the planning amendment in the Victorian Legislative Council, we will not build the Basslink.

That is quite emphatic and was recited three times in the letter. This is not, as some in the National Party perhaps think, a game of poker. It is not about who blinks first and who stares the other party down. This is a serious project. These are proponents. These are serious issues. It is not just about doing the most popular thing for the time being. This is about the future economic wellbeing of the state as a whole, of Gippsland in particular, but also about the rights of citizens and the responsibilities of government. In my view the government has abandoned its responsibilities, and whilst it is not possible to govern from opposition, the reality is that the Liberal Party has needed to take under consideration all these factors to try to resolve a problem that the government would not deal with.

Further, it is important to note that the Leader of the Opposition then responded to Basslink and on 4 October indicated in writing that:

As you would be aware the Liberal Party supports the project on the basis that the cable is underground.

This remains our position.

...

The Liberal Party seeks an undertaking that should we win the next state election, Basslink Pty Ltd would be willing to discuss a commercial arrangement with a Liberal administration to underground the cable.

To which, it is important to note, the response from Basslink was that:

Basslink would discuss all relevant issues with you should a Liberal administration be formed.

That exchange of letters is of critical importance to the opposition because it sets out clearly the position of the parliamentary Liberal Party — that if it wins the next state election it will require Basslink to engage in a discussion to resolve how this project will proceed underground — and it responds in terms that mean the opposition is able today to not disallow this planning scheme amendment.

It is an exchange of letters about a serious project by serious people trying to find a resolution to an enormous conundrum. Therefore, I am pleased to be able to indicate that on the basis of those discussions which the Liberal Party intends to have if in government it will not be disallowing this amendment today.

There has been a certain amount of debate about the costs involved with Basslink, and I will deal with that. The government, in its political reaction — the first serious comment it has made in relation to the project at all beyond the announcement on 13 September when it signed off on the project — claimed that the cost of undergrounding would be \$95 million to \$110 million. I make the point that, as the *Final Panel Report on the Basslink Proposal* clearly indicates, there are different views about costs. I quote from 5.3, page 74:

... the panel commissioned Halliburton KBR Pty Ltd ... to prepare an independent cost estimate for the Basslink Victorian land route development.

And further:

Halliburton KBR's cost estimates have been externally reviewed by the South Australian transmission utility Electranet to confirm their accuracy.

On page 75 it says:

The costings by BPL and by Halliburton KBR indicate that the difference in cost between total —

and I emphasise total —

undergrounding and total overheading is substantial — between approximately \$70 million and \$90 million depending on whose costing is adopted.

I wanted to get that on the record. That is the independent panel report. Notwithstanding the fallacious claims of the government about the total costs, the independent panel report clearly indicates the cost range. However, one has to understand that that cost is being ameliorated by the fact that the government has approved the project on the premise that the first 6.5 kilometres will be underground in any event. Using the costings in the report, it is clear that the net additional cost of the project — that is, the undergrounding of the remaining overhead transmission line beyond the first 6.5 kilometres, which will be mandated to be underground — will be in the order of \$10 million less in net terms than is stated in the report. Therefore, the cost estimate range is \$60 million on one end up to \$80 million on the high side. We know there has been quite a deal of debate about costs and there are alternative views about what the net costs could be.

I referred earlier in my speech to Olex Cables, a cable manufacturer which argues that the undergrounding could be done at a cost of about \$30 million. We know that Transenergie have put a very strong case for HVDC Light technology that argues effectively that the whole project could be undergrounded using HVDC Light technology at no additional cost beyond that cost parameter which exists for the total project now — that is, no net additional cost.

I do not think I am competent to argue the case, in the sense that this is not really my field and I do not want to second-guess what commercial players may have in mind, but when they enter into these debates it is serious commercial business. Clearly, as I have alluded to before, there are opportunities for alternative views to be expressed, as they have been. These matters are commercially sensitive, but on the matter of cost there is no doubt that Basslink has been arguing a very strong case and has recently issued an advice, the 'Basslink information sheet no. 3', in which it is claimed for the purpose of discrediting the HVDC Light option, that it would cost another \$200 million to use that technology.

I do not know what motivated Basslink to do that, because of course it immediately met with a response from the companies that use that technology disproving Basslink's claims about those costs and clearly indicating quite the contrary. Again, these are not matters which I am going to belabour in detail in this debate. I simply make the point that there is absolutely no doubt and no argument that the technology exists in various forms for this project to proceed underground. There is absolutely no doubt. The joint advisory panel report indicates that there is no doubt about the technology being available. We have Basslink itself

confirming that the technology is there to underground the project.

At the end of the day the whole debate turns on a question of cost. What is the total cost? We know the independent panel has said that in net terms it is about \$60 million. There are others who say it could in fact be significantly less. It is appropriate for us to take on board that there may be an additional cost in the quantum as set out in the Basslink joint advisory panel report, and accept that that is the range of cost that the community will have to recognise.

I re-emphasise that there is no doubt the technology exists for this project to go underground. Such is the technology that the recently commissioned Murraylink proposal has received an environmental award. The undergrounding of the cable for the 177 kilometre interconnector, Murraylink, was awarded the winner of the Case Earth award for environmental excellence. That is recognition of the developments that have occurred since the bid process for the Basslink project was enjoined initially back in 1998.

I remind honourable members that there are two recently commissioned interconnectors in Australia which are underground: the 180-megawatt interconnector between Queensland and New South Wales, and the 220-watt interconnector between Victoria and South Australia.

As I was saying, there have been a lot of words between the various companies that are involved in this business of transmission interconnection. I do not intend to read into *Hansard* from this correspondence but I have received correspondence from ABB Australia Pty Ltd and others concerning this debate. I am confident that we will find there is no doubt the project can be delivered within the parameters defined by the joint advisory panel.

This is not a new issue. In 1989 honourable members may recall that the then government was confronted with a similar problem in the area between Brunswick and Richmond, and what notoriously became the proposed Brunswick–Richmond powerline was an issue of great contention in the Victorian Parliament. The energy minister at the time, the Honourable David White, had responsibility for oversighting the process for the implementation of this powerline, which clearly, from my research, commenced not long after the Cain government was elected. I found letters to the editor going back to 11 January 1984 expressing concern about the impact of this proposal on the community between Brunswick and Richmond.

The proposal went through a series of different review processes, none of which was deemed to be satisfactory. Ultimately on 22 February 1989 it was predicted in the *Herald* that the powerline was likely to go underground. The first paragraph reads:

The proposed Brunswick–Richmond powerline seems certain to be re-routed and put underground after the release today of the draft recommendations of the powerline review committee.

I refer to the final report, which is titled *The Brunswick to Richmond Powerline Development — A statement by the Honourable David White, Minister for Industry, Technology and Resources* and dated October 1989. I understand the statement was issued on 5 October. The summary of main outcomes states:

The principal outcome of the review is that the Yarra/Merri waterways and immediate environs will not be used as a route for an overhead Brunswick to Richmond powerline. The government has fully accepted the panel's recommendations on this matter ... the panel recommended the line be placed underground for its entire route. The government has accepted this recommendation and the SECV has agreed construction should begin as soon as possible.

The summary further states:

The estimated total cost of the underground cable project is \$36.6 million, which will be met by the SECV.

It is a long time since I went to school, but I can still multiply. It is not hard to work out that allowing for inflation the real value of \$36.6 million in 1989 would equate today to something more than \$100 million.

Gippsland citizens believe their environment, their aesthetic values, their social justice, are worth not less than those good citizens of Melbourne, whose amenity and environment were potentially to be affected by this transmission line, referred to as the Brunswick–Richmond powerline in the 1980s. I argue strongly that the decision of the Victorian government of the day, led by the Honourable John Cain at that time and announced by the minister responsible for energy at that time, the Honourable David White, that the powerline would be undergrounded at a cost to taxpayers, is absolutely no different in principle to that which is being argued here by the parliamentary Liberal Party.

In conclusion I wish to pick up some points that have been made during the debate by other speakers. In the first place, the Honourable Peter Hall talked about acquiescence. That was extremely disappointing because it is the fact that of all the parties represented in this house, the only party which has worked to find a solution to this dilemma of how to ensure that a major project in Victoria proceeds, but that the rights of the

citizens of Gippsland who are affected by it should be protected, has been the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party has chosen not to take a populist stand in terms of its electorate. It is a position which is highly responsible. A responsible position is a position which achieves the long-term objectives and deals with ameliorating the short-term impacts. The short-term impacts here clearly are the direct effects of the construction of pylons and the carrying of cables across Gippsland farmland.

If it would only be the case that the Victorian government had not neglected its duty of care to citizens and required as part of the terms of reference at the outset of the approvals process that this project be facilitated underground, we would not be here dealing with this matter today. The talk of acquiescence is disappointing because it is the Liberal Party that has worked diligently, as I have recited, to come to a conclusion.

Mr Hall also said the National Party intended to remind people at the election. Mr Hall can bring it on; that's fine. The fact is that the Liberal Party will be reminding people at the election that the only party in the Parliament that is capable of delivering this project underground is the Liberal Party, because it is the only party which has committed to effect its policy in government — which is to put that cable underground.

Mr Hall had a bob each way, having accused the Liberal Party of having a bob each way. The fact of the matter is that Mr Hall said the National Party support for the project is conditional — that is, conditional on its being underground. Then he said that he is against the project because it is not necessary.

You are either for the project or against it. Clearly today members of the National Party have come into the Parliament to demonstrate they are against the project, a project that will improve the competitive position of consumers in the electricity market by 6 per cent in terms of the average pool price and create 1000 jobs in the construction phase. It is a half a billion dollar investment in total in Victoria, Tasmania and, of course, in Bass Strait, and it is a project that will give significant environmental benefits. It is quite clear that National Party members do not work to try to achieve positive outcomes, which is the approach the Liberal Party has taken.

Mr Hall further quoted from a Yarram newspaper and comments by Mr John Richards, a spokesman for Basslink. At the end of the day I do not really care what Mr Richards has to say to the editor of the Yarram newspaper. What I have read into *Hansard* today are relevant excerpts from correspondence that has been

exchanged between the Liberal Party and Basslink which clearly set out the determination of Liberal Party members that if we win the next election we will require Basslink to go underground and that we will insist upon it. Certainly that has been clearly acknowledged as a consequence by National Grid.

Further, Mr Hall said, 'If you want Basslink, you can have it, but put it underground'. That is a bob each way. You cannot disallow this planning scheme amendment and have Basslink. You either have the project and put it underground by facilitating the necessary process, which the Liberal Party is committed to do, or you do not have the project at all. At the end of the day, the only way that this project will proceed underground is for the Liberal Party to insist upon it. That has been clearly demonstrated.

Mr Hall may have been out of the chamber earlier when I said this is not a game of poker. This is a serious issue for serious people. It is not a game of bluff or poker. It is clearly the fact that Basslink has indicated absolutely unequivocally in its correspondence with the opposition and in verbal discussion that there is no possibility that the project will proceed if this planning scheme amendment is disallowed. It is a matter for serious people. Mr Hall does himself a disservice to reflect on that.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Liberal Party has demonstrated a care and concern for country Victoria. On my own part, as I indicated to the house earlier, I have found this to be one of the more difficult challenges I have had since I have been in Parliament — which is now 10 years. I have felt it personally, in the sense that I am very familiar with the people who are affected by it.

Mr Theophanous indicated that the Liberal Party had set out to deceive country Victoria — I think those were his words. All I can say about that is that members of the Labor Party set out to abandon country Victoria by refusing to engage at any point in any discussion with any representative of the community or indeed enter into any discussion with members of Parliament, for heaven's sake, and ministers did not accept any invitation to inspect the route and have some dialogue with the parties directly affected. The decision that was made and announced on 13 September was a complete abrogation of ministerial responsibility because not one minister had properly informed themselves about the decision which was announced.

Mr Theophanous suggested the Liberal Party was showing no leadership. Again we fall into the policy vacuum question. Who did not have a policy? The

government had absolutely no policy on this. It allowed bureaucratic process to determine a government policy decision. The Liberal Party has shown leadership because it has effectively negotiated an outcome which will see the project proceed, but it will certainly proceed underground if we win government.

There were references by Mr Theophanous to the 1980s Portland transmission line debate. Again it just goes to show how out of touch he is. I have to give credit to Mr Hall for raising in debate the development of technology. I have had the same information provided to me about the advances in technology, which I have alluded to in relation particularly to Transenergie interconnection developments. We know that it is technically feasible, that the joint advisory panel report acknowledges it and that Basslink acknowledges it. The debate has always turned on the question of costs.

Hon. Andrew Brideson — And Chris Strong says it is feasible.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — Yes, indeed; there is a greater authority again! The debate has turned entirely on the question of costs, not on whether it is technically feasible or otherwise.

Mr Theophanous rabbited on and said that with Basslink we will not have to build a dirty coal-fired power station. He should have a talk to his Labor candidate in the Latrobe Valley about whether the people in the Latrobe Valley think that coal-fired power stations are a good or bad idea. He will find that the reason the Labor Party has such a significant role in the Latrobe Valley is because of those power stations — I think that is the only way to summarise it. It is a fact that they are an important asset to the state and Victoria will be continuing to use brown coal to generate electricity for many years to come.

I ask Mr Theophanous to reflect on the fact that quite clearly the government's decision to divert water to the Snowy River will have a far more profound effect on the environment than whether a new brown coal-fired power station is built to accommodate 600 megawatts. It is, after all, a fact that the Snowy environmental flows will reduce the output of the Snowy hydro scheme by 7 per cent. The consequence is that therefore it will be indeed coal or gas-fired power stations which replace that lost energy. There will undoubtedly be far greater emissions as a result of Snowy environmental flows than if Basslink proceeds.

Mr Theophanous quoted from a Yarram newspaper and Mr Colin McCallum, who I know as one of the spokesmen for the Basslink Concerned Citizens group,

referring to comments asserted to be from the Honourable Carlo Furletti and me. There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that if Mr McCallum alluded to statements we may have made about underground cables or not, that is the Liberal Party position. That has been our position for three years and remains our position and it is a position which we will put into effect in government. There is no question that what Mr Theophanous is concerned about is the fact that we will in reality have the opportunity to do that in the near future.

The government has missed the opportunity with the terms of reference set in March 2000 to ensure that the debate we are having today was not necessary. If it had not had a policy vacuum it could quite clearly have insisted upon an outcome which would have met the needs of the Gippsland community. There have been no statements on Basslink at all by the government generally or ministers in particular. Even in the context of this debate what I find extraordinary is that we have been considering the matter for several hours this day and in none of that time has the minister responsible for energy been in the house. Not only has the minister not been in the house, she has sent a lackey to do her bidding — and Mr Theophanous has been the person to defend the government. That in itself is an abysmal performance by a minister of the Crown.

It is appalling and abysmal that ministers have failed to receive deputations or inspect the route. It is a disgrace that the justification for this that ministers have perpetually trotted out is that it is clear that they wanted not to interfere in the process.

Let us talk for a minute about interfering in the process. I recall that in January 2001, following an exhaustive process over several years involving an environment effects statement on an open-pit mining proposal for Big Hill at Stawell by Stawell Gold Mines Pty Ltd, the largest gold producer in Victoria and a most reputable company, which was prepared to comply with the conditions that the panel proposed to ensure amelioration of any environmental impact, the Minister for Planning at the time simply overturned the panel's report and disallowed the project. For any minister of this government therefore to suggest that the government should not be involved in a planning process is a complete farce. It is a weak, mealy-mouthed excuse for ministers to not take responsibility.

I conclude by repeating that the Liberal Party's policy on Basslink has been entirely consistent. We have always been in support of the Basslink project but have maintained that the cable on the Victorian land leg must

be underground. We have recently reaffirmed that position and I have done so again today. We gave a commitment that if there is a Liberal government after the forthcoming state election Basslink will be involved in a process to ensure that the cable goes underground.

Basslink had formerly advised, as I have quoted from various pieces of correspondence, that it would withdraw from the project entirely if the planning scheme amendments were disallowed, and the Liberal Party regards the \$500 million Basslink project as important for economic development, providing as it does for the interconnection of Tasmanian and mainland electricity grids and the strengthening of the national electricity market with additional competition which will reduce average electricity pool prices by 6 per cent.

We believe therefore that Basslink should proceed, but that the onshore cable should be underground rather than on pylons. Our policy seeks to achieve that objective and bring about a positive outcome. The Liberal Party has made a policy commitment to which it will give effect with a mandate in government. The election of the Liberal administration will ensure that Basslink goes underground. I therefore oppose the motion.

Hon. K. M. SMITH (South Eastern) — I am pleased to join in this debate today. It has been very interesting. We have had two very comprehensive speeches by Mr Hall and Mr Davis, plus a small speech delivered by Mr Theophanous in his usual carping, divisive way that did not offer anything to the house on the proposal, apart from the fact that it is obvious from what he said that the government does not have any concern at all for the people in Gippsland and is happy to have wires strung across the countryside. That does not worry the city folk; they are not going to see it or live with it every day of the week, so they do not need to be concerned about it.

Our party most certainly has concerns about the pylons and the cables. We have been saying that right from the word go. I remember being at the meeting at Leongatha in 1999. The hall was packed with 1300 people. I sat there listening to the concerns of those people and at that stage had no worries at all about supporting their view that if Basslink was going to go ahead the cables would be put underground.

At that stage we did not know where the cables were going to be. We did not know what part of the coastline was going to be chosen to be the spot where the cables came up onto the beach and then on to another set of powerlines. I gave a commitment at that stage, and for

the last two and a half years I have had a sign in my office saying 'No Pylons'. It was happily displayed there for anyone who came into my office and I was more than happy to discuss my commitment to putting those cables under the ground.

I am disappointed with the position Mr Hall and the National Party have taken. It shows that that party, at this stage in its process of trying to survive, is more than happy to take up any of the populist views around. This is the second issue they have done it on.

Hon. P. R. Hall — 'Responsible' would be a better word to use than 'populist'.

Hon. K. M. SMITH — Mr Hall wanted to have a swipe at us so he can sit there and cop it back from me because I am not too happy about the things he said.

We have taken a responsible position in regard to the powerlines because we believe there is every chance we will be in government after the next election. Where the Nats are going to be remains to be seen, but we are in the position where we believe we will be in government. We believe it is a project that should go ahead, not only for Victoria and Tasmania but for all of Australia when the power hooks into our national grid. That will be important for us. There is a huge \$500 million investment in it, and we are talking about an unknown amount of extra money that it will cost for undergrounding. Various amounts have been talked about. Mr Hall and Mr Davis spoke about the variations that have been discussed by the different companies, which are all competing to put in the best sort of bids, if I can put it that way, for putting it underground.

Altogether there will be about 63 kilometres of cable onshore. The government proposes that 6.5 kilometres of it will go underground, about 57 kilometres to be on pylons. I just do not think that is right. It is not correct that they should be looking at putting 57 kilometres of cable and 180, 45 metre high pylons across the skyline. That will have a very significant effect on the people down there, not just because it is going to spoil the view but because it will be there every day.

They have been sold out by the Bracks government. The Liberal Party on winning government after the next election — there has already been correspondence between the Leader of the Liberal Party in the other place and the company — will be talking with the company and will come up with a financial solution to help put those cables underground. It will be done because there is every possibility we will be in government.

We are not taking the populist view; we are taking a realistic and logical view of how life can be made better for the people of Victoria and Gippsland. That is something the National Party was not prepared to do. Mr Hall is prepared to say, 'Let's revoke the regulation and the whole thing'. That is the result. We heard the Honourable Philip Davis read the letter from the company which said three times that the project will not go ahead if the revocation takes place.

I do not know whether Mr Hall did not believe him or whether he does not care about the project going ahead, but he expressed his personal opinion that he does not want it to go ahead. I had to go to Mr Davis and ask, 'Did he just say that he doesn't agree with it — the National Party leader in this place does not want this to go ahead?'. You have to be joking!

The Liberal Party is realistic in what it will do after it wins the next election. We could have voted with the National Party and the project would not have gone ahead. What sort of responsible opposition would we have been if the project does not go ahead? When the brownouts start who will Victorians blame? Not the Bracks government, which has been incompetent in trying to get decent energy projects off the ground since being in government — they will blame Mr Hall. Whether he is here or not, they will blame him, and the party will blame Mr Hall for raising this issue.

Hon. P. R. Hall — People of country Victoria will blame you for allowing this to go through.

Hon. K. M. SMITH — Mr Hall, they will thank us because there will be power and it will be underground. The Liberal Party has given a commitment to the people of Victoria that it will go underground. I had to laugh at an article in the *Sentinel Times* which said Nats and Davies join forces on Basslink. Mr Hall and the Leader of the National Party in the other place are desperate in joining forces with the honourable member for Gippsland West. She has nothing to offer and not one ounce of responsibility. She can promise the world, but the truth is that she can deliver nothing, and you get into bed with her in regard to this. What are you on about — how desperate are you in trying to pick up votes in Gippsland? If anything is going to bring the National Party down in Gippsland, Mr Hall will.

How much money are we talking about — \$50 million, \$60 million? The money the government wasted by putting Seal Rocks out of business and being found guilty by an arbitrator could have been used to put the cables underground and everything would have been hunky-dory. The government could have done it but did not. What about the \$90 million it rejected from the

federal government for the Melbourne Cricket Ground project? That money could have undergrounded that electricity one and a half times. But no, the government is more than happy to take another \$77 million out of the pockets of the Victorian taxpayer to pay its trade union mates to have a good time at the MCG. Although the MCG project has already started there is still not a written agreement!

Mr Hall, you and your National Party colleagues should be joining us so that after the next election this will happen. Do not be with the government.

Hon. P. R. Hall — You are with them!

Hon. K. M. SMITH — No. Mr Hall, you must understand what we have said to you today. Mr Davis spoke for 1¾ hours about why the project will go ahead and be underground. If you have your way nothing will happen. We may sit on the other side of the chamber with the government and vote against the National Party today and achieve something — the power will be underground. It will happen in Victoria because the project will go ahead. If the National Party has its way nothing will go ahead. Mr Hall will stand condemned for what he has done today and for the things he has said. We will be scanning through his words, and when the power goes off we will be letting people know that the Nats were the ones prepared to take away the right to have power to allow the state to thrive. Labor has ruined it for the rest of us by doing away with manufacturing jobs, but the National Party will turn the lights off in people's houses and force restriction on Victorians because there will be no power for Victoria. The farmers of Gippsland will say to the Liberal Party, 'Thank you Libs for what you did and the stand you were prepared to take'.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 6

Baxter, Mr (*Teller*)
Best, Mr
Bishop, Mr

Hall, Mr
Hallam, Mr (*Teller*)
Powell, Mrs

Noes, 33

Ashman, Mr
Atkinson, Mr
Birrell, Mr
Boardman, Mr
Brideson, Mr
Broad, Ms
Coote, Mrs
Cover, Mr
Craigie, Mr
Davis, Mr D. McL.
Davis, Mr P. R.
Forwood, Mr
Furletti, Mr

Luckins, Ms
McQuilten, Mr
Madden, Mr
Mikakos, Ms
Nguyen, Mr
Olexander, Mr
Rich-Phillips, Mr (*Teller*)
Romanes, Ms
Ross, Dr
Smith, Mr K. M.
Smith, Mr R. F. (*Teller*)
Smith, Ms
Stoney, Mr

Gould, Ms
Jennings, Mr
Katsambanis, Mr
Lucas, Mr

Strong, Mr
Theophanous, Mr
Thomson, Ms

Motion negatived.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA BILL

Second reading

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Madam Acting President, it is with great pride that I introduce the Regional Development Victoria Bill into the house today, because this bill is testament to the Bracks government's commitment to rebuilding rural and regional Victoria.

This bill is further proof of the Bracks government's determination to put rural and regional Victoria at the centre of our decision making, at the core of our economic policies and at the very heart of our drive to take Victoria forward as a thriving and innovative economy.

We are making sure that people in rural and regional Victoria get the investment and opportunities they need to look to the future with confidence.

Jobs; health; education; innovation and IT; local government; road and rail transport.

In all these areas, for the first time in many years, we are making the investments, building the infrastructure and delivering the services people in country Victoria want and need.

I am proud to be part of a government that understands the importance of sharing the benefits of economic growth across the state.

I am proud to be part of a government that recognises the necessity for exciting new projects like the regional fast rail links and the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline.

And I am proud to be part of a government that appreciates that Victoria cannot go forward if we do not find the means to generate even more new jobs and opportunities right across the state, and connect and link rural and regional Victoria to each other, to Melbourne and to the world.

These are big tasks — and they are not always easy tasks, but they are tasks this government has taken on, working alongside the people, businesses and councils of country Victoria.

Much has already been achieved. Much more is to come. And there is still a lot to be done.

It requires commitment, coordination and a constant focus on the people, communities and industries outside metropolitan Melbourne.

That is why the government is proposing legislation to establish Regional Development Victoria — the very first time in our history that country Victoria will have a dedicated body, with a specific role to facilitate the coordinated delivery of government programs, services and resources in rural and regional Victoria.

Regional Development Victoria will be a practical, no-nonsense body that gets on with the job, working alongside local councils to put projects on the ground and create local jobs.

Back in the 1970s the state government of the day released a 10-point plan that promised a similar regional advisory body, but it was never delivered — indeed it was never even considered by the previous state government.

These sorts of bodies are commonplace overseas, including the United Kingdom, and if we are serious about competing for a fair share of investment for country Victoria, we must use the best tools, the best practice and the best ideas available.

This bill will lead the way in Australia when it comes to regional development.

Since coming to office in 1999 the Bracks government has worked towards a vision of a Victoria in which every part of the state contributes to our growth — and shares in that growth.

And we have seen strong and solid progress in rebuilding country Victoria.

Building approvals are at record levels, reaching \$2.7 billion in the last financial year, compared to \$1.7 billion in 1998–99 — a phenomenal growth rate of nearly 60 per cent in the three years Labor has been in office.

Regional exports are increasing, with food and fibre exports reaching \$7.6 billion last year — up by a massive 43 per cent over the past two years. This growth puts us well on track towards our target of

\$12 billion of food and fibre exports by 2010 and is proof that country Victoria can compete with anyone in the world.

The Bracks government has facilitated and attracted new investment of almost \$1.5 billion in country Victoria — working together with regional businesses to explore new markets, develop new products and increase exports.

Our pro-business approach, our commitment to winning investment and creating jobs has delivered:

businesses like Sage Computer Support in Gippsland, which now employs 50 staff and pays out more than \$2 million in wages each year in Gippsland;

businesses like Murray Goulburn Co-op, with its major new investment in Koroit, with total sales of around \$2 billion and exports of more than 400 000 tonnes of dairy products;

businesses like Pasta Master in Bendigo, Alstom in Ballarat, Kooka's Country Cookies in Donald, Visy Industries in Wodonga;

businesses big and small — working alongside our farmers and primary producers — contributing to prosperity in country Victoria and mixing it successfully with the rest of the world.

The government has also backed innovation and agricultural research in country Victoria with major new initiatives to promote innovation and research, and to improve skills and business management.

We have invested \$50 million in creating modern science, innovation and education precincts at Ellinbank, Tatura, Horsham and Mildura and institutes at Hamilton, and modernised facilities at Bendigo, Kyabram and Rutherglen. In addition, we have provided a further \$25 million in funding for projects in country Victoria under the government's science, technology and innovation program.

More generally, through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, we have allocated nearly \$96 million to 54 projects throughout regional Victoria with a value of more than \$218 million.

And we have not been afraid to take on the big issues that should have been tackled years and years ago.

Through the work of the Latrobe Valley task force, we are providing more than \$105 million to boost business and community confidence and improve economic and

social opportunities for those most disadvantaged in the Latrobe Valley.

There is no shortage of talent, ideas, determination and courage in country Victoria.

The difference is that now, at last, Victoria has a government ready and willing to back that talent and encourage and support those ideas.

From massive undertakings like the regional fast rail links to projects that help small country towns carve out new opportunities for themselves, this government has gone out and worked with rural and regional communities to try and give them what they need and want.

Unlike our predecessors, this government has not walked away from its responsibility to country Victoria — and that can be seen very clearly when you look at employment growth in rural Victoria.

In country Victoria the average unemployment rate over the last 12 months has been 6.3 per cent — two percentage points lower than for the year to October 1999.

In absolute terms, the unemployment rate is currently 5.4 per cent — the lowest in more than a decade.

This translates to more than 45 000 jobs created in country Victoria over the past three years.

The government's decisions to relocate the State Revenue Office to Ballarat and the Rural Finance Corporation to Bendigo have helped this strong growth.

Three years ago, morale in country Victoria was low as infrastructure was either closed down or run down.

Over our first three budgets we have invested more than \$2 billion in rural infrastructure, more than doubling the levels of infrastructure spending made under the former government.

Hospitals and aged care services are being redeveloped and upgraded.

New schools are being built — and existing schools are being modernised.

Old and run down police stations in country towns are being replaced.

Community halls are being rebuilt and restored.

Regional rail lines are being reopened.

Over the coming decade, country Victoria will be even further transformed:

the rail freight system will be standardised for the first time in Victoria's history — and there will be better access for regional exporters to our ports;

the Melbourne showgrounds will be reinvigorated with over \$100 million invested to showcase country Victoria;

the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline will be built;

environmental flows will be restored in our great rivers — the Snowy, the Murray and the Glenelg;

there will be fast rail links to our provincial centres and beyond;

our country roads network will be the best in Australia;

we will lead the nation in Internet access and communication connections in regional areas;

and our dairy and barley markets will be thriving and our food and fibre export targets achieved.

Over the last three years, we have taken a partnership approach with the people and communities of rural and regional Victoria to make them part of a better, fairer, more prosperous state.

Right around the state, people have come along to regional community cabinets, to the rural and regional mayors summits, to forums about the future of their particular region or town — and spoken up about what they want for their communities.

One consistent theme coming out of those forums was the need for better coordination across government on regional matters.

This bill today addresses that issue — and it is proof that we are a government that consults, that listens and then gets on with the job.

This bill creates a new statutory body that will work in partnership with regional Victorian communities, business and all levels of government to attract new investment and generate jobs.

Regional Development Victoria will ensure there is a strong and coordinated focus on regional Victoria across all state government programs, services and resources.

It will help regional Victoria boost its competitive strengths — the strengths that are so vital to competing in world markets and generating export opportunities.

Regional Development Victoria will facilitate infrastructure projects that build on regional strengths and provide scope for new business activity and public and private sector cooperation.

And it will help plan and build the social infrastructure necessary to complement economic growth and create strong, thriving communities.

When we won office, we set out to ensure rural and regional Victoria won a bigger slice of the action — not just a few crumbs now and again, but in everything this government does, and in every budget we deliver.

We have met that commitment and we have shown the leadership and taken the responsibility to give rural and regional Victoria a voice — and a future.

We have put rural and regional issues back where they belong — at the heart of government.

Purpose of the bill

The bill:

creates Regional Development Victoria as a statutory body;

defines its role to facilitate economic and community development in rural and regional Victoria;

provides for a chief executive; and

creates an advisory committee.

The primary purpose of Regional Development Victoria is to facilitate economic and community development in rural and regional Victoria.

Its principal functions are to:

facilitate new investment in rural and regional Victoria;

facilitate the operation and growth of existing businesses in rural and regional Victoria;

facilitate the creation of jobs within the private and public sector in rural and regional Victoria;

propose rural and regional infrastructure development opportunities.

It will be required to facilitate the coordinated delivery of government programs, services and resources in

rural and regional Victoria and to facilitate consultation between governments at all levels, business and community organisations.

It will report to the minister on the state of rural and regional Victoria having regard to economic, social and environmental matters.

The bill provides for a chief executive to be appointed by Governor in Council.

The chief executive reports to the minister and is required to advise on the development and implementation of economic and community development policy for rural and regional Victoria.

On matters relating to the general conduct and management of Regional Development Victoria, the chief executive is responsible to the secretary of the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development.

Regional Development Victoria's role

Regional development must involve an integrated effort between those who promote economic development, those who build community capacity, those who plan and build physical infrastructure and those who deliver services.

It also involves a special partnership with local government.

Regional Development Victoria will lead this coordinated effort.

It will deliver the government's commitment to generate jobs within both the public and private sector in country Victoria.

It will work to ensure infrastructure development in country Victoria.

It will smooth the way for projects that enhance the economic and social wellbeing of country Victoria and administer money paid out of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Act 1999.

It will work in partnership with all tiers of government to improve government planning and policy for country Victoria.

And it will promote country Victoria as a great place to live, work, invest and visit.

Regional Development Victoria will be resourced to deliver the range of programs that will make a difference to rural and regional Victoria.

The bill provides that staff transferred, seconded, or assigned work in Regional Development Victoria will continue to be employed under part 3 of the Public Sector Management and Employment Act 1998.

It is intended that staff from the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development will be transferred to the new body to coincide with its establishment.

Staff will be drawn from the following areas: those administering the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, regional industry specialists, the regional network of staff located throughout the state, the Office of Rural Communities and regional policy.

The advisory committee

The bill also establishes a Regional Development Advisory Committee to advise the government on matters relating to economic and community development in country Victoria.

The advisory committee will also play a major role in promoting rural and regional Victoria.

Members of the committee must come from rural and regional Victoria and they will have between them skills and knowledge in economic development, community development, finance and marketing.

The committee will build on the partnerships the government has developed with business, local government, the community — and it reflects, once again, our determination to achieve even greater things for country Victoria.

The bill provides that the minister's power of direction extends to the nine interface councils that are specified in the bill — namely, Cardinia Shire, Hume City, Mornington Peninsula Shire, Whittlesea City, Yarra Ranges Shire, Casey City, Melton Shire, Nillumbik Shire and Wyndham City.

Interface councils are those that have significant rural areas within their boundaries.

We now have a number of regions across the state with both urban and rural areas — and we face a challenge in getting the right mix of services and infrastructure into those areas.

There is a tendency to steer resources into the more heavily populated areas — to the detriment of smaller towns and communities.

So it is particularly important that Regional Development Victoria will focus on specific rural and

regional issues within the boundaries of those nine councils.

When the Bracks government came to office, we said we would do a number of things to boost economic development in country Victoria.

The first was to create the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund.

We did set up that fund, and it has been a spectacular success.

We said we would create a new Office of Rural Communities — and we did.

We said we would strengthen the regional office network and ensure its expansion into smaller rural communities — and we did.

We promised to abolish the catchment management authority tax — and we did.

We said we would abolish compulsory competitive tendering — and we did.

We said we would place a significant emphasis on industry sectors that have particular relevance for rural and regional Victoria.

And we did, delivering jobs and investment to the regions.

This bill represents the next step.

Another first for this state — a dedicated body for rural and regional Victoria.

When this bill becomes law, Regional Development Victoria will review more fully the findings from the government's series of consultations held throughout rural and regional Victoria.

As a priority, it will be required to advise on further action required to deliver on our commitment to regional Victoria. In doing so, it will have regard to economic, social and environmental issues.

It will adopt a whole-of-government, coordinated and collaborative approach.

When this bill becomes law, Regional Development Victoria will also turn its attention to the extension of natural gas into regional Victoria.

During the last five years, there have been very few gas extensions to the reticulated system.

This new body will have a specific role to help councils build a business case to attract investment from gas distributors — something that will be of enormous benefit to country consumers and regional businesses.

This is a priority for the government and it is a good example of how Regional Development Victoria will focus on the needs of country Victoria and then coordinate action to ensure priority projects are delivered.

And it will not be doing it alone.

This bill recognises the hard work, talent and commitment of so many people, organisations and businesses in rural and regional areas — and it represents the next step in a strong and ongoing partnership between country Victoria and the Bracks government.

The establishment of Regional Development Victoria will deliver real and lasting benefits to the people of rural and regional Victoria — and it deserves the support of all members of this house.

I commend the bill to the house.

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

Debate adjourned until next day.

FEDERAL AWARDS (UNIFORM SYSTEM) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 15 October; motion of Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business).

Hon. P. A. KATSAMBANIS (Monash) — The opposition opposes the Federal Awards (Uniform System) Bill for very good reasons. It is an honour to get up today and protect the public of Victoria from the harm this ideologically blinkered bill would have done to the people of Victoria, the damage it would have done to job opportunities, the signal it would have sent to potential investors in Victoria about a return to the bad old days of a centralised state-based industrial relations system, and about the return of trade union control in the industrial relations sphere.

They are the main reasons why we oppose the bill. We do not want to see the destruction of the single industrial relations system, the unitary system we have had in Victoria since the 1990s — a system that gives Victoria a comparative advantage over other states and

makes this state, despite some other actions of the government, still a pretty good place to consider investing in.

We do not want to see the destruction of jobs in this state — jobs in areas such as the retail sector and the rural sector, areas where the sorts of people who would lose their jobs are among the most vulnerable in our society. They would include the lower paid workers or women working part time or casually and people in rural Victoria who rely on employment for their integrity and their way of life. We do not want to see those people's jobs destroyed. That is why we oppose the bill.

We certainly do not want to give unfettered control to a new system of industrial inspectors cloaked under the guise of information services officers who march through every single workplace in this state, including potentially home-based businesses in the family home. We do not want to see any of that.

We are here to play an important role in ensuring that this government's acquiescence to the trade union movement is not enshrined in legislation and that it does not destroy employment opportunities for Victorians or future job growth and future investment prospects in this state. For those reasons, we are proud to stand up and oppose this bill.

Some will have the Liberal Party portrayed as uncaring. Those sorts of comments can be no further from the truth. It is plain that we in the Liberal Party in Victoria support a safety net for workers and support an industrial relations system that encourages flexibility in employment, encourages employers and employees to work together to their mutual benefit. Underpinning all that we in the Liberal Party believe the best safety net you can have is a climate that maximises job growth and employment opportunities for all Victorians.

It is the dignity and self-respect that comes with every individual being able to hold down a good, stable, well-paying job that we want to protect. It is the safety net that we support. We do not pretend, as the Labor Party does, to be in favour of workers when what it really means is that it is in favour of trade union officials who control the Labor Party to a great extent. Certainly trade unions can exist in any industrial relations climate. I have often said in this place that they are welcome, but when we see an industrial relations system run for and on behalf of the trade union movement we will not simply acquiesce to that sort of system. We would not allow that to be introduced because we know that at the end of the day it will lead to the destruction of jobs and the destruction of the

dignity of the individuals this government purports to represent and protect with this sort of legislation.

We will not sit down and watch this bill go through because we believe it is too important to Victoria. It is important that we have a single industrial relations system.

Hon. M. M. Gould interjected.

Hon. P. A. KATSAMBANIS — I will get to that, Ms Gould.

It is a credit to the Honourable Mark Birrell as a former industry minister in this state that he introduced the opportunity to get rid of the dual system that was so confusing. That will stand as testimony to his good work and the work of the Liberal Party in government that Victoria has an innate advantage when it comes to industrial relations in this country, despite some other disadvantages including the disadvantage of our having one of the most militant trade union movements in the Western World, but it is an advantage that we have a unitary system of industrial relations.

This bill, as I will prove and as the Liberal Party will prove, threatens that system despite the sugar coating to the bitter pill that the government has tried to put on the bill. It will simply not wash with the public. This is clearly an attempt to introduce a dual system of industrial relations, to reintroduce the old state-based system of industrial awards, and it is an attempt to force unionisation and industrial awards on every workplace, every employer and every employee in Victoria despite the fact that when given a choice those employers and employees freely choose again and again to reject unionisation.

They choose again and again to reject the inflexible practices that can be imposed on a workplace by federal awards and instead choose the flexibility of sitting down with each other, as they should, and working it out — employer and employee working together for their mutual benefit: benefit for the enterprise, benefit for the employer and benefit for the employee. That is what we are about. We are about protecting, not destroying, that flexibility. That is why, as I keep saying, we are opposing the bill.

I will examine the specifics of the bill to highlight exactly the sort of evil the government is trying to perpetrate through the introduction of this piece of legislation. Theoretically the bill purports to refer to the commonwealth government a power to make what are known as common-rule awards. I will explain them in a minute. On the front page the bill says its purpose is to amend the Commonwealth Powers (Industrial

Relations) Act 1996 to refer to the Parliament of the commonwealth of Australia et cetera, et cetera.

Hon. M. M. Gould interjected.

Hon. P. A. KATSAMBANIS — That is what it says; that is its purpose. I picked up the bill and I thought, ‘Well, if that is the purpose maybe it will be in part 1, which is usually the preliminary description,’ but no. I thought, ‘Maybe it will give that referral in part 2’. But what does part 2 do? It sets up a whole system of common-rule orders. Then I turned to part 3, but no — it talks about compliance and introduces the concept of information services officers. I will deal with them, too, in a minute.

Hon. Bill Forwood — What?

Hon. P. A. KATSAMBANIS — They are industrial relations inspectors by another name, Mr Forwood. I turned to part 4, but it does not do it either. I went to the last few pages of this 33-page bill and found that only in part 5 on page 30 does the bill deal with the referral to the commonwealth government of those supposed powers to make common-rule awards. This bill introduces a whole system of state-based industrial relations well before it even contemplates in part 5 the referral of powers to the commonwealth government.

When it does so, what does it actually mean in practice? Does it simply refer powers to the commonwealth government to make common-rule awards and say, ‘Well, we are having one industrial relations system. If the federal government wants to make common-rule awards or if an industrial relations commission wants to make common-rule awards in Victoria, that is good, but if they do not want to make them, that is fine and good too’, thereby ensuring flexibility and ensuring one industrial relations system? No, this bill does not do that.

It calls on the federal government to introduce legislation and it must be legislation to the liking of the government. And if the government does not like the legislation the federal government introduces it can still impose its own state-based industrial relations system. Is the commonwealth government going to accept the referral of the power? I cannot speak for the federal government. I do not purport to do so. But I know the federal government is interested in flexible workplaces and in protecting the rights of employees and employers rather than protecting the interests and the rights of the trade union movement. The federal government is not going to run off and make common-rule awards simply because the Minister for

Industrial Relations or the Labor government in Victoria wants it to.

What are common-rule awards? Common-rule orders, if you like, are rules that will apply to every enterprise in a particular sector in Victoria whether that enterprise or its employees wants those rules to apply to them or not and whether they are named as respondents to the award or not. We have seen the spectre recently of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA) running around Victoria trying to serve a log of claims on every single retail business in Victoria, trying to make them respondents to the federal award. A difficult task. They have to go and find them, then serve them. It needs a bit of work. They are after members.

You would imagine that if the SDA had a good case, they would run around to every shop and all the employees would sign up en masse to be members of the union and join in the award. They have not had a lot of luck, because employees in Victoria know it is not the union that is going to deliver them better conditions. It is not the union at all. It is their working together with their employer to grow the business and to share in the profits and proceeds of increased productivity and an increased standard of living for both employer and employee. What this government purports to do is to make it really easy for unions like the SDA, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and maybe the Australian Workers Union, the rural workers union in the rural sector and lots of other people to rope in every enterprise and small business in Victoria, every farm, every shop of every variety to the centralised wage fixation model to which this government is ideologically bound.

Yet it removes flexibility and removes the opportunity for people to deal at an enterprise level with their negotiations for all sorts of rates of pay and conditions — and again I will get to those and highlight how out of step this government is with the reality out there in the workplaces in metropolitan and regional and rural Victoria. It wants to impose its centralised, union-focused industrial relations system on the people of Victoria. The people are not fooled and the federal government is not fooled. That is why this referral is buried way down the back of the legislation and is simply a theoretical referral. This government knows that whatever the federal government does, it is not going to accept it and Labor knows that this legislation will give it an opportunity to introduce a state-based system of industrial relations that will take us back to the dark old days of trade union demarcation disputes. That is what would happen.

Part 5 of this legislation is buried down the back because the government knows it is only there in theory, to sugar-coat the bitter pill that it is delivering to the public of Victoria. What will happen is the introduction of the state-based industrial relations in part 2 of the bill, and the euphemistically named information services officers in part 3 of the bill. The state-based industrial relations system is predicated on Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) being the arbiter of industrial relations matters in this state. Sure, the provisions may not be as bad as previous legislation that this government has introduced; that does not make these provisions good. Just because they are relatively better it does not make them good in any way.

VCAT is a tribunal that deals with civil and administrative matters. It has no industrial jurisdiction at the moment. This government is proposing that VCAT create an industrial division. People know VCAT does good work but it is already under-resourced. It does not appear as though any provision has been made for further resources for VCAT to deal with the issues it will have to work on under this legislation, and my goodness, there are going to be a lot of these sorts of issues. What will happen is that an order at VCAT will be made across the board to every workplace in Victoria. There will be no right for anybody to say, 'I do not want this to apply to me. I am an employee; I am happy to work under my current arrangements and conditions; I do not want it to apply to me'. It will apply to every workplace in Victoria that is currently covered by schedule 1A of the Federal Workplace Relations Act.

You can imagine what will also happen: when a trade union goes to this new industrial jurisdiction at VCAT and says, 'I want this federal award to apply as a common-rule order across all these workplaces in this particular sector,' do you think any other trade union might come up and say, 'I would like to have a go at this too.'? It is going to lead to a series of demarcation disputes. We know that trade unions at the moment are in bitter struggles, one against the other, to attract members from each other. We are likely to see the spectre of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union fighting against the AMWU, and maybe the SDA fighting against the Australian Workers Union, or maybe the AWU fighting against the AMWU for coverage of these employees as the common-rule orders start applying to them.

VCAT is going to have to adjudicate on demarcation disputes between trade unions. It is going to be an absolute nightmare — a return to the bad old days where the current certainty will be replaced by

uncertainty and a union-dominated culture and system that serves nobody except the trade union paymasters of this government.

But do not take my word for it; do not take the Liberal Party's word for it. Look at what people out there are saying. Look at what the Australian Retailers Association is saying. I quote from the *Herald Sun* of 1 October, an article headed 'Shops warn of job cuts':

More than 2500 Victorian shop assistants could lose their jobs under proposed industrial relations laws, a retailer group has warned.

The Australian Retailers Association said that the legislation the government is proposing would hurt small businesses and cost jobs. The article continues:

Almost 20 per cent of retailers would stop trading on Sunday, while a further third would cut Sunday trading hours.

That is according to the association's own research. The executive director of the Australian Retailers Association in Victoria, Brian Donegan, said that the laws would force retailers to cut 2500 jobs across the state. Mr Donegan is reported as saying:

There will be no flexibility for businesses to create terms that are suited to their business needs.

There will be no flexibility for business, and there will be no flexibility for employees. Since the liberalisation of trading hours there has been an expansion of job opportunities, particularly for women who want to be in the work force but need the flexibility to look after their children and their families, and for young people, students and so forth, who also need the flexibility to fit their studies in as well as earn some additional income. Those people will suffer most from the decrease in employment foreshadowed by the Australian Retailers Association if this bill is introduced. They are the sorts of people this government purports to represent — people who are crying out for flexibility and who have welcomed the flexibility introduced in the last decade into our workplace. They are the sorts of people who will suffer under this oppressive industrial relations regime.

Then we move to country Victoria. Honourable members know that at the moment rural Victoria is suffering from the drought that this government was not prepared to acknowledge. It was a dirty word, that 'D' word. It took the Premier a long time to even say the 'D' word — drought. He refused to acknowledge something that everybody else knew. We know rural Victoria is at risk of drought. At this time when rural Victoria is in drought the government wants to impose these draconian industrial relations changes.

I quote from an article in the *Weekly Times* of 7 August headed 'VFF cans bid to alter work laws'. The Victorian Farmers Federation pointed out that it was opposed to the government's plan because it did not include enterprise flexibility or link entitlements to productivity. The VFF industrial association chairman, Mr Alan Bowman, is reported as saying:

... the move would be disastrous for farming business and was another example of the government doing the unions' job for them.

This is an acknowledgment by the VFF that this government is looking after the unions, not looking after Victoria, and certainly not looking after rural Victoria. Mr Bowman went on. He said that in reality:

... farming businesses provided a whole range of benefits to their workers, such as housing, power and food, which were unique to agriculture and not recognised by the bill.

It would quite clearly be a disincentive for farmers to take on new employees and also to retain the ones they have.

Mr Bowman made it plain and simple. Out there in the real world it is not a matter of having conditions set in federal awards that are made in Melbourne and Sydney. Out in the real world, in rural Victoria, employers and employees get together and work out bargains that suit them all collectively. That will include agreements about providing housing, power, food, and maybe providing transport. Those sorts of things are not written into federal awards. They are not taken into account in any way, shape or form in the common-rule orders that are envisaged here.

It is made clear by the VFF that this will result in thousands of job losses. Predictions reach up to 10 000 job losses across rural Victoria if this legislation is introduced — 10 000 job losses. Do we want to see that imposed on Victorians? The Liberal Party does not want to see that; I am sure the National Party does not; but that is what this government wants to do. In fact I do not think the government wants to do that; it does not care. The government does not care whether there are job losses in rural Victoria, as long as it does the bidding of its paymasters in the trade union movement.

The government wants to introduce a state-based industrial relations regime that takes us back to the old days of prescribed rules, lack of flexibility, not allowing employers and employees to work things out for themselves, treating business as the bad guy and treating the employees of any business as simpletons who are not able to think for themselves, who are not able to sit down with their employer and strike a fair bargain. Therefore they need the protection of trade union bosses. That is the sort of regime the government

wants to introduce through the common-rule orders and the new state-based industrial relations system. That is something we will not wear. We will not wear those job losses.

If the government was serious about increasing the minimum set of entitlements for people who fall under schedule 1A of the federal Workplace Relations Act, it would lobby its Labor Party friends and colleagues in Canberra to support the bill that is currently before the commonwealth Parliament, the Workplace Relations Amendment (Improved Protection for Victorian Workers) Bill. There is a bill in the federal Parliament that increases the basic safety net provisions in schedule 1A, a whole series of provisions dealing with leave, bereavement leave and so forth — increased minimum provisions.

If this government was serious about increasing entitlements for workers covered by schedule 1A of the federal Workplace Relations Act, it would encourage its Labor Party counterparts in Canberra to support the federal government's legislation to improve minimum standards for Victorian workers. It is not a theoretical bill. It is not a bill that might be introduced one day soon. It is a bill sitting in the federal Parliament in Canberra. With the support of the Labor Party it could be passed tomorrow through the House of Representatives and the Senate. But no, this government is not serious. This government has done nothing to convince its colleagues in Canberra, those same colleagues who are trying very hard to show that they will reduce the trade union influence in their own party from 60 per cent to 50 per cent. Convince those colleagues, and they can show by supporting this federal legislation that they are not tied to the purse strings of the trade union movement. But no, it is not doing that.

How incongruous it is that at a time when less than 20 per cent of all employees in Australia are members of the trade union movement, the Labor Party nationally and here in Victoria is beating itself up about whether to reduce direct trade union influence in its own party from 60 per cent to 50 per cent. They are totally out of step with Australians again. Less than 20 per cent of Australians are members of the trade union movement, yet the Labor Party gives the trade union movement 50 per cent control, and it thinks that is an improvement. My goodness, it has a lot to learn.

If Labor Party members are serious about improving the minimum set of safety net provisions for Victorian workers currently covered by schedule 1A of the Workplace Relations Act, they would encourage their colleagues in Canberra to pass the amending bill. The

fact that they have not even bothered to pick up a phone, let alone write to them about this, indicates — —

Hon. M. M. Gould — Excuse me, the minister has spoken to Minister Abbott, so don't mislead this house! Get your facts right!

Hon. P. A. KATSAMBANIS — I will pick that up. Why don't you listen before you interject? I am not talking about talking to Tony Abbott. Tony Abbott has already introduced a bill to improve protection for Victorian workers. I am talking about you talking to your Labor Party colleagues in Canberra and getting them to support the amending bill, and you are not doing that because you are simply not serious.

Then we have the spectre of the information services officers. Talk about sugar coating and spin! They will have extraordinary powers. The information services officers who will be appointed under this bill will not only have the right to ensure compliance with the act that this bill creates but, as provided by clause 14(2), they will have the power to enforce any other act of Parliament. The information services officers are a return to the system of industrial inspectors. They will be Labor government-appointed — in effect, trade union-appointed — industrial inspectors, who would have the right to go into any workplace across Victoria and demand to look at the books, to take samples and documents away and basically to ride roughshod over any workplace they like. They are going to be there not just to ensure compliance with this act but with any act of Parliament.

This government is proposing to set up a system of state-based industrial inspectors at exactly the same time as it has refused to accept \$90 million of federal government funding because it does not want to allow staff of the Office of the Employment Advocate, the independent umpire of workplace relations in Australia, access to the building site which currently is and will remain an industrial relations battleground — down at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. This government does not want people from the Office of the Employment Advocate anywhere near the MCG to enforce the law. It does not want to comply with federal law. It has given away \$90 million of federal grants so that it does not have to comply with federal law and it does not have to allow people from the Office of the Employment Advocate access to that building site. It has cost the taxpayers \$77 million from the budget and it has also imposed a further levy on Melbourne Cricket Club members because it does not want people from the Office of the Employment Advocate to have access to the MCG building site. At the same time it wants to

set up its own inspectorate, with draconian powers that include the ability to seek search warrants.

The powers include the power to take out search warrants to search any workplace they like, including homes. The emerging small office, home office (SOHO) people who are running legitimate businesses in our community will be subject to a knock on the door and a search warrant from the information services officers. They will not be there to help but to ensure compliance, to issue fines and to prosecute. They will be riding roughshod over any workplace that they like, these euphemistically titled information services officers.

The legislation provides that the information services officers can seek the assistance of the police, which is unprecedented. It is unprecedented in industrial relations law in Australia that any such inspectors would need search warrants. I have been advised by practitioners in this area that that is an unprecedented step, let alone the further step of being able to seek assistance from the police to enter someone's business or someone's home, which could also be their business. Of course in a rural setting, as other members of this place would know, the home is often also the office of a farming business or many other rural businesses.

Who will the inspectors be? They will be appointed by this government. There are a couple of blokes looking for a job at the moment. One of them is Craig Johnston. He is pretty well known for entering business premises. If Craig Johnston is appointed as an information services officer he would have the right under the full weight of the Victorian law to enter business premises. Some would argue that Craig does a pretty good job without the protection of the law. Is that the sort of person we want enforcing any law in Victoria? I would not think so. Martin Kingham, maybe, or John Cummins or a few other people who might be looking for a job could become information services officers and knock on anyone's door, day or night. That is the sort of industrial relations environment that this government wants to set up.

Honourable members have seen what can happen when well-meaning laws are abused. We have seen that particularly in the construction industry, with the use of occupational health and safety laws. There is absolutely nothing wrong with occupational health and safety laws when they are used to enforce occupational health and safety standards. But that is not what Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union members and their mates do. We have seen that in transcripts of the ongoing Cole royal commission into the building industry. We have seen the use of occupational health

and safety laws as an industrial weapon, to bludgeon employers and subcontractors into accepting unreasonable union demands. It is going on every single day in every workplace across Victoria and in many other parts of Australia.

The fear is that that sort of intimidation, that sort of misuse of legislation that currently exists in the building industry, will spread right across every workplace in Victoria, with the use of these supposed information services officers. What a title. It sounds like they will be out there handing out leaflets and helping or assisting people. No, they will be inspectors who will be authorised to seek search warrants and take out penalty notices and to prosecute and punish people for failing to comply with not only this particular bill but with any other act of Parliament that they so choose. I see the spectre of it and, having spoken to a lot of people — not only employers but employees as well — about this legislation, I fear the sort of culture and climate that would be built up if these information services officers were allowed to ride roughshod across Victoria, imposing their standards and the standards of this trade union-dominated government upon employers and employees. They are the sorts of evils this bill proposes.

Eventually in part 5 the bill gets to the referral power. I have spoken about that at the outset. I do not intend to labour the point too much further except to say that if the government were serious about making this referral it would have done so in an individual piece of legislation, but it has not. It would have said, 'Here's a bill to refer the power to the commonwealth government'. If it later thought the commonwealth government was not acting in good faith, it could have come back and introduced another regime if the government so wished.

This is a veiled attempt to introduce a state-based industrial relations system, to give away the gains of the past decade, to give away the flexibility in workplaces that over the past decade has enabled an absolute boom in employment in Victoria, for the sort of people who were cut out of the old nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday, union-dominated, work-to-rule-type of workplace environment. Working mothers, students, even pensioners — people who are able to take advantage of flexible labour market conditions — have been the great beneficiaries and they are the ones who stand to lose the most with the introduction of this sort of draconian legislation.

The Liberal Party is not here to protect the interests of the trade union movement. As I said at the outset, we respect the existence of the trade union movement.

Where its members act in good faith, we work with them.

Hon. M. R. Thomson interjected.

Hon. P. A. KATSAMBANIS — I inform the minister that we have demonstrated that many, many times.

However, we do not believe in an industrial relations system that is run for and on behalf of the trade union movement. We believe in an industrial relations system with the flexibility built into it to recognise modern-day reality and allow employers and employees to work together to their mutual benefit as they have been doing over the past decade. We believe in an industrial relations environment that adds to job growth and does not destroy it.

We believe in an industrial relations environment which, through the unitary system of industrial relations, gives Victoria a competitive edge; and we believe in an industrial relations system that protects Victorian workers and does not work against their best interests. That is what this bill does; it works against the interests of the people it is supposed to protect.

For those reasons we will oppose the bill, and in doing so we will protect the jobs of many thousands of Victorians: jobs that the Victorian Retailers Association and the Victorian Farmers Federation pointed out would be lost; and jobs that many small employers in shopping centres and small businesses all across my electorate and many other electorates in Victoria have pointed out would be lost if this legislation were enacted.

In closing, it is only the Liberal Party that can look after the legitimate interests of Victorian employees, only the Liberal Party that can deliver flexibility in employment and flexibility in conditions that recognise the reality on every shop floor and on every farm. Only the Liberal Party stands between Victorian employees and the massive job losses this draconian legislation would have imposed on them.

Hon. GAVIN JENNINGS (Melbourne) — The Bracks Labor government's legislation, the Federal Awards (Uniform System) Bill, created the opportunity for the Victorian Parliament to step up and create fair outcomes for Victoria's lowest paid workers. It provided us with an opportunity to guarantee reasonable wages for Victorian workers and the opportunity to remove Third World conditions of employment that currently apply to Victorian workers and to remove the legalised arrangements that perpetuate second-class citizenship in this nation.

It is the legal framework we inherited that perpetuates second-class citizenship for Victoria's lowest paid workers not covered by federal awards. They are worse paid than any other workers in the nation, and it is the nature of the law that perpetuates that system. That is most unfortunate, and today is a shameful and sorry day for the Victorian Parliament and for this chamber because it is again not going to take up the opportunity to achieve outcomes by supporting the bill.

As a member of the Labor government that has tried on a number of occasions to address the major disparities in the rights and opportunities of Victorians and those of any other workers in the nation, I am bitterly disappointed. That is what we have attempted by introducing this bill. It is the same sorry story. The Liberal and National parties in this chamber continue to be blind to the plight of 560 000-odd working people in Victoria. They are deaf to the evidence that has been presented to them time and again, established at length by the considerations of the task force established to support the introduction of the Fair Employment Bill and blind to the documentary evidence of the plight of hundreds of witnesses who appeared before the task force providing information about individual circumstances of disadvantage experienced through working conditions.

Members of the Liberal and National parties will leave this place again today rejecting the bill and continuing their silence in the area of advocacy of rights and entitlements of the working poor in this state. That is a blight on the Parliament and a blight on this chamber; and indeed something that will eventually be shown by the people of Victoria to be totally unacceptable. This is one of the hallmark issues that distinguish the Labor Party from the opposition in this chamber. The Liberal and National parties have consistently combined to reject legislation prepared by our government to redress this sorry tale, a tale that goes back to two critical events in the history of workers rights in Victoria: one in 1992 when state awards were abolished; and one in 1996 when under the leadership of the Kennett administration the government took the reprehensible and appalling step of handing over to the commonwealth responsibility for the working conditions of the working poor.

It is appalling the way that legislation handed up to the commonwealth guaranteed only 5 minimum conditions of employment rather than 20 minimum conditions of employment that applied to every other worker in the nation. Every other worker! That was an appalling and reprehensible act.

The Liberal and National parties in Victoria at that time and ever since have continued to live in denial of the impact that had on working people throughout Victoria, in particular working-poor people in regional Victoria where thousands of the poorest paid workers live in regional seats. The backlash at the 1999 election is a measure of the contempt held by regional communities about Victorian legislators and their disregard of the rights and conditions of Victorians who want to carve out a decent life for themselves and their families, and who want to receive decent wages and conditions that cover their terms of employment.

This Parliament in 1996 was derelict in its responsibilities, and that sorry track record will be replicated today. Since 1999 a number of attempts have been made by the Bracks Labor government to correct that history. The Leader of the Government in this chamber when she was Minister for Industrial Relations embarked upon a process of extensive consultation and consideration throughout the Victorian community which saw the establishment of a task force to provide advice to her and the government on the way we could address the situation. The result of that advice was the introduction of the Fair Employment Bill, which met a sorry demise in this chamber in 2000. In my contribution to that debate, which was somewhat lengthier than my contribution will be today, I outlined the evidence that supported the introduction of that bill, which included at the macro level the number of people affected, which is of the order of 560 000 Victorian employees.

It affects thousands of family members who live off the wages of these poorly paid workers. Almost one-quarter of all employees in regional Victoria receive less than \$10.50 an hour. Parliament chose to ignore what that means for the families of workers receiving those wages: the fact that there are many Victorian families where the kids go hungry, where they turn up to school undernourished, which obviously affects the enjoyment of and the quality of their life. It chooses to ignore the fact that come Christmas time many families are stretched to breaking point. It chooses to ignore the fact that many families do not receive proper medical attention. These people do not receive anything beyond the mere satisfaction of their daily lives. Parliament chooses to be blissfully ignorant of that again today.

There is no heartfelt concern expressed by any opposition member in relation to those issues. These are issues that they do not want to discuss. They do not want to consider the impact of any legislation that they pass or reject. They do not want to look at the impact it may have on regional communities, and whether the net

effect of this dampening down of the take-home pay of workers significantly affects economic activity in those regional centres.

We often hear the argument that by increasing the wages of Victorian employees it will dampen down employment levels. The only modelling that has been undertaken and independently contracted to the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research indicates that the drop in employment levels would be less than 1 per cent over a 10-year horizon when one would expect employment growth to be in the order of 10 per cent over that period.

The dampening down of employment opportunities is minuscule compared with employment growth. The furphy run by the opposition, which is one of the key planks in its denial about the worth of this legislation, does not stack up to any scientific scrutiny. At no stage in the consideration of the Fair Employment Bill or this bill today has the opposition provided evidence to support the allegation that there will be a dampening of employment levels in the state.

I challenge opposition members in the Parliament, outside the Parliament and in the public domain to demonstrate any modelling that indicates that there would be an adverse impact upon employment levels beyond the levels I have indicated. I would argue that on the basis of the stimulatory effect of greater take-home pay and discretionary income there would be a net positive. The only scientific research that has been undertaken in this regard, again by the national institute, validates my point of view. I look forward to contesting that argument in the Parliament and in the public domain.

In the time available to me I will outline the intent of the bill. What it does by its name and intent is create a unified system of industrial relations in this state and the nation. Because of the impact of the referral powers from the Victorian government to the commonwealth government it perpetuates a system where there are two categories of Victorian workers: those who are covered by federal awards and those who are subject to schedule 1A of the federal Workplace Relations Act.

It applies to those workers who only have minimal rates of pay and 5 minimum standards of conditions of employment rather than the 20 that apply to all other Australian workers. What the bill attempts to do in the first instance is to say, 'We'll offer up a referral power to the commonwealth'. It does not matter where it occurs in the bill, the logic of the argument is that we hand up those powers to the commonwealth to create common-rule conditions that apply to all workers in the

state just as they apply to all other workers across the nation. That is the nature of the unitary system.

Because of the commonwealth's intransigence, which runs in parallel with the intransigence of the opposition parties in Victoria, it is unlikely to accept those referral powers on the basis of creating a fair and equitable system in the commonwealth jurisdiction because it holds on to the vestiges of disadvantage and creating conflict in the workplace wherever it can. Being mindful of the likely success of that referral power, the majority of the bill concentrates on creating a parallel structure in Victoria by using the vehicle of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to assume the responsibility of providing for common-rule awards that are based upon the standard set by the federal jurisdiction. I refer briefly to how the legislation and legal framework will apply. Federal awards that are established and maintained through the Workplace Relations Act will be deemed to apply in the Victorian jurisdiction through the authority of VCAT.

It does not reinvent the wheel in terms of a new system; it does not create a new superstructure; and it does not duplicate the work and responsibilities of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. What it does do is provide in a minimal fashion the mirror image of the standing of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission and ensure, in a very simple administrative way, that the benefits and entitlements of the conditions of employment flow through to all Victorian workers.

The bill, through the mechanisms within it, will allow the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, through this head of power, to make regulations that cover the industrial relations climate in Victoria; it will enable VCAT to establish common-rule orders which will have legal force and apply to all employers and employees within the scope of those orders; and it will provide for the establishment of inspectors within Industrial Relations Victoria who will have appropriate enforcement powers, including for the imposition of penalties for breaches of the legislation. It would be negligent for the government to introduce this head of power and not to provide for an enforcement mechanism. In fact, it is totally incumbent upon the government and the administration of Victoria to ensure that there is compliance with Victorian laws.

Rather than being onerous and warranting the opposition's hysteria about who those inspectors will be and how they will exercise their powers, it is totally appropriate that a level playing field be created in all workplaces across Victoria. Indeed, many employers in their comments to the task force on the Fair

Employment Bill said time and again that what they wanted was a level playing field. They did not want to have differential commercial and award arrangements applying to different workplaces across the state. The opposition parties, again, conveniently ignore the fact that there is a substantial call from industry and from small businesses to create a level playing field, and that is what the government is trying to achieve in part through the introduction of this piece of legislation.

In order to provide for a fair and equitable system, the bill provides for appeal rights and procedural arrangements to ensure there is transparency and accountability to the statutes and to the people of Victoria, and to ensure that nobody is disadvantaged through the application of orders or inspectorial powers. In fact, all employers and employees will have access to the right to appeal to VCAT.

The common-rule awards and provisions will be established by VCAT through a transparent process that requires the tribunal to publish its intent to provide for industry, stakeholder and community input into its public hearings and deliberations and to publish its determinations and ensure the appropriate distribution of decisions it makes among those upon whom they may have an impact. If the common-rule orders are not complied with some sanctions will apply, and then prosecution powers will be available which will be handed to the industrial division of the Magistrates Court for determination. Without reinventing the wheel by establishing new courts within the administration of the industrial relations system, new provisions will apply to the existing courts within Victoria to cover this important piece of legislation.

Finally, the bill ensures that whenever employees exercise the rights this bill provides them with through the processes outlined, either through the Magistrates Court or through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, penalties will apply for any victimisation that may come their way as a result of exercising those rights.

As a member of this Labor government who was looking forward to the passage of this bill improving the lot of working people in Victoria, I find the most disappointing aspect of all this is the flagrant disregard by the opposition parties in this place of their responsibility to be accountable to the people on this matter and their insistence on ignoring the significant contribution of stakeholders, from whatever vantage point they may have taken in this debate.

There has been significant consultation on this bill with employer groups, with the trade union movement, with

affected communities and with individual employees, and there was galvanised support for the intent of this legislation. Indeed, just as there was with the introduction of the Fair Employment Bill, significant support has been expressed by a number of employer groups such as the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce, the Housing Industry Association, the Victorian Road Transport Association, the Master Builders Association of Victoria and the Australian Industry Group. Those groups are not always friends of the government, but certainly in relation to this exercise they have been very supportive of the government's intent and very supportive of the legislative reform that it has introduced.

In light of this significant support from major employer groups in Victoria it is extremely disappointing that on the basis of the hysteria generated around the Fair Employment Bill the Liberal Party and the National Party continue to deny reasonable opportunities for Victorian workers to receive decent wages and conditions of employment.

Mr Katsambanis in his contribution referred to well-meaning laws in a patronising tone which indicated that he did not have confidence in the legislation being brought forward by this government, in that it would fail because it did not have the rigour to implement a fair and reasonable industrial relations system in Victoria. I challenge his patronising tone. It is well-meaning legislation which I believe has the rigour to deliver the results. That is in stark contrast — a phrase that often gets used in this place — to the ill-meaning legislation that currently applies in Victoria and the ill-meaning industrial relations climate that was established and perpetuated by the Kennett administration and which continues to be perpetuated by the federal conservative government, which revels in conflict and in maintaining second-class working conditions for Victorian workers.

Another catchphrase that has been used in this place to derisively describe contempt for unions that have imposed a degree of industrial discipline within the workplace is 'no ticket, no start'. I would like to impose a different test on those who come into this place to represent the people of Victoria. I would like them to have some ticker. I would like them to have some heart when they come into this place and to have some consideration and some compassion. I challenge anybody who seeks to stay in this place or be elected to this place to apply the standard 'no ticker, no start'.

Hon. Bill Forwood interjected.

Hon. GAVIN JENNINGS — Have a look at yourself in the mirror when you go home and ask yourself whether you would be prepared to eyeball workers in Victoria who, by the very laws of the land, are at a disadvantage when compared with other workers in other parts of the country.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. GAVIN JENNINGS — You will not be able to eyeball yourself, let alone eyeball those workers. It is a very sorry day. There is no regard for the working conditions of people in this state.

Hon. Bill Forwood interjected.

Hon. GAVIN JENNINGS — There is no recognition by the Leader of the Opposition in his interjection. He tries to bait me on the basis of an ideological argument and he chooses to live in denial of the realities of what it is like to be a working person in this state, and the realities of all those people across Victoria who receive less than \$10 an hour. In this day and age they are supposed to eke out a reasonable existence on \$10 an hour — it is unacceptable.

The challenge for the Parliament will shortly be to address outworker legislation. It will be defended again by the Liberal and National parties on the basis of justifying the current regime which perpetuates outworkers being paid as little as \$2 an hour. Again I call on opposition members to look into their hearts to reconsider their position on legislation such as this, because this government will keep on bringing legislation to the Parliament when it can to improve the lot of working people in Victoria. It is devoted to that outcome and it is devoted to that cause.

It will be at the electoral peril of the opposition to continue to deny this important part of the government's agenda. Opposition members will not return to the Parliament after the next election if they do not seriously reconsider their position on legislation such as this. The Parliament has an obligation to introduce fair and reasonable working conditions for Victorian workers and I implore the house to support the bill.

Hon. W. I. SMITH (Silvan) — The Liberal Party is opposed to the Federal Awards (Uniform System) Bill 2002 as it would impact significantly on small businesses. The bill, if passed, would establish a mechanism whereby a federal award in any particular industry would apply to all state employers in that industry if the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) approves the award as common rule. This could affect many award-free workplaces in

Victoria and may also affect every Victorian workplace covered by a federal award, because the bill fails to address what happens if a common-rule order is made which is inconsistent with an award currently applying at a workplace. The bill would reduce employer flexibility and impose yet another level of cost and administrative obligations — —

Hon. R. F. Smith interjected.

Hon. W. I. SMITH — Wait for it, I will give you an example. This bill, if implemented, would do other things. It would see the appointment of information services officers whose primary function would be to provide information about and ensure compliance with this bill or any other act. It would give powers to information services officers to include calling for the assistance of police, entering the premises of a workplace to which a common-rule order applies and interviewing employees. An information services officer could apply for a search warrant, and the bill makes it an offence to hinder or obstruct an information services officer.

I particularly want to look at the impact of this bill on small business, should it be passed. Small business is extremely concerned and opposed to the introduction of the bill. In particular I turn to an area which has many small businesses — namely the retail area.

The Australian Retailers Association Victoria (ARAV) made a submission to the government strongly opposing the introduction of the bill for several reasons — and I want to go through those reasons. It believes there is no appropriate federal industry award for retail currently in existence. It also believes any current federal award does not contemplate the needs and requirements of small business in the current Victorian trading environment. It believes it will create financial operational difficulties for many small business retailers and a less competitive environment in Victorian retailing. The bill will increase labour costs and create unemployment. The ARAV believes the system will introduce new complexities in employment, which neither the current system nor the previous state system ever envisaged.

The ARAV interviewed all its retail businesses to get feedback. The history of retail awards is that the majority of retail businesses in Victoria are not covered by any award conditions. That is particularly the case for those retailers with less than 20 employees, and they represent a significant proportion of the industry. The bill will have a far greater impact on the retail industry as opposed to any other award-covered industries.

According to the ARAV, the diversity in retail businesses in Victoria is even greater now with the deregulated trading environment. It is concerned at the choice of award which would come in for its industry under the bill. Clause 10 of the bill seems to impose upon VCAT restrictions as to which award is to apply as an industry common-rule order. Should an application be made, the current scope of the shops award in conjunction with the requirements imposed by clause 10 would force VCAT to apply the shops award as the industry common-rule order. The ARAV is particularly concerned about having that as its award.

The results of the ARAV's independent survey indicate that the impact of applying the shops award to schedule 1A-covered retailers would impact significantly on trading hours, payroll administration, rostering flexibility and employment. The survey found that if a shops award was applied to businesses, 29 per cent of retailers currently trading on Sundays would decrease their trading hours and a further 18 per cent reported they would cease trading on Sundays. Of those businesses that trade on Saturdays, 25 per cent reported that they would decrease trading hours and 3 per cent would cease trading. In contrast, 14 per cent of businesses reported they would decrease hours on normal weekdays, while only 1 per cent reported they would cease trading on weekdays.

The potential decrease in trading patterns is a major concern for the Victorian retail industry, particularly in light of the unrestricted trading environment, and the Australian retailers welcome having an unrestricted trading environment. The proposed common-rule award would severely impact on small business retailers, forcing them to restrict trading, and thereby cause an inequitable balance in market competition.

In regard to payroll administration and rostering flexibility the survey found that 36 per cent of businesses reported that time spent administering payroll would increase if the shop awards were to apply to their business. Small businesses in Victoria, particularly retailers, have enough overregulation, red tape and compliance costs. As I said, the survey found that there would be an increase of 30 per cent in administration. Some 51 per cent of the businesses reported that the introduction of the proposed award would result in less flexibility in rostering. In regard to employment — and it is very significant for small businesses — the survey reported that 34 per cent of businesses reported that the effect of the application of the award would be a reduction in the number of employees. On average the introduction of the shops award would result in a decrease of approximately 0.8 employees per business.

In small business, which is defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as 20 employees and under, one person off on every business would be significant around Victoria, particularly as around 50 per cent of all employment in the private sector is in small business. The impact would be enormous.

Importantly, 40 per cent of businesses reported that paid employees would work reduced hours. So we would see with the implementation of this bill not only jobs shed, we would see people having less hours to work and therefore less money coming in.

The proposed system is expected to result in an increase in the number of hours worked by the proprietors of the business. Let me tell honourable members, small business owners work very long hours as it is. It is not uncommon for a small business owner to work weekends as well. As a result we may see small business proprietors turning around and deciding whether it is worth their while continuing to run their businesses in Victoria.

Not only do we have overregulation, high taxation and problems with Workcover premiums, we would now be looking at a bill which would have small business owners working longer hours and getting rid of staff. It would make life more difficult.

In summary, the Australian retailers in Victoria do not believe there is an appropriate industry award to cover the types of retail businesses currently operating under schedule 1A. They believe the current federal awards are not structured to the common rule. The concern is that the proposed common-rule system will force an inappropriate award on this industry as there is no mechanism to create an industry award. There is no mechanism in the common-rule application to allow sections of the industry to create terms that are suited to their business needs. Should such an award be applied costs to small business retailers would increase and force an adverse economic impact on that section of the industry. Their surveys indicate that unemployment would increase if such an award were introduced along with decreased employment flexibility.

This bill is antibusiness — it is anti-small business. Proprietors of businesses involved also in catering, in restaurants, cafes and reception centres have contacted me to say what would happen on weekends under such an award. They would knock back work, they would shed staff, and they would work longer hours certainly as owners and proprietors of businesses. Their main concern was that they would employ less people, reduce their staff, have younger staff and not employ older staff to cut down wages. It would impact

enormously. There was great fear this bill might go through.

To conclude, I oppose this bill. The Liberal Party opposes this bill. The bill is anti-small business; it is anti-jobs. It should not go through.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER (North Eastern) — I want to intervene in the debate to indicate that the National Party joins with the opposition in opposing the Federal Awards (Uniform System) Bill. It is in some respects, I suppose, an interesting development because the Commonwealth Powers (Industrial Relations)(Amendment) Bill was introduced in the other place in September last year, and it languishes on the notice paper still. At the briefing I inquired as to what was to be the fate of that bill and whether this bill overtakes that bill. The minister's adviser was unable to give me an answer to that. To her credit, she did follow it up and advised me that this bill does supersede that piece of legislation and that she will follow up having it removed from the notice paper in another place. One would have thought that if the government were a bit better organised the left hand might know what the right hand was doing.

In some respects some honourable members would maintain that this bill is superficially attractive because it is dressed up as if to make a single unitary system of industrial relations apply in Victoria, unlike the present system where the vast majority of workers come under the commonwealth Workplace Relations Act in one way or another through federal awards, or if not under schedule 1A to that act.

It has been said that we should make sure everyone is under federal awards by this referral of the common-rule power and we will have this single system which should be good. One would have to say on the surface that sounds a compelling argument, and it is one I heard the Leader of the Government running by interjection in a disorderly fashion during the contribution of the Honourable Peter Katsambanis earlier this afternoon. It was again clear that the Leader of the Government, as with so many things she touches, does not know what she is talking about because this bill will not achieve that outcome either.

It will not achieve it for two reasons: not every occupation in Victoria falls within the parameters of federal awards — there are still going to be some people under schedule 1A whatever the situation so we are still going to have that difference despite the Minister for Education Services alleging otherwise; more particularly, the bill introduces an entirely separate and new industrial relations situation in the

circumstance where the commonwealth declines to take up the referred power. How it can be logically argued that this bill is designed to achieve a single system when in itself it provides for virtually the re-establishment of a separate Victorian industrial relations set-up completely escapes me.

How could it be thought for one moment that giving the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal industrial relations responsibilities is a clever thing to do? Again the logic of that escapes me. Whatever expertise VCAT may have — and bearing in mind it is generally set up to review administrative decisions — to have it suddenly branching off into some fully fledged industrial relations circumstance and to have the accompanying powers the bill also envisages for those designated with the quaint and Orwellian name 'information services officers' is, I think, a clear indication that the government is not serious about this piece of legislation.

If it were serious the government would have brought in a bill that sought to do only one thing — that is, refer the common-rule power and leave it at that. It would give the commonwealth the opportunity to take up that referral, or at least put pressure on the commonwealth to take it up, and if it then did not this government could have brought in legislation to do what it might have thought was the answer to what it alleges are the problems confronting schedule 1A employees in Victoria.

But it chose not to do that. It chose to bring in this hybrid bill, and if it thought for one moment that the National Party was going to support such a hybrid bill it was well mistaken. I know full well what is the intent and design of this legislation. It is to provide another plank in the platform of the Labor Party as it hurtles towards the early election that it so clearly wants to achieve. The government put a trigger in the bill to make sure the opposition was less than happy with the bill and was likely to oppose it. It reinserted some of the obnoxious provisions we saw in the Orwellian-named Fair Employment Bill which this house fortunately defeated some six or seven months ago. One such provision concerns the so-called information services officers, who would be nothing but compliance and enforcement officers who would be given draconian powers to virtually invade businesses in this state.

By putting in the bill those sorts of provisions, which were clearly based on the government's experience with the Fair Employment Bill and which were and are totally unacceptable to the National Party, the government made it clear that it did not intend in any genuine way to get this legislation through.

To recap the situation a little, the former government referred most of the state's industrial relations powers to the commonwealth. I think everyone would acknowledge that that was a good move, that by and large it has worked extremely well. People employed under the federal Workplace Relations Act have a greater amount of freedom to come to a satisfactory agreement between themselves and the employer as to the terms of their employment, their hours of work, their leave and so on. I think everyone would think it has gone fairly well.

At the time it was decided for good and proper reasons — and I have already explained some of those reasons, and I will not go over them again — to retain the common-rule power. Then we had the introduction of the Fair Employment Bill and the alleged exploitation of schedule 1A workers. Time and again I invited the former Minister for Industrial Relations, when she held that portfolio — she is now the Minister for Education Services — to produce for me any solid evidence of exploitation of schedule 1A workers.

I heard some figures bandied about during this debate today by the Honourable Sang Nguyen about alleged low rates of pay. I had a look at the minimum rates of pay that apply to schedule 1A workers and I compared them with federal awards — not in every award but in a number, and certainly in the agriculture industry. In fact there is very little difference. Yes, they are marginally lower, that is true, but only marginally so. The differences are more particularly in the minimum conditions — 20 under the federal award system, 5 minimum ones under schedule 1A.

That is not to say that employers do not provide those employees with other conditions which they agree to. I have yet to find any evidence of any employee being denied bereavement leave, for example, yet if you listen to the former Minister for Industrial Relations that was a regular occurrence, but she has never been able to produce any example to me of where that has occurred.

It is a typical Labor Party attitude that all employers are exploiters and they grind workers into the dirt and that all employees are angels and do not have the capacity to stand up for themselves, that they need unions to do their bidding. Both those scenarios are demonstrably false. I find that employers, by and large over a long experience now, particularly small employers who rely so heavily on a loyal, dedicated work force, do not treat their employees poorly because they know they will leave. They can go down the street and get a job with another employer. If a business that has perhaps only 1, 2, 3 or 4 employees loses one through alleged dissatisfaction with the conditions and the treatment

they are receiving, that is 25 per cent of the work force that walks out the door, and word gets around so that it is hard to attract good workers to come to work for you.

By and large, I would say that in 99.9 per cent of cases, in my experience, there is a very good relationship between employers in small business and their work force, because there has to be. Small business cannot survive otherwise. Yet we constantly hear this mantra rolled out by Labor Party people that suggests that somehow or other employees under schedule 1A are being stood over, exploited and driven down. I am yet to see the evidence.

We also had the so-called independent task force. It gets held up on many occasions as the greatest thing since sliced bread, and it brought in a report that demonstrated the need for change and highlighted all the ills that are out there in industry. It is held up by the minister and by this government as if it were some unanimous report. It was not a unanimous report at all. If you take the trouble to read some of the comments by a couple of dissenting members you will see they believe that much of the work the task force did was tainted by bias. It did not decide unanimously all the things that the minister in this house from time to time claimed it did.

Following the defeat of the Fair Employment Bill in this house we saw the commonwealth Parliament have presented to it a bill called the Workplace Relations Amendment (Minimum Entitlements for Victorian Workers) Bill 2001. What happened to that? It has languished on the notice paper in the House of Representatives because there has been no indication from the Labor Party in Canberra that it would allow the bill to pass through the Senate. Why would the federal government proceed with a piece of legislation such as that if the Labor Party is not going to facilitate its passage through the upper house? If this government were serious about its claims that it wants to assist schedule 1A workers and give them a greater range of minimum conditions I would have thought the first thing it would have done would have been to encourage its commonwealth colleagues to accept the legislation and have it pass, and we would have seen how it went. But no, it has chosen not to do that. It has chosen to make an election platform out of this particular aspect of Victorian government.

In my earlier remarks I said that if the government were genuine and serious it would have brought in a piece of legislation that simply would have referred the common-rule power and not added the other points. It added the second string for VCAT if the commonwealth were not to pick up the referral power. I

do not know whether the commonwealth will pick up the referral power; I haven't a clue what the commonwealth's intentions will be. But it is unlikely to be encouraged to pick it up, I would have thought, by this legislation because this legislation has so many other prickles in it.

I, for one, certainly do not want an inexperienced tribunal down at VCAT getting involved in industrial relations matters. VCAT may be a perfectly suitable vehicle for looking into administrative decisions, but it is clearly not an appropriate vehicle to be dealing with industrial relations matters. I think with the best will in the world it would simply become a creature of the unions, which would use it as a vehicle to leapfrog one over the other and to jack people into different and varying federal awards with no regard whatsoever for employers who run a capacity-to-pay case.

Surely if this economy is to thrive we have to have wage increases which bear a resemblance to productivity. Yet there is no indication in this legislation at all that employers would have the opportunity to run a capacity-to-pay line at all. They would be roped in and VCAT would be doing the union's work as I see it. It would be bringing people in under a federal award in various industries right across the board without any opportunity for individual employers in those industries to put their case before a properly constituted industrial relations commission. So I reject the notion that VCAT should get involved in industrial relations.

In terms of being at VCAT, if you were there, as I read the bill there does not seem to be any opportunity for an industry or employer within an industry to put a case for set-off provisions, for example. In agriculture many employees are provided with very good housing at either no rent or very nominal rent that is well below market rates, yet as I read the bill there would be no opportunity for that to be set off against their hourly pay rates because they would simply be lumped under the relevant federal award which does not take that into account. I am sure there are other examples.

The dairy industry, our largest export industry in this nation, relies very heavily on flexible hours. I think of the 20 000 or so employees in the dairy industry. By and large they are young men and women, many of whom are trying to get a foot on the ladder to get their own farms. They are prepared to work very flexibly with their employers to do the work when it needs to be done rather than by some strict regime that says you will work certain hours and beyond that you are on overtime. If you listen to the Minister for Education Services you would think that anyone who worked

more than 38 hours as a schedule 1A employee was paid nothing beyond the 38 hours. That is simply not true at all. Most employers come to arrangements with their employees as to hours of work and rates of pay if those hours extend abnormally long, as they do occasionally due to seasonal conditions.

It is not just the hourly rate we need to be looking at; there are all sorts of on-costs when you are employing people, as anyone who has been an employer well knows, whether it is the workers compensation premium or the super guarantee contribution that has to be made and is now running at 9 per cent. There is a whole range of extra costs and, as the Honourable Wendy Smith said, it is likely that if this sort of legislation were foisted upon small business there would be thousands of jobs lost.

Too often government members come from union backgrounds where they have been accustomed to dealing with large employers with hundreds, if not thousands, of employees and a huge turnover where these costs are amortised over such a big operation that they do not have quite the same impact. If you are a small employer this sort of thing can tip you over the edge from financial viability into financial disaster. I do not think we should be a party to just passing the bill and thinking it is going to work all right. There is no doubt that jobs will be lost, particularly in agriculture and the restaurant trade and the like. How many I cannot judge, but I can certainly put them in the thousands.

The National Party has consistently said it wanted a cooperative workplaces and cooperative arrangements between employers and employees. It believes the actions taken by the previous coalition government in this state in referring industrial relations powers to the commonwealth has gone a long way to providing for workplace agreements that are entered into voluntarily, in good faith and with goodwill. I do not want to be a party to spiking that progress; I want it extended so that in due course it covers all workers in this state.

Hon. R. F. SMITH (Chelsea) — In the immortal words of Austen Tayshus: 'How much can a koala bear?' How many times do we have to implore those conservatives opposite to support changes to the current industrial legislation that will afford the least skilled and most impoverished families in this state a fair go? There is no legitimacy in the arguments I have heard so far from those opposite that could support their stance in opposing this legislation — none whatsoever. They clearly care more about their employer mates than they do about the citizens of this state. I suggest they should

at least have the courage to stand up and say that, as we do.

We are often accused of caring more about our union mates and ordinary workers. I unashamedly admit that, and I have done on numerous occasions. We do care about workers, particularly those who are disadvantaged. I absolutely and unequivocally admit to that, but we also care about employers. The simple reason is that we understand the direct relationship between employers being successful and job creation. There is a direct link, and we understand that. We are about getting a fair go for both sides and to do that you need a legitimate and fair industrial system. We simply do not have it here in Victoria, and that is because of the resistance of the conservatives opposite. They just do not want their mates to be disadvantaged in any way, shape or form.

The puerile arguments but forward by the Honourable Wendy Smith about the impact on jobs and the capacity to decimate employment in this state if these changes were to occur are illogical for one simple reason: workers in exactly the same industries in other states working under federal awards are actually working. They are not unemployed or out on the street. The businesses they work in are functioning, viable and profitable.

To argue that if the workers of Victoria were paid an equivalent amount to those interstate would mean decimation just does not stand up. It is inconsistent. They are being exposed for the clear and obvious attempts to support at all costs those who support them. By that I mean when you go to a Liberal fundraiser, 99 times out of 100 there is going to be a businessman, a business representative or a small business representative there, paying up to make sure you are going to stay here to protect them. The government understands that, but the opposition should be honest and open about it.

As I said, if interstate workers' entitlements are contrasted with Victorians' entitlements — that is the five basic entitlements under schedule 1A compared with the 20 under federal awards — there is what I describe as a huge and disgraceful difference. There is no rational reason for that. If the opposition genuinely cared about the citizens of Victoria, as the government does — the government cares about everyone and governs for all Victoria, as opposed to the opposition — it would do something about it.

I heard Mr Katsambanis say that only the Liberal Party cares about the best interests of ordinary working people. I nearly threw up on the spot. I suggest he

might like to talk to police, public servants, nurses, teachers and thousands of other workers to see what they think about the Liberal Party looking after their interests. It is like Dracula going to the blood bank. The opposition does not understand the havoc it has wreaked on ordinary working people in the state; it just does not get it. However, it will in a few months time or within the next 12 months. It will understand clearly what it has done because people will demonstrate via the ballot box — ta-ta! — and the opposition deserves it.

If I could see just one piece of evidence that demonstrates a benefit to schedule 1A workers I might be able to understand the arguments that have been put forward by the opposition, but I cannot find one. There is a view among those opposite that all small businessmen and employers support their views and want to oppose this bill. I am here to tell them that is not true.

Numbers of small businessmen regularly contact the relevant union, government departments, or indeed local politicians, and inquire about what they should be paying for the simple reason that they care about being fair and just to their employees. They like the people who work for them and they want to do the right thing. They want to pay them fair compensation. Their concern is related to the fact that those who do not do the right thing have an unfair advantage over them. It is pretty clear — competition. If you pay a little bit more in the workplace you will do it a little bit harder than those who do not. We say drag everyone up, lift them up, raise the floor and allow the legislation to go through, as it will be of significant benefit to the very people who need it the most — those ordinary working people and their families. I do not understand the logic of the opposition.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — It doesn't matter if it puts them out of a job.

Hon. R. F. SMITH — I hear this but all the evidence shows that since 1992, Mr Baxter, that has not occurred. The research shows that there has been minimal movement either way. Increased jobs did not occur under the legislation. Why not? If the opposition is right and the legislation that is in place is better, then why aren't employees from around the country flocking into Victoria to take advantage of the different system? It does not happen. Why aren't they flowing out of Victoria? It has not happened. Despite the opposition's arguments all the evidence demonstrates minimal movement of workers and employers from Victoria and to Victoria as a result of the opposition's puerile industrial system. There is no evidence whatsoever, and

the opposition was exposed on that. I thought Mr Baxter would have known better than to run that argument.

The bill provides for the referral of the common-rule power to the commonwealth, and this will allow the commonwealth to legislate for federal awards and to apply and bind all Victorian workers who are not currently protected. Mr Baxter said the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) is incapable of handling this legislation or will not be able to administer it. There has to be some sort of body that can do that. Rather than set up another state industrial commission, VCAT would be the most appropriate and I think quite a clever organisation to handle it.

VCAT would have powers to handle or to make orders and rules et cetera under common rule, and also handle any appeals. It would have powers to administer inspectors who would also have powers in the workplace to lay prosecutions. That people have the capacity to go into the workplace and ensure that the law is being adhered to is absolute anathema to the opposition. I do not see any difference between the workplace and any other place. The law is the law, people should abide by it, and there should be the ability to ensure that happens. Unfortunately I am constrained by time and will not get out a lot of the things I want to say.

Hon. K. M. Smith — You got all the good stuff out, Bob.

Hon. R. F. SMITH — There was plenty more to come.

Mr Baxter made a point about employers not being able to afford these changes and that they would be driven out of business. The legislation is clear. It provides exemptions for those employers who can genuinely demonstrate an incapacity to pay. The government is not being irresponsible here, quite the contrary — if they can demonstrate an incapacity to pay they are off the hook until such time as they can. How fairer can we be than that?

In my view all the angles have been covered. The government is more than confident that this will deliver the best and fairest outcome for working people in Victoria. It puts us on a level playing field with other states. I believe I have expressed a strong argument to suggest that the opposition should support the bill. I commend the bill to the house.

Hon. M. A. BIRRELL (East Yarra) — I share the concerns of many Victorians about this proposed legislation. In particular I wish to comment on the

economic impact that this bill, if passed, would have. It is because it would harm employment in this state, harm smaller businesses and in particular harm people in regional economies that I oppose this proposal and am pleased that we are on the verge of ensuring it will be defeated. There is no doubt that if this bill were passed the inevitable immediate impact would be to threaten at the margin a number of jobs in small businesses and other smallish businesses, because at the margin employers would have to work out whether they could meet the cost of the increased salaries that this bill would immediately cause.

There is no doubt that unions would make immediate applications. The Victorian Trades Hall Council would see this as a rare opportunity to be relevant, and as a consequence of that the cost of employing existing employees in existing businesses in this state would rise and jobs would be imperilled. Business organisations that are interested in this have done assessments and have come up with that conclusion, and I think it is inescapable. You cannot simply expect a small business to pay substantially increased salaries and have nowhere to pass the cost on. They cannot pass it on in increased prices because of the lack of likelihood of being able to compete properly in their own domestic marketplace. Therefore, we will see them laying people off.

Smaller businesses that employ mainly members of their families will not necessarily be affected in that way. But smaller businesses that employ 3, 4 or 5 people at the margin will cut their employment. That will have a disproportionate impact in country Victoria, and if for no other reason we should be alarmed at the potential impact of the passage of the proposal.

The Victorian Farmers Federation and the Australian Retailers Association are among those organisations which have legitimately aired their concerns about the legislation, and we should be listening to them. I have not heard a convincing countervailing argument and in particular, with the exception of the views of the Trades Hall Council which are predictable, I have not heard any significant public figures arguing that the bill is absolutely essential.

Given the significant union militancy in this state I would also argue that there is no timely reason to pass this type of legislation. Instead of passing a law which would give increased powers to unions we should be looking to reduce the disruptive influence of existing unions under existing laws in the state. We need a higher profile in terms of state government advocacy to reduce the impact of union strikes, union fights and union bans.

The previous speaker presented well the arguments that the Australian Labor Party puts in favour of this bill. He is a classic spokesman for the ALP in this state. The point that he unfortunately missed is that there is no need for that legislation to protect the people he says deserve protection. Any individual in this state who wants to be under a federal award can go under a federal award. Any individual who believes their employer should be under a federal award is able to organise a mechanism to seek that. Indeed, the majority of employers in this state are covered by federal awards or agreements, not by this part of the act that the Labor government seeks to change.

The reason the previous speaker did not cover this point is because it shows that employees have not grouped together to move out of this part of the law. Employees have not grouped together to be 100 per cent under federal awards. Indeed, a large number of employees are perfectly happy with the environment and the area of the law they work under. They have not been roped into federal awards and they have not been covered by union claims to go into federal awards. One of the strengths of the system is that it offers diversity in choice, a choice which employees have willingly taken.

The problem for the unions, which is the true motive issue for the Labor government, is that they find it hard to unionise these smaller workplaces that are under the part of the act which the government wants to change. The ambition of the state government is to pass this legislation which would mean there would be almost automatic unionisation of the smallest businesses and the smallest workplaces throughout this state.

I do not regard that as being in the public interest. I do believe there should be a right to unionise a workplace but I do not believe it should be either compulsory or unavoidable. If this legislation is passed it would be compulsory and unavoidable. That as well is not in the interests of smaller business and particularly regional businesses.

The final point I make is in relation to the so-called information services officers. This is a proposed new and intrusive power as it would affect small businesses in this state. It is insufficient for the Labor Party to argue that similar powers exist under federal legislation covering larger businesses. As true as that may be, it also has to be recognised that those powers do not cover most smaller businesses. While BHP, which has an industrial relations advisory staff of 100, is easily able to cope with an inspector knocking on the door, the local farmer who runs a dairy and has a few staff or the local small businessperson who runs a newsagency and has a few staff is far less capable of dealing with the

bureaucracy and intrusive structure that the ALP proposes in the bill. We have to propose proportionate mechanisms for enforcement. This bill is disproportionate in putting a heavy and ill-explained burden on small businesses under the guise of information services officers.

In conclusion, therefore, not only is the case for this bill not made out but the case that it would cause significant economic and employment impact of a negative nature is overwhelmingly clear. We have in Victoria a unique advantage in having a federal industrial relations system and no state system. We have done in this state what industrial relations commentators and academics of the left and the right have argued for for 50 years: we have abolished the state industrial relations system and have an integrated system. I look forward to the day when other states face up to the inevitability of the fact that they do not need state IR systems and that we have one national IR system.

We are in transition, and as we go through that period of transition this proposal, even though more modest than the previous Fair Employment Bill, would be a retrograde step and not a step towards having one unified system.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 12

Broad, Ms	Mikakos, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)
Gould, Ms	Nguyen, Mr
Hadden, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Romanes, Ms
Jennings, Mr	Smith, Mr R. F.
McQuilten, Mr	Theophanous, Mr
Madden, Mr	Thomson, Ms

Noes, 26

Ashman, Mr	Forwood, Mr
Atkinson, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Furletti, Mr
Baxter, Mr	Hallam, Mr
Best, Mr	Katsambanis, Mr
Birrell, Mr	Lucas, Mr
Bishop, Mr	Luckins, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)
Boardman, Mr	Olexander, Mr
Brideson, Mr	Powell, Mrs
Coote, Mrs	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Cover, Mr	Ross, Dr
Craige, Mr	Smith, Mr K. M.
Davis, Mr D. McL.	Smith, Ms
Davis, Mr P. R.	Strong, Mr

Pairs

Hall, Mr	Darveniza, Ms
Stoney, Mr	Carbines, Ms

Motion negatived.

NATIONAL PARKS (BOX-IRONBARK AND OTHER PARKS) BILL*Introduction and first reading***Received from Assembly.****Read first time on motion of Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources).****Hon. C. C. BROAD** (Minister for Energy and Resources) — I move:

That the bill be printed and, by leave, the second reading be made an order of the day for later this day.

Leave refused.**Ordered to be printed and second reading be made an order of the day for next day.****BUSINESS LICENSING LEGISLATION (AMENDMENT) BILL***Introduction and first reading***Received from Assembly.****Read first time on motion of Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business).****MURRAY-DARLING BASIN (AMENDMENT) BILL***Introduction and first reading***Received from Assembly.****Read first time on motion of Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources).****TRAVEL AGENTS (AMENDMENT) BILL***Introduction and first reading***Received from Assembly.****Read first time on motion of Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business).****CONTROL OF WEAPONS AND FIREARMS ACTS (SEARCH POWERS) BILL***Introduction and first reading***Received from Assembly.****Read first time on motion of Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation).****BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE****Adjournment****Hon. M. M. GOULD** (Minister for Education Services) — I move:

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until tomorrow at 10.00 a.m.

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I would have thought there would be a reason why it is proposed that this house sit at 10.00 a.m. tomorrow when nobody from the government has approached the National Party on any form of official basis to give an adequate reason why the house is being called back at that time.

Yes, rumours get around this place, and yes, the rumour had come back to me that we were sitting at 10.00 a.m. tomorrow. I would have thought that the government would have had the decency to come and talk to the National Party and explain the reasons why it wants to be back here at 10.00 a.m. tomorrow. This is a most unusual occurrence. We had a scheduled sitting and an agreement between the parties that our sitting times for this week would be Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Now we find at 6.28 p.m. that we are expected to sit for another day again this week — for what purpose, for what reason?

The rumour tells me that we are sitting purely to debate the National Parks (Box-Ironbark and Other Parks) Bill. If that is the case I would be interested to know. It was not on the schedule; it was not in the agreement at the start of the week that that would be one of the bills the house would debate this week.

I refer honourable members to the position of National Party members who live in the country. We live in box-ironbark country. People have made numerous representations to us on that issue. We want to raise their issues. All of the documentation of those representations is back in our electorate offices and this Parliament expects us to return and debate this bill tomorrow. It is not allowing us to represent our constituents in the way that we should.

It is an absolute disgrace, if that is the reason — and I would be interested in the government's response — that at this last minute we are being called on to sit tomorrow. It is not just because of the agreement and because of the fact that no warning was given — people have made commitments for Friday; okay, we put Parliament first, we always do, we always put our

parliamentary commitments first — but we expect a bit of decency and consultation on how this place is run.

I say in this particular episode that there has been no ounce of decency and no commonsense displayed by the government in respect of calling for this Parliament to sit at 10.00 a.m. tomorrow. We are strenuously opposed to coming back here because we will be prevented from doing our job properly. We expected that the debate on the box-ironbark bill would be held the next week that Parliament is sitting when we would be fully prepared to represent our constituents.

Under this sham it appears that the government, in collusion with the opposition, is trying to rush through a piece of legislation. For what reason? What have they got to hide by rushing this legislation through? I do not know. I have not been given an adequate explanation for it, and I expect it here tonight.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER (North Eastern) — I hesitated to get to my feet because I expected that we might have got an explanation from the government. The Minister for Education Services, the Leader of the House, has demeaned the Parliament yet again by moving a motion without any consultation with the leader the third party at all. This house has prided itself now for many, many years on working by cooperation and agreement, and here the Leader of the Government does not have the common decency or courtesy to consult the leader of the third party as to what the plans are for the sitting of the house tomorrow. We are expected to accept that the house is going to come back without any reason whatsoever being given.

If we are to speculate that it is to debate the box-ironbark legislation, why would that be so? Why would the Parliament be debating that immediately we got it into this house when traditionally the house does not do that except in two circumstances — and those circumstances do not apply in this case. The two circumstances are these: if it is towards the end of the sitting and it is a piece of innocuous legislation we often debate it in the same week. We are not towards the end of the sitting, officially; the sitting is to go to 5 December according to the program that has been given.

The other occasion when sometimes legislation is debated immediately is if it is urgent legislation and there is some event or circumstance in the community that requires the Parliament to act urgently. That patently does not apply to the box-ironbark legislation.

We are left with no other reason or conclusion to draw than that the government — and perhaps the

opposition, but the government in particular — is feeling the heat of the lobby groups, those that are concerned about the box-ironbark legislation. We know the government is furious that it has been forced to accept two amendments in another place on fossickers in particular and on eucalyptus harvesting. We know it is feeling the heat. We know it just wants to get out of the way as quickly as possible, and it is prepared to demean the normal procedures of this house for its own political ends.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — It is not a point of order, you idiot! I'm speaking against the motion.

I think it is totally unbecoming that we are expected to vote on a motion with no reason being given whatsoever. It is inconvenient, as the Leader of the National Party said, in the sense that there are many people who wanted to see the legislation debated in the other place and then make further representations before it was debated here. They had every expectation that would be the circumstance because it is the circumstance in 99 per cent of cases. They will be denied that opportunity, and I think that is a denial of democracy.

I call on the government not to put this motion, but to have the Parliament sit when it is next scheduled to do so — that is, in Benalla on 30 October. There is absolutely no reason why the box-ironbark legislation cannot be passed that week. Nothing is lost by having it held over until then, but by Jove a lot is gained.

Hon. GAVIN JENNINGS (Melbourne) — There is a lot of tension and angst in the chamber this evening as we debate this motion about how long the house adjourns. In fact, I think some of the angst and tension may be misdirected towards the mover of the motion. Nonetheless, it is incumbent on me to respond on behalf of the government on the motion.

There is a notion that the motion had been communicated to the National Party only on the basis of the rumour mill, and that that may indicate there may be a need at times such as this for us to formalise processes by which information is communicated. If that is in fact the message the National Party wants the government to take, it is taken.

In terms of the proceedings of the house today, I have been in the house for most of the day and, on my counting, the house has spent less than 2 hours dealing with government business. As has been indicated by the National Party, the next sitting week will be severely truncated because of the Parliament's visit to Benalla.

In fact, we will lose the Tuesday sitting day, we will have in the order of only 2 hours to spend on government business on the Wednesday, and the Parliament will be resuming in Melbourne at lunch time on the Thursday.

Again, today's government business program has been severely truncated by a combination of matters resulting from sessional orders, but in particular it has been severely truncated by an issue that was raised by the National Party.

Hon. P. R. Hall interjected.

Hon. GAVIN JENNINGS — That was an issue of concern to the National Party, and I am not denying that it is a legitimate issue and I am not denying the legitimacy of the National Party's seeking today to deal with a matter that was heartfelt by its members, but the reality is that most of the business of the Parliament today was taken up with that item and the government had in the order of only 2 hours to deal with government business today.

Hon. P. R. Hall interjected.

Hon. GAVIN JENNINGS — I have already accepted the point made by the Leader of the National Party that the discussions that took place today were informal and inconclusive and did not provide the National Party with any clear sense of direction or purpose in terms of the government's intention. That message has been taken, and mechanisms will be put in place to formalise discussions in the future.

However, in terms of pursuing the government's business agenda, the Leader of the Government has moved a motion that the house adjourn until 10.00 a.m. tomorrow, and we will come back tomorrow to debate important parts of the government's business program.

Hon. R. M. HALLAM (Western) — Will the government inform the house, by way of further clarification and courtesy to the members of the chamber, what the government's business program shall comprise tomorrow? I am led to believe that the issues we are canvassing here are complicated by the question of leave being refused for a second reading to proceed today.

I am told — again, by the same rumour mill that is apparently the only basis upon which information permeates this chamber — that the government does not have a clean bill anyway and that it might have been quite convenient that leave was refused because we could not have proceeded in any event. In that context I seek from the government some indication of

the order of the day that will proceed at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Education Services) (*By leave*) — To answer the Honourable Roger Hallam's question, we have just done five bills on message; there is the National Parks (Box-Ironbark and Other Parks) Bill and the Commissioner for Ecologically Sustainable Development Bill, so there are at least two bills. We have done only one bill today, so that would be a 100 per cent improvement on today's effort.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 33

Ashman, Mr	Lucas, Mr
Atkinson, Mr	Luckins, Ms
Birrell, Mr	McQuilten, Mr
Boardman, Mr	Madden, Mr
Brideson, Mr	Mikakos, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)
Broad, Ms	Nguyen, Mr
Coote, Mrs	Olexander, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Cover, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Craige, Mr	Romanes, Ms
Davis, Mr D. McL.	Smith, Mr K. M.
Davis, Mr P. R.	Smith, Mr R. F.
Forwood, Mr	Smith, Ms
Furletti, Mr	Stoney, Mr
Gould, Ms	Strong, Mr
Hadden, Ms	Theophanous, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Thomson, Ms
Katsambanis, Mr	

Noes, 6

Baxter, Mr	Hall, Mr
Best, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Hallam, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Bishop, Mr	Powell, Mrs

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Education Services) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Schools: Silvan Province

Hon. W. I. SMITH (Silvan) — The matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Education and Training in the other place, and it is in regard to a number of schools in my province that have been promised funding for projects but seem to have dipped out.

Hon. I. J. Cover — I think it is the Minister for Education Services.

Hon. W. I. SMITH — I think the matter is for the Minister for Education Services.

Hon. M. M. Gould — What is it?

Hon. W. I. SMITH — It is in regard to promised funding for capital works projects at schools in my electorate. I will list the four schools, as I can see the Minister for Education Services is being a bit deaf on this.

Four schools in my electorate were promised money in the 2001–02 budget and it has not been delivered. Boronia Primary School was budgeted \$1.182 million for technology-enhanced classrooms. Its funding allocation in 2001–02 was \$709 000 and its actual expenditure in that year was \$210 000. Yarra Road Primary School in Croydon was budgeted \$647 000 for technology-enhanced classrooms. The funding allocation was \$388 000 in 2001–02 and the actual expenditure was \$54 000 in that year.

Stage 2 of the Upwey High School was budgeted \$2.32 million for an upgrade of its facilities. That dipped out too. The funding allocation in 2001–02 was \$670 000. It did a bit better and got \$584 000. Wonga Park Primary School was budgeted \$871 000. Its funding allocation in 2001–02 was \$523 000 and the actual expenditure was \$103 000. I ask the minister: will the funding shortfalls be provided and when will they be provided?

Gembrook Primary School

Hon. N. B. LUCAS (Eumemmerring) — I address my question about Gembrook Primary School to the Minister for Education Services. The school received a letter in August indicating that the department may give four weeks notice and take away three relocatables. Another relocatable had been placed on the emergency excess list.

The school has about 170 pupils and only two permanent classrooms. The rest of the school is in relocatables. The relocatables that are now at risk are used as a computer room, for integration students — and this school has a very fine reputation and people come from quite a distance to bring integration students to that school — arts and crafts, and music.

Over the years the school has had to maintain relocatables. There was a classic example where one was painted and recarpeted at the cost of the parents and then it was taken away. Over time this matter has been raised with the government, but there has been no formal response.

This is not good enough. It is a fiasco, and I hope the Minister for Education Services can provide me with some certainty tonight — some certainty that the parents need, the students need and the teachers need at Gembrook. I hope they will have the courtesy of a formal reply from this minister. I ask the minister: is the Labor government going to take away the relocatables from Gembrook Primary School or not?

Roads: black spot program

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport in the other place relating to the provision of black spot funding. I have received a letter from the City of Greater Dandenong regarding its priorities for black spot funding throughout Dandenong. It lists a number of important black spot proposals, most of which are intersections requiring certain upgrades. It includes intersections such as Clow Street and Robinson Street, McCrae and Wedge streets, et cetera. In total there are eight projects requiring approximately half a million dollars in funding.

I am concerned at recent reports that funding for black spot projects has dried up, and the shadow Minister for Transport in the other place has indicated there is now a shortage of black spot funding. Given that the City of Greater Dandenong has prepared this list of its priorities for black spot funding, obviously with a degree of urgency, I seek from the Minister for Transport an undertaking that black spot funds will be available to put towards the eight priority projects which have been listed by the City of Greater Dandenong.

Schools: East Yarra Province

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — My adjournment issue tonight is for the attention of the Leader of the Government in her capacity as the Minister for Education Services with the responsibility for school services and buildings. I note that the government's recently released document on capital works funding draws attention to the fact that a number of schools in my electorate have not received the full capital funding allocations we had been led to believe they would receive. I draw her attention to the Box Hill Secondary College, where a \$1.478 million facility modernisation was listed. There was a funding allocation in 2001–02 of \$443 000 but an actual expenditure in 2001–02 of \$35 000. I note also that the Princes Elizabeth Junior School in Burwood, a \$2.5 million new school, had a funding allocation in 2001–02 of \$1.75 million but an actual expenditure of \$196 000.

I ask her to give an explanation as to why this has occurred and to assure people in and around my electorate that these allocations will be made up in a proper time and to explain why this allocation has not been made in the time it was promised.

Chisholm Institute of TAFE

Hon. P. A. KATSAMBANIS (Monash) — I raise an urgent issue with the Minister for Education in the other place. It relates to information I have received about the imminent closure of the St Kilda Road campus of the Chisholm Institute of TAFE. This particular campus is unique in that it is the campus that teaches Auslan, which is the Australian sign language — the language of the deaf community within Australia. This week is the National Week for Deaf People, and I noticed in the other house today that an Auslan translator was translating question time, which was a good thing.

Unfortunately the imminent closure of this campus will lead to a critical shortage of Auslan translators. It is interesting to note that the course has not only people from Victoria, but people from New South Wales and South Australia as well.

With the closure of the campus it is proposed that Chisholm will transfer this course out to Dandenong, which will make it very difficult for existing students to get there, and less students are likely to apply for the course. The course is situated now at St Kilda Road, which is very close to the Victorian School for Deaf Children, which is located in St Kilda Road, and there are a lot of synergies that are driven by having the Auslan course located so close to the VSDC.

It has been indicated to me by a number of constituents who are undertaking this course that they will find it impossible to travel to Dandenong on public transport. There are 60 full-time students and 250 part-time students. It is going to be very difficult, particularly for the part-time students, to get out to Dandenong and attend this course.

The consequences are going to be that we are going to end up with less Auslan qualified sign language translators and interpreters in Victoria in the years to come. In the week that we are celebrating the National Week for Deaf People it is important that the minister take urgent action to address this issue.

In August last year when the minister announced the restructure of Chisholm Institute of TAFE she suggested that there would be minimal disruption to students. With the closure of the St Kilda Road campus we will find that 310 students are not going to be

minimally disrupted but are going to be disrupted to a very large extent. I seek the minister's assistance to ensure that, rather than close the campus that is teaching Auslan, she seek to somehow have that campus connected to another facility to enable people to continue to attend the St Kilda Road campus with all the advantages it provides for Victoria and for deaf people in Victoria.

Arts: Dream Out Loud project

Hon. E. J. POWELL (North Eastern) — I raise an issue for the attention of the Minister for the Arts in another place. I have recently been briefed on a very worthwhile project called the Dream Out Loud arts project. I also had an opportunity of sending a letter of support.

This project will be based in Shepparton and it is an initiative of the Victorian College of the Arts open program and the Goulburn Murray Local Learning and Employment Network (GMLLEN). This is going to be an exciting new project that will allow young people in the Goulburn Valley region the opportunity to reconnect with the community through the creative arts. These young people have come from a variety of backgrounds — indigenous and new settler groups, as well as a broad spectrum of alienated and often unemployed individuals.

This will be a great initiative for the City of Greater Shepparton which has the highest Koori population outside of Melbourne and a strong multicultural population including some new settlers of the Arabic-speaking community. The creative arts projects would include dance, drama, film and television as well as the arts. It is intended to give young people at risk in the Goulburn Valley region an opportunity that they would not normally have.

I congratulate Goulburn Murray LLEN, particularly the executive officer, Mrs Jennifer Hippisley, for putting together the submission for funding and for working hard to create this exciting project. This project will build young people's self-confidence and increase their skills and self-esteem. I urge the minister to support the funding for this much needed project, which will be of great benefit to the young people in the Goulburn Murray area.

Blue Light discos

Hon. K. M. SMITH (South Eastern) — I address my adjournment debate matter to the attention of the Minister for Youth Affairs, and I am pleased that she is in the chamber. I raise the issue of Blue Light discos,

which have been a huge success for some 25 years, certainly here in Victoria. They are run by off-duty policemen and volunteers who put in a fair amount of time to entertain our kids. Probably a number of honourable members have dropped their kids off at Blue Light discos, picked them up some time later and have had confidence in the fact that their kids were looked after and supervised properly because they are not allowed to drink too much or smoke too many cigarettes.

I have been approached by some members of the local police who have raised with me the issue of public liability insurance. The house discussed public liability insurance earlier today. The police last year paid \$11 500 for public liability insurance for Blue Light discos across Victoria. This year the premium has gone up to \$180 000. That is a huge amount of money. I understand that the governments in Queensland and South Australia have paid for that insurance. They have been prepared to pick up the tab. They realise that it is a large amount of money, but they also realise the importance of Blue Light discos. Some 170 000 kids attend events organised under the Blue Light program each year.

The Minister for Youth Affairs has been very free with the money so far as Freeza was concerned — I have no criticism of that — and she may consider the position that can be taken by the government. The minister talked about the government's initiatives as far as youth were concerned — —

Hon. Bill Forwood — Vision!

Hon. K. M. SMITH — Yes, vision. Just the fact that the government had a vision flattened me. But it had a vision this morning for the youth — —

Hon. M. M. Gould interjected.

Hon. K. M. SMITH — Hang on, I was doing all right until I got on to that. But you had a bit of a vision about the kids.

I would like the minister to have a little bit more of a vision and have a look at the fact that she may be able to help the Blue Light discos from failing and completely falling over.

Understand that Freeza came after the Blue Light disco, and Freeza is more for the kids who are a little bit older. The money given to Freeza pays for the bands, halls and buses to move people from site to site. I am asking the minister in the nicest way I possibly can — and this is very much out of character for me — to help the kids.

Patterson Lakes: library

Hon. B. C. BOARDMAN (Chelsea) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Local Government which concerns an ongoing issue in the Patterson Lakes area, which happens to be in the seat of Carrum. I have to admit I do not think the current honourable member for Carrum realises that, because Patterson Lakes is a growing and prosperous area, particularly as it is receiving substantial investment in residential development and as a consequence the public sector infrastructure investment is not commensurate with what is happening on a private level. Unfortunately that has been a hallmark of this government and will continue. An illustration of that is the necessity and the strong justification for a library in the area.

Mr Malcolm Dunkinson, who is a Patterson Lakes resident, has raised the issue and argued the case for a library in Patterson Lakes for many months. He has been highlighting some inefficiencies in both state government and local council policy. Previously he has written to the Minister for Local Government outlining some serious concerns about council policy and where council policy was not only failing to meet its own stated objectives but may be required to be further examined financially because of some viability issues associated with its expenditure.

After three months Mr Dunkinson received a response from the minister which was quite inappropriate and led Mr Dunkinson to write the following:

Thank you for your reply of 27 August 2002. To say the least not only am I disappointed with its content, but I am also dissatisfied with its lack of answers. The information it contained is already known to us. I made it quite clear in my letter to you that we were aware of the Living Libraries Fund and its application criteria, i.e. to benefit from this fund you must have an existing library that you want to renovate or improve. This is the problem, we have no library at Patterson Lakes.

From your reply it leads me to believe that you paid scant attention to my letter.

Honourable members, and in particular the minister, would acknowledge that the tone of the letter is quite forceful but in the circumstances well and truly justified. Mr Dunkinson is highlighting that Kingston council is investing \$30 000 in addition to rent for new premises for the Moorabbin library when the benchmarks set by the council suggest it would not be viable in 12 months time. Equally, he has pointed out that by his calculations there is only one library in the municipality south of Mordialloc Creek that serves 31 per cent of the population compared with seven libraries north of the creek serving the remaining 69 per

cent of the population and that this inadequacy needs to be addressed.

Mr Dunkinson has raised this matter with the Minister for Local Government but the response has not been to his or the community's satisfaction. I raise it now for the minister to give a more detailed consideration to the matter, to acknowledge that there is a need for a library in the Patterson Lakes area and to outline what the government response will be.

Responses

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Education Services) — The Honourable Wendy Smith raised a matter with me and I did not get all the names, I am sorry — there was a bit of noise in the chamber at the time with honourable members leaving — but she raised a matter with respect to upgrades and developments in schools. The government has given a commitment that these programs will be carried out. One was Yarra Road Primary School, Upwey and — —

Hon. W. I. Smith — Wonga Park Primary School.

Hon. M. M. GOULD — The other was Wonga Park Primary School. I am happy to give an assurance to the honourable member that those programs will be completed. Often what occurs is that planning is put out to tender. Once the construction work starts, the money that is allocated is paid to the contractors and it does not take a great deal of time.

I assure the honourable member that those schools that have been identified in the budget and for which the government has given a commitment to upgrade will be upgraded.

Hon. W. I. Smith — Time frame?

Hon. M. M. GOULD — I will have to check the records, I do not have them with me.

The Honourable Neil Lucas raised a matter about relocatables at Gembrook Primary School. Relocatables are used by the government and the department to ensure we have sufficient classrooms in appropriate schools. If the Gembrook class sizes and enrolment growth means they require those relocatables, they will keep them; but if the enrolments are reduced and they are in excess and there is a school that is overcrowded, we will move those relocatables.

If the enrolments demand they need those relocatables, they will stay there. If enrolments decrease and other

schools have increased enrolments, they will be relocated to a school that is appropriate and in need.

Hon. N. B. Lucas — On a point of order, Mr President, there is to be a public meeting tomorrow at Gembrook and I was hoping to get a more specific answer from the minister about this so we can tell the people at Gembrook what is going on.

Hon. M. M. GOULD — I have disposed of the matter, but I am happy to restate to the honourable member that with respect to relocatables, they are used to move from school to school to meet the enrolment demand. If Gembrook has sufficient students to require those relocatables to stay there, they will. That will happen if enrolments are increased. But if enrolments decrease and the relocatables are in excess, the government will look at shifting them to a school where they are needed.

Hon. N. B. Lucas — Can you come to the public meeting?

Hon. M. M. GOULD — No, I will be here, Mr Lucas.

The Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips raised a matter for the Minister for Transport regarding black spot funding in Dandenong. I will pass that on to the minister.

The Honourable David Davis raised a matter about capital works at Box Hill. I give a similar answer to what I told the Honourable Wendy Smith about the government's commitment. We will deliver on our commitment.

The Honourable Peter Katsambanis raised a matter about Auslan being taught at the St Kilda Road Chisholm campus and his concern about the ongoing teaching of Auslan. I will pass that on to the Minister for Education and Training in the other place.

The Honourable Jeanette Powell raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning in another place with respect to the Dream Out Loud arts project. I will pass that on to the minister and ask her to respond in the usual manner.

The Honourable Ken Smith raised a matter about public liability and Blue Light discos. I am happy to raise this with the Minister for Finance in the other place who has been dealing with the public liability issue and ask him to get in touch with the Blue Light disco people to see if he can assist in this matter because, as Mr Smith rightly says, Blue Light is a good organisation and has been supported by all parties for

many years. I will raise that with the minister tomorrow and see if he can get somebody from his department to contact them.

The Honourable Cameron Boardman raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government regarding the Patterson Lakes library. I will pass that on to the minister.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 7.08 p.m.